



## VILLAGE PANCHAYAT MEETINGS MUSIRI AREA - STUDY

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### **Abstract:**

Grama Sabha shall be conducted in such a way that intervening period between two Grama Sabha meetings shall not exceed more than six months. However, the Government of Tamil Nadu have issued instructions to conduct Grama Sabha meetings at least on four important days on

- ✓ 26<sup>th</sup> January
- ✓ 1<sup>st</sup> May
- ✓ 15<sup>th</sup> August and
- ✓ 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

Grama Sabha was made effective by amending the Act suitably to reduce the quorum from 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of electors to 1/10<sup>th</sup> of electors in the Village Panchayat. Every resolution which has been moved shall be seconded. Otherwise it shall not be discussed. It should be mentioned in G.O.Ms.No.1248 Rural Development and Local Administration 1961. In the meeting, resolutions are passed on rural developments, budget, health and sanitation programmes and problems in the administration are discussed.

### **Types of Meetings:**

- ✓ Ordinary Meetings
- ✓ Special Meetings
- ✓ Obligation Meetings

### **Grama Sabha as People's Platform for Participation:**

Grama Sabha has been granted constitutional status since the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment. It is the only body in the newly created tiers of PRIs, which provides the citizens a space and opportunity to participate in matters, which concern their lives. The Constitutional Amendment Act defines Gram Sabha as a "body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level" (Article 243). "Village means a village specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purposes of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified"[Article 243(g)]. Therefore, Grama Sabha of a particular village refers to "All persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of a Village Panchayat"[Section 3(3)]. It is the village assembly of voters. An institution is made synonymous with its members who are the voters in a constituency. This is a revolutionary concept demanding a total commitment to responsive governance.

### **Exploring the Root Causes:**

The findings show a pathetic situation in the matter of responsiveness of Grama Sabhas in Musiri block institutions for people's participation and platforms created for addressing people's participation and platforms created for addressing people's needs. This lack of serious discussion on development issues in a District like Tiruchirappalli requires further probing and investigation. The reasons are closely related to the lack of commitment of the political leadership to the cause of true devolution of powers to the people, lack of proper orientation and awareness among the people coupled with their increasing indifference to the public affairs, bureaucratic apathy towards people's concerns. The present reality stares at us in spite of these efforts towards decentralization. This study becomes an empirical affirmation of the official government position. After several years since the enactment of relevant laws, in 2002, the State Planning Board assessed the status of PRIs, especially the Grama Sabhas as handicapped in many fronts. "The Grama Sabhas and Ward Sabhas were severely handicapped by poor attendance, non-participation of above poverty line families, lack of discussion on development issues, emphasis on beneficiary selection, lack of effective social audit and want of enthusiasm among elected members".

### **Introduction:**

In this paper an attempt has been made to emphasize the village panchayat meetings in Musiri area. The role of Panchayat Raj system is vital Village Panchayat meetings. It provides an ideal forum for decentralized planning an implementation of development programmes in accordance with the people's needs and aspirations. The central government as well as state government launched a number of schemes in the rural development. The empowerment of Panchayat Raj institutions is of great importance for the economic and

social development of village of Tamil Nadu and many meetings were held and discussed the all matters. Some subjects are responds and some subjects or not respond.

**Basic Structure of Panchayat Raj System:**

According to the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendent of the Indian Constitutions the Panchayat Raj system has a three tier structure Viz, (i) the Village Panchayat, (ii) Panchayat Union (iii) District Panchayat while most of the states have adopted this three-tier structure in some of the states and Union Territories there is only a two-tier system and some cases only a one tier system prevails.

**Village Panchayat:**

The Village Panchayat or the Grama Panchayat functions at the village level. It is a statutory body covering one or more villages with an average population varying between 1,000 and 3,000 and an average area of about six squire miles. The village Panchayat area is generally divided into number of wards, each ward returning its representative on the Panchayats. The ward members and the President of Panchayat village are elected through voting in a general assembly of the village known as Grama Sabha . They hold the office normally for a five years term.

