

Role and significance of the panchayati Raj in the situation of Covid 19.

- **Soumya Singh.**

Our aims must be to restore to the Villages the Power to meet their own requirement.

- **Rabindranath Tagore.**

Panchayats have been a very life full and very changing character of the villages of India from the very initial days of the past. In the year of 1946 the father of the nation said that the freedom of India should start from the roots of the country which is the villages. He said further every village of the country must be free and must concentrate some power of the panchayats. This thought of him has come true as the system of three levels of panchayats has been introduced in India. The 73rd amendment was passed to give them constitutional status. Panchayati Raj system, the way of participation has been opened for the general rural population. The basic qualities of this system is that it can exist in the states having the 2 million habitants. The panchayat was formed after a span of five years. Reserving the seat for women and other classes up to one third seats. To give authority and domain to the panchayat by the creation of the finance commission. For the growth and infrastructure development there must be the creation of a district finance commission.

After the constitution of the Uttarakhand state, initially it was called as Uttaranchal after the passing of Uttar Pradesh Reorganization Act, 2000. The state was doing well with the Uttar Pradesh panchayati raj act, 1947 till the year up to 2016. It was mostly 16 years of using the U.P.Panchayati Raj Act, that meant it simply took 16years for introducing and enforcing the Uttarakhand panchayati raj act, 2016. The act came into force on 4th April, 2016. The act has same three tier level of panchayat i.e. Gram panchayat, Kshetra panchayat and zila panchayat. The panchayati raj of Uttarakhand has removed the concept of Nyay panchayat. The main aim of panchayati raj of Uttarakhand after considering women as important in state has been to give the reservation from the 33 percent to 50 percent of seats to the women inclusive the STs and SCs. It is also given that 14% of the reservation is being given to the Backward Classes in proportion to their population.

There has been a survey which gave figures of village council as 7000, block council upto 95 and 13 district council in the state of UK. The election held in the year 2019, there were 70 thousand spokesperson as well as the head of panchayats out of which 50 percent were spokeswomen. After the establishment of the state, the dept. is endlessly are organizing the training Programmes for the chosen spokesperson and their personal efforts to evolve the panchayati raj system. The department of panchayati raj of Uttarakhand has been given more subjects to work for. The official of the panchayats who are zila panchayat president, block panchayat head, village panchayat chief would be person who would be incorporated to do task over these subjects that are e-panchayat, GPDP, Solid Waste Management, sustainable development goals, accounting method, women empowerment, disaster management, scheduled caste/ scheduled tribe related Programmes, right to information and so on. Along with these there has been much recreational and training given keeping in mind the welfare Programmes.

Currently the authority and the responsibility of the panchayat officially has been widely growing. The motive of the constitution is that the public have to choose their own development assignments through the gram sabha and form the self-governing body to help protect the resources by themselves. Now focusing the actual work of the panchayat there is planning of the Programmes for the infrastructure development in villages. Usually the assignment/tasks given to the village panchayats/gram panchayat are the assembling and aftercare of the water sources, highways or village roads which is the connection to the cities. The building of roads seems necessary to improve connectivity of the village to the cities; these roads, after being built, are being maintained by the authorities. There is so much politics that the roads are not maintained till years but at the arrival of elections these are being built. Some work of hand pumps in villages are being given by the panchayats, there is also the task to build some govt. schools and maintaining it. The other tasks of the panchayats are the impositions of the tolls, duty and charges and accumulation are some of the jobs of the panchayats. Even the implementation of the Programmes, plans and policy are the task and duty of the panchayat. Even they are the source of employment generation. Also the accumulation of taxes from the residents, markets are some of the major income sources for the panchayats. All the money which is received from the other schemes through other branches of the administration is sent to the panchayats for the further

development of the village and district's rural areas. Now the assignment or task of the district panchayat is the formation of the development planning in regards to the areas of district. The Samiti or the sabha are the one which decides how the funds to be distributed amongst the village council. The main job of the panchayat is to select beneficiaries. This sabha mainly controlled or supervised that they didn't misused their power.

