

# INTRODUCTION TO PANJAYAT RAJ

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## Unit - I

Local Self Government - an introduction - Evolution of Panchayat Raj in India - Local Self Government during the Chola period - Local Self Government under the British Rule.

### Objectives:

- ❖ To define and explain the significance of local self-governance in empowering local communities and promoting grassroots democracy.
- ❖ To examine the historical development of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) from ancient times to modern constitutional frameworks.

## INTRODUCTION

Local administration is the lower-most level of self-government in India. The term 'local administration' is not new in India; it has been well known in India for many centuries. In India, a village is considered as the basic unit of social life in the local government system or the local administration. More than three-fourth of Indian population still lives in villages. Great thinkers and leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Narayan articulated that the major task of the Independent India would be to take democracy to the grass-roots levels and to involve the rural masses in the objective of national integration and reconstruction. The nature, scope, importance and evolution of local administration in India have been discussed in this unit.

## **MEANING, SCOPE AND IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT IN INDIA**

Local administration deals with the powers of the administration to provide remedies to the problems at the grass-roots level. The local administration also protects the people when those powers are abused by these authorities. In a welfare state, many progressive schemes and programmes are launched by government. Their execution and implementation are the responsibilities of the local administration. Local administration is based upon making decisions regarding the demands of the local people of an area and their implementation at the grass-roots level. Its functions also include sending the advisories to the people at the grass-roots level. S. K. Dey, in his book Panchayati Raj, says, 'Modern science calls for an advanced stage of organization and wider coordination of the thinking action than is feasible in a single village. Whether or not we like it, there will be no room in the wide world of tomorrow for pockets of poverty, ignorance or disease. 'Infuse in minds of the rural people a spirit of self-help, self-dependency and self-reliance and to obtain their goals. 'Planners viewed the Panchayat Raj as units of administration and planning and the government sought support form these units to help improve the implementation of national plans for development.1' Local participation was seen as an instrument for better implementation of government policies. The five-year plans gave Panchayat Raj a role in performing functions for development and the view that Panchayats were units of

folded democracy. This is fact the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI) is considered as the grassroots level bodies servings various civic and developmental activities fort the rural people. They are basically grass-roots political institutions involved in the upliftment of rural masses in various dimensions. Most of the rural populations are under the grip of poverty, malnutrition, illiteracy and degradation. The enlistment of such destitute rural masses is the main goal of these local bodies. Numbers of factors are influencing India's grass-roots politics. Features of Local Governance at Rural Level in India The concept of Panchayati Raj (PR) is unquestionably Indian in origin. PR bodies, which are genuine and effective democratic decentralized institutions, provide simple opportunities for a large number of rural people to take genuine and effective participation in the development and democratic decision-making process and to infuse, in the minds of the rural people, a spirit of self-help, self-dependence and self-reliance in order to obtain their goals. The concept a PR, since its inception, faced various interpretations both from its protagonists and antagonists. On the one hand, the emphasis was on maximum local autonomy and minimization of supervision and control by the higher authorities, especially the state government. On the other hand, some consider it to be ruination for the country. Another controversy relates to the role of political parties in the PRI. The term PR came into usage after the acceptance of recommendations on democratic decentralization of the Balwant Rai Mehta study team. Previously, the terms used were Village

Panchayat, which was the self-governing body at the village level. PR implies the creation of local government institution at the village, block and district levels. These bodies play a vital role in rural administration, in the present age, when more and more governments are working for the making of a welfare state. In fact, the powers entrusted to these bodies really make a state democratic. India comprises states and union territories. These states are divided into districts and, in turn, sub-divided into tehsils for administrative convenience. The units of local self-government in rural areas are village panchayat, Panchayat samities and Zila Panchayat (ZP). The V.P. has been linked to the panchayat samiti at the block and to the Z.P. at the district level.

Present panchayat system is a channel for popular participation. Panchayat system is a political administrative arrangement. The system at PR is expected to usher in a democratic setup when once it is established on the lines expected by its promoters. It is PR that has brought about some degree of the social change. Its increasing interest lies in activities such as agriculture, production, education, cooperation and social and economical justice.

### **Importance Local administration**

Local administration is important to understand the nature of leadership and communication among the grass-roots level people. The behaviour of the masses, the power addressee, is the cornerstone upon

which the socio-political system in India depends. Who do people vote for? The answer points towards the social elites' behaviour towards masses, in the field of political institution building at grassroots level in a developing nation. According to NES community projects team, instituted for such study in 1957, 'So long as we do not discuss as create a repress democratic institution which will supply the money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development.' Some relevant works also say that 'It is not theory or dogma which is impelling us to make these recommendations, but practical considerations. Democracy has to function through certain executive, but democratic government influences large areas though executive machinery cannot completely appreciate local needs and circumstances. It is, therefore, necessary that there should be a delegation of power and decentralization of machinery and that such power is exercised, and such machinery is controlled by popular representatives of the local area.'

## **EVOLUTION OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT IN INDIA**

Mahatma Gandhi advocated that 'India lives in her villages. Indian independence must begin at the bottom, thus making every village a republic or panchayat, enjoying full powers. His remarks say that true democracy cannot be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre and has to

be worked from below by the people of every village'. These very dreams were responsible for the inclusion of Article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution of India. There has been socio-economic transformation in rural India. The grassroot units of local self-government that have made this transformation possible are the Panchayati Raj institutions. Local governments are able to respond better to local needs not only because of their proximity to the people but also because they are in a better position to make the best use of resources. As mentioned in the previous section, in India, Panchayati Raj is seen as an institutional expression of democratic decentralization. Power is decentralized to the panchayats to empower people and involve them in decision-making processes at the ground level. Panchayati Raj is another name for the system of decentralizing democratically. Panchayati Raj is the tool that helps ensure democracy. It is also the tool that is capable of transforming the socio-economic condition of a village/region. Democracy can be ensured in a country only through mass participation in the country's governance. The Government of India took a revolutionary step in 1993. It made Panchayati Raj Institutions a part of the Constitution. Panchayati Raj has been able to withstand several political changes and upheavals in the ancient and medieval periods till the British Raj. Following colonial administration, the manner of functioning of these local bodies changed drastically.

#### **History of the Panchayati Raj System:**



Pre British Rule In the Rig Veda and other scriptures, there is mention of the term 'Panchayat' which were composed over 1000 years before Christ. The word is derived from Panch, which means five, referring to the five members of the Panchayat. These five members of the village Panchayat were called Pancha Parameswar, or the five Gods. The word is also said to be a derivative of pancha panchasvanusthitah. The Panchayat was responsible for distributing land, collecting revenue and settling disputes. It would not be wrong to say that Panchayati Raj, as an institution, existed since the time the Indian civilization has existed. Since ancient times, it has not only been present but has been controlling and managing affairs, both judicial as well as civil, in Indian villages. In addition to the Rig Veda, the Manusamhita, Dharmashastras, Upanishads and Jatakas mention local administration extensively, for instance, the panchayat system of administration is mentioned in the Manusmriti while the Shantiparva is mentioned in the Mahabharata. Grama Sanghas or village councils are also mentioned in the ancient scriptures. These village councils are described in detail in Kautilya's Arthashastra of 400 B.C. This work gives a detailed discussion of the village administration that prevailed during that period under the supervision of the Adyaksha or headman who controlled everything. He was of course supported by other officials, such as Samkhyaka (accountant), Anikitsaka, (veterinary doctor), Jamghkarmika (village couriers) and Chikitsaka (physician). It was the responsibility of the headman of the village to collect the state dues and also control the actions

of criminals and offenders. In Valmiki's Ramayana, the village federation or Ganapada is mentioned, which was probably a type of federation of village republics. In India, there were self-governing village communities, which were primarily agrarian economies, that were in existence since time immemorial. Even the Rig Veda from approximately 200 BC mentions that the basic unit of administration was the village during the Vedic era. The Sabha and the Samiti were the most important features of the early Vedic polity.

### **Panchayati Raj under the British Rule**

Under the British rule, the Panchayats started losing their self-governing character gradually and the authority of the state had direct control of the British rulers. In the new judicial system, disputes arising in the village were carried to the courts that were outside the village. Special programmes like construction, relief works, maintenance of irrigation work and payment of grants-in-aid to schools were implemented by the state under them. Hence, the age-old functions of the Panchayat were carried by the external agencies. The British arrived on Indian soil with the main objective of trading. They did not have much to do with governance and development. Their first priority was never the local government were not at all their first priority and before the advent of the British rule in India, the local and rural republic had grown and thrived. With the emergence of the British Raj in India, the panchayati raj institution ceased to play the role

that it had earlier. The truth remains that local self-government as a representative institution came about during British rule. In the beginning, the British were only interested in creating local bodies comprising nominated members. These bodies were built around trading centres. In 1687, a municipal corporation was formed in Chennai (Madras), based on the British model of town council. This body possessed the power to levy taxes for building guild halls and schools. With the passage of time, similar bodies came up in other major towns and a model became prevalent to help the British to widen their taxation power. This model continued to comprise nominated members without any elected elements at all. After the First War of Independence in 1857, local-self-government received some more attention from the British Government and District Funds were set up in several states with some power to levy a tax on land, education, revenue and roads. With them, the District and Taluka local fund committees were set up, the fate was such that the funds were small and the village was hardly touched by the district committee.

### **Mayo Resolution of 1870**

Lord Mayo, the then viceroy of India from 1869 to 1872, felt it was necessary to decentralize powers to bring efficiency in administration. In 1870, he launched the system of elected representatives in urban municipalities. Lord Mayo's Resolution of 1870 under the British Rule, is considered as a huge step in the history of evolution of local self-

government. It aimed at enlarging and increasing the powers and responsibilities of the governments, ruling in the Provinces and the Presidencies. Local public works, sanitation, health services and education had a chance to receive more attention from them as well as the local-self-governments also. The revolt of 1857 had put the finances of the Britishers under a lot of pressure and it was necessary to finance local service by the way of local taxation.

### **The Bengal Chowkidar Act of 1870**

The Bengal Chowkidar Act of 1870 was an initiative to re-introduce the age-old tradition of village panchayati system in Bengal. The Chowkidar Act gave the power to district magistrates for setting up panchayats. It comprised nominated members, who were the residents of the villages, and their work included collecting taxes for the purpose of paying the chowkidars (watchmen) hired doing this work.

