

Local Self-Government- Rural

Meaning and Significance of Local Self-Government

Local self-government refers to the management of local affairs by local bodies which are elected by the local people. In villages, the local institution which manages the affairs of the village is known as **Panchayat**, while in towns and cities, it is known as **Municipal Corporation** and **Municipality**.

Salient Features of the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992

The Panchayati Raj system was initially set up at Nagaur in Rajasthan in 1959. Then it was started in Andhra Pradesh. The 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, made it mandatory for the state governments to establish the Panchayati Raj system in their states.

- The 73rd Amendment Act provided for the three tier system of Panchayati Raj for states with a population of more than 20 lakh.
- Panchayat elections are held regularly after every five years.
- One-third of the total seats in the Panchayat should be reserved for the members of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women.
- The 73rd Amendment Act also laid down that the state government should appoint the State Finance Commission to make recommendations for improving the financial powers of the Panchayats.

It is important to draw a line of distinction between a local self-government and local government. In local government, the administration is looked after by the officials who are appointed by the state. Some of these officers are the *patwari* and village *chowkidar*.

Local self-government consists of officials who are elected by the members of the locality.

Significance of Local Self-Government

- Local self-government is the foundation stone of any democratic structure. Local self-government enables the local people to govern their own affairs.
- They provide a training ground for local people to gain necessary skills and experience for undertaking larger challenges at the state or national level.
- Through local self-institutions, the government can reach ordinary citizens in times of need like emergency.
- These institutions reduce the burden of administering local areas on the state and national governments.
- The local self-governmental institutions encourage and facilitate the active participation of local people in managing their own administration.



People participating in the discussions held by Gram Panchayat

Panchayati Raj System

The Panchayati Raj works at three levels. They are

- Gram Panchayats at the village level
- Panchayat Samiti at the block or middle level
- Zilla Parishad at the district level

There are also Nyay Panchayats whose work is to deliver quick justice. There is one Nyay Panchayat for every three to four villages.

Qualifications Required for Election to Local Bodies

A person who wants to become a member of a local body should have the following qualifications:

- He/she must be a citizen of India and should not be less than 21 years of age.
- He/she must be a registered voter.
- He/she should not have been a convict or should not have been disqualified by law.
- He/she should not hold any office of profit under the government.

Gram Panchayat

The Gram Sabha includes all adults of the village who are more than 18 years old. They together elect the members of the Gram Panchayat.

- The Sarpanch is the head of the Gram Panchayat. A Vice Sarpanch is also elected from among its members. They are honorary members and are not paid a salary.
- The membership of a Village Panchayat varies from 5–31 depending on the size of the village.
- One-third of the seats in the Panchayat are reserved for women. Seats are also reserved for the members of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.



The gram panchayat have set up various health care centers in their villages

Administrative Functions

- To look after the public works such as maintenance of the village roads, bridges, tanks and wells
- To look after sanitation and to set up dispensaries and basic health care centres at the village level
- To provide primary education to children
- To look after the irrigational facilities and supply seeds and fertilisers to farmers
- To maintain the records of common village property, their sale and purchase

Social and Economic Functions

- To construct and build libraries, guest houses and marriage halls
- To organise village fairs and exhibitions
- To establish fair price shops and co-operative credit societies
- To plant trees, parks, gardens and playgrounds for recreational activities

Judicial Functions

- Nyay Panchayats, also known as Panchayati Adalats, look after the administration of justice in villages.
- They ensure quick and inexpensive justice to villagers.
- They cannot award a sentence of imprisonment and lawyers cannot appear before these panchayats.
- If Nyay Panchayats deliver justice within their jurisdictions, there can be no appeal against its decisions.
- However, sub-divisional magistrates and sub-judges of the district are empowered to hear appeals.
- The state government or the state judicial service decides the jurisdiction of these panchayats.

Panchayat Samiti (Block Level)

The Panchayat Samiti works at a block or middle level. It consists of the following members:

- Sarpanchs of all panchayats which come under its circle
- Members of the State Legislative Assembly of the state from the area
- Members of Parliament of the area

- Block Development Officers of the area
- Representatives of Cooperative Societies in certain states
- Chairperson, Deputy Chairperson and Secretary

Functions

- To supervise and coordinate the working of Gram Panchayats
- To make provision for education at the secondary level and above for a group of villages at the block level
- To build hospitals and provide health facilities to the people
- To develop agriculture by undertaking irrigation projects, distribution of good quality seeds and fertilisers
- To approve building plans and to undertake construction of roads and bridges at the block level
- To provide safe drinking water
- To act as a link between the Gram Panchayat and the Zilla Parishad

Zilla Parishad (District Level)

The Zilla Parishad lies at the apex of the three-tier Panchayati Raj System. It is a local self-government at the district level.

Composition: Its membership varies from 40 to 60 members. It consists of the Deputy Commissioner, Presidents of Panchayat Samitis included in the circle, heads of all governmental departments, members of the State Legislative Assembly, members of Parliament belonging to the area, women and members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

A **Chairperson** is elected from among the members. He/she presides over the meetings of the Zilla Parishad and conducts its business. A **Deputy Chairperson** is elected from among the members. The Zilla Parishad also has a **Secretary** who is a government employee.

Functions

- It looks after the developmental work of the district.
- It has many Standing Committees which execute the policies of the Zilla Parishad.
- It supervises the working of the Panchayats.
- In states such as Assam and Bihar, the Zilla Parishad also scrutinises the budget estimates of the Panchayat Samiti.
- It supervises and coordinates the working of the Panchayat Samiti regarding works undertaken by it like providing irrigation facilities, setting up of schools and village industries and carrying out works related to sanitation and public health.
- It acts as a link between the state government and the Panchayat Samiti. It advises the state government on all matters related to the Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis.

Contribution of the Panchayati Raj

- It has brought government closer to the people.
- It ensures effective coordination between government programmes and voluntary agencies.
- The District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) work in close cooperation with Zilla Parishads.
- The higher bodies in the Panchayati Raj release funds for the Gram Panchayats under the Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojana (JGSY).
- The Gram Panchayat has been active in implementing the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, which aims at providing 100 days of work to every rural household.