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Decentralized Democracy: Evaluation of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Democracy is considered as one of the best form of government because it ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision making. Participation and control of governance by the people of the country is the essence of democracy. Panchayati Raj is one of the important political innovations of India, which helps establish of grass-roots democracy and ensure the greater people's participations in political system of the country. Panchayati Raj Institutions that work as grass-root units of decentralized democratic self-government have been considered as an instrument of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Involvement of people at the grass-roots level is the most important means of bringing about socio-economic development. This very processes an eye opener for the village communities so far as the grassroots democratic political process is concerned. As a result, the people got themselves involved with the developmental process of the rural area. Panchayati Raj Institution has brought a many socio-political changes in the rural Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, importance and effectiveness of working of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh is an interesting subject of study to whether these institutions are an effective mechanism for the modern grassroots democratic political participation. With this objective, the present study is intending to shed light on the democratic decentralization political institutions and empowerment of people in Arunachal Pradesh.

Keyword: *Democracy, Panchayati Raj, Decentralized Democracy, Arunachal Pradesh*

Introduction: Democracy is considered as one of the best form of government because it ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision making. Participation and control of governance by the people of the country is the essence of democracy. *Panchayati Raj* is one of the important political innovations of India, which helps establish of grass-roots democracy and ensure the greater people's participations in political system of the country.

Panchayati Raj Institutions that work as grass-root units of decentralized democratic self-government have been considered as an instrument of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Involvement of people at the grass-roots level is the most important means of bringing about socio-economic development. Decentralization of power to the *Panchayat* is seen as a means of empowering people and involving them in decision-making process. Local governments being closer to the people can be more responsive to local needs and can make better use of resources. The democratic system in a country can be ensured only if there is mass participation in the governance. Therefore, to achieve this objective, a system of democratic decentralization popularly known as *Panchayati Raj* has been introduced in India.

The term '*Panchayati Raj*' may be relatively new, having originated during the British administration, but it owes its origin to the different traditional patterns of governance, in the phase of history in many parts of India. '*Raj*' literary means 'governance' or government'. Conceptually, *panchayat* can be described as an assembly of the village people or their representatives and the term "*panchayat*" is a Hindi word, which literally means assembly (*Ayat*) of five (*Panch*) wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community.

Mahatma Gandhi equated *panchayati raj* with 'village republic'. He explained his concept of village *panchayat* thus, ...the government of the village will be conducted by the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males and females, possessing maximum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required : since there will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined without much interference even from the present government whose sole effective connection with the village is the execution of the village revenue, here there is perfect democracy based on individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government.

Thus, Gandhi had envisaged the vision of self- sustained and self-sufficient village republic capable of managing own affairs, as the foundation of India's political system. The term for such a vision was *Gram Swaraj* (village self-government).

Philosophically, *Panchayati Raj* is a multidimensional idea. It has its pluralistic definitions and wider connotations in the writings of different thinkers. Emphasizing the ideology of *Panchayati Raj* Gandhi viewed, "India lives in her village. Independence must begin at the bottom, thus making every village a republic or *Panchayat*, enjoying full powers. He remarked that, "Twenty men sitting at the centre could not work true democracy. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."

The Constitution of 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 marks a new era in the federal democratic set up of the country and provide constitutional status to the *Panchayati Raj* institutions. Initially, it was included in Part-(IV) under the Directive Principle of State Policy. The *Article 40* herein says, "The state should take steps to organize village panchayat and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of Self- Government."

In Arunachal Pradesh, *Panchayat* bodies have been the first modern political institutions. Democratic political process was started in the erstwhile *NEFA* (North East Frontier Agency) in 1969 with the inauguration of *Panchayati Raj*. Significantly, the modern *Panchayati Raj* was introduced in *NEFA* (Present Arunachal Pradesh) on the backdrop of existing traditional tribal councils. In substance, the indigenous isolated tribal communities were exposed to grassroots political process. A new framework of participatory development and village management was introduced which mobilized the tribes to a great extent. Thus, the *panchayat* institutions engineered the modern political process in Arunachal Pradesh. The introduction of modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh became the key instruments for the development of village life. The people got the opportunity to exercise their franchise for the first time in the *panchayat* elections. This very processes an eye opener for the village communities so far as the grassroots democratic political process is concerned. As a result, the people got themselves involved with the developmental process of the rural area. *Panchayati Raj* Institution has brought a many socio-political changes in the rural Arunachal Pradesh.

Therefore, importance and effectiveness of working of *Panchayati Raj* in Arunachal Pradesh is an interesting subject of study to whether these institutions are an effective mechanism for the modern grassroots democratic political participation. With this objective, the present study is intending to shed light on the democratic decentralization political institutions and empowerment of people in Arunachal Pradesh.

