

Preface

Friends, we got familiar with different kinds of movements in unit-7. Their contribution in bringing about reforms and revolutions in society has been prominent. Consciousness, leadership and development among people are important aspects that affect their collective behaviour. In India, the role of Panchayati raj assumes importance in the context of social development of rural communities and leadership. In this unit, we will learn about three-tier structure of Panchayati raj and its social influences.

Since Vedic time, panchayati institutions exist in India. Each village had its own *Sabha* or *Samiti*. We find mention of gram sabha in times of Pallavas and Pandyas of 8th to 12th centuries. Gram panchayats or gram sabhas were existent in one form or other till eighteenth century. The local panch of village used to carry out its activities based on the principle of *panch parmeshwar*.

We find mention of gram sabha or gram sangh, carrying out administrative activities at local level, in Rigved, Manusmriti, Upanishads, Jataka tales etc, though it was known by different names in different parts of India. These gram sabhas or gram sanghs, administered by mukhi or panch, were engaged in carrying out welfare activities, resolving problems, controlling and regulating people's behaviour and insuring they follow their traditions and religious customs.

During British regime, structure, function and form of gram panchayat began to change. In order to strengthen and stabilize political control, the British Government, with carrying out changes in land and revenue system, also changed the form of gram panchayats and reorganized them. In 1870, in Madras (now Tamil Nadu) Bengal, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh etc. laws related to establishment of institutions of local self-government were enacted in which Lord Mayo had taken initiative. In 1882, Lord Ripon avowed a resolution for reforming rural local self government. Over a period of time, the British Government enacted various laws related to institutions of local self-government.

Gandhiji firmly believed in gram swaraj (village self-governance). He has said that freedom in Panchayati raj should start from the bottom. According to him, a village is a little republic and that only through decentralization of authority democracy can be established in true sense. Therefore, panchayat should have all authority. Only with panchayats having all the needed power, rural people can be made happier. Under the influence of Gandhiji, it is mentioned in the article 40 of the constitution of India, under Directive Principles of State Policy; that the state shall also work for organization of village panchayats and help enable them to function as units of self-government.

After independence, community development programme was implemented under first five year plan in 1952. The programme basically aimed at public participation but it failed to evoke popular response. Dependency on government for finance and other resources led people think that they would not be able to help themselves.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru emphasizing the need of making panchayats effective, had specified panchayati raj as a revolutionary experiment.

Community development programme aimed at rural development from different perspectives but its failure made it clear that public participation in development programme can only be effective when people are linked with both policy formation and implementation of programme at local level.

In 1957, a committee under the chairmanship of Balwantrai Mehta was appointed by Planning Commission to evaluate the working of community development programme initiated in 1952 and

suggest measures for its better working. Using the word 'democratic decentralization' which finally came to be known as panchayati raj, the committee recommended three-tier panchayati raj system at village, taluka and district level with people's representatives carrying out development activities.

Meaning of panchayati raj

The panchayati raj is a South Asian political system mainly found in India, Pakistan and Nepal. The word panchayat comes from the word panch; i.e. a group of five elders selected by local community.

Shree S. K. Day : 'Panchayati raj is a means for people's development. Its true meaning lies in the fact that people should become organized, aware and self-reliant and exercise rights by acquiring them from the government'.



Meeting of Gram Panchayat

Vidyasagar Sharma : 'The notion of panchayati raj presents a new perspective of democracy before the world. In brief, panchayati raj means decentralization of authority, authority to carry out developmental works and system of panchayats elected by people.'

Aims of panchayati raj :

(1) Democratic decentralization of authority :

Decentralization of authority in a democratic way is one of the important aims of panchayati raj. Active participation of people in the system is made possible by this process. Participation of rural people is essential for developmental programmes to succeed. Village people should have responsibility and authority to carry out local administration so that they develop interest in developmental works. Aim is also that people should have opportunity to express their opinion up to the highest level.

(2) Rejuvenation of community development programme :

Community development programme had failed to realize its target and therefore Balwantrai Mehta committee had recommended panchayati raj for rejuvenation of community development programme. Participation of rural people is essential for developmental programmes to succeed. Panchayati raj method was introduced with the anticipation that people will participate and support development programme to make it effective and successful.

(3) Increase in public participation :

Aim is also to increase public participation in and support for rural developmental activities. Rural people should address their problems themselves and participate in development programmes.

(4) Makeover of villages :

One of the basic aims of panchayati raj is makeover of villages through their overall development. It includes satisfying their basic needs by eliminating poverty, unemployment etc. and raising their socio-economic status.

