



ROLE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS TOWARDS RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PULWAMA DISTRICT OF JAMMU AND KASHMIR

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ABSTRACT

Lot of rural development programmes were carried out by panchayat raj institutions in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir from time to time in order to develop the rural area. The Government of Jammu and Kashmir assures people's participation in developmental activities and in the local governance institutions with adequate gender, class and caste representation as per the need of the amendment package. But, the level of people's participation in developmental activities at grassroots level seems to be very low. Moreover, gram panchayats are not adequately accountable to gram Sabha. The idea of participation, as an important part of panchayat raj, has rarely been observed in practice. Against this backdrop, the study is designed to investigate the panchayat representatives in order to understand their role towards implementation of various rural development programmes. An attempt has also been made to fully understand the role of Gram Sabha in panchayati raj system and rural development. A structured interview schedule was administered for this purpose. Besides, informal discussions and field observations also proved to be helpful in providing inputs to strengthen the arguments in analysis.

Keywords: Panchayat, Gram Sabha, Rural Development Programmes, Participation

INTRODUCTION

The Government of India has made great efforts since independence to meet the needs and expectations of the people. With the help of Rural Development Department and Panchayat Raj Institutions, special efforts have been made to solve the multifaceted problems of rural areas in rural areas. In time, the 73rd Amendment Act was passed to restore panchayat institutions. Panchayat raj institutions have implemented several rural development programs from time to time for rural development. The state ensures people's participation in development activities and municipal government institutions with appropriate gender, class and caste representation in the package of changes as needed. However, accountability and grassroots governance remain an important issue. Thanks to the very informal social structure at the local level, transparency is ensured to a significant extent. Basic management automatically becomes directly responsive to the people because the routine activities of local institutions are visible and questionable. Efforts were made to develop rural life and the standard of living of the people with the help of various rural development programs. But the level of people's participation in people's development activities is very low. Moreover, the gram panchayats are not sufficiently accountable to the gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha is not aware of the functioning of the gram panchayat, which is the main governing body. People do not have enough knowledge about different systems, which is a major problem. The idea of participation as an essential part of panchayat raj has rarely been realized in practice. Against this backdrop, the study aims to explore the participation of Gram Sabha members and panchayat representatives and fully understand their role and perceptions in rural development. For this purpose, a structured interview schedule was prepared. In addition, informal discussions and field observations proved to be a useful input to strengthen the arguments of the analysis. In 2019, Article 370 was repealed and Jammu and Kashmir was stripped of its statehood. The study was conducted in 2016-2017 before Jammu and Kashmir became a Union State.

OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the role of Panchayat Raj Institutions in implementing the rural development programmes.
2. To find out the perception and participation of panchayat raj representatives towards rural development.
3. To find out the role of Gram Sabha in panchayati raj system and rural development.

METHODOLOGY

Panchayat representatives remained the unit of observation. In the Pulwama district of Jammu and Kashmir, there are 5 blocks and five villages were chosen purposively for study from each block. From each selected village, 5 Panchayat Raj Representatives including 1 Sarpanch were selected randomly for intensive study. Thus, from 25 selected villages of 5 blocks the sample of 125 Panchayat Raj Representatives were taken. For the data collection, the tools to be used for obtaining information was interview schedule, emerging trends were crosschecked with respect to facts point of view. On the basis of collected data, code books were prepared, all the interview schedules were coded systematically. Coded schedules were entered in the computer using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS). All suitable statistical tools were used for analysis and interpretation of data. The data was then scrutinized and analysed as per objectives of the study.

PROFILE OF THE DISTRICT

Pulwama (known as Pnwngam in antiquity, and later as Pulgam is one of the districts in the Indian State of Jammu and Kashmir. It was carved out from District Anantnag as a new district in 1979. The District is located at an altitude of 1500 to 2000 meters above mean Sea level. The District Headquarter Pulwama is about 32 Kms away from Srinagar city. The Boundary Districts of Pulwama are Anantnag, Kulgam, Shopian, Budgam & Srinagar (Pulwama, 2022).

District Map of Pulwama



Demography

District Pulwama came into being in existence in July-1979 and was carved out from District Anantnag in the larger interests of maintenance of law and order, closer supervision, more effective control and above all to ensure balanced development of the area. Pulwama district comprised of 331 villages and 149 Panchayats, which are grouped in four (4) Tehsils viz. Pulwama, Tral, Pampore and Awantipura. It has five development blocks namely Pulwama, Tral, Pampore, Kakapora and Keller (Pulwama, 02/01/2016).

