

Role of Culture in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Abstract

The father of the Nation M.K. Gandhi desired that the system of governance should not only close to the people but also reach up to the last man of the society. In his opinion it can be made possible by involving the people in their own governance. The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are not only an agent of governance but also act as the vehicle of development and socio-political transformation of the rural society. The state makes use of these PRIs for executing the rural development programmes almost of all kinds. The involvement of these PRIs at the grass roots level is mainly intended to ensure people's participation in the development process of the rural areas of the country.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj, Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Smiti, Zila Prasad, Political Leader, Public Administrator, PR Leaders.

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Introduction

An historical examination of the evaluation of PRIs indicates that the beginning of these institutions dates back to Rig Veda's period i.e. 1200 B.C. There is also definite evidence available of the existence of village "Sabha" (Council or assemblies) and "gramins" (senior persons of the village) until about 600BC. During the medieval and Mughal period "these village bodies..... had been the pivot of administration, the centre of social life, and above all, a focus of social solidarity". However, the local self –government of present day, in the sense of an accountable representative institution, is the creation of the British Rule in India. The Mayo's Resolution (1870) and Lord Ripon's efforts (1882) have provided the much –needed democratic framework to these institutions. The Royal Commission on Decentralization in 1907 recommended that "it is most desirable alike in the interests of decentralization and in order to associate the people with the local tasks of administration. An attempt should be made to constitute and develop village Panchayats for the administration of local village affairs'.

Montague Chelmsford Report (1919) included the subject of local self-government in the list of "transferred subject". The most significant development of this period was "the establishment of the Village Panchayat in a number of provinces no longer a mere adhoc judicial tribunal, But a representative institution symbolizing the corporate character of the village and having a wide jurisdiction in respect of civic matters". By 1926, eight provinces and six native states had passed Panchayat Acts/Laws. However, these statutory panchayats covered only a limited number of villages and had generally, a limited number of functions.

The Government of India Act, 1935 and the inauguration of provincial autonomy under it marked another important stage in the evolution of panchayats in the country. However, it is Gandhi ji who set the tone of the nationalist point on the panchayats and declared that "the village panchayats would be now a living force in a special way, and India would almost be enjoying self-government suited in its requirements." He had defined his vision of village panchayats (villages Swaraj) as "a complete republic based on perfect democracy and individual freedom." He viewed the panchayats as a 'Swadeshi' institution and "argued that village organization meant the organization of the whole of India, as much as India was predominantly rural." Unfortunately, the subject of panchayats was not in the first draft of India's Constitution.

The village panchyats were given a place in the Indian Constitution under Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy .It states "The state shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local self-government" ¹ This provision does not make it mandatory on the part of the state to constitute village panchayats as it was there in the Directive Principles of state Policy. But

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Committee on Plan Projects (popularly known as Balwant Rai Mehta Committee) realized that without an agency at the village level which could represent the entire community, assume responsibility and provide the necessary leadership for implementing development programmes,² real progress in rural development cannot be achieved. Therefore, it recommended that "public participation in community works should be organized through statutory representative bodies."³ Thus organizing village panchayats in the villages was considered as necessity for undertaking the developmental programmes and by mid 1960 panchayats had reached to all parts of the country.

Thereafter Ashok Mehta Committee (1978)⁴, C.H. Hanumantha Rao Working Group on District Planning (1983)⁵ and G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985)⁶ were set up to revamp the PRIs and to review the existing administrative arrangements for rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. Another committee headed by L. M. Singhvi (1986) prepared the Concept Paper on Panchayat Raj and recommended for devolving more financial resources to panchayats so as to make them more viable.⁷ The committee viewed panchayats as the base for democratic and republican operations of the nation. Sixty- Fourth Constitutional Amendment Bill (1989) followed it but it could not be passed by Parliament. Therefore, a similar Bill known as 73rd Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in Parliament in 1991 and it become an Act after the assent of President on April 20, 1993.

Haryana after its creation as a separate state has adopted the enactments of Punjab Gram Panchayat Act (Amended) 1952. Punjab Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act of 1961. In other words, PRIs in the state were set up as per the provisions of the above-mentioned acts passed by Punjab State Legislature. Thus, there were Gram Panchayats (GPs) at village level, Panchayat Samitis (PSS) at block level and Zilla Parishads (ZPs) at district level. However in 1970, a committee, headed by Shri Maru Singh Was appointed to examine the working of PRIs. The committee observed that an excessive and undue interference of the bureaucracy and the political elite is one of many reasons responsible for failure of democratic decentralization in the state.

Culture is a unique achievement of mankind. Culture, in fact distinguishes man for the rest of the animal world. "Human beings have been able to make progress from generation with the help of culture. It is a "complex whole" consisting of "capabilities" acquired by man as a member of Society. Administrative culture is a sub-culture of the culture of its people of the society. Administrative culture therefore can be seen in the manner in which its functionaries operate. The culture of administration depends on the role-perception and performance culture in of their functionaries. The various interactions constituting the administrative culture in India are: politician-bureaucrat relationship, status – consciousness, feudal moorings. Total disregarded of the under-privileged, power- orientation of the administrators,

development orientation, and absence of accountability and non-fulfillment of professionalism. The cultural milieu of public administration can be looked at from these three different angles:

1. The inter-relationship between public servants.
2. The relationship between civil servant and the political masters and
3. The civil servants responsiveness to the common man, whose interests the administration purports to serve.

In many of these sets of relationships, the values attitudinal system adopted by each of these parties influences the culture environment.

