

# Introduction

*“My idea of village SWARAJ is that is a complete republic, independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants, and yet interdependent for many others which dependence is a necessity.”*

**- Mahatma Gandhi**

Rural transformation is a process of societal change where rural civilizations diversify their economy and diminish their reliance on agriculture, becoming more reliant on distant locations for commerce and acquisition of commodities, services, and ideas. Panchayat raj is the foundation of true democracy. Panchayat Raj is a transformation of rural India. Panchayat play an important role in rural development in India, particularly after independent Panchayat raj fulfils the aspirations of the rural people and helps in transforming the country. Development of a Nation is largely depends upon the development of entire rural areas. The Gram Panchayat is empowering the underprivileged and promote prosperity among rural communities. The origins of Panchayat raj in India may be traced back to the ancient era and long history in India. In the early period the Panchayat raj was associated with village which has been in existence since the time of immemorial.

In India total 584 Zilla parishad, 6,312 Panchayat samithi and 2,38,054 Gram Panchayat. India is primary an agriculture based country. for the growth of Indian economy rural development in India is one of the most important factors. According to 2011 census 68.84 per cent of population of India lives in rural areas. There are around 6,49,481 villages in India.

The Panchayat Raj system of local governance is the oldest in the Indian subcontinent. Panchayat Raj institutions have existed as local government units in India for a long time, in many forms and combinations. The 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 first time the Indian Constitution designated Panchayat raj as the third level of India's federal democracy. The Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) is divided into three levels: Gram Panchayat in village level, Block Panchayat in block level and Zilla Panchayat in district level.

Panchayati Raj Institutions that work as grass-root units of democratic decentralization of self-government have been considered as an instrument of socio-economic transformation in rural India. People's participation at the grass-roots level is the most significant factor in achieving socioeconomic development. Decentralization of power to Panchayatis is considered as a way to empower people and include them in decision-making. Local governments can be more responsive to local demands and make better use of resources if they are closer to the people. Only by ensuring public participation in governance can a country's democratic system be ensured. Therefore, to achieve the objective, a system of democratic decentralization popularly known as Panchayati Raj has been introduced in India.

The history of Panchayat Raj is split into six periods: the Vedic era, the epic era, the ancient era, the mediaeval period, the British period, and the post-independence period. In the Vedic period, 'Panchayat' means assembly (ayat) group of five person (panch) and raj means (rule). The term 'panch parameshwar' or 'panch' refers to the deity. Ramayana reveals that governance was split into two sections throughout the epic era - 'Pur' and 'Janapad,' or city and village. The village was named Janapad, and the people who lived there were known as Janapada. The Ramayana mentions Gram, Maha Gram, and Ghosh (Village, Big Village, and Group of Villages). Tulsidas' Ramcarit Manas divided the system of government into three parts: the rule of the King (Raj Tantra), the rule of the people (Prajā Tantra), and the rule of the wise men (vivat-tantra), or educated and informed people. During the ancient era, the Kautily Artha sastra recommended the King to establish village units of 100-500 households. There were centers with 10 villages, 200 villages, 400 villages and 800 villages. During the medieval era, the smallest unit was the village, which was managed by the Lamardar, Patwari, and Chukidar. Panchayats were common in villages throughout the medieval period.

After independence, the Indian government, under the influence of Mahatma Gandhi, was committed to establishing the Panchayat raj system in order to provide true swaraj to the people of the rural areas. The government has appointed committees and commissions to make recommendations to improve the structure and operation of Panchayats.

The 'Panchayati Raj' was promoted by the father of Mahatma Gandhi, the nation's father. The 'Panchayati Raj' as a system of self-governance was first introduced in 1959, based on the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report (1958), which recommended a three-tier structure of local self-government, with Gram Panchayats at the village level, Taluka Panchayat Samiti at the sub-district level, and Zilla Parishad at the district level. As a result, the Panchayati raj system has been implemented throughout the nation.

Mahatma Gandhi father of Nation was first philosopher who coined the term 'Gram Swaraj' which referred to Panchayat Raj with the idea of self sufficient and self reliant villages and had dream that all villagers should be characterized by direct and participatory democracy and gives all power to the villagers

The word democracy is derived from the Greek roots- cracy meaning rule of and 'demos' meaning 'the people'. Democracy is considered as one of the best forms 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. Democracy giving power to the people .Democracy is run by people, role by people and for the benefit of the people. In order to protect rural people.Democracy provide space for participation of people in political process. The institutional mechanism of self-government closer to the people and promoters interactive governance.

