ABSTRACT

Sustainable developmental goals (SDG’s) are new global level of goals, with targets and indicators that 193 member countries of United Nations in the world have mutually set and agreed upon. There are 17 goals on which the entire world is focusing at present to ensure sustainable development. For attaining these goals, local self-governance is used at the grassroots levels and in India the machinery is Panchayati raj Institutions. These institutions operate from central and state government level and include all the villages in it.

These villages have panchayats and it is maintained by Gram Pradhans i.e. elected representatives, Secretary and other members of the gram panchayats. Though a lot is being done at grassroots level by these Gram Pradhans, under the mechanism of Panchayati raj institution and other administrative bodies, however it is not free from challenges. The present case study is a descriptive study which focuses attention to identify different challenges the elected representatives experience, in Panchayati raj institutions in India, which contribute directly for the sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Sustainable development is one of the common phenomenon for which most of the countries are striving at present. The concept of sustainable development and its significance increased with the increase in awareness among people of the world and their obvious concern for continuous development along with protecting the natural resources for upcoming generations.

The current movement among different countries towards sustainable development is through sustainable development goals (SDG’s). The SDG’s were adopted by members of United Nations (U.N) as new global goals for sustainable development during 25-27, September 2015 as the successors of Millennium Developmental Goals (MDG’s). The official agenda of the SDG is “Transforming our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable development” includes 17 universal, transformative goals, 169 targets, and 305 indicators.

The purpose behind these SDG’s is to achieve a sustainable world in which ‘no one is left behind’ without compromising sustainability of the planet. These set of SDG’s are supposed to be used by member countries of United Nations to develop the developmental plans, policies, agenda and action plan for low carbon pathways in coming 15 years.

Sustainable development goals in India have been considered as a matter of national priorities for attaining development at grass-root level. The Ministry of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj considered these SDG’s mandate and now is committed to poverty eradication and creating appropriate infrastructure to increase the pace of socioeconomic growth of rural regions in the country (Kar, 2017). Their aim is to promote strategies for attaining SDG’s at the panchayat level by encouraging different states for capacity building and strengthening all local government by 2030.

Panchayati raj institutions in India are the means of decentralization in India aimed for local governance at grassroots level. Indian economy is based on agriculture and it is being done primarily in the villages of the country and the development of the villages depend upon the democratic set up and its execution at the village level. Thus the efficient Panchayati raj system is considered as instrumental of growth.
EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

Sharma and Chakravarty (2017), mentioned that the evolution of Panchayati raj system in India can be categorised in three broad phases, the pre-British period, British period and post-independence period. Though the concept of local governance is evident in our ancient holy books like Vedas, however the structural foundation of local self-governance was laid down during British period in India.

During British period the self-governance of local level was not really democratic institution and often the problems of social prejudice, oppression and exploitation of people got evident in local power structures.

Later the committee for drafting constitution of free India under the chairmanship of B.R. Ambedkar incorporated Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy in the draft of Indian Constitution. Article 40 of the constitution states that “The state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.”

After it, the need of revival of the concept of Panchayati raj system was felt in 1957 and Balwant Mehta committee was formed. Then after two decades Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) was set up for necessary modifications in the policy of panchayati raj system in India. The committee emphasised on the status of woman in India and argued forcefully on equality. The needs and concerns of the rural women in India never got sufficient weightage in the plans and policies of Government of India.

Then in 1992, 73rd and 74th amendment in the Indian constitution was made and the major highlights of the amendments are as under:

I. Reservation of seats for SC’s/ ST’s in proportion to the population of SC’s/ ST’s in the panchayat area.

II. Not less than 1/3rd of the total number of seats reserved under clause – I shall be reserved for women belonging to SC/ST.

III. Overall not less than 1/3rd of the total number of the seats to be filled by direct election for every panchayat shall be reserved for women. Seats reserved for women may be rotated to different constituencies in a panchayat.

IV. Offices of the chairpersons of the panchayat shall be reserved for SC’s/ ST’s and women as legislature of a state may provide. The offices of chairpersons reserved for SC/ST shall be in the same proportion to the total number of such offices in the panchayats as the populations of the SCs/ ST’s in the state bears to the total population.

V. Not less than 1/3rd of the total number of offices of chairpersons in the panchayat at each level shall be reserved for women.

VI. The legislature of the state may make provisions for reservation of seats in Panchayat or offices of chairpersons in favour of backward class citizens.

