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Rural development with active role of Panchayati Raj in tribal village of Arunachal Pradesh

Millo Seema

Research scholar, Department of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University, A.P., India

Abstract

India is predominantly rural in character where nearly two-third of its total population lives in village areas. The growing problems of unemployment and poverty in rural areas led to the low rate of development of a country as a whole. Therefore, the urgent need of rural development is essential for the overall development of a country.

In the context of Arunachal Pradesh, the concept of rural development is equally important as most of the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh live in remote villages. Keeping in view with this, a new political institution known as Panchayati Raj was introduced. Subsequently different rural development schemes have been provided by the Department of rural development with active role of the Panchayat bodies in Arunachal Pradesh.

Rural development is a process to strengthen the democratic structure by involving the people directly in the process through Panchayati Raj institutions. It is a process leading to improvement of rural status. Therefore, the study of rural development and Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh is an interesting subject of study to examine whether Panchayati Raj institutions are effective mechanism for rural development. With this objective an attempt has been made to study the rural development and to examine the role of Panchayati Raj in the tribal village of Ziro valley of Arunachal Pradesh.

Keywords: Development, rural areas, tribal people, development schemes, panchayati raj

Introduction: In India, rural areas are characterized by low-income levels, not even adequate to ensure a quality of life compatible with physical well-being.¹ Rural development occupies a very crucial position in the context of Indian administration as around more than 70 per cent of its population dwell in rural areas.

Rural development signifies bringing about simultaneous development in rural infrastructure, rural income, agricultural productivity, rural welfare in terms of health, education, safety, equality, employment, rural technology, rural politics and institutional aspects by involving the people directly in the process. It also implies that development in one dimension is dependent on the development in other aspects, requiring an integrated effort for overall development. In other words, rural development aims at improving the quality of rural life of all the people in all the spheres of human needs. As per Gandhiji, rural development must be based on constructive work, consisted of promotion of village industries, use of khadi, removal of untouchability, basic and adult education, village cleanliness, communal harmony, education in health and hygiene, women uplift and propagation of national language. Thus, a conscious planning is needed for rural development and

the planning should not be based on entirely centralized rather it should be decentralized with multifarious approach².

As long as rural development is concerned, there is a need for decentralization of administration at the grassroots level where the villages form the basic social and economic unit. In order to formulate and to implement the rural development programmes, the administrative structures need to have one supervisory agency preferably an elected body such as panchayat under which the project could be executed³. Panchayati Raj institution is, therefore, a recent innovation of Government of India⁴. It has been entrusted to work with an efficacy for the rural upliftment. As such Panchayati Raj is considered as an essential component in the process of improving rural status.

Therefore, for the overall progress of the nation, the priority should be given to the development of the rural sector⁵. As such the country progress will not be possible without the administration of rural areas. According to Gandhiji, "Indian independence must begin at the bottom. Every village should be a republic or a panchayat having full powers. The greater the power of panchayat, the better it is for the people"⁶. Accordingly, the panchayats are expected to play a vital role in rural development of India, particularly after independence⁷. Hence, for the rapid development of rural areas through active role of panchayat bodies, Dr. Manmohan Singh, then the Prime minister of India stressed the devolution of the three Fs- functions, finance and functionaries to the panchayats. He said the task remains to transport the political and social empowerment through Panchayati Raj into effective administrative and economic empowerment⁸.

In the context of Arunachal Pradesh the concept of rural development is equally important as the state consists of heterogeneous tribal population dwell in remote villages. As a result, the village tribes of Arunachal Pradesh require an integrated way of development⁹. Consequently, Panchayati Raj was introduced in the state as the modern political institution for rural development. However, in Ziro valley, the Headquarter of Lower Subansiri District of Arunachal Pradesh which consist of several villages such as Bulla (Reru and Kalung), Diibo, Tajang, Hari, Hija and Hong, prior to the introduction of Panchayati Raj, Buliangs were working as some sort of local government but with the introduction of Panchayati Raj the present administrative scenario of the area has been changed. Buliangs are now merely working for the administration of the area, whereas, they are taking more active role in the management of customs and traditions of the village. At present in Ziro valley people are more concern about rural development. As such they welcome the developmental programmes, to be undertaken by the Panchayati Raj institution.