### **Ripon Resolution (1882)**

Lord Ripon is regarded as the father of local self-government in India because of the resolution he made and passed in 1882. He turned into action the intention of Lord Mayo. He gave importance to both administrative efficiency as well as political education at the ground level of locals. The Ripon Resolution focused on towns that provided for a majority of elected non-official members and a non-official chairperson for the local

board. It was resisted by the colonial administrators. The contribution of Lord Ripon in the development of local Government is great. The local boards were split into smaller units under his local self-government plan so as to ensure higher levels of efficiency. He launched a system of election aimed at ensuring popular participation, that was applicable to the local boards as well. The government resolution of 18 May, 1882 is of great significance in the structural evolution of local governments. It contained provisions for the local boards comprising a large majority of elected non-official members presided over by a non-official chairperson. Lord Ripon's Resolution was said to be The Magna Carta of local democracy in the country. This resolution proposed to establish rural local boards with two third members being elected representatives. He introduced the concept of self-government in urban municipalities as well. Hence, he is also regarded as the founding father of urban local government. After Ripon's resolution, there was a series of Committees, Commissions and Acts. The Royal Commission on Decentralization, set up in 1909, elaborated some more principles of Ripon resolution but this was not implemented. Ripon's scheme could not be of great help in the development of local self-government institutions.

Montague-Chelmsford Reforms of 1919 The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were passed in 1919. This reform transferred the subject of local government to the domain of provinces. The reform also recommended that as far as possible there should be a complete control in local bodies.

By 1925, there were eight provinces which had panchayats but they only had a few villages which were functioning well. It led to a lot of organizational and fiscal constraints and because of this, the reform was unable to give great results as far as democratization of panchayats was concerned.

The Royal Commission on decentralization, which was chaired by C. E. H. Hobhouse tried to bring back the old culture of panchayats by starting local-selfgovernment at the rural village level instead of the district level. The Commission recommended granting some powers to the Panchayats to help them perform their duties without depending on others. They were given some roles, such as the control over the village ponds, sanitation in villages and management of schools. It also provided for some finance for this. The village panchayats were introduced in many provinces after the Montague-Chelmsford reforms. By 1925, about eight provinces had already passed Panchayat Acts. By 1926, there were six native states that also passed panchayat laws. With the introduction of diarchy, ministers contributed a little to the development of local government. In 1927, the Simon Commission was given the work of looking into the working of local-self-government. It also suggested some improvement in the system. Many drawbacks, such as the huge size of an average district, lack of good spirit among voters, lack of funds and absence of control by the provincial government were pointed out.

### **Government of India Act (1935)**

The Government of India Act is said to have played a significant role in the evolution of panchayats in British India. All the provinces had elected governments. Therefore, it was natural for them to feel bound to enforce legislations promoting democratization of local self-government institutions, including village panchayats. Although the popular government in the provinces governed by the Congress let go their office following the declaration of the World War II, 1939, the local government institutions continued to remain powerful until August 1947, when India finally became independent. The British government was not at all interested in the village autonomy. Yet, they were forced to bring it about because they wished to continue ruling the country. In addition, it had to fulfil its financial necessities. The rural republic of India thrived till the British arrived, but lost popularity during the British reign. The panchayats of the 'self-contained' villages came to a stop, and soon gave way to formally constituted institutions of village administration. In the highly centralized system of British rule, village autonomy took a back seat. In 1937, some popular ministries were formed that undertook legislation to make the local bodies which were truly the representatives of the people. Unfortunately, they decided to resign with the outbreak of the World War II in 1939. From 1939 to 1946, the provinces were ruled by one man – the Governor. India finally got independence in 1947.

## **Panchayati Raj after Independence**

The aim of the British rulers was not to decentralize democracy, but to facilitate colonial administration. The Freedom Movement was concerned more with swaraj for the country than with Gram Swaraj. Mahatma Gandhi, greatly advocated Gram Swaraj, but not all the leaders had the same viewpoint. For instance, Dr Ambedkar, who made a significant contribution in drafting the Indian constitution observed that ‘the village (was) a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrowmindedness and communalism.’ He also said that: ‘I am glad the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit.’ Therefore, when the Constitution was adopted on 26 January 1950, the Panchayati Raj institutions were placed under the Directive Principles of State Policy under Article 40. The Article says: “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 local self-government.’ As is well-known, the Directive Principles cannot be enforced in a court of law. Thus, it was only expected of the state that it would foster the development of Panchayati Raj. This constitutional weakness of the Panchayati Raj institutions subsisted there for over four decades. The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution had to be removed because of this. During these four decades, many committees were set up at different times for making recommendations for strengthening panchayats. Some of these committees are briefly discussed below.



### **The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957)**

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was set up to study the Community Development projects and the National Extension Service and make recommendations. The Committee strongly recommended the involvement of the community in the decision-making, planning and implementation processes for the success of the community development project. Some important recommendations of the Committee were that there should be an early establishment of elected local bodies and devolution to them of necessary resources, power and authority; the basic unit of decentralization was the block/samiti; the body was to be constituted for five years by indirect elections from the village Panchayats; the higher-level body, zilla parishad was to be an advisory body only. The Panchayati Raj system in India could not achieve the expected results because there was resistance from politicians and administrators to share power and resource with local-level bodies and domination of local politics by the local strong people.

**The Santhanam Committee (1963)**

The Santhanam Committee was set up to see the financing of the Panchayati Raj institutions. Some of the recommendations of the Committee were that the panchayats should have powers to levy taxes like land revenue and home taxes; all grants at the state level should be mobilized and sent in a consolidated form to the Panchayati Raj institutions; a Panchayati Raj Finance Corporation should be set up to take care of the financial needs of

Panchayati Raj institutions. Some of the recommendations of the Committee are being taken up by the State Finance Commissions now.

### **The Ashok Mehta Committee (1978)**

The Ashok Mehta Committee was set up when the Janata Party government came to power in 1977. It was set up to suggest measures that will help strengthen the Panchayati Raj institutions. The committee made some of the important recommendations. The district is a viable administrative unit for planning, coordination, resource allocation with the available technical expertise. Therefore, a two-tier system is desirable with Mandal Panchayat at the bottom and Zilla Parishad at the top. There should be a four-year term for the PRIs and political parties should participate in elections. There should also be both functional and financial devolution. The committee recommended to the Panchayati Raj constitutional protection and further decentralization of power at all levels.

### **The G. V. K. Rao Committee (1985)**

The G. V. K. Rao Committee was set up to look into the various aspects of panchayats. Its recommendations were that the Panchayati Raj Institutions were to be activated and provided with all necessary support; Panchayati Raj Institutions at the district level and below should be given the task of planning, implementation and monitoring of rural development

programmes; and the block should be the key level in the rural development process.

### **The L. M. Singhvi Committee (1986)**

The two most important recommendations of the L. M. Singhvi Committee were that the local-self-government should be constitutionally recognized, protected and preserved by the inclusion of a new chapter in the Constitution; political parties should not be involved in panchayat elections. Although there was a huge resistance against these recommendations from various directions, finally the Constitution was amended to make Panchayati Raj Institutions constitutional institutions. It fell upon the post-Independence Indian government to strengthen the Panchayati Raj System. It was important for the government to ensure that the village panchayats were empowered so that the democracy could be strong. Mahatma Gandhi who supported Grama Swaraj was all in favour of putting power in the hands of the rural folk. He felt that the villages need to be selfsufficient so that they can govern themselves via elected panchayats. However, surprisingly, the draft Constitution created in 1948 had no provision for Panchayati Raj Institutions, which drew a lot of criticism from Gandhiji. He demanded prompt rectification and soon, panchayat was also added in the Directive Principles of the State Policy.

**73rd Amendment Act, 1992** Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India was responsible for introducing the 64th Amendment bill on local

government on 15 May 1989. However, it did not receive the expected support. He attempted again, in September 1990 to have the bill passed. However, in this second try, the bill was not even considered. In September 1991, once again a bill on Panchayati Raj was introduced by the Congress government under the Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao. It was passed in 1992 as the 73rd Amendment Act with slight modifications and enforced on 24 April 1993.

### **The salient features of the Act**

The 73rd Amendment Act had provisions for establishing Gram Sabha in every village. It will be a body consisting of all the members registered as voters in the panchayat area. It gave a three-tier shape to the Panchayati Raj system at the village, intermediate and district levels. Smaller states with population less than 20 lakh will have no option but to have intermediate level panchayat. Seats in the panchayats, at all three level, shall be filled via direct election. In addition, the chairperson of the village panchayat can be made member of the panchayat at the intermediate level. MPs, MLAs and MLCs could also be member of panchayat at the intermediate and the district level.

### **The 73rd Amendment towards decentralization**

The 73rd Amendment created positive conditions for decentralization in India. Although there is some disagreement about whether and to what extent the reforms have been implemented, the general consensus within this school is that the 73rd Amendment was a positive step for Indian decentralization and that the only factor preventing successful devolution is the failure to implement fully the terms and conditions of the 73rd Amendment. A second school is even more critical of decentralization in general and the 73rd Amendment in particular. A central assertion that underlies this second school is that the reforms put in place in 1993 are largely cosmetic, and that the ultimate distribution of power and resources in rural areas is dependent on the pre-existing pattern of social inequalities created by caste, religion, class, gender and other forms of rural domination .

## **EVOLUTION OF URBAN LOCAL BODIES**

As mentioned in the previous section the introduction of local government was motivated by interests of the British. They first saw it as an instrument to ease central and provincial finances and thus to sub serve imperial needs. A municipal corporation was first set up in 1687 in Madras. It was based on the model of British local institutions prevalent at that time. Its main purpose was to levy different taxes. According to Maheshwari, 'the municipal corporation was set up because the East India Company believed that the people would willingly pay five shillings for the public good, being

taxed by themselves, than six pence raised by their despotic power' (Ibid: 14). In 1726, owing the opposition from the local population for excessive taxation the municipal corporation in Madras was replaced by mayor's court. This reduced its administrative role and increased its judicial powers. The persistence of Sir Josiah Child, who was the governor of Madras during that time, resulted in the establishment of a municipal government, based on the English pattern of governance. This was directed at resolving the difficult problems pertaining to the conservancy of that town. The consequences of this were that in 1687, the East India Company was granted the authority to establish a corporation and mayor's court in Madras, through a charter. This authority was given to the East India Company by James II, King of England. The establishment of this new civil government took place with complete support from the mayor, Aldermen and Burgesses, who had the power to impose taxes for constructing a building to be used for meeting and performances, a prison and a school with houses for its staff. These taxes were also utilized for the development of other works of public utility and civic services and for paying the salaries to members of the municipal staff, including the teachers. The mayor and aldermen introduced a court of record for running trials of civil and criminal cases. The attractive characteristics of municipal operations were very similar to those in London and on significant occasions, the mayor would carry with him, two staffs of silver, a layer of gold, for decoration, which was not more than three and a half feet long. The robes worn by him

and the aldermen comprised of scarlet serge gowns. They travelled on expensively decorated horses that were decked with different types of ornamental trinkets. However, despite all the flamboyance related to the situation and occasion, there was a firm opposition from the people against the direct taxes that were levied. Hence, it was not possible to carry out the work related to the new corporation till the mayor granted the permission to impose taxes for building up funds to carry out the related development work. Subsequent to this, in the year 1796, a mayor's court with alderman and without burgesses was introduced by a Royal Charter. Similar courts were established in each of the three presidency cities of Calcutta, Madras and Bombay. However, the target of these courts was to put into effect judicial, rather than administrative operations. Long after this, the Charter Act of 1793 made the first statutory enactment of real municipal administration. The British parliament approved and agreed to pass this Act as soon as the East India Company took charge of the political responsibilities in India. Through this Act, a governorgeneral of India was appointed and was given the power to appoint justices to keep up peace in the presidency cities. Along with their judicial responsibilities, they had the authority to raise funds by gaining access of lands and houses in the towns for scavenging, watching and maintaining the streets. Approximately fifty years later (in the period of 1850-53), the municipal constitutions of the three presidency cities were created and a restricted edition of the elective principle was set up. However, soon after this, in the year 1856, a policy

that looked like a reaction to this, was introduced and operations of the municipality were limited to a body corporate of three nominated and salaried members. It is an amusing fact that since the year 1793, the practice of raising money for municipal related development work has been done through lotteries. In Calcutta, the money thus raised was used to reconstruct the Town Improvement Committee, which was appointed by Lord Wellesley, in the year 1803. The income earned from these lotteries was commendable. It was used to carry out various public related works and services. The popularity of this method was endorsed by the creation of a lottery almost committee in the year 1817. For, 20 years, this committee was involved in work related to utility and development

