

**Title of the Article:** *Emerging Model Villages in India: A Study of Punsari Village From The State Of Gujarat (INDIA)*

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*Emerging Model Villages in India: A Study of Punsari Village from the State of Gujarat (INDIA)*

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**Abstract:**

Although India no more lives in its villages, the rural population is sizeably large and more importantly it reels under the pressure of extreme poverty, pitiable basic amenities and dearth of livelihood opportunities. Today, Urbanisation and urban growth has captured the attention of government and policy makers especially in the post liberalisation period. However, much needs to be done to improve the conditions of the people living in the rural areas. The strengthening of village democracy was considered as a possible solution to resolving issues at the grassroots level. This paved way for the historic 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment act (CAA) in 1993 which sought to empower people at the base of India's federal polity. Encouraging people's participation in the process of development, policy making and its implementation was the fundamental objective of this legislation. Twenty five years have passed by since the promulgation of 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA in 1993. Nonetheless, much needs to be done and achieved. There is an urgent need to transform the rural landscape of India and bring them at par with its urban counterparts while retaining the soul of the rural life. The case of village Punsari from the Sabharkantha District of state of Gujarat (INDIA) is unique as it stands out as a smart and model village. All the modern amenities found in an urban area are available in this area. The present paper aims to argue using descriptive analytical framework that such smart villages are a ray of hope for the rural revitalisation in the countryside of India. Semi structured interviews of the local leaders, officers and stakeholders formed an important part of the research to generate insights and conclusions. The paper argues that grassroots leadership, community participation, decentralisation of powers to local bodies in rural areas and financial support in the form of various government schemes can bring far reaching changes in rural landscape of India. Punsari represents a classic example as well as an exemplar of concerted efforts of elected leaders, community people and government support to bring transformation and make villages smart as well as sustainable.

## **Emerging Model Villages In India: A Study Of Punsari Village From The State Of Gujarat (INDIA)**

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### **Introduction:**

India is rapidly urbanising so much so that the 2011 census for the first time recorded greater absolute increase in urban population than the rural population of India. Not much to the surprise since the onset of globalisation in early 1990's the urban bias is declining and increasingly national and sub-national governments are focusing on urban rejuvenation programmes like JNNURM and latest flagship programme of Smart City Mission of the current government in India .However, one must understand that although India no more lives in its villages, the rural population is sizeably large (68% of the total Population) and more importantly it reels under the pressure of extreme poverty, pitiable basic amenities and dearth of livelihood opportunities. Therefore an equal amount of attention is required to be directed towards rural renewal schemes which china has been doing since late 1980's<sup>1</sup>. Since Independence dedicated government programmes have been directed toward integrated development of rural areas. Nonetheless the results and achievements of these development schemes have been disappointing. Uneven regional development, extreme backwardness of specific rural regions, increased migration to urban areas, dearth of employment opportunities and sub-standard living conditions are some of the major concerns of the rural areas in India. Therefore development of the hinterland is one of most important goals and challenges that India is facing today.

In this backdrop, the present paper purports to explore, analyse and explain the concept of model village in India. This paper aims to basically answer following research questions:

- 1) What is rural development in Indian context and how idea of model village is an important tool to achieve it?
- 2) How did Punsari Village transform into a model village and what are its major achievements?
- 3) Is there a gap between model village and an ideal village and why it is so?

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<sup>1</sup> For an interesting account of rural rejuvenation programmes in china look at the work of Minzi Su. (2009) China's Rural Development Policy: Exploring the "New Socialist Countryside." Boulder: First Forum Press.

In order to seek answers to above mentioned questions the paper focuses its study on one of the first model village from the state of Gujarat in India and endeavours to chart out its transformation in this paper.

