

73rd CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT: AN IMPACT ASSESSMENT DOWN THE LINE

Dr T. Brahmanandam

Associate Professor at Centre for Multi-Disciplinary Development Research, Dharwad, India

ABSTRACT

The paper makes a critical attempt to assertion the functional aspects of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) especially in the aftermath of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. After a brief review of the history of Local Self-Government in the pre and post independent India, a concerted attempt has been made to present the working condition of the Local Self Government in India. The operational aspect of the three tier system of Panchayat has also brought out a number of impediments that have hampered their effective functioning. Mere mentioning the functions in the Constitution does not imply anything substantial without the effective back up of financial decentralization. The dominance of the upper caste still hovers around and is threat to the inclusive participation of the deprived sections of the society. The paper is mostly based on secondary data consisting of research literature on the subject including the government reports and also field based studies.

KEYWORDS: Local Self-Government, 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Weaker Section, Functional Devolution, etc

INTRODUCTION

The idea of decentralisation is, to a certain extent, embedded in the democratic practice of the political organization. Democracy as a form of political institution may be viewed as an opportunity to ensure people's participation not only in the sovereign power of the state but also in the day-to-day functioning of government. J.S. Mill argues that the only government which can fully satisfy all the exigencies of the state is one in which the whole people participate (*Datta, 2009, p.1*)

The formal, i.e., legitimate Panchayat system was introduced by the British in the later part of the 19th century. However, the practice is believed to be ancient especially in places where the villages were not covered under the emperors' rule in such places the village elders or religious leader's uses to discuss and sort out their problems. In fact, Kautilya mentioned about 'Panchayats' in his book *Arthashastra* (<http://www.arthapedia.in/index.php>). Not only was this referred to in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, there were inferences of existence of panchayats even in the *Rig Veda*. Within the modern federal set up and also in hierarchical governance structure, Panchayati Raj is the lowest and closest to the community.

In multi-layered governance, the Panchayati Raj comes closest to the people and hence little scope for negligence to the needy villagers as there is little social space between the ruler and the ruled, between the electorate and the elected. The true spirit of participatory democracy gets reflected in the working of the Panchayat system. That is why this system is also known as "self-governance, self-management, mutual co-operation, sharing equality, freedom and brotherhood to all could be practiced and developed for better if man lived in small communities." (http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/354/11/09_chapter2.pdf, p-24-26.). In this background, the proposed paper on 73rd Constitutional Amendment: An Impact assessment down the line would critically examine the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

- To apprise whether the former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's vision of the Panchayati Raj has been fulfilled;
- To explore the transferability, and to what extent, of the subjects mentioned in the XI Schedule of the Constitution to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) in letter and spirit.

The paper has been divided into two parts. The first part deals with the Panchayati Raj system in India before the 73rd Constitution Amendment 1993, and the second part does with after the 73rd Constitution Amendment. The paper is mostly based on secondary data consisting of research literature on the subject including the government reports and also field based studies.

