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Human Security and Local Government: Role of Gram Panchayats

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Abstract

Today the human kind is facing a lot of humanitarian and developmental challenges which brings insecurity in nature to the people. These insecurities can grow exponentially and damage the livelihoods of the people. Human Security issues are universal and complex. In pursuing the realization and growing concern of human security issues, greater attention is required to combat and resolve the issues with the help of community, non-profitable organization, public organizations and local institutions. The main agenda in addressing the human security concern is to strengthen the capabilities of the people and community which lead to human and social development. Local bodies play a vital role in enabling the people to better manage their lives at the bottom level. They are the viable institutions to assess, develop and solve wide range of issues. In this context, the article attempts to identify the core human security issues and how the local bodies respond in addressing and averting these concerns.

Keywords: Human Security, Human Development, Public Affairs, Local Government, Gram Panchayat.

Introduction

The concept of Human Security has been at the centre of world Politics with military conflicts, civil wars and unrest leading to a migrant crisis and human security concerns after the end of the world wars. For the first time, Former US President Franklin D Roosevelt in his speech on February 1941 mentioned about, Freedom from Want, Fear along with freedom of Speech and Worship, the first two have become the base of the human security model.ⁱ The United Nations Development Program, One Global Human Development report (1994) iterating the need to develop and strengthen the human

security framework for a people centred development. The report also identified seven dimensions of security concerns that affect individuals. In the late 1990s, Canada's approach to human security, with its focus on freedom from fear, incorporated it in the foreign policy while leading the International Commission for Interventions and State Sovereignty (ICISS) from the forefront with its agenda of "responsibility to protect". The establishment of the Commission on Human Security initiated by Japan with its focus on responsibility for development and further lead to the formation of UN Trust Fund for Human Security (UNTFHS) with both nations funding the agenda.ⁱⁱ The Human security network was formed with 13 states in 1999 to take forward the Human Security agenda worldwide. Later in 2005, the World Summit, In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All (2005) report, which stated that development and human security are directly proportional to one another and both can be achieved only with respect for Human rights.ⁱⁱⁱ The outcome of the summit resolution was adopted. Later in 2012, General Assembly adopted UN resolution 66/290, emphasised and recognised development, human rights and peace and security, which are the three pillars of the United Nations, are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.^{iv} The Evolution of Human security has been significant which has paved the way to study, identify the concerns in order to address and avert them. The 2030 Agenda of the UN is 'to leave no one behind,' which can only be realised with a people-centred approach in addressing human security concerns, leading to sustainable development. Freedom from want, freedom from fear and freedom from Indignity are the three aspects on which the Human Security paradigm is built. The concept of Human Security is defined as "The right of people to live in freedom and dignity, free from poverty and despair. All individuals, in particular vulnerable people, are entitled to Freedom from Fear and Freedom from Want, with an equal opportunity to enjoy all their rights and fully develop their human potential".^v

Human Security has been classified into seven types of security, namely Economic, Food, Health, Environment, Personal, Community and Political Security. There are the two main principles of Human security; it follows a Multi sectorial approach and people centred. Human security concerns are interconnected or associated with one another. UN report A More Secure World: Our shared responsibility: "poverty, infectious disease, environmental degradation and war feed one another in a deadly cycle" ^{vi} s they are interlinked. The Human Security concern has two strategies, namely, Empowerment and Protection, through which it can be addressed effectively. The recent domestic labour migration to their home states in India during the pandemic was an eye-opener and accelerated the human security concerns, which brought in debates widely. Both of the strategies are of vital importance for a Local government to function effectively to address the human security concerns.

The local government or panchayat is the lowest level of governance, focusing on the development and protection of the rights of the people. The Panchayats, which derive their powers from Article 243 under the 73rd Amendment of 1992 of the Indian Constitution, are empowered to address human security concerns directly. Local governments are the immediate institutions responsible for preventing or addressing human security issues, and their impact is being studied using various parameters by different institutions from time to time. These studies inform policy decisions related to human security concerns.

