

CONCEPT NOTE

“25 YEARS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN INDIA: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES”

**TWO-DAY NATIONAL SEMINAR TO BE ORGANIZED ON 18TH AND 19TH AUGUST 2017 BY THE
CENTRE FOR REGULATORY STUDIES, GOVERNANCE AND PUBLIC POLICY AT THE WEST
BENGAL NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF JURIDICAL SCIENCES, KOLKATA**

I. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Panchayati Raj system in India is one of the unique and sought-after institutional frameworks that not only supports effective management of resources through democratic decentralization but also promotes knowledge creation and capacity building through training and other organised activities. The Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads are the three independent tiers within the Panchayati Raj framework. All the three tiers of local self-governance take part in participatory planning, in institutional development, in resource mobilization and, most importantly, in the administration and effective implementation of rural development schemes and programmes.

Even though the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) seem to be a gift of modern democracy, in reality, they have been existing since centuries. If we look through the lens of history, we see that similar institutions existed in the time of Rig Vedas (1700 BC), in form of self-governing village bodies named ‘Sabhas.’ The importance of the Sabhas can also be seen in the great epic Mahabharata in the form of ‘Panchala Kingdom,’ which was a mahajanapada of ancient India. The name Panchala janapada indicates that it was a mix of Five Janas. Furthermore, the system of Janapada, flourished between 1500 BCE and 500 BCE. Arguably, the earliest mention of the term ‘Janapada’ occurs in the Aitareya and Shatapatha Brahmana texts. Over time, these Janapadas evolved to be Panchayats, which was a council of five persons. These Panchayats were productive institutions responsible for local governance and administration. They had wide powers, both executive and judicial. Land was

distributed by the Panchayats, which also collected taxes out of the produce and paid the government's share on behalf of the villages. These institutions existed for centuries (albeit in different forms) although, arguably, during the Mughal and British regimes there were signs of erosion of these institutions. The early 20th century marked a revival of these institutions and the British policy of 'divide and rule' eventually made way for political decentralization. The importance of local self-government found its demand with the Royal Commission on Decentralization in 1907 under C.E.H. Hobhouse, where the commission recommended: "it is most desirable, alike in the interests of decentralization and in order to associate the people with the local tasks of administration, that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village Panchayats for the administration of local village affairs." The observations of the Commission were further consolidated with the introduction of the Montague-Chelmsford reforms in 1919 that tried to bring the Panchayat system as a provincial transferred subject, under the domain of Indian ministers in the provinces. By 1926, eight provinces of British India had passed Panchayat acts and six native states had passed Panchayat laws. The Panchayats in India eventually evolved under the Government of India Act, 1935. In the Constituent Assembly debates, especially the one that was held on 19th November, 1949, lively discussions on the pros and cons of the Panchayat System ensued. Because of that, a directive to the state came in the form of Article 40 of the Indian Constitution. Article 40 reads, "The State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."

In independent India, the system was introduced in October, 1959 in Naguar district of Rajasthan pursuant to the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, 1957. Apart from the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, several other committees and commissions were instituted to look into the functional autonomy of the Panchayati Raj framework. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 formalized the framework by creating PRIs as institutions of local governance. Vide the 73rd Amendment, a new Part (Part IX) was appended to the Constitution and new articles defining gram sabhas, composition of Panchayats, reservation of seats, etc., were added. Since the Amendment, almost all states except Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram adopted the system. As of today, the PRIs are enabling foundations supporting the cause of bottom-up development and institutional capacity building at the grass-roots level.

II. NATIONAL SEMINAR ON 25 YEARS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN INDIA

Year 2017 is the 25th year of the Panchayati Raj system since the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 formalized the institution. While the system has stood the test of time and has been instrumental in promoting inclusive growth in rural areas, there are institutional and behavioural issues plaguing the framework. Also, while some states such as West Bengal, Kerala, Karnataka, etc., have effectively implemented the system, quite a few states have failed to do so. There are also accountability and transparency issues at various levels of the three-tier system. In view of the rising issues and concerns, the Centre for Regulatory Studies, Governance and Public Policy (CRSGPP) at the West Bengal National University of Juridical Sciences (WBNUJS), Kolkata intends to organize a two-day National Seminar titled “25 Years of Panchayati Raj System in India: Issues and Challenges” on 18th and 19th August, 2017 at WBNUJS.

The Seminar will be graced by dignitaries, academicians and stakeholders, who have expertise in the given field. The speakers and panelists will focus on the flaws and the merits of the prevailing PRIs in India and the ways to revamp the institutions.

The Seminar is also open for paper presentations. Teachers, policy makers, government officers, lawyers, undergraduate and postgraduate students of law and social sciences, research scholars, etc., are invited to participate in the Seminar. Up to 40 presenters may present their papers during the event.

Those who wish to participate and present a paper in the Seminar can do so by submitting an abstract to papers.crsgpp@gmail.com on or before 10th July 2017. The sub-themes of the Seminar are mentioned below.

III. OBJECT & RATIONALE

The purpose of the Seminar is to examine and analyze the effectiveness of PRIs not only in promoting rural development and capacity building but also in fostering the cause of social justice and equitable growth. Another object of the Seminar is to know how far and how much the best practices and the capacity building initiatives have been effective at the operational level. Yet another objective is to identify the difficulties faced by the local-level

decision-making units in monitoring and implementing rural development policies and schemes. In order to attain the above objectives, the Seminar intends to determine the loopholes that exist in the PRIs and the real problems confronting the beneficiaries. In addition, the Seminar intends to focus on social, political and legal issues and to seek suggestions from the policy makers, members of the civil society, noted academicians and stakeholders about possible solutions regarding overhauling the PRIs. The participants will try to explore ways by which the administration of PRIs in India can be enhanced.