A BRIEF LITERATURE REVIEW

The Greek philosopher Aristotle hailed from the Greek-City states known for having the best possible system of governance and administration. However, J.S. Mill is considered to be the best exponent of participatory and direct democracy which is very much relevant to the local self-government in Indian context. The Mayo Resolution of 1870, no doubt, added strength to the local self-government. Thereafter, the Lord Rippon Resolution emerged as a landmark in the history and evolution of the local governments. This resolution is still considered to be the 'Magna Carta' of local democracy in India (*Mathew, 2013, p.4*). Socialists such as Jayaprakash Narayan (J.P) also advocated the "direct democracy" at village level and stated that the Gram Sabha signifies democracy at village level. J.P argued for the direct government (direct democracy) at least in one place. He further says that the relationship between the *Panchayat* and *gram sabha* should be that of the cabinet and assembly (*Bandyopadhyay, et al.2003, p.3986*). The principal focus of the Panchayat has to be the dispensation of social justice and resolution of local disputes. There are several studies which have highlighted the importance, status, and functions of the Panchayati Raj. Within these, some of them are trying to understand the working of new PRI system. *Singh (2009)* suggests that the Drafting Committee of the Constitution had paid lip service to the local self-government institutions. Whatever may be the half-baked approach of the Drafting Committee, the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act of 1993 also failed to have significant impact on the local administration as the political elites in most of the states were not willing to share the power with the PRI. *Lele (2001)* has mentioned *Rai (2000)* arguing that the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts have augmented / opened up the democratic process of these deliberative bodies. Moreover, Constitution Amendment Acts have opened up a larger debate of democratisation where the marginalised groups get easy access to the decision making process quite legitimately. However, in reality, even the participation in the decision making process as well as the statutory provisions fails to provide guarantee to their empowerment. In majority cases, the marginalised groups who get elected to these bodies are facing open confrontations with traditional bodies like 'Gavaki in Maharashtra,' Khap Panchayats in Haryana, and Customary Village Council (CVC) in Karnataka. *Narayan (2007)* has highlighted that the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act has forced the state to create the panchayati bodies. The inadequacy of the Panchayati Raj resources falls short of its much needed demands for development expenditure. In 2002, the Government of Andhra Pradesh had diverted most of the funds of *Swarna Jayanti Gram Samridhhi Yojana* under the Gram Panchayat to the construction of individual household latrines and school toilets. Had the PRI functioned effectively, adequate and regular funds should have been provided. *Singh and Kumar (2005)* observe that the state control always reduces the PRI to subordinate status. The paper provides details of different types of state control, such as like institutional control, administrative control, and financial control over the PRI. With the institutional control, the ruling party

at the state level always tried to gain its own political interests. For example, in Haryana, the Chautala government tried to dissolve the panchayats much before the stipulated time in order to score advantages in the assembly elections year. However, it could not succeed because of the stay order issued by the Punjab and Haryana High Court. The inadequate resource of the PRIs with the financial control of the state government has put the PRIs in dilemma between autonomy and dependency. Such practices of the state government undermine the very purpose for which the PRI have been instituted.

The NIRD (2005) study on Gram Sabha and Social Audit in Schedule V Areas of Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh which focuses on the role of 'social audit role' by the Gram Sabha under the provisions of PESA in the Schedule V Areas. The study showed that a large majority of the members of Gram Sabha are not aware of the powers of the Gram Sabha in all the three states and more so in Madhya Pradesh. The study also noted that neither the official functionaries nor the members of the Gram Sabha had any knowledge of the concept of 'social audit'. Ghatak and Ghatak (2002) study in West Bengal states that the average attendance in Gram Sansad was as low as 12 per cent. However, the quorum for sansad is 10 per cent. This implies that the participation level of the villagers across states.

PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

Immediately after independence, many leaders including Mahatma Gandhi thought of establishing the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) at the grass root level for democratic decentralization. On the other hand, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar strongly opposed village panchayats because the villages represent regressive India, 'a source of oppression' (*Buch, 2012,p.1*). He further argued that the empowerment of village institutions would mean perpetual dominance of the upper castes, who would continue to exploit the lower castes and the poor. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, was a powerful voice representing the Dalit community of the country. He himself had experienced the caste discrimination and exploitative practices of the upper castes. In that circumstances, the village panchayats did not figure in the draft constitution as Dr. Ambedkar argued them as nothing 'but a sink of localism, den of ignorance and narrow –mindedness' (*Mathur, 2013,p.8-9*)

Gandhiji, however, severely criticised this attitude, because the village communities based on a communitarian principle has been the units where in the individual happiness, freedom and independence have been realized since ancient times, according to Rathi. Shubhangi (http://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/village_development.html,). However, Dr. Ambedkar opposed the concept of communitarian principle because the deprived sections were not part of the community. All these circumstances forced Dr. Ambedkar not include village panchayats in the beginning and later it included as a limited measure in the Directive Principles of the State Policy. Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy states that 'the state should all 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 self- governments.'