NOTES Self-Instructional Material 15 Introduction to Local Self Government in India till, the public opinion in England went strongly against this method of provision of funds for municipal purposes. This resulted in the end of the committee in the year 1836. One of the most prominent evidence of the use of these funds was The Town Hall of Calcutta This was one of the great works of public service, built during those years with the help of the funds collected through lotteries. The system of municipal administration was restructured after the Council's Act was legislated in the year 1861. This restructuring took place through provincial legislatures which were then put into function and since then, there were augmented differences in the history of the growth and development of municipal affairs in each of the three presidency cities.



Through locally legislative procedures, in the years 1872, 1876 and 1878, Bombay, Calcutta and Madras, respectively adopted the system of electing representatives by the ratepayers for the first time. However, one cannot suppose that any system, even remotely resembling a complete local self-government was granted to them through those Acts. Almost fifty years later, the government framed policies that were oriented to exercise a stringent and unreasonable control over these municipalities through official chairmen and other different set-ups that were calculated to deprive them of real popular control. With the help of different methods, some even positively retrograde in character, those three municipalities have finally obtained more or less developed real self-government. Practical autonomy was achieved by the Corporation of Calcutta (III of 1993) and also by those of Bombay (III of 1888) and Madras, (IV of 1919), although the extent of acceptance was not that much. Beyond presidency towns, there were no efforts directed to establish municipalities, prior to the year 1842. The first province to experience the attempt made by this act was Bengal. This was far in advance of the times. Due to these factors, it was not successful in impressing the public mind. Just one town introduced this and when it was time to realize the tax, the entire town not only refused to pay, but it actually prosecuted the collector for trespassing, when he tried to levy it. In 1850, one more attempt was made by an Act for the whole of British India. This was a more lenient Act, but its success was higher, as this Act levied taxes indirectly. The application of this Act was widely carried

out in the then North West Province and in Bombay. It was feebly applied in Bengal and Madras, which were the areas that had been subjected to other municipal efforts. Subsequently, the report of the Royal Army Sanitary Commission was published in 1863 and prime focus was given to the requirements of municipal measures in the county territories, (Mofassils). Between the years, 1864 and 1868, Acts for Bengal, Madras, Punjab and North-West Provinces were passed. After incorporating changes, the Act of 1850, was adopted in Bombay and the central provinces and the Punjab Act was adopted by Oudh. In the following series of acts a very large number of municipalities were created. There have been a number of cases where zeal overcame caution and unimportant rural geographies were loaded with municipalities that were later withdrawn. The Acts for Bengal, Northwest Provinces and Punjab made the elective principle permissible, but in almost all places the commissioners were nominated. Though from the point of view of local self-government these acts did not achieve much success, still they were definitely of great help in improving the conditions of sanitation in many countries and cities.

Two important steps that were adopted by the great viceroys, i.e., Lord Mayo and Lord Ripon, in the years that followed. These steps were highly motivating to local self government in India. The system of provincial finance was introduced by the resolution of Lord Mayo's government. This resolution clearly aimed at giving opportunities for the development of self government and also for the association of Indians and

Europeans in taking a large share in the administration of local affairs. To carry out this advantageous policy, new acts were passed for almost every province and they also got extended to Burma. The Acts gave a broader spectrum to the sphere of municipal usefulness and also enhanced the principle of election. The elective principle, however, could not be successfully introduced in any province with the exception of the central provinces. This was due to the objections raised by the people themselves. Approximately ten years later, in 1881-82, the government of Lord Ripon issued orders which resulted in further encouraging the development of local self government. Like a true statesman, he showed a keen interest in the matter, as it was his belief that local self government was a means of popular and political education. The success of this would have been many times more if the bureaucracy that was handling the actual organization had not been short sighted and had been more like that of a statesman. However, Acts that were implemented in 1883-84, greatly changed the constitution of the municipal bodies and also gave them more power and responsibilities. It was decided for a wide extension to be given to the elective system and some towns to be provided with elected chairmen instead of executive officials. Lord Ripon made another major alteration, which was freeing the municipalities from the burden of paying the costs of the town police on which they had no control. To replace such costs, the support of the municipalities was sought for education, medical aid and local public works and at the same time, some parts of the provincial

revenues were allocated to local self government, with proportionate liability. It is not easy to thoroughly examine the growth of municipal constitution in the different provinces of India. The municipal government was vested in a body corporate and it comprised of members, some of whom were elected by the ratepayers and others were nominated by the government. Within the Acts, there was a chairman of the municipality and in advanced provinces he was usually an elected member of the body. The municipal funds and properties were vested in these bodies. A sizeable part of the work was carried out in the form of committees. It was common to have elections every three years and the rules for elections were framed by the respective provincial governments. It was mandatory for voters to have a certain property or status qualification. The elections in larger bodies were held in general by wards or classes of the community, or both. The enfranchisement of women was rather an exception than a rule, but the popularity of it was being gradually accepted. The history of government control over the municipalities was not a pleasing scene.

### **Urban Local Government in India after Independence ‘**

After independence first major reforms in the local self government were initiated in 1948. The then local self government minister D.P. Mishra initiated a reform in provinces where he abolished the dual structure of local self government one district administration and another local government with its rural and urban local governments. This initiative

extended the sphere of activity of the district board to the whole of the district administration and making the district collector the chief executive officer of the district board and the district staff as its own. This reform divided the powers into four classes of I, II, III and IV which ranged from full powers to the district boards to the advisory powers. In all the cases, district board were to be taken into confidence. This scheme though had advantages of district boards having full sovereignty on certain matters and having full control over the staff met with severe criticism at the central levels. It was called as Central Provinces and Berar Local Government Act 1948. This scheme took Tehsil as the basic unit of government and therefore considered to be the closest scheme till time which took it to the people. It was also known as Janpada scheme. After the adoption of the new constitution, the reforms in the rural local self government got tremendous attention unlike the urban local self government. Since local government was a subject of state list, the Central government did not took much notice to it till the Third Five Year Plan. In the Third Five Year Plan (1961-66) it was accepted that 'in the next phase of planning, as many towns and cities as possible, at any rate those with a population of one lakh or more, should come into the scheme of planning in an organic way; each state mobilizing its own resources and helping to create conditions for a better life for its citizens' (Planning Commission, as quoted in Maheshwari 1971: 26). Till 1968, the central government had appointed several committees in order to bring reforms in the urban local government. Some

of these committees were, Local Finance Enquiry Committee 1951, Committee on the Training of Municipal Employees 1963, Committee of Ministers on Augmentation of Financial Resources of Urban Local Bodies 1963, Rural-Urban Relationship Committee 1966 and Committee on the Services Conditions of Municipal Employees 1968. As we can see most of these committees were formed only after the 1960s, showing very clearly that it was only then the central government realized the need to improve the condition of local self government in India .

Since local government falls under the purview of state governments, there are some variations in their nomenclature and structure. Every state has separate departments for urban and rural local self government as has the centre. Most of the urban local self governments in all the states however have similar structure which we shall discuss further in the unit. Prior to the 1992 Amendment, the structure and power of the urban local self government was very different from what we perceive it to be today. After the 1992 Amendment many significant changes took place which contributed to its present structure.

Till very recently, urban local government constituted the charge of the Ministry of Works and Housing. Historically, local government in India had its beginning in an urge to improve local sanitation and hence has continued as the responsibility of the Ministry of Health. The Ministry of Health was looking after both urban and rural local government until 1958,

when the latter was separated from it and came under the charge of the Ministry of Community Development. In January 1966, apart of local government, namely urban development, was renamed the Ministry of Works and Housing, which was again renamed in 1967 as the Ministry of Works, Housing and Urban Development. Again, in the same year the subject of urban development was transferred back to the Ministry of Health which carried a rather longish name, the Ministry of Health, Family Planning and Works, Housing and Urban Development.

The Central Council of Local Self Government, which was created in 1954, was a c oordination body between the different state ministries of local government and central Ministry of Health. Till 1958, it was concerned with both rural and urban local governments. After that it was only concerned with the urban local self government. This Council use to organize annual meetings of Mayors, State Ministers of Town and Country planning, Housing Minister's Conferences, etc. These meetings were organized to evolve a greater uniformity and coordination of urban local government institutions and bodies.

Urban local government till 1992 was the responsibility of the Department of Local Self Government in the states. At the state level a number of departments deal with subjects which are the direct concern of the urban government. In addition to the Department of Local Self Government, the functional departments in the secretariat administer the

various components of urban development. Thus, water supply, drainage and sewerage, road construction, land acquisition and development, housing and slum clearance, etc. are being dealt with by respective functional departments. As is to be expected under such a fragmentary arrangement, the urban affairs do not get viewed as one integrated function. Consequently, there is a haphazard and piecemeal development bearing an imprint of lack of coordination. It is, therefore, not unusual to find the dwelling houses in a town fully completed yet remaining unoccupied for, say, want of electricity or water supply or even both. This is an avoidable waste. Urban local self government needs greater coordination between its different bodies. The structure of the urban local self government is very complex.

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

1. Who introduced the system of provincial finance?
2. Which Act made local government in India a statutory body for the first time?
3. How was British India divided, for administrative purposes?
4. When did the Government of India accept the Montesquieu Chelmsford reforms?



**Unit II : Grama Rajya - Gandhian Principles - Bhoodan Movement - Sarvodaya Philosophy - 73rd Constitutional Amendment.**

**Objectives**

- ❖ To analyze Mahatma Gandhi's idea of Grama Rajya (village self-rule) based on principles of self-sufficiency, non-violence, and participatory democracy.
- ❖ To evaluate Vinoba Bhave's Bhoodan Movement and the philosophy of Sarvodaya, which aimed at achieving land redistribution and uplifting all sections of society.