There is an urgent need to transform the rural landscape of India and bring them at par with its urban counterparts while retaining the soul of the rural life. This is primarily needed to ease the galloping pressure on urban areas, decongest them and restrict migration of rural population to urban dwellings. The case of village Punsari from the Sabharkantha District of state of Gujarat (INDIA) is unique as it stands out as India's first model as well as smart village. The paper aims to argue using descriptive analytical framework that such smart villages are a ray of hope for the rural revitalisation in the countryside of India. The paper maintains that grassroots leadership, community participation, decentralisation of powers to local bodies in rural areas and financial support in the form of various government schemes can bring far reaching changes in rural landscape of India which is essential to deal effectively with rural distress. Punsari represents a classic example as well as an exemplar of concerted efforts of elected leaders, community people and government support to bring transformation and make villages smart as well as sustainable. The paper also aims to strongly advocate a view that there still exists a considerable gap in what we call a model village and what should be an Ideal village. These questions have been interrogated through descriptive analytical method. The information is gleaned from primary as well as secondary sources. In-depth semi-structured interviews of the Ex-Village Headman (Head man/woman is called a Sarpanch in India), Current village Headwoman and other members of the Punsari Gram Panchayat (Rural Local Body in India) and observations from the field visits of the village constitute the core of the primary data of the present paper. Books, journal articles, government reports and online sources also have been used to substantiate the arguments made in this work.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part explains the concept of rural development and explores the trajectory of rural development in India. The second part tries to focus on the role of elected bodies i.e. Panchayati Raj Institutions that are considered as the important vehicles of rural development. The third section of this paper draws heavily from the field work conducted at the Punsari Village and discusses in detail the process of transformation that took place in this village. The final segment of the paper offers concluding remarks and

jostles to argue that a lot is yet to achieve since there exists a gap between model village and an ideal village.

### **Conceptualising rural development and idea of Model Village:**

Development<sup>2</sup> is a highly complex, relative and multi-dimensional concept. The core focus of this term even today remains economic growth however some quintessential terms such as sustainability and inclusiveness have been added to broaden the scope of this concept. From a holistic perspective development is directed to achieve goals in health, education, public infrastructure and empowerment of the people particularly at the grass roots level. The term rural development represents improvement in the quality of life of the people in rural areas. As per Chambers (1983) “Rural Development is a strategy to enable a specific group of people, poor rural women and men, to gain for themselves and their children more of what they want and need.” According to Sreedhar G (2006) as a phenomenon rural development can be viewed as the result of interactions between various physical, environmental, technological, economic, socio-cultural and institutional factors in the rural areas of a nation. Sreedhar G adds that as a strategy, rural development is the approach or operational design to bring about the desired positive change in the socio-economic and cultural life of the people. Although development of rural areas was always a priority of Indian government since independence, off late rapid urbanisation has diverted attention of the government on urban areas. Equal attention needs to be paid to the goal of rural rejuvenation. In the following section, author briefly sketches the trajectory of rural development programmes in India.

### **Trajectory of Rural development in India:**

Following the Gandhian vision and dream of Gram Swaraj (Village Level Self-Governance), rural development was always accorded critical salience in the planning process of independent India. It began with launching of the Community Development Programmes (hereafter CDP) in 1952 followed by National Extension Services (hereafter NES) in 1953. These two programmes had ambitious objectives and envisioned community participation but failed miserably due to its top-down development paradigm. Later, successive Five Year Plans led to the creation of essential physical and institutional infrastructure to bring about socio-economic changes in rural areas. (Patel: 2014). The Fifth Five year plan proposed

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<sup>2</sup> For an interesting analysis of the concept of development look at The Intellectual History of Development Towards a Widening Potential Repertoire by Benjamin knutsson, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, Perspectives, no. 13, April 2009

different approaches to rural development such as Area Development, Target Group Approach and comprehensive development approach.<sup>3</sup> Schemes involving special financial and fiscal concessions, bank credit on soft terms and capital subsidies were also introduced in underdeveloped areas to attract increased investments for development. (Patel: 2014).

The Integrated Rural Development Programme (hereafter IRDP) launched in 1976 aimed at alleviation of rural poverty and holistic rural development through self-employment opportunities. The IRDP was conceptualized as a program oriented towards development of a given area rather than development of specific sector. It was designed to alleviate poverty through local level planning taking into account development of local resources including human resources through formulating projects on scientific lines. IRDP also failed to realise its targets. “Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana [SGSY]” is for the self-employment of the rural poor and has been under implementation since 1999 after restructuring and merging the erstwhile IRDP and its allied programs. In 2011 government announced National Rural Livelihood mission with an objective to further the cause of rural development. All these programmes have met with partial success but much needs to be achieved. It is important to identify and understand specific concerns, needs and challenges in different rural areas of the country and adopt specific policies rather than adopting a ‘one size-fits all’ approach. Universal programmes need to be tweaked to suit local requirements so that their success is guaranteed.

