



# A GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE INSTITUTIONS OF PANCHAYATH RAJ IN INDIA

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## ABSTRACT:

The Panchayath Raj is a political system common across South Asia, particularly in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal. It is a form of local self-governance. To broaden democracy into rural India, the system of Panchayath Raj was set up in India. The Panchayath Raj system is not a new concept and hence it is considered as one of the best ways of rural Indian governance. However, the system of Panchayath Raj, despite deriving their abilities and being from the Constitution of India encounters numerous challenges in its day-to-day functioning due to various explanations, and thus this third level of government has not been able to serve them for which it was launched in India. This indicates that the system has been encountering challenges. Through the establishment of elected self-governing local bodies in rural areas, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 aimed to fortify grassroots democracy by conferring constitutional status and an institutional framework upon panchayath. This article examines the history and organization of Panchayath Raj in India, as well as the difficulties that current Panchayath Raj Institutions encounter in operating effectively. Women's involvement in PRIs and recent panchayath governance initiatives are also noted in the paper.

**KEYWORDS:** Constitution, Democracy, India, Panchayath Raj, Self-governance, Women.

## INTRODUCTION

It is now broadly acknowledged that local-level self-governing institutions are crucial for national development and effective public involvement. They are a fundamental and necessary component of the democratic process. 'Grassroots of Democracy', which is founded on small governmental units, allows individuals to develop a sense of accountability and foster democratic values. In addition, it offers a distinctive opportunity to engage in public matters, such as developmental work. Every political system, regardless of its nature (traditional/modern, democratic/totalitarian, large/small), includes participation as a component.

Panchayath Raj system Grassroots units and institutions of local self-governance are seen as instruments for socio-economic transformation in rural India. It is recognized as a democratic decentralization institutional expression in India. By being closer to the people, local governments can better respond to local needs and optimize resource utilization. The democratic decentralization system known as Panchayath Raj is regarded as a means to guarantee democracy and socio-economic transformation. Mahatma Gandhi championed the idea of India residing in her villages. To achieve Indian independence, it is essential to start from the grassroots level by establishing every village as a republic or panchayat with complete authority. He noted that twenty men sitting at the center could not enact true democracy. Members of every village must work from the ground up. As a result of these aspirations,

Article 40 was incorporated into the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Indian Constitution. In 1993, about five decades post-independence, the Government of India made a groundbreaking move by incorporating Panchayath Raj Institutions into the Constitution.

Numerous committees, such as Balwantrai Mehta (1957), K. Santhanam (1964), Ashok Mehta (1978), G.V.K. Rao (1985), and L.M. Singhvi (1986), made various recommendations to the center from 1957 to 1986. The concept that emerged from this was proposed as legislation (64th Constitutional Amendment Bill) in the Lok Sabha in 1989. Even though this bill could not be put into law, the concept was incorporated into the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, which introduced an innovation in the country's grassroots politics. It was acclaimed as a historic move to empower the people, ensuring their more effective participation in grassroots electoral processes and granting them a greater role in decision-making and developmental functions regarding issues that directly affect them. Issues that concern them directly. The three-tier rural local government structure of the Panchayath Raj system is established at the Village, Block, and District levels to implement democratic decentralization. The institution is referred to as Gram Panchayat at the village level. In certain States/UTs, the institution operating at the block level is commonly referred to as the Panchayat Samiti. It is also referred to by other names, including Taluk Development Board in Karnataka, Panchayath Union in Tamil Nadu, Kshetra Samiti in Uttar Pradesh, Janapad Panchayath in Madhya Pradesh, and Commune Panchayat in Pondicherry, among others.

Except in Assam, the institution at the district level is commonly referred to as Zila Parishad, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. In Assam, the equivalent of this national body is called Mohkuma Parishad, while in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu; it is referred to as District Development Council. With the exception of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Lakshadweep, where the Panchayath Raj system has not yet been established, these institutions are present at various levels across all States/UTs. The Balwantrai Mehta Committee suggested a three-tier system of Panchayath Raj consisting of Village Panchayath, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad. Levels vary across states without uniformity. Over the years, however, the structure and functions have changed.