The functions of a Village Panchayat are:

- ✓ Provision of sanitation, conservancy and drainage
- ✓ Construction and cleaning of public streets drains latrines, wells, tanks etc
- ✓ Lighting of streets
- ✓ Preventive measures against calamities
- ✓ Supply of drinking water
- ✓ Registration of births and deaths
- ✓ Providing vaccination and inoculation as well as anti- epidemic measures
- ✓ Establishment of clubs, libraries, parks reading rooms etc.
- ✓ Reclamation of unhealthy locality
- ✓ Managing community centres, public health and safety measures.

Besides, tree plantation, arranging fairs, promotion of agriculture, rural industries, Co-Operative farming, family planning, animal husbandry, etc., are also included in the function of the Village Panchayat. Again it acts as an agent of the Panchayat Union in the implementation of the development schemes. Village Panchayat or Grama Sabha shall be conducted in such a way that intervening period between two Village Panchayat meetings shall not exceed more than six months. However, the Government of Tamil Nadu have issued instructions to conduct Village Panchayat meeting at least on four important days on

- ✓ 26<sup>th</sup> January
- ✓ 1<sup>st</sup> May
- ✓ 15<sup>th</sup> August and
- ✓ 2<sup>nd</sup> October.

Village Panchayat was made effective by amending the Act suitably to reduce the quorum from 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of electors to 1/10<sup>th</sup> of electors in the Village Panchayat.<sup>1</sup>

**Panchayat Meetings:**

<sup>1</sup>Available at <http://www.rural.tn.gov.in> PRI –statutory institution. Grama Sabha. Ordinarily the president shall put the amendment to the vote in order in which they have been moved and lastly the original motion, if the amendments are lost. But it shall be in his discretion in any case to put to the vote original motion and the amendments in such as the president things fit. In any resolution several points has been separately to the vote. No discussion shall be permitted on a motion for leave to withdraw except with the permission of the president.<sup>2</sup> every resolution which has been moved shall be seconded. Otherwise it shall not be discussed. It should be mentioned in G.O.Ms.No.1248 Rural Development and Local Administration 1961.<sup>3</sup> Every Panchayat moving of resolutions meeting annually two times under G.O.Ms.No.1248 Rural Development and local Administration 1961.<sup>4</sup> In every Panchayat moving of resolution meeting in yearly four times Grama Sabha meeting and monthly meeting. All Pnachayat members are attending the meetings. The Panchayat president is held by the meeting. If he is not attend the meeting, Union Officer held the meeting. In the meeting, resolutions are passed on rural developments, budget, health and sanitation programmes and problems in the administration are discussed.

**Types of Meetings:**

- ✓ Ordinary Meetings
- ✓ Special Meetings
- ✓ Obligation Meetings

It is the Grama Sabha platforms that the proposals of development programmes have to be initiated based on people's needs and interests. People are empowered to raise in the Grama Sabha meetings any question within the items listed in the XI Schedule of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the Grama Panchayat has to see that people are given opportunities to raise such issues in the Grama Sabha meetings. Responsiveness of the Grama Sabha consists in its exercise of the rights, carrying out its functions, fulfilling its

responsibilities and abiding by its duties—all for the benefit of the people. Grama Sabhas should make plans for the development of the people and implement them in the areas prescribed in the XI Schedule. While real democracy decentralization and good governance together and jointly demand institutional responsiveness. Devolution of powers to the grass roots aimed at strengthening democracy and making the governance effective, transparent, accountable and ultimately responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people. A strengthened democracy replaces a weak democracy and paves the way for good governance replacing weak governance.

#### **Goods Governance and Democracy:**

Though democracy as a system of government has been the concern of the scholars from very ancient times, and good governance came to the spotlight very recently, the implied demands of good governance and real democracy are not very much different, perhaps, because the defining concepts of good governance have been evolved from those of real democracy. A democratic institutions, over and above all, is expected to respond to the people's needs positively and constructively, effectively and purposefully, the same is expected from a system of good governance. Active and direct participation of the people in government is a prerequisite for ensuring liberty and equality to the people.<sup>6</sup> Democracy as the rule by the people is interpreted as a system where people are the sovereign and all citizens are politically equal.<sup>7</sup> For Commission of Global Governance, it "is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting and diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be taken. It includes formal instructions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting and diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action may be take. It includes formal instructions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed on or perceive to be in their interest"<sup>8</sup> Good governance encompasses important aspects like sound, forward-looking and enlightened constitutional frame work, democratic governance, independent judiciary, freedom of press, and independent, a political, neutral and fearless civil service owing allegiance to the Constitution and the rule of law.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Village Panchayat as People's Platform for Participation:**