According to census 2011 Pulwama district has a population of 570,060. The district has a population density of 598 inhabitants per square kilometre (1,550/sq mi). Its population growth rate over the decade 2001-2011 was 29.18%. Pulwama has a sex ratio of 913 females for every 1000 males, lower than the national average of 940, and a literacy rate of 65% slightly higher than the national average of 64.3% (Wikipedia,02/01/2016).

Administrative Set up

S. No	Constituencies	Tehsils(No.of Villages)	Blocks (No. of Panchayat Halqas)
1	Pulwama	Pulwama (191)	Pulwama (45)

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2	Tral	Tral (66)	Tral (60)
3	Pampore	Pampore (26)	Pampore (23)
4	Rajpora	Awantipura (46)	Kakapora (29)
5			Keller (29)

Gram Sabha and its Role in Rural Development Programmes

The Gram Sabha is the cornerstone of the entire scheme of democratic decentralisation in India initiated through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution. Hence, the success or failure of the Panchayati Raj system largely depends on how powerful and effective the gram sabha is at the decentralised level to fulfil the desires and inspirations of the people. In Jammu and Kashmir, panchayat raj institutions re-established after a long gap and still are facing lot of challenges however; special efforts have been made to empower the PRI's.

Table 1.1

Knowledge about Gram Sabha

Responses	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	104	83.2
No	21	16.8
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.1 shows that 83.2 per cent of panchayat representatives know about gram sabha and 16.8 per cent did not have knowledge about gram sabha. Data clearly shows that a huge majority of representatives have knowledge about gram sabha however, it is a negative sign that a sizable number of representatives did not know about gram sabha which is the main governing body of panchayat.

Table 1.2

Gram Sabha Meetings Attended in Panchayat

Meetings Attended	Frequency	Per cent
No	111	88.8
Once	11	8.8
Two times	1	.8
Three times	2	1.6
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.2 describes the gram sabha meeting attended by the representatives. 88.8 per cent representatives are of the opinion that they did not attend a single meeting of gram sabha. 8.8 per cent revealed that they attended once, 0.8 per cent attended twice and 1.6 per cent attended thrice. Above analysis clearly shows that no gram sabha meeting took place in panchayats as majority of representatives pointed out that they have not attended a single meeting of gram sabha which is not a positive sign.

Table 1.3

Role as a Member of Gram Sabha in Rural Development Programmes

Role	Frequency	Per cent
Discussion on problems of village	63	50.4
Proposal on Construction works	51	40.8
No role	11	8.8
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.3 illustrates the role of gram sabha members in rural development programmes. 50.4 per cent of representatives pointed out that as a member of gram sabha their role is to discussion on problems of village. 40.8 per cent of representatives are of the view that proposal of construction works is their main role as a member of gram sabha in rural development programmes. Whereas 8.8 per cent reveal that they do not have any role. It clearly shows that discussion on problems of village and proposal of construction works is the main role of panchayat representatives as a member of gram sabha in rural development programmes.

Table 1.4

Level of Participation of Gram Sabha Members in Rural Development Programmes

Level of Participation	Frequency	Per cent
Higher	23	18.4
Medium	48	38.4
Lower	54	43.2
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.4 explains the level of participation of gram sabha members in rural development programmes. The level of participation has been traced at three levels viz., higher, level and medium. A varied kind of responses is coming out. 18.4 per cent respondents are of the opinion that the level of participation of gram sabha members in rural development programmes is higher. 38.4 per cent respondents feel that level of participation is medium and 43.2 per cent respondents pointed out that the level of participation is lower. Thus, it is clear from the above analysis that the level of participation of gram sabha members in rural development programmes is lower or medium.

