



Panchayat and rural development: A case study of Kudhani block under Muzaffarpur district, Bihar

Dr. Anjana Kumari¹

¹ Faculty of Commerce, L.S. College, Muzaffarpur, B.R.A. Bihar University, Muzaffarpur, Bihar, India

Abstract

The Panchayat Raj System is playing an important role in rural development. Jamaruha Gram Panchayat under Kudhani block of Muzaffarpur district, Bihar has taken the responsibility of implementing various rural development programmes sponsored by both state and central governments. The study is crucial for evaluating the role of Panchayat and the impact of the same on the development of study area.

Keywords: panchayati raj institutions, rural development, empowerment, human development, socio-economic empowerment

Introduction

Panchayat Raj is a system of governance in which Gram Panchayat are the basic units of administration. Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been involved in the programme implementation and they constitute the core of decentralized development of planning and its implementation. Panchayat Raj Institutions aim at translating the Gandhian dream of village self-governance (Gram Swaraj) and to become an effective tool of rural development and reconstruction. Since 1959, almost all rural development departments have been executing their programmes through PRIs. With the implementation of State Acts under the spirit of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment a clear cut role of Panchayat Raj Institutions in rural development has been envisaged. Government of India and the different State Governments are now increasingly seeking the assistance of the Panchayat Raj Institutions in the implementation of various schemes as well as poverty alleviation programmes. The paper aims to highlight the system of Panchayat Raj system, role of Panchayat Raj institutions in the implementation of the government schemes for poverty alleviation and rural development, various government schemes, etc.

Objectives of the study

1. To evaluate the rural development activities of Jamaruha gram Panchayat
2. To identify problems of Jamaruha gram Panchayat in implementing rural development programmes; and
3. To give suggestions for the better implementation of policies and development.

Methodology

In the light of objectives of the study, a systematic research design is drawn. The relevant data for the study was collected through primary and secondary sources. Samples of 180 beneficiaries of various development schemes were taken to assess the impacts of the various development schemes/programmes on their lives. Research tools such as interview schedule and participant observation was used. The Secondary

sources comprised of official records of Jamaruha Gram Panchayat, books and articles in learned journals.

Rural development connotes an overall development of rural areas in social, economic, political and cultural spheres so that people could lead a pleasant life ^[1]. It is a broad, inclusive term which takes in its consideration the socio-economic and political development of the rural areas. It includes measures to strengthen the democratic structure of society through the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as measures to improve the rural infrastructure, improve income of rural households and delivery systems pertaining to education and health ^[2].

Rural development: Conceptual dimension

The rural development strategy propose to reduce the poverty and unemployment, to improve the health and educational status and to fulfil the basic needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural population (Panda and Majumder 2013, 37). For this to realize, Government of India launched some developmental schemes such as Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Sampoorna Grameen Rozgar Yojana (SGRY), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY), Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA), etc. All these schemes are intended to lessen the gap between rural and urban populace which would help to improve the quality of life of the rural people.

Notwithstanding this fact that the term 'Rural Development' is of focal interest and is widely acclaimed in both the developed and the developing countries of the world, there is no universally acceptable definition of rural development and the term is used in different ways and in vastly divergent contexts. As a concept, it connotes overall development of rural areas with a view to improve the quality of life of rural people. In this sense, it is a comprehensive and multi-dimensional concept and encompasses the development of agriculture and allied activities - village and cottage industries and crafts, socio-economic infrastructure, community services and facilities, and above all, the human resource in rural areas. As

a phenomenon, it is the result of interactions between various physical, technological, economic, socio-cultural, and institutional factors. As a strategy, it is designed to improve the economic and social well-being of a specific group of people, the rural poor^[3].

Rural development through PRIs

It is a fact that the formulation and implementation of rural development programmes require an appropriate institutional structure. This need was met by the establishment of Panchayat Raj Institution (PRIs) in India. Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of the recorded history. Panchayat Raj is a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the basic units of administration. Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been involved in the programme implementation and they constitute the core of decentralized development of planning and its implementation. Panchayat Raj Institutions aim at translating the Gandhian dream of village self-governance (Gram Swaraj) and to become an effective tool of rural development and reconstruction. Since 1959, almost all rural development departments have been executing their programmes through PRIs.

The PRIs, being local self-governing bodies ensure, the opportunity for people's participation and involvement in the formulation and implementation of rural development programmes. Thus, the PRIs are entrusted with the task of promoting rural development in India.

Since Independence greater emphasis has been laid on the social, economic and planning policy of our country for creating an appropriate rural, economic and social infrastructure and to promote an overall development. The planning policy of our country accorded the highest priority to agriculture and rural development. The measures envisaged from the first five-year plan had considerable bearing for the growth of rural economy. The first five-year plan laid down that development of agriculture, based on the utilization of man power resources of the countryside and the maximum use of local resources, holds a key to the rapid development of the country^[4]. In the words of Committee on Plan Projects, "so long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply the local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, invest it with never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development" and the team recommended a three-tier model of Panchayat Raj to serve as instrument of rural development in India.^[5]

Panchayats have been in existence for a long period, however, the present set-up clearly marks itself off from the past in respect of powers, functions and financial resources. The four main aspects of the present system are: (i) democratization of the constitution and universal establishment of Panchayats. (ii) transfer of more powers from the state to these bodies, (iii) expansion of the scope of and transfer of more functions to the Panchayats in regard to agriculture and allied activities, health and welfare and education and (iv) strengthening of the resource position of these bodies.

