



**International Research Journal of Interdisciplinary & Multidisciplinary Studies (IRJIMS)**

A Peer-Reviewed Monthly Research Journal

ISSN: 2394-7969 (Online), ISSN: 2394-7950 (Print)

ISJN: A4372-3144 (Online) ISJN: A4372-3145 (Print)

UGC Approved Journal (SL NO. 47520)

Volume-III, Issue-V, June 2017, Page No. 246-258

Published by: Scholar Publications, Karimganj, Assam, India, 788711

Website: <http://www.irjims.com>

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**Rural Transformation Mandate for Panchayati Raj:  
A Governance Perspective**

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**Abstract**

*The idea of Panchayati Raj as has been conceived in the historical conceptual development sustained over long and meaningful debates in the Union Parliament of the country has prioritized the need to rebuild India with a strong and undiluted focus on the rural India. The entire constitutional machinery has accordingly been made to respond to orchestrate the very commitments of the Panchayati Raj system. The basic goal envisaged under the system is to grant roots to the democratic culture which needs to be deep rooted in the mass mind of the Indian people. Subsequent reviews of performance of Panchayati Raj have however made it clear that the desired 'teeth' for the institution needed to be provided to make Panchayati Raj to the dream delivery democratic machine that it has been considered to be. It has also been recurrently emphasized that Panchayati Raj in order to deliver at its best when the governance system fully satisfied the needs to confirm to the style of functioning as Panchayati Raj envisages. Recasting governance or gravitating governance appropriately hence is highly necessary despite sufficient satisfactory progress already achieved in this direction. It has to be rightly emphasized and noted that governance has to strike roots at the grassroots levels of democracy that is in the villages where the first tier proposed under three tiers Panchayati Raj model in the form of Gram Panchayat exists and works.*

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**Introduction:** The idea of Panchayati Raj as has been conceived in the historical conceptual development sustained over long and meaningful debates in the Union Parliament of the country has prioritized the need to rebuild India with a strong and undiluted focus on the rural India. The entire constitutional machinery has accordingly been made to respond to orchestrate the very commitments of the Panchayati Raj system. The basic goal envisaged under the system is to grant roots to the democratic culture which needs to be deep rooted in the mass mind of the Indian people. The most important Gandhi-Ambekar debate in the conceptual order with regard to the ideals and practical

achievements of Panchayati Raj, notwithstanding, the Nehruvian policies still granted Panchayati Raj a substantial potential as an institution to gather support for itself such that in due course with still the successive governments. Under various political parties and coalitions got its final desired say as a practically delivering constitutional mechanism with 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992. Subsequent reviews of performance of Panchayati Raj have however made it clear that the desired 'teeth' for the institution needed to be provided to make Panchayati Raj to the dream delivery democratic machine that it has been considered to be. It has also been recurrently emphasized that Panchayati Raj in order to deliver at its best when the governance system fully satisfied the needs to conform to the style of functioning as Panchayati Raj envisages. Recasting governance or gravitating governance appropriately hence is highly necessary despite sufficient satisfactory progress already achieved in this direction. It has to be rightly emphasized and noted that governance has to strike roots at the grassroots levels of democracy that is in the villages where the first tier proposed under three tiers Panchayati Raj model in the form of Gram Panchayat exists and works.

This paper seeks to deal with governance geared to work under the Panchayati Raj system to help achieve its rural transformation mandate. Accordingly, governance practices in use in the state of Arunachal Pradesh with example of the Panchayati Raj functioning in the West Kameng district of the state have been dealt with in order to show how effective governance helps in rural transformation and how much more effectively the governance mechanism has to further upgrade itself so that people's faith in an already popular development machinery like Panchayati Raj could be strengthened. The paper has been developed with five interrelated sections: 1. Introduction 2. Governance for Rural Development under Panchayati Raj 3. Governance with reference to practices and Panchayati Raj ideals 4. The case of Panchayati Raj in practice in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh, a North-eastern state with predominately tribal population, where governance has to effectively execute itself in translation of its potentials to respond to the Panchayati Raj goals of rural transformation. 5. Conclusion

**The paper has been developed adopting the following methodology:** Questionnaire-cum-interview schedule, developed on themes of Awareness and Understanding of the Panchayati Raj system, Enumeration of the Problems, Evaluation of Panchayati Raj System and Suggestions based on Awareness and Evaluation of PR System, has been administered to functionaries, beneficiaries and stakeholders of Panchayati Raj picked at random from the Panchayati Raj institution working in the West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh.

