

National Seminar on Decentralised Governance in Three Decades of Constitutional Amendment

Experiences, Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

(29-30 January 2026)

Sponsored by

 Indian Council of
Social Science Research
New Delhi

Organised by



**M.P. Institute of
Social Science Research**

(Autonomous Institute of ICSSR, Ministry of Education, Govt. of India
and Govt. of Madhya Pradesh)

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About the Institute

The Madhya Pradesh Institute of Social Science Research, located in Ujjain, was founded in 1983 and serves as a leading research institution supported by the Indian Council of Social Science Research, the Ministry of Education, Government of India, and the Ministry of Higher Education, Government of Madhya Pradesh.

MPISSR focuses on research, evaluation, monitoring, and training concerning the issues of social, economic, cultural, administrative, and civic dimensions. The core activities of MPISSR address challenges and issues pertinent to Madhya Pradesh and its neighbouring states. Recognising the significance and relevance of researchable areas, MPISSR has identified several thematic areas to guide its research endeavours: Studies in PanchayatRaj and Rural Development; Studies in Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes; Studies in Democracy and Electoral Behaviour; Studies in Social Justice and Human Rights; Studies in Education; Gender Studies; Studies in Environment; Studies in Information Technology and Society; Studies in New Economic Policy and Society, and Studies related to Corporate Social Responsibility.

MPISSR caters to the needs of policy planners, academia, government officials, legislators, non-governmental organisations, students, teachers, doctoral and post-doctoral scholars, other research institutions, and national and international organisations. The Institute, since its inception, has been carrying out systemic studies in the form of research projects on issues of topical importance. Most of these studies are commissioned/ sponsored by the various ministries/agencies of central and state governments, national and international organisations. Full academic freedom and high professional quality are the hallmarks of the Institute's research works and environment.

MPISSR strives to make a strong impact on society through the dissemination of the results of its research studies. Since its inception, the Institute has completed more than 200 studies on wide-ranging topics in the social sciences. These cover applied and policy-related studies on various economic, social, political, and administrative issues of Madhya Pradesh and adjoining states. The faculty members of the Institute have published about 40 books and also 250 articles in national-level refereed journals. Besides these, the faculty has been regularly contributing to leading newspapers to stimulate serious public debate and to create public opinion on many contemporary issues.

MPISSR has been publishing two biannual journals, one in English (Madhya Pradesh Journal of Social Sciences) (UGC-CARE Listed-Group-I) since 1995, and the other in Hindi (Madhya Pradesh Samajik Vigyan Anusandhan Journal) (UGC-CARE Listed-Group-I) since 2003. Both journals disseminate views, debates, research findings, and book reviews related to contemporary social science issues. MPISSR has been regularly organising several training and capacity-building programmes and workshops for research scholars and faculty members of social science disciplines related to research methodology. MPISSR has been organising seminars/conferences regularly on contemporary issues. The faculty members have been engaged in national and international seminars to disseminate the findings of their research work among the academic fraternity.



About the Seminar

The fundamental requirement for effective decentralised governance is that the system must align well with the needs, desires, backgrounds, and cultural values of the local population, and those chosen to operate the system should possess integrity, capability, and a commitment to public service. Governance needs to be democratic, inclusive, transparent, and accountable. The essence of effective and responsive governance is centred on serving others, addressing their issues, and improving their quality of life to make it more enjoyable and fulfilling. This concept closely aligns with Gandhi's belief in politics as a means to serve the public rather than to dominate them. The issue of governance is particularly significant for grassroots democracy and rural development, as the decisions made by elected representatives at the local level directly affect a large portion of population.

In India, post-Independence efforts have aimed to fulfil the needs and expectations of rural inhabitants. Significant initiatives have targeted various rural issues with considerable investments, but the outcomes have fallen short of expectations. After three decades of decentralised governance, there have been numerous achievements along with some challenges. The states have ensured community involvement in local governance bodies with appropriate representation across gender, class, and caste in line with the amendment package. Issues of accountability in local governance remain a serious matter of concern. Although there is direct public participation, transparency continues to be scrutinised, although a highly informal local social structure contributes to an assurance of transparency. Local governance is directly responsive to the community since the routine operation of local institutions is visible and can be questioned. Effective governance remains a challenge due to insufficient training and capacity building for grassroots organisations.

