

From Conflict Resolution to Development: Reassessing the Role of Rural Local Governments in India

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Abstract:

Rural local governments play a pivotal role in shaping the socio-economic and political landscape of India. This paper explores the relevance and importance of these grassroots governance institutions, emphasizing their potential to foster development, resolve conflicts, and empower marginalized communities. Anchored by the transformative provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which institutionalized Panchayati Raj systems, the study examines the practical implementation and challenges faced by rural local governments in India.

The research delves into the relevance of the local government in resolving ethnic disputes such as the Manipur crisis, caste-based disputes as, even after 78 years of independence, the society is marred by such anachronistic customs, one example of such being the discriminatory practices in Palnadu region of Andhra Pradesh.

While rural local governments are often heralded as instruments of democracy and development, the study critically evaluates their shortcomings, including political interference, corruption, and their inability to mediate conflicts effectively in certain cases. This paper aims to provide insights into strengthening the functioning of rural local governments and enhancing their role in building resilient, inclusive, and equitable rural societies.

The findings underscore the need for capacity-building initiatives, greater accountability mechanisms, and enhanced collaboration between local governments and civil society organizations to realize the full potential of grassroots democracy in India.

Key Words: Panchayati Raj, dispute resolution, democratic process, socio-legal disputes, government initiatives.

Rural local governments in India, epitomized by the Panchayati Raj system, are the cornerstone of grassroots democracy. As decentralized institutions, they are vital for promoting socio-economic development, resolving conflicts, and ensuring participatory governance. These institutions serve as a bridge between the state and the people, empowering marginalized communities to assert their rights and access public resources. However, despite their potential, rural local governments face significant challenges that hinder their ability to deliver on these lofty ideals.

This paper seeks to reassess the role of rural local governments in India, focusing on their dual responsibility of conflict resolution and development. The relevance of these institutions becomes even more pronounced in the context of a diverse and complex society like India, where ethnic, caste, and regional tensions often undermine social cohesion. Anchored in the transformative vision of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, the paper examines

how these grassroots governance structures have evolved, their achievements, and the persistent roadblocks in their journey toward creating inclusive and equitable rural societies.

HISTORY OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

The concept of local self-government in India can be traced back to ancient times, when village communities, known as *sabhas* or *panchayats*, played a pivotal role in managing local affairs. These institutions functioned autonomously, handling issues such as land disputes, resource management, and social welfare, often guided by customary norms and practices. However, during the colonial era, these indigenous systems were gradually undermined. The British introduced a centralized administration that prioritized revenue collection and governance efficiency over local autonomy.

Efforts to revive local self-governance began in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Lord Ripon's resolution of 1882 is often regarded as the first significant step toward decentralized governance, advocating for the establishment of local boards with elected representatives. Later, the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 and the Government of India Act of 1935 provided limited autonomy to local bodies, but these measures fell short of empowering rural communities.

After independence in 1947, the need for a robust system of local governance gained prominence. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) laid the foundation for the Panchayati Raj system, recommending a three-tier structure of governance at the village, block, and district levels. This was further refined by the Ashok Mehta Committee (1978), which emphasized the importance of decentralization, constitutional recognition and proposed strengthening local governance structures¹.

THE 73RD CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ACT, 1992: A MILESTONE IN DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA) of 1992 was a transformative piece of legislation aimed at decentralizing governance and empowering rural local governments in India. Its introduction marked a significant step in institutionalizing grassroots democracy and ensuring the direct participation of citizens in decision-making processes. This section elaborates on the conditions that led to the amendment, its provisions, and its broader implications for rural governance in India.

