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A study on the impact of panchayat raj on Karnataka state's rural development

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Abstract

Poverty persists as a persistent state for about 35% of India's rural population. One of the primary factors contributing to poverty in rural areas of India, affecting both individuals and communities, is the limited availability of productive assets and financial resources. Moreover, impoverished rural populations often have a significant prevalence of illiteracy, insufficient healthcare provisions, and severely restricted availability of social services. Numerous initiatives and programs have been implemented by both national and state governments with the aim of eliminating rural poverty. They have been unsuccessful in attaining the intended goal. In recent years, there has been a growing interest among economists in India regarding the field of rural development. The Panchayats have been anticipated to assume a significant role in the pursuit of rural development since the era of independence. Therefore, the current research is situated within this framework to investigate the significance of panchayat raj systems in the rural development of Karnataka state. Additionally, it aims to provide appropriate strategies for enhancing the operational efficiency of panchayat raj institutions to enhance the socio-economic circumstances of rural populations. The research is grounded on a combination of primary and secondary data sources. The main data was obtained from a field survey conducted in a sample of seven districts within the state of Karnataka. The study revealed that several amenities provided by gram panchayats, such as road condition and sanitation, have been deemed insufficient. However, the rural population residing in certain regions within the sample has expressed their contentment with some services such as schooling, access to clean drinking water, and the provision of street lighting amenities. It has been observed that the implementation of poverty alleviation measures by panchayat raj institutions has resulted in notable structural transformations within rural communities.

Keywords: Panchayat raj institutions, rural development, decentralization, rural poverty

Introduction

Although India has managed to sustain a growth rate of over 7%, positioning itself as one of the rapidly expanding economies globally, poverty continues to persist as a significant issue in the country. Based on the census conducted in 2011, it was found that 69% of the population lives in rural areas. The 2017 census reveals a significant surge in the population (31%) residing in metropolitan areas. As to the official assessment by the Indian government in 2012, the poverty rate in the nation was at 22%. Notably, a significant proportion of the impoverished population resides in rural regions.

Therefore, poverty continues to be a persistent state for nearly 35% of India's rural population. The prevalence of poverty is most pronounced among those belonging to scheduled castes, tribes, and women residing in the rural areas of the nation. According to Pandut and Kulkarni (2012) [6], there is a higher prevalence of rural poverty in certain states in India, including Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, and Karnataka.

One of the primary factors contributing to poverty in rural areas of India, affecting both individuals and communities, is the limited availability of productive assets and financial resources. Moreover, impoverished rural populations often have a significant prevalence of illiteracy, insufficient healthcare provisions, and severely restricted availability of social services. Numerous initiatives and programs have been implemented by both national and state governments with the aim of eliminating rural poverty. They have been unsuccessful in attaining the intended goal. In recent years, there has been a growing interest among

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economists in India regarding the field of rural development. Given this context, the examination of rural development becomes more significant (Vijaykumar; 1999) [7].

The Panchayats have been anticipated to assume a significant role in the pursuit of rural development since the era of independence. It is expected that Panchayats would carry out several tasks, including civic, developmental, land management, land reform, and judicial functions. Therefore, the current research is situated within this framework to investigate the significance of panchayat raj systems in the rural development of Karnataka state. Additionally, it aims to provide appropriate strategies for enhancing the operational efficiency of panchayat raj institutions to enhance the socio-economic circumstances of rural populations.

The Conceptualization of Rural Development

Rural development refers to the comprehensive advancement of rural regions across all dimensions, including social, economic, political, and cultural aspects, with the goal of enhancing the well-being and contentment of rural inhabitants. Rural development signifies the improvement of the quality of life for those living in rural areas. Additionally, the socio-economic and political growth of the settlements is taken into consideration. Rural development includes the enhancement of village infrastructure, the augmentation of rural family income, and the advancement of rural education and health.

