



PARTICIPATORY GOVERNANCE AND EMPOWERMENT OF TRIBAL COMMUNITY OF MANA VILLAGE OF UTTARAKHAND

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Abstract

Participatory governance for tribal communities in India focuses on empowering indigenous populations through direct involvement in decision-making, utilizing and strengthening traditional self-governance and enforcing legal frameworks like PESA (1996). Key initiatives include the Dharti Aaba Janbhagidari Abhiyan which promotes community-driven development in over 25000 villages and Aadi Karmayogi Abhiyan aimed at building 20 lakhs tribal leaders. Tribal empowerment and governance in PESA Act empower Gram Sabhas (village assemblies) to manage natural resources, resolve disputes based on customary laws and oversee development projects. The Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) established in 1999 leads policy, while initiatives like Jan Sunwayi allow direct voice planning. For economic empowerment through National Schedules Tribes Finance and Development Corporation (NSTFDC) loans are provided for livelihood and self-help groups. Ekalavya Model Residential Schools are established to ensure qualitative and holistic education to the tribal students. The schemes like Dharti Aaba Janbhagidari Abhiyan – a massive nation-wide campaign to ensure saturation of government schemes in tribal areas. Aadi Karmayogi Abhiyan provides training to more than 20 lakhs tribal youth as community leaders to drive development. PM Aadi Adarsh Gram Yojana transform tribal majority villages into model villages. Recognition is given to traditional Tribal Panchayats for social control and local management. These efforts focus on transitioning from a “welfare” approach to a “right-based”, participatory model that recognizes the agency of tribal communities in their own development.

Key Words: Welfare, Tribal, Participatory, Empowerment, Governance, Right-based, Model-villages.

I. Introduction

Empowerment, a multidimensional concept is one of the perennially contemporary issues which is relevant even today. Empowerment involves the community in the decision-making process and rights of the community are secured. In this paper researcher will focus on the steps taken by the government in ‘Mana village’ in empowering the local ‘Bhotia community’ and safeguarding their rights through several measures and infrastructural development for the survival of the community. Here the paper will explore the concept of participatory governance in empowering the community to foster economic growth and encourage capital formation in the village. The schemes like Dharti Aaba Janbhagidari Abhiyan – a massive nation-wide campaign to ensure saturation of government schemes in tribal areas. Aadi Karmayogi Abhiyan provides training to more than 20 lakhs tribal youth as community leaders to drive development. PM Aadi Adarsh Gram Yojana transform tribal majority villages into model villages. Recognition is given to traditional Tribal Panchayats for social control and local management. These efforts focus on transitioning from a “welfare” approach to a “right-based”, participatory model that recognizes the agency of tribal communities in their own development. (<http://blog.mygov.in>)

II. Concept of Participatory Governance

In contemporary era the state’s prosperity is inextricably linked to the prosperity of its citizens. A secure, economically prosperous and engaged community forms the backbone of a strong state. Empowerment includes wealth generation, support the artisans and traders, ensure rights of the community, and to protect his citizens in time of crisis. Empowerment is the inclusion of the marginalized people of the village in local governance through the formation of regional centres. Empowerment was balanced with responsibility of the ruler where residents promoted the prosperity of the whole community. Participatory governance includes accountable leadership (<http://www.civicus.org>) in governing the state and to promote educational and ethical growth of the people. Participatory governance is a model that empowers citizens and



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stakeholders to directly influence public decision-making, policy formulation, and implementation rather than relying solely on elected representatives. It aims to increase transparency, trust, and accountability by fostering collaboration between government and the public (<http://blog.mygov.in>). Often called participatory democracy or collaborative governance, it emphasizes direct, active citizen involvement. Participatory governance results in more relevant and accepted decisions, strengthens the relationship between government and citizens and gives marginalized groups a stronger voice. Core areas include participatory budgeting where citizens directly decide how to allocate part of a municipal or public budget. Citizen councils are formed where residents are chosen to express on required policy issues. It is totally community-based planning where residents help to design development projects or public services. It is built on principles of transparency, accountability, inclusivity, and equity in public life (McNulty&Wampler,2015:1-14).