Village Panchayat has been granted constitutional status since the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment. It is the only body in the newly created tiers of PRIs, which provides the citizens a space and opportunity to participate in matters, which concern their lives. The Constitutional Amendment Act defines Grama Sabha as a "body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level" (Article 243),"Village" means a village specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purposes of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified" [Article 243(g)]. Therefore, Grama Sabha of a particular village refers to "All persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of a village panchayat[section 3(3)]. It is the village assembly of voters. An institution is made synonymous with its members who are the voters in a constituency. This is a revolutionary concept demanding a total commitment to responsive governance.

The three tiers of Panchayats do not provide for direct democracy but continue with the practice of representative democracy. "Village Panchayat is the only forum which can ensure direct democracy. It offers equal opportunity to all the citizens of a village to discuss, criticize and approve or reject the proposals of the Panchayat executive and assess its past performance and is a watchdog of democracy at the grass roots level"<sup>10</sup>

Village Panchayats are envisaged in the Musiri block, 1994 as people's platform for shedding, individually and collectively, their needs, wishes, aspirations, suggestions, plans and solutions to individual and collective problems existing in the village level. "Village Panchayat are envisaged as a form of direct democracy where people are given a chance not only in electing their representatives but also in discussing, deciding and participating in the developmental activities of the Panchayat" The elected representative of a particular constituency is the convener of the respective Panchayat and his ability to perform the functions, The Panchayat President may appoint a member representing any adjacent constituency as the convener [Section 3(4)].

Every meeting of Village Panchayat shall be presided over by the president of the Village Panchayat or in his absence, the Vice-President, or in the absence of both of them by the convener of the Grama Sabha[Section3(5)].

The Village Panchayat meetings are (i) a report relating to the development programmes relating to the constituency during the previous year and these that are proposed to be undertaken during the current year.(ii) their expenditure, (iii) the annual statement of accounts and (iv) the administration report of the preceding year. The Grama Sabha shall, in its ordinary meeting or in a special meeting convened for the purpose, discuss the report referred to in sub-section (6) of section 3 and is shall have the right to know about the budgetary provisions, the details of plan outlay, item wise allocation of funds and details of the estimates and cost of materials of works executed or proposed to be executed within the area of the Grama Sabha [3A (2)].

When beneficiaries are to be selected according to any scheme, project or plan, the criterion for eligibility and order of priority shall be fixed by the Panchayat subject to the terms and conditions prescribed in the scheme, project or plan and such criterion shall be published in the manner prescribed and intimated to the

Grama Sabha[3A(8)]. The priority list prepared by Grama Panchayat after inviting applications for the selection of beneficiaries and conducting enquiries on the application received, shall be scrutinized at the meeting of the Grama Sabha in which the applicants are also invited and final list of the deserving beneficiaries, in the order of priority, shall be prepared and sent for the approval of the Grama Panchayat.

#### **Responsibilities of Grama Sabha:**

The Act provides that the Grama Sabha has responsibilities [3B (1)] to participate in and disseminate information regarding development and welfare activities in the sectors of health and literacy, environmental cleanliness, etc. The status of Grama Sabhas in Musiri block has been enhanced through the amendments made by the Act 13 of 1999. Though the formal and ultimate authority to take decisions on the matters concerning subjects discussed in the Grama Saha is the Village Panchayat, Grama Sabha has sample scope to participate meaningfully in the local governance. Scope of participation is widened to involve the voter in the process of need assessment, formulation of development programmes, monitoring and assessment. The voter is empowered through Grama Sabha to involve in the social audit and performance audit whereby he can question, ask for clarifications and criticize the officers as well as the elected representative. Regarding the selection of beneficiaries for the beneficiary-oriented schemes, Grama Sabha is in effect placed above the Village Panchayat in the sense that Village Panchayat is not to change even the priority in the list prepared by the Grama Sabha.

In order to understand to what extent the Grama Sabhas in Musiri block responded to the needs of the local people by providing a platform to discuss the twenty nine subjects included in the eleventh schedule, a view was made of the recorded and available minutes of 4 Village Panchayat identified namely Evoor, Gunaseelam, Ayyampalayam and Vellur.