The details about the mandatory provision, discretionary provisions, powers and functions of Panchayats have been discussed in article 243-G of Indian constitution and it includes 29 sectors or function listed in the Eleventh schedule of Indian Constitution may be transferred by state government to the Panchayati raj institution.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by UNDP in 2000, mentioned about the challenges of decentralization and mentioned few such as adequate devolution of resources, authority and responsibility. Some other challenges mentioned were imbalance in the local power structures, need to work on capacity building and access to information by using IT infrastructure.

As per a report by Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India (2008), caste and reservation system in India played an important role in the presence of not only female but also male elected representatives in the Panchayats. Most of the female elected representatives did not have long association with political setup. This report also mentioned the need for training on rules and regulations of Panchayats.

Teltyumbde (2011) concluded in their work that India’s Panchayati raj system is influenced by Caste and gender. In case the seat is reserved for woman, it is mostly the wife or daughter in law of some old Sarpanch who is only there to sign papers and in case the seat is reserved for SC/ST’s then there would be some bonded sort of labourer of the old Sarpanch. Mohanty (2016) mentions that it is a well-known fact that the structure of the panchayat is saddled with various systemic problems. Women are subjected to various types of discriminations, such as caste, class and patriarchy.

Banerjee (2013), claimed in their work that the main problem of Panchayati raj system in India is in its establishment as autonomous body. State Government are reluctant to avoid PRIs (Panchayati Raj Intuitions) under their control as they enjoy power of governance. Sometimes they keep PRIs starved of infrastructure, and manpower so that they can ensure the expenditure of centrally sponsored schemes under their control.

Dwivedi and Poddar (2013) believes that the panchayats are not running efficiently and also experience lack...
of people’s participation. They also discussed in their status paper about various challenges PRI’s are facing in India and some of them are political and administrative decentralization, devolution of funds, clarity in functions and functionaries, audit mechanism and participation of woman to strengthening the effectiveness of Panchayati raj institutions in India.

Hussain & Ahmed (2018), in their secondary data based work on complications of rural development panchayati raj systems in Jammu and Kashmir found lack of program guidelines, delay in panchayati raj elections, lack of awareness among different stakeholders such as community, poor computer literacy, illiteracy, delay in planning and thus in execution, corruption and poor coordination among different administrative bodies as some of the challenges.

Kumar, Kumar and Singh (2018), mentioned in their work that the Panachayati raj system has been successful in some parts of the country; however there are disparities in their implementation at ground level. They studied the perception of Gram Pradhans about their nature, degree of participation and challenges faced by them. They noticed that on the basis of education and training, there is difference in the involvement of Mukhiyas in different developmental activities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

On the basis of literature review it was found that there have been various studies on Panchayati raj institutions of India; however still there is need to study the issues and challenges associated with elected representatives in India. For the said purpose in this study the challenges faced by Gram Pradhans are being covered and the objectives of the current study are as follows:

• To understand the role of Panchayati raj institutions in Sustainable development
• To explore the issues and challenges related to functioning of Gram Pradhans of Panchayati raj institutions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The presented research is a descriptive study and for the purpose of the study primary and secondary data has been collected. The primary data was collected through interview method from 10 ‘Gram Pradhans’ from all the 8 block panchayats of Lucknow mandal i.e. Gosaiganj, Kakori, Bakshi-ka-talab, Chinhat, Mal, Malihabad, Mohanlalganj & Sarojani Nagar. Thus a sample of 80 Gram Pradhans was considered for the study. The combination of quota and convenience sampling method was used for the purpose of the study. Secondary data for the study was collected from published resources including, research papers, newspaper articles and reports by international agencies, Indian Government and local consulting groups. To limit the work the review of available literature during last 5 years i.e. 2013 onwards has been collected, reviewed and analysed.

ANALYSIS STRATEGY

The data collected from the semi-structured interview technique was analysed using manual content analysis. During the study the respondents were contacted through their mobile numbers for the purpose of fixing an appointment for detailed interview. After fixing the appointment personal interaction was scheduled and semi structured questions were asked. The answers of all the respondents were carefully summarized and then common conclusions were drawn out of the content available.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Various observations were made during primary data collection and the same have been compiled and presented below:

**Proxy Presence of Female Gram Pradhans**

For fixing appointments with the gram pradhans telephone calls were made. For female pradhans the calls

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Blocks</th>
<th>No. of Male Gram Pradhans involved in the study</th>
<th>No. of Female Gram Pradhans involved in the study</th>
<th>Total No. of Gram Pradhans involved in the study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gosaiganj</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakori</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakshi-ka-talab</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinhat</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mal</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Malihabad</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mohanlalganj</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarojani Nagar</td>
<td>6</td>
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<td>10</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s compilation
were answered and the mobile phones were handled by their spouses or male members in the family. In fact during personal interaction also the male members answered all the questions and females kept on joining or doing their household chores. It shows proxy presence of females in the panchayati raj system in the sampled location.

