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### **BA Hons-Paper-III**

## **Panchayati Raj System: A Primary Unit of Governance in Grassroots Democracy with Special Reference to Bihar**

### **Introduction**

Panchayati Raj Institutions-the grassroots of democracy and the grassroots units of self-government- have been proclaimed as the vehicles of socio-political and socio-economic transformation in rural India. Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation, emphasizing on 'Gram Swaraj' (village autonomy) strongly advocated that:" Independence must begin at the bottom, thus every village will be a republic of panchayat having full power." Gandhiji believed that democratic freedoms have to be founded in institutions of self-government in every village in India. He promoted Panchayati Raj Institution as a decentralized form of government where each village is responsible for its own affairs and establishes it as the foundation of India's political system. Panchayat Raj is a system of governance in which Gram Panchayats are the basic units of administration. This is form of democracy at local or village level. It enhances the direct participation of rural people in politics and political process. The Panchayati Raj Institutions provides closest democratic experience to people in rural areas. The PRIs bodies were expected to awaken political consciousness on the countryside and to improve a democratic process in rural India. Hence, Panchayati Raj confers on the rural people the power of decision making regarding developmental objectives. It has 3 levels namely- village, block and district.

### **Aims and Objects**

The spirit and importance of Panchayati Raj System found place in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India, which says: "The states should take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government".

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru the first Prime Minister of India, considered panchayats as an important socio-political and socio-economic institution at the village level. While inaugurating the Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan in 1959, he underlined the importance of people taking responsibilities: "To uplift millions of villages is not an ordinary task, the reason for the slow progress is our dependence on official machinery. An officer is probably necessary because he is

an expert. But this can be done only if the people take up the responsibility in their own hands. The people are not merely to be consulted, but effective power has to be entrusted to them."

Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, while emphasizing on the significance of panchayats had remarked: "We must put an end to planning from above. We must put an end to priorities being conceived and decided at ethereal heights, far from the ground realities."

The aim of every village being a republic and panchayats having powers has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three- tier Panchayati Raj System to enlist people's participation in rural reconstruction. The First Five Year Plan also recognized the need for disaggregated planning through a process of democratic decentralization incorporating the idea of a village plan and a district development council. The Government of India constituted several committees at different points of time to time, to strengthen the local self-government institutions. The first one was the Balwantrai Mehta Committee constituted in 1957. The second was K Santham Committee constituted in 1959. The Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations appointed in 1983 recommended in its report that the objectives of decentralized planning cannot be achieved unless the Panchayati Raj and other local bodies are allowed to perform their assigned role. The committees recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralization' which finally came to be known as Panchayati Raj. (i) Establishment of a 3-tier Panchayati Raj System - Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. This system was adopted by state governments during the 1950s and 60s, as laws were passed to establish panchayats in various states.

### **The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act**

The 73rd amendment of the Constitution is an epoch-making event in the history of democratic decentralization in India. The Act aims to provide a 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States having a population of over 2 million, to hold Panchayat elections regularly every 5 years, to provide seats reservations for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women; to appoint a State Finance Commission to make recommendations as regards to the financial powers of the Panchayats and to constitute a District Planning Committee to prepare a development plan draft for the district. The 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj consists:

1. Village-level Panchayats
2. Block-level Panchayats
3. District-level Panchayats

Powers and responsibilities are delegated to panchayats at the appropriate level :

- i) Preparation of the economic development plan and social justice plan
- ii) Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects given in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution
- iii) To levy and collect appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees

## **Reservation for women in PRIs**

The Union Cabinet of the Government of India, on 27 August 2009, approved 50% reservation for women in PRIs (Panchayati Raj NIJO Institutions). The Indian states which have already implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs are Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh.<sup>[4]</sup> As of 25 November 2011, the states of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan and Tripura also reserve 50% of their posts for women.