Panchayats are now an important feature of Indian democratic landscape and are being engaged in implementing and monitoring development and social protection programs with varying results across different states. Establishing a localized institution of Panchayats on the basis of regular elections with universal adult suffrage across the whole country was a major step towards deepening of democracy at the grassroots levels. Introduction of an effective Panchayat Raj system represents a major milestone within the movement of democratizing Indian society.

Decentralization is a process in which administrative power, public resources, and duties are transferred from central or state government agencies to lower-level organizations such as Village Panchayats, Municipalities and Municipal Corporations. As a result of decentralization process, a people-centered system of governance emerges, allowing previously powerless individuals and groups to play significant roles in the

implementation of programs and policies, as well as the mobilization, allocation, and distribution of public resources, transforming them into the primary engine of development rather than mere recipients. Decentralization is required to guarantee efficient and cost-effective administration and quick and realistic decision-making, which is essential for a large and complicated task such as rural development.

Decentralization is also regarded as a vital tool for ensuring effective resource allocation, enhancing governance, accelerating economic development, reducing poverty, achieving more gender equality and empowering society's weakest members. Arguments against it include the fact that it weakens central governments' ability to implement macro economic stabilization, that it causes efficiency losses due to local governments' lack of administrative capacity to carry out the functions assigned to them.

Balwant Rai Mehta is widely regarded as the father of Panchayat Raj. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was the first to investigate the difficulties of democratic decentralisation in independent India, and it was set up in 1957. The Committee was asked to provide information on community development project. The Committee offered comprehensive recommendations for democratic decentralisation and rural reconstruction. It was pointed out that the community development programme failed because it failed to elicit local effort and that growth would be impossible without local initiative and interest. The committee laid down five fundamental principles. Committee recommended that there should be three tier structures of local self government bodies from village to district level and these bodies should be linked together.

On May 15, 1989, Rajiv Gandhi Prime Minister of India introduced the 64th Amendment bill on local government in Parliament, but it did not receive the necessary support. In September 1990, a second attempt was made in Parliament to pass the bill. The bill, on the other hand, was never even considered. The Congress government, led by then-Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao, introduced a new bill on Panchayati Raj in September 1991. In order to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institution, the Government of India introduced the 73rd Amendment Bill in the Parliament in 1992. It was passed in 1992 as the 73rd Amendment Act 1992, with minor changes, and went into effect on April 24, 1993. 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act is the main turning point of Panchayat Raj.

Article 243 G of the XI Schedule includes 29 subjects assigned to rural local bodies by this Amendment. Agriculture, including agricultural extension, Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation, minor irrigation, water management and watershed development, animal husbandry and poultry, fisheries, social forestry and farm forestry, small-scale industries, including food processing industries, khadi, village and cottage industries, rural housing, drinking water, fuel and fodder, roads, culverts, bridges, waterways and other means of communication, rural electrification including distribution of electricity, non conventional energy sources, poverty elevation programme, education, including primary and secondary schools, technical training and vocational education, adult and non-formal education, libraries, cultural activities, market and fairs, health and family sanitation including hospital, primary health centers and dispensaries, family welfare, Women and child development, social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded. Welfare of the weaker sections and particular, of the scheduled cast and scheduled tribes, Public distribution system

Panchayat Raj system is a three-tier structure with elected officials at the village, block, and district levels. Gram Panchayat is a vital in rural administration and is known as bottom up approach. Gram Panchayat promotes more public involvement and successful execution of Rural Development programmes.

The Panchayat raj objective are to promote people's participation in rural development programmes, Provide an institutional frame work for popular administration based on the concept of Democratic Decentralization, act as a medium of social and political change, facilitate mobilization process at beat levels and prepare plans for development and assist in their implementation in the concerned areas.

Panchayat Raj Institutions are often regarded as the pillars of Indian villages. It is considered the third or local government in charge of legislating and executing different rural development programmes. The primary goal of all Panchayat programs is to guarantee comprehensive economic and social development of rural regions, reach out to the underserved and address poverty problems. The effective administration of Panchayat Raj Institutions, which are run by and for the people, helps to play various roles in attaining

rural development objectives. Addressing contemporary rural social problems and unfavorable conditions or trends, such as suicide of farmer, price fluctuations, declining production due to climate change Panchayat raj proves to be a vital cog in the wheel of rural development.