**Lack of Computer based Infrastructure**

For routine functioning, day to day operations, track the progress and facilitating monetary benefits, the digital platforms are being created for joining all the panchayats on same platform. The process is quite tedious and time consuming. The gram pradhans generated their Id’s however still not very well versed with the technical aspect of computed based infrastructure. It puts them in fix and their work gets stuck.

**Delay in Implementation**

The gram Pradhans reported delay in the routine activities that they perform. For example, in the financial year 2018-19, they were asked to prepare their annual plan of action in accordance with Gram Panchayat development plan (GPDP) and get it uploaded on the website. For the said purpose they were asked to complete the exercise by end of May 2018. The financial year begins in April every year and in this case 02 months of the financial year were spent in preparing the plan, uploading and then getting funds. It unnecessarily delays the functioning at the implementation level.

**Poor Coordination among Different Administrative Bodies**

It has been observed that the Gram Pradhans experience challenges while working on ground level due to poor coordination among different administrative bodies. The work like constructions of roads require coordination with other departments including police department and the poor approach, availability of these officials in villages puts the Pradhans in difficult situation. The outcome is experienced in terms of delay of the activities and non-utilization of funds on timely basis.

**NON UTILIZATION OF SANCTIONED FUNDS**

It has been found that the sanctioned funds are underutilized many times due to delay in planning, delay in release of funds, poor coordination among different administrative bodies, weather conditions like rainy seasons, negative attitude of villagers, and poor support of secretaries appointed by governments in each panchayats.

**Attitude of Villagers**

It has been noticed that sometimes the villagers have a very casual attitude towards the government schemes and their implementation for the benefits of rural population. In one of the cases, a few families of one village were not even trying to collect the cheques for construction of toilets at their homes under the ‘Swachh Bharat Abhiyan’ (SBM Scheme). The Pradhan asked them to collect the cheques many times but they were found to be reluctant as they needed to invest nominal amount at their end to get the toilets constructed. They wanted it to be free of cost. It demonstrates a negative attitude of the villagers towards government schemes and volunteers devoting their time for the benefits of village as whole.

**Lack of Manpower**

The respondents mentioned that they experience lack of manpower with them as there are various parallel schemes running at the village level and they find themselves helpless to efficiently execute many of them at parallel level. Thus more manpower is required to work faster and cover the implementation of schemes at grass root level.

**DISCUSSION**

The growth and development of any village depends on the local governance i.e., Panchayati raj system in India and there is a lot to be done for improving village infrastructure. There are various stakeholder and gram Pradhans are one of them. The presented case study focuses attention on the issues and challenges faced by Gram Pradhan’s in their territory while implementing the functions of PRI’s. The findings of the presented case study confirm some of the challenges identified in previous studies. Bahera & Nayak (2018), Proxy presence of female gram pradhans can be understood as empowerment however they have not been considered as political entities so far. These females are mere face of the male members of the family be it husband, father; father in law or son. The interpersonal relations issues among the gram Pradhans, community and other administrative bodies’ officials may not be cordial as they may be elected representative without sufficient political background. As mentioned in the report by Ministry of Panchayati raj (2008), many elected representatives were observed as first time contestant for election they won.

After this study a strong need was felt to understand the same scenario of PRIs in other locations of U.P., and other states so that a better image can be drawn to find out the challenges and way to deal with them.
CONCLUSION

The real benefits of Panchayati raj institutions in terms of development of villages through local governance are impossible without strengthening the role of functions of PRIs. There are many plans and policies made at the central government level to achieve sustainable development in coming years however it can't be achieved without understanding the issues and challenges imposed on people responsible for executing the relevant tasks. Thus the presented case study exposes the challenges faced by Gram Pradhans at their territory and now state government may consider them for efficient functioning of PRIs in respective state i.e. Uttar Pradesh.

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