## **SECTION-II**

### **Governance for Rural development under Panchayati Raj:**

Rural development aims at the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. Major objectives of rural development are –economic development of rural people, increased participation of people in the rural development programmers, decentralization of planning and better enforcement of land reforms. Immediately after

independence the focus of rural development in India was laid on agriculture, industry, communication, education, health and allied sectors but later on it was observed that accelerated development can be possible only if governmental efforts were adequately supplemented by direct and indirect involvement of people at the grassroots level.

Since independence, Panchayati Raj System has been playing a very significant role in rural development in India. It has been carrying out the new role of rural transformation by implementing all rural development programmes / schemes of central government and state government as well. It has become an agent of change by transforming the rural villages into developed villages. It has helped in drawing people's participation in rural development programme at the grassroots level. Accordingly, rural development with emphasis on institutional framework begun in 1950 was strengthened in the year 1959. From this period onwards, the Government of India and State Governments, while implementing the rural development programmes, focussed on the institutional approach i.e. on the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions and it also acted as an Institution of Rural Transformation by implementing all the programmes of Government of India as well as the State Governments all over the country. (<http://odisha.gov.in/e-magazine/Orissareview/2014/Feb-March/engpdf/17-27.pdf> 09-6-17)

**Major Programmes for Rural Development:** The following major programmes are being operated by the Ministry of Rural Development:

1. Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act,
2. National Rural Livelihoods Mission,
3. Rural Self Employment Training Institute,
4. Mahila Kisan Sashaktikaran Pariyojana,
5. Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana,
6. Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana,
7. National Social Assistance Programme,
8. Deen Dayal Upadhyaya -Grameen Kaushalya Yojana,
9. Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojana,
10. Watershed Programme

With the foregoing schemes, rural development challenges have been sought to be addressed in a very ambitious, but target-bound way. In such context, we have to see as to how Panchayati Raj could be better made to grapple with the order of challenge set before it while taking the advantages of the schemes floated under the rural development.

Thus, it is essential to have a corresponding understanding of what the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has for guidance on Panchayati Raj functionaries at all levels.

**Ministry of Panchayati Raj:** The Ministry has the primary objective to ensure the compliance of the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution, provisions regarding the district Planning Committees as per Article 243 ZD and PESA. Schemes under the Ministry of Panchayati Raj are Panchayat Sashaktikaran Abhiyan, Rashtriya Gram Swaraj Abhiyan, e-Panchayat Initiatives etc. (<http://informatics.nic.in/index.php/news> retrieved on 15-6-2017) To addresses the major constraints of inadequate devolution of powers, lack of manpower, inadequate infrastructure and limited capacity in the effective functioning of Panchayats by providing manpower, infrastructure, training and promotion of devolution of power to Panchayats and put in place structures of accountability.

To help Panchayati Raj Institutions to develop governance capabilities to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) was announced in 2016. (<http://UPSCfever.com/upsc-fever/en/econo> retrieved on 15-6-2017)

### **SECTION-III**

#### **Governance with reference to practices and Panchayati Raj ideals Governance:**

Governance has become a key concept in the international development debate over the past few years. The concept of development was adapted for use at the international level in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The development goals of the Third World were considered to be achieved through transfers of capital and technical expertise (Hyden et al, 2002).

The word governance refers to the activities of a government. It refers to the rules and laws made by the government to be implemented through the bureaucracy. The process of governing people or a state is called governance.

Governance refers to the capacity of governments to manage resources efficiently and to formulate, implement and enforce sound policies and regulations and the respect for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them.

To consider (Bevir, 2007), the concept of governance is useful as he lays down that it offers a more diverse view of authority and its exercise. Theories of governance generally suggest that patterns of rule arise as contingent products of diverse actions and political struggles informed by the varied beliefs of situated agents.

