

6th - Panchayati Raj



Panchayati Raj: Our country being so vast, it is impossible for the central or the state government to look into day-to-day issues. Therefore it was necessary to have a system of local government that could take care of the requirement of the rural population and implement policies meant for them. We call this system Panchayati Raj.

Panchayati Raj in ancient India: The Panchayat, which literally means a group of five people. The Panchayat consisted of five respected elders of the village. They would meet regularly to hear out and try to solve the problems of the villagers. The villager, trusted the judgment of the Panchayat members, and had to obey their decision.

Why is Panchayati Raj essential?

1. Panchayati Raj is best suited for the development and administrative needs of rural people.
2. It gives villagers a chance to actually participate in decision-making.
3. Panchayati Raj trains the people to manage their own affairs.
4. It helps them gain experience in administration.
5. It teaches the youth at the grass root levels about the workings of a democracy, and trains them to be the leaders of tomorrow.

How does the Panchayati Raj work?

In 24 April 1993, a law came into effect which made it compulsory for all states with a population of more than 20 lakhs to have a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj. A system of local democracy was created at:

- The village level called the gram Panchayat
- The block level called the Panchayat samiti consisting of 10-20 gram Panchayat.
- The district level called the zilla parishad. Consisting of 4-10 blocks or Panchayat samiti.

The Gram Panchayat: The village Panchayat consists of three bodies:

1. **Gram Sabha:** The Gram Sabha is a meeting of all adults who live in the area covered by a Panchayat. This could be only one village or a few villages. Every village Panchayat is divided into wards, i.e. smaller areas. Each ward elects a representative who is known as the ward member. All the members of the gram Sabha also elect a sarpanch who is the Panchayat president. The ward members and the sarpanch form the gram Panchayat. The gram Panchayat is elected for five years. The gram Panchayat has a secretary who is also the secretary of the gram Sabha. This person is not an elected person but is appointed by the government. The secretary is responsible for calling the meeting of the gram Panchayat and keeping a record of the proceedings.

- The gram Sabha is a key factor in making the gram Panchayat play its role and be responsible. It is the place where all plans for the work of the gram Panchayat are placed before the people. The gram Sabha prevents the Panchayat from doing wrong things like misusing money or favouring certain people. It plays an important role in keeping an eye on the elected representatives and in making them responsible to the persons who elected.

2. **The Gram Panchayat:** The gram Panchayat meets regularly and one of its main tasks is to implement development programmes for all villages that come under it. The work of the Gram Panchayat has to be approved by the Gram Sabha. In some states, Gram Sabha form committees like construction and development



6th - Panchayati Raj



committees. These committees include some members of the gram Sabha and some from the gram Panchayat who work together to carry out specific tasks.

3. **The Nyaya Panchayat:** This body provides speedy justice to the villagers. It has more than one village under its control. Nyaya Panchayats deal with minor cases like petty thefts and only have the power to impose fines.

The Function of the Gram Panchayat

- Construction and repair of village roads.
- Provision of electricity and street lighting.
- Provision of drinking water by maintaining public wells and tanks.
- Building and supervision of primary schools.
- Maintenance of records of births and deaths.
- Supply of seeds and fertilizers to farmers

Panchayat samiti: The Panchayat samiti or block samiti is the second level in the Panchayati Raj system. The members of the Panchayat samiti are elected by the sarpanch of all the villages of that block. Member of the legislative assembly (MLAs), member of the legislative councils (MLCs) and Member of Parliament (MPs) from that block are also members of the Panchayat samiti. Member of a block samiti elect a block chairman or block pramukh. The block samiti is elected for a term of five years. The block development officer (BDO) appointed by the state government is the secretary of the samiti and takes care of its administration.

Function:

- To prepare, execute and co-ordinate the programme of community development at the block level.
- To help in the development animal husbandry, poultry and fishery
- To look after drinking water supply, sanitation, education and rural health.

Zilla parishad: The Zilla parishad is the highest body in the Panchayat Raj system. It provides a vital link between the village Panchayat, the block samiti and the state government. It looks after the welfare of the district as a whole.

Composition: All the presidents of the block samiti in a district are member of the Zilla parishad. Member of the state legislature, members of parliament, chairpersons of municipal boards and mayors of corporation from the district, are also member of the Zilla parishad.

Functions

- It prepares plans for the development of the district based on reports submitted by the block samiti and the gram Sabha.
- Improvement in agricultural production. Sanitation and health, maintenance of roads and other developmental action are some of the tasks taken up by the Zilla parishads.
- It builds and maintains secondary, vocational and industrial schools in the district.

Important Facts:

1. There are 234,078 Panchayati Raj institutions in the country.
2. In India, April 24th is celebrated as National Panchayati Raj Diwas every year. The day marks the passing of the Constitution Act (73rd Amendment), 1992, that came into existence with effect from April 24, 1993.
3. Rajasthan was the first state to establish Panchayati Raj. It was inaugurated by the Prime Minister on October 2, 1959 in Nagaur district.
4. Second state to establish Panchayati Raj was Andhra Pradesh. (1959).

