

Social, Cultural & Economic Changes in Jammu & Kashmir's Panchayati Raj System after Abrogation of Article 370

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ABSTRACT

The abrogation of Article 370 on 5th August, 2019, led to significant social, cultural & economic changes in Jammu & Kashmir's Panchayati Raj System. The removal of J&K's special status and its reorganization as a Union Territory allowed the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, strengthening local self-governance. Reservations in Panchayats for SCs & STs and women were ensured under the 73rd Amendment, leading to greater political inclusion. Panchayats now handle local development, as Sarpanches and Panchs have decision-making authority in village affairs. National laws on local governance and rural development now apply, promoting uniformity with other states. Panchayats now receive direct funding from Central Government, reducing bureaucratic delays. Panchayats can now approve and implement schemes like MGNREGA, PMAY & Jal Jeevan Mission at the village level. Despite these positive changes, challenges remain like security threats, capacity building & corruption and Bureaucratic hurdles. The abrogation of Article 370 and implementation of the three-tier Panchayati Raj System have brought social inclusion, cultural integration and economic empowerment to rural Jammu & Kashmir. While challenges exist, the overall transformation has been positive, making grassroots democracy stronger and development faster.

Keywords: Jammu & Kashmir, abrogation, Article 370, Panchayati Raj System, social, economic, cultural.

INTRODUCTION

Background:- Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) historically enjoyed special status under Article 370, which limited the application of India constitutional provisions, including the 73rd Constitutional Amendment that strengthened local governance across India. Before 2019, The Panchayati Raj System in J&K lacked real autonomy, and the state government retained control over funds and decision-making. The abrogation of Article 370 and reorganization of J&K into a Union Territory introduced significant changes, including direct implementation of the **73rd Amendment**, which empowered local governance structures. This research examines the school, cultural and economic impact of these changes on the Panchayati raj System.

Objectives:-

- To analyze the social impact of Panchayati Raj empowerment in J&K.
- To evaluate the cultural implications of decentralized governance.
- To assess economic transformations and local development.
- To identify challenges and suggest policy recommendations.

Methodology:-

This study employs a **qualitative research approach**, using secondary data from government reports, academic studies, media reports, and policy documents. It also includes **case studies** from various districts to illustrate grassroots-level changes.

Evolution of Panchayati Raj in J&K

Pre-Abrogation Status:-

Before 2019, J&K has its own **Jammu and Kashmir Panchayati Raj Act, 1989**, but this system lacked autonomy due to:

- **Weak devolution of power:** Key decisions were centralized under the state government.
- **No direct funding:** Panchayats relied on state-level approvals for financial allocations.
- **Limited political participation:** Elections were irregular, and turnout was low.

Post-Abrogation Reforms:

After the revocation of Article 370, J&K's Panchayati Raj system underwent major changes:

- Implementation of **73rd Constitutional Amendment**, enabling three-tier governance (Panchayats, Block Development Councils, and District Development Councils).
- **Direct funding from the central government**, improving financial autonomy.
- Increased focus on **rural development schemes** and local economic projects.

Social Impact of Panchayati Raj Reforms

Increased Political Participation

- **Higher Voter Turnout:** The **2018 Panchayat elections** saw **74% voter participation**, and after 2019, the **first-ever District Development Council (DDC) elections in 2020** recorded a **51% turnout** despite security concerns.
- **Inclusion of Women & Marginalized Groups:** Women and Scheduled Tribes (STs) now hold reserved seats, fostering grassroots democracy.

Empowerment of Local Leadership

- Panchayat representatives now play a direct role in **local decision-making**, unlike earlier when state bureaucracy controlled most policies.
- **Increased accountability** in service delivery, particularly in education, healthcare and sanitation.

Challenges in Social Transformation

- **Resistance from Bureaucracy:** Some local officials remain hesitant to devolve power to Panchayats.
- **Security Concerns:** Threats from militant groups continue to limit full-fledged political participation.

Cultural Impact of Decentralized Governance

Preservation of Local Traditions

- Panchayats are now actively promoting **cultural tourism** and **traditional handicrafts** such as pashmina weaving, carpet making, and wood carving.
- Funding for local **festivals, fairs and community events** has increased.

Role of Panchayats in Cultural Heritage Conservation

- New policies encourage **village-level initiatives** to restore historical sites and promote Kashmiri and Dogri art forms.

Challenges in Cultural Revival

- Some **conflicts over land use** arise between cultural heritage projects and development initiatives.
- **Need for capacity building** to train Panchayat members in cultural management.

Economic Impact of Panchayati Raj Empowerment

Direct Financial Support To Panchayats

- After 2019, the **central government transferred ₹1,700 crore** directly to Panchayats under rural development scheme.
- Panchayats now have greater control over **MGNREGA, NRLM, and PMAY** funds.

Employment & Rural Development

- Strengthening of local governance has boosted **rural employment through handicraft clusters, horticulture projects, and dairy farming initiatives**.
- Improved **rural infrastructure** (roads, water supply, schools, and health centres) has enhanced the standard of living.

Private Investment & Tourism Growth

- Better governance has encouraged **private sector investment** in **tourism, handicrafts, and agribusiness**.
- The **“Back to Village” program** has promoted entrepreneurship and rural startups.

Challenges in Economic Growth

- **Corruption risks** in fund allocations.
- **Delayed project implementation** due to bureaucratic inefficiencies.
- **Security threats** affecting business confidence in some districts.

Challenges & Limitations

- **Security Issues:** Political representatives, especially in rural areas, still face security threats.
- **Resistance from Bureaucracy:** Some officials resist transferring full power to Panchayats.
- **Slow Implementation of Policies:** Despite reforms, the pace of change remains slow in certain areas.
- **Capacity Gaps:** Need for skill-building programs for newly elected Panchayat representatives.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

Key Findings

- The Panchayati Raj System in J&K is now more empowered, with direct funding and decision-making powers.
- Social and political participation has increased, especially for marginalized groups.
- Economic development has accelerated, but challenges like corruption, slow implementation and security risks remain.

Recommendations

- **Capacity Building:** Train Panchayat members in governance, finance and rural development.
- **Stronger Anti-corruption Mechanisms:** Ensure transparency in fund allocation.
- **Security Enhancements:** Provide better protection to local representatives.
- **Sustainable Rural Development:** Strengthen rural economy through targeted policies in agriculture, tourism and handicrafts.
- **Community Engagement:** Ensure that all sections of society benefit from decentralization.

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