

**CONDUCTING
PANCHAYAT ELECTIONS
J&K**



OBJECTIVES

- STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY AT THE GRASS ROOT LEVEL.
- EMPOWERING COMMUNITIES IN GEOGRAPHICALLY CHALLENGING LANDSCAPES.
- INCUBATING LEADERS OF TOMORROW.



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Panchayati Raj is the vibrant first tier of self governance in the Indian administrative structure. However, the State of Jammu and Kashmir was not able to hold Panchayat elections between the period of 2011-2018 due to law and order apprehensions. This not only created a political void at the grassroots levels but also led to inadequate utilisation of budgetary resources for village development.

Panchayat elections were successfully conducted in Year 2018 in a peaceful manner with a record voter turnout of more than 74%. What especially caught the eye was enthusiastic participation of highly qualified candidates including a large number of women in these elections. This was a razzily tall then. Several innovations adopted by the Department of Rural Development & Panchayati Raj (DRDPR), J&K have led to this welcome development.

In order to maximise voter turnout, DRDPR deployed the Systematic Voter's Education and Electoral Participation (SVEEP) method to inform, educate, motivate and facilitate voters to ensure maximum participation of the public, and an error-free electoral process. The activities encompassed setting up of District & Block level groups to create awareness among the public.

The members of the Self Help Groups, set up under Unnied Scheme of the National Rural Livelihoods Mission, played a pivotal role in educating and encouraging women and youth about the importance of exercising their right to vote. IEC cell of DRDPR proactively publicised the innovative reforms ushered through the Panchayati Raj Amendment Act. These included direct election of Sarpanches, enhancement of honorarium of Panches/Sarpanches, reduction of security deposit to be furnished by candidates etc. The awareness was created through advertisements in local newspapers as well as catchy jingles on All-India Radio.

DRDPR has been making all out efforts to build upon the successful conduct of Panchayat elections. A series of comprehensive training Programmes have been conducted for the newly elected representatives covering 3650 Sarpanches and 20,000 Panches. The focus of these training initiatives is to make Sarpanches and Panches well versed about the provisions of J&K PR Act, various management skills (like participative planning, social audits, e-governance) and details of various centrally sponsored schemes relevant to rural development. The aim is to equip the elected representatives to become productive partners in the development of rural areas.

"The training helped me in understanding my powers and responsibilities as a Sarpanch, besides making me cognizant of the guidelines of the scheme," admits Khairi, Sarpanch of Panchayat Barpara, District Poonch. "New large amount of funds have been placed at our disposal and the Panchayats have been assigned the charge of monitoring, implementation and execution of 21 subjects. The Panchayats are now authorized to levy taxes/ fees for generation of resources and our Panchayats are also acting as an accessible and effective Grievance Redressal Forum."

Successful conduct of Panchayat elections has unplugged the flow of funds, pending for the past three years for want of Panchayat bodies in J&K from Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Govt of India. The first installment received as a part of 14th Finance Commission award for the year 2016-17 has already been disbursed to the panchayats for various development works approved as per prescribed procedure. The development works in rural areas are on the upswing. What is special this time is that unlike in the past, the works approved are demand-driven and approved/ implemented by the panchayats. This has significantly subdued the earlier feeling of disenchantment and has inculcated a new sense of empowerment and partnership at the grassroots level.

With devolution of powers, the responsibility of monitoring of schools and health institutions has been passed on to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Panchayats are now responsible for various development Programmes focused on literacy, gender ratio, water conservation, natural resource management, agriculture/ horticulture development, health etc. It is with these changes that the Panchayati Raj institutions will don their true mantle as harbingers of social change.



Aarifa Jan Rather | Sarpanch Lalpora B, District Baramulla.

A young 29-year-old girl has shattered the stereotypical image of women by actively participating in the Panchayat elections. Aarifa had relegated herself to household chores after completing her Bachelors in Science, but destiny had something else in store.

"It was not an easy task to plunge into the electoral process," recounts Aarifa, adding, "DRDPR through its Self-Help Groups held intensive awareness camps encouraging the women to participate in the election process. So I did it, that too successfully," Aarifa asserts that "in absence of Panchayat bodies, the people of this Panchayat suffered tremendously. Nobody heard our grievances and nobody reached out to us. But now the Panchayats have empowered us in real sense. Now we can develop our area with our own hands."

She also credits the intensive trainings organised by DRDPR for sensitising them about their roles & responsibilities and their rights & duties as elected members of the Panchayat.

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