



Perceptions of Denizens of Kashmir on Panchayat Raj: A Study of some Villages of District Anantnag

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Abstract

Panchayati Raj is the sole means for the common denizen of any state of the country to come in the mainstream development. It is the government of the local people as they are well aware of their local problems and know their solution in a more serious way. However, if we look at the performance of these local democratic institutions we find three categories of states, the states where these institutions perform very well, the states where panchayats perform at an average and the last category where Panchayat institutions facing challenges while performing. Jammu and Kashmir are also one of the states which are listed among those states whose performance was very low as per the 2015-16 report of Ministry of Panchayat Raj Government of India.

The current study was conducted in some Villages of District Anantnag Jammu and Kashmir. The rationale behind this study was to study the perceptions of the denizens of the study area about the five years of Panchayati Raj in their villages. For this study, a self-made tool Questionnaire schedule was administered for the accumulation of fresh hand data from the respondents. The study reveals that there was a great hope among the voters of Kashmir Valley regarding the 2011 Panchayat elections that it will lead development and peace in the Valley.

Keywords:- Panchayati Raj, Anantnag, Challenges, low performance, Government steps and 2011 Panchayat elections.

Still I bear in mind the days of the 2011 Panchayat election when the Denizens of Kashmir were seen happily at polling booths while casting their ballots. There was a robust assertion among all voters of the Valley that this Panchayat election can lead development and peace within the Valley” (Author)

Introduction:-

When we speak about the word Kashmir a picture of Natural beauty comes in our mind which we have picked up on the TV sets. Every day we see a lot of discussions and debates on the different dimensions of Kashmir. However, the common man of the valley knows how is spent the life of fear in this heavy military zone of Asia. The common people want to get rid of this fear which has enveloped him since 1989 when an armed struggle erupted in the valley. The 2011 Panchayat election was the first time after the long wave of demolition in the valley people participated to use their right a huge turnout was registered. The remarkable thing about this 2011 Panchayat

election was the participation of young buds of the valley. Before this there was a strong assertion among all sections of the society of the valley that it will open the doors of development and peace. The Denizens of the valley has seen various faces of the past different Governments of the state which have done nothing for the welfare of the state expect lip service and corruption in this context Assistant prop. Of Kashmir University, Ashraf Wani Writes on different Governances of State

Wani writes:-

“One of the greatest tragedies of J&K has been the fact that the state had to face a rule of misgovernance. Except for very brief periods in between, the pages of J&K’s history are full of miseries that people of the state had to face on account of an authoritarian and dictatorial rule. What is, however, ironical is the fact that even after the installation of popular governments after 1947, misgovernance continued unabated with the full acknowledgement and even support of the central government. One of the disastrous and tragic outcomes of this reign of misrule has been the emergence of militancy in Kashmir” (Ashraf wani 2011).

Therefore in this whole episode, there was lack of suitable environment in which the seeds of local democracy will germinate in the state. Despite, the autocratic rule in the State Maharaja Hara Singh have planted the sampling of local institutions in the state in 1935 by introducing the Village Panchayat act 1935. Even after 1947, the condition was not so mature for the local democratic institutions in the state, especially when Sheikh Abdullah was arrested. However, there was an article in Directive principle policy of the state constitution which speaks about the establishment of panchayats in the state. Apart from this the introduction of single line administration model by Sheikh Abdullah in 1977 also provides food to the idea of panchayat institutions of the state. In this connection, it was 1989 when the Govt. amended previous Panchayat Acts and reframes a new Act which is called The Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat act 1988. The act focuses on the three-tier panchayat raj that is Halqa level, Block level and Distracts level. In this way, the state of Jammu and Kashmir was the state which enacts the Panchayati Raj act before the the73th constitutional amendment of Indian constitution. But after the enactment of Panchayat Raj act of 1988, the Valley came beneath the destructive wave of violence which results the act was not implemented. Obviously, the Panchayat Raj also became the Victim of this wave during this period the mainstream political leaders left the valley and moved to winter capital Jammu because of the fear.

It was the year of 2001 when the situation was improved a little bit in the valley still there were the faces of Militancy in the Valley despite this Government conducted the Panchayat elections. These elections did create a centre of attention in the Valley because of fear even some constituencies remain vacant in the Valley. Rekha chowdery called this election a Paper exercise.