Conditions Leading to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment

The passage of the 73rd CAA was necessitated by several socio-political, economic, and administrative factors. Despite earlier efforts to promote local self-governance, rural governance remained weak and ineffective. The following conditions underscored the need for a constitutional amendment:

¹ Wheeler, H. (1917). Local Self-Government in India. *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, 17(1/2), 153–164. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/752246> Assessed on 19th January 2025

1. Failure of Earlier Systems:

While efforts to establish local governance systems were made post-independence, these were largely ad hoc and ineffective. Recommendations of committees such as the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) and the Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) remained unimplemented or inconsistently applied. Consequently, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) lacked uniformity, legitimacy, and functional autonomy.

2. Inadequate Decentralization:

Before the amendment, state governments had considerable control over local governance, often using PRIs as extensions of state bureaucracy rather than autonomous institutions. This over-centralization stifled grassroots participation and limited local governments' ability to address community-specific issues.

3. Increasing Inequalities and Marginalization:

Marginalized groups, including Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), women, and economically weaker sections, faced systemic exclusion from political processes. PRIs, in their pre-amendment form, failed to create an inclusive platform for participation or address disparities effectively.

4. Developmental Inefficiencies:

Centralized planning models struggled to meet the diverse needs of India's rural population. With over 60% of India's population living in villages, the lack of community-driven initiatives led to inefficiencies in service delivery, resource allocation, and development planning.

5. Democratic Deficit:

Although India adopted democracy in 1947, this was largely restricted to national and state levels. The absence of an empowered third tier of government created a democratic void, limiting citizens ability to influence decisions affecting their immediate surroundings².

CHALLENGES FACED BY THE RURAL LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT

1. Lack of Financial Autonomy

Financial autonomy is crucial for rural local governments to address localized conflicts and foster development. However, they face significant challenges in managing funds:

- **Dependence on Grants:** Rural local bodies rely overwhelmingly on state and central government grants, which are often tied to specific schemes (e.g., MGNREGA, Swachh Bharat Mission). This limits their ability to allocate resources to address pressing local needs or mediate conflicts over scarce resources like water or land.

² Singh, H. (1994). Constitutional Base for Panchayati Raj in India: The 73rd Amendment Act. *Asian Survey*, 34(9), 818–827. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645168>, Assessed on 19th January 2025

- **Weak Revenue Base:** Panchayats have limited capacity to raise revenue through property tax, cess, or user fees. Rural economies often lack significant taxable assets, and local governments struggle to enforce tax collection mechanisms.
- **Delayed and Inequitable Fund Allocation:** Delays in fund disbursement from state governments often lead to stalled development projects. This can intensify disputes over resource distribution and undermine trust in local governance.

Without financial independence, Panchayats cannot effectively mediate disputes over resources, nor can they initiate developmental activities that address root causes of conflict, such as poverty and unemployment. Strengthening fiscal capacity is critical for achieving both immediate and long-term developmental goals.

2. Social Inequalities and Marginalization

India's rural landscape is deeply stratified along caste, gender, and class lines, which poses a major challenge to the inclusive functioning of Panchayats:

- **Exclusion of Marginalized Groups:** Although constitutional provisions mandate the inclusion of Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), and women in local governance, these groups often face systematic exclusion from decision-making. Dominant caste groups or elite families frequently capture Panchayat institutions, sidelining the voices of marginalized communities.
- **Gender Bias:** Despite reservations for women in Panchayats, many female representatives face social and familial pressures that render them powerless (e.g., the "Sarpanch Pati" phenomenon, where male relatives exert de facto control). This perpetuates inequality and undermines the Panchayat's role as an inclusive institution for conflict resolution.
- **Escalation of Social Conflicts:** Inequalities within communities often lead to disputes over access to resources like land, water, and public services. These unresolved conflicts can escalate into larger communal tensions, hindering developmental efforts.

Social inequalities reduce the ability of rural local governments to act as neutral arbiters in resolving disputes. Addressing systemic marginalization is essential to enable Panchayats to function as instruments of equitable development and social harmony.