(5) Public empowerment :

Panchayati raj also aims at public empowerment. This measure includes reservation of 33

percent of the seats for women, reservation for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes according to their population, assignment of authority and responsibility to panchayats and assistance to voluntary organizations for rural development.

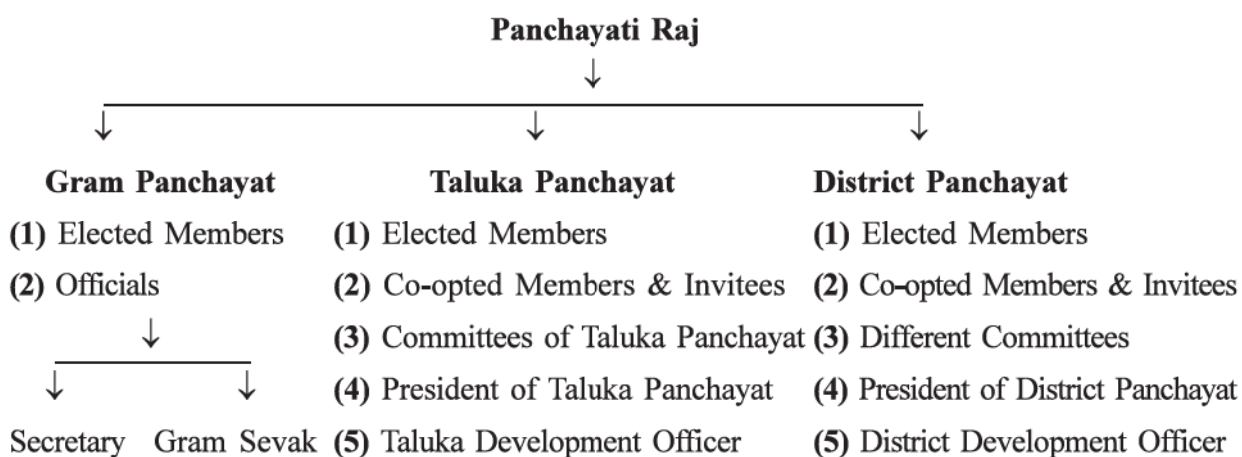
Three-tier structure of panchayati raj :

Panchayati raj is a governmental method with gram or village panchayat being the basic unit. Panchayati raj method was adopted by state governments during the decade of 1950-1960. Panchayati raj acquired constitutional status through 73rd constitutional amendment on 24th April, 1993. Balwantrai Mehta committee had recommended three-tier (village, taluka and district) panchayati raj. According to their convenience, all state governments in India developed the form of democratic decentralization.



Three-Tier Structure of Panchayati Raj

The structure of three-tier panchayati raj, as suggested by Balwantrai Mehta committee was as follows :



Village panchayat is the basic unit of three-tier structure of panchayati raj, then comes taluka panchayat at taluka level and then district panchayat at district level where elected members of panchayats carry out administrative and developmental activities. A special election commission is appointed for panchayat elections. Details of formation of panchayats at these three levels are given below :

(1) Gram panchayat (first level) :

Gram panchayat is the basic unit of self-governance in panchayati raj structure. The number of members in gram panchayat is decided on the basis of village population. People vote and elect their representatives who form gram panchayat as an institution of local self-government. Gram panchayat has the responsibility and authority for resolving local problems and carrying out developmental activities. Apart from elected members, gram panchayat has two government officers, a secretary and a gram sevak who help and guide sarpanch in administrative work.

Elected members of gram panchayat :

As mentioned above, gram panchayat is formed by elected members. Based on population, a gram panchayat has minimum of 7 members and maximum of 15 members with certain seats reserved for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women. Sarpanch and other members of gram panchayat

are elected by village people and elected members elect deputy sarpanch. Sarpanch is the head of gram panchayat.

Sarpanch plays a significant role in carrying out administrative and developmental activities. Apart from this, he has to oversee the work of panchayat functionaries and also to implement the decisions taken by panchayat.