Statement of the Problem: The most significantly experiment in reforming governance in India from a participatory democratic decentralization point of view has been the introduction of constitutionally mandated panchayat system through the 73rd constitutional amendment in the early 1990s. It was expected that the newly created panchayat system drawing strength from the constitutional provisions would emerge as effective tools of local self-governance and would strongly further the primary objectives of economic growth and social justice. Unfortunately, many of the expectations have largely remained unfulfilled.

The *Panchayati Raj* Institution has been working in Arunachal Pradesh since 1969, which has brought some significant changes in the lives of the people of rural areas. It broadened the outlook of the rural folks and increased their participation in political activities. It has also been instrumental in bringing women folks in political arena through the system of reservation. Above all, it remained as an instrument of development of rural areas buy ensuring participation of people in developmental initiatives. Conforming to the 73rd Constitution amendment Act Arunachal Pradesh *Panchayati Raj* Act, 1997 was passed. Despite of these landmark regulations, the democratic decentralization and empowerment of people in Arunachal Pradesh has a distant dream for the people.

Hence, the present study will be made to enquire into the actual workings of the PRIs of Arunachal Pradesh.

Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the study are:

- 1) To understand the people's perceptions on decentralized political institutions.
- 2) To have an appraisal of the people's participation in panchayati raj institutions.
- 3) To assess the present working of panchayati raj as decentralized political institutions.
- 4) To find ways and means to strengthen the PRIs.

Review of Literature: There have been several studies done on the history and workings of *Panchayati Raj* in India both by the government initiatives as well as by individual scholars but there are limited studies done with reference to Arunachal Pradesh. For the present study, some of the important literatures have been reviewed.

Joshi, R.P and Narwani, G.S, *Panchayati Raj in India, Emerging Trends across the State* has attempted a critical study of conceptual and historical evolution of the panchayati raj in India from a very ancient time to present days. They also shed light on various phases of theoretical development and practical implementation of the system of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions. According to them the success of the moves of *Panchayati Raj* institutions, however, has been constrained on account of lack of a clear-cut vision about the shape and power of the *Panchayati Raj* institutions.

Hooja, Rakesh, *Democratic Decentralization and Planning* has attempted to review the genesis of the concepts of *Panchayati Raj* and democratic decentralization. He states that there is the need for having a harmonious working relationship between *Panchayat* institution and the District Administration for the formulation of proper decentralize planning.

Bandyopadya, D and Amitava, Mukherjee, *New Issues in Panchayati Ra* they have made a significant analysis on the working of *Panchayati Raj* in the grassroots level in pertaining to various issues like that of elites groups versus dalits in *Panchayati Raj* institutions.

Dubey, Sanjay, *Dynamics of Tribal Local Polity and Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh* thoroughly discussed about the origin and historical evolution of the *panchayati raj* institutions in Arunachal Pradesh. According to his views, the *panchayati raj* institution has contributed a significant change of socio-economic and political development in grass-root level as well as in state in macro level perspective. He also opinion that there is a significant declined of the traditional village council system in Arunachal Pradesh due to influenced of modern political institutions.

Hajra, Anupam, "Panchayati Raj System: Strengthening Rural Decentralization and Democracy" has examined the role of panchayati raj institutions to strengthening rural decentralization and democracy. According to him, rural decentralization through *panchayati raj* system has provided a strong platform for political participation and mobilization and brought many changes in the Indian system of governance.

Dogra, Bharat, an article "*Criminalization of Grassroots Politics*" case study of Uttar Pradesh has revealed the growing role of criminals and anti-social elements in *panchayati raj* institutions in several parts of the country. This is particularly evident at the time of panchayat elections. A disturbing find of his study is that the violence and factionalism, which affects several villages at election time, and sometimes continue for a long time. The side that emerges victorious in election ignores the needs of the other sections.

Sharma, B.M in his article published in, "*A Step Towards District Government*", The Indian Journal of Public Administration (2010)" volume-(VI) has analyzed the relationship between the panchayati raj and district administrative functioning. According to him the Panchayati Raj Institutions are stirring the conscience of common people and slowly but surely they are becoming aware their political rights. But still the local change has a long way to go and there are many roadblocks, which it should clear before achieving something, substantial and significant. Further, he examined the feasibility of the inclusion of a fourth list as "local list" for PRIs in the Constitution. This fourth list may incorporate the subjects allotted to the local bodies in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution.

Swain, P.C, *Panchayati Raj, Study of Arunachal Pradesh*, has extensively analyses the *panchayati raj* system in the tribal situation of Arunachal Pradesh in Lohit district. According to him *panchayati*

raj institutions is first modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh that promotes the greater political participations and political socializations at grassroots level. However, he stated that the tribal hilly areas find it difficult to adopt the constitutional provisions of the new panchayati raj system because of the predominance of rigid customary law as well as indigenous institutions over the existing *panchayat* bodies. Further, the panchayat leaders, administrators and technocrats function within the framework of *panchayati raj* system with tribal/ local dynamics.