Sreedhar G (2009) has identified few general characteristics of rural economy which at times work against the successful implementation of ambitious government schemes. Some of the main features are, pre-dominance of agriculture and its dependence on monsoon, high levels of poverty, unemployment, illiterate and unskilled work force, pre-eminence of small holdings, indebtedness, capital deficiency, lack of infrastructure and basic amenities and low level of technological advancements. However, Sreedhar also believes that collective decisions and actions, visionary dedicated leadership and social consciousness can help in alleviating these problems. One reason for the failure of rural development schemes has been the lack of a holistic focus on the village as a unit. Separate flagship schemes targeting different sectors such as health (NRHM), education (SSA) and livelihood (NREGA, NRLM) have been launched in the past, but met with limited success.

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<sup>3</sup> For a detailed account of Rural development in India look at Sreedhar G (2014) Rural Development in India: strategies and Processes, concept publishing company

Hence, in last two decades the focus is not only on general schemes of rural development but focusing on one particular village as a unique case and addressing the issues at the local level with involvement of local leaders and community. The “Model Village” as a concept has been gaining salience precisely because of its comprehensive and localised approach. It can address resource deficits in each of the sectors like health, education and growth with adequate focus on the special needs of every village. The idea of an “Adarsh Gram” or Model Village has been explored earlier as well, most notably through the Pradhanmantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (Prime Minister’s Model Village Scheme), launched by the Central Government in 2009-10. The scheme was implemented in pilot mode in thousand villages of Assam, Bihar, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu, with an allocation of Rs. 10 lakh per village. This limit was later raised to Rs. 20 lakh per village. The target villages under the scheme were those with more than 50 percent of the population belonging to Scheduled Castes (SCs). Additionally, State governments have also taken steps in this direction. Himachal Pradesh launched a Mukhya Mantri Adarsh Gram Yojana (Chief Minister’s Model Village Scheme) along similar lines in 2011, with the allocation of Rs. 10 lakh per village.

In line with the recommendations and suggestions gleaned from various committees and works of scholars working in the area of rural development, recently government of India has launched a programme namely Saansad Adarsh Gram Yojna <sup>4</sup>(Member of Parliament Model Village Scheme). Under the new scheme, each parliamentarian is mandated to adopt three villages and ensure that the chosen villages are transformed into model villages. By 2019 it is estimated that 2379 villages would be covered by the scheme. Village Development Plans will be prepared by the Gram Panchayat (Rural Local Body) and approved by the Gram Sabha (Rural Local Assembly). Sustainability, community involvement, technology and connectivity are four most important guiding principles of the proposed scheme. Villages will be backed up by the provision of basic amenities that are often only available in urban areas and a social security system. “Sansad Adarsh Gram Yojana” of the Central Government aims to involve members of parliament (MP) more directly in the development of model villages. By adopting a village(s) under this initiative, a member of parliament has the opportunity to directly benefit all sections of a village community in an integrated, efficient and

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<sup>4</sup>For a detailed account of the scheme look at <http://saanjihi.gov.in/>

participatory fashion. Far beyond mere infrastructure development, SAGY aims at instilling certain values in the villages and their people so that they get transformed into models for others. These values include<sup>5</sup>:

- Adopting people's participation as an end in itself – ensuring the involvement of all sections of society in all aspects related to the life of village, especially in decision-making related to governance
- Adhering to Antyodaya (Development unto the last) – enabling the “poorest and the weakest person” in the village to achieve well-being
- Affirming gender equality and ensuring respect for women
- Guaranteeing social justice
- Instilling dignity of labour and the spirit of community service and voluntarism
- Promoting a culture of cleanliness
- Living in consonance with nature –ensuring a balance between development and ecology
- Preserving and promoting local cultural heritage
- Inculcating mutual cooperation, self-help and self-reliance
- Fostering peace and harmony in the village community
- Bringing about transparency, accountability and probity in public life , Nurturing local self-governance.