## STUDY INTENTION

1. Below are several aims of the study
2. To examine the historical context of PRIs in India.
3. In order to emphasize the difficulties and challenges that PRIs are dealing with at present.
4. To investigate the function of women in PRIs in India.
5. To learn about recent initiatives in Panchayath governance.

## RESEARCH METHODS

The methods employed in this research are analytical. It relies on secondary data. Secondary data is gathered from a variety of sources, including books, articles in different journals, newspapers, and Panchayath Raj websites.

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PANCHAYATH RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

The word 'Panchayath' has its origins traced returning to the expression 'Panchapanchavanusthitah'; this denotes the presence of Gram Sanghas, which are also called Rural Communities. The institution of Panchayath Raj has its origins at the dawn of Indian civilization. Since ancient times, it has existed and effectively governed the civil and judicial matters of rural communities throughout that time. A multitude of ancient texts, including the Rigveda, Manu Samhita, Dharmashastras, Upanishads, Jatakas, and others, provide extensive references to the panchayath system of administration employed in local governance.

The Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata contains the earliest reference to panchayath. This reference comes from the term Pancha, which denotes an institution of the five. Pancha and panchavanusthitah share a semantic similarity with the panchayath. Another source detailing these village councils is the Arthashastra, authored by Kautilya circa 400 B.C. A detailed account of the system of village governance that existed during its historical period is given in the Arthashastra. Throughout this period, the Adhyaksha was responsible for overseeing and regulating all facets of village governance.

The PanchayathRaj system consists of three levels in the state, featuring elected bodies at the Village, Levels of Taluk and District. This guarantees enhanced involvement of individuals and a more effective execution of rural development initiatives. A Gram Panchayath will be established for each village or group of villages, a taluk level, and a Zilla Panchayath at the district level.

### **INDIA'S EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATH RAJ INSTITUTIONS**

In India, the Panchayath system cannot be regarded as a phenomenon that arose purely after independence. The prevailing political institutions in rural India centuries of serving as the gram panchayath. Panchayaths in ancient India were typically elected councils that held both executive and judicial authority. The significance of village panchayaths was eroded by foreign domination particularly the Mughal and British empires as well as by natural and imposed socio-economic transformations. In the time before independence, though, panchayaths served as tools for upper-caste dominance over the rest of the village, exacerbating divisions rooted in socio-economic status and the caste hierarchy. Post-independence, the evolution of the Panchayath Raj System culminated with the drafting of the Constitution In accordance with Article 40 of the Constitution of India, "The state shall take steps to organize village panchayaths and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." The Government of India appointed several committees to examine the implementation of self-government at the countryside degree and suggest measures for realizing this aim. The appointed committees are as follows: Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, Ashok Mehta Committee, G. V. K. Rao Committee and L. M. Singhvi Committee.

#### **Balwant Rai Mehta Committee and Panchayath Raj**

In 1957, the committee was designated to review and propose improvements to the operations of the Community Development Program and the National Extension Service. The committee advised that a democratic decentralized local government, called the Panchayath Raj, to be established.

Recommendations by the Committee:

- Destuffing's Panchayath-Raj-System: Gram Panchayath, Panchayath Samiti und Zila Parishad.
- Representatives who are directly elected will constitute the Gram Panchayath, while those who are indirectly elected will form the Samiti and Zila Parishad. Panchayath
- The fundamental aims of the Panchayath Raj system are planning and development.
- The Panchayat Samiti ought to function as the executive body, while the Zila Parishad should serve in an advisory and supervisory role.
- The Zila Parishad chairperson will be the District Collector.
- It also asked for the supply of resources to help them fulfill their duties and responsibilities.

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee further energized the development of panchayaths in nation, with the report advising that the Panchayath Raj institutions should have a significant involvement in community development initiatives throughout the nation. The aim of the Panchayaths was to achieve democratic decentralization by means of well-planned programs that would ensure effective local participation. Even the Prime Minister of India at that time, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru supported the panchayath system by stating, "Authority and power must be given to the people in the villages.... Let us empower the panchayaths.