Karbak, Gomo, *Decentralization, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development in Arunachal Pradesh: A study of West Siang District*, Ph.D thesis, Rajiv Gandhi University Itanagar, 2010, made in-depth study on the working of panchayati raj and its role on decentralization planning and implementations of various rural development programmes. However, his study is only limited to his study area of west siang district.

Tiwari, Nupur, “*Reinventing the Delivery of Essential Social Services at Grassroots Level Through Panchayati Raj*”, published in *Kurukshetra*, April, pp.26-28, has concluded that active participation of people in grassroots planning will bring about the desired transformation of the region by establishing peace and setting in motion the wheels of progress towards prosperity. Moving from a model of central provision to that of decentralization to local governments introduces a new relationship between national and local policy makers while altering several existing relationship such as the between the citizens, elected politicians and the local bureaucracy.

Universe of the Study: The study was conducted on two administrative blocks of Upper Subansiri district viz. *Chetam Anchal* Block and *Daporijo Sigin-1 Anchal* Block. The *Chetam* Circle is situated on *Sippi-Koro* river basin, which is under the administrative control of the Circle Officer (CO), and all the administrative works are functioning through district headquarter Daporjo under Giba CD Block. It is 24 km away from the district headquarter and comprises of 24 villages. In *Chetam* Circle, there are 1 *Zilla Parishad Member* (ZPM), 14 *Anchal Samiti Members* (ASM) and 48 *Gram Panchayat Members* (GPM). For the field research mainly three villages were selected from the *Chetam* Circle for study areas viz. *Sera*, *Siga* and *Soki* villages.

Another study area is *Daporijo Segin-1* block which itself is district headquarter. This area is comprises of 24 villages (mainly three villages were taken for study areas namely *Nima*, *Sippi* and *Sekar* and there are 01 *Zilla Parishad Member* (ZPM), 08 *Anchal Samiti Members* and 22 *Gram Panchayat Members* (GPM). This block is more advanced in comparison to *Chetam* Block in terms of road communication, health facilities, education, electricity and all the modern accessories. The samples consist of 18 *Gram Panchayat Members*, 10 *Anchal Samiti Members* and 02 *Zilla Parishad Members* and 180 general respondents, 30 each from 6 villages.

Methodology: The present study is based on both the method of historical, survey research. The data and information has been collected both through primary and secondary sources. For the process of collecting primary data, different tools and techniques like interview scheduled, questionnaire, formal and informal discussions and participant observation etc. were followed for the present study. Two sets of questionnaire-one for *panchayati raj* representatives and the other for the general people including few officials or beneficiaries. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with *panchayat* representatives, beneficiaries, officials and other who are engaged in related activities. Apart from the primary data, the books, journal from library, released records and documents and both published and unpublished works has been used for secondary sources.

Critical Evaluation of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Arunachal Pradesh: Panchayati Raj Institutions are an important political innovations of India, for the establishment of grass-roots democracy and to ensure the greater people’s participations in political system of the country. The prime objectives of panchayati Raj system is to decentralization of power at grass root level which gives powers to the villagers. *Gandhiji* had aptly remarked that independence must begin at the bottom. Every village ought to be a republic or panchayat with the authority and resources to realize the potential for economic and social development of the village. *Gandhiji's* views found articulation in **Article 40** of the Constitution. It enjoins that *‘the States shall take steps to organise village panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government’*.

Systems of Panchayat bodies have been the first modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh. Democratic political process was started in the erstwhile *NEFA (North East Frontier Agency)* in 1969 with the inauguration of Panchayati Raj. The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Nehru's Government followed Verrier Elwin's idea of retaining the identity of the tribes and also the British policy of isolation until 1962 when China attacked this part of India. Elwin's view as expressed in *A Philosophy for NEFA*, "**let the tribes grow in their own way on their own heritage, according to their own genius and tradition**". Pt. Nehru also favoured the Elwin principles of tribal development and he wrote in his forward to V. Elwin's *Philosophy for NEFA* "**I had a feeling that we should help them to grow in their own way**". As Nehru adopted the policy of development but without interferences in internal affairs of the traditional political institutions of tribes of the region.

However, after the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the Government of India was compelled to change its policies towards *NEFA* and undertook a number of measures for its speedy politico-economic developments to bring the indigenous tribes into national mainstream. A committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of **Dying Ering** for the purpose and specially to recommend regarding the democratic decentralization in *NEFA*. As a result of the historic recommendation of the **Dying Ering Committee**, the modern democratic political institutions were introduced first time in *NEFA*, which incorporated the same in **North-East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967** with few modifications. Significantly, the modern Panchayati Raj Institutions were introduced in *NEFA* (Present Arunachal Pradesh) on the backdrop of existing traditional tribal councils.