Nagaraju, however, has a management view of governance as he says “governance is the management and implementation of the whole set of government activities dealing with the implementation of law, regulations and decisions of the government provide services to the public especially to the marginalized people. Governance means to make public services more responsive, accountable and proactive” (Nagaraju, retrieved on 29-3-2016).

Governance is the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented. Thus governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national governance and local governance. An analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decisions (UNESCAP accessed on 17-9-2009).

**Good Governance:** Understanding of “good governance” in terms of definition “varies from one organization [or person/author] to the other” (Agere, 2000:3). It is necessary to deal with the problems in equating governance with good governance (Kabumba, 2000).

The UNDP (1997:9 as in Kabumba, 2005) considers good governance as “a subset of governance”. It notes: “Governance embraces all the methods - good and bad - that societies use to distribute power and manage public resources and problems”. In addition, Good governance has major implications for equity, poverty and quality of life (Kalsi, et al, accessed on 25-03-2016).

“Good” or “democratic” governance is possible only when the authority of the government is based on the will of the people and is responsive to them. It is also possible only when open, democratic institutions allow full participation in political affairs and when human rights protections guarantee the right to speak, assemble and dissent. Further we can have Good” or “democratic” governance when government and governmental institutions are pro-poor and promote the human development of all citizens.

As far as PR in India is concerned, governance mechanism suitably needs to be geared to meet the ideals of good governance so that the rural development mandate for the PR is achieved in tune with constitutional expectations.

In this regard, the governance matters with reference to the PR in India have to be properly orchestrated so that proper harmony and cooperation at all tiers of the PR system and among all the players at elected representatives level and bureaucracy and government department personnel could help achieve rural development and modernization goals.

Because concepts such as civil society, decentralisation, peaceful conflict management and accountability are often used when defining the concept of good governance, Good governance is related with effective democratic governance and contributes to promoting democratic government (Nagaraju, retrieved on 29-3-2016). PR in context of Indian villages has the exercise in place to democratize the culture of cooperation and cooperative decision making so that development is ensured for the villages with the villagers’ contribution and collective dream and labour.

The World Leaders at the 2005 World Summit concluded that good governance is integral to economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, and sustainable development. The views of all oppressed groups, including women, youth and the poor, must be heard and considered by governing bodies because they will be the ones most negatively affected if good governance is not achieved (<http://allafrica.com/stories/20081209036>). In this line, PR in India could emerge in due course as the real game changer and villages can become healthy and good places to live in with economic opportunities being available to people for work and earning.

Khan (1998) refers to Bilney (1994:17) to define good governance as “the effective management of a country’s social and economic resources in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable and equitable” (Kabumba, 2005). In this connection, as far as PR in India is concerned, people in villages are better set to reap the benefits of good governance when PR bodies function with responsibility to take care of resources over which villages ideally may have collective rights of the villagers and put them to proper economic use for progress and prosperity.

The UNDP (1997b:9) equates good governance with “democratic forms of governance”. These forms “rely on public participation, accountability and transparency”. In case of PR India, participation is the fulcrum on which development has to be projected and turned by making people in villages take due benefit of governance. The aid policy followed by

international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) increasingly has good governance as one of the basic criteria for aid and loans to developing countries (Bevir, 2007). PR with good performance records making Indian villages better, richer and more democratically functioning can help India overcome challenges of poverty, illiteracy, disease in due course.

PR system has to be properly aware of the factors contributing to good governance such that PR bodies can gain maximum for the villages to develop them with governance mechanism already created to serve the poor and the needy and to re-cast the face of Indian villages.

The following factors contribute to good governance:

i) Good and job-oriented education facilities by the government, ii) Basic Infrastructure development like roads, bridges, power, telecom, airports, irrigation, transport etc., iii) Safety of life & property and peaceful law and order, iv) Creating new job opportunities in the private sector and the government, v) Effectiveness and efficiency of the working of government and its staff, vi) Good business environment with free-market economy, vii) Reducing digital divide and other inequalities in the society by positive discrimination in favour of the poorest of the poor and viii) Providing total freedom of speech, of religion, of work and an attitude of non-interference by government (Kalsi, et al, accessed on 25-03-2016).

