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BEST PRACTICE OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT: A STUDY OF PUNSARI VILLAGE

Abstract:

This is 8 years back when district administration stitched up funds from various heads of the district development fund - and started focusing on development of village (lowest administrative unit) named Punsari, Gujarat State (province) India. generally when we listen to the word village the first impression which strikes our images is, mud houses, narrow potholed roads , no drainage and drinking water facilities with socially backward and unconnected people, but Punsari is different story altogether . Punsari has been constructed as a "model village" by the intervention of state government and its young headman, Himanshu Patel. He proudly states that his village offers "the amenities of a city but the spirit of a village". Narendra Modi, Present Prime Minister of India and former chief minister of Gujarat has sent officials to study Punsari and its development model and prepare a project for creating model villages all over the country. The village has also been visited by "more than 300 officials" from all over India who want "to learn how they can replicate our model in their states", Mr Patel proudly claims that the village has public announcement systems, CCTV cameras to provide 24/7 security for villagers, free WiFi connectivity at public gathering places, portable drinking water at affordable price, mobile library, two primary schools with WI Fi connection and projector facilities, gaming zones and internet café for students and children and other basic facilities like health , education drainage, are on par with urban standards Punsari makes a perfect case study as the local self-governance model and this can be a role model for rural India with respective changes accordingly to the local demands. I would discuss the transformative challenges in convincing the villagers and bringing the best practice out of it and its impact on rural development.

Keywords:

Punsari, Local Self Governance, Model Village, transformative, Wi Fi connectivity.

Introduction to Local Self-Government

Local self-government operates at the lowest level of society. It works at the grass root level to the people touching their everyday lives. Local self-government, to borrow a phrase from Sydney Webb, is “as old as the hills”. This can be more true of India than any other country of the world. There is sufficient evidence to establish the fact that the institution of local self-government is almost, pre-historic, and the conception of local self-government is indigenous to the Indian soil. Municipal governments have flourished in India since times immemorial. While empires rose and fell, village panchayats which formed an integral part of the national life, helped to preserve democratic traditions in social, cultural, economic and political life, survived the onslaughts of centuries of political upheavals and saved Indian society from disintegration. The existence of local bodies in ancient India is a positive proof of the inherent genius of our people to manage local affairs efficiently and on a decentralized basis.

Local government is government at the village and district level. Local governments got a fillip after the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Acts. Later in 1992, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were passed by the Parliament. The 73rd Amendment is about Rural Local Governments (which are also known as Panchayati Raj Institutions or PRIs) and, The 74th amendment made the provisions relating to Urban Local Governments (Nagarpalikas)¹. The 73rd and 74th amendments have created uniformity in the structures of Panchayati Raj and Nagarpalika institutions across the country. The 73rd and 74th Amendments came into force in 1993.

Rural Local Governments (or Panchayat Raj Institutions) under this comes Zilla Panchayat , Mandal Or Taluka Panchayats and Gram Panchayats. Then comes Urban Local Governments (or Nagarpalikas) which has Municipal Corporations, Municipal councils and Nagar Panchayats. In 1882, Lord Ripon believed that the aim of Local Self Government was to train the Indians to manage their own affairs themselves.