In the first stage of development of Panchayati Raj System during the *NEFA* period has a significant positive impact on the little known tribal belts. The indigenous isolated tribal communities were first time exposed to modern grassroots political process and subsequently a new framework of participatory development and village management was introduced which mobilized the tribes to a great extent. Thus, the Panchayat Raj Institutions engineered the modern political process in Arunachal Pradesh at grass root level as well as state. It can be assumed that the introduction of modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh have been an instrumental to brought a many significant changes for the development of village life. The people got the opportunity to exercise their franchise for the first time in the panchayat elections. So the PRIs has become an eye opener for the village communities so far as the grassroots democratic political process is concerned. Since the introduction of the Panchayati Raj in Arunachal, the people are actively participating in the electoral process of the state. There are many good impacts on rural leadership pattern in the state as set of new young leadership emerged with the shifting of authority from traditional to an elected one. The political parties made entry to the village level which significantly playing a political socialization to rural people and broadened their political perceptions and attitudes. The Panchayat leaders dominated the village affairs, replacing the numerically learner clans. The political outlook of the people is now increasing to broad level and subsequently the narrow ethnic interests of the village people were minimized. Thus, the Panchayati Raj system added a new dimension to the traditional ethnic political process of Arunachal Pradesh through a method of gradual modernization.

In a subsequent period of time, the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Bill, 1997 duly passed by the Arunachal Pradesh State Legislative Assembly received the assent of the President of India on 13 April 2001(Act no.5 of 2001). This Act is known as the **Arunachal Panchayati Raj Act, 1997**. This is an Act to replace the **NEFA Panchayati Raj Regulation 1967** by a comprehensive law in line with **73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992**. The Act of 1997 extends to the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. This act provides for three-tier Panchayat system with wider representation as well as expanded developmental functions.

In fact, the new Act has become a landmark step so far as modernizing the Arunachal Panchayati Raj Institutions in line with all India pattern. With this development the panchayat bodies have been revitalized to provide more representation to the socially disadvantage groups particularly tribal women in the state. Further, the new Panchayati Raj Act has entrusted a sizeable developmental functions for bringing rapid socio-economic development in village of Arunachal Pradesh. On the whole, the Panchayati Raj Institutions have played a great role in shaping the modern political process of Arunachal Pradesh.

Therefore, importance and effectiveness of working of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh is an interesting subject to understand whether these institutions are effective political institutions for the rural development and for the modern grassroots democratic political participation of the people. In

view of the various shortcomings and challenges confronted to PRIs and in order to impart certainty, continuity and strength to PRIs, certain basic and essential features were enshrined in the Constitution by 73rd Amendment. The 73rd Amendment to the constitution, which confers constitutional status on the protection to the PRIs, is undoubtedly a landmark in the process of democratic decentralization in the state. It facilitated emergence of vibrant, meaningful and effective units of rural local government. In conformity to this amendment, the States are expected to take necessary measures to empower PRIs.

Although there are positive notes about some achievements in the functioning of panchayati raj in Arunachal Pradesh, but there is a general feelings today that the 73rd Constitutions Amendment Act, has not implemented in letter and spirit in case of Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj system. It has observed that the functioning of grassroots democratic institutions depend heavily even today on State Government assistant or aid. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act makes it clear that 29 types of power and functions should be transferred to the PRIs. In addition to these powers and functioned the **Arunachal Panchayati Raj Act 1997** provided with certain power and functions to PRIs. However, the state government has yet to implement or devolve these power and function to grass root level of political institutions. A series of Government has given a assurance to devolve the constitutional power and functions to Panchayati Raj Institutions but it has never been practically implemented and devolution of power to PRIs remains in many respects a distant dream for the people of Arunachal Pradesh.

Further it was expected that the newly created panchayat system drawing strength from the constitutional provisions would emerge as effective tools of local self-governance and would strongly further the primary objectives of economic growth and social justice. Unfortunately, the expectations have largely remained unfulfilled in case of Arunachal Pradesh as many of the rural areas has yet to see the light of developments and still large section of the people are remain poor and illiterate in state. On the other hand, despite the many efforts and initiatives taken up by the State Government to reform the grass root democratic political institutions, the panchayat system continues to be plagued by immense difficulties and faces stiff resistance from several quarters. The ground reality of the working of Panchayati Raj system indicates very weak and ineffective implementation which leading to little progress on the path of real democratic decentralization. This weak implementation is further compounded by different factors like the resistance and non-cooperation from bureaucracy, political class or elites, who view panchayats as a serious threat to their interests and hegemony. On the other hands, lack of capacities at grassroots level, lack of information among common people about Panchayati Raj and lack of political education among the ordinary people whose political role is critical for effective Panchayat functioning. Political leaders of high order (Member of Legislative Assembly) control financial powers of panchayats, so panchayat institutions are totally paralyses of financial position. Today election to the panchayat bodies are fought on party lines, which often resulted into political rivalries at the clan and community level. Faction fighting is largely witness in most of the rural areas during the panchayat election. It is yet to see the true working of democratic decentralization of power to the villagers in Arunachal pradesh, which is big question mark for the people of Arunachal.