#### **Ashok Mehta Committee and Panchayath Raj**

In 1977, the committee was established to propose actions aimed at revitalizing and reinforcing the deteriorating Panchayath Raj system in India. The main recommendations are:

- the existing three-tier system should be substituted with a two-tier system comprising Mandal Panchayath (a collection of villages) and Zila Parishad (district level).
- the first level of oversight following the state level is the district level.
- at the district level, the Zila Parishad will serve as the executive authority and will be accountable for planning.
- to generate financial resources, the institutions (Mandal Panchayath and Zila Parishad) ought to possess compulsory taxation authority.

### **G. V. K. Rao Committee and Panchayath Raj**

The Planning Commission appointed the committee in 1985. It acknowledges that progress has not been observed at the grassroots level, bureaucratization has resulted in the Panchayath Raj Institutions being referred to as 'grass without roots. Consequently, it has proposed a number of important recommendations, detailed as follows:

- The most crucial entity in the scheme is Zila Parishad democratic decentralization.
- The primary entity for implementing development programs at the district level will be Zila Parishad.
- Specific planning, implementation, and monitoring of rural development programs are to be assigned to the district and lower levels of the Panchayath Raj system.
- A position for District Development Commissioner will be established. He will act as the chief executive officer of the Zila Parishad.
- There should be regular elections for the various tiers of the Panchayath Raj systems.

### **L. M. Singhvi Committee and Panchayath Raj**

The committee was established by the Indian government in 1986, primarily to suggest measures for revives the Panchayath Raj systems for democracy and committee provided recommendations:

- the committee recommended the constitutional establishment of the Panchayath Raj system acknowledged. It suggested constitutional measures to acknowledge free and fair elections for the Panchayath Raj systems.
- the committee proposed reorganizing villages to enhance the effectiveness of gram panchayaths.
- It recommended increasing funding for village panchayath's activities.
- Judicial tribunals will be established in each state to adjudicate the elections of Panchayath Raj Institutions and other matters related to their functioning.

These factors all bolster the case that panchayaths can be quite effective in recognizing and addressing local issues. Engaging the villagers in developmental endeavors, enhancing inter-level political communication, cultivating leadership abilities, and generally aiding fundamental state development while minimizing structural alterations. Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the pioneers in adopting Panchayath Raj in 1959, with other states following suit later on. While states differ in some respects, they share certain features. In a majority of the states, such as, a three-level structure has been established, including the village-level Panchayath, the block-level Panchayath Samiti, and the district-level Zila Parishad. As a result of the ongoing efforts of civil society organizations, intellectuals, and progressive political leaders, Parliament approved two amendments to the Constitution: the 73rd Constitution Amendment for rural local bodies (Panchayatsh) and the 74th Constitution Amendment for urban local bodies (Municipalities), which designated them as 'institutions of self-government'. All the states enacted their laws in accordance with the amended constitutional provisions within a year.

### **STRUCTURE OF PANCHAYATH RAJ INSTITUTIONS**

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment resulted in the establishment of a three-tier Panchayath Raj structure at the Village, Block, and District levels in every state.

#### **Gram Panchayath**

Across the nation, Village Panchayath is the fundamental unit in the composition of Panchayath Raj. Since Gram Panchayaths have existed in the country since ancient times, nearly all states have acknowledged their significance. It is also believed that Panchayaths, being closer to the community, will facilitate greater direct involvement of people in the execution of development programs. Every seat in a GP is occupied by individuals selected through direct elections from the territorial constituencies within the Panchayath area. Seats are set aside for women, as well as for scheduled castes and tribes. The Gram Panchayath's size generally varies from one state to another. In regions such as West Bengal, In Kerala, a Gram Panchayath averaged around 20,000 individuals, while in various other states, the average was about 3,000.

## Panchayat Samiti

The next significant organization within the Panchayath Raj framework is the Panchayath Samiti. Samitis has been granted a significant function. The representatives in a Samiti are directly elected by the voters in the area. The state can offer a representative for the chairperson of the Village Panchayath, as well as MPs, MLAs, and MLCs. Therefore, the structure of Panchayath Samitis differs across states. Nonetheless, seats are set aside for women, as well as for scheduled castes and tribes.

