

REPORT
OF
THE STUDY TEAM
THE POSITION OF GRAM SABHA
IN
PANCHAYATI RAJ MOVEMENT



सत्यमेव जयते

MINISTRY OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & COOPERATION
GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

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Letter of Transmittal

R. R. Diwakar,
Chairman,
Study Team on Gram Sabha.

New Delhi,
April 16, 1963.

My dear Dey,

I forward herewith the Report of the Study Team on Gram Sabha.

Almost immediately after the constitution of the Team, I had unexpectedly to go out of India for a considerable period, and so was not able to devote as much time to the study and the visits to the States made by the Team. Another member, Shri G. Venkatachalapathi, could attend only the first meeting and was prevented by illness from taking any further part in the Team's work. The Team was further handicapped by the fact that due to the emergency the two members of the Team, Shri B. S. Mehta and Shri Bhagwant Singh, had pressing calls on their time from their respective States, and could be with the Team only for short periods. In spite of these handicaps, it is satisfactory to find that the Team reached almost unanimous conclusions on most of the major points involved in the Study,

While we are all agreed that the Gram Sabha should be statutorily recognised and encouraged to play a more active part in village affairs, one of our members, Shri G. P. Jain considers that the Gram Sabha should be given a decisive voice in respect of

1. Annual Budget
2. Annual work programme
3. Review of the Panchayat's progress report, and
4. Control of expenditure.

His fear is that unless this is done, members of the Gram Sabha would not take any interest in it and would not attend its meetings. On the other hand, all the other members feel that it is unnecessary to lay down a relationship by statute in the immediate future. This matter has been fully argued in the report and Shri Jain's note of dissent is an expression of one of the two points of view.

It is, however, necessary to point out two inaccuracies in his note. It is not correct to say that 'It came to the Team's notice again and again during the field evidence it recorded that if the Sarpanch was

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keenly interested in calling a meeting of the Gram Sabha, he was indeed able to have a quorum'. Indeed the evidence is just the other way about. Even the most popular and active Sarpanches in Uttar Pradesh where this institution has been functioning for the last twelve years and over, had complained to us about the paucity of attendance at the Gram Sabha meetings and how they had to satisfy the requirements of the law through the device of an adjourned meeting which requires no quorum. Secondly we are very anxious to avoid a situation in which "The minority in the Panchayat will have a chance to carry its fight to the floor of the Gram Sabha and have its prevail". We do not envisage that village democracy would develop in this way. Factionalism has already gone too deep in rural areas, and the Gram Sabha should not provide an added instrument in the process. Finally, all Chief Ministers of States and an overwhelming body of responsible non-official and official opinion whom we consulted were of the view that while ultimately the Panchayat should be responsible to the Gram Sabha, the relationship should be allowed to develop gradually through a process of convention. We are clear that if Gram Sabhas do become active, their views would be respected by the Panchayats, even though they are not strictly binding on them. The development of the Gram Sabha is dependent on certain changes in the socio-economic climate in the village and it will be a process of time before these are achieved, but to do so in the present situation when villagers do not attend and do not take interest, would be putting the cart before the horse.

Shri Raghbir Sahai's dissent from the Team is on two minor matters. He wants gradation of Panchayats to provide them with incentives for good working and he feels that an educational qualification for a Sarpanch should be prescribed. There are at present 2/3rd States where such gradations exist, but we have not had enough experience on their working. Gradations will also involve problems of classification which may not be easy to resolve. Instead we have suggested that the more successful Panchayat should be provided with incentives in the form of increased monetary grants. If Panchayats can improve their working through incentives, these would be as good as those proceeding from the exercise of higher powers.

To make an educational qualification compulsory for the Chairman of the Panchayat and Chairman of the Samiti would disqualify about 80% or more of the rural population from aspiring for such a post. Secondly, we are not aware of many cases, where efficiency of Panchayats has particularly suffered from their Chairman and Panchayat members not being sufficiently literate. Finally, it would be difficult

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for the rural people to understand why this requirement is being asked of them, when it is not required for other elective posts either in the Panchayati Raj or in the States and the Centre.

The other matters raised in Shri Raghbir Sahai's note have either already been dealt with in the report or are outside our terms of reference.

Shri Pahadia's note needs no comment.

I thank you very much for the privilege you accorded to me in serving as the Chairman of the Study Team. It has helped me considerably to clarify my ideas on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Sd/-

(R. R. Diwakar)

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