3. Political and Administrative Interference

One of the most pressing challenges is the undermining of Panchayat autonomy due to external interference:

- **Top-Down Decision-Making:** Panchayats are often bypassed in decision-making processes by state governments and line departments, reducing their authority over local governance matters. This weakens their capacity to mediate conflicts or tailor development programs to local realities.

- **Political Manipulation:** Higher-level politicians often use Panchayats to serve their electoral or personal interests. For instance, funds and resources may be allocated based on political loyalty rather than objective need.
- **Bureaucratic Roadblocks:** Local administrators, such as Block Development Officers (BDOs), often exercise disproportionate control over Panchayat operations. This creates delays in the implementation of schemes and fosters mistrust between citizens and local governments.

Political and administrative interference undermines the credibility and legitimacy of Panchayats as mediators and development agents. Empowering Panchayats with genuine autonomy is essential for strengthening their role in both conflict resolution and sustainable development.

4. Weak Institutional Capacity

Institutional capacity is the backbone of effective governance, but rural local bodies in India are often under-equipped:

- **Skill Deficits:** Many elected representatives lack the necessary education or training to handle complex governance tasks, such as financial management, development planning, or conflict mediation. This is especially true for representatives from marginalized backgrounds.
- **Inadequate Staff and Resources:** Panchayats frequently operate with minimal staff, including a lack of technical experts (e.g., engineers, agricultural officers) who are crucial for implementing development projects. Basic infrastructure, such as computers or internet connectivity, is often absent in Gram Panchayat offices.
- **Poor Monitoring Mechanisms:** Weak systems for tracking the implementation of schemes or addressing grievances result in inefficiencies, corruption, and a loss of public trust. Without robust monitoring, conflicts over resource distribution and service delivery can spiral out of control.

Limited capacity hampers the ability of Panchayats to act as effective intermediaries in resolving disputes or executing development plans. Building institutional capacity through training, staffing, and digital infrastructure is critical for bridging the gap between conflict resolution and long-term development.

THE MANIPUR VIOLENCE

Background

Manipur, located in Northeast India, has long been a site of ethnic tensions driven by complex social, political, and historical factors. The state is home to multiple ethnic communities, including the Meiteis (the majority group residing in the Imphal Valley), the Nagas, and the

Kukis (tribal groups inhabiting the surrounding hill areas). These communities have distinct identities, often shaped by their historical relationships with land, governance, and autonomy.

Key historical and contemporary issues include:

Land Ownership and Autonomy: The **Meiteis**, who dominate the valley, are excluded from tribal land ownership in the hills under existing laws. This has caused resentment among them, particularly as the valley constitutes only 10% of Manipur's landmass while housing nearly 60% of its population. Conversely, the **Kukis** and **Nagas** in the hills have sought to protect their traditional land rights and cultural autonomy, fearing domination by the Meiteis.

Scheduled Tribe (ST) Demand by Meiteis: The Meiteis have demanded inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list, arguing that it would protect their identity and provide access to government benefits. However, this demand is seen by tribal groups as an attempt to encroach on their rights, particularly over land. The ST demand exacerbated fears among Kukis, who already felt marginalized by the state's policies and faced evictions from forest lands under environmental regulations³.

Triggers of Recent Violence: In May 2023, protests broke out in response to the Manipur High Court's directive to consider the Meiteis' ST demand. The protests quickly escalated into violent clashes between Meitei and Kuki communities. The violence was fueled by longstanding grievances, including perceived favoritism toward the Meiteis in governance, and a lack of trust between the two communities. The conflict resulted in mass displacement, destruction of property, and a significant loss of life, further deepening the divisions.

Role of Rural Local Governments

The role of rural local governments in Manipur, especially in the context of tribal areas, is crucial yet faces several challenges. Local governance is primarily divided between **Village Councils** in tribal areas and **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs)** in the hill districts. These institutions are meant to decentralize power, represent tribal interests, and address local issues. However, their ability to function effectively, especially in conflict resolution, is limited due to various factors.

