

DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT AT GRASSROOTS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to underscore the pattern of grassroots democracy and governance in India and the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the development of rural areas. The paper is concerned with the evolutionary perspective of the Panchayati Raj as well as the role of Panchayati Raj in socio-economic growth, socio-political awareness of rural people and the role of local leadership for strengthening the roots of democracy in India. The 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution (1992) unequivocally prescribes that the Panchayats should be institutions of self-government through which powers are devolved to the people as to the participation in the process of planning for economic development and social justice, and implementation of schemes and programmes for these purposes. To strengthen and enhance the efficiency of local governance, PRIs were structured and designed as three tier system. The bedrock of this pyramidal structure is the *gram sabha* (or village assembly), composed of all citizens eligible to vote, and so the foundation of grassroots democracy. Whatever the case, the grass roots level institutions are important instruments in the process of development to lower levels and these processes are accelerated as and when common people identify themselves as active partners. There are so many facets to the issue of grassroots governance and development in India and it is very important because of more than 65 percent of India's population is rural and its fate and future are determined by these PRIs.

KEYWORDS: Panchayati Raj, Democracy