PR bodies are likely to gain from knowledge of the Conditions of Governance Failure. By being on the check, people can prevent elements around that may be responsible for creating those conditions.

#### **SECTION-IV**

**Panchayati Raj in practice in the West Kameng District of Arunachal Pradesh:** This section by offering the district perspective on development achieved in the West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh attempts to critically evaluate the performance of PR.

Arunachal Pradesh is a land of villages. So, development of Arunachal Pradesh is highly linked with rural development as the objective of rural development is to provide better prospects to the people living in rural areas and to facilitate economic development, employment generation and welfare of SC/ST through Panchayati Raj Institutions. Like many other states Arunachal Pradesh has relied upon Panchayati Raj as a medium for rural development, empowerment of rural village and a mechanism to strengthen governance at local level. At present, Panchayati Raj Institutions are provided with more powers under 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Because of this constitutional amendment, Panchayati Raj Institutions have been assigned with 29 subjects to accomplish the task of rural development. This Act also mandates state government to endow the Panchayati Raj Institutions with such powers and authority as may be necessary to act as institutions of local self-government. Thus, the fundamental tasks of Panchayati Raj Institutions are to eradicate poverty, uplift standard of living of people living in rural areas and bring about a healthy society by creating awareness for hygiene, sanitation, eradication of illiteracy and to

ensure social justice to the rural people. However, now-a -days Panchayati Raj Institutions are emphasizing more on implementation of rural development programmes, rather than administration of local areas.

When talking of governance in relation to PR, it has to be carefully borne in mind that local governance in the context of a village and a group of villages in Aanchal Samiti, Block and District set ups has to be a matter of cooperation of the formal and informal actors in the decision making process. In this context, it needs to be seen as to how decision making is variously benefited or hampered due to the role of these formal and informal actors. In the PR system, all decisions are village-centric and these are taken with the cooperation of the concerned villagers only. Best of motives and cooperative processes in this situation can be the only help. However, transparency of goals and methods of execution of development decisions regarding the same could be the real motivating factor to influence the villages. Such transparency could be the contribution of governance mechanism.

**Enumeration of the Problems:** The demand for development in backward areas are top-driven i.e. the government departments from time to time in order to execute various schemes identify a particular area and introduce/implement the same. Such development, however, sometimes does not cater to the people's actual needs. In such cases not introduction of new schemes, but the selection of the site for implementation of the schemes by authorities is to be blamed. To address to the anomaly arising out of the above consideration it is necessary to seek feedback from the people of an area and then implement a scheme there. The bottom-driven approach to development of this nature would be in the actual order of response that rural tribal backward area people like those covered under the present study need. The following examples drawn from the responses explain the position better. It has to be emphasized that every area within a block and every village under an Aanchal Samiti or a Gram Panchayat has its unique set of problems. PR as a system with a vast potential to address to the problems of the villages through people's demands on one hand and their participation in the development activities on the other could be made to deliver most effectively if appropriate steps are taken to enlist people's prioritized demands and to solve them in reasonable time. Problems in the district as categorized on the basis of extensive field trips to the Aanchal Samities or Gram Panchayats covered under them may be as follows: agriculture, communication, health and education.

Development considerations need to be done under proper recognition of the priorities that the people of an area fix among their general nature of demands and that reasonably fulfills their immediate needs. The people of the four blocks in the district despite their differences in the nature emphasis on their problems present one unified approach to list their problems and demands. Food, health, education and communication form their important clusters of demands. Food part of their demand is about ration cards, PDS supply, updating of the BPL lists, updating of the Old Age Pension schemes and agricultural development that includes demands for irrigation channels, C.C. Steps and approach roads connecting to the newly established Palm sites and electricity supply for both irrigation and

lighting purposes in and around the Palms and the surrounding agricultural fields. The vulnerability of crops due to floods in certain areas of the district require high rising embankments or fencing walls of RCC and stones. Communication demanded by most of the villages are about approach roads to be constructed to connect the different nodes in the villages to the main road from where availing of transport could be possible for purposes of marketing agricultural produce, taking patients to the hospitals and for sending children to schools. The demand of the villages has been for education facilities with school to be supplied with teachers; school buildings to be added and properly roofed and maintained to prevent damage to the structures; schools to be connected through approach roads and properly provided with the facilities of electricity, drinking water supply and urinals and also schools to be properly protected with fencing arrangements. In certain cases where the distance between the villages and the school is very long, people have pointed out their problems demanding for up gradation of their schools. Health facilities being an important area of problems of the villagers, people have demanded for health facilities to be ensured with staffing of the new PHCs wherever these have been set up in the district.

