

# NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON DEMOCRATIC DECENTRALISATION AND INCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT:

Issues and Challenges for the Third Decade of *Panchayati Raj* in India

Organised by

**RAJIV GANDHI CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF MUMBAI  
MARCH - 20<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup>, 2014**

## THE THEME:

Democratic Decentralization refers to the programmes and techniques which imply devolution of governmental powers and responsibilities, decentralization of political institutions, development of local leadership and strengthening the efforts for economic modernization. The institutional arrangement for the policy of democratic decentralization in India is known as '*Panchayati Raj*'. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act brought historic power to the grass-root bodies recognizing them as the third tier of government and creating channel for effective decentralization. (Sharma, Swarn Lata, 2011).

The word "democratic" explains the nature and purpose of the concept as also its basic claims in an institutional set up. The word 'decentralization' is essentially indicative of the method to realize the end as contained in the word 'democratic'. Decentralization means transfer of planning, decision-making or administrative authority from the central government to its field organizations, local administrative units, semi-autonomous organizations, local governments or non-governmental organizations. Democratic decentralization envisages association of more and more people with government at all levels. Democratic decentralization stands for people's right to initiate their own projects for local well-being and the power to execute and operate them in an autonomous manner. Decentralization is seen as a theory of development, which requires a variety of institutions for empowering and uplifting the marginalized and the poor. It is expected to work for the building up of an administrative space at the cutting edge level where the felt needs of the poor could be ventilated. Decentralization is a prime mechanism through which democracy becomes truly representative and responsive.

April 23, 1993 is considered to be a landmark day in the history of democratic decentralization as on this historic day, the institution of *Panchayati Raj* was accorded constitutional status through the Constitution (the 73rd Amendment) Act, 1992. The same amendment was enacted in the state of Maharashtra in the year 1994. It has been two decades since the said act has been implemented hence this seminar.

Considerable headway has been made since the enactment of the 73rd and 74th Amendments, which have created PRIs as tiers of local self-rule. Conformity Acts have been passed in all the States for which *Panchayati Raj* was mandated. Many States have devolved functions and powers to local authorities; State Finance Commissions have been constituted and have made recommendations for resource allocations to PRIs. Administrative and democratic decentralization have been made mandatory and most States have made arrangements for periodic elections to local bodies, and have also indicated subjects over which local authorities would have a say.

It has been argued (Lieten, 1996) that the current functioning of *panchayats* fares poorly on the criteria of efficacy in service delivery, inclusiveness and accountability. Although national goals and aspirations are supportive of decentralization, the translation of aspirations into reality requires strengthening the institutions of Panchayati Raj institutions.

The grassroots democracy in India today has several challenges. There are legal inadequacies, lack of funds, functions, functionaries and capacity, adverse socio- economic environment, vested political Interests and lack of political will. Efforts are, therefore, needed to empower Grass root institutions (Sharma, Swarn Lata ,2011). On the basis of experiences of past two decades, there is a need to critically review and come to conclusions as to in what direction the third decade of grassroots democracy should head so that the grassroots democracy can become more effective in ensuring inclusive development.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

- To trace the history of democratic decentralization in India;
- To critically review achievements of democratic decentralization;
- To take a closer look at the deficiencies of democratic decentralization;
- To study best practices of democratic decentralization;
- To suggest ways for more inclusive development in the third decade of *Panchayati Raj* in India.

### **CONFERENCE DATES: MARCH 20-21,2014**

### **ACCOMMODATION AND TRAVEL SUPPORT**

The invited speakers and a few outstation paper presenters will be provided with accommodation on campus and limited number of speakers will be supported with second class train / bus fare. Since the funds are limited, the participants are encouraged to get institutional funding. The elected representatives and grassroots activists will be given priority for attending the event with full support.

### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

This conference will bring together academicians, researchers, civil servants, elected representatives and grassroots workers across India. Participants are invited to send the abstracts of papers based on the seminar theme in 500 words on or before March 3, 2014. The selected abstracts will be notified by March 10,2014 and final papers are expected by March 17,2014. The Centre will publish all selected papers in the book form with ISBN number.

### **ABOUT THE RAJIV GANDHI CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY STUDIES**

Rajiv Gandhi Centre for Contemporary Studies was established on 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2006 by the Ministry of Human Resource Development through University Grants Commission. The Centre works within the broad theme of Globalization, Democracy and Development. The areas of interest are primarily on the theme of Panchayati Raj and Local Governance, Impact of Technology on Society, Secularism & Nation Building.

### **CONFERENCE CONVENOR & CONTACT DETAILS:**

For further details, kindly contact at the following address :

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