2001 Panchayat elections in Kashmir Valley:-

The below table 1 gives the picture of 2001 panchayat election of the Valley

(Table 1)

District	No. of Blocks	No. of Panchayats	No. of Sarpanches elected	No. of Sarpanch vacancies	Total no. of Panches to be elected	No. of Panches elected	No. of vacancies of Panches
Srinagar	04	93	67	26	666	247	419
Kupwara	09	224	168	56	1471	915	556
Baramulla	14	276	162	114	2148	902	1246
Budgam	08	199	61	138	1444	315	1129
Anantnag	10	309	251	58	2242	1191	1051
Pulwama	06	236	202	34	1586	684	902
Total	51	1337	911	426	9557	4254	5302

Source:- PANCHAYATI RAJ IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR Panchayati ... shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/51984/10/10_chapter%203.pdf.

on the deep analyses of the above table 1, it is clear the participation in this 2001 panchayat was not so impressive as 911 sarpanches and 4254 were elected from the six districts of Kashmir Valley.

SC/ST and others in and 2001 Panchayat election as shown in below

(Table 2)

District	Number of Sarpanch elected				Number of Panches elected.			
	SC	ST	OTHERS	TOTAL	SC	ST	OTHERS	TOTAL
Srinagar	-	12	55	67	-	77	170	247
Kupwara	-	25	143	168	-	160	755	915
Baramulla	-	14	148	162	-	101	801	902
Budgam	-	-	61	61	-	5	310	315
Anantnag	-	12	239	251	-	110	1081	1191
Pulwama	-	07	195	202	-	25	659	684
Total	-	70	841	911	-	478	3776	4254

Source:- PANCHAYATI RAJ IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR Panchayati ... shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/51984/10/10_chapter%203.pdf.

The above information of the table reveals that out of total number of elected sarpanches 911 from the Kashmir out of these 70 sarpanches were belonging to ST category; it means 7.6% of ST candidates were elected as Sarpanches. On the other hand the total number of Panches from Kashmir elected was 4254 out of which 478 were ST candidates which mean 11.23%

Women and 2001 Panchayat election in Kashmir

The representation of women in this panchayat election was very miserable. In this election there was not specific reservation for women as it was during the 2011 Panchayat election. In this election only 33 female Panches and two sarpanches were elected from the six districts of Kashmir as (Srinagar 1) (Kupawara 2) (Baramulla 4) (Anantnag 24 Panches + 2 Sarpanches) and from Pulwama nobody.

2011 Panchayat Elections in Kashmir Valley data shown in below table

District	Total Number of Panchayat Constituencies	Total Number of Sarpanches elected	Total Number of Sarpanches Vacancies	Total number of Panch constituencies	Total number of Panches elected	Total number of panch vacancies
Kupwara	356	355	1	2716	2694	22
Anantnag	297	296	1	2054	2037	17
Bandipora	114	114	0	869	865	04
Baramulla	365	350	15	2906	2352	544
Budgam	283	282	1	2155	2108	47
Ganderbal	103	103	0	744	719	25
Kulgam	159	158	1	1060	1040	20
Shopian	103	103	0	763	620	143
Srinagar	10	10	0	79	78	1
Pulwama	186	166	20	1350	841	509
Total	1976	1937	39	14696	13354	1332

Source:-Rekha Chowdhary 2012.

Women and Panchayat election 2011

There was good representation of women in this election because the State Government provides 33% reservation to the women for Halqa Panchayat. The total number of female Panches elected during this election was 4319 from the different districts of the valley like from (Kupwara 937) (Anantnag 673) (Bandipora 288) (Baramulla 714) (Budgam 686) (Ganderbal 227) (Kulgam 324) Shopian(177) (Srinagar 25) and (Pulwama 218).

The total elected representatives from the above mentioned districts of Kashmir was 13354 both male as well as female out of this 13354 the number of females representatives were 4319(it is 32.34%).

Government initiatives for the Empowerment of Panchayat Raj

Institutions:-

The main steps which were taken by the State Government for the empowerment of Grassroot democracy areas:-

1. 33% Reservation for Women were extended only for the Panch level.
2. Incorporation of Provisions in Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Raj act 1989 related To State finance commission and independent Election commission holding elections for Panchayats.
3. In 2016 an amendment was made in Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Raj act 1989 regarding the indirect election of sarpanches.

4. A committee was constituted by the State Government which was called Madhav Lal committee to tackle the devolution of powers. The high powered committee recommended empowerment of the Panchayat Institutions and devolution of 23 functions of 14 main departments at all the three tiers. These Departments are Department of Agriculture, Animal and Sheep Husbandry, Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, Education, Fisheries, Forest, Health and Family Welfare, Horticulture, Industries and Commerce, Public Health Engineering, Public Works, Revenue, Rural Development and Social Welfare under the Cabinet Government Order No: 1126-GAD of 2011 dated: 22-09-201 for devolution of functions to the Halqa Panchayat
5. Apart from this, the elected representatives were giving training of three days at every Block Headquarter in order to impart them knowledge regarding the execution of panchayat Raj decisions on the Ground.
6. A monthly honorarium was provided by the state Government to the elected representatives RS 1500 to Sarpanch and RS 1000 to the Panchs.
7. Steps were taken by the State Government for the construction of Panchayat Ghars in the State under the programme of Apna Panchayat Ghar

