CHANGES IN THE STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN WEST BENGAL

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ABSTRACT:
Though the basic structure of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is identical across the States of India, it is described via different nomenclatures in different States. Panchayats in every State has its own characteristics and even election procedures to these institutions are at variance. A Zilla Parishad is co-terminus with the district. Each district has one Zilla Parishad. Similarly, Panchayat Samitis are co-terminus with blocks of the said district. A Block may have several villages within it, but Gram Panchayats are not necessarily co-terminus with each village. Depending on the size of population a Gram is defined under the law with a specific geographical area, which may consist of a single village or a cluster of adjoining villages. As per the Constitution, Panchayats in their respective areas would prepare plans for economic development and social justice and also execute them. To facilitate this, states are supposed to devolve functions to Panchayats (29 subjects as mandated) and also make funds available for doing these (as per State Finance Commission’s recommendations). The functions of Panchayats are divided among different Committees (as ministries are formed in State and Union Governments), which are called Standing Committees/Sthayee Samitis/Upa Samitis etc. One of the members remains in charge of each of such committees while the over-all charge rests with the chairperson of the Panchayat. Panchayats are supported by a host of other of officials, the number of which varies from State to State. Apart from grants received from the government under the recommendation of the Finance Commission, Panchayats receive schematic funds for implementation of schemes. They can also raise revenue by imposing taxes, fees, penalties etc. as per rule of the state. This paper examines the existing structure and functions of PRIs in West Bengal.

KEY WORDS: Panchayati Raj, structure, Functions.