According to the planning commission, rural development encompasses the economic and social advancement of villages, resulting in an elevation of income levels and an enhancement of the quality of life for the inhabitants. The definition of rural development provided by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD) encompasses the promotion of various sectors such as agriculture, small industry, cottage and village industry, handicrafts, and other rural crafts. The primary objective of this definition is to foster integrated rural development and ensure the overall prosperity of rural areas.

D.M. Nanjundappa defines rural development as a comprehensive and interconnected endeavor including several sectors, such as agriculture and social infrastructure.

G. Shah defines rural development as the process of enhancing rural areas, which typically involves expanding irrigation facilities, increasing access to electricity, improving cultivation techniques, constructing school buildings, providing educational facilities, and enhancing healthcare services. The rural development initiatives implemented by both federal and state governments aim to alleviate poverty and unemployment, enhance health and educational standards, and provide the necessities of rural communities, including food, housing, and clothes.

The Indian government has implemented various rural development initiatives since gaining independence. These initiatives include the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), the Twenty Point Program, the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP), the Training Rural Youths for Self-Employment (TRYSEM), the Food for Work Program (FWP), the National Rural Employment Program (NREP), and others. Panda and Majumder (2013) [5] have put forward several programs aimed at mitigating the economic disparity between rural and urban populations.

The Origins of the 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 decentralized, and it should be at the grass root level. The central government had implemented CDP (community development program) 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 program 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 mechanisms at the local level for implementing rural developmental programs. From 1959 due to Balwant Rai suggestions several experiments have been conducted to revive panchayat raj through its 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) [7].

As mentioned in the constitution of India the Panchayath Raj system has three – tier structure. i) Zilla Panchayat 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

In 1982, research was done by H.R. Chaturvedi and S.K. Mitra to examine the administrative elements of rural development. The primary aim of this research was to investigate the characteristics and scope of citizen engagement in the process of rural development. The researchers chose two districts from two separate states. According to their perspective, active engagement of individuals in various activities, notably via panchayat raj

institutions, is seen crucial for the attainment of rural development.

In his research conducted in 2001, Harijan M.F. sought to examine the impact of panchayat raj systems on the empowerment of landless farmers in the region of West Bengal. The study's results indicate a connection between the panchayat raj system and the empowerment of landless peasants. Panchandikar (1978) ^[4] conducted an analysis of the three primary districts, namely Vijapur, Anand, and Navasari, within the state of Gujarat. The author endeavored to analyze the contemporary elements inside block level institutions over the course of the research. Nevertheless, the primary emphasis was placed on the involvement of conventional establishments like as co-operative groups, rural banks, agricultural credit, and Panchayat Raj institutions in the rural modernization process. According to the research, it has been observed that within the three blocks, panchayat raj institutions have conducted a multitude of programs aimed at modernizing villages.

In his seminal research conducted in 1976, Amal Ray conducted an analysis of the administrative procedures inside the panchayat raj institution, with a specific focus on the taluk level administration and its impact on rural development. Ray collected samples from two taluks located in the state of Karnataka. The results of this research provide valuable insights into the operational characteristics and administrative structure of taluk panchayats in the execution of rural development initiatives.

The panchayat raj institutions in the state of Kerala were examined by G. K. Lieten (2000) ^[8]. According to his research, a significant proportion of those elected and employed in panchayat systems were impoverished farmers who had little involvement in the execution of rural development initiatives. The inclusion of SC/ST/OBC/women in the panchayat system, because of decentralization and reservation, has facilitated their active participation in the developmental process, hence mitigating feelings of alienation. In rural places, the impoverished see an augmentation in their influence over village matters, attributed to the Gramme Sabha.

The studies undertaken by Aziz (1993) ^[1] and Babu (1997) ^[9] examined the process of decentralization in the planning of Karnataka state. This research focused on the establishment of a politico-administrative framework to facilitate decentralized planning. These studies conducted a thorough assessment of the execution of decentralized planning. The results of these research suggest that panchayat raj institutions had exceptional success at the implementation level, while exhibiting subpar performance at the planning level.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To provide appropriate strategies for enhancing the efficiency of panchayat raj institutions in Karnataka state.
- 2) To examine the impact of panchayat raj systems on the rural development of Karnataka state.

