



RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON THE ROLE OF PANCHAYAT RAJ ON THE RURAL DEVELOPMENT OF KARNATAKA STATE

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ABSTRACT

In India poverty remains a chronic condition for almost more than 35% of India's rural population. A major cause of poverty among India's rural people, both individuals and communities, is lack of access to productive assets and financial resources. Further, high level of illiteracy, inadequate health care and extremely limited access to social services are common among poor rural people. Both central and state governments have brought out many measures and programmes to eradicate rural poverty. They have failed to achieve the desired objective. In the recent past the studies on rural development have gained momentum among the Indian economists. In the process of achieving rural development the Panchayats are expected to play an important role, since the period of independence. Hence the present study is placed in this context to examine the role of panchayat raj systems in the rural development of Karnataka state and also to suggest suitable measures for the effective functioning of panchayat raj institutions in improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural people. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from field survey in the sample of seven districts of Karnataka state. It was found that there were some facilities given by gram panchayats, which have been inadequate like quality of roads and sanitation. But, the rural people in certain districts from the sample have shown their satisfaction with some services like education, providing drinking water and streetlights facilities. As it was seen that due to the successful intervention by panchayat raj institutions in poverty alleviation schemes there are some structural changes in the villages.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite India maintaining the growth rate of around 7%, being one of the fastest growing economies of the world, even today poverty remains to be the most important problem in India. According to the census (2011) there are 69% of the people live in villages. As the recent census indicates that the population (31%) living in urban centres has increased tremendously. According to the official estimation of the Indian government (2012) the population of poor was 22% in the country and more importantly a large population of poor people live in rural areas. Hence, poverty remains a chronic condition for almost more than 35% of India's rural population. Particularly poverty is very deep among the members of scheduled castes, tribes and women in the country's rural regions. In India more rural poverty prevails majority among Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh,

Bihar, Orissa, Chattisgarh and Karnataka states (Pandit and Kulkarni, 2012). A major cause of poverty among India's rural people, both individuals and communities, is lack of access to productive assets and financial resources. Further, high level of illiteracy, inadequate health care and extremely limited access to social services are common among poor rural people. Both central and state governments have brought out many measures and programmes to eradicate rural poverty. They have failed to achieve the desired objective. In the recent past the studies on rural development have gained momentum among the Indian economists. In this backdrop the study of rural development assumes more importance (Vijaykumar; 1999). In the process of achieving rural development the Panchayats are expected to play an important role, since the period of independence. Panchayats bodies are being anticipated to perform the following functions; civic, developmental, land management, land reform and judicial functions. Hence the present study is placed in this context to examine the role of panchayat raj systems in the rural development of Karnataka state and also to suggest suitable measures for the effective functioning of

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panchayat raj institutions in improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural people.

Definitions of Rural Development

Rural development is the concept which encompasses an overall development of rural areas in social, economic, political and cultural fields in turn rural people may have a happy life. Rural development indicates betterment of the lifestyles of rural people. It also considers the socio-economic and political development of the villages. Rural development indicates the improvement in village infrastructure, rural income of households and improvement in rural education and health. As the planning commission says that rural development involves economic and social development of villages with an increase in income level and quality of lifestyle of villagers. National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) also has given its own definition of rural development, according to it rural development is a promotion of agriculture, small industry, cottage and village industry, handicrafts and other rural crafts, and allied agricultural activities in rural areas with a view to promoting integrated rural development and securing the prosperity. According to D.M. Nanjundappa, "Rural development refers to integrated multi-sectarian activity which includes the development of agriculture and social overhead facility. According to G. Shah rural development is "the development of rural areas, often rural development has meant the extension of irrigation facilities, expansion of electricity, improvement in the techniques of cultivation, construction of school building and provision of educational facilities, health care etc." The rural developmental programmes of central and state governments intend to reduce poverty and unemployment, to progress health and educational level and also to fulfil the fundamental needs such as food, shelter and clothing of the rural people. Since the beginning of independence government of India has started several rural developmental programmes, some of these programmes are; Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Twenty Point Programme, Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), Training Rural Youths for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), Food for Work Programme (FWP), National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and others. All these programmes proposed to reduce the income gap between rural and urban population (*Panda & Majumder; 2013*).