According to Gujarat State Panchayat Act, village panchayat has following components :

- **Gram sabha** : All voters of the village are members of gram sabha. Gram sabha is the basic unit to which gram panchayat is responsible. In gram sabha which meets twice a year, annual budget of gram panchayat and development programmes are discussed.
- **Executive committee** : Executive committee comprises five elected members of gram panchayat. These five members of executive committee include one women member and one member from either scheduled caste or scheduled tribe. However, according to 73rd constitutional amendment, 33 percent seats are reserved for women in panchayats at all levels.
- **Samajik nyaya samiti** (social justice committee) : This committee is formed to ensure social justice to the people of weaker section of the village.
- **Nyaya panchayat** : A joint nyaya panchayat is formed for a group of 5 to 7 nearby villages. One person, generally educated and qualified, is elected from each of these villages to act as a member of nyaya panchayat. Nyaya panchayat is responsible for resolving local problems of villages involved and it has certain civil and criminal civil rights.
- **Samadhan (compromise) panch** : Samadhan panch is formed in each village. One person from the village, educated and qualified, is elected as a permanent member of Samadhan panch by the gram panchayat. In case of dispute, two members, one each from the two parties which are in dispute and the permanent member sit together to resolve the issue or reach a compromise.

Secretary of gram panchayat :

The secretary of the gram panchayat, appointed by the government, helps gram panchayat in keeping and maintaining records of gram panchayat, preparing budget and other reports, etc. In addition, the secretary also maintains financial accounts of gram panchayat and ensures that sarpanch and other members act according to the government rules prescribed for them.

Gram sevak or village level worker :

Gram sevak is also known as village development officer, who helps in preparing different schemes for gram panchayat and acquaints the gram panchayat with various development schemes. Gram sevak also helps farmers in obtaining loan for agriculture, makes seeds and fertilizers accessible to them and imparts knowledge about modern methods of cultivation to farmers and conveys the report on the progress of different schemes to taluka panchayat.

Functions of gram panchayat :

Gram panchayat performs a variety of functions for overall development of village. Activities carried out by gram panchayat in order to satisfy fundamental needs of village can be clubbed into two types :

(1) Civil works : These include cleanliness, hygiene, water supply, construction and maintenance of roads, lighting, cemetery, primary education, maintenance of wells and ponds and religious places etc.

(2) Developmental works : These comprise all developmental activities carried out by gram panchayat for weaker sections, village youth, children, women etc. They also include providing momentum to cooperative activities, arranging for fairs and haats etc.

Sources of income : Gram panchayat, for carrying out its activities, gets grant from the government, Jilla panchayat and taluka panchayat. In addition, it can raise money by levying certain local taxes and by contribution from people.

(2) Taluka panchayat (second level) :

Taluka panchayat stands between village panchayat and Jilla panchayat. Up to one lakh of population, taluka panchayat consists of 15 members and then 2 more members are added for additional population of 25 thousand. Thirty-three percent of seats are reserved for women and there are reserved seats for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes. The term of the taluka panchayat is of 5 years.

Structure of taluka panchayat :

Structural components of taluka panchayat are as follows :

- **Elected members :** Voters of all villages of the taluka elect members of taluka panchayat through secret voting method. Elected members then elect president and vice president of taluka panchayat.
- **Co-opted members and invitees :** In addition to elected members, taluka panchayat has co-opted members, and invitees who attend taluka panchayat's meetings, take part in discussion and share their suggestions and instructions, but they do not have voting right.
- **Taluka panchayat committees :** In order to carry out developmental activities and other responsibilities, taluka panchayat constitutes executive committee and nyaya samiti from among the members. In addition, other optional committees are formed as and when needed.

(1) Executive committee : Taluka panchayat, from among its members, forms an executive committee of maximum nine members. These members of executive committee select their president. The term of this committee is of two years.

(2) Samajik nyaya samiti : It is compulsory to form this committee in taluka panchayat. The number of its members which is maximum five is decided by taluka panchayat.

President of taluka panchayat :

The elected members of taluka panchayat elect the president and the vice president. Taluka panchayat president is a democratic leader representing the rural population of the taluka.

Taluka development officer (TDO) :

TDO is an officer appointed by the government to carry out administrative work of taluka panchayat. He also guides the president of taluka panchayat in his government related and administrative activities.

Functions of taluka panchayat :

- (1) Health and hygiene :** In the field of health and hygiene, taluka panchayat has to carry out activities related to rural water supply, prevention of water pollution, primary health centers, clinics, maternity homes and family planning.
- (2) Education :** Education related activities of taluka panchayat include establishment and management of primary schools in the taluka, construction of buildings for primary schools,

construction of play-grounds, activities related to secondary education, informal education and adult education.