Panchayat raj is a self-governing autonomous entity having organic links to higher-level institutions such as the State Government and the Central Government to manage economic growth and social justice. The main goal of Panchayat Raj is to encourage people to engage collaboratively in development activities ranging from planning to work execution, thus increasing human capacities. The institution's longevity determines the system's effectiveness in the orbit of the political system, as well as its vitality.

According to **Lawal (2000)**, the three tiers of government are closest to the people, "which is endowed with specific rights to exert control over people's affairs in their area." Local government is a system of public administration at the local level that is takes with bringing the people closer to the government. Depending on the kind of organization and what the members desire, grassroots groups may have various structures.

Gram Panchayats are important tools for rural rehabilitation and development. They have been restructured as institutions of social and economic growth, with greater authority and financial resources. Panchayat Raj has come to be associated with two broad images. First, it is a government by itself and second it is an agency of the state government.

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Gram Panchayat is the primary entity responsible for the overall development of villages. Gram Panchayat also known as grassroot level governance and rural governance. The Gram Panchayat is not only a decentralized type of administration, but it is also a channel through which Indian rural people may communicate and attempt to solve their administrative, social and economic issues to higher levels of government.

Local Self-Government refers to government at the local level that performs a variety of local functions for the local people. It works to meet the civic needs of the people in the area. It is a local government that works to meet local needs with the help of local resources. It works for securing civic amenities and services within its area. It is self-government of the local people. So Local Self Government is the government of a specified locality by the local people through their representatives.

A wide variety of activities for rural development and the welfare of rural people are assigned to village panchayats. Panchayats at the village level are responsible for the direct supervision and execution of socio-economic development programs such as MGNREGA, rural housing, rural sanitation, child and women development, adult education, and other related programs. Village Panchayats are also in charge of water supply, schools and other amenities. Panchayats need the active participation of rural people to manage their own affairs and promote development initiatives which are most suited to meet local needs.

The Gram Panchayat has played an essential role at the local level in improving people's living standards. Their primary duties include providing clean drinking water, constructing and repairing village roads, providing drainage for rural people, providing excellent street lighting, education (primary and secondary), providing money for backward class people and so on. Gram Panchayats is critical to rural development in India. The importance of Panchayats in rural development was highlighted in the second five-year plan.

Gram Panchayats get revenue from various sources, including home taxes, fairs, health, water, and market fees, as well as subsidies from the state and federal governments. Gram Panchayats seem to be the most active in the majority of the states. In general, while GPs provide significant tasks (some of which are mandatory), such as public amenities, health, small building, minor irrigation, village roads and so on.

Grassroots level planning defined as a type of planning at a lower level (village) in which people from all walks of life come together to enlist and prioritize areas of intervention, assess their resources, formulate, execute and supervise plans for the development of their own community by sharing responsibilities.

Gram Panchayat act as a cabinet of the village. The president of the Gram Panchayat are selected through election. Panchayat is chaired by the president. In Panchayat election one third of the total number of seats are reserved for scheduled castes and schedule tribe and one third of the total number of seats reserved for Women.

Gram Panchayat Presidents play an essential role in carrying out Gram Panchayat functions. Presidents preside over and regulate Panchayat and gram sabha meetings, authorize payment and refunds about the Panchayat, prepare and promote village development schemes, organize village sanitation and drainage schemes, mobilize voluntary labor and contribute cash for the community welfare program and assist the Panchayat in the implementation of development schemes.

Gram Sabha is the corporate body, and Panchayat is the executive body under the Panchayati Raj System, for the benefit of the people. According to the state panchayat raj act, the Gram Sabha must meet four times in a year, which is on 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1<sup>st</sup> May, 15<sup>th</sup> August and 2<sup>nd</sup> October every year. Gram Panchayat president preside the meeting of Gram Sabha. There are so many functions that are carried out by the Gram Sabha are to help implementation of the development programmes and schemes of the Panchayat, to identify beneficiaries for different programme, to solicit support in cash or kind or both and voluntary labour from the public for community welfare programme, to discuss and recommends appropriate actions with regards to report the vigilance committee. Consider levy of taxes, rates, rents and fees and enhancement of rates so on.