In conformity with the Constitutional Amendment all the states have amended their state Acts or passed new Acts repealing the then existing ones. Bihar becomes the first state to provide 50 per cent reservation to women in PRIs under NDA Government. In 2006, when Panchayat election was held, the women representatives were occupied half of the seats of Local Bodies at village republic. Today the PRIs are the bedrock of effective implementation of India's rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. It is true that, if effectively empowered, the PRIs have the potential to build a progressive India (which truly lives in its villages) in harmony with the felt needs and aspirations of the people.

## **Sources of Income**

The PRIs is a system of Local Self-Government, wherein the people take upon themselves the responsibility for development. It is also a system of institutional arrangement for achieving rural development through peoples' initiative and participation. Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayats, the rural Local Bodies have the duties to providing basic amenities and civic services to the rural population. To achieve the goal, the PRIs are empowered to collect taxes to raise their own resources to perform their duties. However, the funds collected through their own revenues do not suffice. Therefore, the Government (Central and State) devolves part of their own tax revenues to the rural local bodies to meet their needs. Article 243 (I) and 243 (Y) of the Constitution of India incorporated by 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments Acts heralded a new era in the history of the 'Elected Local Bodies', by providing for the constitution of a State Finance Commission in all the States within one year from the commencement of the Constitution 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, 1992 initially and thereafter at the expiry of every five years to recommend devolution of funds to the local bodies.

The Central Government also asked the Central Finance Commissions to recommend the quantum of Central Government funds to be devolved to the local bodies from Tenth Central Finance Commission onwards. The Assigned/Shared revenues are one which are collected by State Government but transferred/shared to/with local bodies. The major sources of assigned/shared revenues to the rural local bodies are Local Cess, Local Cess Surcharge, and

Surcharge on Stamp duty, Entertainment tax, seigniorage fees and lease amount of mines and minerals, and sale proceeds of Social Forestry plantations.

The main source of income of the PRIs is grants-in-aid and loans from the State Government. The resource base of the rural local bodies in addition to their Own Tax/Non-Tax revenues consists of the following:

- i) Devolution of funds by the State Government based on the recommendations of the State Finance Commissions
- ii) Assigned/Shared Revenues
- iii) Funds provided based on the recommendations of the Central Finance Commissions

The panchayats receive funds from three sources:

- Local body grants, as recommended by the Central Finance Commission
- Funds for implementation of centrally sponsored schemes
- Funds released by the state governments on the recommendations of the State Finance Commissions

## **Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as tools of providing Good Governance**

The foundational norm of any democratic polity is that sovereignty is vested in the hands of the people. Governance refers to the manner in which power is exercised by governments in managing a country's social and economic resources. 'Good' governance is the exercise of power by various levels of government that is effective, honest, equitable, transparent and accountable. Good governance therefore depends on public participation to ensure that political, social and economic priorities are based on a broad societal consensus and that the poorest and most vulnerable populations can directly influence political decision-making.

The PRIs have played a significant role in rural development and providing good governance at district to village level. Panchayati Raj Institutions have some important salient features as the key-role to providing good governance in rural areas. The basic idea behind establishment of PRIs was to ensure the participation of the villagers in local government and to promote the various developmental plans. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of its citizens both male and female. The basic roles of Panchayati Raj Institutions are as follows:

### **Basic Roles**

- Provide essential services and facilities to the rural population
- Provide employment Implementation schemes for the development of agriculture

- Supply best seeds, fertilizer and irrigation facilities to the farmers and inform them of new farming techniques
- Establishment of primary health centers
- Provide best health services to the villagers and for that start Primary Health Centers and Hospitals in village
- Start necessary vaccination drives against epidemics, polio, kalazaar etc.
- Establish and run primary / secondary schools and libraries in the rural areas for children
- Execute plans for the development of the scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, run Ashram shalas for adivasi children and set up free hostels for them
- Encourage entrepreneurs to start small-scale industries and implement rural employment schemes
- Construct bridges, roads & other public facilities and their maintenance
- Supply of drinking water, drainage, and construction/repair of roads and aware them for sanitation
- Development of cottage and small-scale industries, and the opening of cooperative societies
- Establishment of youth organizations