III. What Community Empowerment really means

Community empowerment is the process of building, sharing, or re-negotiating power, capacity and resources enabling people to take collective control over their lives and local environments. It promotes self-reliance by strengthening skills and encouraging active participation in decision-making to address social economic and political issues. In Mana village Skill India helped many Bhotia tribes to engage themselves in a training programme to equip with modern techniques of art and crafts of woollen garments to find a market beyond Mana to international and national fair through governmental shops. Community empowerment helped in developing skills, knowledge and leadership within the community securing the necessary resources, information, and authority to act. It is basically a co-operative model where residents are active partners. Community empowerment (<http://www.mpow.org>) increased sense of belonging and community resilience, it helped the Bhotia community to meet the local challenges and improved their health well-being and quality of life. Government has taken steps to improve the life of the community through textile designing so that it prevents the younger community from migration from the village. Ekalavya Model Residential Schools are developed to provide holistic career-oriented education to the younger generation to empower them better and to engage the youths in leadership role of the village – a means of participation.

IV. Demography of Mana Village

Mana the village with religious specificity is in Chamoli district, Uttarakhand, about 4 kilometres from Badrinath and close to the Indo-Tibetan border is surrounded by snow-capped peaks and ancient caves. Known as the first Indian village by Border Roads Organisation (BRO) on the northern frontier, it is situated at an altitude of around 3200 meters. This culturally rich Himalayan village is a popular tourist spot and places like Vasudhara Falls and Satopanth Lake attracts the trekkers. Mana holds deep mythological significance with sites like Vyasa Gufa, Ganesh Gufa, and Bhim Pul, Saraswati River connected to Mahabharata legends. It is believed that sage Ved Vyas stayed here to write the Mahabharata and Lord Ganesha wrote it down inside Ganesh Gufa. The Pandavas is also said to have passed through Mana on their way to heaven ('swargarohini path), crossing a stone bridge called Bhim Pul. These stories make Mana special for both its history and spiritual value. Mana also serves as the last road-accessible point on NH-7. Home to the Bhutia community, the village offers a glimpse into local life, spiritual heritage, and scenic beauty. Mana has officially marked as 'First Indian Village' by the Indian government. Mana is a medium sized village located in Joshimath block of Chamoli district (Uttarakhand) with a population of 1568 according to Gram Panchayat Data (2024) of the village with high rate of literacy. Mana is home to the Bhutia tribe who are of Indo-Tibetan origin. They live in stone houses, follow old customs, and have a deep faith in religion. Most villagers speak Bhutia, Garhwali and Hindi. During the tourist season they sell handmade woollen clothes, herbs, and local tea. Life of the community is simple, peaceful, and deeply connected to nature and faith. People in this village are very polite follows all cultural ethos, festivals are small and focused around Badrinath temple and local gods. The people dwell in stone cottage which are mud plastered and have slate tiled sloping roofs. The houses are built into the hillside and have a kitchen garden in the backyard. Part of their livelihood is to grow spinach, cauliflower and potato and sell this to hotels and guest houses in Badrinath. The women of Bhutia community are excellent in weaving handcrafted shawls, carpets, and woollen items like gudma, thulma, pankhi, pattu, sweater, cap, muffler, scarf, carpet, ashan and pakhi. The community reside here for six months from April to October and come down from the hill and reside in rented houses in either Joshimath or in Gopeshwar for the rest six months due to heavy snowfall. This shift in residence does not hamper



the livelihood of this tribal community and they are well adjusted in the adjacent places as they are provided with educational facility, shelter, and economic activities through governmental initiatives. Because of severe winters, the villagers practice seasonal migration and engage in weaving and handicrafts. Most interestingly the researcher came to know from Pitambar Singh Moolpa who is the Pradhan of Mana village that few of the Bhutia people owned property and lands in Joshimath and some are affluent class running Hotels and Homestays in Badrinath or Joshimath and very few are engaged in governmental jobs. Mana has education facility; health centres and the election were also held in Mana village. Government is trying to empower the community through various economic measures and Mana village has been selected for Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan a key initiative in improving socio-economic conditions of tribal communities across India (GP Data of Mana Village, 2024).