Rural development can never be a linear process. It faces challenges and issues at different level and of varied kinds. The SAGY has identified these issues so that they help the members involved to deal with them:

- i. Inability to develop a shared vision of development over a longer period
- ii. Disconnect between development inputs delivered and the genuine needs of the community
- iii. Lack of participation of all sections of society, especially the marginalized and the aged
- iv. Focus on infrastructure and expenditure ignoring the social aspects and sustainable outcomes

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<sup>5</sup> A detailed discussion of values of SAGY  
<http://support.saanjhi.in/support/solutions/articles/6000003506-3-values-of-saansad-adarsh-gram-vojana>

- v. Reliance primarily on government grants and not emphasising community contributions and self help
- vi. Absence of organic convergence of different schemes
- vii. Unfair decisions regarding allocation of benefits to locations and households leading to alienation
- viii. Political partisanship – perceived and real
- ix. Disregard of socio-cultural values of different sections of the community
- x. Existence of multiple power structures and absence of a reconciling mechanism
- xi. Ignoring environmental concerns for immediate gains
- xii. Prevalence of social evils like drinking, dowry, casteism, communalism and discrimination against women

### **Rural Development and Role of Grass roots or Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs):**

India has a chequered history of Panchayati Raj (Rural Grass roots Institutions) starting from self-sufficient and self-governing village communities to modern-day organized village governance system in the format of Panchayati Raj Institutions or PRIs. The informal village level council of five elderly men (traditional Panchayats) and the present day democratically elected Panchayats state a lot about the deep rooted culture of self-governance in this country. Sir Charles Metcalf called the traditional Panchayats of India as Little Republics. Although these informal Panchayats suffered the onslaught of Mughal and British imperialism and could never be revived through democratic means in the pre- independence period. The CDP and NES were the first failed baby steps taken in that direction. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1956) and Ashok Mehta committee (1966) recommended that a formal democratically elected structure has to be crafted at the grass roots level in order to actualise the objectives of rural development programmes. Most of the other government committees<sup>6</sup> also recommended that people's participation in planning and implementation and grass roots leadership is a key to fructify objectives of rural development. Rajiv Gandhi's contribution to realise the Gandhian dream of rural self- governance is unforgettable however his government's initiative in the form of 65<sup>th</sup> and 66<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment bill was defeated in the upper house of the Indian parliament. Finally with the pronouncement of new economy policy in 1991 what followed in 1993 was a new polity policy in the form of historic 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendment act which added the third tier to the Indian

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<sup>6</sup> For Example GVK Rao Committee, Hanumantha Rao Committee, L M Singhavi Committee

federal polity. These two acts constitutionally recognised rural local governance and made them responsible to perform twenty nine functions. These functions are exclusively to be performed by a three tier Panchayati Raj Structure which begins with Gram Panchayat (Local body at the village level), Panchayat Samiti (Local body at the block Level i.e. above village) and Zilla Parishad (Local body at the district level. i.e. above Block). This has led to decentralisation of not only functions but also functionaries and finances. It has widened the scope for people's participation in the process of rural as well as self-development. Joshi (2017) calls these Panchayats as the central processing units of Indian democracy. These grassroots level units are the schools of Indian democracy. If they are fed with appropriate inputs, then it will be easier to earn outputs that will strengthen democracy as whole in India. These institutions have been strengthened through salient constitutional provisions such as reservation of seats for women and marginalised section of the society, constitution of state election commission and state finance commission etc. However, the ground analysis of these grassroots institutions reveal, that they have not been honestly vested with the functions, functionaries and financial resources in many states in India. This mars the spirit of decentralised democracy and hampers rural development programmes as well. In fact, it still remains a rubber stamp third tier of Indian federalism (Tremblay, 2001). Financial paucity is the biggest problem faced by the PRIs. And, if PRIs are to work as prime mechanism of development, then they have to be given proper financial aid, especially in a global world. But the situation is not so bad that it does not give us any ray of hope. Certain villages in India are growing exceptionally well. Hiware Bazar, located in the Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, has transformed from being a place fraught with issues to being possibly the richest village in India. The sole reason for this fairy-tale change is one man called Popatrao Pawar. He banned all addictive substances to minimize expense and encouraged the villagers to invest in rain-water harvesting etc. There are a record 60 millionaires in the village and barely any poor. From 168 Below Poverty Line families in 1995, Hiware Bazar now has just three. The villagers continue to strive to see a day when not one person is poor. Mawlynnong, a small village in Meghalaya, was awarded the prestigious tag of 'Cleanest Village in Asia' in 2003 by Discover India Magazine. Located at about 90 kilometres from Shillong, the village offers a sky walk for you to take in the beauty as you explore it. According to visitors, you cannot find a single cigarette butt/plastic bag lying around there.<sup>7</sup> Ankapoor is located in the