Following are some of the tables, which illustrate the detail responses of people through researcher field study.

Table: 1.1

Table showing the people's knowledge about Panchayati Raj institutions.

| Respondents | Response | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|-------|----|------|----------|
| | Yes | % | No | % | |
| Panchayat Leaders | 30 | 100 | 00 | 00 | 30(100) |
| General Respondents | 172 | 95.55 | 08 | 4.45 | 180(100) |

Sources: - *Field Survey, 2012.*

The inquiry began with the assessment of their knowledge about the *Panchayati Raj* institutions. During the field survey, the researcher has interviewed 30 respondents from Panchayat representatives and 180 general respondents. When asked about their knowledge on *Panchayati Raj* institutions, 100

per cent respondents from the *panchayat* representatives answered positively that they know what the meaning of PRIs, and 95.55 per cent general respondents responded the same.

On researcher's supplementary question to people, whether they participate in *Panchayat* elections, the responses were over-whelming positive. All the respondents positively affirmed that they take part in *panchayat* elections. However, respondents also reported that the villagers do not 'actually' elect most of the *panchayat* representatives, as they have been selected influential persons of the area.

Table: 1.2

People's knowledge of power, functions and responsibilities of Panchayati Raj.

| Respondents | Response | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|-------|-----|-------|----------|
| | Yes | % | No | % | |
| Panchayat Leaders | 12 | 40 | 18 | 60 | 30(100) |
| General Respondents | 60 | 33.34 | 120 | 66.66 | 180(100) |

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

Concerning the knowledge about power, functions and responsibilities of the PRIs, it was disheartening to know that only 40 per cent of the respondents from *panchayat* representatives were aware of the power, functions and responsibilities of PRIs, and 60 per cent of total representatives were not aware of power and functions of PRIs. When the same query was asked to public, 33.34 per cent of them answered positively that they are aware of its power and functions. However, an overwhelming majority of 66.66 per cent of respondents of general masses also do not have knowledge about the power, functions and responsibilities of *panchayats*.

Thus, it is evident from the tables 1.2 that majority of the respondents people were ignorant and unaware of the rights and responsibilities meant for the PRIs. The reason behind this may be that most of them were illiterate and they are hardly concerned about the structures, role, and procedures of grass-root democracy.

Table: 1.3

People's response on effectiveness of the present three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Institution.

| Respondents | Response | | | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|-------|----|-------|------------|-------|----------|
| | Yes | % | No | % | Don't know | % | |
| Panchayat Leaders | 12 | 40 | 14 | 46.66 | 04 | 13.33 | 30(100) |
| General Respondents | 64 | 35.55 | 80 | 44.44 | 36 | 20 | 180(100) |

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

With regards to the effective functioning of the present three-tier PRIs, we have got a mixed responses. 40 per cent of *panchayat* leaders and 35.55 per cent of general respondents replied affirmatively, as shown in table 1.3. On the other hand, 46.66 per cent of *panchayat* leaders, 44.44 per cent of general respondents were negative about the effectiveness of PRIS.

During the field study when researcher separately interacted with the *Gram Panchayat Members* (lowest tier) of PRs, they reported that the *Anchal Samiti Member* of their villages did not consult them while preparing and submitting the schemes at *District Planning Committee (DPC)* and their signature are obtained later on. They also reported that even ASM produced forgery official stamp and signature of the GPM for preparing schemes. They told that present system of PRIs creates tensions, groupism and factionalism in the villages.

Table: 1.4

People's response on helpfulness of PRI to rural people.

| Respondents | Response | | | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|--------------|-------|------------------|-------|-----------|----|----------|
| | very helpful | % | Somewhat helpful | % | Unhelpful | % | |
| Panchayat Leaders | 08 | 26.66 | 22 | 73.33 | 00 | 00 | 30(100) |
| General Respondents | 17 | 9.44 | 136 | 75.55 | 27 | 15 | 180(100) |

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

In response to the query on whether the PRIs are helpful for rural people, 26.66 per cent of panchayat representatives and very less numbers of general respondents i.e. 9.44 per cent expressed that PRIs are very helpful for rural people. While an overwhelming majority of respondents, 73.33 per cent of panchayat representatives and 75.55 per cent of general respondents were of the opinion that PRIs are “somewhat” helpful for rural people.

Table: 1.6

People's participation in panchayat meeting or gram sabha meeting.

| Respondents | Response | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|-------|-----|-------|----------|
| | yes | % | No | % | |
| Panchayat Leaders | 24 | 80 | 06 | 20 | 30(100) |
| General Respondents | 40 | 22.23 | 140 | 77.77 | 180(100) |

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

Meetings are regarded as one of the important devices to judge the working of any institutions, at either the national level or state or local level. They reflect the efficacy of an institution in formulating policies and programmes, which reflect the opinions and attitudes of the members participating in it. This is to say, “Important test of any programme decentralization is the freedom it allows for the expression and restraints it imposes to protect the public interest.”⁵ Meeting also offers an opportunity to the members to express the public grievances and the genuine feelings of the masses. The utility of the meetings will be very well understood, only by examining the involvement and participation of the members which is very much influence by their socio-economic and political background.