- COVID 19 AND PROBLEMS FACED BY PANCHAYAT RAJ.

Other than 29 subjects which given in eleventh schedule of the constitution there are various other schemes, plan of govt. which has been the swachh bharat abhiyaan, digital India, Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana, Atal pension Yojana, Beti Bachao Beti Padhao are one of the schemes implemented by the panchayat raj. But this wasn't enough for the scheme. Due to the emergence of new situations in India such as Covid 19 there has been a huge burden on the officials of the panchayats raj. So basically Covid 19 is an infection, virus that transmits through immediate or exposure with an infected person/thing. This acts on the upper respiratory system such as the nose, throat and lungs. The corona virus is a new contagious, transmissible virus named Novel CoronaVirus. This infectious virus was first recognized in Wuhan, China in December 2019. This has been terribly infectious and but slightly destructive. The lethality estimate has been 23 percent. This has been much lower than SARS which has a fatal rate of 10 percent and MERS mortality rate is 35 percent as per the figures of 2012. This created a terror and nervousness due to the deficiency of certified facts and gossip. Due to the novelty of this virus, there has been absence of total, absolute statistics about the consequences that people have. Earlier in 2020. There were just very few Covid cases in India. Efforts were made to control the virus at the very initial stage. The phase of lockdown was imposed on the country but these were govt. departments which were not locked down. One of them was the institution of panchayati raj giving them more tasks to control this pandemic to spread out by providing them the authority to create places for quarantine. Self-government were ordered to create awareness regarding the Novel CoronaVirus. Efforts were made to sanitize the localities. In the pandemic, Mr. Narendra Modi has conveyed to the officials that the town's self-rule body can never be exaggerated. He says that the local self-ruling institutions of the nation are a very indispensable part in curbing out the Novel

CoronaVirus from proliferation. They say the real example we can take is of kerala. With its extensive past of dissolution and both initials and subsidiary healthcare having set down under the ambit of three tier establishments, panchayats in kerala are on the front line of interrelated authority in discovering, arranging health checkup camps, hygiene, social spacing message amongst people. In this the panchayats have played a vital role in supporting cultivation work by guaranteeing the supply of labour and access to condemning food in townley.

Other states have passed on a lot of authority to the panchayats as well as acknowledging their significance in preventing the proliferation of viruses. Lately National Disaster Management, 2005 has given responsibility to ensure separation of returnees and their families. To make sure a localized system of tackling the widespread of corona. The administration had made sure that the village council asked for the registration and method for the society monitoring. In nutshell, PRIs has come as the frontline organization to prevent and curb the virus. The roles of those organizations to get secure in the post-lockdown stage need appreciable efforts. Narendra Modi had a conference with hundreds of sarpanches from over the nation in the event of panchayat raj Diwas. He referred to the panchayats as an important element of growth, evolution and democracy. He launched the programme Swamitva yojana and involved the proper application of e- GramSwaraj/ portal which was a first step toward the digitization of village councils. These e-Gram swaraj yojana would help in formation of the plans, programme and also assist in the execution of these formed plan of village council. He appraised the sarpanches for the work they did as for ensuring the social space/distancing and supplied very indispensable data regarding the covid-19 on regular intervals. They even said that these must become self-sufficient to tackle this situation and supply basic items of need. ¹

When we see Uttarakhand situation in Covid time they have been given jobs/assignment given to the officials was mainly of mainly dealing with prevention of Covid by proper sanitizations in the villages and kshetra. There has been task given for creating awareness

