

Panchayati Raj System in India

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was a committee originally appointed by the Government of India in January 16, 1957 to examine the working of the Community Development Programme (1952, Oct 2nd) and the National Extension Service (1953 Oct 2nd) and to suggest measures for their better working. The Chairman of this committee was Balwantrai G Mehta. The committee submitted its report in November 24, 1957 and recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralisation' which finally came to be known as Panchayati Raj. He is known as the Father of Panchayati Raj System in India

The Panchayat Raj System was first adopted by the state of Rajasthan in Nagaur district on 2nd Oct 1959. The second state was Andhra Pradesh, while Maharashtra was the Ninth state. In India, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) now function as a system of governance in which gram panchayats are the basic units of local administration. The system has three levels: Gram Panchayat (village level), Mandal Parishad or Block Samiti or Panchayat Samiti (block level), and Zila Parishad (district level). It was formalized in 1992 by the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution.

SALIENT FEATURES OF THE CONSTITUTION (73RD AMENDMENT) ACT, 1992

1. To provide three-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all States having population of over 20 lakh,
2. To hold Panchayat elections regularly every five years,
3. Provision of reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women,
4. To appoint State Finance Commissions to make recommendations on financial powers of the Panchayats,
5. To constitute District Planning Committee to prepare draft development plan for the district as a whole.

ORGANISATION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTION

The three-tier system comprises the following:

- i) Gram Panchayats at village level.
- ii) Panchayat Samiti at block level or middle level.
- iii) Zilla Parishad at district level.

In addition, a Nyaya Panchayat has been provided for every three or four village Panchayats.

QUALIFICATION FOR ELECTION TO LOCAL BODIES

- i) He must be an Indian citizen and not be less than 21 years of age.
- ii) He must be a registered voter, in the case of Panchayats, member of the Gram Sabha, in the constituency.
- iii) He should not be a convict or have been disqualified by a Law of the Parliament or an undischarged insolvent.

iv) He should not hold any office of profit under the Government.

INTRODUCTION TO GRAM PANCHAYAT

Gram Panchayat is a basic village institute. It is a formal and democratic structure at grass root level in the country. It acts as a cabinet of the village. It is a political institute. The members of the Gram Panchayat are elected by the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha functions as the general body of the Gram Panchayat.

COMPOSITION OF GRAM PANCHAYAT

Sarpanch: He is the head of the Gram Panchayat. He is elected directly and in some cases indirectly by members of the Gram Panchayat.

Members: The membership of a Village Panchayat is between 5 to 31. One-third of seats of the Panchayat are reserved for women. Seats are also reserved for Scheduled Castes/ Tribes.

Office-bearers: The Sarpanch and Vice-Sarpanch are honorary members. They are not paid a salary. A paid Secretary to the Panchayat and a Treasurer, if the Panchayat is large, are also appointed by the State government.

FUNCTIONS OF GRAM PANCHAYAT

i) Administrative functions:

1. Public works and welfare functions like construction, repair and maintenance of village roads, bridges, drains and wells.
2. Registration of births and deaths.
3. Providing primary education, etc.

Social and economic functions: These are not obligatory.

1. Construction of guest houses, libraries, marriage halls, etc;
2. Planting of trees, parks, gardens and playgrounds for recreation;
3. Establishing fair price shops, Cooperative Credit Societies.

It also performs some judicial functions.

INTRODUCTION TO NYAYA PANCHAYAT

Nyaya Panchayat also called Panchayati Adalat is set up for every three or four Gram Panchayats. The chief characteristics of Nyaya Panchayats are the following:

- i) To ensure quick and inexpensive justice to the villagers.
- ii) They can impose a fine of upto Rs. 100.
- iii) They cannot award a sentence of life imprisonment.
- iv) Lawyers are not allowed to appear before these Panchayats.
- v) The state Government or the State Judicial Service decides the jurisdiction of these Panchayats.

INTRODUCTION TO PANCHAYAT SAMITI (BLOCK LEVEL)

This is the second tier above the Gram Panchayat and under the Zilla Parishad. The long programmes are organized by officials and non-officials of Panchayat Samiti with the help of a voluntary institution at Block level. This intermediate body at the block level is known by different names in different states, like Panchayat Samiti, Kshetra Samiti, Janapada Panchayat and Panchayat Union Council.

COMPOSITION OF PANCHAYAT SAMITI

It has representatives of Panchayats and some others as its members as given below:

- i) Sarpanchs of all Panchayats concerned.
- ii) Members of Legislative Assembly of the State from the area.
- iii) Members of Parliament belonging to the area.
- iv) Block Development officers of the block.
- v) Co-opted members representing women, Scheduled Castes/Tribes.
- vi) Representatives of Cooperative Societies.

FUNCTIONS OF PANCHAYAT SAMITI

- i) To supervise and co-ordinate the working of Gram Panchayats.
- ii) To conduct higher education for a group of villages.
- iii) To provide hospitals and health services at community block level.
- iv) Develop agriculture by undertaking minor irrigation schemes, distribution of quality seeds, etc.
- v) To act as a link between the Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad.

INTRODUCTION TO ZILLA PARISHAD (DISTRICT LEVEL)

It is a local self-government unit at district level. Panchayat Samiti forms a link between the Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. The Zilla Parishad is a link between the State government and the Gram Panchayats. The Zilla Parishad is also known by different names in different States, like District Development Council, Zilla Parishad and Mohkuma Parishad.

COMPOSITION OF ZILLA PARISHAD

It comprises of Deputy Commissioner of the District, Presidents of all Panchayat Samitis in the district and Heads of all Government Departments in the district; Members of Parliament and Legislative Assembly in the district; a representative of each cooperative society; some women and Scheduled Caste members; and Co-opted members having extraordinary experience and achievements in public service. Besides, there are some office bearers such as a Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary.

FUNCTIONS OF ZILLA PARISHAD

1. Overseeing all round development work of the district under the Deputy Commissioner.

2. The Standing Committees having a Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson holds discussions and takes decisions.
3. The Working Committee functions as the executive body of the District Board.
4. Supervision of working of Gram Panchayats.
5. Advise the State Government on all matters relating to the Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis under their own jurisdiction.

ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM

Panchayati Raj system now ensures effective coordination between government programmes and those of voluntary agencies.

2. The District Rural Development Agencies in close co-operation with Zilla Parishads release funds to Gram Panchayats under the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana.
3. The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, provides every rural household 100 days of work in a year which involves unskilled manual work.

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