Emergence of Panchayat Raj System in India

The term 'Panchayat' denotes that a group of five elderly leaders elected by the rural people. Panchayat Raj means democratic decentralization and installation of rural local self-Government at village, block and District levels. The existence of panchayat system in India has a very long history. We can trace back its existence in the ancient times through the religious texts on the administration of the villages. Whereas in the ancient times village panchayat was very strong system which had the power of collecting revenues, implementing developmental plans and providing justice. After the independence panchayat systems got formal structure. Mahatma Gandhi was of the view that democratic functioning must be decentralised and it should be at the grass root level. The central government had implemented CDP (community development programme) in 1952 covering all the initiatives of rural development. But it was not able to perform according to the needs of the rural people. Balwant Rai Mehta committee

had been appointed to oversee the drawbacks of the programme of community development. The report of the committee suggested that the cause for the failure of the CDP was lack of people's participation. Hence Balwant Rai suggested that there should be institutional mechanism at the local level for implementing rural developmental programmes. From 1959 due to Balwant Rai suggestions several experiments have been conducted to revive panchayat raj through it rural development could be achieved. Further, Ashoka Mehta committee had been appointed to envisage the role of panchayat raj for rural development in a faster level. The committee gave several suggestions for the development of panchayat raj system in India, which were based on the principles of decentralization. Most importantly Ashoka Mehta committee recommended for the creation of constitutional status for the panchayat raj systems.

In this background, the 73rd amendment to the constitution came in 1992. This amendment provided constitutional framework for the "democracy at the grass-root level as it is at the state level or National level". With this huge development, state governments also changed their panchayat raj acts and gave more power to the panchayat raj institutions. The major functions of panchayat raj systems enlisted in the state panchayat acts are grouped into three: General Administrative Functions, Developmental and Social Functions and Maintenance (*Vijaykumar; 1999*). As mentioned in the constitution of India the Panchayath Raj system has three – tier structure. i) Zilla Panchayth ii) Taluk Panchayath iii) Gram Panchayath. Gram Panchayath is one of the parts of Panchayath Raj system. It was aimed at the development of a planned village which is taken for counting to play its role at the level of villages these Gram Panchayaths was given prominence to make special works with regards to the development of villages.

Review of Literature

H.R. Chaturvedi and S.K. Mitra conducted a study (1982) on the administrative aspects in the rural development. The major objective of the study was to examine the nature and extent of citizen participation in rural development. The authors had selected two districts from 2 distinct states. According to them in order to achieve rural development it is very necessary for people participation in these activities, particularly through panchayat raj institutions. Harijan M.F. in his study (2001) attempted to study the role of panchayat raj systems in the empowerment of landless cultivators in West Bengal. As the findings of the study show that indeed there is a relationship with the role of panchayat raj system in the empowerment of landless cultivators. Panchandikar (1978) has tried to analyse the three major blocks; Vijapur, Anand and Navasari of Gujarat State. Throughout the study the author had attempted to examine the modern aspects in the block level institutions. However, the major focus was on the role of traditional institutions like co-operatives organizations, rural banks, agricultural credit and Panchayat Raj institutions in the process of rural modernisation. As the study indicates that in the above mentioned three blocks there have been numerous programmes implemented by panchayat raj institutions in making villages modern. Amal Ray in his study (1976) analysed the administration process in the panchayat raj institution, particularly in the taluk level administration on rural development. Ray took sample of two taluks in the Karnataka state. Findings of this study help us to understand

the working profile and administration setup of taluk panchayats in implementing rural developmental programmes. G. K. Lietaen (2000) evaluated the panchayat raj institutions in the state of Kerala. In his study he found that the majority of the people who are being elected and working in the panchayat systems were poor farmers, who never had any role in saying in implementation of rural developmental programmes. Now due to decentralization and reservation for sc/st/obc/women in panchayat system, they are part of the developmental process and do not feel alienated. In the rural areas the poor feel that their power over village affairs has increased and that due to Gram Sabha. Aziz (1993) and Babu (1997) conducted various studies on the process of decentralisation in planning of Karnataka state, which outlines the politico-administrative structure created for undertaking decentralized planning. These studies critically evaluated the implementation of such decentralised planning. The findings of these studies indicate that at the implementation level these panchayat raj institutions achieved excellence but the poor performance was visible at the planning level.