Table 1.5

Basis on which Decisions are Taken in Gram Sabha related to Rural Development Programmes

Decisions	Frequency	Per cent
On majority bases	110	88.0
According to Sarpanch	10	8.0
Do not know	5	4.0
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.5 explains the basis on which decisions are taken in gram Sabha related to rural development programmes. 88.0 per cent respondents pointed out that decisions are taken on majority basis, 8.0 per cent respondents feel that decisions are taken according to sarpanch in gram Sabha related to rural development programmes. Thus, it is clear from above analysis that decisions are taken on majority basis in gram Sabha related to rural development programmes

Halqa Panchayat and its Role in Rural Development Programmes

Gram Panchayat is the most important tier of the panchayat raj system. Actual implementation of all policies and programmes takes place at the gram panchayat level and the selected representatives also works in various capacities in gram panchayat. In J&K there is a Halqa Panchayat as a crucial tier at the village level for the entire process of democratic decentralisation by giving it wide ranging functions.

Table 1.6

Elected Position in the Halqa Panchayat

Position	Frequency	Per cent
President	27	21.6
Vice president	23	18.4
Panch	75	60.0
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.6 explains the elected position in halqa panchayat. Data shows that 21.6 per cent respondents are presidents, 18.4 per cent respondents are vice presidents and 60.0 per cent respondents are panchs. This shows that majority of respondents are panchs.

Table 1.7

Been a Panchayat Member Earlier

Responses	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	15	12.0
No	110	88.0
Total	125	100.0
If yes, how many times did you contest for Panchayat election		
Twice	15	12.0
Total	15	12.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.7 depicts the information that 88.0 per cent respondents are of the opinion that they have not been a panchayat member earlier whereas 12.0 per cent respondents pointed out that they have been a panchayat member earlier and have been elected twice. Thus, it clearly shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents are new comers and have been elected first time.

Table 1.8

Methods Used for the Selection of Beneficiaries in Your Ward

Methods	Frequency	Per cent
Merit	27	21.6
As per govt. guidelines	18	14.4
Don't know	1	.8

By Sarpanch/BDO	79	63.2
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.8 explains the methods used for the selection of beneficiaries in the ward. 21.6 per cent respondents are of the opinion that the selection of beneficiaries in the ward is done on merit basis. 14.4 per cent respondents pointed out that that the selection of beneficiaries is made as per government guidelines and 63.2 per cent respondents feel that the beneficiaries are selected by BDO. An overwhelming majority of respondents cited that the selection of beneficiaries in the ward is made by sarpanch/BDO, which shows that the election process is not transparent and selection of beneficiaries are confined to sarpanch/BDO which is a positive sign.

Table 1.9

Panchayat Representatives Discharge their Responsibility Properly in Implementing the Rural Development Programmes

Responses	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	95	76.0
No	30	24.0
Total	125	100.0
If not, reasons		
Due to groupism in village	14	11.2
Due to non cooperation of government officials and employees	10	8.0
Due to irregularities of meetings	3	2.4
Due to lack of information about the powers of panchayat	3	2.4
Total	30	24.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.9 illustrates whether panchayat representatives discharge their responsibility properly in implementing the rural development Programmes. 76.0 per cent respondents are of the opinion that panchayat representatives discharge their responsibility properly whereas 24.0 per cent respondents are of the view that panchayat representatives did not discharge their responsibility properly in implementing the rural development Programmes. Of those respondents who hold a contrary opinion, 11.2 per cent respondents pointed out that due to groupism panchayat representatives are not able to discharge their responsibility properly. 8.0 per cent respondents claimed that due to non cooperation of government officials and employees panchayat representatives did not discharge their responsibility properly. 3.0 per cent respondents argued that either due to irregularities of meetings or due to lack of information about the powers of panchayat they do not discharge their responsibility properly in implementing the rural development Programmes. Thus, it shows that majority of panchayat representatives discharge their responsibility properly in implementing the rural development Programmes however a notable figure have contrary opinion.

Table 1.10

Work carried out by Panchayats for Rural Development

Work Carried	Frequency	Per cent
Development of roads	17	13.6
Electricity	2	1.6
Housing	19	15.2
All	86	68.8
Other	1	.8
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.10 explains the work carried out by panchayats for rural development. 13.6 per cent respondents are of the opinion that panchayats carried out development of roads. 1.6 per cent respondents argued that works related to electricity are carried out by the panchayats. 15.2 per cent respondents pointed out that works related to housing is carried out. 68.8 per cent respondents reveal that all types of works like development of roads, electricity, housing, infrastructure etc works are carried out the panchayats. Thus, it is clear from above analysis that almost all types of works are carried out the panchayats for rural development which is a positive sign.