Initially all the developmental plans were prepared without giving much importance to the village panchayats. When these programmes 'failed to generate popular interest and enthusiasm' (*Bhalerao,1964, p.804*) in development work, the Planning Commission appointed a committee headed by Balwantrai Mehta in 1956. The committee viewed that "only grassroot level agencies can establish a link between the local leadership who enjoys the confidence of local people, and translate the policies of the government into action" (*Singh, 1994, p.818*) and it recommended three-tier PanchayatiRaj system in the country. While inaugurating the PanchayatiRaj system at Nagaur in Rajasthan on 2nd October 1959, Nehru hailed this as "the most revolutionary and historical step in the context of new India" (*Mathew,2013, p.6*).

By mid 1960s, the Panchayati Raj has reached to almost all parts of the country. However, within two years of its accomplishments, it failed to keep on strengthening owing to a number of crises like food crisis and war with China. Achieving adequate food grain production was major cause of concern for the policy makers, and in that direction many agricultural schemes were launched by the government relying mostly on bureaucracy (*Datta, 2009, p.2*). In absence of the constitutional sanction and clarity, most of the panchayats functioned as government agents rather than self-governing institutes. According to *Mathur*, these institutions were not seen as institutions of peoples' participation that played a role in deepening democracy, but rather seen as instruments to facilitate the implementation of national policies (*Mathur, 2013, p.13*).

As soon as the Janata Party came to power at the centre, it showed interests on reviving the Panchayati Raj system for planning and implementation at the local level. At this backdrop, the Janata government appointed the Ashok Mehta Committee to review and suggest the suitable measures for the strengthening of Panchayati Raj in 1978. The committee had recommended a two-tier system of Panchayati Raj consisting of Zilla Parishad at the district level as the unit of administration and planning and Mandal Panchayati as the base. It also recommended compulsory taxation to Zilla Parishad to generate its own resources and all the developmental functions should be in their control (*Venkatraman, 1989, p.405-406*).

During Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, two more committees (i.e., G.V.K. Rao Committee and L.M.Singhvi Committee) were appointed to study the existing administrative system at local level and also to regenerate PRI system. The G.V.K. Rao Committee had recommended the activation of the "Panchayati Raj bodies". While the L. M. Singhvi Committee had recommended that the PRI should be enshrined in the constitution and 'Gram Sabha' should be the base for decentralized democracy (*Venkatraman, 1989, p.403-04*).

73rd CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AND ITS OPERATIONAL LEVEL

Based on the recommendations of these two committees, Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, had introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill on local self-government in 1989. The sole idea behind the 64th Constitutional Amendment Act was to restructure the Panchayati Raj bodies and to bring uniformity, efficiency, and responsiveness in public services. While introducing the 64th Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha, the Prime Minister said, "this Bill seeks to enshrine democracy at grassroots level" as it intend "to give power to people," and it will "end corruption, fight to finish power brokers and middlemen" in politics. The Prime Minister claimed this Bill would be a "historic and revolutionary Bill" (*Hirway, 1989, p.1663*). However, the Bill got defeated in the Rajya Sabha with a small margin, and subsequently during the Narasimha Rao's government, the bill was passed with near unanimity by the Lok Sabha on December 22, 1992 and by the Rajya Sabha on December 23, 1992. It became 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) on April 24, 1993. The CAA has incorporated all the recommendations of L.M. Singhvi Committee and urged all the states to commensurate with the Act. However, the CAA has exempted the small states with a population less than 20 lacs from constituting the intermediate bodies.

Mathew points out that, certain essential pre-requisites are necessary to make PRI function as local self-government institutions: (a) a clear cut demarcation should be drawn between the state and Panchayati Raj bodies and also among the three local bodies, (b) adequate financial power and authority in commensurate with the development responsibility, (c) functional autonomy within the federal structure. The need was felt to set up the boundaries of the PRI

bodies so that they can function without any crisscross of responsibilities. Since the constitutional amendment opens possibilities for fulfilling these conditions, the new Panchayati Raj Institution must be seen as the third tier of governance (Mathew and Mathew, 2003, p.18-19).