Table – 1

2024 Mana Panchayat Data

Total No. of Houses	562
Population	1568 (Male- 951, Female - 617)
Children (0-6 yrs)	107 (Boy - 51, Girl - 56)
Schedule Caste	84 (Male-57, Female-27)
Schedule Tribe	887 (Male-415, Female-472)
Literacy	97.99%
Workers	1200 (Male – 732, Female-468)

(Source: - GP Data of Mana Village)

V. Community Empowerment in Mana Village

Modern governance pays special attention to how decisions are made and implemented. However, model of governance the king or the leader plays an extremely important roles, since he believes in monarchy as the best system of governance. Contemporary state is not monarchical but the representative democratic state does revolve round the way the leader of the state performs and functions. The role of leader is an important lens to be contextualized and is useful for modern day governance. Historically the Bhutias of Mana were involved in trade with Tibet exchanging goods like wool and salt, but this ceased after the 1962 conflict, leading to a stronger reliance on agriculture and tourism ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in)). This region is home to the Bhutia tribes who have lived in the Mana village for centuries according to government census report 2011. The village has been selected by central government under the ‘Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan’ for tribal empowerment through community-driven tourism and governmental-led sustainable livelihood programs that reflects the unique culture of the Bhutia tribe through various Government Development Programs.

1. Community Based Livelihood Programs
2. Government Developmental Programs
3. Skill Development Programs
4. Participatory Governance and Planning

Community Based Livelihood Programs

- **Economic Empowerment:** These initiatives focus on providing economic stability through sustainable livelihood programs. Homestay programs are a significant social innovation that provide an alternative livelihood and preserve cultural heritage. Homestays generate income for local households and create employment opportunities which helps reduce rural outmigration particularly among the younger generation. Economic activities in Mana village are driven by tourism, agro-pastoralism and handicrafts deeply influenced by its seasonal accessibility and cultural association with the Marcha Bhotia tribe ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in)).
- **Cultural Preservation:** Visitors experience the indigenous traditions, cuisine, crafts, and oral histories of the Bhutia people which strengthens local identity and encourages the continuation of traditional practices. Some homestay initiatives incorporate eco-friendly practices such as organic farming and the use of solar energy. As the India’s first village near the Indo-Tibetan border, Mana attracts many pilgrims and tourists. Locals run small shops, tea stalls and restaurants catering to visitors ([www.https://myroots.euttaranchal.com/village-mana-chamoli-40808.html](https://myroots.euttaranchal.com/village-mana-chamoli-40808.html)).



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- **Self-Help Groups (SHGs):** Schemes often channel resources and training to the tribal women for the economic growth. The village produces ‘panch Badri Prasadam’ (religious offerings), including Randana (millet) laddu, herbal incense and locally made herbal products for pilgrims. Earnings are obtained from selling products of weaving of woollen carpets, rugs (dann), garments like sweaters and handicrafts to the tourists. Due to high altitude, agriculture is seasonal. Key crops include potatoes, beans, and mustard. Livestock rearing including mules and sheep is a significant part of their livelihood with animals used for transport and wool production is another source of earning of the community (www.https://myroots.euttaranchal.com/village-mana-chamoli-40808.html).