Efforts have been made to empower individuals through legislation, yet evidence suggests that participation from the grassroots level remains significantly low, with grassroots bodies like gram sabhas often functioning as mere formal entities without meaningful involvement in their designated tasks. It is disheartening that both the grassroots leadership and local administration have failed to enhance the gram sabha's role. Regarding the financial situation of panchayats, it entirely relies on government grants. The limited engagement can largely be attributed to deep-rooted social and economic hierarchies present in villages. The performance and effectiveness of panchayat members are heavily influenced by these social stratifications and class distinctions. The concept of participation, which is vital to panchayat raj, is seldom reflected in actual practice. In retrospect, it appears unavoidable that influential individuals may perceive broader community involvement unfavourably.

The political dynamics at the grassroots level are complex, involving numerous stakeholders who each hold varying degrees of influence in different contexts. Indeed, one might argue that despite explicit provisions, there remains a disconnect between decisions made at the macro level and the realities faced on the ground. There is a pressing need for awareness among local officials and traditional leaders regarding the functioning of panchayats to achieve effective rural development. Engaging the state, the PRR, and local communities would not only raise awareness about people's rights but also promote transparency in the planning, implementation, and oversight of rural development initiatives.

Since the enactment of the 73rd Amendment Act, three decades have passed, bringing significant changes in rural areas with considerable shifts in socio-political dynamics. This approach is based on two fundamental premises. First, society, with its structural complexities, has gained legal and institutional avenues via panchayat raj to operate in a more accountable and substantive manner at the grassroots level. This suggests that the execution of panchayat raj has attempted to unify the disparities created by social stratification based on caste, class, and gender. This unification has, to some extent, facilitated more informed decision-making at the grassroots level. Second, policymakers at the macro level have exhibited minimal confidence in the new system's ability to deliver results, leading to development processes that are arguably more accountable and reliable than previously tried governance frameworks. Even if these previously untried hypotheses prove accurate, the adaptability of overarching decisions to reform governance will largely depend on how local operatives interpret and adjust to the macro framework. It is quite possible that local power structures still exert substantial influence over the new governance model's democratic functioning.

It can be contended that, after over thirty years of operation, it would be beneficial to assess everything constructed in the earlier analysis. Despite the practicality of such an evaluation, the intent behind generating the insights and process document necessitates an early evaluation of the system from the vantage point of rural governance as well as the socio-political context. The discourse that offers insights into the factors contributing to successes and failures in decentralised decision-making could highlight the importance of stakeholders' awareness of their rights, their understanding of participatory decision-making, issues of exclusion, and concepts of development, equity, and justice within the decision-making framework. This ensures that the perspectives of society's most vulnerable individuals are included in the decision-making process. Additionally, it addresses both the current and future developmental needs of society.

Considering the importance of this relevant topic, the Madhya Pradesh Institute of Social Science Research in Ujjain is hosting a National Seminar on Decentralised Governance in Three Decades of Constitutional Amendment: Experiences, Issues, Challenges, and Opportunities to thoroughly discuss the operations of decentralised governance in India. The seminar aims to gather academics, policy analysts, civil society activists, and researchers focusing on these broad thematic areas.

Themes of the Seminar

The national seminar is expected to attempt to understand the similarities and differences in the context and how PRIs are functioning at the state level, the way in which public opinions are formed at the state level, the assessment regarding the deepening of the democratic political system and the quality of governance at grassroots levels in India. In that direction broad themes of the seminar are as follows-

- **73rd Constitutional Amendment and Status of PRIs in Indian States in Three Decades**
- **Devolution of Funds, Functions and Functionaries to PRIs in Indian States**
- **Changing Power Structure and Empowerment of Marginalised Sections (SCs/STs)**
- **Gender Issues and Emancipation of Women's Leadership through PRIs**
- **Decentralised Planning and Financial Status of Panchayats**
- **Training and Capacity Building Initiatives for PRR at the State Level**

MPISSR invites research papers for participation in the National Seminar. The length of the paper should be between 5000 and 6000 words. The paper presenters may consider focusing on any theme of the seminar. MPISSR will reimburse travel costs and will arrange local hospitality for the invited delegates.

**Submission of FULL PAPER (5000-6000 words)
along with ABSTRACT (150-250 words)
on or before December 29, 2025**

All communications may please be sent to:
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