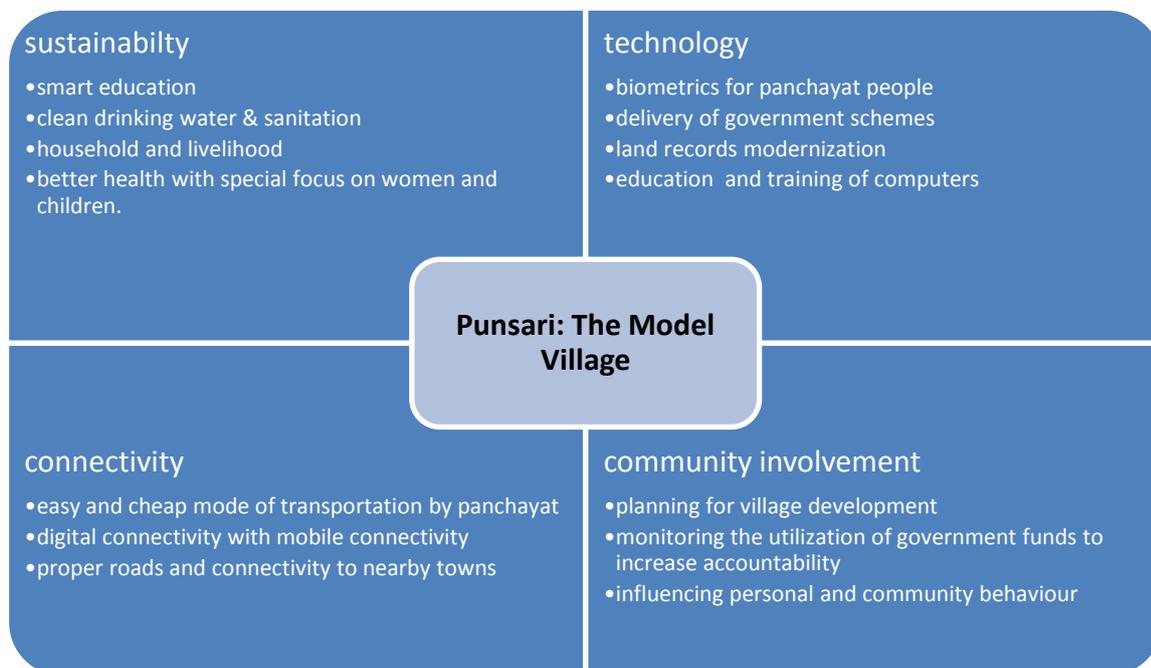
¹ Panchayati Raj in India: Theory & Practice (2nd Rev. & Enlg. Edn.) By S. Rajneesh S.L. Goel

Evolution of Local Self-government in Gujarat

Panchayati raj has come into existence as an important measure in the direction of decentralization from the very beginning in Gujarat state. Gujarat panchayat act 1993, is in force in Gujarat state subject to the 73rd amendment in the constitution of india. By this act, the management and monitoring of the state is done. There are 33 district panchayat, 247 taluka panchayats.

Punsari, the Model Village: Key Elements

If we study the elements of how a smart and model village should be then of course Punsari stands true to the theme of model village.



The main strength which leads Punsari towards a smart and model village and differentiates it from other village is the strong panchayat in terms of finances functions and functionaries & also the potential to inculcate and work for the village.

If we see Punsari and compare it to other villages like Kumbalangi village in Kerala, Ankapoor in Telangana, Hiware-bazaar in Maharashtra we see that these villages are focusing on a particular theme like Hiware bazaar is considered a model for community led. Ankapoor village has focus on agriculture with equal focus on irrigation, watershed management and technology led cultivation should be the way forward. The Kumbalangi approach is to boost tourism and provide livelihood to local communities. But in comparison to all villages Punsari is the village which has looked upon each and every aspect and not has just focused on single development its overall development which Punsari has and that is the reason that it has become a role model village².

Overview of Punsari Village



Punsari is a village located in Sabarkantha district in the state of Gujarat, India. The village is located at about 80 km from the state capital, Gandhinagar. The village follows the Panchayati raj system. It has undergone a transformation under the panchayat. The day starts with gods prayer which is been played by panchayat everyday through loudspeaker. The people there look so happy as they have a well organized day that they do instead of just sitting. Many villagers are employed with dairy products so for them a special bus is arranged which takes all the villagers to the diary

² Accumulation in Post-Colonial Capitalism edited by Iman Kumar Mitra, Ranabir Samaddar, Samita Sen

so that they can collect all milk and then they can produce dairy products. It's like very small things which are done in a planned way. Every morning the panchayats tractor comes to collect all the garbage from every house of the village. Even if we see the medical records there is 100% vaccination provided in the village and even the IMR and MMR rate is zero which is very commendable . The hospitals are clean and special wards for women are also there. Even for young generation there are many programmes launched like computer programs beauty courses etc as earlier students used to go to city nearby in vacations for learning new courses but now its available in punsari itself so the migration level has gone down. Earlier students used to go to private school was around 350 but now every student goes to the primary school and there records are been sent to their parents. Even the shocking news is that the panchayat works so effectively here that since 3 years no FIR has been filed in punsari village. Every road has cctv cameras and the cctv footage is also accessable by all the people in village by wifi they can check who came when to their village and everything.. its really amazing that such an effective gram panchayat works they even have biometric system for all panchayat people and its now getting recognized. More than 1 lakh people have visited this village just to study the working of it.

