RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PANCHAYATI RAJ
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Rural development, it has long been realised, ought to be given high priority in our country’s planning. One of the most promising instruments for accelerating rural development, it was hoped, would be the community development organisation. That hope has not been realised. The Study Team appointed by the Planning Commission (known as the Balwantrai Mehta Committee) to study the Community Development organisation came to the conclusion that a different administrative approach to the problem was called for.

2. The Balwantrai Mehta Committee recommended in its report submitted late in 1957 that elected and organically linked democratic bodies should be set up at the village, block, and district levels, and that all planning and developmental activities should be entrusted to these bodies. These recommendations of the Committee were accepted by the Government of India, after consideration in the National Development Council. The concept of Panchayati Raj has emerged from these recommendations. It was realised at the same time that conditions in States varied so much that it would be unwise to insist on a uniform pattern, and, therefore, each State was left free to decide for itself the pattern it preferred so long as it retained the three-tiered structure, gave sufficient powers to the new democratic bodies at each level, and channelised developmental programmes through them.

3. The Panchayati Raj was ushered in State after State with great acclamation, Rajasthan giving the lead in October 1959. It was
expected to achieve many things. In the first place it was hoped that it would bring about a radical change in the system and outlook of administration; it would lead to a substantial decentralisation of power: every village panchayat would be placed in a position to decide finally about a number of matters, and in regard to a great many others, the taluka (also called panchayat samities), and the district panchayat (also called zilla parishads), would be able to take final decisions either on the basis of the recommendations of the gram panchayats, or on their own initiative. Administration, it was felt, would, as a consequence, become far more responsive to the wishes of the people, be far more efficient, because the people affected and the people taking decisions would be so much closer to each other and be so much more familiar with the problems as also with the lines along which solutions may be found for them. The panchayats were expected to draw up realistic plans in a realistic manner. The people would also begin to understand the difficulties of administration, and to that extent be able to assist administration at the higher levels in a more constructive manner. Problems of rural development would become easier of solution since the panchayats at various levels would become essential participants.

4. It is too soon, of course, to make a final pronouncement on the extent to which these hopes look like being realised or otherwise. But any honest assessment at the moment would suggest that the chances of our hopes being realised through Panchayati Raj are small. The new system must admittedly have as long a trial as is considered necessary by those who believe in it. It is to be hoped, however, that these latter will be honest with themselves and not prefer to live indefinitely in a "fools' paradise". The damage that an unsatisfactory and unsound system of government can do to the entire fabric of administration would be far too serious for us to contemplate such a situation with equanimity.

5. The Panchayati Raj concept may seem sound in theory in that it is an extension of the basic principles of democracy to the weakest and most backward strata of society. But it is not a very easy concept to give effect to in practice. We have, nevertheless, decided to take the plunge and face all the risks involved. Our villages are more
often than not faction-ridden. The principle of elections adds to the embitterment that already exists among the factions and makes workable compromises impossible. And no democratic institution can work without compromise. This is the first major handicap the Panchayats have to overcome, particularly at the Gram Panchayat level.

6. The financial resources that can be placed at the disposal of various Panchayat institutions cannot but be limited. The sources of taxation allotted are not elastic enough. Even if a panchayat authority were willing to tax itself to the maximum extent considered theoretically possible—and this is something which is not only difficult but almost impossible of achievement for a gram panchayat (and very nearly so for the taluka and district panchayats), so great is the resistance to taxation among the tax payers and so difficult in practice is it for members of panchayats to insist upon the levy and the recovery of taxes—its resources are barely adequate for discharging no more than its minimum responsibilities. In these circumstances, to expect panchayat institutions to think out and undertake developmental activities of any significance is to expect something that is well nigh impossible. Inadequate financial resources constitute the second major handicap.