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<sup>7</sup> Get more information about other model villages: 10 Indian Villages That Set A Worthy Example For The Whole Country by Durga M Sengupta find at <https://www.scoopwhoop.com/inothernews/mera-gaon-mahaan>

Nizamabad district in the state of Telangana. Ankapoor has been globally recognized as a “Model Agricultural Village” for its achievements in introducing modern technologies in agriculture while ensuring the participation of all sections of the village community, particularly women. Organizations like the Indian Council for Agricultural Research (ICAR), International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), Manila and International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-arid Tropics (ICRISAT) have formally commended the developments in agriculture in the village. Kumbalangi is essentially a fishing hamlet which has been developed as a unique rural tourist destination in Kerala’s Ernakulam district. The Kumbalangi Integrated Tourism Village Project was launched in 2004, with a focus on eco-tourism, while offering tourists a glimpse of the rich and rustic life of the Indian countryside. The important attractions in Kumbalangi include organic farm produce used to prepare meals for tourists, toddy tapping and crab farming. To keep the village clean and serve its energy needs, households are also provided subsidies for setting up mini biogas plants in their households.<sup>8</sup> These villages in different part of our country are guiding posts and give hope and optimism to work in the direction of holistic rural development.

#### **Case Study of Model Village from the state of Gujarat- Punsari:**

“Swarajya to Surajya” has been hailed as the mantra for rural development in the state of Gujarat. The good governance model of this prosperous state from India has been a matter of study for quite some time now. A number of schemes have been launched in last one decade such as Adarsh Gram, Smaras Gram, Tirth Gram, Sardar Awas, Paawan Gram to develop rural areas in Gujarat. The present paper adopts a constructive approach and aims to explore and understand the successful experiment of Punsari village. The official document of the state government of Gujarat on smart and model village defines a model village as, “A village which has foresight for the development and proper planning to keep the village clean, healthy, green, pollution free, crime free and disease free with co-ordination of various community development and welfare schemes of Government. Smart Village means a village which is aware to increase facilities for the citizen by taking decisions democratically. Smart Village means a village in which the youth, women, farmers, village artisans, backward and deprived people may get equal opportunity for development.”<sup>9</sup> These guidelines aim to offer

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<sup>8</sup> Adarsh Gram (Model Village): A Concept Note find at [http://www.swaniti.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Model-Village\\_Brief.pdf](http://www.swaniti.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Model-Village_Brief.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Smart Village Guidelines, State of Gujarat find at [https://smartvillage.gujarat.gov.in/down/guideline\\_sv\\_en.pdf](https://smartvillage.gujarat.gov.in/down/guideline_sv_en.pdf)

a design of rural development that focuses not only on improving economic indicators of development but also on bettering the social indicators of development such as health, sanitation, education, women's empowerment, inclusiveness etc. In this process the gram Panchayat has to play a pivotal role. The present programme was inspired form the success of a small village from the Sabarkantha district of state of Gujarat namely Punsari. In the following section a detailed discussion on how this transformation took place is given. This is based on the information collected through semi-structured in depth interview of the ex-village headman and current village head woman.

Picture 1: Punsari Village (Source: Village Headman, Punsari)



### **Model Village: Punsari**

Punsari is located approximately 80 kilometres away from state capital of Gandhinagar in Gujarat. It has gained phenomenal success in past one decade under the leadership of a visionary and missionary Sarpanch (village headman) Mr. Himanshu Patel (he served as the Sarpanch from 2006 to 2016). The village has received several awards from state as well as national government for its outstanding achievements and has become extremely popular across the length and breadth of the country. This was the most important reason that motivated the author to visit and study this model village personally and understand and explore how this transformation was made possible. The village has 23 communities with a population of 6000, including only 350 people living below the poverty line. Most of the people in the village are dependent on agriculture and milk production for livelihood. The major crops cultivated in the village are cotton, wheat and potato. The trajectory of development in this village can be broadly divided under five headings. They are as follows,

#### **Infrastructure Development:**

The most important concern in rural development is to provide basic amenities to each and every person living in the rural area. Punsari stands out in this regard as it has constructed a reverse osmosis plant and since then provided house to house piped connections to supply chlorinated water. It also has its own 66 KVA substation for electricity generation and 100% coverage of all streets with LED streetlights. A public address system with 120 waterproof speakers for announcing information and spreading messages has been another striking feature of this village. The village headman uses this public announcement system to share what he thinks, plans and is doing at the gram Panchayat. Entire village has been put under CC TV surveillance, which has helped to bring down crime rate to almost zero per cent. Each and every household has a personalised lavatory and the whole village has a well-designed system for drainage and storm water disposal. Atal Express is free bus service available for commutation to all the villagers. Punsari is the first fully wi-fied village in India and also plans to do GIS mapping for the better implementation of many government schemes. Some of the popular nationalised bank and its ATM centres are also now available.