Government Developmental Programs

- **Sustainable Livelihood:** Mana village has been specifically selected for the Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan which provide a multifaced approach to development. Following the closure of trade routes in 1962, the community need to adapt with the changing social pattern and modern initiatives that creates sustainable economic opportunities and infrastructure development by government. This is a multipronged approach to development. Community is allowed to use forest products like herbs, honey, resins through Van Panchayats to maintain sustainability. Forest based enterprises are centred around high-altitude resources and sustainable community management. These enterprises primarily focus on cultivation, collection, and processing of rare herbs and creating sustainable economic opportunities. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))
- **Digital Inclusion:** Efforts are underway to bridge the digital divide through projects like Bharat Net and localized digital literacy programs, enabling access to e-governance, financial services and e-commerce platforms. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))
- **Healthcare Facilities:** Focus areas include better facilities for the early detection and management of genetic disorders like Sickle Cell Disease as well as general improvements in access to medical services. There is one primary health care centre in the village and is served by an Army Camp Health centre. Due to its location as a remote border village residents rely on health facilities in nearby Badrinath and the Community Health Centre in Joshimath. Under the Vibrant Village Programme, Mana is receiving increased infrastructural focus including improvements to healthcare access. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))
- **Van Dhan Vikas Kendras:** These centres are clusters of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) that focus on value addition and marketing of Minor Forest Products primarily benefitting tribal women.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Pradhan Mantri Janjati Unnat Gram Abhiyan is a key component of broader Viksit Bharat aimed at the holistic development and integration of tribal communities by providing housing, clean drinking water, and road connectivity. Infrastructural improvement enhances basic facilities and connectivity addressing critical gaps in rural infrastructure. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))
- **Educational Facility:** There is an emphasis on ensuring educational continuity for children who seasonally migrate to lower altitudes so their academic year is not disrupted. Initiatives include the establishment of new and improved residential schools and hostels (like Ekalavya Model Residential Schools) to provide quality, free education for tribal children. Scholarship schemes also provide financial assistance to tribal students. In Mana village there is one school and educational facilities are in nearby developed areas like Joshimath and Gopeshwar. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))

Skill Development Programs

- **Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH):** Skill development is a buzzword in India as Union Government has invested a lot of resources in it and when it comes to skilled artisans and that too in remote area like Mana village. Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH) worked in Mana village to develop the skill, design development, create infrastructure, and provide marketing linkages apart from several challenges like high altitude of the village, lack of skill and design input, decentralised distribution of inhabitants and the unwillingness of the new generation to take forward their traditional crafts owing to urbanization. Still with a continued efforts of training of 5 months 40 artisans of the village got trained of new product development. These activities were carried out in association with SVHM (Swami Vivekananda Health Mission) in association with Ministry of Textile (Handicraft Development Office) to bring a revolutionary change in traditional items made of raw wool products like ‘Pankhi Shawl’ under Mana Craft Project



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which aims in designing the items as per international trends and to develop into high fashion items such as garments and accessories. These initiatives will help to bring back the population migrated to cities and increase the local sales as well as exports of handicrafts being produced in this village. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))

- **International Exposure to Local Artisans:** To promote the production of this village and to give international exposure to the local artisans EPCH had taken initiative to bring the artisans to participate in the international fair in Delhi with the new launch of traditional woollen garments into modern trendy fashionable items which increases the demand of the products. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))
- **Empowerment of the Marginalized:** While operating within a traditional social framework, government provides protections for vulnerable groups, including rights for women such as access to property and protection against exploitation. Frontier tribes (atavikas) were given certain rights over natural resources in the areas they inhabited. Improving livelihoods through programs like the *Pradhan Mantri Vanbandhu Vikas Yojana* and ensuring Minimum Support Price (MSP) for minor forest produce. This includes supporting tribal-led eco-tourism and forest-based enterprises. Forest based enterprises are centred around high altitude resources and sustainable community management. These enterprises primarily focus on the cultivation, collection, and processing of rare Himalayan flora. The community engaged in sustainable harvesting of the higher altitudinal herbal plants and rare species for traditional Ayurvedic uses. Utilising local materials like sheep wool and forest sourced fibres, villagers engaged in small scale cottage industries. This includes weaving traditional Bhotiya carpets and garments which are sold to tourists visiting Badrinath. The collection and sale of non-timber forest products such as wild edibles, resins and honey are vital source of economic activities. These provides alternative income reducing dependency on subsistence agricultural products. Local community-led tourism initiatives offer guided treks through the high- altitude forests, showcasing the region's unique bio-diversity. These enterprises are often governed by *Van Panchayats* (Forest Councils) which are community led bodies that manage forest land and ensure equitable distribution of resources. ([www.http://tribal.nic.in](http://tribal.nic.in))