Rural development is generally conceived as a multi-sectoral activity which includes, besides agricultural development,

rural industries, the establishment or improvement of social overhead facilities or infrastructure, such as schools, clinics, roads, communication, water supply, markets, welfare sources, improved nutrition, literacy, adult education etc. The primary objective of rural development is to enrich the quality of the rural masses, particularly the poorer and the weaker sections. The implementation of democratic decentralization through the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) was meant to give an opportunity for local initiative and participation in the developmental activities.

It is in this context that Gandhiji said, "Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Every village should be a republic or a Panchayat having full powers. The greater the power of Panchayats, the better it is for the people"^[6]. To him "Swaraj" signified the vesting of the ultimate authority in the peasant and the labourer. True democracy cannot be worked from below by the people of every village.

Panchayat Raj Institutions are involved actively in fulfilling the most cherished goal of development with social justice bringing the aspirations of the Indian people for their participation in the development process of the country. A clear cut role for Panchayat Raj Institutions in rural development has been envisaged subsequent to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment 1992. Government of India and the state Governments have been increasingly seeking the assistance of Panchayat Raj Institutions in the implementation of various schemes as well as poverty alleviation programmes. The Panchayati Raj Institutions are statutorily elected bodies at the village, Block and District levels with powers of local government. The primary objective of Panchayati Raj is to strengthen the base of democracy at the grass roots and to enable the people of each village to achieve intensive and continuous development in the interests of the entire population, irrespective of caste, class, and creed.

Panchayati Raj or local self-government is an exercise in democratic decentralization of administrative authority. The system is based on the following five principles. First, there should be a three-tier structure of local self-governing bodies from village to district level, with an organic link from the lower to the higher ones. Secondly, there should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies. Thirdly, adequate financial resource should be transferred to these bodies to enable to them to discharge their responsibility. Fourthly, all development programmes at these levels should be channelled through these bodies. Last but not the least, the system evolved should be such as to facilitate further decentralization of power and responsibility in the future^[7].

It is obvious that the future of the country really depends upon effective Panchayati Raj and people's participation or co-operation. It is the only effective instrument which can put speed and substance in our planning process and ensure the most effective use of the country's resources for productivity. In that lies the future of both democracy and development of the economy as well as of the people. In the years to come, Panchayati Raj will be a catalytic agent of integrated development of tribal mass in rural areas.

People's participation and contours of developmental process

In its ideal form, local planning implies entrusting to the local

people and their institutions all duties and responsibilities of local planning and development, with the government reserving to itself only the functions of guidance, supervision and higher planning. In fact, the local level planning process is one of working with the local people, most directly affected by facilities and programmes, so that the plan: is more responsive to local needs; reflects more accurately local perceptions; produces a sense of local ownership and responsibility; builds on and reinforces the fabric of the community and its internal structure; and supports the evolution of a continuing on-going structure of local administration by creating a core of people. These people having worked to make a project happen, and having seen ideals become a part of development, would carry their involvement into administration, maintenance and planning for the future. Elected members of the Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayats, are now directly involved in implementation of the development programmes. Gram Panchayats also prepare a shelf of need-based projects which, after sanction at the Block and District level, are executed by them with the funds made available to them. In short, people are actively participating in the development process directly and through their elected representatives^[8].

Mapping the development phenomenon

Provision of basic infrastructure is a pre-condition for the success of rural development programme. Those who have easy access to infrastructural facilities benefit most and those who do not have adequate access to the infrastructure get by-passed in the process. Opinions of the sample beneficiaries regarding the accessibility, adequacy of different infrastructural facilities such as drinking water, sanitation, street light, education, health, quality of roads, transport, etc. were collected. Extent of people's satisfaction/dissatisfaction on the provision of these facilities was also ascertained during the study.

The study reveals that certain social facilities like sanitation, street light and quality of roads were found inadequate to beneficiaries. As the extent of their adequacy and accessibility varies from village to village, about 132 (73.33%) of the 180 sample beneficiaries have expressed their dissatisfaction over the adequacy and accessibility of the sanitation while 167 (92.78%) and 143 (79.44%) of the beneficiaries expressed dissatisfaction over street light and quality of roads respectively. Hence there is an urgent need of providing these critical facilities on top priority basis to the tribal villagers. Although the beneficiaries have expressed their satisfaction over some services like drinking water and education, here is a greater need for improving the quality and quantity of their services. Similarly the education facility was found to be accessed. Out of the total 180 beneficiaries, 169 (93.89%) beneficiaries have expressed their satisfaction on the facilities provided in the schools and only 11 (6.11%) beneficiaries have expressed dissatisfaction. However, there is a need for improving the quality of education facility and making it possible within the roads of a high level education. Therefore, along with extending the infrastructure, quality maintenance and enhancement should also be given due care.

