

## **Gram Panchayats of Purulia, West Bengal: A Study of Governance and Service Delivery**

**Abhijit Ghosh**

*This study examines the link between the role of people's participation and institutional structure of panchayat body in ensuring good governance and improving service delivery system. All the gram (village) panchayats of Purulia, one of the backward districts of West Bengal, are considered. Four composite indices-service delivery index (SDI), Participation Index (PI) and Institutional Index (II), combination of many indicators, have been constructed. The other dimensions of governance having influence on the service delivery are incorporated in the model as a qualitative variable. Analysis shows that II and qualitative variables have no significant impact on SDI. This calls for reviewing and revisiting our existing public policy.*

### **I Introduction**

West Bengal is considered as the pioneering state in installing three-tier Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) holding continuous elections since 1978, two decades before 73 Constitutional Amendment Act. After coming to power, the Left Front took major initiatives to strengthen local level administration. In 1978 a new generation of panchayats started their journey in West Bengal. Having no interruption in holding election has ensured democratic environment and lively institutional structure of panchayats. The other unique feature of West Bengal panchayats is the direct participation of political parties with their party symbols.

PRIs are the nearest institutions of people. They rush to Gram Panchayat (GP) office when facing a problem. Over the years the activities of PRIs have been gradually increasing. But after 20 years of the enactment of 73 Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA), PRIs are still considered as the implementing agencies of state or central sponsored schemes or projects, overlooking their status of autonomy. However, the motto of 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA was to enable the panchayats to function as the Local Self-Government (Sahasranaman 2012). It is believed that people's participation enhances the service delivery efficiency of PRIs. On the other hand, one of the tasks of PRIs is to ensure the

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Abhijit Ghosh, Assistant Professor of Economics, Division of Economics, A N Sinha Institute of Social Studies, Patna 800001, Bihar, Email: abhijitghosh2007@rediffmail.com

The earlier version of the paper was presented in the 9<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Public Policy and Management, Indian Institute of Management, Bangalore, 2014. The author is grateful to the participants for their useful comments. Special thanks are due to Kalpana Gopalan for valuable suggestions.