



## Panchayat raj and Gram Swaraj

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### Abstract:

*The Panchayat governance is a system with elected bodies at the village levels. Our modern system is based on traditional panchayat governance on the vision of Mahatma Gandhi. The intention of Mahatma Gandhi was to create greater participation of village people in local government. The village Panchayat began in the British days. They opened up the governance at the lowest levels to the citizens. Overall development of country is the main objective of Indian government since its independence. We can say that the overall development of our nation is possible only through the development of rural India. An efficient, effective and democratic government is the best guarantor of social justice as well as an orderly society. Similarly, it is to be based on the fact that the administrative system has to be governing on country level which starts from villages.*

Key Words: *Panchayat, Village, Panchayati raj*

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### Introduction

There is different opinion about the meaning of governance between the conservatives and the liberals, between socialists and the communists. In recent years the word governance has become a very fashionable term and is being used in a variety of ways that covers a large number of organizations both in public and private domains.

The Government of India (GoI) is the union government created by the constitution of India as the legislative, executive and judicial authority of the union of 29 states and seven union territories of a constitutionally democratic republic. It is located in New Delhi, the capital of India. Since 1992, local governance in India takes place in two very distinct forms. Urban localities, covered in the 74th amendment to the Constitution, have Nagar Palika derive their powers from the state governments, while the powers of rural localities have been formalized under the *Panchayati raj* system, under the 73rd amendment to the Constitution of India.

### Objective

To gain knowledge about the socio-economic and political backgrounds of Gaon Panchayat (GP).

To give suggestions to the academicians and policy makers in order to ensure good governance at Panchayat level and administrative efficiency of the representatives of panchayats.

### Review of Literature

A good deal of literature has been reviewed concerning mainly on the concept of good governance at local level Throughout the range of review, it is found that the good governance in Panchayat raj has been made on the overall situation of the governance Government's evaluation report and the reports from NGOs, news papers and articles have been extensively studied to develop ideas on the governance in the rural mechanism of development.

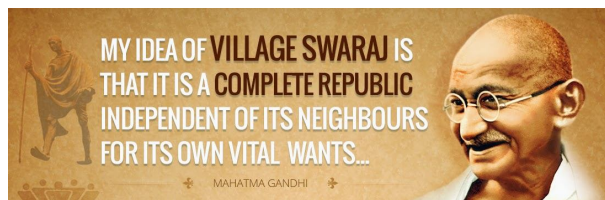
### History of local administration

The village Panchayat, as a system of administration, began in the British days, as they offer to satisfy the demands for local autonomy. They opened up the governance of the lowest levels to the citizens. The GoI act, 1935 also authorizes the provinces to enact legislations.

The Panchayati Raj is a South Asian Political-system mainly; in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal. The word 'Panchayat' literally means 'assembly' of five wise and a respected elders chosen and accepted-by the focal- community.

Panchayats are India's ancient autonomous democratic institutions. Whose description is found in the ancient Indian text 'Rig-Veda' in the form of 'Sabhas' and 'Samities'. At various points of time these autonomous bodies of governance have proven their importance inspite of the political disturbances within the country.

Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of recorded history. Gandhiji, the father of the nation, in 1946 had aptly remarked that the Indian Independence must begin at the bottom and every village ought to be a Republic or Panchayat having powers. Gandhi ji's dream has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people's participation in rural reconstruction.



It is a system of governance in which gram Panchayat is the basic unit of administration. The unit run and governed by the people of village. Mahatma Gandhi also advocated Panchayati Raj, a decentralized form

of government. This system was adopted by state governments during the 1950s and 60s as laws were passed to the establish panchayats in various states. It also found backing in Indian constitution with the 73rd Amendment in 1992 to accommodate the idea. In the history of Panchayati Raj in India, on 24th April, 1993, the constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. Currently, the Panchayati Raj system exists in all the states except Nagaland, Meghalaya and Mizoram and it all Union Territories except Delhi. The states of Goa, Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Sikkim have two-tier panchayats- one at the village level and the second at the Zila or District level. In Jammu and Kashmir, block is the second level. In all other states Panchayati Raj is a three-tier system- village as first level, block or janapad as second level and Zila or district as the third level.

In the initial stage of Republic, the executive functioned with considerable autonomy. The hold of politicians and began with demands for allocation of scarce resources in favour of ruling elites and powerful interest groups. The 'neutrality' of the civil service came under stress with ministerial instability since 1960s in the states. The fragmentation of the authority at centre characterised by coalition governments since the late 1980s has only deepened and extended this process. But election after election common people are asserting their voice, changing their representatives in a manner that has ensured change in government in the states and also at the Centre. This phenomenon supported by the civil society groups, the media and an active judiciary has ushered in demands for accountability of the executive. Democracy has really moved beyond periodic elections towards 'good' governance.