**Performance of Panchayati Raj:** Under the present nature of limited GP role, the necessity of the post seems redundant and there is hardly anything to be satisfied when expectations are there from all sides and no actual work seems to be done because of acute funds crunch at the GP level and squeezing of power and authority of the GP in actual practice PR needs to be visible in its contribution making in ensuring people's comfort and their genuine and immediate needs on fronts of health, education (school going children's residential accommodation for both boys and girls as under SSA Scheme but fund limits need to be raised in consideration of rising costs of construction), hygiene etc.

Inadequate fund allocation leading to less and less number of works to be executed even though priorities are already drawn up (priorities are always in excess of the works for which fund is allocated) makes PR system expect to contribute more effectively in future when 29 subjects for which PRI, should be given responsibility and power, are granted by the state in fulfillment of the central government commitment in this direction.

Quality aspects of works executed through PRI is satisfactory because of people's involvement and their awareness of their own interest in the quality of work (Durability=Quality) but quality aspect is largely a matter of dissatisfaction because it is related to the injected amount of funds, what is needed is all prioritised works should be considered, adequate funds to execute them be given, quality monitoring may be done together with the inspection of the PRIs and the District authorities. It means that PR has guaranteed quality-wise greater satisfaction but quantity-wise much needs to be added.

**Works taken up by Panchayati Raj:** Panchayati Raj, in the opinion of the respondents, should undertake the following works:

1. Public sanitation
2. Water supply
3. School education



4. Drainage repair
5. CC steps
6. Awareness camp on World Environment Day
7. Construction & maintenance of roads
8. Proper supply of electricity

**The above finding** has been arrived at on the basis of understanding of the responses given by the beneficiaries and the PR functionaries as elaborately given below:

- More inflow of funds under specific development schemes based on needs and problems communicated could bring remedy to existing problems and ensure peoples' trust in the effectiveness of the members and make the PR system strengthened.
- Meetings should be held where Gram Panchayat members' case should be heard and given weightage for both consideration of works to be undertaken and funds to be allotted for the same with time limit reasonably given for completion of work. Further there should be clear cut mention of powers and functions for Gram Panchayat members, so that with appropriate coordination development works for the village people could be done via the office of the Gram Panchayat member.
- i) People's needs and village development works should be considered separately from narrow and parochial considerations based on party lines or leadership affiliations.  
ii) People in the village could focus more on the development works of the collective interests only if following MP/MLA elections, unanimity among people for cooperative co-existence in harmony is ensured through elected representatives at higher levels. This should narrow down and almost eliminate unwanted misunderstanding discourage growth of vested interest groups and ensure greater dynamic village people under GP to get development projects satisfactorily completed.
- Individual ASM's personality, popularity, coordination and persuasion in identification of needs, fixing up priorities, pursuing demands with the concerned authorities including the block and district officers and MLA are important factors. Dynamism and interest on the part of the ASM to work for the people with interest and commitment are important things which bind the GPMs together and also the villages under the GPs together for intra-GP and inter-GP level development works.
- State in response to PRI functionaries strike (2008) and in response to the central Panchayati Raj Minister's advice has reportedly shown its willingness to implement 29 subjects' transfer of and responsibility to the PRIs with provision for honourarium to the functionaries. Recent provisions show compliance in this direction on a graduated basis, but the pace being very slow, people's faith in the system and the functionaries is still facing the threat of erosion
- For the improvement of the Panchayat system few steps can be taken-
  - a) The GPMs should distribute the works among the villagers equally without any discrimination