It is quite interesting to see the likely change in the structure of SC community as a result of poverty alleviation

programmes which support the income and employment of the households in the lowest strata of the rural tribal society. For a long time these households were deprived of the benefits under various programmes which makes them deep-rooted in the rural economy. Now these poverty alleviation programmes have created favourable atmospheres for the SC poor to improve their conditions. Another equally vital change that this study witnessed in the study area is that the poor people who never had any voice in the functioning of the village institutions are now taking active participation after these poverty alleviation or rural development programmes. This shows the confidence gained by the SC poor in framing the programmes and policies basically meant for them. This change is predominantly due to the PRIs and their functioning. It is found that majority of the respondents were to some extent satisfied with the programmes as they had helped them to improve their economic condition at least marginally and to some extent employment. Majority of the sample felt quite satisfied with the change that has resulted in an increase in their income and employment. To another question as to whether they would suggest any change in the scheme. Majority of the sample beneficiaries said no and those who pleaded for the change suggested that, the amount of assistance should be enhanced, and if possible it should be released in one instalment.

Thus the rural development programmes especially the MGNREGA implemented through the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the selected village have provided more employment opportunities for villagers. These programmes have also provided good social and economic positions for the rural people. The marginalised people of the village are getting more facility of rural development programmes compare to the other nearby villages.

Areas of constraints

The effective involvement of the Panchayat Raj Institutions in the process of rural development is constrained by some difficulties facing these institutions. The problems largely relate finance, management and organization. The Panchayat Raj Institutions are not provided with adequate powers and resources though the states have thrust lot of responsibilities on these. There is a problem of lack of understanding the laws and rules governing the Panchayat Raj Institutions.

The elected members should understand the law through training sessions but controlling the officials is a problem. They are often able to use the ancient structure of rules and procedures to scuttle schemes unanimously approved by the elected bodies. One way to address the problem is to make the Panchayat and related link department officials attend the training sessions for the elected members. At least some of the trainers should be effectively used by the elected members to address the problems created by the lower level officials. Another problem of the effectiveness of Panchayat Raj Institutions in their functioning for rural development relates to lack of effective participation of members particularly women members in the local governance. The problem arises due to low literacy level without some level of education understanding the laws and the changes in rules and procedures periodically brought out. Panchayat Raj Institutions can be effective in their role to bring about rural

development only if they are governed by a sound and scientific structure of governance. The members of these local institutions suffer from crisis of confidence and low level of self-esteem. It is found that the present election system has brought in ignorant and illiterates into the system. There is also the incidence of excessive interference of government and politicians in the affairs of the Panchayat Raj Institutions.

Conclusion

The role of Panchayati Raj institutions as instruments of rural reconstruction and development needs no emphasis. They have been reorganized with wider powers and financial resources not merely as institutions of political participation but institutions of social and economic development. Panchayati Raj has come to be associated with two broad images. First, it is a government by itself and second it is an agency of the state government. In the integrated exercise of planning for social and economic development, co-ordinate roles, the present set up is a three-tier representative structure of the government where the administrators, elected leaders and local population participate in the developmental effort. In fact the elected representatives play the key role in the decision making process, leaders are regarded as facilities of the process of development. Since the emphasis of rural development policies is bringing about people's participation in the development programmes, it is possible to achieve this through the leaders. The administrators are accepted to participate with missionary zeal in the life and development of the villages and these institutions are to be galvanized to become effective instruments of social and economic change. To sum up, the implementation of rural development programmes through the Panchayat Raj Institutions has brought a radical change in the socioeconomic conditions of the rural tribal people in the study village. The implementation of rural development programmes has affected even the social and political affairs of the people. In the economic sphere, these programmes have shaped an improvement in economic position of the village

References

1. Ramya, Tame, Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Development: The Study of a Tribal Village in Arunachal Pradesh, *Modern Research Studies*. 2014; 1(3):503-521
2. Mishra AK, Akhtar N, Tarika S. Role of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Development (An Analytical Study of Uttar Pradesh). *Management Insight*. 2011; 8(1):44-53.
3. Singh K. Planning and Funding Eco development Projects in and Around Protected Areas in India; Consultancy Report. Dehradun: Wildlife Institute of India, 1995.
4. Ramya, Tame, op. cit, 2014.
5. Govt. of India. Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service. New Delhi: Committee on Plan Projects, National Development Council, 1957.
6. Dayal R. Panchayat Raj in India. New Delhi: Metropolitan Book Company, 1970.

7. Dahama OP. Extension and Rural Welfare. Agra: Ram Prasad and Sons Publishers, 1993.
8. Ramya, Tame, op. cit, 2014.