7. Not only are panchayat institutions severely handicapped financially, they are even more handicapped by lack of competent personnel. The gram panchayat is the greatest sufferer: it cannot appoint its own staff; it has to accept whoever is appointed by the panchayat samiti or the taluka samiti: if the person so allotted does not do his work satisfactorily, it can only request the appointing authority to remove or transfer him for, disciplinary action also rests with the higher authority, and such disciplinary action is rarely taken! Even in the matter of enforcement of its decisions, in the event of opposition from a resident within the panchayat area, it can only make a request for assistance and that assistance is never too readily forthcoming. At higher levels the position may be a little better, but certainly cannot be very much better. The paid staff, out of sheer self-defence, finds it necessary to play politics; it can no longer behave independently and objectively as was hitherto expected of them. They must necessarily keep the elected masters if
not happy at least not displeased with them. In the circumstances, it
is inevitable that the panchayat administration is unable to function
even with the minimum degree of efficiency that is desirable.

8. It has been now generally accepted that a democratic system
of government can run satisfactorily only with the help of a com-
petent professional civil service. Decentralisation of authority does
not lessen the need for competent civil service. Bureaucracy is a
much abused term, but it has to be recognised that no democratic
government can function without an efficient bureaucratic machinery.
Bureaucracy is harmful only when it is allowed to get on top. It is
a good servant and it is advisable not to let it be the master. This
obvious truth is not, unfortunately, always realised. Those who set
about the establishment of the panchayati raj do not appear to have
appreciated the importance of a competent civil service to underpin
the Panchayat institutions. It is true no doubt that in every State,
efforts are made to see that the panchayats at all the three levels
are assisted by a sufficiency of trained officials, and are besides given
guidance and advice by the district collectors and other senior
officials of the State. Care has to be taken to prevent breakdown
of the new system for want of competent bureaucracy to underpin
the elected masters. What does not appear to have been provided
for are arrangements to ensure that the services may be assured of
fair treatment on the one hand, and that the services for their part
behave in a strictly correct and disciplined manner on the other.

9. In practice, things have worked out very differently. The
more senior officials have given up their independence and objectivity,
and they appear only too ready to acquiesce in conduct and action
which once they would have refrained from in the ordinary way.
So far from the officials acting as a brake upon the elected adminis-
trators, they encourage the latter in whatever policy they wish to
pursue or action they wish to take. They have tended to become
"Yes-men". The elected administrators are usually inexperienced
and generally find it difficult to displease by saying ‘No’ or to be
independent and objective. The result inevitably is that the work
of the Panchayat at the higher level is done unsatisfactorily while
at the Gram Panchayat level it is done so badly that effective work is done only where the Sarpanch or the Deputy Sarpanch are active and literate persons.

10. Much depends, undoubtedly, upon the President of the Zilla Parishad, for on him falls the main responsibility of making the panchayati raj function satisfactorily in his district. He has necessarily to work with the support of other members of the Zilla Parishad, and unless he is supported unquestioningly by a majority of the members of the Parishad, he too is compelled to pursue only policies for which he can muster adequate support. The implementation of policies accepted, again, leads to serious difficulties, particularly if it involves giving up an inch of land or an additional rupee. Not many elected administrators are able to insist upon unquestioning compliance with the orders of the panchayat. They are forced to think in terms of the effect of their action at the ensuing elections. If the elections are far away, the reluctance to act firmly may be a little less, but ordinarily the elected administrator is rarely able to act with firmness and decisiveness. If it had been hoped through panchayati raj to achieve efficient administration, the supporters of the panchayati raj cannot have been greatly encouraged with the experience that has been gained so far. And as time goes on, the position is likely to worsen. As more and more people come to the conclusion that they can get away with non-payment of their taxes, or if they are employees, with incompetence and inefficiency, the task of collecting taxes or getting encroachments removed on the one hand, or making the staff work competently and efficiently on the other, will become extremely difficult.

11. What we have done, in fact, by replacing the existing system of administration with panchayati raj has been, in effect, to replace professional civil servants and administrators with elected and amateur administrators. The bureaucratic approach has continued and the situation has worsened by the fact that the extent of decisions taken for considerations other than those of merit has greatly increased. Administrative inefficiency has, in other words, increased. The change-over to the Panchayati Raj could have been justified if, as a result, more realistic policies had been formulated
and administration had shown significant improvement as a result of people in power acting in a more determined and firm though more responsive manner. That has not been the case.