## Zilla Parishad

In all states, Zilla Parishad has been created as the third tier at the district level. Zilla Parishad's structural pattern resembles that of Panchayat Samiti. Delegates from their constituencies are directly elected by voters. These seats are allocated for women, as well as for scheduled castes and tribes. The State Legislature may enact laws for the representation of Chairpersons of the Panchayath Samitis, as well as MPs, MLAs, and MLCs.

## Gram Sabha

The Gram Sabha is a significant component of the village-level panchayath structure. It represents the highest village assembly and sole of PRIs, possessing legal status according to the law. It comprises all adult individuals who are listed as voters in the electoral roll of a village within the Gram Panchayath area. In West Bengal, the Gram Sabha is referred to as the Gram Sansad. In West Bengal, Gram Sabha holds an alternative significance. Every voter of the Gram Panchayath constitutes the Gram Sabha here. The Constitution allows for only three levels of panchayath. The Gram Sabha does not constitute a tier of the Panchayath Raj structure. It operates solely as a suggesting body, without any official capacity. While Gram Sabhas typically convene 2 to 4 times annually, they may meet as needed for important matters. In certain states, the dates of these assemblies are modified (Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, etc.), whereas in other states the Gram Panchayath determines the dates. The subjects addressed at the assembly may have wide implications, but they ought to encompass significant inspiration. Annual Action Plan and Budget, Annual Accounts and GP's Annual Report, selection of beneficiaries for different social administration programs (such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and various Pension Schemes), sanctioned evidence of planning Annual Development Programs of Gram Panchayath (MGNREGA and Now it called Ji Ram Ji Yojana 2025), addressing Audit reports, assessment of performance, and additional tasks. Panchayath Gram

## CONSTITUTION AND PANCHAYATH RAJ BODIES

The 73rd Amendment in 1993 introduced constitutional provisions regarding the establishment, powers, and responsibilities of the panchayath.

According to Article 243B of the Constitution, panchayaths shall be established at the village, block, and district levels in each state level according to the stipulations of Part IX. States are empowered by Article 243C to provide for the composition of panchayaths through legislation, in accordance with the provisions of Part IX of the Constitution.

Article 243D sets aside seats and leadership roles for Women, Scheduled Tribes, and Scheduled Castes.

According to Article 243E, the standard duration of a panchayath's term is five years, and there should be an interval of no more than six months between the end of this period and the elections for the subsequent panchayath term.

Article 243F grants the state government the authority to legislate criteria for disqualifying candidates from panchayath elections.

The authorities and duties of the panchayath are outlined in Article 243G.

Article 243H discusses the panchayath's funds and their authority to levy taxes. Also, in this case, the State Legislature may enact a law to empower the panchayath and outline processes for it to impose, gather, and allocate such taxes, duties, tolls and fees. The state legislature can assign to a panchayath such taxes, duties, tolls, and fees that are imposed and collected by the state government for these purposes.

According to Article 243I, a State Finance Commission is to be established every five years to assess the financial status of panchayath and provide recommendations to the Governor.

Under Article 243J, the State is empowered to create laws regarding the maintenance and auditing of accounts by the panchayath.

The State Election Commission is entrusted with the responsibility of preparing electoral rolls and conducting elections, as per Article 243K.

The text of Article 243L, which addresses the establishment of State Finance Commissions, is akin to that of Article 275 concerning the Constitution of the Finance Commission. This includes matters such as recommendations to the President and the allocation of net tax proceeds between the Union and the states and other associated issues.

Article 243N establishes a time limit of one year for the continuation of any provision of any law pertaining to panchayath just prior to the start of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 (73rd CAA), which does not pertain to the provisions of Part IX.

Committees for District Planning are established at the district level by Article 243ZD. These committees are responsible for consolidating plans created by the panchayath and municipalities within the district and for drafting a development plan that encompasses the entire district. This committee includes representatives from both panchayath and municipal members within the district.