Current status of PRIS:-

After huge turnout in the 2011 panchayat elections the condition changes in the valley. The elected representatives were targeted and many of them killed by unknown persons. Which result a fear spread among the rest representatives consequently most of them give resignation in the local newspapers. The second thing the State Government has failed to provide them security. These elected representatives stated that we are powerless Govt did not provide any power to us. We are unable to do work for our respective areas. Many times these elected Representatives sit on strike against the apathy shown by the State Government in empowering the Panchayats. While chatting with these members it was found that they were very disappointed from the Government as they stated that the State Government made only lip service nothing else regarding the empowerment of Panchayats. They further stated that we are facing hardships because of the apathy approach of government towards our empowerment.

In the context of working for these Institutions, the Government did not show any Interests in empowering these local bodies as was promised during the election. One of the authorities of State politics of Jammu and Kashmir Rekha Chowdhary writes on the current condition of Panchayats of Jammu and Kashmir as:

“The Panchayati Raj institutions in Jammu and Kashmir State suffer both from structural as well as operational weaknesses. Structurally, the Panchayati Raj Act 1989, despite the recent amendments (including the 2004 amendment in relation to reservation of seats for the women, SCs and STs; 2011 amendment to provide for the State Election Commission and; the recently passed Act in relation to the State Finance Commission), the State Act remains flawed, so far as the purpose of making the Panchayats the units of self-governance is concerned. When compared to the provisions laid down in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment.”(Rekha 2012).

George Mathew the founding Director of Institute of Social Science and expert on “local Government system, decentralisation and Gender equity” writes about the post 2011 condition of Panchayats Raj of Jammu and Kashmir as:

“The state Government lost a Golden opportunity by not making extensive capacity building interventions immediately after the elections, when the Voter turnout reflected an obvious mandate for the effective local Governance and development”. (Mathew 2013).

Perceptions of common man about the Panchayat institutions of the State:-

For the ground realities I surveyed various Villages of District Anantnag to find the peoples responses towards the five years of Panchayati Raj in their state. For this, I construct a self-made- questionnaire schedule with 16 questions on different dimensions of Panchayati Raj. Then the gathered responses’ of respondents were analyzed one by one through descriptive statistics frequency, percentage with the help of SPSS.

Questionwise analyses:-

Panchayat House in Your Village is well constructed with all modern facilities?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	20	100.0	100.0	100.0

From the table, it is obvious that there was no Panchayat Ghar with an availability of modern facilities in the study area.

Meetings regarding the village Development are mainly conducted at?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Sarpanch's House	11	55.0	55.0	55.0
Panch's House	4	20.0	20.0	75.0
Compound of Masjid	5	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

The data in the table reveals that most of the meetings are conducted at the Sarpanches houses following by Panch's house and some- times in the compound of Masjid where everyone came.

I have participated in the Halqa Majlis(Village Assembly)?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	8	40.0	40.0	40.0
No	12	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

. From the table, it is evident that only 40% respondents participate and 60% did not, actually what I observed that the sarpanch and panch of respective areas have made a special group of peers who are well connected with the block authorities.

Govt. Official's intervention remains in the Halqa Majlis regarding the development of the village?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	13	65.0	65.0	65.0
No	7	35.0	35.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

65% respondents stated that there remains a Government officials intervention while passing the plan in the Halqa Majlis(Village Assembly). While as 35% respondents of the study area stated Government official's intervention does not remain in the Halqa Majlis while formulating a plan for the Village.

Sarpanch himself inspects the village?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Not Frequently	12	60.0	60.0	60.0
Never	8	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

. The above table reveals that 60% of respondents say that Sarpanch not inspects the Village frequently while as 40% says our sarpanch has never inspected the Village.

A special advertise before seven days are circulated in the Village about the Halqa Majlis.?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	10	50.0	50.0	50.0
Can't say	10	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

.50% of the respondents in the study say that no special advertisement is circulated in the village while another 50% can't say show their response.

Panchayat in our Village invites all the employs of fourteen department's time on time in order to impart education to villagers on different programmes of the Govt.?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	12	60.0	60.0	60.0
Can't say	8	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

60% of the respondents stated no such programme was organized by the Halqa Panchayat in which employs of 14 departments have come in the Village and aware the people. On the other hand, 40% of respondents in the study area on the same question can't say anything.

In our village the agenda of the Halqa Majlis mostly focuses on?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
MGNERAG A	10	50.0	50.0	50.0
A.A.Y	10	50.0	50.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

The main things which were discussed at the Halqa Majlis Meetings are related to MGNERA issues as 50% respondents have a mark on this. While as another 50% of respondents stated that A.A.Y issues are discussed in the meetings in their respective villages.