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<https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/panchayats-pandemic-65185/> (visited on 1 may, 2021)

among public of rural areas. There were some registration for the migrants who returned back home for the purpose of quarantining them for about fourteen days. There were also distributing the sanitizers and masks packages to the poor's and village people. They even distributed the food basically the Rashaan to the village people. They have been also giving some employment to the migrants in some ways. We can also look the gram panchayat has played an important role in these Covid times. As the villages has prepared for these war against pandemic, gram panchayat is assisting all of them against pandemic. They at very ground level provides the grams with the consultation regarding prevention of the Covid. They were given job through Mgnrega. As per the state of Uttarakhand there has been the information that deserted homes in the district of Pauri Garhwal also known as "Ghost" Town, is known by such names as they have been unoccupied after the habitants move out of it. This was sort of beneficial for the state government which has been transferred it into isolation centres. The migrant returning are being kept for 14 days. After the rush by migrants the deserted homes were proved beneficial in keeping them isolated to prevent the virus to spread. These neglected homes and school building were converted into quarantine centres. They specifically selected those outside the villages to protect the villagers. There were up to thousand migrants being quarantine in those deserted homes. Panchayats were being given task of quarantine the migrant either in homes or isolated centres. Panchayats has played a vital role in setting up quarantine centres. Gram panchayats have made efforts of giving the meals, drinking water and clean toilets for those in the quarantine centres. Some gram panchayats of the state have successfully provided these basic needs with the assistance of local NGOs. Those NGOs were the one who helped financially maintain the isolation centres. They even selected beneficiaries to help in those procedures of maintenance. They even focused on the regular sanitization process. Another role of panchayats were becoming the messengers of the public at low level, basically towns and villages. They were given the assignment of making awareness about the virus to the societies and villages. Those assignments consisted of generating the awareness by telling them what kind of symptoms are of Covid -19 and how one can prevent this by taking preventive steps. They even took the assistance of localities as volunteers for these awareness drives. The gram panchayats along with some aids from the self-help groups of the district, NGOs did awareness drives through horns and announcements of Covid

regarding information in every areas. They even with the help of nagar nigam do proper sanitizing sprays to every locality in regular intervals. Another step taken by the panchayat at every level was the inspection, examination of the rumors, innuendo, misleading information on the media platforms, social web by sharing the original data. Also the task of reporting the false pictures, fake video to the police and making the society aware of such fake news of Covid-19. Another part played by the panchayats is that they were authorized for the regulation of the market and also creating a safe experience for the villagers in those markets. The job is to ensure that they have to look at the item the seller is selling out. They are directed to sell the essential important stuff which is basically for survival purposes. Village panchayats/ councils has met with the shopkeepers of the market and told them to follow rules for social distancing at mandis and regional haats. There were some issue arose as the some shopkeepers didn't followed rules but after many attempts they started taking precautions and became a new normal in the society. The another important step taken up by the panchayati raj were making sure food and survival of the public where most of the general public were in home without any employment. This issue of them with unemployment how they would raise their children, their needs without any jobs. The panchayats were then given tasks of providing them with basic food items. More than thousands of packages of the food grains were disseminated by the help of the government's Ration shops/ public distribution systems (PDS) , providing the Rationn to the poverty stricken public. We can say these PDS has kind of lit up some rays of hope that their life would become better after pandemic. As there was an ample Ration distribution held in the state. As an outcome of the lockdown, the funds of the farmers has been totally utilized leaving them with the ability to buy them the seeds for their next season of farming which can seriously affect the food supply of the state. Still the aids has been provided financial help of the farmers up to 2000 rupees for more than 50 million farmers. Subsequently they must choose more attainable farming procedures and method more like that utilizing the seeds more and more organic fertilizers. The employment was also the issue during the pandemic. For that purpose they have introduced the scheme of chief minister self-employment scheme. These programme basically center of attention on motivating youth and nomads returning back to the state for the freelancers, self- employed by keeping in mind the pandemic in mind. Loan facilities are to be provided to the eligible

applicants up to Rs 25 lakh in production process and Rs.10 lakh in service providing business scheme. The employment was provided in the scheme.

