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Panchayati raj and democracy in India

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Abstract

India is a country of villages. In India, special arrangements have been made for administration at the local level. Development of political consciousness is the soul of the democratic system. Constant awareness is necessary to protect the rights and freedoms given to citizens in democracy. Today, tireless efforts are being made for rural development by the state government as well as the central government.

Keywords: Panchayati raj, democratic decentralization, rural development, Viksit Bharat

Introduction

The idea of Panchayati Raj is not the gift of independent India, rather its roots in Indian history. Hence, it is necessary to study this historical background. An overview of the ancient history of India shows that Panchayats existed in the Vedic period. Even in those times, the king ruled through Panchayats. The head of the village was called Gramani at that time. Gramani was the main worker of the Panchayat. There is mention of village councils in the Buddhist period as well. There is mention of its expansion and development in the Ramayana and Mahabharata period as well. In the Mauryan period, the village was the smallest unit of governance. The person elected by the people of the village, 'Gramik' was the head of the village. In the Gupta period records also, the 'Gram Sabha' has been called 'Gram Janapada and Panchmandali' which used to perform the main tasks at the village level. Before independence, the form of Panchayati Raj system in India was not the same as is seen at present.

Historical background

The first panchayats were established in Bharatpur in 1925, the Gram Panchayat Act was passed in Kota in the same year and in Bikaner in 1928. In 1937, a brief Gram Panchayat Act was passed in Jaipur. But this Act was not implemented. In Mewar, the Mewar Panchayat Act was passed in 1940. In 1948, the Panchayat Raj Ordinance was passed by the United Government under the leadership of Manikya Lal Verma. After independence, the Panchayat Raj Act was passed in November 1954 and implemented in India. In this regard, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had described it as a new revolutionary step in the self-governance of India. Mahatma Gandhi, while throwing light on the Panchayat Raj system before independence, had said that till the time the people at the ground level do not participate in the governance, the roots of democracy cannot be strengthened and in the absence of Panchayat Raj, it will remain baseless. The first effort for the need of Panchayat Raj and rural development was made by Gandhi ji. The development of villages can be done only by Panchayat Raj institutions, Gandhi had said that the soul of India resides in the villages. Panchayati Raj institutions cannot be successful unless the villages are developed and made self-dependent. Gandhi Ji's concept of Gram Swaraj and Pandit Nehru's concept of Panchayati Raj are the direct form of Indianness. In "My Picture of India", Gandhi ji had said that the main objective of Panchayati Raj should be the development of rural areas because successful democracy is not possible unless the villages are developed. In the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, it has been said that the Panchayati Raj system will be a three-tier system. There will be Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zila Parishad at the district level. Thus, under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, a new chapter Part 9 has been added to the Constitution. Articles 243 A to 243 N are attached to this part. 11 schedules related to Panchayats have also been kept in the

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Constitution. Panchayati Raj institutions have been recognized by the Constitution by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. By this amendment, provision has been made to form Panchayats in three stages, these are- (A) Gram Panchayat at the village level. (B) Panchayat Samiti at the block level. (C) Zila Parishad at the district level. Under this, provision has been made for reservation for scheduled castes and tribes. Out of the total seats to be filled by direct election in each Panchayat, one third seats will be reserved for women. One third seats for the post of village president will also be reserved for women. Each Panchayat will work for a period of five years from the date of its first meeting. If the Panchayat is dissolved before time, then elections should be held within 6 months from the date of dissolution.

Discussion

In the Indian political system, special arrangements have been made for administration at the local level. To make the democratic decentralized political system more and more popular, important powers and rights are being provided to the Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and District Councils organized at the local level so that the execution or implementation of social and economic developmental works in rural areas can be done successfully by rural people and active rural leaders and workers at the village level and at the district level. After the establishment of Panchayati Raj, there have been serious changes in the structure and nature of the villages of India. The establishment of Panchayati Raj is the most important among the political reforms done in India after independence. Norman D Pamer has considered them to be the most inspiring experiment in the democratic decentralization of a developing country. From the political point of view, the main objective of the establishment of Panchayati Raj was to establish democratic values and behaviour at the rural level so that decentralization of power could be done at the lower points of the government structure and the people living in the remote areas of the country could also be given an opportunity to influence the affairs of the country. This was the basic idea behind the democratic decentralization that Balwant Rai Mehta Committee has given to the Panchayat Raj system. To achieve this goal, more and more autonomy is being provided to democratic decentralized institutions. It has become a question mark whether these Panchayat Raj institutions are fulfilling their responsibilities properly? Similarly, it has also become a question mark whether the rural leaders and workers working at the village level, block level and district level are discharging their responsibilities effectively and taking the rural social and economic development programs in the right direction.

After independence, the implementation of the new constitution, the national level government agencies in India have been decentralized. But even the important matters related to the lives of the common people were decided by the government officials. In such a situation, the villagers have not been able to get the proper benefits of the various schemes adopted for rural development. Thus, unless there is participation of local people in these programmes, neither can they be successful nor can their benefits be made permanent. Hence, democratic decentralisation was suggested so that all the problems of local level development are left in the hands of the affected people. In this, the common people not only participate in the