Areas for development in our village are selected on the bases of political party affiliation?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	9	45.0	45.0	45.0
No	5	25.0	25.0	70.0
can't say	6	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

45% of the respondents feel this that areas of development in the village are selected on the bases of political party affiliation, while as 25% respondents say that no it does not happens and 30% respondents can't say anything.

Our ward representative inspects the ward?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	3	15.0	15.0	15.0
No	10	50.0	50.0	65.0
can't say	7	35.0	35.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the ward representative inspection to the respective ward, 15% of respondents say our ward member visits the ward. While as 50% of respondents say no our ward member does not visit the ward and 35% of respondents in the category of cant say.

In our village Panchayat organises various awareness programmes about the different welfare programmes of the govt?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
No	13	65.0	65.0	65.0
I have never seen	7	35.0	35.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

It was found from the study that no awareness programme regarding the Government welfare policies was organized by the Halqa Panchayat in the study area. It is clear from the table 65% of respondents say that no such programmes were organized by the Panchayat. While as 35% respondents say we have never seen such type of programme organized by the Panchayat.

I support the step that females are coming in the decision making at grass root level in our village?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	12	60.0	60.0	60.0
No	7	35.0	35.0	95.0
Can't say	1	5.0	5.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the coming of females in Decision making 60%, respondents say that we are supporting this move while as 35% respondents' shows rigidity and conservatism and 5% of respondents can't say anything.

Do you feel Panchayats in the Valley will help in the development of poor?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	9	45.0	45.0	45.0
No	3	15.0	15.0	60.0
Can't say	8	40.0	40.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

About the development of poor through Panchayats 45% of respondents say that yes Panchayats play a role in the development of poor in their villages, while 15% of respondents say no panchayats does not help the poor and 15% respondents came in the category of can't say.

Main challenges of Panchayati raj in the Valley?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Security	12	60.0	60.0	60.0
Lack of awareness among the people	5	25.0	25.0	85.0
Lack of political will	3	15.0	15.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

It was found that the security is the main challenge as it is obvious from the above table that 60% of respondents say this and 25% of respondents say along with security lack of awareness among the people is also one of the challenges. On the

other hand 15% respondents say that lack of political will to empower the panchayat is also a challenge.

Did you find any change after the establishment of panchayat Raj in Kashmir?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	7	35.0	35.0	35.0
No	7	35.0	35.0	70.0
Can't say	6	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the impact of Panchayats in their areas 35% respondents said that yes a lot of change has been occurred because of Panchayats while as 35% other respondents said no change has occurred and 30% of respondents' ticks on can't say option.

Are you satisfied with the steps of government which are taken for the empowerment of panchayats since 2011 panchayat elections?

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Yes	2	10.0	10.0	10.0
No	11	55.0	55.0	90.0
Can't say	7	35.0	35.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Regarding the steps of Governments after 2011, 10 % of respondents are satisfied and 55 % of respondents are not satisfied by the Government steps and 35% respondents tick the option of can't say.

Conclusion:-

Robust local democratic institutions will play a crucial role in plummeting political alienation among the Denizens of the Valley. As we, know these institutions connect the common Denizen with mainstream development by directly participated in the planning of the local area. From the above study, it was depicted that the Panchayat institutions of the Valley are facing a lot of problems. These Institutions lack vital infrastructure and men power. However, the government is solely doing the lip service in the name of empowerment. According to the (2015-16) Annual Report of Ministry of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development Government of India, the State is listed among low performing states. Apart from this, we find that two narratives one is from the Representatives side who say That State Government have not taken serious efforts for their empowerment it is the reason we can't deliver at the grassroots level. The second narrative is from the common denizens of the Valley who say that the elected representatives along with their close peers have utilized the Village money for their own concerns. They distribute work among their close

relatives. Some people called a part of exercise done by the state Government to divert the attention from 2010 agitation in which 125 youths were killed and further told that we did not benefitted by this because the Sarpanchs and Panchs use the Government seal for their own personal gains and benefits.

In above study, it was also found that despite the Government efforts like adding 33% Reservation for Women or incorporation the provision of Finance Commission and creation of independent election commission for holding Panchayat elections in the State. The representatives and the people are not satisfied they felt it is not enough for the empowerment of grassroots democracy in the State. The state government did not conduct the elections of Block level and District level which is the clear signal that the State Government at that time was not so grave about the Panchayat empowerment in the state. The representatives demand that the State Government should enforce the 73rd constitutional amendment in the state or should amend the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Raj act according to the Provisions of the 73rd constitutional amendment. In 2016 the amendment made by the State Government in the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Raj act 1989 about the elimination of direct election provision for sarpanch at the Halqa level. Some state politicians raise the questions on this step of the Government some called it murder of Democracy.

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