Methodology

The research utilizes both primary and secondary data sources. The main data was obtained via a field survey conducted in a sample of seven districts in the state of Karnataka. The main data was collected via the use of field surveys, interviews, and participant observation

methodologies. The primary sources of secondary data for the study include existing literature and data found on websites, as well as publications from Central and State authorities, particularly the State Level Bankers Committee in Bangalore and the Institutional Finance Department. Additionally, other sources such as books, magazines, newspapers, reports, articles, and seminar papers published by universities and research institutions will be utilized. In addition to the published information, the research also relies on engaging in talks with a diverse range of individuals, including both officials and non-officials from the Lead Bank Office and Gramme Panchayath.

Major Findings of the Study

The research yielded notable results, derived from the analysis of a comprehensive survey performed throughout the state of Karnataka.

- It has been discovered that several amenities provided by gram panchayats, such as road quality and sanitation, have been insufficient. The accessibility of these routes varies from village to village. Approximately 70% of the beneficiaries have said that these specified amenities are insufficient. There is an urgent need to improve the quality of services in the areas of roads and sanitation.
- The inhabitants of rural areas in certain districts from the sample have expressed contentment with services such as education, provision of potable water, and street lighting amenities. Every village now has elementary and secondary schools, which are managed by the gramme panchayats.
- It has been seen that the effective involvement of panchayat raj institutions in poverty alleviation programs has led to significant improvements in the villages' infrastructure. Additionally, the earnings of individuals belonging to the lowest socioeconomic group have experienced a noticeable boost. Throughout history, there have been several instances when those belonging to the lower social strata have been subjected to exploitation by those in higher social classes. These poverty reduction projects have established a conducive and motivating environment for poor individuals to enhance their earnings within the rural economy.
- Thanks to the establishment of panchayat raj institutions, individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds now have a forum, known as the gramme panchayat, where they may actively engage in discussions and attempt to resolve their difficulties. Currently, these individuals of lower social status are actively participating in rural activities.
- The inclusion of panchayat raj institutions in job guarantees initiatives such as MGNREGA has shown to be very beneficial for villages. Most of the respondents had a favorable reaction, stating that these initiatives had effectively contributed to improving their economic situation.
- Therefore, the rural development programs that have been carried out via the Panchayat Raj institutions in certain regions have effectively created additional job prospects for individuals in rural areas who do not own land, as well as for craftsmen, small-scale and subsistence farmers, and handicraft workers. Furthermore, these programs have effectively facilitated

favorable social and economic opportunities for those residing in rural areas. The SC/ST individuals get more benefits from rural development programs compared to those of other castes, since they are socially and economically disadvantaged relative to their counterparts. Rural development programs serve as effective tools for promoting infrastructure development in rural areas.

- The Panchayats provide many amenities including clean drinking water, sanitation facilities, healthcare services, school infrastructure, adult education programs, road and bridge construction, street lighting, and more. These facilities are supplied by the Panchayat Raj institutions as an extension of the state government.

Conclusion

In the 21st century, it is crucial to undertake rural developmental initiatives and activities via the system of panchayat raj institutions. This research demonstrates that the introduction of PRIs has a substantial impact on the lives of rural people. Rural development programs have significantly improved the economic conditions of the chosen region. The execution of these programs has led to a substantial increase in the income of most of the population. The main evidence indicates that the absence of panchayat raj institutions now makes it impossible to implement any state or federal governmental plan. An example of this may be given: the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Guarantee Scheme has been effectively implemented in rural areas across India with the assistance of panchayat raj institutions. Like MGNREGA, there have been other initiatives implemented with the objective of eradicating rural poverty and unemployment. The involvement of panchayat raj institutions has led to a rise in the engagement of the people in developmental efforts.

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