Hence these small things are need to be adapted by every village and it will help like how tha sarpanch works how it makes the policies and programmes easily available to the people. And we cant make the village smart easily infact all the departments should work smartly and should try to make a model for rest village.

Proper water system and many facilities for villagers

In punsari village there is facility for drinking water by creating a RO plant in the village. Moreover they have created a water tanker for special occassions use of water like in weddings and functions. There is also a complete underground drainage system and at bus stops there are water coolers for all to drink water. The water bottles are also created there which give employment to many people in the village. The panchayat also runs a

bus name Atal express named after former prime minister of India for transporting women and girl student free and men have to pay nominal fee.

There is also working women's groups who have deposited 32 lakhs of savings and are about to open a new convention and shopping centre. There are about 1000 women in only 100 punsari sakhi mandal. The Sarpanch stresses on 24*7 hospitals in the close vicinity of the village.

Electricity and Education at Punsari

The next thing is a 65 kv sub station that supplies power to that area, powering the rurban lifestyle that the village has. Most of punsari village household is derived from agriculture with potato and cotton as the crops of season while enroute to the school. There are two primary schools in Punsari and the school drop-out rate is zero. To keep a check on quality and ensure regularity of classes, CCTVs have also been installed in all schools. The classrooms are well-equipped and also have education technology aids such as projectors He has provided computers in school's classrooms and it's accessible for all like for another village students also. And also another school is there which is fully equipped with computer labs.

The sarpanch says that the village also tackled the problem of collecting taxes by incentivizing of filling taxes with syntax tanks and shows us a shopping Centre that has been built up for the benefit of mahila mandal . The credit for this astonishing transformation of Punsari goes to their Sarpanch, Himanshu Patel. Mr. Patel, first elected Sarpanch in 2006 at the age of 23, is a graduate and a tech-savvy man. He leads an 11-member committee which runs the village affairs. Of these, five are women. They have installed 140 waterproof speakers at strategic locations in the village. The speakers not only broadcast bhajans, shlokas and Gandhian philosophy, but also keep people informed about the new schemes, government regulations and projects that they can avail of.

While many in the cities lack an insurance cover, every person in the village has a cover of Rs 1 lakh and a medi-claim policy of Rs 25,000. The village panchayat pays an annual premium of Rs 25 lakh against the insurance.

The Reverse Osmosis plant in the village supplies 20-litre cans to houses for a token amount of Rs 4. With all these advancements, if the idea was to stop migration out of the village, it has been a partial success. Around 15-20 families have returned to the village from the cities like Mumbai in recent years. He has even proposed Government of Gujarat to set up GIDC nearby so that youngsters don't need to migrate for job.

A move towards replication of Model Village

In June 2014, the additional secretary of the Rural Development ministry of the Union government visited the village to study this model so that it can be replicated across 640 districts in India. The visit was prompted by the PMO and adds that more than 300 officials have made similar visits from all over India to recreate similar villages. The model can be easily replicated in India. It only takes smart planning, dedicated people participation and a non-corrupt system. Impressed with the village and in awe of the village's unprecedented progress graph, the Kenyan delegates left with an indelible thought of powering the 'rurban' – rural area with urban facilities – lifestyle that Punsari has come into prominence for. Patel was the first sarpanch in Gujarat state to launch the gram panchayat website in 2009. The village was given a B+ rating during the Gunotsav 2011, an annual education campaign run by the state government. The school dropout rate is zero in Punsari. Closed-circuit cameras, Reverse Osmosis water purifying plants, air-conditioned schools, Wi-Fi, biometric machines have been installed. It took about eight years and Rs.16 crore to make an impact. 'Punsari Model' has been such a success that 500 panchayats in Gujarat alone have adopted it. Punsari now has a bottled drinking water plant, around of Rs. 10-lakh. Bus facility is also been arranged for transporting milk to the diary. The village has demonstrated the understanding of various government schemes available and shown the ability of leveraging them properly to bring about a qualitative change at grass root level.

Conclusion

Presenting one of the best models of local governance, the model of local self-government at Punsari should be replicated by other state villages as well because decentralization is the key to development. Decentralization facilitates greater popular participation in governance. It brings government closer to the people, and thus enables citizens to be better informed and better understand the conduct of public business. Decentralization, manifested in a participatory style of local governance, fosters greater social cohesion and stability, and encourages reconciliation between local interest groups and a convergence around common interests. And therefore, Punsari has been able to become a model village as it encompasses all these principles of local governance.

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