

Weaker Sections Representation in Panchayathi Raj Institutions- A study in Karnataka

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Abstract

The present paper intends to discuss the theoretical aspects of panchayat raj system in India in general and the growth of panchayat raj systems in Karnataka in particular. It also focuses on the provisions for weaker sections in 73rd Amendment Act, and in subsequent panchayat raj Acts passed in Karnataka. It analyses the status of weaker sections in Chickballapur District's panchayat raj institutions. The objective of this paper is to discuss the status of representatives of weaker sections. In order to assess the effective functioning of weaker section's representatives in panchayat raj institutions after 1993 Act of Karnataka, the case study and analytical methods have been employed in this study. In the study the collected sample is 200 in total, covering of three types of panchayat raj institutions. The caste wise distribution of sample included, 80 belonging to SC, 45 from ST and 75 from OBC. Based on the information collected from the field the findings have been made.

Key words: panchayat raj, Act of 1993, Balwanthroy Mehta, weaker sections, 73rd Amendment

Introduction

Without understanding the social structure in the Indian context, it's nature, social structure, pattern of land holding, caste structure, the problem of rural villages, it may not be possible to understand the working of rural local Governments in India. Since Indian society is based on caste system and consequent social inequality, only the people from higher social status used to be involved in the process of administration, directly or indirectly.

Social inequalities existed in the villages and these have continued for centuries. Under these circumstances, soon after Independence the concept of social justice figured in the Indian constitution. Thus the constitution of India made an attempt to provide equal social opportunities for the development of personality of all the people in the society, without any discrimination on the basis of caste, sex or race.

However, social inequalities continued for a long time in the Indian society. The reasons may be several. The people from higher social strata had received education, and they controlled and managed land. They took up income-earning activities. On the contrary, the lower strata people were denied education, and they were deprived of their right to manage and controlled land. Thus they were forced to take up low-income earning activities. Particularly in the villages the lower strata

people took up supportive works for the people who had taken up agricultural activities, such as Carpentry, Blacksmithy, Leather work, Mason, labourers and other works.

As the low income group people in the villages became marginalized, they became the weaker sections of the society. Therefore, after Independence, India was one among the countries which went in for social and economic transformation of the rural population. As a preferred condition, rural development became a definite strategy for the improvement of the living conditions of the rural poor. In this direction the Government of India made efforts to solve problems such as poverty, ill health, illiteracy, and backwardness of varied nature prevailing in rural areas, by giving greater attention to the upliftment of the rural poor.

The SC,ST, and OBC who are considered as backward classes or marginalized sections have become an important component in defining of the development policies because of their socio-economic deprivation in the traditional society of India. The political involvement of the upper castes is still more in institutions like Assembly and Parliament. The reservation of seats for SC,ST in parliament and state assemblies was 15%. On the contrary, there was no representation from the larger sections of the marginalized castes i.e., from the backwards. As a result of this, at present, political participation in India is limited to only a few upper castes and those who are having income of crores of rupees, as they manage and control the political system, land pattern. The upper caste and capitalist people did not mind in formulating and execution of welfare and developmental policies intended for the weaker sections. It can be seen in the failure of several programs. Among these are Community Development Programs and National Extension Program. These programs were implemented in tune with the upper caste people in the rural areas.

The present paper intends to discuss the theoretical aspects of the Panchayat raj system in India in general and the growth of panchayat raj institutions in Karnataka in particular. It also focuses on the provisions for weaker sections in 73rd Amendment Act, and in subsequent Panchayat Acts passed in Karnataka. Finally, it analyses the status of weaker sections in Chickballapur district's Panchayat raj Institutions. Based on the information collected from the field the findings have been made.

BALWANTHROY MEHTA COMMITTEE REPORT

The union government appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Balwanth Roy Mehta. The main purpose of appointing this committee was to evaluate the functioning of community development programmes. While reviewing the functions of community development programmes Balwanthroy Mehta committee thought about panchayat raj system. Thus, the creation of panchayat raj system in India is purely by the intellectual contribution of Balwanth Roy Mehta committee. The creation of panchayat raj system was begun in India on 2nd October 1959 in Rajasthan. Later on Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Assam and in some Union territories. The basic purpose of creating the panchayat raj system is purely to meet the local problems and to implement the developmental programs. Balwanth Roy Mehta committee recommended three tier system for panchayat raj. The committee gave the thrust on Panchayat samithi, which is to be established at block level. It is known as block level body. It is a statutory and executive body, comprehensive in its functions, equipped with necessary authority and in possession of adequate sources. The committee further felt that the Panchayat Samithi must not be cramped by too much control by the government agencies. It is an

important to note that the committee had given importance to panchayat samithi and neglected the other two systems of Panchayat raj Institution's. Among the other important reason was that the committee wanted to implement rural developmental programs very effectively and without interference from political parties and groups.