### **THE 73RD CONSTITUTION AMENDMENT ACT OF 1992**

P.V. Narasimha Rao at the controls as Prime Minister, at the time, the Congress government presented a new bill on the Panchayath Raj in September 1991. It was recognized as the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 and took effect on April 24, 1993. This act brought the Panchayath Raj system under the equitable part of the Constitution, compelling the government to adopt it.

The 73rd Amendment Act provides for greater demoralization and empowerment of underprivileged groups, and enhancement of the performance of the panchayath nationwide. Similar guidelines for urban areas are provided by the 73rd Amendment. The Amendment Acts offered a framework and guidelines for all states to develop their policies regarding the devolution of panchayath and urban bodies.

### **IMPORTANCE OF THE ACT**

- The Act introduced 'The Panchayaths' as Part IX of the Constitution and included the Eleventh Schedule, comprising the 29 functional items related to panchayaths.
- The Constitution's Part IX comprises Articles 243 through 243 O.
- The Amendment Act implements Article 40 of the Constitution (Directive Principles of State Policy), which requires the state to organize village panchayaths and grant them the powers and authority to operate as self-governments.
- The Act places Panchayath Raj systems within the justifiable section of the Constitution and requires states to implement this system. Moreover, the elections for the Panchayath Raj Institutions will occur independently of the state government's desires.
- The Act comprises two sections: one that is mandatory and another that is voluntary. State laws must incorporate mandatory provisions, which include the establishment of the new Panchayath Raj systems. On the other hand, it is up to the state government to decide on voluntary provisions.
- The Act constitutes a major advance in establishing democratic institutions at the grassroots level in the country. The Act changed representative democracy to participatory democracy.

### **Prominent Characteristics of the Act**

1. Gram Sabha: The Panchayath Raj system's main entity is the Gram Sabha. This is a village assembly made up of all voters registered in the panchayath area. It will exercise powers and perform functions as prescribed by the state legislature. On the official government website, candidates can refer to gram panchayath and gram panchayath jobs. <https://grammanchitra.gov.in/>

2. Three-tier system: This Act mandates the establishment of a three-tier Panchayath Raj system in the states (Village, Intermediate, and District tiers). States whose population is below 20 lakhs cannot form the intermediate level.

3. Election of Chairperson and members: All levels of the Panchayath Raj directly elect their members, while the Chairperson at the intermediate and district levels is chosen indirectly from among those elected. The state government selects the Chairperson at the village level. In the panchayath meeting, the Chairperson and other members of the panchayath have voting rights, regardless of whether they were directly elected from the regional constituencies of the panchayath area.

4. Reservation of seats:

- ❖ **For SC and ST:** Reservations must be made at all three tiers by their population percentage.
- ❖ **For backward classes:** State legislatures are provided with the authority to determine the reservation of seats for backward classes at any level of panchayath or in the position of chairperson.
- ❖ **For women:** At least one-third of the seats set aside for women and at least one-third of the chairperson positions at all levels of the panchayath are reserved for women.

5. Duration of Panchayath: The Act stipulates a five-year term at all levels of the panchayath. Nonetheless, the panchayath can be dissolved prior to the end of its term. However, new elections to establish the new panchayath will be conducted before the end of its five-year term.

6. Commission of State Elections:

- ❖ The preparation of voter lists as well as overseeing, guiding, and managing the panchayath elections.
- ❖ The state legislature can establish regulations for all issues concerning elections to the panchayaths.

7. Powers and Functions: The state legislature has the authority to grant the panchayaths necessary powers and authority to allow them to operate as institutions of self-government. Such schemes might include provisions concerning the operation of Gram Panchayaths. They may be tasked with implementing schemes for economic development and social justice, including those related to the 29 matters outlined in the Eleventh Schedule.

8. Finances: The State Legislature has the authority to;

- ❖ Grants panchayaths the authority to impose, gather, and allocate duties, taxes, tolls, and fees.
- ❖ Allocate to a panchayath the taxes, duties, tolls, and fees that are imposed and gathered by the state government.
- ❖ Decide for the distribution of grants to the panchayaths from the state's consolidated fund.
- ❖ Make provision for the establishment of funds to deposit all panchayath money.