#### **Education:**

Education for all and free for all is the mantra this village has aspired to adopt. Punsari has five primary schools and four secondary schools. The class rooms in these schools are fully equipped with CCTV cameras, LED screens used for teaching, mineral water plants, separate

toilets for girls and boys, computer labs, and well-stocked library. Mid-Meals programme of the central government has been successfully implemented in this village. Availability of these basic amenities within the premises of schools also has helped in reducing the dropout rate to zero.

### **Health, Sanitation & Women Empowerment:**

Punsari has a 24\*7 primary health centre equipped with a medicine shop and a library. It also has a 24\* 7 maternity ward to encourage institutional deliveries in the village. In fact, the village has been successful in achieving the goal of 100% institutional deliveries. The village has also been able to materialise the objective of 100% immunisation and zero per cent infant and maternal mortality rate. The waste collection system offers door to door collection service. The street polluters are heavily fined. There are 109 women self-help groups in this village which has helped and changed lives of more than involve 1200 women from the village. They are provided vocational training in order to make women self-reliant.

### **Democratic Governance:**

A team of 22 full time and 47 part time employees along with the elected officials of the gram Panchayat under the leadership of village headman make things happen in this village. The village has developed an effective mechanism to redress grievances through a toll free number. A complaint register is maintained in order to ensure time bound grievance redress. A co-ordination committee involving elected representatives and government officials works tirelessly to achieve goals of good governance.

### **One man, many schemes and multiples hands that made Punsari a Model Village:**

Traditionally rural development was always looked as a top bottom process. This view was further reinforced through centrally funded poverty alleviation and rural development programmes. In 2006 a young man Himanshu Patel got elected as village headman of Punsari. He hails from Chaudhary Patel Community. There was no model in front of him at the time when he was elected. He began with performing mundane and routine functions of the gram Panchayat. While doing his work, he realised that the village requires urgent attention and plethora of existing government schemes that are available can be a useful source to finance development projects. He was clear that he will not beg for funds from corporate entities under their corporate social responsibility schemes or funds from non-residents Indians (NRI). He knew that revenue generated by the Panchayat is not the only

source of finance and is also not adequate. Hence it was necessary to rely on the funds that flow from the state and centre. The only challenge for him was how to establish link between gram Panchayat and various existing government schemes. Currently close to eighty two different schemes for rural development are in operation in India. Himanshu Patel thought of joining the village system with these existing scheme and get benefits out of it for his village. E.g. Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Scheme for Education for All) central government gives funds to construct rooms, toilets, buy educational material in a primary school. Task of a leader at the local level and the gram Panchayat is to mobilise the gram Panchayat members and village folks, to prepare a proposal and apply for such schemes so that the money flows to a concerned village and that money can be utilised for the purpose of the development in the field of education. Similarly he consistently thought of identifying such schemes and ministries and departments which were already offering financial assistance under a variety of headings for rural rejuvenation and he declined to exhaust money generated by Panchayat through taxes.

In last ten years more than seventeen crore of rupees have been transferred in the form of financial assistance under various schemes and programmes of the government to this single village. Generally a criticism is levelled against our three tier federal model that government units at the grassroots have biggest problem of financial crunch but this village stands out as a different example and exemplar. He disproved the myth that money doesn't flow from state and centre. He rather made a point that what is required is local level committed leadership, activism and vision for rural development. Self-governance begins with first owning your work and responsibilities. Finance is just one aspect of rural reconstruction. The bigger challenge is to take the team of elected representatives at the grass roots level together, generate consensus amidst difference of opinions and actions. Himanshu Patel successfully handled this situation as he sees village headman not merely as an elected representative but visualises him as a Chief Executive Officer of a particular village. He believes that a Village headman should be available 24\*7 for his people. The rural transformation was not merely a process of changing the village physically but also changing the way village headman has to function. His model also focused on a change in the beliefs and attitudes of people in the village. A model village needs to first have a model Sarpanch (Village Headman) who reaches the gram Panchayat office regularly on time and spends considerable quality time at the Panchayat office. Sarpanch's role is to ensure that the citizen's charter is taken seriously by the Panchayat and issues of people are resolved on priority basis. Maximum