Table: 1.7

Showing the total panchayat or gram sabha meetings conducted in the study gram sabha.

| Name of villages | Year | | | | | Total |
|------------------|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | |
| Sera | 01 | 01 | | | | 02 |
| Siga | 01 | | 01 | 01 | | 03 |
| Soki | 01 | | | 01 | | 02 |
| Sippi | | 01 | | 01 | | 02 |
| Sikar | 02 | 01 | 02 | 02 | 01 | 08 |
| Nima | 02 | 02 | 01 | 01 | 01 | 07 |

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

With this in view, an attempt has made to examine the deliberation of the meetings and people's participations in PRIs. In response to the query, overwhelming majorities of panchayat leaders of 80 per cent were affirmatively replied and 20 per cent of panchayat leaders responded negatively. Those who positively reply said that they had attended the Block level and District level Panchayat meetings regarding implementations and formulations of policies of various rural development programmes like BRGF, NREGA etc. and other development related issues. However, in village level they never attended *Panchayat* meeting. On the other hand, 22.23 per cent general respondents positively answered and an absolute majority of 77.77 per cent of general respondents replied that they never attended *Gram Sabha* meetings.

Table: 3.6

People's response on development activities done by the panchayats in their respective areas.

| Respondents | Response | | | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|-------|-----|-------|-------------|-------|----------|
| | Yes | % | No | % | No response | % | |
| Panchayat Leaders | 14 | 76.66 | 00 | 00 | 07 | 23.33 | 30(100) |
| General Respondents | 27 | 15 | 119 | 66.11 | 34 | 18.88 | 180(100) |

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

This section deals with the actual working of panchayats for village development. The intention here is to find out what the village panchayats have actually done for development of villages by implementing various developmental programmes. Arunachal Panchayat Raj Act of 1997 has entrusted the village panchayats with various functions in different spheres. However, in actual practice, the *panchayats* have carried out only a few of these functions. On being asked to the respondents whether the PRIs have brought developments in the village. In response to this, it was heartening to note that 76.66 per cent of panchayat leaders replied “yes”. Only 15 per cent of public gave the same reply. They were of the view that panchayats have brought some changes in the village through different centrally sponsored schemes like *Backward Region Grant Funds (BRGF)* which is only received by Upper Subansiri district in Arunachal Pradesh, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Rural Sanitation Programme, SGYS, etc. Through these schemes a number of development work have been taken up. The some of the works, which have been completed under these schemes, are renovation of School Buildings, CC-steps, Minor Irrigation Projects (MIP), Land Development (LD), Flood Control, Orange garden, Community hall, Suspension bridges, Water supply, rural link roads, Fishponds, Play ground, etc. During the field survey, it has been found that all the six study villages have done similar types of development works.

However, it has also been found that there are big anomalies in the implementation and execution of the works because *Gram Sabha* meetings were never conducted while executing and preparing the schemes. It is also revealed that as per the records of the concerned Block Development Office many development works have been completed in these study villages but that these are done only in paper work.

Almost all the schemes are prepared in individuals name by the panchayat leaders themselves. On the other side an overwhelming respondent from general respondents, 66.11 per cent felt that so far, the PRIs did not bring any developments in village. They argued that they have not seen any works. Further, they said that all the rural schemes which are meant for rural development have never been successfully implemented and only highly influence persons of the area, panchayat members, politicians and concern officers takes the maximum benefit in the name of rural masses. Thus, PRIs remain as mere democratic institution at grassroots level for state politics and in Arunachal Pradesh PRIs has become as like an agency of party in power at State Government. During the field survey, it was found that people openly criticized their panchayat leaders. They said that after winning the election panchayat leaders do not visit to them and never ask about their problems.

Table: 1.7

People response on political interference in the working of PRIs.

| Respondents | Response | | | | | | Total |
|----------------------------|----------|-------|----|-------|------------|-------|----------|
| | Yes | % | No | % | Don't know | % | |
| Panchayat Leaders | 18 | 60 | 06 | 20 | 06 | 20 | 30(100) |
| General Respondents | 137 | 76.11 | 20 | 11.11 | 23 | 12.77 | 180(100) |

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

The political interferences by the local politicians or MLAs significantly affect the functioning of the panchayat bodies.⁶ The state levels as well as local politicians are interested in creating vote bank in the villages by using the *Panchayati Raj* institutions. In most of the cases, the members belonging to the ruling party in the State dominate these institutions at block and the district levels.