#### **Subjects Never Discussed:**

It is noted that certain subjects never came for consideration in Village Panchayat meetings. Evoor minutes reveal that four subjects were not at all discussed in the sample Grama Sabha meetings. They are Social forestry and farm forestry, fuel and fodder, non-conventional energy sources, and libraries were never included in the agenda of the sample village assemblies. In Gunaseelam seven subjects were never discussed in the sample village assemblies. Mat industries, social forestry and farm forestry, minor forest produce, fuel and fodder, non-conventional energy sources and Public Distribution System. In Ayyampalayam Grama Panchayat, three subjects did not attract the attention of the Grama Sabha meetings during the reporting period. They include social forestry and farm forestry, Minor forest produce and adult and non-formal education. There are four subjects, which never figured in the agenda of the sample Grama Sabha meetings in Vellur Grama Panchayat during the three years under study. Social forestry and farm forestry, minor forest produce, fuel and fodder and non-conventional energy sources, adult and non-formal education Public Distribution system.

#### **Exploring the Root Causes:**

The findings show a pathetic situation in the matter of responsiveness of Grama Sabhas in Musiri block institutions for people's participation and platforms created for addressing people's participation and platforms created for addressing people's needs. The lack of serious discussion on development issues in a District like Tiruchirappalli requires further probing and investigation. The reasons are closely related to the lack of commitment of the political leadership to the cause of true devolution of powers to the people, lack of proper orientation and awareness among the people coupled with their increasing indifference to the public affairs, bureaucratic apathy towards people's concerns.

Grama Sabha meetings are very often attended by prospective beneficiaries of the welfare schemes. These beneficiaries are very often women of families living below poverty line, women with little or no exposure to public interactions due to low level of education. The middle class and the upper caste groups totally kept away from the meetings. They felt that it was none of their concern. The duty of the citizens to participate in the reconstruction of their environment by participating in the governance of local bodies is widely forgotten. The society has a commitment to itself to prevent it from disintegration and corruption. The lack of this commitment among the citizens is a major cause of the malaise.

Decentralization is in principle, but good governance is yet to come. 'The Statement of Objects and Reasons' accompanying the Constitution Amendment Bill<sup>11</sup> said in 1991 that the PRIs failed to become viable and responsive people's bodies due to absence of regular elections, prolonged super-sessions, insufficient representation of weaker sections like Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes and women, inadequate devolution of powers and lack of financial resources. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional amendment Act 1992 and the subsequent confirmation Act, the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Raj Act 1994, came into being specifically to address these problems affecting the envisaged responsive nature of the PRIs. The Government of Tamil Nadu in compliance with the Amendment Act did make provisions in the law to address all the above problems by regular elections in five years and holding elections. With in a period of six months in the event of super-session of any Panchayat, reservation of seats to Schedules Castes and Schedules Tribes in proportion to their population for membership of Panchayats and office of Chairpersons in Panchayats at each level, reservation of not less than one-third of the seats for women, devolution by the State Legislature of powers and responsibilities upon the Panchayats with respect to the preparation of plans for economic development and social justice and

for the implementation of development schemes and sufficient funds authorized by the State Legislature. In addition to a major share of funds from the State, the panchayats were granted powers to collect funds from the public by cash or kind and through taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

The present reality stares at us in spite of these efforts towards decentralization. This study becomes an empirical affirmation of the official government position. After several years since the enactment of relevant laws, in 2002, the State Planning Board assessed the status of PRIs, especially the Grama Sabhas as handicapped in many fronts. The Grama Sabhas and Ward Sabhas were severely handicapped by poor attendance, non-participation of above poverty line families, lack of discussion on development issues, emphasis on beneficiary selection, lack of effective social audit and want of enthusiasm among elected members.”

**Conclusion:**

The Panchayat Raj System is best suited for developmental and administrative need of India's rural masses because of wide variation in the nature and magnitude of local problems and issues. Only this system can more realistically and expeditiously act to resolve them judiciously. The panchayats provide a form where local people can meet and work out programmes of their own progress. Thus existence of Panchayat Raj enables the country to have more meaningful development of the plants in which mass participation of the rural population.

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