- Article 243D of CAA made mandatory reservation for the SCs and STs in proportion to their population in both seats and posts of chairpersons at all levels of the PRI. *On this point, Mathur* made a significant observation that Article 243D says about the reservation of seats and posts for the SCs in proportion to their population. According to the Constitution, only 15 percent of reservation is provided to the SCs in educational and other services. In India, more than 53.6 per cent of the SC population is concentrated in Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Bihar. However, all these states have adopted what the Constitution of India has mandated for the SCs i.e., 15 percent rather than the proportion to their population in the districts and villages. This is also the blatant violation of article 243D in actual practice (Mathur, 2013, p.95).
- The CAA also says that not less than 1/3rd of seats and posts of the chairperson should be reserved for women including SC and ST women. All these provisions have helped them to get elected to PRIs on one hand, and on the other it has also facilitated them to be decision makers. Due to this, More than 21 lakh representatives stand elected to the three levels of panchayats. Of these, more than 40 per cent are women; 16 per cent belong to SCs, and 11 per cent belong to the STs (Ragunandan, 2007, p.29). For details, see Table -1. It brought a virtual democratic revolution with 30 lakh representatives getting elected at the local level every five years, out of whom 10 lakh are women and more than six and a half lakh are Dalits. Among six and a half lakh, the Dalit women are also getting elected as presidents and ward members (Mathur, 2013, p.37).

Table 1: Composition of Panchayats in 2006

Panchayat Level	Number	Elected Representatives	Women%	SC%	ST %
District Panchayat	602	11,825	41	18	11
Intermediate Panchayat	6097	1,10,070	43	22	13
Village or Gram Panchayat	2,34,676	20,73,715	40	16	11

Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2006).

Mandated reservation of one-third of panchayat positions for women had been successfully implemented by 2000 (except in Punjab and UP), while for SC/STs it has been somewhat less than their demographic weight in some states: the ratio was below 70 per cent in Gujarat, Orissa, and UP (Chaudhuri, 2005). Many people thought that the CAA would certainly make these local bodies active. However, there has been a prolonged delay by the state governments in transferring these constitutionally mandated powers and functions to the local bodies. There are number of reasons which have been spelt out below for the delay in transferring these powers.

- In spite of the mandatory provisions mentioned in the Part XI of the Constitution on the creation of panchayats, the Constitutional bodies fail to prepare electoral rolls and conducting regular elections to these bodies has never been considered as the constitutional breakdown in the state. For indefinite delaying elections, an observation has been made with reference to Andhra Pradesh where the Congress government had delayed the conducting of elections of PRI bodies for more than 2 years because of lack of clarity on Backward Class (BC) reservations. Elections were conducted to these bodies only in 2014 because of the High Court interventions (*The Hindu (Hyderabad)*, 4th July, 2014). Another example is Bihar for not conducting elections to the PRI bodies until 2001. Even after the

73rd Amendment Act, the government of Bihar did not conduct elections to the local bodies and kept delaying because of litigations pertaining to the reservation of leadership positions in Panchayats. Finally, it conducted elections to these bodies in 2001 without reservations provided for leadership positions in Panchayats (http://www.nrcddp.org/file_upload/Status%20of%20Panchayati%20Raj,%20Bihar.pdf). Based on these facts, the working group on Decentralized Planning and Panchayati Raj of the Tenth Plan observed that "... most of the court cases, grievances of aggrieved parties related to reservation of seats for SCs/STs/OBCs/ women, delimitation of constituencies, percentage of reservation for chairpersons of lower tier to higher tier, etc. and in most of the cases, the state governments have not pursued these pending court cases vigorously for their early hearing so that a final decision of the court becomes available as early as possible" (Pal, 2004, p.139). This reflects that the political elites at the state level are not interested to incorporate women and marginalized groups in the developmental process.