**The Role of PRIs to providing Good Governance in Local Administration is as follows:**

- **As a Tool of Participatory Democracy:** Political participation in term of deliberations and practice of power transformation has come a long way in Indian democracy through the composition, election and role of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Through the adult franchise, all adult men and women of the village should have share to direct participation in local administration
- **As Role of Accountable Administration:** The basic idea behind the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions is to ensure the participation of the villagers in local administration and to promote the various developmental plans for all over development of every district. It is accountability of democratic government that the local administration should be accountable, transparent and responsive to the people so that it can make mass aware of their participation at various levels of administration. The major success can be seen in the field of agriculture
- **Consensus Oriented Administration:** The Panchayati Raj System promotes consensus oriented administration at local, district and state level issues among the villagers and in this regard, all decisions in village panchayats shall be taken on basis of consensus which should clearly be out of divisive approaches arising from consideration of political party, local politics, religion, caste, creed, class or culture.

**Loopholes in Implementation of Panchayati Raj System:**

Mahatma Gandhi believed in panchayats' immense potential for democratic decentralisation and for devolving power to the people. Despite the fact that villages of India have had a long

history of the panchayats being the basic unit of administration and the nationalist movement's clear commitment to panchayats as the primary unit of administration, the first draft of India's Constitution did not include a provision for establishing panchayats in the free republic India. But, because of the efforts of Gandhian scholars and followers in the Constituent Assembly, the provision (Article 40) relating to village panchayats in part IV of the Constitution (Directive Principles of State Policy) was included. Instead of establishing Panchayats as vehicle for economic development and social justice in rural areas, Community Development Programme in 1952 and National Extension Services in 1957 were launched which could not evoke people's participation in rural development as these programmes were bureaucratic in orientation.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment certainly marked the beginning of a new era in the annals of Panchayati Raj in India. The Institutional mechanism of Panchayati Raj has now got a new thrust and dynamism, and certainly is a great improvement over the earlier system in several ways.

**Firstly**, The state governments are under a constitutional obligation to implement the new system envisaged under the amendment.

**Secondly**, Reservation for women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes have significantly altered the power scenario.

**Thirdly**, Provisions for conducting free and fair elections with the help of state level Election Commission and Finance Commission to devolve greater resources to these bodies are a great landmark in the history of Panchayati Raj.

But, the big question regarding the status and role of PRIs in present political scenario is that, whether the people in the rural areas, who are going to manage the institutions, have been truly involved so far in connection with the implementation of new system? Several years have been lapsed since the beginning of the New Panchayati Raj system in India after the enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the Constitution. During this period assessment of the working of the panchayats shows that Panchayats have not entirely fulfilled the people's aspirations in terms of becoming participators in decision-making, in decentralised administration, in good governance, and in planning and development. Instead of establishing Panchayat, participation of the down trodden class and the poor communities of the rural society in local governance has not entirely been ensured by way of reserving seats for them in the Panchayats. Vital issues affecting local government have been either in the domain of the state government or central government.

The basic idea behind establishment of PRIs was to decentralize the power at village levels, to provide good governance at grass root levels, to ensure the participation of the villagers in local government and to promote the various developmental plans for upliftment of life of masses. Though these institutions have been set since British time in India but due to major

gaps they cannot flourish as it was expected and cannot achieve much, but the major success can be seen in the field of agriculture.