### The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act

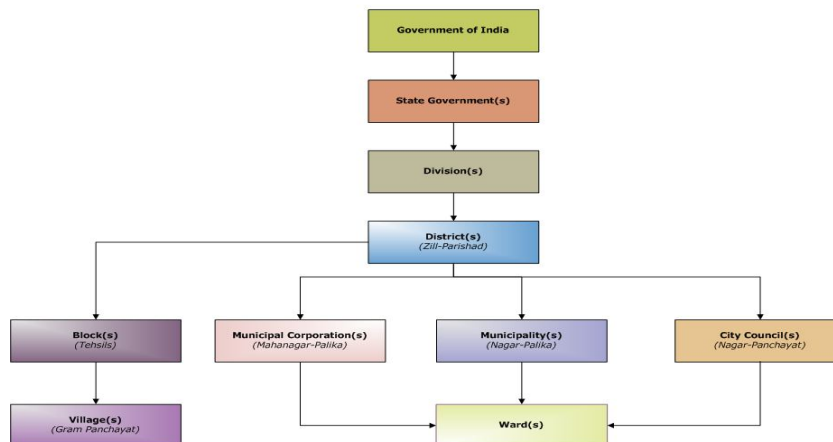
The idea which produced the 73rd Amendment was not a response to pressure from the grassroots, but to an increasing recognition that the institutional initiatives of the preceding decade had not delivered, that the extent of rural poverty was still too large and thus the existing structure of government needed to be reformed. It is interesting to note that this idea evolved from the Central and the state governments The Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act, passed in 1992 by the Narasimha Rao government, came into force on April 24, 1993. It was meant to provide constitutional sanction to establish "democracy at the village level as it is at the state level or national level". Its main features are as follows:

- The Gram Sabha or village assembly as a deliberative body to decentralised governance has been envisaged as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj System. 73rd Amendment of the Constitution empowered the Gram Sabhas to conduct social audits in addition to its other functions.
- A uniform three-tier structure of panchayats at village (Gram Panchayat — GP), intermediate or block (Panchayat Samiti — PS) and district (Zilla Parishad — ZP) levels.
- All the seats in a Panchayat at every level are to be filled by elections from respective territorial constituencies.
- Not less than one-third of the total seats for membership as well as office of chairpersons of each tier has to be reserved for women.
- Reservations for weaker castes and tribes (SCs and STs) have to be provided at all levels in proportion to their population in the panchayats.
- To supervise, direct and control the regular and smooth elections to panchayats, a State Election Commission has The Act has ensured constitution of a State Finance Commission in every State/UT, for every five years, to suggest measures to strengthen finances of Panchayati raj institutions.
- To promote bottom-up-planning, the District Planning Committee (DPC) in every district has been accorded to constitutional status.
- An indicative list of 29 items has been given in Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Panchayats are expected to play an effective role in planning and implementation of works related to these 29 items.

### Present scenario

At present, there are about 3 million elected representatives at all levels of the Panchayat, one-half of which are women. These members represent more than 2.4 lakh (240,000) Gram Panchayats, about 6,000 intermediate level tiers and more than 500 district panchayats. Spread over the length and breadth of the country, the new panchayats cover about 96% of India's more than 5.8 lakh (580,000) villages and nearly 99.6% of the rural population. This is the largest experiment in decentralisation of governance in the history of humanity. The Constitution of India visualise panchayats as institutions of self-governance. However, giving due consideration to the federal structure of India's polity, most of the financial powers and authorities to be endowed on panchayats have been left at the discretion of concerned state legislatures. Consequently, the powers and functions vested in PRIs vary from state to state. These provisions combine representative and direct democracy into a synergy and are expected to result in an extension and deepening of democracy in India. Hence, panchayats have journeyed from an institution within the culture of India to attain constitutional status.

Administrative structure of India





## Village Level

Village is the basic unit of Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is generally a revenue unit. The unit of local government here is called village Panchayat. In the structure of the Panchayati Raj, the village Panchayat is the lowest unit. The Panchayat chiefly consists of representatives elected by the people of the village.

Only the persons who are registered as voters and do not hold any office of profit under the government are eligible for election to the Panchayat. The persons convicted by the court for criminal offences are disqualified from election of the Panchayat.

There is also provision for co-option of two women and one member of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, if they do not get adequate representation in the normal course.

The Panchayat as a body accountable to the general body of the village known as Gram Sabha which meets at least twice a year. The Gram Panchayat must present its budget, accounts of the previous year and annual administrative report before the Gram Sabha. Furthermore, it has to secure the latter's approval of the village production plan, proposals for taxation and development programmes before they are enforced by the Panchayat.