12. Panchayati Raj has so far given no indication that it will be capable of achieving what was expected of it in the sphere of administration, of developmental activities, and of realistic planning. Planning from below is not a particularly sound or practicable approach in any case. What can, however, be done to great advantage from below is to determine in a realistic manner the needs. It should, thus, be possible to prepare village plans in the sense of spelling out the requirements of a village in specific and quantitative terms of fertilisers, improved seeds, pesticides, etc. required for the purpose of maximising agricultural productivity. Panchayats can tackle such a task efficiently, and having determined these basic requirements, proceed also to ensure that these requirements are obtained and distributed equitably. To entrust the Panchayats with other tasks of administration is to impose a type of burden and responsibility for which the people are neither trained nor have enough leisure. The Collector's authority should be restored, and he should be enabled to function as the effective co-ordinator of the work of all the different agencies of the State and Central Governments operating in his district. The Panchayats for their part should function as advisory bodies and not as executive authorities. They would then be able to operate most usefully and effectively.
पंचायत राज अस्तित्व बनावर तरीण जून सारी गावत छ. पहेल, ते अनंत तेना अभिवाद्या सुरक्षी आहे आहेत. आवाससुरक्षा'ंत तेना यासु'ं सरक्षा'ंती तो आम गावत छ. १) तेनांची आम्हांमध्ये र्हेही जून्शनवाची आत्माना पूव्ह ने पूव्ह किंवा गोने छ. जेथे तर्कनसकतापूर्व करती आही तेना साया सदस्यांमध्ये आम करती नाही. (२) तेनी नागिकांसारी शासीने सरक्षित होत अनें तेनींनी ते तेनीं आमां नागिकांसारी शासीने ते तेन्यां वारतवांन सरक्षित नाहीं. अनें ती करेसर नागिकांसारी आवशी ता ते वीपावतांमध्ये आवशी नाहीं. जेणे तेनी नागिकांसारी शासीने सरक्षित होते. (३) आवल वैद्यवाचीने पूव्ह 'भांवे' छ. आमां 'एम्याशाल्व भेंत ह्यां शंका शंका नाही. तेनांना 'एम्याशा'सारी आवशी ता ते तेन्यां आवशी 'नागिकांसारी शासीने होत. तेंती स्वतंत्रती शासीने 'वां' की 'वां' अद्तार घेते. अनें आववाची रीतीने नागिकांसारी बनावर नाही. ती तेनींनी तेनीं नागिकांसारी 'ताकी' वाकर गेली नाही. नागिकांसारी ती पैर आमांसारी शासीने अनेंती आमां नागिकांसारी वाकर गेली छ. अनें वैद्यवाचीने पूव्ह आनंदवाची निषिद्धकार्यांच्या पुर्यावर घेते गावतांनी आमां सरक्षित म्हणून जून्शनवाची वाकर गेली छ. आवल वैद्यवाचीने पूव्ह आनंदवाची निषिद्धकार्यांच्या पुर्यावर घेते गावतांनी आमां सरक्षित म्हणून जून्शनवाची वाकर गेली छ.

पंचायत राजींनी केला आपल्या आयोजनांना पूव्ह वादलसारी गावला ह्यांनी अनें ती सावल घात: निम्नांत्रण करती 'आंतर्जातीय अंडिया' करतांनी सावल आयोजना अनेंती तीम आच्छादने. आवल तेनींनी ते अद्तार: निम्नांत्रण आपल्यांना म्हणून अनेंती तीम आच्छादने. आवल तेनींनी ते अद्तार: निम्नांत्रण आपल्यांना म्हणून अनेंती तीम आच्छादने. आवल तेनींनी ते अद्तार: निम्नांत्रण आपल्यांना म्हणून अनेंती तीम आच्छादने. आवल तेनींनी ते अद्तार: निम्नांत्रण आपल्यांना म्हणून अनेंती तीम आच्छादने. आवल तेनींनी ते अद्तार: निम्नांत्रण आपल्यांना म्हणून अनेंती तीम आच्छादने.