9. Finance Commission: The financial status of the panchayaths is examined by the State Finance Commission and proposes what actions are needed to supplement the panchayath's resources.

10. Audit of Accounts: The state legislature may provide for the maintenance and auditing of panchayath accounts.

11. Application to Union Territories: The President has the authority to direct that the provisions of this Act apply to any union territory, with exceptions and modifications as specified by them.

12. Excluded states and regions: The Act is not applicable to the states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and some additional domains. The areas include;

- ❖ The scheduled areas and the tribal areas in the states.
- ❖ The hilly areas of Manipur, for which a The Zila Parishad is in existence.
- ❖ Darjeeling district in West Bengal, governed by the Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council is present.

13. Continuation of current legislation: All state laws concerning panchayaths shall remain effective until the end of one year after this Act came into force. To put it differently, the states must implement the new Panchayath Raj system as per this Act within a maximum of one year from 24 April 1993, the date when this Act came into effect. All Panchayaths that exist when the Act begins will remain in place until their terms expire, unless the state legislature dissolves them before then.

14. Court interference prohibition: The Act prohibits courts from intervening in panchayath electoral matters. It states that no court can question the validity of any law regarding the delimitation of constituencies or the allocation of seats within them. Additionally, it establishes that no panchayath election may be challenged except through an election petition submitted to the designated authority and following the procedures outlined by the state legislature.

## **PESA ACT OF 1996**

Part IX's provisions are not applicable to the areas listed in the Fifth Schedule. The parliament may extend this Part to areas it specifies, with exceptions. Like that Parliament enacted the Provisions of the Panchayaths Extension to Scheduled Areas Act, commonly referred to as the PESA Act or the Extension Act, under modifications and these provisions.

- ❖ To enable self-governance for the tribal communities. • To establish village governance with democracy that includes participation.
- ❖ In order to create participatory governance that aligns with customary practices.
- ❖ In order to safeguard and uphold the customs and traditions of the tribal communities.
- ❖ To equip panchayaths with authority customized to the requirements of the tribal.
- ❖ In order to prevent the usurpation of lower-level panchayath powers and authority by higher-level panchayaths.

Due to these constitutional measures implemented by the union and state governments, India has progressed towards what has been characterized as 'Multi-Level Federalism', and more importantly, it has broadened the democratic foundation of the Indian polity. Prior to the amendment, the Indian democratic structure, represented through elected officials, encompassed only the two houses of Parliament, state assemblies, and select union territories. While the system has introduced governance and redressal of issues at the grassroots levels in the country, other challenges persist. Tackling these issues will contribute significantly to establishing an environment in which certain fundamental human rights are honored.

## **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATH RAJ INSTITUTIONS**

Women make up nearly half of the global population, yet India exhibits a disproportionate sex ratio, with females being comparatively fewer than males. Concerning their social status, they are not regarded as equals to men in all areas. In Western nations, women enjoy equal rights and status alongside men across all professions. However, the distribution of gender and discrimination are still present in India today. It is a paradox that she was regarded as a goddess at times, while at other times, she was seen as just a slave. The committee's report on the status of women in India recommended that all women's panchayats be granted statutory status with functions, resources, and active links with Gram Panchayaths that are clearly defined. However, there were concerns that the establishment of an all-women panchayath could result in the marginalization of gender issues related to women's concerns, which would not be adequately represented in these bodies. It was thus considered that collective empowerment via representation in the democratic process would provide them with a voice and foster a sense of solidarity. New interest and issue-oriented groups will emerge, fostering local women leaders being involved in the processes of deciding and mobilizing. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act made this a reality, leading to a significant number of women entering the electoral competition as grassroots candidates.

The aim of decentralizing authority via the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act only partially succeeded, as it did not eliminate gender imbalance and bias within grassroots local self-government institutions. Furthermore, Indian women have been awaiting their just political power share. Due to the socio-economic structure of Indian polity, the constitutional guarantee of equal political rights has only been partially

achieved. Women were only meekly exercising the right to vote. They rarely had equal chances to assume political offices and roles. They continued to be marginalized in political, social, and economic spheres, enduring different forms of oppression.