- (3) **Construction** : Taluka panchayat carries out activities of construction and maintenance of roads connecting villages, roads connecting highways and village roads. It also carries out plantation activities on wayside in the taluka.
- (4) **Village habitation** : Taluka panchayat is also responsible for planning and execution of activities related to development of main village area of villages under the taluka and residences.
- (5) **Agriculture** : Under this head, taluka panchayat needs to carry out a variety of activities which comprise improvement in agriculture, construction of irrigation infrastructure, land improvement and land conservation, arrangement of loans for agriculture and irrigation, arrangement of training classes for farmers, extension activities, watershed related works, construction and maintenance of godowns etc.
- (6) **Animal breeding** : Management and execution of veterinary hospitals, artificial insemination centers and dairy development related activities are the ones which taluka panchayat has to perform.
- (7) **Village industry** : For development of village industries, taluka panchayat needs to establish production-cum training centers, make efforts for development of Khadi Village Industry (KVI) and cottage industries and perform activities related to running of technical and occupational training centers.
- (8) **Cooperation** : Taluka panchayat is also expected to accomplish the task of establishment of credit, sale, industry, irrigation cooperatives for the development of cooperative activities in the taluka.
- (9) **Relief aid** : In times of natural calamities such as flood, fire, earthquake, epidemic, drought etc., taluka panchayat is expected to distribute relief material to the village people.
- (10) **Social welfare and security** : Taluka panchayat has to form and implement schemes for welfare of weaker sections of society, disabled, old, destitute, widows, divorced and also for elimination of untouchability. Construction and management of orphanages and shelter for poor to provide social security to them are also termed as functions of taluka panchayat.

(3) Jilla panchayat (third level) :

Jilla or district panchayat is at the top of three-tier system of panchayati raj. Up to 4 lakh of population, Jilla panchayat consists of 17 members. Thereafter, for each additional population of 1 lakh, two more members are added. Thirty-three percent of the total seats of jilla panchayat are reserved for women and based on the criterion of population, there are seats and offices of chairpersons reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Ten percent seats and offices of chairpersons are reserved for other backward classes.

Structure of jilla panchayat :

Following are the components of jilla panchayat :

- (1) **Elected members** : Voters of the villages of the district elect members of jilla panchayat in a direct election and then elected members elect president and vice president from among them.
- (2) **Co-opted members and invitees** : In addition to elected members, jilla panchayat has nominated members, co-opted members, and invitees. However, these members do not have any voting right.
- (3) **Jilla panchayat committees** : Jilla panchayat has to perform a variety of jobs related to development of villages of the district. For this purpose, about 10 committees are formed from among the (elected) members. Members of each of the committees elect the chairman of the committee from among them. The committee works under the guidance of the chairman.

- (4) **Jilla panchayat pramukh (president)** : The pramukh or president of jilla panchayat is a democratically elected leader and works as the head of the jilla panchayat. The post of jilla panchayat president is considered as one of the vital posts in panchayati raj. The president represents rural population and the success of panchayati raj and rural development is based on his performance.
- (5) **District development officer (DDO)** : DDO, known as *jilla vikas adhikari* in Gujarati, is a government official, looking after administration in jilla panchayat office. He also guides president and members of jilla panchayat in their activities and acquaint them with government rules and regulations.

Functions of jilla panchayat :

Jilla panchayat provide guidelines to all talukas and villages of the district for activities to be carried out for overall development of villages. Some of its functions are described below :

- (1) It forms development policy for all rural areas of the district and get it implemented by talukas and villages.
- (2) Jilla panchayat provides facility of transportation to people of rural areas and carries out construction of roads connecting different villages and talukas of the district.
- (3) With the aim of increasing agricultural production in the district, jilla panchayat makes agriculture related facilities available to farmers, such as irrigation, seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, improved methods of cultivation etc.
- (4) With the intention of reducing unemployment in rural areas of the district, jilla panchayat forms programmes for establishment of small industries, handicrafts, and for creation of employment opportunities and get them implemented by taluka panchayats.
- (5) The task of establishment of village health centers, family planning centers, mother and child welfare centers is also carried out by jilla panchayat. In case of epidemic, it makes arrangements for sending team of doctors, medicines, equipments for treatment etc. to the affected villages.
- (6) Special efforts are made by jilla panchayat to reduce illiteracy in the villages of the district. These efforts include establishment of primary school in each village, raising financial help, providing educational equipments, recruitment and transfer of teachers in rural schools, evaluation of schools and recommendations for educational improvement, creating facilities for adult education etc.
- (7) Jilla panchayat involves taluka panchayats in formation of schemes for uplift of weaker sections of rural areas such as scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, agricultural labourers, etc. and implement them.
- (8) With the objective of promoting cultural and sports activities in rural areas of the district, Jilla panchayat helps taluka and village panchayat in their efforts of establishing libraries, organizations of youth and women development, etc For this purpose, jilla panchayat provides financial help and required equipments.