As there was a sudden jump in the Covid cases. There were officers of the panchayat given special duties in respect of the Covid 19 case to manage the various aspects of state pandemic action. There were the duties given of such as prevention of black market of drugs and oxygen, an officer for online registration, a nodal officer were given responsibilities in management in regarding the corporate social responsibility funding and chief minister relief funds. The nodal officers were given duties in respect of oxygen supply and Remdesivir supply. Nodal officers other duty was management of the transportation, deployment of oxygen tankers, quarantine center, Covid care centres, fire safety at Covid hospitals, uninterrupted power supply, Covid hospitals.

Other than this the Uttarakhand gram panchayat exists numerous awareness generation camps about the outbreak and spreading of Covid -19 is being organized in the village panchayat region has been perceiving the standard of the epidemic like social distancing and taking into consideration the hygiene protocol. A sequence of initiatives is being taken up to curb the outbreak and growth of noble corona virus in the village panchayat. In different areas of the village panchayat painting has been drawn to make villagers aware about the corona. The village panchayat were given tasks to generate awareness through whatsapp and facebook. Thus Social Media has been playing an important role in reaching out to people quickly. Another activity is of the health sanitization and other related like Hand sanitizers and masks have been provided regularly to the GP staff, poor and vulnerable people of the GP area, migrant labourers in the Quarantine Centres. Special arrangements have been made in the Quarantine Centres for supplying pure and sufficient drinking water, electricity. Besides, regular sanitization has been going on in the Quarantine Centres. Anticipating fatality, Gram Panchayat has initiated several precautionary steps before the Lock Down period such as postponement of all prescheduled ceremonies and social gatherings; and observance of minimum distancing between the customers. The heads and management boards of all the religious places have been requested to control their gatherings and all of them have responded positively. Posters on

Do's & Don'ts have been displayed in public places. There have been initiatives for quarantining the migrant labours. The VP has very successfully identified the migrant workers and also corona affected persons in the vicinity of its area. Considering the seriousness of the situation, the VP has taken the decision to extend what kind of help and to whom. The government school has been converted into an Isolation Ward under the supervision of Sarpanch and the pds Public Distribution System has been strengthened to enable all poor and vulnerable people to get their mandated ration without any difficulty. GP functionaries have been monitoring the distribution of ration very closely.

- **The main aspect of success of Gram Panchayat is as follows:**

Enormous support and appropriate cooperation have been received from the Block and District level officers. The GP has encouraged the farmers to continue agriculture and horticulture related activities, maintaining social distancing and abiding by all necessary safety measures. Voluntary team comprising rural youth has been working against the Covid19 crisis under the leadership of Elected Representatives. At present GP has taken highly responsible initiative to distribute the allowance, declared by state government

Covid-19 has posed a great challenge and has given enough opportunities to serve people during the pandemic. Our team is very active and working day and night to create awareness among people regarding Guidelines issued by the government and to help the people to come out of the clutches of the deadly virus. Some of the works performed by our team is as follows-

1. Door to door communication of Covid protocols and do's and don'ts by efficient Anganwadi workers and Aasha workers.
2. Use of vehicle mounted land speaker to aware people about Corona guidelines.
3. Sanitization of Gram Panchayats.
4. Distribution of masks by our team to needy villagers
5. Spreading awareness about the third wave of Corona pandemic.
6. Constitution of Village Monitoring Committee (VMC) at village level headed by Gram Pradhan and teachers, Aanganwadi workers and Aasha as its members.

7. Provision of employment to villagers through MGNREGA.

- **CONCLUSION**

By these tasks/ duties in this whole situation of the pandemic by Panchayats this is made evident by the fact that they have played and still playing an essential role in the situation of Covid in district as well as rural areas. They may be slow in their work but still they are trying their best in this ongoing pandemic. How they tackled situations like reluctance of the general public, sanitization, PDS, Isolation Centre. They have been successful in those assignments given to them from the previous year. They have emerged as the pandemic warriors by protecting the habitants of Zilla and Gram. They have taken seriously the word of Mahatma Gandhi “I shall live for an India in which the poorest shall feel this is his country, in the making of which he has an effective voice. And making efforts in saving the general public of zila in this situation of pandemic.