development programmes of their area but can also play an important role in decision making. A new political philosophy was implemented at the rural level in Panchayati Raj, the main objective of which was to politicise the rural people and bring them into the mainstream of democracy. The 73rd Amendment Bill of the Constitution 1993 has proved to be a milestone in this regard. The participation of women in Panchayats was first talked about in the report of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee in 1957. After that, the report of Ashok Mehta Committee was presented in 1977 and the report of L.M. Singhvi Committee in 1985. But late Rajiv Gandhi took the initiative to revive Panchayati Raj institutions by giving them constitutional status and other powers. Late Rajiv Gandhi, while expressing his intention to empower Panchayats, had said that "Democracy has no meaning without Panchayati Raj. Their neglect in India is Gandhi's neglect". Real change, as Pandit Nehru had said, "comes from the villages, it cannot be imposed from outside". Congress came to power in 1991 and in 1992, Panchayats were given constitutional status in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. This amendment was an important step for the political empowerment of women. Section 243 D(2) of the amendment directs that one-third of the total posts will be reserved for women. 243 D(5)(6) also direct similar reservation for other posts of Panchayati Raj. The state on which this study is focused also reserves 1/3 posts for women as per Section 15 in its Panchayati Raj Act. One third of the Panchs in every Panchayat, one third of the chiefs in the entire state will be women. And women wards will also be reserved. Only women candidates will be able to contest elections from women wards. Women can also contest elections from male wards if they wish.

Results

We can say that Bihar is the first state in India where there is provision of 50% reservation for women in the Panchayat Raj system from Gram Panchayat to Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad. By giving reservation to women of every category in Panchayat Raj institutions, an attempt has definitely been made to include them in the mainstream of village development. If awareness is brought in this work of the society, then all the development programs, whether related to wage employment or self-employment, can be brought into the mainstream of development due to special provisions for women.

In the modern era, the concept of politicization is a new approach. The meaning of politicization is that the people of a country or region discuss among themselves about the political events, organizations, activities, decisions and important changes etc., participate in them, express different opinions or reactions towards them, force the political power to take decisions in their favor and not to take unfavorable decisions. Thus, politicization means the development of political consciousness, which is the basic soul of the democratic system. In democracy, constant awareness is necessary to protect the rights and freedoms that are given to the citizens. India is a country of villages. Politicization could not take place in Indian villages during the time of foreign rule. After independence, a democratic system was established in India, and the democratic government started community development schemes for the development of villages. But due to lack of expected success, bureaucracy dominated these. To deal with this situation, the principle of democratic decentralisation was

implemented on the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. Under this, political consciousness started developing among the rural people through the system of three-tier village, block and district democratic decentralisation.

Political awareness helped in instilling self-confidence in the people of the village, as a result of which they became quite active in protecting their political rights. The old leaders of the rural areas who were elected only due to lineage and birth in a high family gradually moved away from the political arena and in their place, responsible people from the relatively younger generation started getting elected. As a result of this change, the promotion and spread of political awareness started taking place in the new generation. The influence of the caste system is very deep in the villages of India and as a result, the castes considered backward and low have been isolated from political power since a long time. The Panchayati Raj system has brought about a change in this old traditional system and awakened political awareness among the backward castes, thus changing the traditional feudal leadership and bringing democratic leadership in the mainstream of development in its place.

Thus, due to Panchayati Raj, Indian villages have been transformed politically and socially. Along with Panchayati Raj, development of means of communication, establishment of educational institutions, promotion of community development programmes, establishment of many public welfare programmes, and social visits of political leaders to rural areas have also helped in bringing the rural people on the path of development. Panchayati Raj has brought a revolutionary change in the social psychology and political outlook of the people of the villages in the hands of a new type of leadership. While demonstrating the importance of Panchayati Raj, Jai Prakash Narayan has written that "It would be appropriate to mention that the success of Panchayati Raj will depend on the extent to which political parties are able to stop themselves from interfering in it and making it a puppet in their hands and a ladder to climb the heights of power. There is no doubt that as the consciousness awakens among the rural people, they will want to become less pawns of political parties and ambitious politicians." But initially the main requirement is that the political parties themselves decide in the interest of the public that they will not put pressure on the elected representatives to become party members through which they can control these democratic institutions. Thus, it is worth mentioning here that some political parties have voluntarily decided to keep themselves away from Panchayati Raj institutions. Those who believe in this view say that if political parties start participating actively in Panchayati Raj institutions, then many of its current evils will automatically go away. Instead of creating obstacles in the work of Panchayati Raj, these political parties will provide them inspiration to work on the basis of their comprehensive socio-economic policies. As a result, people will be able to unite due to similar political views from the rural level to the national level and join the mainstream of the nation. Giving his opinion in this regard, Rajni Kothari has written that it is not accepted that the unity of the village, which is feared to be broken by political parties, is only a false imagination (myth) which does not exist in reality. Political parties make an important contribution to the development of the country. Party struggle breaks the

boundaries of opinions based on voluntary organisations. This leads to the establishment of uniformity of programmes and principles in place of dynastic privileges.

Conclusion

India is a country of villages where about 70% of the population lives in villages. Hence every political party will definitely focus its attention on villages and will try to get rural leaders to support the programmes and policies of that party. The politics of the country is strung together in an organic unity from bottom to top, i.e. from village level to national level like a garland. In such a situation, it is not possible that political parties working independently at the national level keep the rural level out of their area of work. Because the basic form of Gandhi's dream India is to bring the village into the mainstream of development. Because the soul of India resides in the villages, the entry of political parties is a natural process. Wherever there is power, the arrival of politics is natural. No one can stop it. In this regard, S. Bhatnagar has said that it is correct to say that the entry of political parties in the local area has a healthy impact on rural life and the administration of these institutions. Thus, in the present political environment, the 73rd amendment of the Constitution has taken a revolutionary step in the development of the Panchayati Raj system. Today, tireless efforts are being made for rural development by the provincial government as well as the central government. Even the person at the last rung of the society is reaching the heights of development. In this regard, sb ka Saath and Sab ka Vikas by the present government is a historic step. That is why the problems of electricity, water and roads in every village of present India are ending and touching new heights. There is not only hope but complete confidence that the day is not far when India will also come in the category of developed nations.

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