Nevertheless, the current state of affairs necessitates careful consideration and initiatives to implement the stipulations of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment that paved the way for women to access opportunities across multiple domains. The policy of political empowerment of women seeks to encourage their active involvement in the decision-making processes within these institutions. Nevertheless, achieving political empowerment for women involves more than just their introduction into positions of power within PRIs. Once they are elected to these institutions, their true role starts.

## PROBLEMS AND OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN PANCHAYATH RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA

Addressed advance along:

1. **Absence of Computer-Based Knowledge and Infrastructure:** In certain cases, the absence of competencies in using computers results in a rapid decline of effective working standards. The e-panchayath project has been initiated by the government in approximately 360-gram panchayaths. The e-governance initiative aims to deliver citizen-centric services electronically, keep database of gram panchayath resources, and ensure transparent access to gram panchayath data and services.

2. **Insufficient Coordination Among Various Administrative Entities:** Proper cooperation and coordination are lacking among the populace and the authorities. Moreover, Gram Pradhan faces challenges stemming from inadequate coordination among various administrative entities. Due to officials' inability to carry out their responsibilities in a competent and effective manner, developmental activities have been delayed and funds have not been fully utilized. Moreover, the Panchayath Raj bodies encounter multiple administrative challenges such as local administration becoming politicized, lack of coordination, confusion between popular and bureaucratic officials, scarcity of good opportunities, promotions, and incentives for those engaged in administration, among others.

3. **Male Dominance:** It is generally explained that women do not participate because they are oppressed by male domination. It should be acknowledged that while men do not actively prevent women from engaging in politics, they also do not provide support or encouragement for their participation. Men, 75 percent of whom do not support women even in pursuing employment, are culpable for this. Their stated rationale is that the current unemployment rate among men is primarily due to the possibility of women displacing men in politics, just as they have in some job opportunities.

4. **Opponents of Reservation for Women:**

- ❖ Women become targets of assaults by anti-social elements when they leave their homes or venture outside their village for work, meetings, etc.
- ❖ They note that whenever women occupy elected positions, it is the male officers who 'dictate' what should or should not be done. They assumed command of the whole situation, leaving women who were elected representatives at the mercy of authority.
- ❖ These adversaries argue that even if there is a significant increase in the number of women elected, the power dynamics will remain unchanged.

It indicates that all the women are aware of the current political parties in society, although some only know them by name. Some using symbols. It is evident that women are no longer confined to household work alone; they are also gradually empowering themselves. Before, they were only aware of activities like weaving, cooking, and brewing liquor. However, the implementation of the Panchayath Raj Act made them aware of the entire process of societal change.

They are taking an active part in the Panchayaths for rapid development, to bolster their unity, and to assert their rights.

5. Lack of Awareness: The deficiency in awareness regarding the implementation of Panchayath Political interference, economic factors, and societal influences contribute to bureaucratic delays that render Panchayath Raj ineffective. The village Sarpanch and Panch do not sufficiently promote public awareness.

6. Lower Literacy Rate: The country has a significant illiteracy rate for both men and women. Women are in a worse situation. This causes problems for better establishment of Panchayath Raj throughout the country.

7. Political Interference in Policy Development and Fund Distribution to Panchayaths: At every level of the Panchayath Raj administrative structure, political interference is widespread. It leads to a great deal of imbalance and inconsistency, as well as delays in work and the development of ineffective policies. Panchayaths are provided funds through political pressure, which also influences policy creation. Consequently, they are unable to develop improved policies.

8. Insufficient Financial Resources Allocated: The absence of adequate funding for panchayath development poses a significant problem for Panchayath Raj system. The panchayath often lacks adequate funding, leading to negligence, corruption, and delays in job progress.

9. Corruption throughout all tiers of Administration: Corruption presents a significant challenge and worry in India. It is present in all administrative systems and has an impact on the Panchayath Raj system. It affects the development of the Panchayath Raj system. A campaign to reduce corruption should have been initiated by the administration.