In brief, jilla panchayat, as a topmost democratic institution of panchayati raj at district level, has to make efforts for overall development of rural areas of the district. Jilla panchayat gets certain grant from the government to meet its functional objectives. In addition, it also receives some money from revenue and local taxes. It can also raise other sources of income.

Social effects of Panchayati raj :

The major objective of panchayati raj is decentralization of democracy and overall development of villages. In this context, we find following social effects of panchayati raj on rural society :

- (1) **Dissemination of democratic values** : Majority of population in India is rural. Implementation of panchayati raj has provided momentum to democratic values in rural society. Rural voters get an opportunity to elect their representatives by using their votes.
- (2) **Emergence of new leadership** : Generally, elders used to be leaders in traditional rural society. Because of panchayati raj, young and educated people of rural areas have got opportunity to contest and get elected and as result a young, educated and dynamic leadership has emerged.
- (3) **Change in structure of authority** : Establishment of panchayati raj has led to decentralization of authority. Village people have authority in their hands and they select their representatives and carry the responsibility of planning and implementation of developmental works and administration. In panchayati raj, distribution of authority is based on equality and freedom.
- (4) **Increase in social mobility** : Panchayati raj has been instrumental in increasing social mobility. Provision of reservation at all three levels has provided an opportunity for people of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes to get elected in panchayats and obtain authority. Thus, people belonging to castes hitherto placed lower have got a chance to improve or raise their socio-economic status. This has led to increase in political, economic and social mobility.
- (5) **Political awareness** : Panchayat elections have played a great role in creating political awareness. At the time of election, leaders of various political parties visit villages, address gatherings of people and speak about their election manifestos. As a result, villagers get familiar with various national parties and their social and economic policies, which have ultimately increased rural people's political understanding and consciousness.
- (6) **Secularization** : The fact, that a candidate in panchayat election needs support of people belonging to different castes or communities, and after election, panchayat members need to act without any discrimination towards castes or communities, has weakened the traditional idea of sectarianism in village society and has disseminated secular values.
- (7) **Reduction in social distance** : Panchayati raj has succeeded in lessening the traditional distance between higher-lower castes and communities, men and women, landowners and labourers, etc. due to increased communication between them. Earlier, there prevailed a sort of aloofness between these groups and classes but panchayat elections and involvement of all in village developmental activities made mutual interaction and social contacts necessary. This resulted in reduction of social distance between them.
- (8) **Increase in public participation** : Panchayati raj has also succeeded in increasing public participation which was one of its aims. This has also been established by certain studies. Now villages have panchayat building, gobar gas plant, water works, public toilet, street light, plantation on wayside, etc. Similarly, many villages are electrified with the combination of government assistance and people's contribution. There are many instances where villagers have done *shramdaan* (donation of labour) for construction of village roads.

Panchayati raj has some negative social impacts too. They are briefly described below :

- (1) **Groupism and contention** : Panchayati raj elections have encouraged contention and groupism in villages. During elections, different political parties become active in villages and they make groups to get support for their candidates. As a result, relations between villagers become sour.
- (2) **Encouragement to casteism** : Population of castes becomes a criterion for selection of candidates in panchayat elections. In such a situation, personal qualifications of candidate become secondary and support of caste becomes a deciding factor for winning election.

That is to say that even if the candidate belonging to the caste having larger population is less qualified than other candidates, the former, in order to get support of his/her caste, emphasizes the interests of his/her caste and makes promises to develop it in election propaganda. This encourages casteism in villages and the constitutional ideal of elimination of caste-system takes a retreat.

- (3) Intercaste conflict :** Casteism leads to intercaste conflicts. Groupism nurtured by caste-based elections creates tension and resultant conflict among different castes. Incidences of quarrels, fighting etc. between different castes occurring in villages after elections are known facts and they also get published in newspapers. Thus, panchayati raj system has certain limitations too.

Features of 73rd constitutional amendment

Gram sabha is considered as the base of the panchayati raj system. These gram sabhas will exercise powers and perform functions provided by state legislature.

Panchayats will be constituted at village, intermediate and district levels. There will be no panchayat at the intermediate level in states having population not exceeding twenty lakhs if they wish so. According to Article 243, members can be made under special arrangements for union territories by the President of India. There will be directly elected members at all three levels. Chairpersons of village panchayats can be members of panchayats at intermediate level and chairpersons of intermediate panchayats can be members of panchayats at district level.