Every Panchayat elects a president or Sarpanch and a Vice-President or Up-Sarpanch. In some states, the Sarpanch is directly elected by the gram Sabha either through the show of hands or through secret ballot. The Sarpanch occupies a pivotal position in gram Panchayat system. He supervises and coordinates the various activities of the Panchayat. The Panchayat secretary and the village level worker are the two officers at the Panchayat level to assist the Sarpanch in administration.

## Functions and duties of Panchayats

### 1 Mandatory

### 2 Discretionary

**1. Mandatory Functions:** Sanitation and drainage, prevention of public nuisances, supply of drinking water, construction and maintenance of village roads, construction and repair of public buildings, registration of births and deaths, opening and maintenance of cremation and burial grounds, rural electrification, poverty alleviation programme, preparation of annual budget and development plans, construction and maintenance of cattle sheds, ponds etc. social farm forestry, fuel and fodder, slaughter houses, public parks and playgrounds, agriculture, poultry and fisheries etc.

**2. Discretionary Functions :** Agriculture, animal husbandry and dairy development, minor irrigation, small scale industries, housing, electricity and non-conventional energy, rural development programmes, education cultural affairs and heritage, public health etc. In addition, the village panchayats may be assigned additional functions by the state governments and Zila Parishads.

## Sources of Revenue

Money received by the Gram Panchayat like contribution or grants made by the State Government, Union Government, Zila Parishad and all sums received by the Panchayat in the form of taxes, rates, duties, fees, loans, fines and penalties, compensation, court decree, sale proceeds and income from Panchayat property etc. go into that fund.

Village Panchayats empowered to levy taxes, fees on houses and buildings, professions, trades, employments, fees on registration of vehicles, fairs and melas, sanitary arrangements, water tax, lighting tax, tax on sale of firewood, tax on slaughter houses, private fisheries, license fee on tea stalls, hotels or restaurants, carts, carriages, boats, rickshaws etc.

## Block Level

Block or Union is the second or intermediate level of local self government in rural India. It has been named differently in different states. In Andhra Pradesh, it is known as Mandal Parishad, in Assam, it is known as Anchalik Panchayat, in Bihar, Jharkhand, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh,



Tripura, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab and Rajasthan it is known as Panchayat Samiti and so on.

Usually, a Panchayat Samiti consists of 20 to 60 villages depending on area and population. The average population under a Samiti is about 80,000, but the range is from 35,000 to 1,00,000.

The Panchayat Samiti generally consists of the followings:

1. About twenty members elected by and from the Panches of all the Panchayats falling in the block area.
2. Two women members and one member each from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to be co-opted.
3. Two local persons possessing experience of public life and administration, which may be beneficial for the rural development.
4. Representatives of the co-operatives working within the jurisdiction of the block.
5. One representative elected by and from the members of each small municipality lying within the geographical limits of a block.
6. The members of the State and Union legislatures representing the area are to be taken as associate members.

#### Functions and duties

The principal function of the Panchayat Samiti is to co-ordinate the activities of the various panchayats within its jurisdiction. The Panchayat Samiti supervises the work of the Panchayats and scrutinizes their budgets. It also reserves the right to suggest measures for improving the functioning of the Panchayats. The Samiti is charged with the responsibility of preparing and colon implementing plans for the development of agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, small scale and cottage industries, rural health etc.

#### Sources of Revenue

All State legislations provide for the creation of Panchayat/ Block Samiti Fund like the Consolidated Fund of the State. All money collected by the Samiti goes into that fund. These are grants given by the State Government or Union Government, donations received, income from properties owned by the Samiti, all taxes, fees, tolls etc. levied by the Samiti, any share of the land revenue or taxes levied by the State Government and assigned to the Samiti, part of the income of the Zila/ District Parishad assigned to the Samiti, all loans raised by the Samiti etc.

#### District Level

Except in the State of Jammu and Kashmir, the District / Zila Panchayat constitute the apex body of the three-tier structure of the Panchayati Raj system. The Panchayat at the district level is called Zila Parishad in most of the States. But, in Goa, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim and Uttar Pradesh it is called Zila Parishad and in Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Gujarat its name is District Panchayat. Generally, the Zila Parishad consist of representatives of the Panchayat Samiti, all members of the State Legislative and the Parliament representing a part or whole of the district, all district level officers of the Medical, Public Health, Public Works, Engineering, Agriculture, Education and other development departments.

There is also a provision for special representation of women, members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes provided they are not adequately represented in the normal course. The collector is also a member of the Zila Parishad.