Economic security

Poverty and unemployment are economic insecurities that prevail and have a domino effect on other security concerns, such as Food and Health security. In India, the economic

upliftment of the marginalised has been a poll promise or a goal of every government, but it has not been entirely successful. The MGNREGA, being a flagship scheme of the Indian government, has been able to reduce unemployment and extreme poverty in rural areas. All three tiers of local government – District, Block, and Gram Panchayat – are involved in the planning and implementation process. However, the role of the Gram Panchayat is of paramount importance from planning the work, registering of household/ individuals, issuing the job card, inspecting the work and most importantly allocation of equal work days to every individual in a cluster wise manner. Apart from it, the local government also serves as an intermediate to avail the welfare schemes of the government mainly for the downtrodden people and ensuring economic security.

The local government also ensure the economic security of the communities under its administration through the local self-help groups. The Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY) was implemented in 1999, enabling the formation of rural poor into self-help groups for self-sustaining or self-employment. The objective of SGSY is to bring the assisted family above the poverty line by providing them income-generating assets through a mix of bank credit and Government subsidy.^{vii} The Gram Panchayat can manage the SHG effectively through proper administration and can help in bringing ideas and technology for sustainable revenue-generating opportunities. The local administration is attempting to ensure the economic security of rural people through its powers, but it has still not been able to eradicate poverty due to several challenges.

Food Security

Food is one of the basic needs of a human being, and the Directive principle of state policy under Article 47 of the Indian Constitution states that it is the duty of the state to raise the level of nutrition and standard of living of its people as a primary responsibility.^{viii} The National Food Security Act of 2013 also states that “the objective is to provide for food and nutritional security in a human life cycle approach, by ensuring access to adequate quantity of quality food at affordable prices to the people to live a life with dignity”^{ix}. Though the state has ensured food security through these laws, the implementation and supervision have been under the purview of the local administration. The local administration is responsible for identifying eligible households for the Targeted Distribution system. The Gram Panchayat is also involved in monitoring and overseeing the functioning of the Fair Price Shops, and it can inspect the records of these shops to prevent mismanagement. The mid-day meal scheme in Tamil Nadu for school students is also monitored by the Education Committee at the village level, along with other committees, to ensure proper implementation. Through its monitoring and implementation of the schemes, the Gram Panchayat directly ensures Food security to the Marginalised at the grassroots level of the state.

Health Security

Public health and the public health system have become the predominant domain of every state since the Pandemic outbreak in 2020–2022. The establishment of Public health infrastructure and the actions to mitigate public health occurrences in India have always been decentralised for effective management to reach its vast population. The role of Local government in mitigating public health issues is of Vital Importance, as it monitors and reports to the local health department about any outbreaks or diseases in the locality. The local Bodies ensure the Hygiene and Sanitation of every village under their administration to maintain proper hygiene and prevent diseases. Women's and children's health are given excessive importance through the anganwadis in every panchayat. The president and

members of the Gram Panchayat are part of the anganwadi level monitoring and support committee, which ensures smooth functioning of the program. The Gram Panchayat also provides support and coordinates with the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee (VHSNC) in maintaining the public health of the village. In and around every panchayat, a Primary health centre is present, which serves as the basic health unit, providing access to basic healthcare for the people. The Primary health centres are externally monitored by the Village Health Sanitation and Nutrition Committee to ensure their standards. The essential criteria for local bodies to maintain public health are the urgency to take measures to contain or prevent disease.

Personal & Community Security

Personal and community security can be studied together as they are interconnected in certain aspects. Personal security refers to an individual's security from crime and violence. Community security threats are ethnic or community clashes, Identity clashes and, uniquely in India, the caste system, which has led to discrimination and violence. Both are interconnected as some individual incidents have become community concerns, e.g., caste-based violence. A significant reason is that in some localities, personal and community security threats have been linked to caste issues. Though the law and order is maintained by the district administration and the state at large, local bodies play an important role in averting violence and clashes. Many times, clashes among communities arise over basic amenities, as in one locality of a certain community does not have proper facilities. In contrast, another community's locality possesses all the necessary facilities, which has led to clashes. The painful reality is that even now, in many villages, people are settled based on caste and live separately from each other in separate streets or localities. The local body reports to the district law and administration regarding community tension beforehand to prevent clashes. To ensure personal security, the local administration enhances basic civic amenities, such as streetlights, to prevent or deter crimes at night. The Gram Panchayat has the important duty of protecting women and children from violence and crime, which it does through awareness campaigns and neighbourhood watch. To summarise, much work has to be done to avert community security threats as the caste system is still prevalent widely in rural areas, and the local administration, in many incidents, has turned a blind eye to atrocities / discrimination or even been a part of it at times.