At each level, the term of the panchayat will be of five years and election should be held before the completion of the term. If the panchayat is dissolved, it is compulsory to hold election within six months.

In all panchayats, the number of seats reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes will be proportionate to their population in that panchayat area. One-third of the total seats will be reserved for women. One-third of the total number of offices of chairpersons will be reserved for women in the panchayats at each level. The number of offices of chairpersons reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes will be proportionate to their population in the state. Apart from this, state legislature can reserve seats in any panchayat or offices of chairpersons in the panchayats at any level in favour of backward class citizens.

A Finance Commission will be constituted in all states within one year from the commencement of the seventy-third constitutional amendment (24th April, 1993) and thereafter at the expiration of every fifth year. The Finance commission will review allocation of financial resources between states and panchayats at all levels and will consider measures to improve the financial position of panchayats.

Sufficient finance will be made available to panchayats for implementation of developmental schemes.

State government will decide whether to authorize panchayats to collect taxes or proportion of revenue to be given to them.

State election commission, to be constituted in all states, will carry out the task of preparing voters' list and conduct elections.

If any person is declared disqualified by state legislature or any other act of state, s/he cannot be a member of panchayat.

In the end, eleventh schedule (article 243G) containing 29 matters is added. According to article 243 G, panchayati raj institutions are given an effective role for planning and implementation of matters of local importance. Some of the 29 matters are as follows :

- (1) Agriculture, including agricultural extension
- (2) Land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation

(3) Minor irrigation, water management and watershed development

Public participation and carrying out work according to prescribed rules are necessary for community development. However, occurrence of deviant behaviour in the process may have negative impacts on community development. We will learn about such deviant behaviour in the next unit.

Exercises

1. Answer the following questions in detail :

- (1) Explain the meaning and aims of panchayati raj.
- (2) Explain the three-tier structure of panchayati raj.
- (3) Describe social impacts of panchayati raj.

2. Give concise answers to the following questions :

- (1) Functions of gram panchayat.
- (2) Explain the structure of jilla panchayat.
- (3) Describe the negative impacts of panchayati raj.
- (4) Explain the '73rd constitutional amendment'.

3. Answer the following questions in brief :

- (1) Meaning of gram sabha.
- (2) Write about Samajik nyaya samiti of taluka panchayat.
- (3) Functions of gram sevak.
- (4) Give definition of panchayati raj.
- (5) Give names of committees of taluka panchayat.

4. Answer the following questions in one sentence :

- (1) What are the developmental functions of gram panchayat?
- (2) Who becomes president of taluka panchayat?
- (3) What Jawaharlal Nehru has said about panchayati raj?
- (4) Give full form of TDO.
- (5) Give full form of DDO.

5. Choose the right options from the following :

- (1) 'Freedom in panchayati raj should start from the bottom'. Who stated this ? ☐
(a) Jawaharlal Nehru (b) Mahatma Gandhi
(c) Lord Mayo (d) Balwantrao Mehta
- (2) Panchayati raj means..... ☐
(a) Decentralization of authority (b) Centralization of authority
(c) Neutral authority (d) Deprived of authority
- (3) How much is women's reservation in panchayati raj ? ☐
(a) 22 % (b) 33 % (c) 44 % (d) 40 %
- (4) Who carries out the administrative and developmental activities of village ? ☐
(a) Sarpanch (b) Gram sabha
(c) Panchayat functionaries (d) Executive committee

- (5) When was the 73rd constitutional amendment implemented ? ☐
- (a) 24th April, 1993 (b) 22nd March, 1994
(c) 1st December, 1990 (d) 1st January, 2000
- (6) What is the tenure of panchayat ? ☐
- (a) Five years (b) Three years
(c) One year (d) Two years
- (7) Which committee recommended the three-tier structure of panchayati raj ? ☐
- (a) Sevak committee (b) Balwantrai Mehta committee
(c) Metcalf committee (d) British committee
- (8) In which year did Lord Ripon decide the principles of local self-government ? ☐
- (a) 1882 (b) 1801
(c) 1909 (d) 1947

Activity

- Visit any village panchayat.
- Organize students in your class according to three-tier structure of panchayati raj.
- Visit taluka and jilla panchayat.
- Organize a mock poll in your school to understand the process of panchayat elections.
- Evaluate the functions of village panchayat and write a report.