1. Autonomous District Councils (ADCs): ADCs were created under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution to empower the tribal areas of Manipur, giving them control over local governance, including matters like land management and cultural preservation. Despite their potential, ADCs in Manipur have not been as effective as similar institutions in other northeastern states, largely due to their **lack of financial and administrative autonomy**. The state government retains control over key resources and policies, which undermines the councils' ability to function independently. This situation has created a sense of **mistrust**

³ Sanjib Baruah, "Northeast India: A Reader" (2016), <https://archive.org/details/northeast-india-a-reader/page/129/mode/2up>, Accessed on 20 January, 2025

among tribal communities, who feel that their interests are sidelined by the **dominant Meitei-led government**. The limited power and underfunding of ADCs have contributed to the **failure of these institutions to adequately address local issues** such as resource allocation, land disputes, and the preservation of tribal culture and identity. Without sufficient autonomy, ADCs are unable to **mediate conflicts** or engage meaningfully in **effective governance**.

2. Village Councils in Tribal Areas:

Village Councils are meant to act as grassroots institutions representing local communities, particularly in tribal regions. These councils are responsible for managing local affairs, overseeing development activities, and handling disputes. Village Councils, especially in Kuki-majority areas, have often been **excluded from the decision-making process** at higher levels of government. This exclusion has resulted in **alienation** of these communities, as their concerns, particularly regarding land rights and cultural identity, are not addressed adequately. The lack of **inclusive planning** and the absence of a **mechanism for conflict resolution** have left many tribal areas without proper avenues to resolve disputes. Consequently, this has **escalated tensions** and exacerbated the **violence** between different communities, particularly in the context of land ownership and ethnic identities.

3. Failure to Address Deep-Seated Grievances:

Land Rights and Identity Issues: Both ADCs and Village Councils have struggled to address **historical grievances**, including issues related to **land ownership** and the recognition of cultural identities. With inadequate mechanisms for handling these concerns, communities have often resorted to other means, including protests and violence, to assert their demands.

Resource Allocation: The distribution of resources, such as government funds for development, often remains **unequal**, which further deepens feelings of disenfranchisement among tribal communities.

4. Limited Conflict Resolution Capacity:

Mediation Challenges: Neither ADCs nor Village Councils have been equipped with the necessary tools or capacity to **mediate conflicts** effectively. These institutions are often viewed as ineffective when it comes to resolving land disputes, ethnic tensions, and other local conflicts.

Cultural Disconnect: Additionally, **decision-making bodies** at higher levels of government may not always understand or respect the **cultural nuances** of the tribal communities, further isolating them and hindering effective conflict resolution.

In Manipur, rural local governance structures like ADCs and Village Councils are pivotal in representing the interests of tribal communities and ensuring decentralized governance. However, their effectiveness is compromised by **lack of autonomy, limited resources, exclusion from decision-making processes, and failure to address key grievances**. Strengthening these local institutions, ensuring **financial and administrative autonomy**, and

including **grassroots voices** in governance and decision-making processes are essential for fostering **peaceful conflict resolution** and improving governance in these areas.

FACTIONALISM IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Caste-based politics in Andhra Pradesh has severely undermined rural local governance, turning Panchayati Raj Institutions into arenas for caste supremacy rather than development. Dominant groups like **Reddys, Kammas, and Kapus** control political representation, while Dalit divisions, particularly between Malas and Madigas, further weaken marginalized communities. For instance, **The Praja Rajyam Party (PRP)**, despite its claim of social justice, largely served Kapu interests, highlighting how caste mobilization often prioritizes power over governance.

At the village level, Panchayat leadership is dictated by caste loyalties, leading to biased resource distribution and inefficient administration. Dalit leaders are often co-opted into dominant-caste parties as symbolic figures rather than decision-makers, limiting their influence. Factionalism among castes obstructs policy implementation, delaying welfare programs and infrastructure development. The exodus of dalit leadership in PRP not only destroyed the hope, but importantly wiped out the space of possibility for the emergence of Dalit based political parties.