These institutions came to be associated with few major problems that are as follows:

- The PRIs have faces lack of adequate financial resources and support, hence could not achieve much towards their goals regarding the decentralization of power, providing good governance and implementation of development plans. The Central and the State government have not provided them adequate power yet, to working as independent elected body with enjoying all the powers and functions given by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment
  - The maximum membership of this institution is confined to the landlords, the upper caste people and some affluent members of the village. The poor and other needy groups of villagers cannot be representing themselves in these institutions and hence it fails to achieve the theme of mass representation and participation of poor, needy and downtrodden classes of village society as compared to rich landlords
  - The attitude of bureaucrats towards the PRIs at different level of management, decentralization of power, administration and co-ordination is not very positive and serviceable to the elected representatives of local bodies and common people too. Deep rooted corruption, misuse and abuse of power and public funds is also a major problem, which could be facing by the common people in day-today local administration
  - One of the major obstacles in the path of success of PRIs is that, it is mainly constituted by the illiterate villagers, who have lack political consciousness, and have divided in caste, class and group politics. The reality is that, some of elite landlords have always use money and mussels power to threat the poor and downtrodden classes of village society, that's why it could not receive the goal of decentralization of power and mass political participation

**Dr. George Mathew**, in his keynote presentation on 'Decentralized Governance through Panchayati Raj', expressed 'The Constitution intended to bring about a 'devolution' type of democratic decentralization and not simply a 'deconcentration' or 'delegation' type of administrative decentralization'. Some crucial issues are identified by him, which pose problems for panchayats to become 'Institutions of Self-government' and 'Institutions of Good governance, are as follows:

- In the State Panchayats and Municipal Acts after 1992, one finds that the states have accepted the letter of the 73<sup>rd</sup> or 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments rather than their spirit. In many State Acts, civil servants are indirectly given powers over the elected body. Transfer of activities and functions to panchayats is taking place very slowly

- Although all the states have passed conformity Acts, many of them are yet to formulate rules and byelaws for the day-to-day functioning of panchayats. Added to this, the necessary infrastructural facilities are lacking for panchayats in many states. Many a panchayat does not have even Panchayat Gharas yet
- The paucity of panchayat personnel is also hampering panchayats' functioning particularly budget making. In many states one Secretary is in charge of two or three Panchayats
- The reluctance of state-level politicians to recognize the importance of the lower level of governance – their autonomy their powers and their areas of functioning – is creating problems in devolving powers. Ministers, MLAs and senior political leaders are worried that the power they enjoyed so far will diminish if panchayats and municipalities become really powerful. State-level leaders do not like local level leadership to emerge, which could pose-challenges to them in due course. MLAs put hurdles in the smooth functioning of Panchayats to prevent them from blossoming into full-fledged local governments
- Government officials and government employees prefer to work with a distant control mechanism i.e., the state capital. They do not want to be closely supervised under Panchayati Raj. Therefore, their non-cooperative attitude towards elected panchayat members is a major issue. A related issue is that the officials who work at the district level and below are found to be reluctant to take orders from the elected panchayat executives like the District Panchayat President, Block Samiti President or Village Panchayat President
- A low level of political consciousness in many parts of the country is another factor, which is pulling the new Panchayati Raj backwards. The states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Orissa have a low Panchayati Raj performance rating. Madhya Pradesh was the first state to hold elections to panchayats after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment and elected local bodies came into existence. But soon reports began to appear in newspapers that all was not well with their functioning. A chain of events was reported 161 from different parts of the state: A lady president was stripped naked, another lady was gang-raped, a lower caste vice-president was tortured and a Scheduled caste panchayat member was beaten up
- In many places panchayats themselves are working as oppressive instruments. Absence of land reforms, low levels of literacy, livelihood, awareness, especially among women, patriarchal system, etc. work against weaker sections in the villages. A majority of people suffering from the effects of



traditional oppressive power structures is unable to utilize effectively the new opportunities provided through panchayats.