**GRAMARAJYA - GANDHIAN PRINCIPLES**

Good governance demands respect for human rights, rule of law, strengthening of democracy, promoting transparency and capacity in public administration. The responsiveness of the state and its institutions to the needs and aspirations of the people, and inclusive citizenship are imperative to good governance. Democracy depends upon the equality of all human beings, their right to participate in social and political transformation and the right to development, to live in dignity. Panchayat Raj is a system and process of good governance. Villages have always been the basic units of administration in India since ancient times. The Gram Sabha can become the cornerstone of the whole Panchayat Raj institutional set-up, thereby the Indian democratic system. So in this paper focus is on

Gandhian concept of Panchayat Raj. This is useful to development of India. So in 21st century this concept becomes powerful in the Nation.

### **Importance of Democratic Decentralization:**

Gandhi's concept of democratic decentralization bears the stamp of his passionate belief in non-violence, truth and individual freedom. He calls it Panchayat Raj or village Swaraj. He wants to see each village a little republic, self-sufficient in its vital wants, organically and non-hierarchically linked with the larger spatial bodies and enjoying the maximum freedom of deciding the affairs of the locality. Gandhi wanted political power to be distributed among the villages in India. Gandhi preferred the term 'Swaraj' to describe what he called true democracy. This democracy is based upon freedom. Individual freedom in Gandhi's view could be maintained only in autonomous, self-reliant communities that offer opportunities to the people for fullest participation.

### **Village Panchayats:**

The vehicle that was most ideal to initiate both political and economic democracy at the grassroots level was the Panchayat Raj system. Mahatma Gandhi's tours all across the country reinforced his convictions that India would benefit if the villages were governed by Village Panchayats based on the principal of "simple living and high thinking". These were village republics which were self-contained and self-reliant and having all

that people want. These were the institutions where minimum standard of living could be accorded to all human beings. An individual had maximum freedom and opportunity to develop his personality to the greatest extent. In these republics there would be a diminution of the state and the roots of democracy deepened. According to him centralization cannot be sustained as a system without adequate force. The affairs are to be managed by Panchayats consisting of five persons elected annually. Gandhi aimed at the individual the centre of the local administration. People are expected to take personal interest and turn up in large numbers at the meeting to deliberate problems of common interest such as village industries, agricultural production, obligation and planning.

**Village -unit of a decentralized system:**

Gandhi made it very dear that concentration of either economic or political power would violate all the essential principles of participatory democracy. To check centralization, Gandhi suggested the institution of village republics both as institutions of parallel polities and as units of economic autonomy. Village is the lowest unit of a decentralized system. Politically a village has to be small enough to permit everyone to participate directly in the decision-making process. It is the basic institution of participatory democracy. The technical skills of the villages will be fully developed; there will be no dearth of men with high degree of skill and artistic talent. There will be village poets, village artists, village architects,

linguists and research workers. Gandhian decentralization means the creation of parallel politics in which people's power is institutionalized to counter the centralizing and alienating forces of the modern state. According to Mahatma Gandhi, utilization of the local resources is quite fundamental to the development of the Panchayat Raj system. The Panchayats with the Gram Sabhas should be so organized as to identify the resources locally available for development in the agricultural and industrial sectors. Gandhi wrote, "Democracy becomes an impossible thing until power is shared by all, but let not democracy degenerate into monocracy". Each village has a little republic, self-sufficient, enjoying maximum freedom for deciding the affairs of the locality. Gandhi also proposed a scheme of government under the Gandhian Constitution beginning from the primary unit the Village Panchayat to the level of the All-India Panchayat, with the powers being assigned to all levels of the government. These villages should not only be self-sufficient but also capable of defending themselves, even if need be, against the whole world. In his Presidential Address at the Belgaum Congress, Gandhi said that the Panchayat was not only a right medium for securing cheap justice but also an instrument for avoiding reliance on government for the settlement of mutual justice.

**Panchayat Raj system:**

The Gandhian ideas of Gram Swaraj and Panchayat Raj system can become vehicles for ushering in the much needed social and political

change by including all the stakeholders in the process of decision-making and public policy formulation. As Gandhi said, "Panchayat Raj represents true democracy realized. We would regard the humblest and the lowest Indian as being equally the ruler of India with the tallest in the land".

### **India's Development policy about Panchayat Raj:**

Mahatma Gandhi advocated Panchayat Raj, a decentralized form of Government where each village is responsible for its own affairs, as the foundation of India's political system. The term for such a vision was Gram Swaraj (village self-governance). Recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was a committee appointed by the Government of India in January 1957 to examine the working of the Community Development Programme (1952) and the National Extension Service (1953) and to suggest measures for their better working. The recommendations of the committee were approved by NDC in January 1958 and this set the stage for the launching of Panchayat Raj Institutions throughout the country. The committee recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralization' which finally came to be known as Panchayat Raj. (i) Establishment of a 3-tier Panchayat Raj system. This system was adopted by state governments during the 1950s and 60s, as laws were passed to establish Panchayats in various states. It also found backing in the Indian Constitution, with the 73rd amendment in 1992 to accommodate the idea. The Amendment Act of 1992 contains

provision for devolution of powers and responsibilities to the panchayats both for the preparation of economic development plans and social justice, as well as for implementation in relation to 29 subjects listed in the eleventh schedule of the constitution.

### **Social Audit:**

The Ministry of Panchayat Raj has issued specific guidelines to make Gram Sabha as a vibrant forum for promoting planned economic and social development of the villages in a transparent way. The guidelines are a part of the proceedings to observe the year 2009-10 as year of Gram Sabha and relates to the social audit for the effective implementation of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA. According to the guidelines, the Gram Sabha as a Key to the selfgovernance and transparent and accountable functioning are a forum that ensures direct, participative democracy. It offers equal opportunity to all citizens including the poor, the women and the marginalized to discuss and criticize, approve or reject proposals of the Gram Panchayat and also assess its performance. Hence, the States may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be required to enable them to function as institutions of selfgovernment under them, Article 243G read with the Eleventh Schedule stipulates that. Such laws may also endow powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats for the preparation and implementation of plans for economic development and social justice including in relation to the 29 matters listed in the Eleventh

Schedule. This did lead to the enactment of Gram Panchayat Acts by various States; these were no more than half-hearted attempts for the creation of rural local government institutions. But the failure of the Community Development Programme, which had been launched for bringing a silent revolution in rural society by awakening the dormant forces of progress, led to the appointment of Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team.

### **BHOODAN MOVEMENT**

Throughout the late forties and the early fifties, Acharya Vinoba Bhave had been noticing the breakdown of India's economy, the perilous state of the country's agriculture and the inhuman and appalling poverty of the landless millions. Not less than 50 per cent of the agricultural labour households were landless in 1950-51 and their number was increased to 57 per cent in 1956-57. He noticed how the agrarian legislation, particularly the land distribution and land ceiling laws passed by the various state governments, failed to achieve the desired results. The big land owners knew how to escape the mischief of the law, traditional land customs were powerful, and the ignorance of the peasants was widespread enough to make the laws ineffective. The feasibility of legislation as a measure of agrarian reform remained dim. It is with the aim of evolving a change in the moral and spiritual horizons of man through large-scale and extensive social realisation of the socioeconomic values of human existence that Vinoba had marshalled the prodigious movement of Bhoodan.

It was then that the idea of Bhoodan came to Vinoba - as a revelation during his Telangana tour in 1951. India's economic life could not be re-organised unless the basic land problem was solved in the interest of the tiller and the landless. It is true that Bhoodan had its immediate origin in the solution to the problem of securing land for India's landless peasants but it would be wrong to suppose that Bhoodan concerns itself solely with the collection and distribution of land. As one may subsequently see, this movement was meant to be the first step in the onward march of the Sarvodaya society purported to be an all-round revolution in the socio-economic sphere - a non-violent constructive programme of transformation of India's social structure through a radical change in values. The Bhoodan movement is no mere mercy mission started by Vinoba on behalf of the landless. True, Vinoba exhorts the privileged to part with a portion of what they have in favour of those that have not. As land is the basic factor and source of production in this country, a solution of the problem of ownership of land by those who till it must be settled in the interests of real democracy which Sarvodaya aims to establish. Bhoodan is a step in the direction of the attainment of real democracy as it is a call to the land owners to recognise their real interest and try to protect it by conceding the landless their due rights. The "Dan" does not mean charity: it really implies equal distribution (Vinoba, Bhoodan Ganga).

## **BASIS AND IDEOLOGY**



The movement may be looked at as a concrete manifestation of the application of the universal principles of Love, Truth and Non-Violence to India's practical problems. The ideological basis of the movement is the philosophy which asserts that whatever people have is a trust and should be held and used as such, whether it is land or any other kind of property, or whether it be knowledge, skill or experience. It is a trust that people hold for their fellow human beings and for the whole community. It is not meant for their personal enjoyment alone; everyone has a share in it. It is by propagating this philosophy of Love and Truth and by persuading people to regard themselves and live as one family that Vinoba has aimed at bringing about a non-violent agrarian revolution. The movement thus arose by the surrender of part of a person's land but in course of time partial sharing, developed into total sharing.

The Bhoodan movement thus aims to prepare the groundwork for an agrarian economy wherein land ceases to be a marketable commodity and where the individual works to attain the good of the entire community. This is just one step towards the realisation of real democracy or "Swaraj" by setting right the inverted structure of economic centralisation through practices based on the principles of truth and Non-violence and also the decentralisation of political and economic power.

## **AN INVERTED PYRAMID**

The economic structure of the Indian society resembles an inverted pyramid (Jayaprakash Narayan, *Swaraj For The People*, 1961, p. 2). The millions of the have-nots and the landless at the base are at present unable to form into any concrete or solid foundation for a permanent and stable economic structure. It is of paramount importance that the base of the structure must be broadened by uniting the poor masses and the top heavy layers suitably built in conformity with the basic structure. The upper levels of the economic structure are broad with heavy concentration of economic power and the bottom levels are narrowed down to its mere point as each higher level from the bottom upwards broadens into increasing economic power. At the village level, the pyramid like structure begins with the landless masses at the base, with the poor peasants, rich peasants and big land owners above them in that ascending order. This conical economic structure does not admit of any advantages or benefits of the government schemes and projects ever “percolating” down to the landless and the poor peasants. The benefits are sucked out at the level of the big land owners and rich peasants: little reaches down to the poor and nothing to the landless. Even the various land or tenancy reform measures have failed to benefit the latter. And out of this inverted economic system, the village’s wealth is drained out through the outlets in the structure. These outlets have been the market, the village banker, the government customs and superstitions and intoxicants. The result has been that the village has been

reduced to a disparity unit where the few who own land do not work upon it while a large number who work do not own the land they cultivate.