communication with villagers, officials of the village level bureaucracy and others guarantees minimum frictions and disagreements. This is the most striking feature of this village which garnered stupendous public support for most of the work done by the Panchayat. For Patel, it was essential to reinforce connections with people and that was the biggest advantage for smooth operation of various functions and tasks. The village headman of Punsari used to talk, discuss and tried to resolve issues of at least hundred people on a daily basis. In fact he believed that if, hundred people are not coming to visit Panchayat office than Sarpanch i.e. the leader has actually failed to garner confidence of people and consequently also fails to represent them as a village headman. People may come with small and petty issues but headman's involvement in resolving these issues actually helps in strengthening confidence of people in the Panchayat system. In most of the villages in India, the village headman almost disappears in the post-election period. After winning the election these headmen fail to own responsibility and build a connection with their village folks which is the main reason behind increasing dis-connect and distrust between people and headmen. Himanshu Patel was able to overcome differences and criticisms levelled against him because of a strong connect that he had established by constantly being in touch with people. He did not hold grudges and biases against people who did not agree with him but rather tried to accommodate them and absolve their differences.

Himanshu Patel has set an example in front of other villages that committed leadership and community support are key elements that cause rural development possible. He has many more plans like GIS mapping of people, resources in the village, generating sources of livelihood within the boundaries of the village, change of mind set of people to transform this model village in to an ideal village. For him development of infrastructure and use of sophisticated technology is not the only sign of development. This leader believes that it should be coupled with communal harmony, social justice, improvement in some essential social indicators of development like zero maternal/ infant mortality rate, hundred per cent institutional deliveries, zero dropout rate, hundred per cent immunisation etc. A holistic development model is the attractive feature of this village. The village Panchayat has established a skill development centre which focuses on enhancement of skills that are required for locally available livelihood opportunities. Village headman of Punsari repeatedly indicated that it is essential to link rural development process with local culture, available resources and local needs. Punsari comes quiet close to what Ash (1994) recognises in his work that there is double movement of globalization on one hand and devolution,

decentralization and localization on the other hand, which has been termed as glocalization<sup>10</sup>. Particularly in the subject of women empowerment Punsari goes beyond the conventional idea of empowerment where women are seen as working in high profile positions or are highly educated or are dressed in so called modern avatar. This village under the able leadership of Himanshu Patel believed in empowering their women by re-establishing, re-connecting, reviving and recognising their role in the village life. Their role was undermined by imposing upon them out dated and orthodox customs and rituals. The process of empowerment had to be in the direction where these orthodoxies have to be fought and women can come out and are able to contribute to not only their development but also overall development of their village. Therefore the Panchayat offered those women credits, loans or provided them with land or offered skill improvement programmes so that they can come out of their traditional shells and can be part of the progress of their village. This doesn't break their connections with rural life. Rurbanisation is a term which became quite popular in recent times. The concept centres around development of global villages that preserve and nurture the essence of rural community life without compromising on facilities perceived to be essentially urban in nature; thus creating altered 'Rurban' forms. Gujarat government has already rolled out a scheme for the purpose of Rurbanisation under which selected villages shall be transformed to provide them urban amenities yet preserving its rural soul. Government of India also had launched a similar Scheme titled Provision of Urban amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) in 2010.<sup>11</sup>

#### **Future plans of Punsari Village Headman:**

After, successfully serving for two terms as village headman Himanshu Patel has stepped back from the post since this time it was reserved for a woman candidate. He now wants to focus on preparing a team of young local level leaders who are not only from his own state but also from across the country. He already has networked with a thousand such young village headmen from different corners of India, cutting across party ideologies. The aim of such a group is to share experiences of rural development with them. Nonetheless what is important to note here is that Himanshu Patel but does not intend to replicate Model of Punsari in other parts of the country. It rather believes that every village

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<sup>10</sup> Amin, Ash (ed.), Post Federalism: A Reader, Oxford: Blackwell, 1994, p. 282.