ASHOK MEHTA COMMITTEE:

The central government appointed an important committee in 1977, that was Ashok Mehta committee. It was appointed to enquire into the working of Panchayat raj Institutions and suggest measures to strengthen them to "enable a decentralized system of planning and development to be effective". The committee also suggested recommendations only with the intention of development in rural areas. It recommended reform and revitalization of panchayat raj based upon the central premises of "linking institutions of democratic decentralization with socially motivated economic development".

Both the acts thought of attempting to bring about rural development either by three or two tier system of panchayat raj institutions. They could not achieve the specified motive to a larger extent, due to the ignorance of the people, non involvement of weaker sections, to whom the schemes are to be reached. The upper caste and dominant people of the villages intentionally diverted the schemes. Thus, the attempt of panchayat raj institutions in developing the weaker sections has remained limited only to the records.

PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTINS IN KARNATAKA

Before reorganization of Karnataka State on linguistic basis, were under Mysore state, Madras presidency, the Bombay presidency, and the state of Hyderabad. In all parts there was the working of local governments i.e., under Mysore local bodies acts 1902 there were three tier structure of Union Panchayat, Taluk Boards, and District Boards. In princely Mysore state the local governments were given limited powers, though there was limited concentration on the development of rural areas.

Under Madras Presidency, the local governments were established by the Madras District Boards Act, 1920 and in the Madras panchayat Act 1920. These Acts facilitated only two tier systems of local governments i.e., District Boards were related to education, public health, maintenance of roads etc., It is evident that all these powers are to concentrate on local problems and thus achieve rural development. In the Bombay presidency the local governments were established and further enlarged by series of amendments, such as the Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1920 which facilitated the introduction of panchayat raj system in Bombay presidency. The other Acts were 1928, 1933, 1939, and 1947. " These Acts extended to the local bodies with the powers to the supervision and control of primary and secondary education, since, the education is one of the instruments for development. In the State of Hyderabad, the local government at village and district level were assigned limited developmental roles. But the village institutions were to collect the revenue from villages.

After India got independence, the development of panchayat raj institutions in Karnataka has taken place in phases. Based on the recommendations of Balwant Roy Mehta Committee, the Government of Mysore enacted a new legislation in 1959 called "Mysore Village Panchayat and Local Bodies Act, 1959". Accordingly there came into existence (1) Village Panchayat, (2) Taluk

Panchayat and (3) District Development Council. These institutions carried on functions satisfactorily and were able to make people to participate actively in developmental process.

KARNATAKA PANCHAYAT RAJ ACT OF 1983 AND WEAKER SECTIONS

The term 'Weaker Section' has been defined differently by different authorities. The study group on the welfare of weaker sections was of the view that "we should not however, be wrong if the agriculture labourers, petty cultivators and village artisans also constitute weaker sections". As a matter of fact the weaker sections consist of all such people who because of socio-political, socio-religious reasons, have become suppressed, depressed and oppressed.

The people of the weaker sections are those who are subject to both social and economic disabilities and are denied the opportunities to equip themselves to participate in administrative, political, social, and cultural affairs. Weaker sections consists of vulnerable groups of society needing special care and protection. They are the alienated section of the society. For the purpose of the present study the SCs, STs and OBSs as identified by the Government of Karnataka are taken as the weaker sections of the society.

The Karnataka panchayat raj system based on 1983 Act has been recognised as important in making effort in the process of democratic decentralization. Firstly, the Act gives status and stature to the panchayat raj bodies, secondly, the Act entrust the Panchayati raj bodies with all those welfare, development and civic functions and responsibilities, thirdly, the Act equips Panchayat raj bodies with resources by way of budgetary support and staff, fourthly, the Act entrusted powers to perform the entrusted functions satisfactorily with statutory autonomy of decision making, and fifthly, the Act also called for involvement in socio-economic rural development with distributive justice.

Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act of 1993

Karnataka State was one of the very few states in India to obligation set by the 73rd Amendment Act. In Karnataka an Act was passed in the year 1993 and accordingly a three tier panchayat raj system consisting of Zilla Panchayats at the district level, Taluk panchayats at the taluk level and Grama Panchayats at the village level was been established in the years 1994 and 1995.

The 73rd Amendment Act provided for due reservation to SC and ST. As for the reservation to the OBC in the local bodies, it was optional and discretionary on the part of the states. Accordingly, in the country many states have provided reservations to their weaker sections particularly to OBCs along with SCs and STs.