## NEW MEASURES IN PANCHAYATH GOVERNANCE

e-Gram Swaraj Portal: The Ministry of Panchayath Raj has rolled out e GramSwaraj(<https://egramswaraj.gov.in>), a centralized platform for efficient oversight and assessment of Panchayath Raj schemes. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated it as National Panchayath Raj Diwas on April 24, 2020, which is observed on National Panchayath Raj Day. By providing a unified interface for documenting Panchayath information, the program enhanced the reporting and tracking of Panchayath activities. Additionally, the Ministry has put into operation an Electronic Fund Management System that consolidates e-Gram Swaraj in conjunction with PFMS (eGSPI). The eGSPI has been mandated by the Panchayath for utilizing funds from the Central Finance Commission. Since April 5, 2021, all Panchayath Raj Ministry schemes have been implemented on eGSPI, and online payments are mandatory at all three levels of the system.

Spatial Development Planning: Gram Manchitra, a consolidated Geospatial platform introduced in 2019, assists in visualizing various developmental tasks spanning 29 sectors and offers Panchayaths a decision support system during the entire planning process. The app also connects to the Socio-Economic Caste Census report, the Mission Antyodaya report, and both spatial and non-spatial data from various other ministries and departments. Spatial planning enhances the transparency and quality of services in rural areas. Starting in 2021, the planning method for Gram Panchayath will be grounded in evidence and will incorporate spatial planning.

Online Audit of Panchayath Accounts: The 'Online Audit' application was launched by the Ministry of Panchayath Raj on April 15, 2020. in the form of a significant institutional change. Audit Online offers not just the capability for online auditing of accounts, but also provides tools for maintaining audit records. The goal of this application is to simplify the process of carrying out audit inquiries, preparing local audit reports, drafting audit paragraphs, and various other tasks. This application was first utilized to perform an online audit of Panchayath finances for the 14th Finance Commission for the financial year 2019-20. The Social Audit and these actions will assist in strengthening the Panchayath's financial administration system. The three parts are: (a) Focusing on

SDGs at the village level, (b) Aligning SDGs with Functional Domains, and (c) Enhancing collaborations to realize SDGs.

Citizen Charters for Panchayath: The Ministry of PanchayathRaj initiated a nationwide campaign called “Meri Panchayath, MeraAdhikaar- Jan SevaayeinHamaareDwaar”, and Gram Panchayath across the country created and published Panchayath Charters for Citizens. The main aim of the Panchayath Citizen’s Charter is to enhance individuals’ empowerment regarding public services and to improve the quality of service in accordance with the expectations of each citizen. By creating a Charter, the professionalism of Panchayath operations is enhanced and outreach to all societal segments is facilitated without bias. The National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayath Raj played a key role in creating a model Citizen Charter for Panchayaths and helping PRIs with the charter drafting process.

## CONCLUSION

The Panchayath Raj institutions represent a significant milestone in the evolution of administrative grassroots-level institutions. The term Panchayath Raj Institution is not new to the political structure; it has existed at all stages wherever the culture of administration developed. Panchayaths have been instrumental in the development of rural regions in India. As noted previously, the Panchayath Raj system encounters various challenges. Nonetheless, it is long overdue to implement concrete corrective measures to guarantee governance that is genuinely representative. These problems can be addressed, yet individuals must work together to embrace these alterations. The traditional way of thinking still prevailing needs to be eliminated step by step, so that individuals can properly grasp the significance of this system. It concluded that the Panchayath Raj system, which was established by the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992, has a long the background to it. India hosts the largest democratic process globally. In Indian democracy, the Panchayath Raj system serves as a significant method and effective instrument. In 2019, India had a total of 664,369 villages. Thus, the Government of India aims primarily to deliver effective services for village-level infrastructure development. The primary aim of the Government of India is at the village level. During the age of globalization, competition has been growing from one nation to another across the domains of economics, society, politics, technology, and so forth. In contemporary times, the development concept poses a challenge to the Indian democratic system. The Panchayath Raj Institution plays a crucial role in establishing a successful Indian democracy, serving as the backbone of local governance and democracy.

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