Participatory Governance and Planning

- **Grassroots Leadership and Governance:** Launching the Adi Karmayogi Abhiyan to train tribal youth, women and officers as change-makers (Adi Sewa Kendras) and implementing 'Tribal Village Vision 2030 Declaration' through participatory planning at the Gram Sabha level. This initiative empowers local communities (gram sabhas) to create their own 'Village Action Plans', ensuring development aligns with local priorities. This approach transforms tribal communities from beneficiaries to decision-makers. (www.mygov.in)
- **Decentralization and Gram Sabha-Approved Planning:** The administrative structure facilitated local participation through a hierarchical system, including villages (grama) and regional centres (sangrahana, kharvatika, dronamukha, sthaniya) as seen in Kautilya's time. *Gram Sabha Approved Planning* under mission 'Vikshit Bharat' ensures employment for the tribal community and 'Gramin Vikshit Bharat Gurantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission' Bill, 2025 emphasized that planning for rural employment and development schemes should be Panchayat-led and Gram Sabha approved ensuring a bottom up approach. (www.mygov.in)
- **Youth Engagement Platforms:** The government launched platforms like www.mygov.in and www.mybharat.in portal for citizens especially youth to share ideas and visions for Viksit Bharat 2047. Initiatives like the 'Vikshit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue' involve selecting participants from villages to discuss and contribute ideas on a national level. In essence 'political participation' in the context of Vikshit Bharat in village like Mana is less about traditional party politics and more about active 'civic community' involvement in government initiated developmental and cultural programs aimed at transforming rural areas and to bring prosperity of the whole community. (www.mygov.in)
- **Accountability and Transparency:** Citizens are encouraged to engage actively in local governance, demand transparency and use mechanisms like the Right to Information (RTI) to hold local authorities accountable for the utilization of development funds and to check bureaucratic corruption. (www.mygov.in)
- **Vikshit Vibrant Villages Program (VVVP):** The program involves youth volunteers from across the country working with local communities in identified border villages as in Mana, to promote development in domains like healthcare, skill-building and environmental protection. (www.mygov.in)



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VI. Conclusion

During the modern era the welfare economists recommend adequate funds for the social sector and our constitution proclaims the welfare of masses as the ideal. For example, in the Constitution, Article 41 of Directive Principles asks the state, “The State, shall, within the limits of its economic capacity and development, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education and to public assistance in cases of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement, and in other cases of undeserved want (Article 41)”. Article 42 says the state shall make provisions for securing just and humane conditions of work and for maternity benefits (The Constitution of India, Part-IV). State to be accountable for any kind of welfare and crises in a nation which is very clearly visible in modern democratic countries like India.

Conclusively we may say that welfare is not a matter of charity but a right of citizens living in a state. Promotion of the welfare of different sections of society is the duty of State. Today we have a clear idea of a self-reliant, mixed, and welfare-oriented economy. Therefore, welfare state provides the guarantee against starvation, poverty, and unemployment. Such type of welfare state where there is no poverty, no unemployment, and no starvation is the requirement of every economy. The state laid down various regulations to control the free play of competition, which could be detrimental to the interests of the common people and the revenues and security of the state. During modern era also the establishment of a welfare state is the fundamental objective of modern democratic governments. To achieve this objective, the State attempts to satisfy the wants of each person of the society. To be precise modern Governance focus on –

- Economic Empowerment and Livelihood (focus on wealth generation Artha as a source of earning livelihood with state assistance, support for artisans and traders to take decisions, rights of the community were protected and King should protect the citizens or assist them to raise their standard of living).
- Social and Local Governance (administrative decentralization through participation of the local people by maintaining regional centres, protection of the vulnerable groups and empowerment of marginalised, tribes were given the rights over natural resources for the sustainable livelihood).
- Civic Engagement and Responsibility (active participation of the local community for betterment of all and empowerment is balanced with responsibility towards citizens leader’s accountability to the people, ensure education and foster a sense of duty).
- Infrastructural Development and Accountability (to provide strong, fair, and impartial administration where people could live and work stably).

In the essence, participatory governance advocates for a “welfare society” where empowerment is achieved through a combination of state-supported economic opportunities, decentralized governance, and a strong, ethical leadership that prioritizes the collective good.

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- <http://www.civicus.org>
 - <http://blog.mygov.in>
 - <http://www.mpow.org> (Community Empowerment Process in the Context of Community Planning)