In Karnatka till the amendment of Panchayat Raj was made in 1993, almost all the institutions were managed and controlled by the dominant castes.

As per the amendment Act of 1993, following are the reservation provisions provided for weaker sections in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

- Reservation of seats in favour of SCs and STs in proportion of their population subject to minimum of 15 and 3% respectively in all levels.
- Reservation of 1/3 of seats for women at all levels
- Reservation of 1/3 of seats to persons belonging to backward classes.

- Reservation of seats in each category (SCs, STs and Backward classes and general) at all levels for women.
- The office of the Chairmans and Deputy Chairmans are also reserved at all levels for persons belonging to SCs,STs and women.

As a result of 73rd constitutional amendment and the subsequent Panchayat Raj Acts in 1993, the Karnataka Government extended the reservation of seats in Panchayat Raj Institutions to people belonging to OBC and Women on par with SCs and STs. Infact this Act facilitated the political reservations for weaker section in all types of Panchayt raj Institutions.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this paper is to discuss the status of weaker sections in Panchayat Raj institutions in the state of Karnataka, It also intends to discuss the implementation of welfare policies through the representatives of weaker sections. In order to assess the effective functioning of weaker section's representatives in panchayat raj institutions after 1993 Act of Karnataka, the case study and analytical methods have been employed in this study.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS:

In order to find out the facts relating to the working and involvement of weaker sections in panchayat raj institutions, besides the secondary data, the primary information was also collected by visiting the rural areas, meeting the people, officials and representatives. The main focus is on the developmental work at the places/colonies of the people belonging to SC,ST and OBC. Though the places of living belonging to upper caste area observed, this was only for comparison. In the study the collected sample is 200 in total, covering of three types panchayat raj institutions. The caste wise distribution of sample included 80 belonging to SC,40 from ST and 75 from OBC. Based on the information collected through a scientific research method and keeping in view of involvement, reservation benefit, awareness towards the panchayat raj institutions and the efficiency to implement the welfare programs for the development of weaker section through panchayat raj institutions in Chickballapur rural Zilla panchayat, the following observations are made.

1. The weaker section's involvement is necessary for the formulation of welfare policies for the development of weaker section, since a number of rural development policies are being implemented through panchayat raj institutions in Karnataka.
2. The weaker section's political participation in panchayat raj institutions is made possible by providing reservation of seats, since the Indian society is based on caste system. Particularly caste is the basis of earning and for social status. In turn, these factors determine the political power in the rural areas.
3. There exists a relationship between the economic earnings of representatives and the level of involvement in the working of Panchayat Raj Institutions. The members who are actively involved in the working of all tiers of panchayat raj institutions are only with independent earnings. On other hand, those whose income is less and depend on other activities are showing less interest in the involvement of panchayat raj institutions.
4. There exists a larger number of involvement of members belonging to OBCs, due to the provision of 73rd Amendment Act and particularly the Karnataka.

Panchayat Raj Act of 1993, Where this act provides 1/3 of seats reserved for OBC. In fact, this provision facilitated the weaker sections, particularly OBC to enter into the working panchayat raj institutions and are being concentrated on the welfare of their community.

5. In the study area there exists the political participation of women belonging to weaker sections. The women representatives are not aware of the objectives of panchayat raj institutions. The reservation provision made under 1993 Act made many women to become the members of panchayat raj institutions. But, the offices are managed by the male members of the family.
6. In the study area the educational status of representatives is between illiterates to degree and diploma courses. There exists a good number of illiterate members. Another important finding of the study is that the highest number of representatives over the institutions of panchayat raj is between 4th to 7th standard and from 8th to 10th Standard. This trend is because of the drop out from the school education. And started to concentrate on their traditional works. On the other hand, educated persons have migrated to cities in search of employment. Thus, the 73rd Amendment and of Karnataka panchayat raj Act, 1993 provided the opportunities to the school drop outs by involving them in panchayat raj institutions.
7. The representatives belonging to SCs and STs are most organized, aware of their rights, understand the panchayat raj institutions and are committed to the welfare of their community. The majority of them have studied upto 10th Standard and above, because of the provisions under welfare schemes. They are organized by different associations and are bringing pressure on the Government for their rights and welfare.
8. The majority of the representatives belonging to OBCs constitute number of sub-castes and there exists differences over the castes across OBCs.

Finally, the paper concludes that the political participation of SC,ST and OBCs is possible due to the reservation provisions in Panchayat Raj Institutions. Though there are some lacunas in the working of weaker sections in panchayat raj institutions, it is still the most significant factor for the success of democratic decentralization. A number of developmental programmes would be implemented by the involvement of weaker sections through the political participation.

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