IV. PROGRAMME DESCRIPTION

The two-day National Seminar on “25 Years of Panchayati Raj System in India: Issues and Challenges” will be held on 18th and 19th August, 2017 at WBNUJS, Kolkata. The Seminar shall commence at 10 am on 18th August, 2017 and shall conclude in the evening of 19th August, 2017. A detailed programme schedule will be sent to the presenters, participants and guests in a few weeks.

Apart from the 40 presenters, the organizers of the two-day National Seminar may accept registrations for 20 (twenty) participants on a first-come-first-served basis. At the end of the Seminar, Certificates of Presentation / Participation shall be given to all presenters / participants. **Certificates will not be issued in absentia.**

The Seminar will be divided across sessions, which may include parallel sessions, and will be based on sub-themes mentioned below. The Seminar deliberations will be moderated by distinguished guests and learned academicians.

V. INTENDED OUTCOME OF THE SEMINAR

The two-day National Seminar will benefit not only the main stakeholders involved in the administration of various rural development plans and programmes but also the rural community in identifying the prospective roles and functions of PRIs. The Seminar will help us in finding the merits and defects of the PRIs. It will also help us know the efficacy of the statutory and constitutional framework vis-à-vis the PRIs. Last but not the least, it will let us know how far the issues of equity and justice are being addressed through these institutions.

VI. SEMINAR SUB-THEMES

- (1) Justice, equity and inclusive growth under the PRIs.
- (2) The role of women in the development and consolidation of PRIs.
- (3) Mobilization and utilization of own source revenue.
- (4) The Role of the Indian Constitution in augmenting laws and policies on PRIs.
- (5) The social and legal problems facing the PRIs.
- (6) E-panchayats and the role of information technology.
- (7) Role of PRIs in rural development.
- (8) Institutional capacity building through training and community participation.
- (9) The relevance of Nyaya Panchayats under the ongoing legal regime.
- (10) The role of law in ensuring transparency and accountability in PRI institutions.

VII. SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

ABSTRACTS

- (1) An abstract of **not more than 300 words** on any of the aforementioned sub-themes must be sent to papers.crsgpp@gmail.com on or before 10th July 2017.
- (2) The abstract must be accompanied with a brief profile of the author that should include Author's (i) Name (ii) Designation (iii) Institutional Affiliation (iv) Mobile Number (v) Email-Id.
- (3) **Co-authorship is not allowed.**
- (4) The abstract must be in MS-Word format (.doc or .docx) and in A4 size paper with one inch margin on all the sides. It must be typed in Times New Roman (Font Size 12) with 1.5 line spacing.

(5) The abstract **must have a title and must mention the sub-theme** on which such title is based.

(6) The abstract **must encapsulate the main objective(s) and argument(s)** of the paper.

FULL PAPERS

(1) Detailed submission guidelines will be mailed to the authors once their papers are selected. Notification of selection of papers will be made on or after 14.07.2017.

(2) Any other guidelines will be notified to the authors once their papers are selected for presentation.

VIII. SELECTION OF ABSTRACTS

Abstracts will be reviewed by a team based on certain criteria to be decided by the Centre. Only those authors whose abstracts are selected for presentation will be notified on or after 14.07.2017. **The decision of the Centre regarding selection of abstracts shall be final.**

IX. REGISTRATION

The Registration form is available at the end of this Note. The Registration fee, which includes registration kit, Lunch, teas, etc., but does not include accommodation, is as follows:

(1) For Paper Presenters – Rs 1,500/-

(2) For Participants – Rs 750/-

Presenters/Participants need to send scanned copies of the filled-up form and of the National Electronic Fund Transfer (NEFT) Payment acknowledgement (received from the bank after successful remittance of money) to crsgpp@nujs.edu. Registration of Presenters/Participants for the National Seminar opens on 15/07/2017 and closes on 30/07/2017. Authors whose papers are accepted for presentation need to register them as Presenters. In case of non-acceptance of respective papers, the authors can register themselves as Participants, provided they are among the first 20 (twenty) participants, who shall be accepted on a first-come-first-served basis.

The mode of payment of Registration fee is NEFT. The Bank Account Details for NEFT are as follows:

- (1) Name of the Account: **THE W.B.NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF JURIDICAL SCIENCES, CRSGPP**
- (2) Account No: **066300101009449**
- (3) Bank: **Corporation Bank**
- (4) Branch: **NUJS Campus, Kolkata**
- (5) IFSC Code: **CORP0000663**

X. IMPORTANT DATES

- (1) Abstract Submission: **10/07/2017**
- (2) Notification of Acceptance of Papers: **14/07/2017**
- (3) Registration Opens: **15/07/2017**
- (4) Registration Closes: **30/07/2017**
- (5) Final Paper Submission: **14/08/2017**
- (6) Seminar: **18/08/2017 and 19/08/2017**

XI. CONTACT INFORMATION

Prof. (Dr.) T. R. Subramanya,

Research Fellow and Coordinator, CRSGPP, WBNUJS

E-mail id: tr.subramanya@gmail.com

Phone No: 033-25694700 (Ext: 7211)

REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL SEMINAR ON 25 YEARS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN INDIA:
ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

DATES: 18TH AND 19TH AUGUST, 2017

ORGANISED BY CRSGPP, WBNUJS

1. Name of the Applicant:

2. Designation/Affiliation of the Applicant:

3. Name of the Institution (Postal Address, Phone and E-mail):

4. Contact Details of the Applicant (Postal Address, Mobile No. and E-mail):

5. Registering as a Presenter or Participant:

6. NEFT Details (No, Bank, Date):

I declare that all the information provided above is true to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature of the Candidate

Date: