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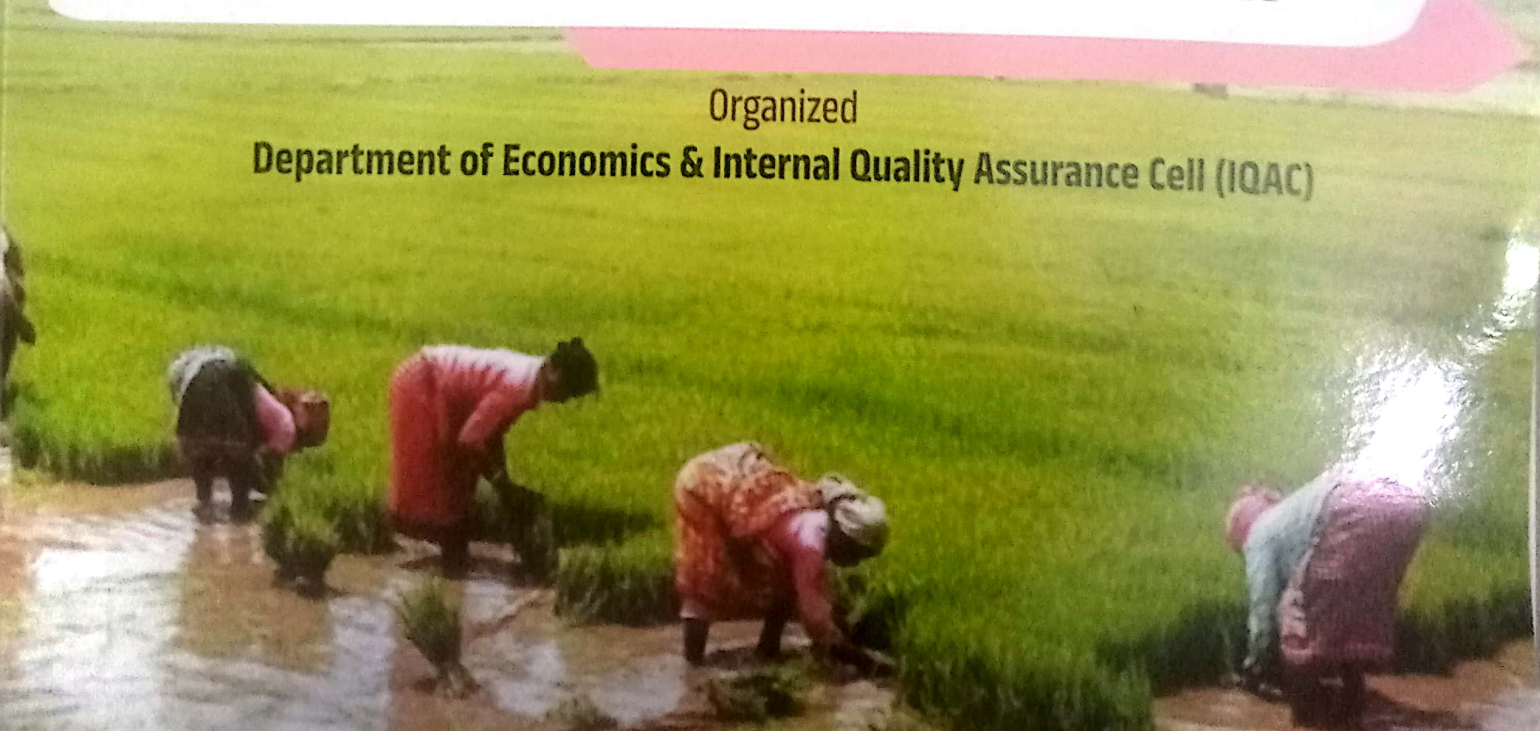
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in India: Issues, Challenges and Possibilities"**

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41) आंबेओहळ मध्यम सिंचन प्रकल्प: आर्थिक आणि पर्यावरणीय अभ्यास
कु. साक्षी चंद्रकांत धुरे, गडहिंग्लज

|| 184

42) शाश्वत कृषी विकास आणि कृषी पर्यटन
डॉ. काशिनाथ रामचंद्र तनंगे, गडहिंग्लज

|| 188

43) भारतातील शेतमजुरांच्या समस्या
प्रा. सुषमा युवराज पाटील, गडहिंग्लज

|| 194

44) शाश्वत विकासामधील कृषी—आधारित उद्योगाची भूमिका
प्रो. डॉ. मधुरा बाबासाहेब देसाई, कु. विश्रान्ती जांबीवंत चव्हाण, कोल्हापूर

|| 197

45) भारतातील कृषी प्रक्रिया उद्योग
प्रा. डॉ. प्रकाश यशवंत बुरुटे, बोरगांव, जि. सांगली

|| 201

46) शेतकऱ्यांच्या आत्महत्या अर्थमिमांसा
प्रा. क्रांती सुधीर शिवणे, गडहिंग्लज

|| 205

47) सेंद्रिय शेतीचा ध्यास : पर्यावरणाचा विकास
प्रा. कविता विलास पोळ, गडहिंग्लज

|| 207

48) Role of Local Self-Government Institutions in Rural Development: With....
Mr. Datta Jadhav, Kolhapur

|| 210

49) Analytical Study of Changing MSP Rates in India
Dr. Ashish Bhasme, Kolhapur

|| 213

Role of Local Self-Government Institutions in Rural Development: With Special Reference to Maharashtra