- Article 243D also specifies the mandatory rotation, i.e., the structural constraints of reservation of seats among constituencies from one election to the next election in 3-tier Panchayati system. As per this Act, if a seat or a constituency is reserved for a particular category, he or she is eligible to contest for that particular term only and they cannot contest for second term from the same constituency. It implies that women and other marginalized groups cannot contest from the same constituency once their five year term expires. This has denied them the right to contest from the same constituency. The states such as Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh Maharashtra, and Rajasthan have also introduced the two child norm as eligibility criteria for contesting elections. Though this norm goes against both men and women, it is more detrimental to women especially to the scheduled castes and schedule tribe community because majority of the families follow the big and joint family norm. To assess the impact of this norm, a study was conducted by the Mahila Chetna Manch, Bhopal based NGO, and it observed that unless and until proper information of 'two child norm' is disseminated to the rural areas, it is impossible to empower the economically and socially vulnerable sections of the society (Datta, 2009, p.23).
- The traditional bodies like 'collectives' or 'gavki' in Maharashtra and 'customary village councils' (CVCs) in Karnataka are functioning parallel to the village panchayats. In fact, in Maharashtra they are called as 'collectives' or 'gavki'. In Maharashtra, 'gavki' is dominated by the upper caste and elite landlords. It does not have any legal sanctity in the state. Despite having no legal sanctity, these bodies are powerful than elected representatives at village level. Gavaki is very active in the Konkan region of Satara, Ahmad Nagar, Nandurburg, Raigad and several other districts. These Gavakis (*Kangaroo courts*) deliver illegal judgments like social boycott, cleaning of public latrines, donating blood or arranging social functions. In 2013, a pregnant girl from the Gosavi community, who got married to a Dalit boy, was killed by her father. This act of cruelty was being committed by girl's father due to the pressure and high handedness of the community members. A similar diktat was issued in Raigad district by which Santosh Jadhav was ostracized by the Kunbi community in 2005 for defying the diktat against contesting for the sarpanch's post at Harihareshwar in Raigad. These unlawful judgments of the *Kangaroo courts* have motivated the incumbent Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavisto propose a law on the Prevention of Social boycott Act of 2015. "The main aim is to crack down on the parallel justice system in Maharashtra, which frowns at inter-caste marriages, change in social practices or even people's choice of

clothes.”(<https://sjsa.maharashtra.gov.in/en/maharashtra-cm-devendra-fadnavis-pushes-social-boycott-law-against-parallel-justice-system>). This shows the strength of the ‘Gavaki’ in Maharashtra. They are very effective in areas where women or Dalits are in power. Based on the above observations, Lelerightly said that “reservations which intended to empower marginalised sections in rural governance are being made ineffective by these established traditional bodies in the rural areas” (Lele, 2001,p.4703).Even today, in many parts of India, the traditional bodies are part and parcel of the village culture, and the law makers should give a chance to these traditional bodies to play some sort of conciliatory role on local issues. This would certainly promote the cooperation between elected representatives and traditional bodies and avoid confrontation between them which may again defeat the purpose of the Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA).

- The Khap Panchayats (KP) are another example of the traditional body that exercises powers parallel to the village Panchayatie specially in Jat dominated areas of North India, i.e., Haryana, Panjab, and the Meerut region of Uttar Pradesh. In this region, the Khap Panchayatse merged as an extra judicial body that pronounces harsh punishments as retribution based on the age-old customs and traditions. In Haryana, when a Dalit girl was gang raped by four youths, instead of condemning the incident, the KP directed that girls should be married off early so that rapes can be avoided. Later, the same Dalit girl committed suicide. When the girl committed suicide, the Congress President Smt. Sonia Gandhi visited the girl’s family, and she just condemned the incident and never uttered a word against the KP’s extra judicial power(*The Indian Express (Chandigarh)*, 8th Oct.2012).Even the former Chief Minister Bhupender Singh Hooda said that Khaps are social institutions and steps taken in a hurry to curb them would have dangerous impacts on the law and order situation in the state (Mathur, 2013).The appeasement policy taken by the political leaders would certainly encourage the KP to act more vigorously.
- One of the main objectives of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act is to empower the weaker sections by offering the constitutional status to the PRI bodies. However, in reality, certain state governments are passing more and more obstructive laws against these sections of the society. For example, the Rajasthan govt. has issued an ordinance stating that if a person wants to contest to the post of village sarpanch then he/she has to have the minimum qualification of Std. VIII. In case of reserved constituency for schedule caste, one should have the qualification of Std. V. In states like Rajasthan where the women literacy is 46%, much below the national average, it severely affects the prospects of SC and ST women candidates who mostly fail to satisfy the educational criteria for contesting elections as their educational status is much lower than that of the general women. It may look good to suggest educational qualifications for the candidates across communities provided 100% literacy is achieved. If not so, it is intended to create hurdles among weaker section. Another discriminatory law against the marginalized sections is the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2015(*The Hindu (New Delhi)*, 10th Dec., 2015). Recently, the government of Haryana has passed this Act fixing the educational qualifications for the contest of local body elections. In addition to this, the candidates have to provide proof of having household toilets. In a country where the educational qualification is not fixed for the Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, how can one fix educational qualification as criteria for eligibility to local body elections? This kind of legislations will certainly hinder women, OBCs, and Dalits who are forced to give up education because of their socio-economic backwardness and gender discrimination.