- More or less all states have facing caste violence during the panchayat election and post-election. There are so many examples, just as last year, the southern districts of Tamil Nadu have been rocked by caste related clashes in which six persons were shot dead by the police while 14 more were killed during the clashes. The main reason behind these clashes was the planned effort of oppressive castes to throw out Dalits from their settlements. On that day just because the Dalits stood for elections to the village panchayat, the upper caste people of the village brutally murdered six persons, including the president and vice president of the panchayat in broad daylight. The post of panchayat president in this village was reserved for the Dalits
- It may be noted here that women representatives in the local bodies have not been treated with the dignity they deserve. In many instances, they are used as proxy members conduct meetings in panchayats and wield the real power. Also, the women elected members face violence if they dare to come out alone to attend meetings or show themselves as dissent
- Working conditions in the panchayats are not congenial. Besides these handicaps, the general atmosphere of the local politics has been vitiated with corruption, violence and petty-mindedness. A great deal of money is involved in contesting election. All these factors affect the choice of deserving candidates among women and also their efficiency after they are returned. Atrocities against women representatives take place in several states
- Another ugly development is the numerous no-confidence motions being brought against female Sarpanches. If a no-confidence motion is passed against a chairperson or deputy chairperson by a two-thirds majority, he/she has to resign. This is how male deputy chairpersons in Panchayati Raj Institutions oust unwanted women office bearers and effect a takeover until fresh elections are held...Some sections of the politically and economically dominant caste groups, which had to cede Panchayat power to OBC/Dalit woman used no-confidence motion to return to the positions of power to protect their vested interests. The reports of auctioning of panchayats in the newspapers can be seen, which is blow to the direct democracy and free and fair elections
- There is a major contradictions found in the precept and the practice. The panchayats are totally dependent on the centre or state governments for their subsistence. Their autonomy is simply meaningless and empty. Election to the Panchayats is manipulated by clever feudal or caste elites. The villagers have no power to recall or re-elect a Panchayat. There is no process of referendum on any important issue. The village body as a whole cannot take any decision freely. Thus, the theme destination of direct democracy and the

decentralization of power at grass root level of very institutions are missing. The illiteracy and poverty of the people prevents their coming out boldly against foul practices

Despite teething troubles, several developments point to a situation of poise and optimism. Non-governmental organisations, Community initiatives and People's organisations are playing an important role in strengthening the Panchayats and municipalities. A large number of NGOs are playing an important role in treating, enabling conditions for the success of the panchayats through awareness-building programmes about their rights and duties to serve the people, training of elected members, especially women, ensuring their active participation in elections, and assisting panchayats in planning and implementation of social development strategies and programmes.

Local bodies in India with their Constitutional legitimacy and interaction with citizens' groups and voluntary organisations present an ideal meeting point between the state and the civil society. The new Panchayati Raj is opening up possibilities for a better flow of information. Information is power and the dominant classes kept the ordinary people in the dark. Transparency in public dealing was missing because everything official was secret and confidential. When democracy is in the hands of ordinary citizens, it can conquer poverty, ensure economic growth with equity, sustain healthy environment and work for human rights. Unfortunately, forces against devolution of democracy to the grassroots are still powerful. One can discern deliberate attempts in the part of vested interests supporting the status quo to create scepticism about the working of the local governments. The dream of Mahatma Gandhi's 'Gram Swaraj' could be converted into reality only when the little republics worked for equality and the prosperity of the people through great dedication.

### **Panchayati Raj System in Bihar**

The Bihar state has well organized and efficiently functional Panchayati Raj Institutions. In the light of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, Government of Bihar enacted the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 which become effective from April 24, 1993. The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 2006 an Act to replace the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 1993 as amended up to date. It shall extend to the whole of the state of Bihar excepting the areas to which the provisions of the Patna Municipal Corporation Act, 1951.

The present Bihar Panchayati Raj Act 2006, is unique in many ways. It has ensured 50% reservation for women in all the categories. 20% reservation has been given to Annexure-1 category of Backward Community. The provision of Gram Kachahri

has also become the part of the Act. Changes have been made to ensure the holding of Gram Sabha meetings regularly.