### **THE NEED AND TECHNIQUE OF REVERSION**

Such an economic structure, as a whole or at the village level, was neither stable, nor conducive to higher production and to the establishment of a balanced community life. It is necessary, therefore, that the broad upper levels of the structure and large portions of the vast upper floors of the pyramid are brought down to earth so that the structure could become a real, normal pyramid, narrow at the top and broad at the bottom, which involves economic decentralisation. How to discover ways and means whereby the landless millions may obtain land, or in other words, how to revert the inverted pyramid back to a normal structure? The method and approach of the Bhoodan movement indicates the guidelines for the technique of reversion. The techniques adopted were based on love, non violence, voluntary surrender and mutual sharing. Vinoba has contended that the problem of the landless should be solved first as it would provide a solid foundation to the village economic structure. Every one must have land to till and to make one's living. For this, it is that ownership of land, property or resources must be recognised as Nature's or God's, that one who consumes must do some productive physical labour and that the vast differences between wages or salaries must go. The Bhoodan, therefore, requires the big land owners to give as much land as they can, keeping with

them what they require for their self-cultivation; the demand from the rich peasants is one sixth of their land and the poor peasants are also asked to donate whatever they can as a token of their acceptance of the Bhoodan. It preaches the negation of the instinct of “acquisitiveness” or ownership of land; stands for the provision of the means of production to the producer; initiates all to the spirit of dedication in each and every activity and requires that one should be concerned about the welfare of one’s hungry neighbour and so long as he is in distress, one should eschew the temptation to enjoy happiness oneself. Since it is a “Dan”, it contends for the just and equitable distribution of land among one and all; it requires the donor of land to do his duty towards himself and his neighbours; it claims to be a right of the landless poor who have been deprived of land on account of a vicious economic system and it insists that all should work on land and none should keep it who does not work.

## **THE NASCENT ECONOMY**

Economic decentralization is one of the ends of the movement. The ultimate objective is the setting up of decentralised self sufficient units where the villagers would decide their affairs themselves. The first priority was the problem of land. It is interesting to visualise the economy envisaged by the Bhoodan movement. The communitarian society of the movement would be based on cooperation and co-sharing (J. P. Narayan, 1964, p. 219); its unit would be the individual worker; its aim would be the welfare

of all and each of its members and it would subserve the objective of a balanced and all-sided development of its components. The economy of such a communitarian society would be a balanced economy, particularly careful about the non-renewable resources of nature. It would not be wasteful; it would try to restrict consumption as far as possible of renewable resources. This nascent economy is most likely to be of small machine, labour intensive type. It would be agro industrial in character evidencing an organic blending of agriculture and industry. It would naturally aim at the full utilisation of local and regional resources to the satisfaction of the local and regional needs. This economy aimed at self-sufficiency. It would engage in production for self consumption and would be so organised where the basic material needs are satisfied as near at home as possible. Planning in a nascent communitarian society would naturally begin from below. That would imply that the unit of planning would be the village development plan prepared by the Gram Sabha comprising of a member from each family in the village. The position of the worker would be pivotal since work would be the most essential thing for the life of the community. Work would be a meaningful expression of human powers because the worker would be a responsible participant in the work process having a stake therein. Over-specialisation is ruled out while the agro industrial nature of the community would allow him to follow a diversified occupation. A large part of industry and commerce is apt to be cooperative or owner-worker type.

## **GRAMDAN**

Whereas Bhoodan, literally land gift, aims at a social reform through individual acts of charity, Gramdan, literally village gift, tries to accomplish a social revolution through collective community decisions, whereby individual ownership of land should be abolished. In Bhoodan, individual land donations are accumulated and then redistributed to the landless, maintaining the concept of private ownership on both the benefactors' side as well as the beneficiaries. A Bhoodan village had the same structure as an ordinary Indian village except that portions of land had been given "unto this last." In Gramdan villages, however, all the village land was to be pooled and vested in the community. In such a village the landless labourer ceased to be a recipient of acts of charity and was elevated to the status of an equal among all other members of the Gramdan community. If that scheme had succeeded on a grand scale, then India would have made a great stride towards the Gandhian goal of village autonomy and village government. Such were the hopes of the fifties.

Gandhi's vision of independent India, as portrayed in an article in July 1946, was composed of innumerable villages in ever widening but never ascending circles. "Life will not be a pyramid," he wrote, "with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the village, the latter ready to perish for the circle of villages, till at last the whole becomes one life

composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance but ever humble, sharing the majesty of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units.”(Harijan, 4-8-1940, p. 235) This theory of a stateless society of self-contained villages was further elaborated by Vinoba. According to him, Sarvodaya Workers “believe in a stateless society as ultimate goal”. They do, however, recognise “that in the preliminary stages a certain measure of government is necessary, but we do not agree that it will continue to be necessary at a later stage. Neither do we agree that totalitarian dictatorship is necessary to ensure progress towards a stateless society. On the contrary we propose to proceed by decentralizing administration and authority. In the final stage there would be no coercion but a purely moral authority. The establishment of such a self directing society calls for a net work of self sufficient units. Production, distribution, defence, education everything should be localized. The centre should have the least possible authority.” Thus the Movement decided in 1963 to concentrate all its efforts on three main areas of activity: (1) the establishment of Gramdan villages all over the country, (2) the development of khadi and village-industries in these villages so as to make them self sufficient and independent of outside resources, and (3) the recruitment and training of a “Shanti Sena” or Peace Army, to prevent any outbreak of violence in the country or, if violence should occur, to bring it under control by non violent means. This was the only enforcement potential thought necessary in a Sarvodaya society, where mutual cooperation and not individual competition would be the driving

force of motivation and behaviour. To give not only the farmers in the villages but also the urban professionals and industrial workers a place in the Movement, Vinoba further enlarged the concept of “Dan,” or gift, so as to include the following aspects:

**Shramdan** literally labour gift, meant the contribution of part of one’s labour to a certain Sarvodaya project.

**Sampattidan**, literally wealth gift, meant the dedication of part of one’s property or income to the Movement.

**Buddhidan**, literally intellect gift, meant the dedication of one’s mental abilities and knowledge to the realisation of Sarvodaya ideals.

**Jeevandan**, literally life gift, meant the dedication of one’s whole life and energy to the cause of the Movement.

These generalisations and the ambitious targets the Movement had set for itself had far reaching consequences: a modified concept of Gramdan known as simplified or Sulabh Gramdan was introduced in 1963. From then on a distinction was made between “ownership” and “possession.” As such, the new concept of Gramdan was much less radical than the original and involved significant concessions to the principle of private property. Though all land donated to the village was to be vested in the village community, up to nineteen-twentieths of it could remain in the possession of the donors, who could only pass it on to their heirs. In this way at least



one main aim was achieved: Sulabh Gramdan prevented village land from passing out of the control of the community; the means of production were controlled by the villagers themselves and could not be taken over by outside capital. Gramdan villages where more than fifty per cent of the total land owned by resident private owners had been donated and in which at least three quarters of the adult residents had joined the programme were then to be combined at the block level, the lowest unit of the government's Community Development Programme. If in such a block with an all India average of some eighty thousand inhabitants, more than 85 per cent of the revenue villages or 75 per cent of the adult population had decided to join Gramdan, it was declared a "Blockdan." "Districtdan" is then district in which all the blocks have met the condition of Blockdan and "Statedan" is a State in which all the districts have gained the status of Districtdan. With this scheme it was hoped to gradually transform the existing government establishment from the grassroots upward. By the end of the Gandhi Centenary Year in 1969, the Movement claimed to have reached 1,40,000 of India's 5,60,000 villages; of these Gramdan villages 60,000 were in the northern State of Bihar, where the Movement had pooled a great deal of its efforts and resources. With nearly 90% of its villages covered, Bihar was proclaimed the first Statedan in India.

**The Movement distinguished three steps in the development of a village:**

(1) “prapti” means that people have been persuaded to join Gramdan and transfer their ownership to the village council.

(2) “pushti” means that the village people implement the primary conditions of Gramdan, i.e. the redistribution of one twentieth of the land among the landless. The verification of gifts and the legal transfer of titles takes place at this stage.

(3) “nirman” means that all the necessary resources have been mobilised through the Gram Sabha (village assembly) so that constructive development programmes can be started.

The fact is that by 1970 only few villages, most of them situated in tribal areas with their own traditions of communal ownership, had reached the “nirman” stage. The majority of villages, however, were in the initial phase of propaganda and declaration of good intentions. To persuade villagers to adopt the Gramdan ideals and to join Vinoba on the Gandhian path of rural reconstruction was one thing; to follow up with the necessary legal paraphernalia and agricultural extension work was quite another. Here the Sarvodaya workers were more or less on their own and could not draw on the saintly image of their leader, who, moreover, considered these things secondary. According to Vinoba, what mattered was the change of attitude, which would by itself lead to socio-economic results. “Let it be understood clearly,” Vinoba wrote in 1957, “that increasing agricultural production is certainly not the aim and object of bhoodan and gramdan. That would be

only incidental. Its main object is to widen man's loyalty to the entire society."

Seen from a western point of view, it must have been a hard lesson for Vinoba that it was in Bihar, which had been declared a Statedan at the end of 1969, that the Naxalbari Movement spread a movement which tried to show the people a shortcut to progress through revolutionary practice. Vinoba met this challenge and the growing discontent among the Sarvodaya workers in his own way and withdrew more and more into his inner self.

### **MISGIVINGS ABOUT THE BHOODAN MOVEMENT**

The Bhoodan movement has been subjected to a lot of criticism by leading economists (of the country), philosophers, political thinkers and social reformers all alike. Even some of the disciples of Gandhi had expressed their dissent on this important issue. 'The philosophy behind the movement and the results of its working has come for sharp criticism from various quarters. It will, therefore, be desirable to assess this criticism for whatever it is worth and to examine its validity'

**The Absence of Clarity** A line of argument against Bhoodan is the supposed absence of clarity regarding the objectives of the movement. It said that although a lot of things are claimed about the potentialities of the Bhoodan movement regarding the creation of a stateless society through a non-violent social revolution, no one apparently seemed to know how far

the movement was to really benefit the people. To bring in Gandhi's name and to claim that the movement is born of the Gandhian idea of a thorough social awakening is one thing but to visualise concretely the objectives of the movement is quite another. The protagonists of the movement have said that the Bhoodan aims at the greatest good of all. Based on the Gandhian ideals of non-violent social revolution, i.e., on love and innate goodness of man, it aimed at the welfare of the common man, specially the down trodden and the proletariat. In the context of the colossal poverty of the Indian agrarian population, any scheme for the well being of the people, howsoever slight its contribution may be, should be welcome.

**The Lopsidedness** The movement is said to be lopsided in approach to the agrarian problem. Bhoodan aimed to help and provide land only to the landless villagers, thus leaving out the semi landless or those villagers who possess some land but still work as cultivating labourers and depend wholly or partly on wages. Vinoba considered the problem of the landless labourers as rather baffling and urgent. Hence the Bhoodan movement stood for the landless. No landless in the village was the first step of Vinoba and his last is that there would remain no land owner. It developed into Gramdan, where all the persons co operate for the common cause and the distinctions like the landless and the land owner would be wiped out.

