

## TOPIC: PANCHAYATI RAJ

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The Panchayati Raj is a **South Asian political system** mainly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal.

It is the oldest system of local government in the Indian subcontinent. The dream of 'Gram Swaraj' of Mahatma Gandhi and motto of 'Power to People' are essence of true democracy. The task of capacity building of these large numbers of Panchayats is quite gigantic exercise.

As per the assessment of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj even after two decades of **enactment of 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act** and also after having three rounds of Panchayat elections in many States of India the empowerment of Panchayats has not taken place as envisioned in the **73rd Constitution (Amendment) Act in 1992**. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution in 1992 gave Constitutional status to the Panchayats as institutions of local self government and also for planning and implementing programmes for economic development and social justice.

The institution of Panchayati Raj is not new to India. It existed since earliest times. We get ample references about the Panchayats in the **Manusmriti**, the **Arthashastra** and the **Mahabharata**. During the Muslim rule also the system continued to operate unobstructed.

With the assumption of power by the British and the adoption of policy of centralization, the Panchayats suffered a temporary setback. But soon the British realized the value of this institution and the **Decentralization Commission recommended in its report in 1907**.

The recommendation was "In ignoring the village as the primary unit of local self- government, the government made the beginning with a false step. This scanty success hitherto made to introduce a system of rural self-government, is largely due to the fact that we have not built from the bottom and hence it is most desirable to constitute and develop village Panchayats for administration of certain local affairs with the villages".

However, the Government of India did not pay any heed to the recommendations of the commission. The outbreak of the First World War gave a further setback to the demand for revival of Panchayats. With the introduction of the **system of Diarchy under the Montague Chelmsford Reforms of 1919** the responsibility of local self-government institutions was transferred to the ministers. These ministers enacted a set of laws with a view to revive the Panchayati Raj institutions. But paucity of funds stood in the way.

During the **1920's Mahatma Gandhi made a strong plea** for introduction of self-government in the villages with a view to improve their economy. He had pointed out that independence must begin at the bottom. Every village should be a republic or a Panchayat having full powers. The greater the power of Panchayats is the better for the people. However, the British Government did not pay any heed. It was only in 1937 when the Congress Ministry was formed that attention was paid to the **establishment of the Gram Panchayats** and their reorganization. However, before they could achieve anything substantial in this direction, the British declared India as a Party to war without consulting the popular ministries. This resulted in the resignation of the Congress Ministries. These developments gave a severe blow to the movement for revival of Panchayats. Soon after World War II, the elections to the central and such; provincial legislatures were held and the Congress was returned to the power. Once again, it paid attention to the issue of revival of Panchayats and passed numerous Acts.

**When India became independent in 1947 perhaps one-third of the villages of India had traditional Panchayats and their functioning was not up to the mark.** The Congress Government made a determined effort to promote the creation of Panchayats to make them effective units of local government. Article 40 of the Constitution of India declared "The State shall take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government". The aim was to foster democratic participation, to involve villagers in the development effort and to ease the administrative burden on the states. The subject of implementation of the Panchayati Raj was placed in the State List. **In the initial years after gaining independence, no efforts were made for the setting up of the Panchayati Raj.**

The Community Development Programme was launched in October 1952 to seek people's participation and involvement in the task of rural reconstruction. The programme failed in its mission without an agency at the village level.

The Planning Commission, in the Second Five Year Plan, recommended its review. In January 1957, a team for the study of Community Projects and National Extension Service, headed by Balwant Rai Mehta, was appointed.

### **Key Recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:**

1. There should be a three-tier structure of local self- government from the village to the district with the village at the bottom and the district at the top with its intermediary link of institutions all organically related to one another;
2. There should be genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these institutions of local government;
3. Adequate resources should be transferred to these bodies to enable them to discharge those responsibilities;
4. All programmes of social and economic development formulated through the network of planning should be channelled through those institutions;
5. The whole system of Panchayati Raj should facilitate further devolution and dispersal of power, responsibilities and resources in the future.

### **Role of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj**

With a view to provide a focus to the decentralization of powers and empowerment of the Panchayats as institutions of local self government, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) was formed in 4 May, 2004 after carving out the Panchayati Raj Division from the Ministry of Rural Development. The major functions of the Ministry are to oversee the implementation of Part IX of the Constitution, inserted by the Constitution (Seventy Third Amendment) Act, 1992, the provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act (PESA), 1996 and Article 243 ZD of Part IX-A of the Constitution relating to the District Planning Committees read with the Eleventh Schedule which

illustratively sets out a list of 29 matters, which might be considered by the State Legislatures for devolution to the Panchayats so as to ensure that they function as 'units of Self-Government.'

Other functions include, servicing of the Empowered Sub-Committee of the National Development Council (NDC) on Administrative and Financial Empowerment of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), review of the Centrally Sponsored Schemes of Ministries which deal with subjects included in the Eleventh Schedule to enable role & responsibilities of PRIs, capacity building and training.



**FLOWCHART OF PANCHAYAT SYSTEM IN INDIA**