In the light of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, Bihar has three tier Panchayati Raj Institutions with Gram Panchayats at the lowest, Panchayats Samiti at the intermediate level and Zila Parishad at top level. The Chairperson of Gram Panchayats called Mukhiya, while Panchayat is called Pramukh and Zila Parishad is called Adhyaksha (Chairperson). At the state level the Panchayati Raj Department, Govt. of Bihar, coordinates the function of BPRIs. In Bihar there are 9 Divisions, 38 Districts, 101 Subdivisions, 534 Blocks and 8,463 Panchayats. The Bihar Panchayati Raj Act was passed in 1993 in accordance with the amendment and the whole Act was revised and replaced extensively in 2006. The Bihar Panchayati Raj System evolved a three tiered system with a theme destination of enhancement of political participation and completes decentralization of power at the grass root level, and has objectives to strengthen participatory democracy to make rural masses more articulate.

**TABLE: 2**

**Bihar Profile- At a Glance:**

Total area	94,163.00. sq. kms.
Rural area	92,257.51.sq. kms.
Urban area	1,095. 49. Sq. kms.
Districts	38
Blocks	534
Number of Revenue Villages	45, 103
Total Population	104,099,452 (2011)
Literacy	63.82% (2011)

**TABLE: 2**

**Profile of Reservation Status in Bihar Panchayati Raj System**

Members	Unreserved	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	OBCs	Total
Members of Gram Panchayats	77186	18898	891	18901	115876
Mukhiyas (Chairperson of Gram Panchayats)	5549	1382	87	1464	8463
Panchayat Samiti	7516	1881	91	2078	11566
Pramukh	348	89	04	92	531

Members of Zila Parishad	744	192	09	217	1162
Chairpersons of Zila Parishad	25	06	00	08	39
Panch Members	77187	18898	891	18900	115876
Sarpanch (Chairpersons of Gram Katchharies)	5549	1382	68	1464	8463

In theory, Reservations and the Gram Sabha provide an important means of ensuring that marginal groups are incorporated into local politics and that representative's act in a way that is consistent with their formal responsibilities and the plural interests of their constituents. In practice, a notable change in the social status is being attributed to the implementation of Panchayati Raj. The involvement of the suppressed and down trodden class in the election process and being elected to the constitutional posts is a paradigm shift in the history of Bihar.

However, neither appears to have lived up to this (rather lofty) ideal. Studies of decentralisation have consistently highlighted the fact that the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and earlier attempts at decentralization have failed to prevent a local (and primarily landed) élite from controlling local Panchayats. Most States have held at least one round of elections since 1993. Reservations allowing the participation of women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have been respected (although there is great scope for corruption). Finally, voter participation has been high.

Micro-level studies have shown that Gram Sabha often fail to fulfil their role as deliberative bodies or as a mechanism for accountability. This is partly attributed to low levels of participation among the electorate as well as the non-cooperation of local officials.

The World Bank's study of 53 villages in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh (Alsop et al., 2000) found that gender and education were important determinants of political participation, measured in terms of campaigning, attending rallies, supporting a candidate, influencing voters, contacting a public representative, and attending Gram Sabhas. Interestingly, wealth – measured in terms of land holdings – was not a strong determinant of public participation (see below). Along similar lines, Deshpande and Murthy's study of Panchayati Raj in Karnataka (2002) found that levels of participation were 'considerably low', particularly among women. Similar conclusions have emerged from field studies in West Bengal (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002), Rajasthan and Haryana (Nambiar, 2001).

Even when there are reservations to ensure that marginal groups have a place in the Panchayat system, there is evidence to suggest that these formal institutions have been usurped by more informal patterns of domination and power. Reservations for women, for instance, are notoriously prone to corruption by male relatives, excluded from formal participation by their lack of scheduled status (Vyasulu and Vyasulu, 1999). Similar patterns have been observed among SCs and STs, whose economic wellbeing is dependent on the patronage of local élites.