**The Insufficient Land** The movement is said to have provided insufficient land to the landless, neither providing him with employment for whole of the year nor raising the income level to an appreciable extent. Within a short period there would be a fall in the acreage under cultivation (as transfer of land takes some time to be finalised) and worsen the already bad situation of food production in the country. But this contention is based on the plausible assumption that cultivable land received in donation, if not distributed immediately among the landless labourers, remains idle for sometime. This is not true. The land received in gifts continues to be cultivated by the donors until it has been redistributed and legal formalities are completed. As to the “insufficient land” given to the landless, it can easily be said that provision of five acres of land is beneficial when about 62 per cent of the holdings in India are below five acres of land.

### **Fragmentation and Sub-Division**

The Bhoodan movement and its working were criticised as it allegedly leads to the division and fragmentation of already small and scattered fields. As it happens, the land gifts from every type of owner big or small are accepted. The donations by small farmers of little pieces of land out of their miniature holdings tend to accelerate the sub-division and fragmentation of land. The economic disadvantages of this unhealthy trend are too well known to be emphasised. On behalf of the movement, it is claimed that the land donations from small land owners are accepted in

order to create the right type of atmosphere for converting the big land owners. Vinobaji has said, "I am more worried about the fragmentation of human hearts than the fragmentation of land ... Fragmented land can be easily consolidated later with mutual goodwill and co-operation; but fragmentation of hearts owing to the social and economic inequalities is full of dangerous possibilities in a state like India." Admittedly, this argument may not appeal to a professional economist. But the fact is that before distribution all attempt is made to consolidate small plots of donated land as far as possible. Regarding the subdivision of land, it may be pointed out that in the majority of cases only those lands have been donated which formed complete units by themselves. Bhoodan thus has not entailed any further fragmentation of holdings but only already divided and small pieces of land and have come to its fold. No land has been further divided merely for the sake of donation in Bhoodan movement.

### **The Uneconomic Holdings**

Critics pointed out that Bhoodan created uneconomic holdings. As poor persons join the movement by donating a small piece of land from their already tiny plots, the holdings are reduced to uneconomic units. In answer to this, it is necessary to look upon the of holdings of cultivable land per family in India. As has been stated earlier about 20 per cent of holdings (in the country) are of below an acre, contributing to only a little over 1 per

cent of total area, operated and about 40 per cent holdings are below 2.50 acres, contributing to only 6.71 per cent of the total area operated (The NSS Report (June 1961), 16th Round, No. 113, pp. 13 and 21). More than 74 per cent of the agricultural holdings are below 7.50 acres comprising of 29.76 per cent of the total area operated. The inescapable fact here is that 62 per cent of the land holdings are below five acres of land. The average size of land holding in India is only 6.63 acres of land. In view of the above facts it must be admitted that holdings of five acres of land which Bhoodan provides is certainly an improvement over the existing situation. Moreover, the concept of “economic holding” is quite relative. In Japan the average holding is of 2.5 acres and yet her average produce from land is three times that of India. A small holding does not necessarily show a fall in production or become an uneconomic unit. intensive cultivation practices with the help of better manures, seeds and irrigation facilities can turn even a small plot of land of 2.5 acres into an economic unit. The Japanese method of intensive cultivation can be practised by the peasants and given this land of five acres each in Bhoodan, they can quite sufficiently maintain a decent standard of living.

### **Land Unfit for Cultivation**

Mira Behn, an old disciple of Gandhiji, felt that most of the land donated is of inferior quality and some of it is extremely poor. She opined that over 80 per cent of the collected land, is of inferior character (Reply of

Critics, *Hindustan Times*, 4-6-53). Also, a good percentage of land received under Bhoodan is either grazing land or covered with forests. The critics further added that Vinoba was aware of this fact but insisted that no land could be useless and that one can make the best possible use even of the rocky tracts and the hills. It is widely believed that a high percentage of land collected in Bhoodan is unfit for cultivation. As up to 1957 no such statistics was collected regarding the quality of land received in Bhoodan. The fact is that out of the total land of 42,27,476 acres collected up to 1964, about 14,84,830 acres of land has been found unfit for cultivation. The estimate, therefore, comes to about 35.8 per cent (Sarvodaya, April 1965, p. 480). As up to 31st March, 1967 only 42,64,096 acres of land has been collected, the approximate percentage of such bad land can safely be said as 35 only. The gifted land has been divided into three groups: (1) land under cultivation by tenants; (2) land cultivated by the donor himself; (3) cultivable land but not under cultivation. In the first case big tenants or land owners are requested to donate their tenancy rights and small cultivators are made full owners. In the second case, the land goes directly to the landless peasants. In the last case, the donor is requested to donate it after breaking it with plough or otherwise, i.e., after making it fit for cultivation. In case he is unable to do so the land will have to be broken with the help of government or money donation or the free labour volunteers. In no case the poor receiving the land are expected to meet the cost of reclamation or such other charges in making the land fit for cultivation. In fact, donors



themselves are asked to bear such expenses. Besides, the psychological effects of the Bhoodan movement should not be undermined. When a landlord donates land, no matter of what quality it is, it certainly reflects some sacrifice for the landless and an acceptance of the idea behind the movement. Through his act of land donation a change is apt to be affected in his psychology. This seed of thought sown in his heart is bound to bear fruit some day. And there are many possibilities of his donating more of his land in future. So land of whatever quality it is, is not to be refused though one may well say to the donor that this was a bad gift. Bad land can be and has to be reclaimed and put to its best possible uses.

### **The Question of Rehabilitation**

The argument against Bhoodan is that it will hardly be successful in rehabilitating all the landless agricultural labourers. Land donations are not like donations of money or food grains to be immediately made use of. On immediate acquisition, land is more of a liability than an asset until it can be made productive with the help of necessary inputs and management. Thus providing land to the landless will not rehabilitate them unless they are also provided with all the resources or inputs and implements for agriculture. On the other hand, such a change of ownership of land in favour of the landless will cause unjustifiable loss of production and dislocation of agriculture without really benefiting anybody. That is why Vinoba asked to provide implements and other facilities to the landless of the village. He

started a number of other Yajnas such as Sadhandan (Haldan, Baidan, Koopdan), Sampattidan, Shramdan, etc. The objectives and methods of Sampattidan combines all the allied Yajnas of the Bhoodan movement. Vinoba himself admits that only Bhoodan or Gramdan cannot bring about any change in the economic life of the people unless their other possessions, like labour, capital and the ability are shared by all for the good of the society as a whole.

### **Why Land To The Landless?**

The slogan “Land to the Landless” seems to emphasise the “indispensable” character of land for those who do not have it. But the ideology of Bhoodan by no means can be justified that land is as indispensable as air, water and Sun. By no stretch of imagination it can be compared with these objects. Sardar Lal Singh, in his minute of dissent on the land ceiling, has compared land with a factory or a textile mill and argued that it is made to yield “maximum production” and should be handled by those who are efficient and not necessarily by the landless (Sardar Lal Singh, 1958, p. 115). The need of the country is not the equal distribution of land but the higher productivity and efficiency of land, labour and capital. The approach of Bhoodan is quite different. Land is as free a gift of nature as air, water and Sun. It is, therefore, nobody’s property. Vinoba says that if we want to rejuvenate the rural economy, the old values must change. The re-distribution of land would significantly

enhance the social status and the economic power of the landless. What is the use of higher production, if the distribution pattern remains defective and the big land owners still dominate the village economy? Land being limited must not be owned by anybody is the main idea behind the Bhoodan movement. It calls for a voluntary surrender of at least one sixth part of one's holdings for the benefit of the landless of the country. Vinoba's next demand is the total abolition of private property in the shape of Gramdan. Vinoba has deeply studied the rural problem and found that it is not simply the problem of increasing production, but it is a great problem of transformation of human values and establishing a new economic order. The Bhoodan movement seeks to bring about a change of this type on the basis of its ideology stated above.

### **Against Mechanised Farming**

It is said that Bhoodan stands in the way of mechanised farming. The small five acre holdings that the Bhoodan aims at providing to the landless of the country are unsuitable for mechanised farming which some critics hold as indispensable for increased agricultural production in view of the fast growing population. In addition, it is feared that the re distribution of land will stand in the way of subsequent general reform of the land system. It was hoped that the Bhoodan movement, through the liquidation of vested interests and creation of socio-economic equality, would go a long way in furthering the cause of co operative farming in India. Moreover,

judging from the ultimate aim of the Bhoodan movement, namely, “the greatest good of all”, there would be no objection, in principle, to make plots sufficiently large, if all the villagers agree and it does not infringe the basic principle of Sarvodaya. Similarly, though there is not much scope for mechanised farming in India, yet there is no objection to consider its use for increased aggregate efficiency if it does not, in any way, endanger the stability of the village economy. Vinoba has repeatedly said that the present distribution of land under Bhoodan movement will not stand in the way of general agrarian reforms. As it is, our laws of inheritance and transfer may well have to be amended suitably in order to prevent fragmentation and transfer of land into the hands of non cultivators or giant cultivators or combines. A welfare feature of the land reforms is of the land ceiling act, but Vinoba goes further and demands “Land Flooring” wherein all the landholders will shed off their right of ownership and pool their lands for common use and benefit. But the cause of land reforms was not hampered by the Bhoodan movement.

### **The Legitimate Objection**

The only legitimate objection to the working of Bhoodan is that its machinery is not efficient and the distribution process is very slow. Upto 31st March, 1967 only 11,90,718 acres of land could be distributed. About 16 lakh acres of land was yet to be distributed. (The remaining 14 lakh acres of land is supposed to be unfit for cultivation).

### **Target Not Achieved**

The target for land gift was set at fifty million acres which was to be, achieved by the end of 1957. It was too high an ambition for a voluntary movement depending almost entirely on moral persuasion. Up to the end of 1957 only 1/10th of the target has been achieved. Bhoodan planned to achieve land revolution by 1957 but has failed. This is perhaps because many unrealistic and exaggerated claims were made on behalf of the movement. Also the movement relied rather too much on the goodness of human nature and Godhead in man. The attention of the movement has been diverted from Bhoodan to Gramdan. When the entire land of the village is donated, the question of Bhoodan is automatically solved. Judging from the Gramdan point of view the movement was a great success. Up to July 1971 about 1,68,058 entire villages have been donated to Vinoba including 1,249 entire Blocks and 47 districts all over the country.