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Local self-government institutions (LSGIs), particularly Panchayats, have been designed to address these challenges by decentralizing power and promoting community participation in governance. This paper focuses on the role of these institutions in the rural development of Maharashtra, examining how effective they have been in improving the quality of life for rural populations. The study seeks to evaluate the impact of LSGIs on rural governance, infrastructure development, and social welfare, while also addressing the obstacles that hinder their full potential.

Objectives

1. To analyze the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural development in Maharashtra.

2. To evaluate the effectiveness of local self-government in addressing key rural issues such as infrastructure, education, health, and sanitation.

3. To examine the challenges faced by LSGIs in rural governance and suggest measures to enhance their functioning.

4. To assess the impact of decentralization policies on rural empowerment and community participation.

Hypothesis

Local self-government institutions in Maharashtra play a critical role in rural development by enhancing governance at the grassroots level, but their effectiveness is limited due to challenges in resource allocation, political interference, and administrative constraints.

Description of Area

Maharashtra, located in the western part of India, is the second-most populous state, with a population of over 114 million (Census of India, 2011). While Maharashtra is often seen as a hub of industrial growth, especially in cities like Mumbai, Pune, and Nagpur, a significant portion of its population resides in rural areas. Over 57% of Maharashtra's population lives in rural areas

Abstract

Local self-government institutions (LSGIs) play a pivotal role in rural development, acting as the bridge between the government and local communities. This paper explores the role of LSGIs, particularly Panchayats, in fostering rural development in Maharashtra. By examining the legal framework, financial mechanisms, and operational strategies, the study assesses the effectiveness of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in addressing local issues such as infrastructure development, social welfare, education, and healthcare. The paper highlights both the achievements and the challenges faced by LSGIs in Maharashtra and provides recommendations for enhancing their role in sustainable rural development.

Keywords : Local Self-Government, Rural Development, Panchayati Raj, Maharashtra, Panchayats, Rural Infrastructure, Social Welfare, Decentralization, Governance, Empowerment.

Introduction

Rural areas in India, including Maharashtra, face multiple developmental challenges such as poverty, poor infrastructure, and limited access to education and healthcare.

(Government of Maharashtra, 2020), and agriculture remains the backbone of the rural economy. This rural landscape is not homogenous but includes a wide range of geographical, cultural, and economic settings, making rural development in the state complex and multifaceted.

Geographical Diversity

Maharashtra's rural areas are geographically diverse, with regions ranging from coastal plains to the Western Ghats, which run parallel to the Arabian Sea. The state's topography includes:

- **Coastal Regions:** The Konkan coast is fertile and ideal for agriculture, particularly for crops like rice, cashew, and coconut. Coastal regions face issues like high population density and vulnerability to natural calamities like cyclones and floods (Chavan, 2015).

- **Western Ghats:** The Western Ghats, a mountain range that stretches along the western side of Maharashtra, is home to tribal communities and is known for its dense forests and biodiversity. Agriculture here often depends on monsoon rains, and farmers face challenges like soil erosion and limited access to modern farming techniques (Shinde, 2017).

- **Drought-Prone Areas:** The Marathwada and Vidarbha regions are particularly susceptible to droughts, leading to water scarcity, crop failure, and poverty. These areas have faced a significant agrarian crisis, further exacerbating the need for development (Dixit, 2019).

- **Plateaus and Deserts:** The Deccan Plateau, which covers a large part of Maharashtra, experiences semi-arid conditions in areas like Solapur and Ahmednagar, where agriculture is limited and heavily dependent on irrigation (Patil, 2018).

Demographic and Socio-Economic Composition

The rural population of Maharashtra is diverse in terms of caste, class, and ethnicity. Communities like the Marathas, Kunbis, and Dalits have historically dominated agriculture,

while tribal groups such as the Bhils and Warlis live primarily in the forested regions (Deshmukh, 2016). These communities face unique social and economic challenges, including limited access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities.

Maharashtra also has a large number of farmers who rely on traditional farming methods, while other regions, especially in more developed rural areas, have embraced modern agricultural practices and technology. However, the state's rural economy faces several challenges, including:

- **Low Agricultural Productivity:** Areas like Vidarbha and Marathwada still suffer from low agricultural productivity, mainly due to a lack of modern farming practices, inadequate irrigation facilities, and erratic rainfall (Raut, 2018).

