

Chapter- 5

Panchayati Raj- Local Government of Rural Areas

STUDY NOTES

INTRODUCTION

A government is to take care of the requirements of a society. Government works at different levels- the national level, the state level and the local level. In India, the central government rules the country at the national level, the state government rule at the state level, and the Panchayati Raj takes care of the government at the local level.

LOCAL SELF –GOVERNMENT

Local self government is a system where the problems of a local community are managed by people belonging to that community. The local government are closer to the people of their areas. They understand the needs, requirements and problems of the people better than people sitting in the central or state governments would.

So, separate systems of local government have been developed for both areas. Villages, or rural areas , are governed by village panchayats, panchayats samitis and zilla parishads. Towns and cities are governed by municipal corporations, municipalities and nagar palikas.

PANCHAYATI RAJ

People face all kinds of problems in their day-to-day lives. Our country being so vast, it is impossible for the central or the state governments to look into the issues of the local people. Therefore it was necessary to have a system of local government that could take care of the requirements of the rural population and implement policies meant for them. This system is called as Panchayati Raj.

PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ANCIENT INDIA

The Panchayati Raj system is a three –tier system of local administration based on the concept of the panchayat. The panchayat, means a group of five people, has been a part of our village life for several hundreds of years. 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 villagers trusted the judgement of the panchayat members, and had to obey their decision.

WHY IS PANCHAYATI RAJ ESSENTIAL?

- i) Panchayati Raj is best suited for the development and administrative needs of rural people.
- ii) It gives villagers a chance to actually participate in decision making.
- iii) Social and economic justice can be best achieved if local people are a part of the governing body.

- iv) Panchayati Raj trains the people to manage their own affairs. It helps them gain experience in administration .
- v) It teaches the youth at the grass root levels about the workings of a democracy, and trains them to be the leaders of tomorrow.
- vi) The villagers learn to cooperate and work together to solve their problems.

HOW DOES THE PANCHAYATI RAJ WORKS?

The Panchayati Raj system is based on three levels:

- 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:

- i) The gram sabha : This is the general body to which all adults of the village, above 18 years of age, belong.
- ii) The gram panchayat: This is a small committee elected by the members of the gram sabha .Each panchayat is headed by a sarpanch or pradhan.
- iii) The Nyaya Panchayat, or the village court: This body provides speedy justice to the villagers. It deals with the minor cases like petty theft and only have the power to impose fines.

THE FUNCTIONS OF THE GRAM PANCHAYAT

The gram panchayat performs many functions. It is responsible for the:

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

SOURCES OF INCOME

Where does the gram panchayat get the money needed to carry out all the functions?

- The gram panchayat imposes and collects taxes on land, electricity, water, etc.
- It levies taxes on houses, markets, fairs, etc.
- It also gets aid in the form of grants from the government.

PANCHAYATI SAMITI

The Panchayat Samiti or block samiti is the middle rung or the second level in the Panchayati Raj system. Members of a block samiti elect a chairman or block pramukh. The block development officer (BDO) appointed by the state government is the secretary of the samiti and takes care of its administration.

FUNCTIONS

- To prepare, execute and co-ordinate the programme of community development at the block level.
- To implement plans for the development of agriculture- distribute seeds, implements and fertilisers to the farmer
- To help in the development of animal husbandry, poultry and fishery.
- To look after drinking water supply, sanitation, education and rural health.
- To promote small scale and cottage industries and co-ordinate the working of the block development officer and the executive officer.

SOURCES OF INCOME

- Taxes on land, property, cattle, etc.
- Grants-in-aid from the state government

ZILLA PARISHAD

The zilla parishad is the highest body in the Panchayati 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 samitis in a district are members of the zilla parishad. Members of the state legislature, members of parliament, chairpersons of municipal boards and mayors of corporations from the district are also members of the zilla parishad. Seats are reserved for representatives of scheduled tribes and scheduled castes. One-third of the seats are reserved for women.

FUNCTIONS

- i) It prepares plans for the development of the district based on reports submitted by the block samiti and the gram sabha.
- ii) It supervises the implementation of the Five-year Plans and Community Development Plans at the district level.
- iii) Improvement in agricultural production, sanitation and health, maintenance of roads and other developmental actions are some of the tasks taken up by the zilla parishads.
- iv) It distributes the funds allotted to the district by the central or state government among the panchayat samitis.
- v) It builds and maintains secondary, vocational and industrial schools in the district.

SOURCES OF INCOME

- Government grants
- Taxes
- Rents from property