Innovation of rural development programmes in Arunachal Pradesh: History of rural development programmes in Arunachal Pradesh dates back to the days of NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) when the planners of the Government of India felt the need for rural development in order to bring a change in the social and economic scenario of rural India for overall progress of a country¹⁰. Keeping in in view with these objectives, the Government of India introduced the Community Development programmes under the Five year plan. The programmes were started with the launching of 15 pilot projects on 2nd October 1951. In order to set up approximately 53 projects for development in different sectors such as agriculture, education, health, employment, social welfare, etc., the Government of India entered into an agreement with United States of America and Fort Foundation (an American organization). Subsequently, the community development programme was introduced in North East Frontier Tract on 2nd October 1952. Meanwhile, the National extension service was also organized for the entire country. The first National extension service Block was set up in Namsang of Tirap District, whereas, the first Community Development

Block was launched at Pasighat in siang Frontier division of the then North East Frontier Agency¹¹. Gradually, the Community Development Block was extended to the remaining parts of Arunachal Pradesh. The Community Development Block was introduced in the state with the objectives of simultaneous social, cultural and economic development. Therefore, the Blocks were entrusted with task of rural development.

Table-1 showing the District wise number of Blocks, Blocks areas and villages covered under rural development programme in Arunachal Pradesh as on 31-3-2012

District	Blocks functioning	Inhabited village covered	Area in sq.km
Tawang	6	268	2172
West kameng	5	281	7422
East kameng	8	347	4134
Papum pare	5	250	2875
Lower subansiri	3	243	10135
Kurung kumey	10	423	
Upper subansiri	9	450	7032
West siang	12	498	10193
East siang	6	140	
Upper siang	6	216	
Dibang valley	3	86	13029
Lower dibang valley	3	121	
Changlang	7	264	4662
Tirap	7	155	2362
Lohit	5	469	11402
Anjaw	4		

Source- Statistical Abstract of Arunachal Pradesh, 2012, p.90. Directorate of rural development, Arunachal Pradesh, Itanagar.

However, in order to review the implementation of the Community Development programmes and the National extension service, the Government of India recommended for the three-tier system of rural local self government known as Panchayati Raj as an instrument for rural development based on democratic decentralization through mass participation at the grassroots level. Consequently, almost all the states and union territories in the country now have Panchayati Raj institutions in one form or another¹².

Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh: The urgent need for the rapid socio-economic development was felt in the tribal areas of Arunachal Pradesh, then North East Frontier Agency (NEFA) after the Chinese aggression in this part of India. The Chinese aggression of 1962 resulted into a sudden transition in the administrative policy of Government of India towards North East Frontier Agency. Consequently, the Government of India shifted its policy of isolation towards tribal people of North East Frontier Agency and adopted the new policy of integrating the indigenous tribes with rapid socio-economic development. It was during this period that the North East Frontier Agency designed its administrative machinery in order to achieve the objectives of bringing the area to the mainstream of national life as quickly as possible and to involve the people to take part in developmental activities¹³. As a result, the modern Governmental institutions were

sought to be introduced so that the tribal area could be come closer to the mainstream of political life in the country. The first step towards realizing these objectives was to appoint a committee, popularly known as Dying Ering Committee. The committee submitted its report in January, 1965. Thus, the committee was to give due consideration to the stage of advancement reached by each tribal village so that to bring a change in the political structure of the territory¹⁴.

Thereafter, the President of India promulgated the North East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 framed on the basis of the Dying Ering committee recommendations and the Panchayat bodies were first constituted in 1969. The different Panchayat bodies envisaged by it are: the Gram panchayat at the village level, the Anchal samiti at the block level, and the Zila parishad at the district level. Besides, the regulation also provides for an Agency council for the territorial level¹⁵. Subsequently, in order to ensure more power and responsibility to the Panchayat bodies and ultimately to the village people, the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1997 was created by revising the provisions relating to its three-tier Panchayati Raj system in conformity with the 73rd constitution Amendment Act, 1992. The Act of 1997 extends to the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. This Act provides for three-tier Panchayati Raj system with wider representation as well as expanded developmental functions. The Act ensures uniformity of Panchayati Raj system, constitution of Gram sabha for each village, reservation of one-third of seats at different level of Panchayat bodies for women, reservation of seats for schedule tribes, fixed tenure for all the Panchayat bodies and regular election, thereby minimizing interference from outside agencies¹⁶.