### **Collectivisation or a Misgiving?**

It was claimed by the protagonists of Bhoodan that they were not enamoured of collectivisation and they intended to give land to the millions of landless labourers in the country side on an individual or family basis to begin with. Later on the idea was to welcome cooperative endeavour, not so much for the pooling of land as for the pooling of various agricultural

operations. Subsequently, however, there was a significant shift from the earlier views. Under it land becomes the property of the state or the village and the peasant becomes a mere worker on land. In Gram Swaraj of Vinoba's conception it is feared, the peasant, under a more or less collectivised system of land management, may become a pawn in the hands of the village community. The authority having control over in that case may not be far removed from him and may be more amenable to his desires and demands. But he loses his individuality, a large part of his freedom and becomes absorbed in that collective order. His initiative is curbed with obvious consequences. It is incorrect to suggest that there has been any shift in the Bhoodan thought. Bhoodan does not begin with any prior theory about individual or collective agriculture. It pools the land and then it gives some land to the dispossessed land labourers and eventually brings about a re-distribution of land. Land is apportioned to individuals but the right of ownership ceases to be unconditional. The most important unit in Bhoodan is the individual. He has to be wide awake and realise clearly that the joy of life and sense of achievement comes only when one offers with real goodwill, whatever one may have for the social good. Bhoodan wants the people to come together, to think together and work together for the common good of all. The people as a whole and not any small elite, or a group, or a party, should have the initiative. It is thus a revolutionary effort, to create a Sarvodaya Society in which every individual has the sense of being the centre, and where all participate actively in the

social process. It is an attempt on the part of the individual to become harmonious with the whole of which he is a part. It naturally wants to create a society in which every one will have a role and an importance in the measure in which they serve the well being of all. So the bonds that will bring people together will neither be those of self interest nor those of enforced collective order of suppression and serfdom.

### **GANDHI AND KUMARAPPA**

Mahatma Gandhi and Bharatan Kumarappa were the most articulate and fervent advocates for the introduction of prohibition in India. Not only do they summon arguments, but also pin them to the cultural and socio-economic context of India. For them, prohibition also represents a moral awakening of India.

Gandhi on Prohibition Prohibition has a pride of place in the Gandhian vision of the world. To Gandhi “drink is more a disease than a vice” (Young India, 6-7-1921, p. 210). “I would hold drink to be more damnable than thieving and perhaps even prostitution.” (M.K. Gandhi, Prohibition At Any Cost, p. 10). Gandhi recalls that many empires were destroyed through the drink habit of their rulers. This monstrous evil was undoubtedly one of the contributory factors in the fall of the Roman Empire (Young India, 11-4-1929, p. 115). Gandhi cites the case of his eldest son who became an addict despite the fact that he was intelligent, brave, patriotic and capable of sacrifice. Kumarappa: Why Prohibition? Bharatan Kumarappa was one of

the most articulate exponents of Gandhian ideals on prohibition. He published a collection of essays in his book, *Why Prohibition?* Kumarappa addresses the issue of individual freedom in relation to intoxicant drinks. He argues persuasively that prohibition be conceived in India primarily in the interest of the poor. The suffering experienced by the male addict's wife, children and other dependents should be a matter of social concern, more so when the man earns a pittance, hardly sufficient to meet the basic needs of himself and his family. Thus the man's drinking habit leaves his dependents practically destitute. The ill-treatment meted out to family members due to intoxication has an anti-social dimension. Under the influence of liquor, the human being is enslaved. Considering drink as an anti-social habit, the state has to intervene and curb the freedom of the individual. Kumarappa also cites the examples of many western countries imposing restrictions on individual freedom in the case of narcotic drugs. Alcohol is also a narcotic. The western countries have been unable to deal with drink by law because it has become entrenched in social customs, whereas in India only a small minority are liquor addicts, and "where public opinion is definitely against it, it should be possible to prohibit liquor just as easily as drugs in the West". He draws our attention to the fact that both Hinduism and Islam, major religions of India, ban drink. When drink is sold freely in the open market, non-addicts are attracted to it, thereby spreading the drink evil. Prohibition is, therefore, concerned not merely with the drink addict, but also with the non-drinker, observes Kumarappa.



Citing Prof. Edwin Lemert of the University of California, Kumarappa notes that excessive drinking is like other forms of criminal behaviour (eg. sexual immorality, disturbance to peace, destruction of property, misuse of credit, etc.) which run counter to the normal expectations of a sober community. Hence, the state has to legislate against drink and protect by law the interests of the average citizen and the non-drinker. According to Kumarappa educative propaganda against drink is without question very essential; this is after all the permanent non-violent way of dealing with the problem. Propaganda must be carried on with or without prohibition. Public opinion in the West is predominantly in favour of moderate drinking rather than for total abstinence. Kumarappa argues that the regular moderate drinker is worse off than the one who gets drunk once in a while, but does not drink regularly. More over, all alcohol addicts start off as moderate drinkers. Therefore, if liquor is an evil, there is no point in permitting moderate drinking. One has to ban drinking of liquor altogether, both moderate and excessive, for the two go together and are inseparable. Both Gandhi and Kumarappa were of the firm view that one of the reasons why men drink is economic. Amelioration of the socio-economic conditions coupled with provision of social amenities like clubs, playgrounds, parks and other recreation and entertainment facilities would help to wean away from liquor those with idle time, the labourers in particular. Kumarappa considers liquor taxation as unjust and iniquitous. It helps the contractors who bid for licences and who are encouraged to sell

the maximum. Also much of the liquor revenue is collected from the poor. The government could impose or increase other taxes which will be spread out evenly among all strata of society. Prohibition should not be given up on the ground of obtaining revenue. Kumarappa musters statistics to show that the period of prohibition registered a big spurt in savings, investments consumption and public health indices besides improvement in production efficiency. He observes that the costs of enforcement and loss of liquor revenue is outweighed by the gains to the consumer in multiple ways. It means better living conditions, better health and education to the consumer and greater efficiency for the economy. On the debit side of liquor are immorality, crime, family squabbles, hungry children and broken homes. Social legislations like prohibition cannot succeed without public cooperation, notes Kumarappa. He states: "... prohibition will remain a dead letter so long as the people do nothing about it..." An evil like prohibition cannot be wiped off by mere legislation.

## **FARMERS' MOVEMENT**

India has a long history of peasant or farmers' movement, dating back to the colonial period when farmers in different parts of India revolted against Zamindars, landlords, British colonial masters or powers including feudal lords. These movements were the results of severe exploitation, oppression, loss of rights over land, imposition of new taxes, and new agrarian relations of the peasants with the Colonial state or the

feudal lords. Most of the struggles that the peasants resorted to were either carried as part of nationalist struggle or independent of it. Some of the important struggles of farmers or peasants during the British period were : Bhil Revolt ( 1822,1823,1837-60), Deccan Peasant Revolt (1875), Mopilla Revolt (1921), The Muslhi Satyagraha (1921-24), Struggle of Warlis (1945), Birsa Munda revolt Nagar Peasant Uprising(1830-33). In this context, three important struggles that Gandhi led require our special attention. They were: Champaran (1918-19); Bardoli (1925) and Kheda(1918). In the first struggle, the primary issue was opposing the Tinkathia System imposed on the Indigo cultivators of Champaran by the colonial powers. In the second and third struggle, opposing the rent payable to the government at the time of distress was the major issue. All these struggles had one impact: it brought the peasants to the nationalist movement.

### **FARMERS' MOVEMENT AFTER INDEPENDENCE**

It was obvious that with the termination of colonial rule, the character and nature of the peasant or farmers' movement underwent sea change. The Post-independent India saw broadly two kinds of peasant or farmers' struggles in the recent past. Peasant movements led by Marxist and Socialists- such as Telangana Movementλ (1946-51), Tebagha movement (1946-1949), Kagodu Satyagraha (1951), Naxalbari Movement (1967) and Lalgarh movement (2009). Farmers' movement led by rich farmers in Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra,λ Punjab and Gujarat.

One of the problems that the scholars faced while detailing farmers' movement is the conceptualisation. How to distinguish "peasants from farmers"? Is peasant a suitable analytical category in the post-independence period? In fact, the concept of "peasant" is now increasingly being replaced by "farmers" for the simple reason that the development paradigm initiated during the post-independence period has created a new category called 'Market Oriented' farmers. The peasant is simply defined as a social category, who lives in subsistence level and desist from market competition. On the contrary, the farmer involves in market competition and tries to be autonomous while dealing with production, distribution and cropping pattern issues. Infact the introduction of green revolution, new technology, government subsidies etc has created such a category in recent past. These categories are also called "rich farmers". The struggle that these farmers resorted to in recent years has been conceptualised as 'New Farmers' Movement'. The latter movement comes closer to Gandhian movement of yesteryears. This is because of the fact that the strategies that they resorted to, methodologies that they adopted, the politics that they played, the analysis that they made including the conceptualising of some of their struggles, had the bearing of Gandhian Movement. Even some of organisations in New Farmers' Movement such as the one in Karnataka vouched for Gandhism openly. Others such as Shektari Sanghathana of Maharashtra did not accept or adhere to Gandhism in total.

### **Social Bases of the Farmers' Movement**

The Farmers' movements are often criticised for their class bias. It is often argued that the New Farmers' movement is highly biased towards market-oriented farmers than those who are living in the subsistence economy. All through their struggles, these movements have raised such issues which have helped either the rich farmers or the middle farmers. For example, their argument in favour of writing off loans, remunerative prices, declaring agriculture as an industry, abolition of tractor loans etc ultimately helped the big or the rich/middle peasantry or the farmers. Even the movements have not addressed the issues beyond irrigated areas. The issues of non-irrigated areas have received scant focus in their discourse. This is the reason why the farmers' movement began to lose its appeal in the years to come. The movement encompassing different categories of farmers, however, lost its vitality or appeal in due course. This is the reason why it is stated that its social bases are confined to rich and middle peasants including the farmers of commercial cropping and also market-oriented farmers. Secondly, there are criticisms that movements never become the movements of or for all caste groups. In Karnataka, the Raitha Sangha largely became the movement of two dominant castes- the Lingayats and Vokkaligas. In Maharashtra, it did become a movement of Maratha Kunbis. However, it tried to encompass Dalits, Other Backward Castes, artisan castes, and others. However, their proportion was less when compared to Kunbi Marathas. On the contrary, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh movements became movement of Jats. In Tamil Nadu, it is argued that its

membership derived from such castes as Naidus, Goundars, Tewars, Vanniyars and Nadaars. However, the representation from dalits, Muslims, etc. is minimal. In Gujarat, under Khedut Samaj, the movement was largely dominated by Pattidars, although others such as OBCs are also its support bases but in less number. This wide range of social bases has literally made the farmers' movement confine to their agitational politics or to their locality. Therefore it has become difficult to organise the farmers' movement at an all India level.

### **Gandhism in Farmers' Movement**

There has been a debate whether to analyse these movements as Gandhian or not. In other words, to what extent the New Farmers' Movement may be treated as Gandhian Movement? What are the characteristics that make them to vouch for Gandhism? Infact, the Karnataka movement, under Raitha Sangha, is very vehement in advocating that it is a Gandhian movement despite the fact that in its analysis, the arguments of and about Third World or the arguments of Marx, Lenin, Rosa Luxemburg's internal colonialism are apparent. Hence it argues that its final objective is the realisation of "village republic". This is nothing but a "form of social, political and economic organisation based on direct democracy". In this democracy "affairs affecting several communities are decided upon through process of consultation involving all affected" (Nanjundaswamy, 1998). This is apparent in its organisational level or from

the grass roots level to the top level. These principles are apparent in different struggles. During the time of destroying Cargill seeds as part of global resistance and also as part of People's Global Action, it advocated the Gandhian principle of non-violence as the strategy or action. It looked at the issues of non-violence as respecting all the living-beings including police, the people who work for Multinationals and also non-genetically modified living beings. Interestingly it viewed the destruction of the property of MNCs, godowns etc as part of non-violence. Nonetheless, the Gandhian approach is further apparent in its decentralised campaign against globalisation, and reclaiming the natural resources etc.