Ultimately, caste-driven politics erodes democratic governance, reinforcing social hierarchies and economic disparities. To ensure effective rural development, structural reforms are needed to promote transparency, curb caste-based favoritism, and empower marginalized communities in decision-making. Without addressing these deep-rooted biases, rural governance will remain a tool for caste dominance rather than a platform for inclusive progress.⁴

Factionalism in the **Palnadu region** of Guntur district and **Anantapur district** in Andhra Pradesh is also deeply entrenched in the socio-political and cultural fabric of the region. These areas are often referred to as the heartland of factional violence in Andhra Pradesh due to longstanding feuds among dominant caste groups, such as the Reddys, Kammas, and Kapus. In contemporary history, the region is a powder keg, witnessing faction violence and revenge killings, often influenced by local politics.⁵ Despite legal provisions for self-governance, decision-making remains concentrated in the hands of higher political elites, leading to inefficiencies and dependence on state-controlled resources. Another major issue is the political interference in PRIs through parallel governance structures, such as the **Janmabhoomi program**. Launched by the Andhra Pradesh government, **Janmabhoomi bypassed Panchayats and entrusted governance functions to state-controlled Community-Based Organizations (CBOs)**. While

⁴ Gundimeda, S. (2009). Dalits, Praja Rajyam Party and Caste Politics in Andhra Pradesh. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(21), 50–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40279035> Accessed on 24th January 2025

⁵ Rahul Devulapalli, "In contemporary history, the region is a powder keg, witnessing faction violence and revenge killings, often influenced by local politics" (2024), <https://www.theweek.in/news/india/2024/05/17/faction-violence-makes-a-bloody-comeback-in-rayalaseema-and-palnadu-regions-of-andhra-pradesh.html>, Accessed on 23rd January 2025

these institutions were intended to promote participatory governance, they instead undermined local governments, allowing state-level politicians to control funds and development projects directly, thereby reinforcing caste-based political patronage.⁶

Impact on Rural Governance

Factionalism significantly affects rural governance by undermining the democratic functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Instead of serving as platforms for inclusive decision-making and development, these institutions often become arenas for caste-based rivalries. Dominant caste groups frequently capture PRIs, using them to consolidate power while sidelining marginalized communities and monopolizing access to resources. Elections to Panchayats are often marred by violence and intimidation, discouraging free and fair participation.

This, in turn, erodes public trust in local governance, as people perceive Panchayats as extensions of factional interests rather than neutral institutions working for the collective good. Additionally, factionalism skews development by directing schemes and resources to benefit particular caste groups, further deepening social and economic inequalities. Marginalized communities, including Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, are often excluded from welfare programs, reinforcing their vulnerabilities. As a result, rather than fostering grassroots democracy, factionalism transforms PRIs into tools of exclusion and power struggles, hindering equitable rural development.

SIMILARITIES IN BOTH THE CASES

Despite differences in geography, history, and cultural composition, the conflicts in **Manipur** and **Andhra Pradesh** share deep-rooted similarities in how identity-based divisions shape rural governance, resource allocation, and public trust in democratic institutions. Both cases highlight how **ethnic and caste-based factionalism** undermines the effectiveness of local governance, perpetuates socio-economic inequalities, and weakens grassroots democracy.

1. Identity-Based Conflicts as the Root Cause

- In **Manipur**, ethnic tensions between **Meiteis, Kukis, and Nagas** fuel long-standing disputes over land rights, autonomy, and political representation. Meiteis, who dominate the Imphal Valley, have sought inclusion in the Scheduled Tribe (ST) list, which Kukis and Nagas fear would lead to encroachment on their traditional lands. This ethnic polarization has led to violent clashes and distrust between communities.
- In **Andhra Pradesh**, caste-based factionalism is the dominant force shaping rural governance. Powerful caste groups like **Reddys, Kammas, and Kapus** have historically controlled political and economic power, often marginalizing Dalits and other backward

⁶ M. Gopinath Reddy. (2003). Status of Decentralised Local Bodies: Post-73rd Amendment Scenario. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 38(12/13), 1284–1292. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4413379> accessed on 23rd January 2025

communities. The intense rivalry between these caste factions has resulted in factional violence, particularly in regions like **Palnadu and Anantapur**.