- **Dependency on Rain-Fed Agriculture:** Many rural areas, especially in drought-prone regions, are highly dependent on the monsoon, making them vulnerable to fluctuations in rainfall patterns and climate change (Patil, 2020).

- **Migration:** Due to limited employment opportunities in rural areas, many residents migrate to urban areas in search of work, which further exacerbates labor shortages in agricultural sectors (Chand, 2017).

Panchayati Raj System in Maharashtra

The state of Maharashtra is a strong proponent of decentralized governance, and the Panchayati Raj system plays a key role in rural development. It operates through three levels of governance, as mandated by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of 1992:

1. Gram Panchayat (Village Level):

At the base of the Panchayati Raj system, Gram Panchayats are responsible for the administration and development of individual villages. They are tasked with implementing rural development schemes, managing local resources, and providing essential services like

sanitation, water supply, and education. The Gram Panchayats have a direct impact on the daily lives of the rural population and are central to addressing local issues such as poverty, health, and infrastructure (Maharashtra Panchayati Raj Act, 1996).

2. Panchayat Samiti (Block Level):

Panchayat Samitis operate at the block level and oversee the functioning of several Gram Panchayats within their jurisdiction. They handle larger development projects such as the construction of roads, schools, and healthcare facilities that span multiple villages (Maharashtra Rural Development Department, 2019).

3. Zilla Parishad (District Level):

The Zilla Parishad is the apex body of the Panchayati Raj system at the district level, playing a vital role in coordinating development programs across various blocks. Zilla Parishads also oversee district-wide projects like the implementation of central government schemes (such as MGNREGA) and rural development initiatives (Government of Maharashtra, 2020).

These three-tier Panchayati Raj system is designed to promote local participation in governance, decentralize administrative authority, and enable communities to address their unique needs effectively. However, the system has faced challenges, including limited financial autonomy, political interference, and a lack of administrative capacity in many rural areas (Jadhav, 2018).

Key Rural Development Challenges in Maharashtra

The rural areas of Maharashtra face multiple development challenges that are intricately tied to the region's diverse geography, socio-economic conditions, and historical factors. Some of the most pressing issues include:

- **Water Scarcity:** A significant portion of rural Maharashtra depends on agriculture, but the recurring water scarcity, especially in regions like Marathwada, severely impacts farming activities (Jadhav, 2017).

- **Poverty and Unemployment:** High levels of poverty and limited employment opportunities plague rural areas. Even with government programs such as MGNREGA, the rural workforce faces inadequate income and job security (Maharashtra Rural Development Report, 2020).

- **Agricultural Distress:** Fluctuating crop prices, poor irrigation infrastructure, and dependence on rain-fed agriculture have contributed to the agrarian crisis in rural Maharashtra, leading to farmer indebtedness and migration to cities for better prospects (Dixit, 2020).

- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Despite improvements in road networks and electrification, issues like inadequate healthcare facilities, poor educational infrastructure, and inefficient public transportation persist in many rural areas (Shinde, 2018).

Despite these challenges, local self-government bodies such as Panchayats have made significant strides in addressing these issues, although their success has been uneven across different regions (Raut, 2021).

Conclusion

Maharashtra's rural areas are diverse, with each region facing its own set of unique developmental challenges. The Panchayati Raj system, while a powerful tool for promoting decentralization and addressing local issues, still requires strengthening to meet the demands of rural development in the state. Efforts must focus on improving the functioning and financial autonomy of local self-government institutions, empowering the rural population, and addressing key challenges such as water scarcity, agricultural distress, and unemployment. By doing so, Maharashtra can achieve more inclusive and sustainable rural development outcomes (Jadhav, 2019).

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Analytical Study of Changing MSP Rates in India

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Abstract :

The agricultural sector is the main income and employment source in India. Most of the people are depending on agriculture. India produces several agricultural products and they sell in the national and international markets. But agricultural production is uncertain and depends on some factors and due to that farmers/producers are also uncertain about getting the same (good) returns all the time. To overcome this problem of uncertain returns, the government of India provides MSP to the farmers. The major 22 crops get MSP from the government every year. The MSP rates change every year by the government. As per changes in the cost of production government changes the MSP of that crop.

Here in this study, the researcher tried to focus on only understanding the changes in MSP rate from 2003-04 to 2024-25. Year-wise changes are studied by the researcher and tried to interpret the situation. The researcher considered only Kharif crops for this analysis and the remaining 8 (rabi and commercial) crops were not studied.

Keywords_ Minimum Support Price (MSP), Kharif, Farmers, Market.

Introduction:

As in other developing countries, agriculture is the primary source of income and employment in India. According to one of the