<sup>11</sup> For a detailed information look at Scheme for Provision of Urban Amenities in Rural Areas (PURA) , Final Report of Working Group, by Ministry of Rural Development find at [http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/wrkgrp12/rd/wgrep\\_pura.pdf](http://planningcommission.nic.in/aboutus/committee/wrkgrp12/rd/wgrep_pura.pdf)

should be a unique example which is rooted in its own ecology and environment. He has been appointed as the programme officer to overlook the implementation of Nandgram project which is based on a PPP model. Vedanta Company is contributing 1000 crore rupees under its CSR initiative. The proposed programme focuses on nutrition of infants and kids and fighting against the concern of under and mal nutrition in India.

**Punsari is a Model Village and yet struggles to be an Ideal Village:**

A model is not necessarily an ideal village. Villages in India are dubiously famous for the caste divide, communal tensions, social injustices and at times instances of violence. Punsari has performed exceptionally well in providing basic amenities, reducing inequalities among different social groups, improving some major social indicators of development. However, Punsari still has to accomplish its goal to become an ideal village where each and every member hailing from different socio-economic background has a voice and choice. While interacting with the current village head woman of Punsari village certain issues got revealed that are conveniently overlooked under the grand saga of development in this village.

Sunanda Patel, current village head woman hails from the dominant caste called Chawdhary Patel. Interestingly but not surprisingly Himanshu Patel also hails from the same caste group. She did not have any experience in governance or political activity yet was fully supported and backed by Himanshu Patel so that she can be successfully instituted as the Sarpanch of Punsari Village. Since in 2016 the post was reserved for a woman candidate, Himanshu Patel had to back out. Women from other caste groups also stood for election at that time. In order to prevent these other (read lower caste group women) caste women from becoming the village headman, Himanshu Patel not only mobilised his resources but also his influence that he had earned in past ten years. This new puppet like women Sarpanch was asked questions about her future plans, what strategies she would adopt to implement her plans and many more such questions which were answered inefficiently. In fact, within few minutes after the interview began her husband joined her in the office, who made sure that Sunanda answers as per a pre-determined design. She was blowing the trumpet of development done by Himanshu Patel and could not tell anything concrete about her plans and programmes. This interview reinforced a fact that eventually a woman (in most cases barring few exceptions) merely plays a role of rubber stamp and real governance is managed through dominant men in the village. It also exposes the way rural democratic institutions are actually working in India. Another important fault line found in this village was that Gram Sabha meetings are

not conducted on regular basis here. Article 243(b) defines Gram Sabha as “a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of the Panchayat at the village level” Gram Sabha is an integral part of the Gandhian concept of Village Swaraj. The Gram Sabha is to enable each and every voter of the village to participate in decision- making at local level. It is a constitutional body consisting of all persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village Panchayat. It provides a political forum to people in the village to meet and discuss their common problems, and consequently, understand the needs and aspirations of the community. Thus Gram Sabha is expected to be an epitome of participatory and direct democracy, and is the only body, which should provide valuable inputs to Gram Panchayat to lead local government effectively. Gram Sabha is also to act as a watchdog in the interest of village communities by monitoring the functioning of the Gram Panchayat Effectiveness of gram Sabha has been marred by social exclusion, dangerous information gap, political apathy on part of villagers, dependency syndrome, and political culture of patronage. Joshi (2017) also laments on the low participation in Gram Sabha meetings and irregular and informal ways of its conduct are some of the major concerns at the grassroots.

### **Conclusion:**

India is marching ahead in the direction to take up leadership role not only in the Asian continent but also globally her strengths are being appreciated. Despite rapid urbanisation, sizeable population living in her rural areas require focused attention and planned development. The present paper attempted to explore the development journey of a smart village called Punsari. It argued that grassroots leadership, community participation, decentralisation of powers to local bodies in rural areas and financial support in the form of various government schemes can bring far reaching changes in rural landscape of India. Punsari represents a classic example as well as an exemplar of concerted efforts of elected leaders, community people and government support to bring transformation and make villages smart as well as sustainable. The paper highlighted the role played by a local leader who with his vision and mission can achieve the impossible. However there still exists a gap between a model village and an ideal village. The gap can only be filled with the persistent efforts for rural revitalisation not only by the government but also with effective involvement of the local leaders and village folks. Economic progress has to coincide with social progress which inclusive, sustainable and sensitive to not only its environment but also to its people.

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