- In addition to these, there are certain negative facets observed by the women and Dalit representatives while discharging their duties. Wherever women and Dalit are elected to the PR bodies, the elected persons would be the de jure representative, whereas the de facto representative would be someone else. In the case of women representatives, the de jure would be women and the de facto would be the eldest male member of the family. This is also known as 'proxy rule'. In this situation, a woman would be placed nominally, and the role of the president would really be done by her husband/ male member of the family and would act as the de facto president. The sole aim of the CAA is to empower the weaker sections like women and Dalit. But in reality, it is defeating the purpose of empowering women and Dalits (*Reddy, 2003, p. 1290*).
- When former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha, he wanted the grass root institutions to be made more efficient, responsive, power to people and end to corruption. However, in practice, everything went on as usual in contrary to the vision and ideas of Rajiv Gandhi. Even in 1989, the non-Congress opposition created pressure on the government to withdraw the Panchayati Raj Constitutional Amendment Bill on ground of anomalies in the preamble to the proposed Bill (*Hewitt and Rai, 2010, p 36*).
- Aiyar (2002), amongst others, has stressed the need for reforms in the following areas: (i) devolution of functions and finances to panchayat bodies; (ii) training of panchayat officials; (iii) formula-based grants to village panchayats and development of their capacity to raise local revenues; (iv) checks and balances over operation of village panchayats, audit by government, involvement of NGOs, and disclosure of accounts; (v) conduct of elections electoral reforms and (vi) encouragement of local planning based on popular participation. To translate the intentions of the previous amendments into reality, perhaps another amendment is necessary.

CONCLUSIONS

When India got independence, Gandhi wanted villages should be made as self-governing units so that they can serve the local needs at local level. However, this idea was not considered by Drafting Committee of the Constitution. To fulfill Gandhi's Gram Swaraj, an amendment was introduced to the Constitution in 1993. This Amendment Act has brought drastic changes in the PRI bodies, introducing reservation in presidents/sarpanch and ward members for SCs and STs according to the size of their population. It was also suggested that not less than 1/3rd of the seats would also be reserved for women in the entire 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj. Due to 73rd Constitution Amendment, the much needed changes have been introduced to the PRI bodies. However, in reality it failed because of the powers and functions of the PRI have not been clearly stated and demarcated from that of the state administration. In some cases, the political leadership of the state is not very favorable to empower the marginalized groups and also the PRI. In this connection, the same leadership is framing new laws with regard to education, household, toilet, and local bank clearance.

Dr. Ambedkar didn't want to include the panchayats in the Constitution because it was nothing 'but a sink of localism, den of ignorance and narrow-mindedness' and a source of oppression. While countering his arguments, Madhava Rau of Mysore said, "It is true some villages are faction ridden and remain the stronghold of untouchability". Looking at this worst situation, Mr. Rau insisted that even if 30 percent of the population could be classified as good, it could not be ignored. Taking all these into consideration, certain changes were brought into the PRI system through 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Despite these changes, a large section of the marginalised groups feels that it does not come close to the Gandhian wisdom because of the

paucity of its powers and very limited financial resources. Very often the elections of these bodies are not conducted regularly. In many states, the traditional bodies are functioning parallel to panchayats, and even today. Under these circumstances, the policy makers should review it and make necessary changes to transfer the 29 subjects to the village panchayats, conduct elections to these bodies regularly, to give power and resources to Gram Sabha/ Ward Sabha to implement the schemes / works. Only then, it can serve the purpose of the people at grass root level both to strengthen democracy and to help build Gandhi's Gram Swaraj.

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