- b) The GPM and ASM should cooperate with each other and also with the villagers
  - c) For the development of the village the Panchayat has to be active in relation to its work.
  - d) New faces should be introduced and the Panchayat members should listen their point of views.
- i) Meeting should be held where GPM's case should be heard and given weightage for both consideration of works to be undertaken and funds to be allotted for the same with time limit reasonably given for completion of work.
    - ii) Clear cut mention of powers and functions for GPM may be given so that with appropriate coordination development works for the village people could be done via the office of the GPM.
  - Regular office, minimum staffing and stationary assistance and conveyance money and vehicular support should be extended to the PRI (at least at ZPM level considering that it is immediately next in importance to MLA).
  - Authority and power to execute work as per entitlement under constitutional provisions needs to be given to the PRIs without unwanted forceful play of power by higher ups (work diversion, fund diversion, beneficiary selection etc. need be done exclusively by PRIs whereas at present overriding powers are exercised by representatives and government authorities & superseding and encroaching upon the jurisdiction of PRIs of various levels without consideration of political party affiliations elected PRIs must be given to exercise power & authority as due to them. Consultation and consideration to enlist decisions are required.
  - Frequency, regularity and content discussed at the Gram Sabha level to include more of the development problems and to ensure more and meaningful cooperation of the people required. (Rajja Meeting- General Meeting of the Villagers).
  - Once one set of works of a particular nature ( like C.C. Steps, foot path, drain) is completed, PRIs should be empowered to recommend other more pressing need areas of development to ensure better and efficient use of meager funds put at its disposal. Autonomy on the score is necessary to be allowed to encourage both creativity & additional areas of development concern.
  - Level and quality of deliberation at the Gram Sabha further upward meetings could be better achieved through ensuring certain levels of educational background for the PRI functionaries at all the levels (there would be more for understanding and for vigorous pursuing development matters with higher authorities and MLA. PRI as an effective pressure group representing the interests of the village could work then better and on the other hand its delivery efficiency could also be better promoted.
  - The existing limited number of training programmes on inculcating awareness among the PRI functionaries about their powers and functions is far too insufficient in consideration of the kind of the people from various educational backgrounds entering into the PRI bodies at present when no minimum education bars are laid down for eligibility and candidature. More such programmes would create situation

for effective dissemination of ideas at the level of the functionaries simply on the basis of their field experiences on people's expectations and demands from the government authorities on responsibility and accountability and also on the practical coordination needed to be struck at the levels of the PRIs, District officials, MLAs, MPs etc.

**Conclusion:** PR has been made to evolve under very difficult, but meaningful circumstances with the centre and the states in India in many ways giving their best of reasons and thought to give PR a shape and to grant it finally the constitutional status as an institution that has to carry out the mandate of rural transformation to a level where urban-rural divide is rendered meaningless and villages become viable great sites of collective and cooperative coexistence of villagers in peace, harmony and progress with constant positive orientation towards prosperity and well-being of all the villages and the villagers. This paper thus concludes by affirming that where PR is conceived as the critical ultimate tool so far developed to grant villages new lease of hope to seek out existence with confidence, dignity and all-round success, sound governance system put in place will guarantee the effectiveness of PR as a real rural transformation agency.

**{Acknowledgements:** The author is grateful to Dr. K.C. Mishra, Associate Professor in English, Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar whose valuable comments and suggestions have formed the basis of the perspective developed in this paper. The author is also thankful to all the PRI-functionaries, beneficiaries and stakeholders who have very kindly made themselves available for candid, clear and critical comments on the provisions, ground realities, and suggestions that have made analysis of the prevailing scene as presented here possible.}

#### **NOTES AND REFERENCES:**

Government plans, policies and programmes updated upto NDA Government of the present have been followed, on acknowledgement to the relevant government and related portals, as in relation to the relevant description and analysis of the same to help explain PR role in rural development with governance mechanism properly reviewed in terms of contributions it has been making while steadily responding to the changing patterns of pressure that the Union Government is exerting on it to make PR contribution effectively visible such that the rural level representation of the people at relevant lowest local level PR bodies is aided, enabled and encouraged to implement rural modernization schemes for all-round development of the rural life in India.

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