Thus in this study an attempt has been made to find out political interference in the PRIs. In response to our query on the level of political interference and party politics in the working of PRIs, we got an overwhelming majority of 60 per cent of panchayat leaders and 76.11 per cent of general respondents with “yes” answer. Only 20 per cent of *panchayat* members and 11.11 per cent of general respondents answered negatively and remaining 20 per cent of panchayats and 12.77 per cent of general respondents did not reply. It is clear from the above data that there is political interference in the working of panchayat system and they expressed that due to political interference by local politicians, the functioning of panchayat bodies are affected. They also narrated that during panchayat elections party politics plays a very significant role to divide the villagers in party colour. In one of

our study village i.e. Nima, about 90 per cent of the respondents were affiliated with one political party i.e. *Indian National Congress (I)*. It seems that this village is dominated by one party politics. Further, some of the panchayat members reported that their association or linkage with higher-level politicians ensures better officials cooperation.

However, maximum of respondents like intellectuals, youths and elites members of the society opine that panchayat representatives' linkages with the ruling political party are for their personal interests, ignoring the interest of the rural community at large and creates a misunderstanding among the villagers by dividing them on party lines.

When interacting with the Block Development Officers about the extent of political interference in administrative works, they expressed strong dissatisfactions about the frequent interference by the politicians in their official's functions. They also reported the close association of the ASMs and ZPMs with the MLAs and Ministers. These panchayat members take a due advantage by using their political linkage to exercise control and influence over the officials.

Therefore, we can assume that the ideas of Gandhi and JP Narayan remain defeated. The *sarvodaya* idea inspired by Gandhiji was that PRIs should be "Non-political", meaning that political parties should be kept out of Panchayat bodies. Jaya Prakash Narayan believed that parties had corrupted the whole of the *Panchayati Raj* programme and had used decentralization for selfish party interests.

Conclusion Incorporated with the Findings and Suggestions: To become a strong and vibrant grass root political institutions, the Panchayati Raj Institutions today needs a numbers of corrective measures in Arunachal Pradesh. Still today, the functioning of self-government is heavily depending on the State Government. The State Government should be devolved the all power and functions given to the Panchayat Raj Institutions. There are some of the noteworthy points as per my study and personal observations, which may not be appropriated but would like interpret in a simplest way. Accordingly, in this section finding of the study and based on them gives some suggestions or recommendations for remedial measures to make the PRIs more effective and proper implementation of rural development programmes in the State. The findings and recommendations are based on the detailed study of the working of PRIs obtained from the field study of the six villages of Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh and researcher's personal observations of the functioning of PRIs in the State, which reveals certain significant and meaningful findings.

Findings: The findings of the study reveal that the PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh have been exercising very few powers and perform very few functions. The majority of respondents observed that the intended functions were not transferred to PRIs. It is observed that the Government of Arunachal Pradesh is not willing to devolve power and transfer functions to PRIs. As Pratap Chandra Swain has rightly states that in Arunachal Pradesh, the State Government obviously preferred the "*Bureaucratic Raj to Panchayati Raj*".

Some of the important findings of the study are that many of panchayat representatives and people were not aware about the power, functions and responsibilities of the PRIs under various constitutional provisions especially the provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act. Very significantly, about 60 per cent of people's representatives and 66.66 per cent of general respondents are not aware about the power, functions and responsibilities of the PRIs. Therefore, it is cleared that bureaucrats or government department may have the upper hands in the implementation of the various provisions and development activities of PRIs in the district. So far the effectiveness of the present three-tier Panchayati Raj system is concerned around 46.66 per cent of peoples' representatives and 44.44 per cent of general respondents were negatively answered. From the respondents' opinion, it has been found that Block level and District level panchayat bodies are dominating the village level panchayat bodies in which resulted into ineffective working of present three-tier panchayat bodies. One of the significant finding in this study is that there is no proper co-ordination between these three *Panchayat* tiers while implementing and formulating the various policies and programmes which lingering the developmental process at the grassroots level. Therefore, the majority of the people did not satisfy with the present set up of PRIs.

As far as the political interference in the working PRIs is concerned, it has found that political leaders are still controlling the PRIs. In my study it has been found that the political leaders like MLAs and Minister are interfering in the working of PRIs and they get the development work done in

their political reasons and as such, the needy and remote villages are neglected and remain underdeveloped in the my study areas. All the people representatives have direct linkage with the political party. They contested panchayat elections on political party tickets. The high-level politicians used panchayat bodies as vote bank and influence zones in the area. Due to political interference, the PRIs experience the factional fight and group formation among the panchayat leaders themselves and public also. The internal divisions among the panchayat leaders are due to their diversified backgrounds and confronting political interests.