- **Commonality:** Both regions demonstrate how identity politics—whether based on ethnicity (Manipur) or caste (Andhra Pradesh)—becomes the basis for **exclusion, violence, and power struggles**, rather than a tool for inclusive governance.

2. Marginalization of Weaker Communities

- In **Manipur**, tribal groups like **Kukis and Nagas** often feel politically and economically excluded. They argue that the state government, largely controlled by the **Meitei-majority administration**, favors Meitei interests in governance and resource distribution. Policies such as land acquisition for forest conservation have disproportionately affected Kuki tribes, fueling discontent and rebellion.
- In **Andhra Pradesh**, **Dalits (Malas and Madigas)** and other marginalized caste groups face systematic discrimination in **Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)**. These institutions, instead of being platforms for inclusive governance, are dominated by powerful caste leaders who exclude weaker sections from decision-making and resource distribution.
- **Commonality:** In both cases, marginalized communities **lack representation in governance, face exclusion from economic opportunities, and struggle for equal rights** in a system controlled by dominant identity groups.

3. Weak Local Governance and Political Interference

- In **Manipur**, local governance is split between **Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) in the hills** and **Village Councils** for tribal areas. These institutions were designed to provide self-governance for tribal communities. However, **ADCs lack financial and administrative autonomy**, as most power remains with the state government. This prevents ADCs from addressing tribal grievances effectively, deepening distrust.
- In **Andhra Pradesh**, **PRIs are heavily influenced by state-level politicians**, especially through parallel governance structures like the **Janmabhoomi Program**, which bypasses Panchayats and allows the state government to directly control funds and development projects. This undermines Panchayats, making them tools for **caste-based political patronage** rather than effective self-governance bodies.
- **Commonality:** In both cases, **local governance structures exist on paper but lack true autonomy**, as they remain heavily controlled by state-level political elites, preventing them from acting as neutral platforms for development.

4. Resource Monopolization and Inequities

- In **Manipur**, a major trigger of conflict is the **unequal distribution of land and resources**. While the Meiteis dominate the valley (which comprises only 10% of Manipur's land), the

hill tribes control the remaining 90%. However, government policies often favor valley-based economic activities, leaving hill communities with fewer resources and opportunities.

- In **Andhra Pradesh, government schemes, funds, and development projects are often allocated based on caste loyalty** rather than actual need. Dominant caste groups control the flow of welfare benefits, ensuring their own communities benefit while others remain excluded. For instance, **Dalits and Scheduled Tribes** are frequently denied access to land distribution programs or infrastructure projects.
- **Commonality:** In both cases, dominant groups **control and monopolize resources**, while marginalized communities struggle for fair access, leading to resentment, conflict, and further factionalism.

5. Breakdown of Social Trust and Public Participation

- In **Manipur**, repeated ethnic violence has created a deep sense of **mistrust between communities**. Many Kukis and Nagas feel the state government is biased toward Meitei interests, leading to separatist sentiments and armed resistance. Similarly, the Meiteis feel threatened by tribal autonomy movements, increasing polarization.
- In **Andhra Pradesh**, factional violence prevents **free and fair elections in PRIs**. Panchayat elections are often marred by **intimidation, vote-buying, and political violence**, discouraging weaker sections from participating in local governance. Villagers often perceive Panchayats as serving factional interests rather than as neutral institutions working for development.
- **Commonality: A climate of fear, political violence, and institutional bias discourages genuine public participation in governance**, leading to further alienation and disillusionment with the system.

