

Children's Gram Sabha

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Abstract

Local self-government or Panchayath Raj System is the most accepted form of Indian administration. It has given an indelible impression in the minds of rural people. It is continuously spreading and advancing gradually to every state covering a substantial portion of humanity and Mahatma Gandhiji's welfare state concept. The essence of this Panchayat Raj System [PRS] the Gram Sabha has been a forerunner in making PRS vibrant, efficient institutions. The Gram Sabha has played a crucial role in taking not only people's but also political, social, patriotic aspirations and emotions of children to the government in order to construct the strongest nation forever. Gram Sabhaexecutes at the village or small-town level and is charged with the welfare and development of the entire rural area and its inhabitants, particularly in relation to children the Gram panchayath plays a crucial role in the implementation of survival protection development and participation rights of everychild. It is also responsible for ensuring the children enrolled in primary schools are given vast opportunities to frame their future. In Karnataka, there are still seemed to be children in the surrounding rural and tribal areas who were deprived of basic amenities proper sanitation primary health centers drainage system shortage of drinking water malnutrition, and a general lack of preservation of their infrastructure and public areas is a harsh reality that is not lost on the budding youth of these villages. The children's Gram Sabha which is introduced in 2006 mandates that every Gram Panchayath in Karnataka must conduct the children's Gram Sabha every year in November. Various NGOs and several Gram Panchayath have recently incorporated the idea in a progressive and structured manner and have revived this mandate. The children havebeen given a positive and constructive platform to advocate their problems and opinions in this forum. Children's Gram Sabha provides the solution to problems voice raised by the children and for the children by recognizing their voice and validating their fundamental rights it also enables to empower children to follow up on promises given. Their participation ultimately results in creating an effective change not just in their life also in their own community.

Keywords: - Gram Sabha, amenities, aspiration, advancement, substantial.

Objectives

- To know the importance of children's participation in the local self-government
- To know the role of Gram Sabha in strengthening children's rights and consideration in the democratic concept
- Gram Sabha as a voice of rural children
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Introduction

"Local institutions constitute the strength of nations. A nation may establish a system of free government but without local institutions, it cannot have the spirit of liberty".

Alexis De Tocqueville¹

In India, human rights have been considered the soul of the democratic system. The optimum development of children through human rights attains special significance in the subject of national development. Child development encompasses the ways in which children acquire skills in a range of domains including social interaction and participation². (UNICEF 2001) Hence children and their voices, interests, concerns, aspirations, and challenges deserved to be heard by any government system. Regarding this issue, Gram Sabha believes in Child Rights and their protection. It takes a serious view that children are bearers of human rights as a legal obligation of the United Nations Convention opinions on the Rights of the Child is to educate children about what their own basic human rights are the values and practice of human rights and citizenship.³

Gram Sabha and Children's Participation:

In India Children Gram Sabha has noticed recent political development which was expecting the fulfillment of the complete democratic concept. The Implementation of this policy in 2006 mandates that every Gram Panchayath in Karnataka must conduct the Children's Gram Sabha every year in the month of November and create a forum for the rural children to introduce themselves to the democratic concept. Such kind of involvement has given voice to their rights, and it can be traced out that how Children's Gram Sabha plays its role in the empowerment of children's rights.

1. Introducing the Democracy

"Children are subjects of rights rather than merely recipients of adult protection"
Convention by the United Nation.

All people have the right to express their views when decisions are being made that directly affect their lives and children are considered people too. Having a voice about one's rights is therefore essential to their fulfillment and no children should be left alone to fight the battles to achieve respect for their rights⁴

That's the reason children should be a part of the decision-making process. Promoting the involvement of young children is a means whereby they can acquire knowledge and understanding of political processes as well as strengthen their interest in and commitment to democracy. Hence Children need more opportunities to learn what their rights and duties are, and how their freedom is limited by the rights and duties. They need opportunities to participate in the democratic decision-making process from the grass-root level to the parliament level moreover, it is not sufficient to give children the right to be listened to, but it is also important to take what they have to say seriously. For the fulfillment of this issue effectively and efficiently Gram Sabha has been created in 2006, initiative mandates every Gram Panchayath in the state to conduct Gram Sabha for children every year. Through this program, children can express their problems, opinion, decision, and too. Here children from Child Rights Clubs and others would actively participate in child rights special Gram Sabha meetings and their participation is taken into consideration by the concerned community and by the local government.⁵In this meeting problems relating to child labor, child marriage, and child discrimination will be discussed. In this platform, children can realize how the government system formed and existed in the village on a constitutional basis, what the nature of the system is and how they will be a member of the village. In this context children totally introduce themselves to this concept of democracy and get a clear picture of it.