Importance

Administrative culture is likely to help us not only to understand and analyze an administrative system but also important for generating a full understanding of the process how administration perform its tasks, in other words, one can have the perceptions about the operational aspects of the administrative system and exposure of the attributes related to the weakness or strength, vitality, durability, and stability as well as cracks present in specific administrative system. He Administrative culture helps in answering the questions concerning to the consequences of differences in attitudes, opinions, beliefs, values and sentiments which shape administrative decisions.

Review of Literature

Bata K. Dey (1996) observed that the federal government in India has failed to recruit and promote the civil servants according to pretension requirements. He considers that the failure is attributed to him an element and it would not be fruitful till professional objectivity and humane consideration are added to the management of recruitment in government. Therefore lie stressed the need to change the process which select the persons with standard formulations should be changed.

B.Guy Peters (1996) analysis that there are differences in the manner in which individuals in different setting consider management. There are also differences in people's minds about what the proper policy roles of administration are and what constitutes good public policy. These differences can be discovered empirically. If they are to be addressed empirically, then a good deal attention should be placed on the values held by administration. Who came into contact with citizens. This interfaces between the population and their governments an important one. Especially for democratic regime, and should be better understood in both nature and maturing democratic political systems.

According to Jayanta Kumar Ray (1996) only a small number of functionaries in state and semi-state agencies are engaged in strenuous efforts to preserve administrative ethics, professional excellence and public interest. A smaller number are even ready to risk their career to this culture of preservation. The vast majority has reared up the culture of destruction of professional ethics/excellence as also of public interest. Actually, this culture of the majority has given to the cult of self-aggrandizement.

K.S. Shukla (1996) made an attempt to synthesize the concept of administrative culture through the behavioral patterns prevalent in an administrative set-up at a given point of time and in a specific space. According to the author, the cultural values get manifested in a variety of ways of which the traits of a given set –up are broad indicators of the value system of that group. The author concludes that cultural traits of administration have both influence and impact on the people in general.

P.D. Malviya (1996) illustrate that Indian administrative system is strongly power oriented and feudal in character. The author concludes that it is really in the national interest that the administrative system should produce strong. Self - reliant and self-respecting workers particularly those who are employed at the public interface. Our need is to establish a new result oriented, and people oriented administrative culture to achieve the national goals of our country.

A.P. Barnabas (1998) in his article entitled "Good Governance at Local Level" focuses on role of PRIs in bringing about good governance at the cutting edge level in rural areas. The author identifies problems pertaining to perception of role of PRIs, inadequacy of resource support, problematic of Bihar structure etc. There is confusion regarding functions in PRIs, as there is no delineation of function between the three tiers. At the district and block level there is little autonomy for planning, as national and state plans have to be accommodated. The social structure and the administrative system are hierarchical. Hence there has been little scope for culture decentralization.

Hoshiar Singh (2000) in his empirical study relating to "cultural attributes of women administrators" states that the study of administrative culture in public administration was intended to answer questions concerning the consequences of differences in attitudes opinions beliefs, values and sentiments which shape administrative decisions.

Neelima Deshmukh (2000) enumerated cultural traits of Indian administrators of today as – lack of integrity, i.e. rampant corruption, resistance to change with internal logic, reutilization of administrative processes hungering responsible, self generating and demanding administration, preventing emergence of culture of innovation and lack of adaptation to changing need of time. According to the author, administrative legacies heritage and administrative experiences as behavior pattern or interaction are the constituents of administration culture.

Ravindra Sharma and Rameshwar Lal (2000) in their empirical study of culture in recruitment practice in agriculture department came to the conclusions that there is role of nepotism, religion /caste. Top officer recommendations, intense political interventions and also major role of money in appointments. The authors states that atmosphere in India is generally vitiated by corruption, influence, patronage, abuse of power and widespread inefficiency. Corruption in the civil service is a complex phenomenon. It has sociological, economics,

ethic- religious, juristic and even political roots. In recent years, Indian administration has deteriorated because of the moral decay that marks the conduct of political leaders.

Aim of the Study

The following are the objectives of the present research study.

1. To study the socio –economic back ground of the administrative officials of PRIs and their clientele i.e. the members of Gram Panchayats. Panchayats Saintis and Zila Parishads.
2. To observe the leadership traits in administration.
3. To examine the relationships among leaders and officials of PRIs.
4. To examine the culture of efficiency in administration.
5. To analyze the perceptions of the administrative process as a whole.
6. To study the values and personal attitude of officials and leaders towards the administrative process of PRIs.
7. To study the perceptions and performance evaluation of administrative officials.
8. To study the impact of administrative culture on the growth and development of democratic decentralization process.

Achievements

Interactions will develop cordial relations between the two groups of PRI and bring them close to each other and bring morale efficiency, which is fundamental component of administrative culture.

Challenges

There is Corruption, favoritism, malpractices, decay in moral values and ethics in the functioning of PR leaders and officials.

Conclusions

It is concluded that there does not exist recognition of democratic values in PR working. Some blame bureaucrats, some blame the politicians. Some are of the opinion that we have no cultured politics in the country but only uncultured politicians. In Haryana state, it is considered that the administration of panchayats is practically controlled by the state bureaucracy whereas, the chairpersons of the PRIs have no control on bureaucracy. In, there has been mixed responses of local leaders and officials regarding the level of morale efficiency. There should be regular short term, innovative, specifically designed, need based and interactive training programmes of the PR leaders and officials. These programmes are essentially required to improve execution efficiency, building up team spirit, which is essential for improving performance efficiency.

Suggestions

There should be regular short term, innovative, specially designed, need based and interactive training programmes of the PR leaders and officials. There is an urgent need to raise and moral consciousness in administrative officials and leader to fight against the forces of corruption, favoritism, malpractices. There is need to make these institutions as more democratic one.

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