Methodology

The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The primary data has been collected from field survey in the sample of seven districts of Karnataka state. To obtain the primary data along with field survey, interview method and participant observational methods have been used. The sources of secondary data for the study are; existing literature and data in websites, various publications of Central and State, especially State Level Bankers Committee, Bangalore and Institutional Finance Department and other sources like books, magazines, newspapers, reports, articles, seminar papers published by universities and research institutions. Apart from the published material, study is also based on discussions with various people such as officials and non-officials of the Lead Bank Office and Gram Panchayath.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the role of panchayat raj systems in the rural development of Karnataka state
- To suggest suitable measures for the effective functioning of panchayat raj institutions in Karnataka state

Major Findings of the Study

The following are the significant findings of the study, which are based on the analysis of the survey conducted throughout the state of Karnataka. It was found that there were some facilities given by gram panchayats, which have been inadequate like quality of roads and sanitation. The accessibility of these roads vary from village to village, around 70% of the beneficiaries have said that these mentioned facilities are not adequate. So, there is a need of urgency in providing quality of services in the area of roads and sanitation. But, the rural people in certain districts from the sample have shown their satisfaction with some services like education, providing drinking water and streetlights facilities. The numbers of schools; primary and secondary have been opened up in each and every village and being taken care by the gram panchayats. As it was seen that due to the successful intervention by panchayat raj institutions in poverty alleviation schemes there are some structural changes in the villages,

whereas the incomes of the people who are living in lowest strata has noticeably increased. For a very long time in the history we can find references that these people at the lowest level had been exploited by the higher class people. These poverty alleviation programmes have created favourable and encouraging atmosphere for these lower people to increase their incomes in the rural economy. Due to the panchayat raj institutions people's participation, particularly people from lower strata have found a platform to discuss their issues through gram panchayat, in which they try to solve their problems. In the current scenario these lower people are taking active role in these rural activities. As it was found that panchayat raj institution's involvement with the employment guarantee schemes like MGNREGA has helped villagers in a significant way. Majority of the respondents reacted positively as they were saying that these programmes had helped them to improve their economic condition. Thus the rural development programs implemented through the Panchayat Raj institutions in selected area have provided more employment opportunities for village landless people, artisans, small and marginal farmers and handicrafts. These programs have also provided good social and economic positions for the rural people. The SC/ST people are getting more facility of rural development program compare to the other caste people, because they were socially and economically backward than their counter parts. And the rural development programs also become a good instrument for infrastructure development of rural area. The Panchayats providing more facilities like drinking water, sanitation, health services, school buildings, adult education, roads and bridges, street lights and etc, these facilities provided by Panchayat Raj institutions as agency of state government.

Conclusion

In the 21st century it is imperative that the implementation of rural developmental schemes and programmes to be made through the system of panchayat raj institutions. As this study clearly indicates that with the emergence of such PRIs there is a significant change in the lives of rural people. In the economic front of the rural development programs have created an improvement in economic position of the selected area, as a result of implementation of rural development programs most of the people gain additional income. As the primary data shows that without the panchayat raj institutions nowadays it is not possible to initiate any state or central governmental plan. For that an instance can be quoted; throughout India in the rural regions the programme of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Scheme has been implemented successfully with the help of panchayat raj institutions. Like MGNREGA there have been numerous programmes which aim to eliminate rural poverty and unemployment. With the increasing role of panchayat raj institutions the people's participation in developmental activities also have increased.

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