Environmental Security

At present, environmental security is being discussed worldwide due to the depletion of natural resources, deforestation, and pollution, which have led to greenhouse gas emissions, disasters, and extreme climate change. Environmental concerns have already reached a high point due to unchecked environmental degradation in the past decades. However, still, certain aspects can be followed to avoid Environmental threats. These threats have a direct impact on the livelihoods of people, which can lead to economic, food, and health security concerns, as they are interlinked. The local administration has a greater role to play in averting these environmental concerns; Apart from collecting taxes from industries, it should ensure that industries are following the guidelines laid down by the government. Importantly, it can check, report, or complain to the relevant department authorities when the guidelines are not followed. Local bodies must prevent land and water pollution completely to halt degradation and ensure that industries comply with emission norms, thereby reducing air pollution. Another important area where the panchayat needs to concentrate is on waste management and recycling, which is still in its initial stage in India; however, many local bodies are able to do it successfully. A poor

waste management plan has also been a significant contributor to pollution. The increase in forest cover, or afforestation, is being implemented by local administrations, and it has been successful in certain parts of the country, resulting in a rebalancing of the ecology. Even though laws, acts, and tribunals are established to protect the environment, the role of local administration must be proactive in preventing degradation and avert environmental security threats.

Political Security

Political suppression, lack of political representation, exclusion from the local public discourse and human rights concerns are the main threats to Political Security. The Constitution of India has granted political rights and freedoms to every individual or community, allowing them to participate in democracy directly or indirectly. To avert the above-mentioned threats, reservations for underrepresented or downtrodden communities in elections are mandated to rectify past injustices to these communities and ensure equal representation. The state follows participatory democracy at every level of the government; Gram Sabha and MGNREGA social audit are exemplars. The caste dynamics present at the grassroots level of administration affect the process of democracy and the participation of marginalised people in governance. The local administration monitors and reports human rights violations to the concerned departments, ensuring the political security of the marginalised. The caste system has led to political suppression and exclusion, and it is still widespread all over the country. The Local administration should ensure that public discourse is free from suppression or exclusion. The grievances of the marginalised or suppressed are to be heard and addressed to secure their trust in the system, which in turn will ensure their political security.

Role of Gram Panchayats

The Gram Panchayats carry the primary responsibility of protecting the people from human security threats and ensuring good governance. If a Panchayat is manifestly failing to avert the human security threat, it cannot lead the community towards participatory democracy and development. Achieving human security requires cooperation among various stakeholders, including local administration, district administration, state administration, civil society, and the local community. The Panchayat's interventions on the ground to address human security concerns directly will ensure the building of a sustainable and resilient community, empowering individuals to thrive, prosper, and live in harmony.

To avert the human security issues, the local administration should conduct an in-depth analysis of the intended situation and its impact on the community. Furthermore, identify the specific needs of the affected individuals or community and provide appropriate solutions to address those concerns. The Gram Panchayat should address the root cause of the threats, in addition to providing an immediate solution. Its main focus should be on preventing threats through the two strategies of Protection and Empowerment. In the process of ensuring Human Security, the local administration should also practice participatory governance, which in turn will lead to cohesion between the administration and the community. Firstly, the local administration should establish transparency and accountability in its functions, which leads to participatory governance. This cohesion will lead to solution-oriented, sustainable development, as both primary actors are in association.

Furthermore, Gram Panchayats should engage with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as they can significantly contribute to improving human security by providing sustainable and pragmatic measures in collaboration with the local administration.

Conclusion

The grassroots-level planning and implementation of schemes have to be strengthened, which in turn would ensure Human security. By further empowering participatory processes, the human security approach can include diverse actors and establish concrete mechanisms for collaboration to address these issues. The cooperation between local government and citizens will lead to proper management of administration and resources, which in turn also improves social cohesion. This collective social cohesion can avert or address human security concerns more efficiently, which in turn will lead to human development, enabling individuals and communities to live better lives.

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