Table 1.11

Role of Panchayat Raj Representatives in Implementing the Rural Development programmes

Role	Frequency	Per cent
Inspect schemes under work	38	30.4
Give suggestions	19	15.2
Discuss schemes with people	19	15.2

Put proposals	8	6.4
Identify beneficiaries	39	31.2
No Role	2	1.6
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.11 explains the role of panchayat raj representatives in implementing the rural development programmes. 30.4 per cent respondents pointed out that they inspect schemes under work. 15.2 per cent respondents give suggestions. 15.2 per cent respondents discuss schemes with people. 6.4 per cent respondents put proposals. 31.2 per cent respondents identify beneficiaries. Thus, from above analysis it is clear that varied kind of responses are coming out. Majority of respondents claimed that they inspect schemes under work and also identify beneficiaries.

Table 1.12

Panchayats Satisfying the Needs and Requirements of the Villagers through Different Schemes

Responses	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	89	71.2
No	13	10.4
Do not know	23	18.4
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.12 explains whether panchayats are satisfying the needs and requirements of the Villagers through different schemes. 71.2 per cent respondents are of the view that panchayats are satisfying the needs and requirements of the Villagers whereas 10.4 per cent respondents pointed out that panchayats are not satisfying the needs and requirements of the Villagers through different schemes. Thus, from above analysis it is clear that an overwhelming majority of respondents revealed that panchayats are satisfying the needs and requirements of the Villagers through different schemes.

Table 1.13

Transparency and Accountability in the Decision Making Process in Panchayats

Responses	Frequency	Per cent
Yes	87	69.6
No	22	17.6
Don't know	16	12.8
Total	125	100.0

Source: Primary Data

Table 1.13 explains whether there is transparency and accountability in the decision making process in panchayats. 69.6 per cent panchayat representatives are of the opinion that there is transparency and accountability in the decision making process in panchayats whereas 17.6 per cent respondents pointed out that there is no transparency and accountability. 12.8 per cent respondents highlighted that they did not know whether there is transparency and accountability in the decision making process in panchayats or not. Thus, from above analysis it is clear that majority of panchayat representatives claimed that there is transparency and accountability in the decision making process in panchayats which is a good sign.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The major findings of the study are:

- The study revealed that panchayat representatives have good knowledge about gram Sabha but they have never attended gram Sabha meetings which is not a positive sign.
- Majority of panchayat representatives says that their main role in rural development programmes as a member of gram Sabha is to discuss problems of village and to prepare proposals on construction works.
- Majority of respondents pointed out that decisions about the schemes are taken on majority basis but the level of participation of gram Sabha members in rural development programmes is by and large lower.
- Study revealed that an overwhelming majority of leadership is new and first timer. While asking their role in implementation of rural development schemes their opinion varied at number of cases. Majority of respondents claimed that they inspect schemes under work and also identify beneficiaries some respondents are of the opinion that they discuss schemes with people and put proposals.
- Considerably high number of respondents claims that the selection of beneficiaries of rural development is made on merit basis. Large numbers of respondents feel that panchayat representatives discharge their responsibility properly and are playing an important role in implementing the rural development programmes and are satisfying the needs and requirements of the Villagers through different schemes which is a good sign. However, one fourth of the respondents are against to it and feel that due to groupism in village and



non-cooperation of government officials and employees panchayat representatives are not able to discharge their responsibility properly.

- Half of the respondents claim that all types of works viz development of roads, electricity, housing, infrastructure etc are carried out the panchayats for rural development which is a positive sign. Majority of the respondents agrees that there is transparency and accountability in the decision making process in panchayats which is a good sign.

CONCLUSION

Panchayat raj institutions are implemented in almost all states of India and are continuously working for upliftment of rural masses by providing them benefits through different rural development scheme and J&K is not an exception. Numbers of rural development schemes are implemented in the state through panchayat raj institutions. These Panchayat institutions re-emerged after a long gap in the state of J&K. It seems that these institutions are playing a vital role in developmental activities of the village and panchayat representatives are discharging their responsibility properly but people are not participating in gram sabha meetings which is out of imagination of the people and is not an encouraging sign. In spite of all odds state is showing good progress in rural development and panchayat raj activities which is a good sign. Serious efforts are being made now to lift up the poor people's spirit but without the active involvement of the rural poor, they can neither attain all round development nor stabilize their progress. There is need of more involvement of people in rural developmental programmes and more co-operations between the people, panchayat representatives and government officials.

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