6. Failure of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

- In **Manipur**, ADCs and Village Councils are **not empowered to mediate disputes** effectively. Ethnic conflicts often escalate due to the absence of neutral conflict resolution bodies at the grassroots level. Community-led negotiations are rare, and the state government's responses are often seen as biased.
- In **Andhra Pradesh, Panchayats fail to resolve caste-based conflicts**, as they are often dominated by one faction or another. Local leaders, instead of acting as mediators, often take sides, further inflaming tensions. Legal and administrative measures to address factional violence are weak and rarely implemented effectively.
- **Commonality:** The **lack of independent, empowered conflict resolution mechanisms** at the local level allows disputes to escalate into violence, further weakening governance.

Both **Manipur and Andhra Pradesh** illustrate how **identity-based factionalism—whether ethnic or caste-driven—undermines local governance, fosters exclusion, and deepens inequalities**. Without structural reforms, these conflicts will continue to hinder democratic governance and rural development. Strengthening local institutions, **ensuring fair representation, and implementing effective conflict resolution mechanisms** are essential to breaking the cycle of factionalism and building **inclusive and transparent governance** at the grassroots level.

REHABILITATION MEASURES FOR STRENGTHENING RURAL LOCAL GOVERNANCE

To ensure the efficient functioning of rural local governments and mitigate the adverse effects of factionalism, a comprehensive set of rehabilitation measures must be implemented.

1. Firstly, the **strict implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act** is crucial to strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by ensuring decentralized governance, transparency, and accountability. Additionally, **stringent action must be taken against factional violence**, including strict legal consequences for perpetrators, to deter future conflicts and ensure the safety of rural communities.

2. **Inclusive Governance and Representation:** Promoting **equal representation of people from diverse communities in politics** is essential to breaking caste-based power structures and fostering inclusive governance. Implement **proportional representation** for marginalized groups, ensuring their active participation in governance. Conduct **leadership training and capacity-building programs** for members of PRIs and ADCs to promote inclusive decision-making. Raise awareness and provide education to empower weaker sections to engage in governance processes.

Furthermore, the **district administration should oversee the implementation of welfare schemes without political interference**, ensuring that resources reach the intended beneficiaries rather than being controlled by dominant factions.

3. To protect future generations from the cycle of factionalism, **children from conflict-affected areas should be sent to residential schools**, providing them with a safe and unbiased learning environment. In addition, **employment opportunities should be provided to the spouses of individuals who lost their lives in factional violence**, offering financial stability to affected families and reducing their dependence on factional networks for survival.

4. **Institutional Reforms for Autonomy:** Grant greater **financial and administrative autonomy** to Panchayats in Andhra Pradesh and ADCs in Manipur to enable them to address local grievances effectively. Reform governance structures to ensure **accountability and inclusivity**, preventing their capture by dominant groups. Establishing platforms for inclusive decision-making, where representatives from both Meitei and Kuki communities participate, is essential to rebuilding trust.

5. Strengthening grassroots governance through **reserved seats for weaker sections**, encouraging their active participation, and implementing regular social audits can further enhance accountability and curb resource misallocation. Encourage **joint development initiatives** (e.g., cooperative farming, shared water management, and community infrastructure projects) that require collaboration between conflicting groups. Partner with **civil society organizations** to support programs such as cultural exchanges, vocational training, and youth empowerment, fostering inter-group cooperation. Promote **grassroots initiatives** that prioritize community well-being over factional or identity-based interests, reducing tensions and strengthening local governance.

6. Lastly, **the Mid-Day Meal Scheme plays a pivotal role in increasing school enrollment, reducing dropout rates, and promoting education**⁷, which in turn leads to empowerment and long-term socio-economic progress. By ensuring access to education and proper nutrition, rural communities can gradually overcome deep-rooted factionalism and build a more inclusive and development-oriented governance structure.

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