2. Freedom of Expression through Gram Sabha

There are many reasons for singling out children's rights in a separate human rights aspect. Children are not the possessions of parents nor of the state. They have equal status as members of the human family. Children rely on adults for the nurture and guidance they need to build up their independence. Such nurture is ideally found in adults in children's families. But when primary adult caretakers cannot meet children's needs, it is up to the state as the primary duty bearer to find an alternative in the best interests of every child. Practically every area of government policy from education to health affects them to some degree. Without children's participation or short-sighted policymaking failing to take children into account has a negative impact on the future of all members of society. In many circumstances, most policymakers or governments do not interfere with children because generally children do not vote and take part in political processes. They have considered still developing and vulnerable. Without special attention to the opinions of children as expressed in family, in a school, in local communities even in governments children's views go unheard on the many important issues that affect them in the future⁶Such kind of political forum has not failed to make children part of the democracy. Children Gram Sabha literally fulfilling the intent of the Indian Constitution Article 19(1) (a) which states that "all citizens shall have the right to freedom of speech and expression", the philosophy behind this Article lies in the preamble of the Constitution of India, where the solemn resolve is made to secure to all its citizen's liberty of thought and expression. In this plot, it can refer that Justice E.S. Venkataramaiah another former Judge of the Supreme Court had coated the 4 broad purposes of freedom of speech and expression in Indian Express v/s Union of India (1986):

- It helps an individual to attain self-fulfillment
- It assists in the discovery of truth
- It strengthens the capacity of individuals to participate in decision
- It provides a mechanism by which it would be possible to establish a reasonable balance between stability and social change.⁷Children Gram Sabha and its implementation show that children's earliest experience significantly influence their future development as well as the nation.

3. Assurance and Protection of Children's Rights

The problem of child labour exploitation is a major challenge to the progress of developing countries. Unfortunately, India, as it tops the list with the highest numbers of child labour in the world, and the problem of children, seems too severe than reflected. Child labours are "hidden workers" where "families shall have to go without their children's income for several years, a choice many poor parents will be unable to make without help."-BBC news. In this circumstance, the shocking factor is that there were 15 million child labours who were bonded as one estimated in 2000. Bonded child labour is practiced widely across many parts of rural India and it can be traceroute that along with these problems still there are many alive children's problems with female infanticide, sale of children and organs, child abuse, malnutrition etc⁸. By understanding all these major problems, the Constitution of India guarantees free and compulsory education to children between the age of 6 to 14 and prohibition the employment of children younger 14 in any hazardous environment. In this context, the Gram Sabha also discusses problems of enrolment of all children in the schools, their attendance, and the development of schools in its jurisdiction. The health officer of the primary health center of the panchayat tool will attend the Gram Sabha and brief the Gram Sabha about the inoculation programs, children suffering from malnutrition and precautionary steps to be taken against diseases like Malaria, etc. The Gram Sabha also discusses the services and facilities to be provided by the health centers. In this way Gram Sabha trying to protect children's educational rights and improve children's health and standard of living⁹.

4. Political Participation and decision making

The right of children to participate in decision-making in the local level matters that affect their lives. Gram Sabha by developing its mechanism in administrative execution can support the effective participation of children in public decision-making processes is possible in levels and in all contexts. Children's Gram Sabha with a number of approaches exists to support children's participation in public decision-making. It allows children to make their voices heard on important matters affecting their needs. It can also include healthcare, education, violence against children, child marriage, etc. while numerous approaches exist to ensure children can be expressive towards their rights to participate. Such kind of forum has the advantage of reaching a greater number of children day to day lives. Local structure often into national structure and linkages can be formed between local and national

councils and parliament in this way. Children's Gram Sabha can play an active role in their communities with the support of civil society, and it can also serve to bring recommendations to decision-makers.

