

Panchayati Raj institutions yet to don mantle of educators

Special Correspondent

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Fourteen years after the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, the envisaged greater role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in providing quality education mostly remains on paper. In the absence of a political will to implement the provisions, coupled with bureaucratic indifference in developing power to the PRIs, the goals of better accountability, larger resource mobilization and greater empowerment of the marginalized populations have been mostly left unfulfilled, observed a forum of experts who discussed the role of PRIs in universalisation of quality education here over the past weekend.

The existing legislations emanating from the 73rd Amendment lacked teeth through focused attention by local players still could enable significant change. Once the communities decided to bring about changes even with little help from the political and bureaucratic hierarchy, good results were possible, they said. The two-day national seminar was organised by the Aga Khan Foundation as part of a series of such exercises being carried out all over the country on PESLE (Programme for enrichment of school level education).

“Even 8 years after the formal launch of Panchayati Raj it continues to face teething troubles. It did not have a natural growth,” said Rajasthan Chief Secretary Anil Vaish at the inaugural function.

Conflicting situation

When it came to education, the situation was conflicting “Primary Education needs democratic decentralization but standardization needs centralization,” he

said pointing out that in a vast State like Rajasthan the Race often had been between quality and quantity.

In his keynote address, Laxmidhar Misra, Former Labour Secretary, observed that the country was yet to fulfill the obligation of ensuring education to all under Article 21 A of the Constitution.

It was important to examine the institutional Relationship between the Education Department, Panchayati Raj Institutions and civil society at each level and reflect on the extent to which community had been empowered, he said.

“I am feeling very Disappointed. No State Government has taken the initiative or shown the political will to implement the provisions of the 73rd and 74th Amendments in letter and in spirit,” noted George Mathew, Director of the Institute of Social Sciences, Delhi. “The real powers envisaged by the amendments have not been handed over to the PRIs”, he said.

He termed the politicians, bureaucrats, the dominant caste groups in the villages and the middlemen as the four enemies of the Panchayati Raj System.

Dr. Mathew suggested doing away with the provision of the local area Development Funds of both the Members of Parliament and State legislators.

“Development should be concern of the panchayats which are the institutions of self-government. They will do all the development,” he said.

Former Rajasthan Chief Secretary M.L.Mehta suggested that PRIs must help their communities do “bottleneck

planning” by identifying the obstructions in achieving quality in their schools and then by removing them. Ajay Mehta of the National Foundation of India felt that panchayats needed a vision,

A diverse group of people representing eight to nine States, from international and national funding agencies, academicians, NGOs, Panchayati Samiti members, teachers’ union representatives and members of local governments shared their grassroots experiences at the seminar.

Yogendra of BODH Shiksha Samiti noted that BODH had refused to wait for the right and space for self-governance to be “given” from the top. “By simple convergence of those with a stake in the village’s school-the teachers, the panchayat, the parents and the larger community- critical problems were identified and solutions found.

The result was the creation of a thriving empowered school that attracted other villagers and panchayat members, he said.

Water harvesting will boost farm productivity: SOZ

Staff Reporter

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‘We are working with experts to ensure that all got water’

Union Water Resources Minister Saifuddin Soz Has Said the water harvesting schemes launched by his Ministry will ensure that India is among the top four countries in agricultural productivity in future.

He was speaking at a workshop on traditional water harvesting organised by Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti here on Wednesday.

Mr. Soz said the schemes would push up the agriculture growth rate to 4 per cent, “India will become known among the comity of nations for its food productivity. As agriculture yield depends on good supply of water, we are working with experts to ensure that that water reaches everybody.”

Senior journalist Mrinal Pande stressed the need to involve women in water harvesting. “Women are aware how much water they need for their household work, so their involvement is necessary,” she said.

State of Yamuna

Ms. Pande expressed unhappiness over the fact that despite spending crores of rupees on cleaning the 22-km stretch of the Yamuna in Delhi the river was still very polluted. “I want to know where all the money has been spent,” she said.

Veteran Gandhian and social activist Subba Rao said a nationwide “Jal Satagraha-2007” was launched on April 18, as it was on this day Mahatma Gandhi challenged the might of the British at Champaran in Bihar.

Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti director Savita Singh said “Jal Satyagraha-2007” was launched to deal with problems relating to the fast depleting water resources.

- Involve women in water harvesting schemes: Mrinal Pande.
- A nationwide ‘Jal Satagraha-2007’ was launched on April 18.

Strategy

“I had gone to the North-east and Champaran to get first-hand information on the water problems faced by the people there. We are working with Magsaysay award winner Rajinder Singh. There will be different kinds of interaction with the public and grass roots activists and then a strategy will be evolved,” She said.