The Gram Sabha is intended to be the pinnacle of participatory and direct democracy. It is the sole entity that should offer meaningful contributions to Gram Panchayat for it to run local government successfully. At the same time, Gram Sabha serves as a watchdog in the interests of local communities by reviewing Gram Panchayat's operations. (Barna, 2013)

The National Panchayat Raj Day is observed annually on April 24<sup>th</sup> every year by the Ministry of Panchayat Raj and rural development. On April 24, 2010, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh proclaimed the first national panchayat raj day. This event allows direct interaction with Panchayat members from throughout the nation and honoring their accomplishments to inspire and encourage them further. On that day, the

Ministry of Panchayat Raj presented awards to in a variety of categories. In all, 2.6 lakh Panchayats were granted throughout India.

Panchayat have a significant role to play in effective and efficient implementation and flagship schemes to transform rural India. There are many outstanding performance among Panchayats recommended by the state /UT since 2011-12. Ministry of Panchayat Raj giving award to the panchayat for different category. The awards are given on the National Panchayat raj day celebrated on 24<sup>th</sup> April of every year. There are two types of awards on central level awards and state level awards. Central level awards such as Deen dayal upadhyay Panchayat shashaktikaran purashkar (DDUPSP). Nanaji Deshmukh Rashtriya Gaurav Gram Sabha Puraskar. Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) and Child Friendly Gram Panchayat award. Award meant for Panchayat at state level such as Nirmal Gram Puraskar award, Panchayat shashktikaran Puraskar, e-Panchayat award, Uttamar Gandhi award, clean village award.

The rural development and Panchayat Raj department is in charge of implementing various centrally sponsored, state-funded, and externally aided schemes for poverty alleviation, employment generation, sanitation, capacity building, and women's social and economic empowerment. The department is also in charge of ensuring that Panchayat raj institutions function as effective units of local self-government. The Ministry of Panchayat Raj and Rural Development implemented a number of schemes aimed at rural development and job creation. National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme of Mahatma Gandhi (MGNREGS). Schemes provide 100 days of employment. Indira Awas Yojana, which was previously part of the Jawahar Rozgar Yojana, became a separate scheme in 1997-1998. Its goal is to build free houses for members of scheduled castes/tribes, freed bonded labourers in rural areas, and non-sc/st rural poor living below the poverty line. The Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS) provides infrastructure facilities and bridges the infrastructure gap that exists between rural and urban areas. The government of India launched the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC) to provide sanitation facilities to all households and promote hygiene behaviour.

The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj is a prominent National Centre of Excellence in Rural Development and Panchayat Raj. It is an

autonomous organisation under the Union Ministry of Rural Development. It is a national level government institute founded in 2006 to strengthen the ability of panchayats and the Panchayat Raj system, both official and non-official, as well as the general public.

State Institute of Rural Development established a network of training centers in the state to organize the training programme in a decentralized manner. Capacity building, training, research and consultancy service are the core functions of the institution focus on training is one capacity building of development fonctionnairies, both official and non official s are involved in the implementation of flagship programmes of Ministry of Rural development and Ministry of Panchayat raj. These programmes are carried out as training course, workshop, seminars and conference. Target group Government officials function aries from the state, district, block and village levels and master trainior and trainees of Institution. Non-officials elected PRIs at the district and block level, volunteers of NGOs, member of SHGs, member of social audit committees.

District Rural Development Agency has traditionally been the primary organ at the district level in charge of overseeing the implementation of Ministry of Rural Development anti-poverty programmes. DRDA was established to carry out the Integrated Rural Development Programme.

The term "e-Government" has been used to describe initiatives and programmes that should be classified as e-governance. Over the past few years, "governments have hurriedly adopted e-government technologies and ideas from simple, online communication of government information to real time, secure transactions for various processes and payments. Demands generated from political leadership, other associated governments, capacity building needs and perceived citizen expectations all contribute" to adoption of e-government methods for good governance.

E-governance is the public sector's use of information and communication technologies to improve information and service delivery, encourage citizen participation in decision-making, and make government more accountable, transparent, and effective.

E-panchayat mission mode project with a vision to attain at decentralized and participatory local self government through Panchayati Raj institution which will focus on

the strengthening of the panchayat in village. The mission has objective like empowerment, enablement and accountability of PREs to ensure inclusive development with social justice and efficient delivery of services

The Gram Panchayat are also constitutionally mandated for preparation of Gram Panchayat Development Plans for economic development and social justice utilizing for resource available with them. The GPDP should be comprehensive and based on participatory Gram Sabha and will be in convergence with schemes of all related 29<sup>th</sup> subjects listed in the eleventh schedule of the constitution.

In order to assess the performance of Panchayat raj, the devolution index was prepared by the National Council of applied economic research and Ministry of Panchayat Raj. The devolution index gave the status to devolve the powers and responsibilities of Panchayat Raj. Devolution index consisted with 6 indicators such as

**D1 is Framework:** Framework give basic details of Panchayats, Panchayat duration & Elections including State Election Commission, Dissolution and bye Elections of Panchayats

**D2 is Function:** Detail on Panchayat empowerment for functions and participation in schemes, as these were transferred to various tiers of panchayats to varying degrees by the states and union territories. Functions delegated to Panchayats and Panchayat involvement.

**D3 is Finance:** Grants under the Thirteenth Finance Commission, the recommendations of SFCs were given due place as the provisions for them had contributed in removing the encumbrances imposed by states, funds availability with Panchayats, operation of Panchayat Nidhi/Fund (receipt & expenditure), Expenditure of the Panchayats, initiatives related to Finances and Accounts.

**D4 is Functionnairies:** Functionnairies helps the Panchayats to perform better and function as institutions of self government, physical infrastructure of Panchayats, e-Connectivity of Panchayat, Role of Panchayats in parallel bodies, infrastructure for efficient & effective management of Panchayat, power and functions of Panchayats.

**D5 is Capacity building:** It focuses on the establishment of training institutions and training programmes for officials and elected representatives organised by states/UTs to assist them in performing their duties efficiently. To assess the impact of Panchayat capacity building, consider factors such as the institutions involved in training, the content and method of training, the training curriculum, the number of people trained, and so on.

**D6 is Accountability:** accountability defines accounting and audit

components, Panchayat assessment and incentives serve as tools to capture accountability of functionaries to Panchayats. Indicators such as grame sabha functioning, social audit, transparency and anti-corruption covering, right to information and Citizens' Charter are designed to endorse Panchayat accountability to the people.

#### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

The present study entitled on “**Performance of the Gram Panchayats of Selected Blocks in Coimbatore District of Tamil Nadu**” is carried out with the following objectives are: to

- ❖ Assess the performance of the Gram Panchayats in terms of governance, resource mobilization and service delivery.
- ❖ Analyze the capacity of the Gram Panchayat presidents.
- ❖ Identify the factors influencing the performance of the Gram Panchayats and
- ❖ Determine the challenges faced by the Gram Panchayats and presidents

#### **FORMULATION OF THE HYPOTHESES**

A hypothesis is a speculative or speculative assertion that is tested via a research. It's a statement regarding how variables are anticipated to interact. With the help of review of literature related to the study, the following specific hypothesis are formulated pertaining to the objectives outlined:

- ❖ There will be no association between gender, age and educational qualification with leadership qualities of Gram panchayat presidents.
- ❖ There will be a relationship between software application adopted by the Gram Panchayats with e-connectivity of the Gram Panchayats.
- ❖ There will be a association between gender with social audit practices of Gram Panchayat presidents.
- ❖ There will be no association between age, gender, education qualification and annual income with performance of Gram Panchayats President.

### **LIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

- ❖ Local language was one of the barriers for data collection.
- ❖ Difficulties to get permission from Block Development Officers because of their busy schedule .

### **NEED FOR THE STUDY**

- ❖ There is a limited research studies on Gram Panchayats performance, the present research will serve as a guide for researcher in future.
- ❖ Focus the factors responsible for effective performance as well as bottle neck experienced by the Gram Panchayat presidents.
- ❖ Gram Panchayat is the local level governance of the rural people. Rural people doesn't have adequate information and knowledge about the performance of the Gram Panchayat. So through the research study rural people will aware about the performance of Gram Panchayat. Thangathurai A(2004) in his research study "Performance of the Gram Panchayat presidents and evaluation" findout that rural people doesn't have adequate information about the performance of Gram Panchayat.

### **SCOPE OF THE STUDY:**

- ❖ The findings of the research will focus performance of Gram Panchayats in terms of governance, resource mobilization, achievement and service delivery would help us to have a better understanding of the roles and responsibilities of Gram Panchayats, infrastructure facilities of Gram Panchayats, finance of Gram Panchayats, Gram Sabha and awards received by Gram Panchayats.
- ❖ The research also focuses on enhancing the capability of Gram Panchayats and functionaries.
- ❖ The challenges of Gram Panchayats will also be thoroughly investigated, along with appropriate recommendations from Gram Panchayat presidents.