What Gram Sabha can do more?

even though there are many opportunities for children to be a part of administration a number of obstacles and barriers are preventing children's meaningful participation in public decision making. Problems like children's views are not considered serious or limit children's voices. More than local level children are unable to get sufficient information to support their involvement or inadequate budgetary support frustrates their participation in such processes. For all this, some suggestions are given as follows

1. **Ensuring children's effective and meaningful participation in public decision making:**- where government and policymakers seek to include the voice of children in policy formulating in a meaningful way, a number of criteria need to be taken into account. Gram Sabha must be conducted regularly without fail or delay and it should maintain transparency with ethical approaches based on political values. Participation should be voluntary and relevant to create a child-friendly and enabling atmosphere. More than this Gram Sabha must treat every child with dignity, and equality to ensure the opportunity for all.
1. **Recognizing children's rights to take civic action:**
Every state should expressly recognize the rights of children to engage in civic action including the rights to assemble peacefully, associate, and express themselves. Information required by children to exercise these rights should be given in a form that is easily accessible and understandable. Barriers to the exercise of their rights should be strictly removed.
2. **Access to Information:**
It can be noticed that the most identical barrier to children's participation in accessing information is because most of the acts or laws of the country are not reachable for all citizens of the village due to a lack of technical, and educational difficulty in accessing information. Children or students of the village are unable to know what kind of provisions are there for children's development and how they can be beneficiaries¹⁰. To break all these barriers there must be compulsory and special provisions for rural areas and even for disabled children through Panchayath Raj Institutions. Children's participation and decision-making process must be held in their presence and there must be
 - super accountability of government to its people
 - maintain transparency in government activities
 - increase public and children's influence in public policymaking
 - Easy accessibility of technology and internet facilities.

Moreover, Gram Sabha must create awareness of the right to information [RTI] is an act of the Parliament of India that sets out the rules and procedures regarding citizens' right to information. It replaced the former Freedom of Information Act, 2002.¹¹ It also coats that the Right to Education Act, 2009 explains that schools have a duty to give information to local bodies or governments. Section 12 (3) says, "Every school shall provide such information as may be required by the appropriate government or the local authority as the case may be if school is established by the government or aided, it has to provide the information as 'Public Authority under the right to information act to every citizen seeking the information.'¹²

Strong implementation of PESA Act 1996 in Tribal Area

When the concept of Gram Sabhas is discussed, it must not be ignored the special constitutional provision of the 1996 PESA Act (Panchayath Extension to Scheduled Areas) which is the reflection of tribal people's administration. Because it can be observed that the government has not reached completely all over the states and tribal people are not showing much interest in the local self-government. Because people of the tribal area much believe in their own traditional practices and administration, they don't wish to have any kind of outsourcing influence in their village affairs. Due to this reason, many states tribal people are not able to come under the PRI system. In this view, it can be observed that rural or urban children can easily get all the benefits from the local and urban government. But tribal children still face major problems like transportation, poverty, sanitization, health issues, child laboring, child marriage, teenage pregnancy, etc. these area children don't have a strong forum to raise their voices for violation of their rights. Such kind of administrative absence can lead the children is all the opportunities for constitutional rights and set them back in all dimensions of the development program. Hence all the state governments must try to implement PESA Act all over the tribal area and must conduct children Gram Sabha to involve children and strengthen their constitutional rights.

Conclusion

If a nation wants to make the best decisions, then it needs the best participation available. Consulting children and understanding their perceptions, knowledge, and ideas are essential to the development of effective public policy. But one of the most effective ways of encouraging children to accept responsibilities is to first respect their rights. Gram Sabha can contribute to making the villages the best place. Gram Sabhas is a crucial platform to involve children in governance. It recognizes children as equal citizens and gives them the vast opportunity to meet and question authorities, discuss their problems, become part of policymaking programs, and make recommendations for improvement of their standard of living.

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