#### Functions and Duties

The Zila Parishad, for the most part, performs co-coordinating and supervisory functions. It co-ordinates the activities of the Panchayat Samiti falling within its jurisdiction. In certain states the Zila Parishad also approves the budgets of the Panchayat Samitis. The Zila Parishad also renders necessary advice to the Government with regard to the implementation of the various



development schemes. It is also responsible for the maintenance of primary and secondary schools, hospitals, dispensaries, minor irrigation works etc. It also promotes local industries and art.

Sources of Revenue: The legislations of all States provide for the certain of separate Zila Parishad/District Panchayat Fund which is like the consolidated Fund of the State.

The sources of income of the Zila Parishad / District Panchayat are

1. Grants-in-aid given by the State Government and the Union Government (general or for any particular project)
2. Donations and incomes like rent or lease or sale proceeds of the properties of the Parishad.
3. Toll, fees or cess imposed on bridges, ferries, entertainment, fairs, haats etc.
4. Share of the land revenue assigned to the Parishad.
5. Several States like U.P., Punjab, Manipur, Maharashtra etc. Have empowered them to levy taxes on any matter on which Panchayats at the lower levels are empowered to do.
6. Loans raised by it against the security of its properties.
7. Loans raised by it against the security of its properties.
8. Contributions made by Panchayat Samitis or any other local authority.

E-power to empower

The National e-Governance Plan was meant to make government services accessible to the citizens through common service delivery outlets. Now, e-Panchayat, a component of Mission Mode Projects (MMP), has been launched by the ministry of Panchayati raj. The project envisages empowering people in villages by improving governance at the third tier of government for rural local bodies at gram panchayats, block panchayats and district panchayats.

E-Panchayat aims to transform Panchayat functioning holistically by applying cost effective integrated technological solutions to overcome challenges including issues such as inadequate physical infrastructure, poor human resources and poor power supply. The more complex constraints are extant grassroots political, economic, and social power structures; and gender, age, caste, communal and other sectarian divides.

Many States such as Gujarat, West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Goa have taken e-initiatives at the Panchayat level, but a nation-driven, integrated, holistic approach is required to make a dent on the functioning of panchayats and thereby improving the livelihoods of people. The e-Panchayat programme hopes to ensure people's participation in decision-making. To improve the functioning of panchayats in the country, it is imperative that people should be involved in identifying and prioritising projects, programmes, schemes and welfare activities pertaining to them.

The Panchayat planning process, budget, accounts, and the maintenance of books of accounts physically or online should capture the entire fund flow from the Centre, States, other bodies and own funds identifying the sources and application of expenditures.

The plan outlay should be linked to development works, projects, programmes and activities and services with functionaries to achieve the targeted, specified, measurable, realistic timely outputs and outcomes. E-Panchayat must integrate State-specific software and central software to enable effective monitoring, transparency, rule of law, and accountability. Internal audits, oversights, social audits and CAG audit should be geared towards actualising the intended objectives.

Automating workflow

E-Panchayat is about automating the workflow processes of all panchayats covering about 30 lakh elected people's representatives and several lakh PRI functionaries. Information and Service Needs Assessment (ISNA), Business Process Reengineering (BPR) and Detailed Project Reports (DPR) for every State/UT as a whole can help radical transformation through



decentralised local governance. Cloud-computing, mobile applications, m-governance, work automation, digital payments based on digital identity can penetrate hitherto remote localities. The poor can access e-health care, e-learning and e-agricultural extension services. Technology enables informed decision-making; intelligent transportation; generation, transmission and distribution of power supply; boosting productivity in farming; and increasing access to clean drinking water. The Internet of Things and connecting sensors to online monitoring can be revolutionary for transforming India. Simplifying unwarranted policies and regulations at all levels has helped India become the fastest growing economic power. Investment by way of FDI, FII, Indian nationals and NRIs is on the rise. The transformative technologies, if implemented rightly, can help governance become cost effective, participatory, and citizen-centric, while at the same time empowering the poor.

### Conclusion

After 73rd ' Constitutional Amendment in 1992, the States were expected to decentralize their authority to the institutions of self-government at the local level. The purpose was to take democracy at the grass-root level so that the people should manage their own affairs at that level. The idea was not only to entrust the people with the power of decision-making but also to give them the authority and capacity of governing themselves.

The need is to go for 'million negotiations' that would ensure that government, market and civil society work together for the poor.

E Panchayats are the need of the day as people in rural areas are still deprived of basic facilities for a decent life. Common wisdom says that poverty and deprivation exist not only due to lack of resources but also persist because of inefficient and malfunctioning institutions. In the emerging knowledge society and information revolution, Panchayats should not be left in isolation. They should be provided with adequate technological resources in order to be able to play a meaningful and sustainable role in the development of nation.

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