Therefore, the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1997 is a landmark development for revitalizing the Panchayati Raj system of Arunachal Pradesh. This Act not only helped in providing constitutional status to Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat system in conformity with 73rd constitution Amendment Act but also sufficiently made the system of representation broad bases with expansion of the developmental functions of different Panchayat bodies. Thus, Panchayati Raj institution is expected to bring a change in the living pattern of the tribal people of Arunachal Pradesh.

Working of Panchayats: Panchayati Raj institution has been the first modern political institution in Arunachal Pradesh. The democratic political process was started in North East Frontier Agency in 1969 when Panchayat Raj was introduced. The NEFA Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 was envisaged with the following objective:

“The Panchayat in NEFA will be the prime agency for rural development. It will be the prime agency for rural development. It will provide a sound basis for economic and political growth. Secondly, it will provide workable medium through which the rural people would be able to express themselves on various problems of the area and also to evolve an integrated community approach for solutions of problems that concern the entire Agency. The Panchayats will, therefore be, not only a decentralized form of administration, it would be much more than that”¹⁷.

Thus, Panchayati Raj institution has been working to ensure socio-economic and political development at grassroots level. It has brought several changes in the administrative scenario of Arunachal Pradesh. The indigenous tribal people got the opportunity to exercise their franchise for the first time in the Panchayat election for electing their representative to Panchayat bodies. This institution provides reservation of one-third seats for women at different levels of Panchayat bodies. The Panchayat leaders took active role in implementing developmental projects and schemes. In rebuilding the village society, Panchayati Raj has been working for development of living standard and the social pattern of rural area to a great extent through promotion and development of

agriculture, undertaking poverty alleviation programmes, educational schemes, promoting better sanitation, public health and family welfare, women and child development, and such other functions as may be assigned from time to time.

Rural development programmes in the study area: Different schemes have been provided by the Department of Rural development with active role of the Panchayat bodies for providing comfortable rural life in Arunachal Pradesh. However, the following rural development programmes have been recently implemented in the study area:

Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA): Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act is the extension of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act which was enacted by the parliament as an Act in 2005. The Act ensures rural employment to every household whose adult members volunteers to do unskilled manual work not less than 100 days in every financial year according to the scheme made under the Act. The funding share of the scheme between the centre and the state is 75:25 proportions respectively. Permissible works under this scheme include irrigation works; water conservation and water harvesting; land development; construction of Anganwadi centres; improving livelihoods; flood control; rural connectivity; horticulture development; development of pond and such other works as may be notified by the Government.

Panchayat Yuva Krida Aur Khel Abhiyan (PYKKA) : Panchayat Yuva Krida Aur Khel was launched on 1st April 2008 for the rural youth to give an opportunity to showcase their talent in the field of sports. The ministry of youth affairs has taken an initiative for Panchayat Yuva Krida Aur Khel in order to promote sports and scout talent of the youth of India. The programme includes different types of sports. This programme has been shared by both centre and state Governments funding on 80:20 proportion respectively.

Swach Bharat Abhiyan (SBA): The prime minister of India launched the swach Bharat Abhiyan on 2nd October 2014 with the objective of making a “clean” India. The focus of this programme is to achieve Swach Bharat by 2019, which in rural areas shall mean improving the levels of cleanliness through solid and liquid waste management activities and stopping the problem of open defecation. It also includes cleaning of roads, pavements and drainage system, etc. The funding for this programme is shared by both centre and state in the ratio of 75:25 respectively. However, for most of the North-Eastern states including Arunachal Pradesh the ratio of funding share for this programme is 90:10 respectively.

Conclusion: It may be said that the Panchayati Raj institution is an important agency for rural development. The Government of India has assigned the Panchayats with the authorities for planning and implementation of the rural schemes. The role of Panchayats for rural area has brought several changes in socio-economic conditions of the rural people. It has strengthened the democratic political process by involving large number of rural people. In other words, the Panchayati Raj institutions play crucial role in the process of rural development. However, there are certain concerns as per as meaningful Panchayati Raj system is concerned. Such as proper devolution of power three Fs (finance, function and functionaries) to the Panchayats for proper implementation of the rural programme has not taken place; lack of participation of women in the developmental activities and the hurdle in the implementation of the scheme by Bureaucrats.

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