To achieve the destination to provide participatory and decentralized democracy to the rural communities, the PRIs have faces some ground level problems are as follows:

- In present scenario, there is lack of coordination between the PRIs and the urban local bodies. Article 243 ZD of the Constitution provides that the municipal bodies are expected to coordinate and work in tandem with other institutions of self-government. The chairman of the zila Parishad is the chairman of the district planning committee and the mayor of the municipal corporation and president of the municipal councils in the district are members of this constitutional body
- The PRIs have weak social auditing yet. The reality is that, technically the panchayats do not have adequate expertise, manpower, and skill to plan and implement development schemes and projects. Thereby they are increasing their dependence on the state apparatus. This puts them on the defensive while facing social auditing by the community
- Politicization of PRIs is the biggest problem which has been facing by the local bodies in day-to-day administration .Many Sarpanches contest elections under the patronage of national and regional political parties, as it facilitates their political advancement. This has promoted the use of money and muscle power and even communal clashes have taken place in panchayat elections. Politicization of the panchayats at very large scale, is also responsible for the dismal functioning of Gram Sabhas
- Centralization of power in the hands of Sarpanches is also creates obstacles in the way of decentralized functioning of PRIs. During training programme of representatives of the PRIs in all most all states, many Panches complained that the Sarpanches did not take them into confidence while performing the functions of gram panchayats such as spending government grants, selecting the beneficiaries of welfare schemes and implementation of development programmes. Citing the case of West Bengal, Ghatak and Ghatak (2002) remarked ‘the power of the village council is totally concentrated in the hands of Pradhans (Presidents), for all practical purposes, and the Pradhan is a powerful man’
- Growth of parallel bodies is anther grave problem which has been facing by the PRIs regularly. The parallel bodies taking away functions of PRIs is a growing

concern. Water user groups, joint forest management committees and expert committees are a few examples of the working of parallel institutions in different states. A parliamentary standing committee commented that these parallel bodies were undermining the decision-making powers of the Gram Sabhas and the gram panchayats. Even the youth clubs, Mahila Mandals and other village level organizations that get direct grants from the government were undermining the role assigned to the PRIs by the constitution

## **Conclusion**

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of nation once stated, “Independence must be at the bottom...it follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affair”

The main objective of PRIs is ‘power to the people’ through the panchayats. The PRIs making India not only the world’s largest democracy, but also the world’s most representative, participatory and decentralized democracy. The Amendment Acts provides a framework on which to build the third level of governance panchayats.

However, the impetus gained momentum with the statutory recognition of local bodies as institutions of rural and urban self-governments after the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional amendments in 1993. Although this was not done as a component of structural reform, the attempt at decentralisation coincided with other market-oriented reform efforts. Dr. Bhimrao Abbedkar, the father of Indian Constitution provide for village panchayats in State List of Seventh Schedule, but consistently stressed the need to incorporate reservations for the depressed segments of society in the structure of PRIs .Rajiv Gandhi ensured this and added reservations for women of all categories in PRIs.

**Finally**, we can say that April 23, 1993, is a landmark day in for the Indian democracy, when the Panchayati Raj Institution was accorded constitutional status through the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, thereby seeking to transform Mahatma Gandhi’s dream of Gram Swaraj into reality. The Act provides a vibrant and enlightened Gram Sabhas in central to the success the working of PRIs. To make members of Gram Sabhas aware of their responsibilities, power and functions with a view to ensuring mass participation, particularly of the hitherto marginalized groups, such as women and SCs/STs. Ensuring welfare of the people at village level including welfare of children, especially girl child, health, sanitation, education, communal harmony, social justice particularly caste and gender based discrimination, dispute resolution etc. The Amendment Act also envisages empowered Gram Sabhas as the Parliament of rural people at the grassroots level to whom the Gram Panchayats are solely accountable. Administration of development programmes aimed at social, economic and cultural development are entrusted to these local –self-governing institution.