Findings of the study also reveal that there are officials or bureaucratic dominance over the decision-making process and implementation or execution of various rural development programmes in the district. They reported that sometimes officials do not accept the decisions made by the *Gram Sabha* meeting. It is strange that the bureaucrats' functions as the Ex-officio level head of the panchayat bodies in Arunachal Pradesh under its statutory Panchayat Raj Regulation. As the bureaucrats enjoy vast statutory powers, the elected representatives believe that the *Panchayati Raj* system is imposed one over them by the officials. The *Panchayat* leaders/elites people express strong dissatisfactions against the bureaucratic upper hand in the finalization of the developmental schemes. Officials delay, unsympathetic attitude and target minded nature of the bureaucrats and lack of transparency in the implementation of developmental programmes etc. are some of the hindrances before the PRIs. They also blame the bureaucrats for creating artificial dearth of fund and for submitting false information and report. Due to large-scale bureaucratic domination, Arunachal Panchayati Raj degenerates into "*Bureaucratic Raj*" as Pratap Chandra swain observed. The bureaucratic dominance adversely affects the process of democratic decentralization as far as PRIs are concerned. The people's representatives play a subordinate role to the bureaucrats.

As far as the meeting of the Panchayati Raj bodies at all the three levels are concerned, it was found that meetings are not taking place regularly. It is cleared that the highest meeting conducted in the study area from year 2008 to 2012 is only 08 times at Sikar village and lowest meeting conducted within this period is 02 times at Sera village. It was observed that even if the meeting is held people did not participate in the meeting. The village level panchayat meeting or gram sabha meeting are held on paper only. Therefore, the people participations in working of PRIs in the study area are very weak. Thus, we can say that the concept of grass roots democracy and democratic decentralization remains a utopia because people's participation in PRIs is inadequate. It was also found that maximum of respondents expressed that instead of three-tiers of panchayats, there should be two tiers-one at the district level and other at the village level. In other words, they preferred strengthening of the structure at village level i.e. *Gram Sabha*. They wanted that *Gram Sabha* should be given more powers and should be involved in the planning process so that the objectives of grass-roots democracy can be achieved. They too opined that there is no need of panchayat Samiti at block level and it is unnecessary delay for functioning of PRIs. According to the provisions of the new Act, 29 subjects have been given to the *panchayats*. However, our findings reveal that very few of these subjects have been transferred to the panchayats and are neither substantial nor meaningful. They are only supervising in nature.

This study strongly brings out the contradictory realities of the panchayat system in Arunachal Pradesh. On the one hand, there is very progressive legislation, policies and guidelines for the panchayats backed by strong political will. On the other hand, the ground reality clearly indicates weak and ineffective implementation of the *panchayat* system, leading to little progress on the path of real democratic decentralization. Therefore, the study clearly identifies many of broad sets of issues that are hampering the development of an effective *panchayat* system in the state.

Suggestions: In the present section, some suggestions are being given to further strengthen the panchayati Raj institutions in Arunachal Pradesh and for proper implementation of various rural development programmes. These suggestions are based on the findings of the study and researcher's personal field experience. Though our suggestions may not be appropriate for the proper functioning of the PRIs in the state, yet we feel that it will be helpful for further strengthening of *Panchayati Raj* system in the State if the people considered it in policy formulation. Some of the suggestions are as follows:

- As per the findings, all the three tiers of PRIs are not so effective at present. Hence, it is suggested that the three-tiers of the PRIs have to be made effective and for this, first of all, the

Gram Sabha have to be made functional. People have to be made aware and mobilized about the potential of *Gram Sabhas*.

- It is further suggested that *Gram Sabha* should be involved in the planning process. The *Gram Sabha* should list out priorities and assist in the selection of beneficiaries for various programmes and schemes.
- Comprehensive training programmes can improve upon the competence and capacities of rural leaders. Proper training programme should be imparted at District, Block and village level and it should be made compulsory for all the elected *panchayat* members.
- It is also suggested that minimum education qualification should be made compulsory for contesting the *panchayat* election.
- The eleventh Schedule provided twenty-nine functions for PRIs but they have not been transferred to the *panchayats*. Hence, it is suggested that the stated functions should be immediately transferred to the PRIs for effective implementation.
- Factors like personal efficiency and educational background could be given preference to become leaders in the PRIs.
- The elected leaders of these institutions need to be at least literate who can read and write, so that they could guide and tell the villagers about the various provisions of the PR-Act.
- There should not be any groupism and party politics in terms of planning i.e. selection and location of schemes rather genuine implementation of the projects are necessary for strengthening the decentralized planning.
- The administrative wing and local politicians associated with the PRIs should not dominate the elected representatives.
- Further, in order to encourage the participation of women there should not be any social restriction. The family members and society as a whole should support women representatives.
- Another immediate step to enrich these institutions is the transferring of financial powers. Therefore, it is to be suggested that the State Government should release their share to the institution in time. Besides, the Finance Commission should take feasible steps for the transferring of financial power to these institutions as soon as possible.
- Besides, literature related to the various provisions of rural development should be provide to the *panchayat* leaders as well as to the common villagers so that they will be more acquainted with their functions and various developmental schemes. Further, all the guidelines of rural development programmes should be made available to *panchayat* leaders and common villagers.
- A continues assistance by the State Government is highly needed in every sphere of activities.

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