## **SARVODAYA**

The concept of Sarvodaya is a significant contribution of Mahatma Gandhi to the socio-political philosophy. His vision of Sarvodaya is not independent from the religions he came across, the persons with whom he came into contact, and the movements he has acquainted with. Though it is not easy to define properly Gandhi's vision of Sarvodaya it is an all-comprehensive vision assuring the total good of every individual: religious, moral, social, political, and economic. He used the word Sarvodaya to describe the principles that he felt should guide us in our efforts to build ourselves, our families, our communities and nations. He had arrived at these principles of a Sarvodaya society on the basis of his studies, his

observations and his experiments with truth and non-violence. In the world threatened by poverty, unemployment, racial discrimination, exploitation, ecological destruction, war, and dehumanization, it was Gandhi's ardent desire to establish a new just society free from all social evils and which would ensure the good of all. proposes Sarvodaya to achieve the integral development of every individual. It is an ideal to be translated into action in order to build up a new world society.

### **THE MEANING OF SARVODAYA**

Sarvodaya is a Sanskrit word derived from two words, namely, sarva and udaya. Sarva means 'all' which includes every kind of living beings. Udaya means 'rise,' 'uplift,' 'prosperity,' 'affluence,' etc. So Sarvodaya literally means 'the welfare of all' or 'the upliftment of all.' The ultimate objective of Sarvodaya is the total well-being of all or the greatest good of all. By 'welfare of all' Gandhi means the sum total of conditions – religious, moral, political, social and economic – for the all round growth of the total individual and of every individual in the context of the overall development of society. By the concept Sarvodaya Gandhi really means universal uplift or the welfare of all men and women and not just the welfare, or greatest happiness, of the greatest number. Sarvodaya is the name Gandhi gives to the new society embracing the betterment of the entire humankind and the world at large. It is a society directed towards the integral welfare of all



living beings based on age and on the old spiritual and moral values of Indian and those found elsewhere.

## **THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SARVODAYA**

The socio-political philosophy of Gandhi may be termed Sarvodaya. It may, however, be noted that Gandhi was not the author of the idea of Sarvodaya. He borrowed the idea as well as the term from Ruskin. Ruskin himself had borrowed it from the Bible. Gandhi first used the word Sarvodaya in a booklet which he published in his native Gujarati after he read John Ruskin. The essay, *Unto This Last*, was based on a parable from the Gospel according to Matthew 20:1-16 concerning the owner of a plantation and his hiring of labourers to work in his vineyard. In his parable Jesus made the master of the vineyard declare: "I will give unto this last even as I give unto thee." The emphasis of Ruskin's essay, as interpreted by Gandhi, is certainly that ideal society is none in which there is concern for the welfare of all. This is the foundation for his Sarvodaya movement. Along with *Unto This Last* Tolstoy's *Bread Labour* also influenced Gandhi. However, the credit of Gandhi lies in the fact that he devoted his entire life to the creation of a new society, a society based on the principles of Sarvodaya.

## **THE GOALS OF SARVODAYA**

The fundamental goal of Sarvodaya is the greatest good of all living beings. Gandhi aims at the transformation of society in which everybody contributes his or her own maximum share for the peace and harmony of the world. As a consequence the integral growth which includes spiritual, moral, political, social and economic welfare of every individual and the welfare of all is visualized. It also aims at the all-round development of all, without distinction of caste, creed, sex or religion. Gandhi wanted to establish a welfare state in India, which he called Ram Rajya. When each individual including the sick and the invalid fulfills his or her duties according to his or her capacity, there will be a healthy community assuring the integral welfare of all beings. By providing sufficient opportunities to every individual for their personal initiatives and capacities Sarvodaya aims at the total and integral development of every individual in human society. Gandhi was not the supporter of utilitarianism which aims at the greatest happiness to the greatest number. Sarvodaya aims at the integral liberation of every individual. It also stands for the well-being of the whole individual, body and soul. The goal of Sarvodaya is not the suppression or liquidation of an individual or a group but the triumph of truth which means the victory of the oppressor and the oppressed, the exploiter and the exploited. It is not the victory of an individual over another individual or even a group over other. The main principle behind it is that the good of the individual is contained in the good of all. Gandhi's liberated society defends and stands for the rights and the dignity of every human person. While rejecting the

principle of the greatest good of the greatest number, it upholds the maximum welfare of every individual on the basis of sharing goods and services regardless of one's own contribution. The resources and the progress of the village should be accessible to every individual. No individual or a group will be left out or suppressed in the Sarvodaya society.

### **THE MAIN FEATURES OF SARVODAYA**

The main features of Sarvodaya are trusteeship, economic equality and networking.

**Trusteeship** The theory of trusteeship, elimination of exploitation in every shape or form; a classless society which offers no privileges by the birth or wealth or talent; mutual cooperation being the driving force of motivation and behaviour; and above all, securing the welfare of all without any distinction of race, religion, sex, political affiliation: these may be said to be the highlights of the Sarvodaya society envisioned by the Mahatma. Sarvodaya is the application of the principle of non-violence in the transformation of societies: from their present forms which are mostly exploitative of and unfavourable to the disadvantaged, toward more balanced, inclusive and egalitarian forms in which can be enshrined the principle of social justice for all.

#### **Economic equality**

According to Gandhi economic equality is the master key to non-violent transformationary independence. Working for economic equality means abolishing the eternal conflict between capital and labour. A non-violent system of government is clearly and impossibly so long as the wide gulf between the rich and the hungry millions persists. The most disadvantaged sections of the community being the economically, the physically and the mentally poor, it is obvious that no egalitarian society could evolve without the poor taking part in the evolutionary process. And for this sector to take part, focus must be put on raising their status to an acceptably decent level. However, as it should be for all the other sectors of society, if an acceptable level of existence is to be reached and maintained for the disadvantaged sector, it is imperative that it should be self-sustainable through their participation in their own management.

### **Sarvodaya Network**

During his lifetime, Gandhi never allowed Sarvodaya organisations to be formally instituted. His thinking was that once you served people, as ‘sevakas,’ within the Sarvodaya philosophy there was no need for institutionalization. But since his demise Sarvodaya organisations have been established world-wide genuinely helping people towards building new societies from the ‘grassroots’ up. At the operational field level, the most successful Sarvodaya programmes have most often been those which, apart from being self-created and self-managed, have employed practical hands-

on-learning-by-doing methods, including a lot of income generation, skills training and conscientisation; rather than the theoretical 'talk-shop' or workshop approach.

## **SOCIO-POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY OF SARVODAYA**

Gandhian concept of Sarvodaya is both social and political in nature. It is not easy to distinguish both. For Gandhi politics was a means to social change and social transformation. Therefore, all his political agendas, principles and movements were social in nature. The main pillars of Gandhian political philosophy are philosophical anarchism, partyless democracy and decentralization. Let us see them in detail.

**Philosophical Anarchism** In political struggles we find the causal role of ruthless competition for power and dominance. In such dangerous games of politics we can discover at the action of the fundamental urge for domination over others and the working of an elementary rule that if one person renounces the attempt for obtaining power, others will begin to dominate over him. Sarvodaya accepts the sacrosanct character of the human spirit. Hence, it is emphatic on the inculcation of the values of freedom, equality, justice and fraternity. Thus, it is opposed to the state machine. In most cases the state operates by methods of intimidation, coercion, persecution and organized violence. Gandhi wanted that swarajya should be based on the moral sovereignty of the people.

**Partyless Democracy** The activities and operations of the political parties in modern states become mainly oriented to the ruthless pursuit of power. Even in democracies, in spite of the theoretical adherence to the principles of the basis of government, in actual practice, there is the domination of the allpowerful parties. Consequently, there are no occasions for the continuous dynamic political initiative of the masses and for the sovereign exercise of that general will of the community conceived. Sarvodaya is definitely hostile to the mechanism of representative democracy which amounts in actual practice to the dictatorship of the cabinet and the party oligarchy. Hence Sarvodaya advocates partyless democracy.

**Decentralization (Ramarajaya)** In place of the ever-growing centralization of power Sarvodaya pleads for decentralization. Gandhi was hostile to all types of concentration of power and he pleaded for decentralization at the economic and political levels. What is essential is that the people should be trained and disciplined into the management and control of their own affairs. These workers should behave as the brethren of the people and not their rulers and educate the people through tier co-operative solicitude. The advocates of Sarvodaya are quite correct in holding that if genuine selfgovernment or real democracy is practised at the village level, then that would be the greatest bulwark against any totalitarian encroachment. Sarvodaya accepts the universalization of selfgovernment. This means the activation of the people for vigilant and active

participation in cooperative action. If the officials at the top are liable to perversity and corruption, it is equally essential to guard effectively against the corruption of the workers and petty officials at the level of the villages. Sarvodaya wants to elevate the people. Hence the people and not the central parliament or cabinet have to become the focus of political attention.

### **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF SARVODAYA**

The fundamental theme of Sarvodaya is the realization of the happiness and elevation of all. At the political level it has two implications: the repudiation of the theory of class struggle and the safeguarding of the interests and rights of the minority.

#### **The repudiation of the theory of class struggle**

Sarvodaya attacks the repugnant and perverse consequences of egoism and the lust for power and wealth. Hence, it stresses the necessity of the disinterested service. Service, dedication and the realization of common good are its techniques and formulas and it is opposed to the Marxist theory of class struggle, which favours utilization of violence. Sarvodaya pleads for the replacement of the concept of class struggle by the more rational and organic theory of social good and harmony. The aim is not the forcible expropriation of the wealth of the rich but the conscious and spontaneous practice of 'sharing' the goods one has ready at hand. In this

way there can be an overpowering accentuation of the ideal of sharing and almost a mass moral revolution oriented to the effectuation of a peaceful social reconstruction can be brought about. Sarvodaya contemplates not the retention of the system of exploitation and coercion but it wants to bring about a regime of absolute social equality and the maximum of economic equality too. Sarvodaya contemplates a regime of liberty, equality and justice to be brought about by the dynamic transforming power of love and non-violence.

**The Repudiation of the Concept of Majoritarianism** The second implication from the sarvodayist conception of the organic reality of the community is the repudiation of the element of superior virtue supposed to be contained in the judgement of a majority of heads. If the community is an organic structure and if all the individual members of it are bearers of moral and cultural values then there is no place for jeopardizing the lives and interests of even the lowest and humblest. But if truth is the supreme canon and if the opinion, wish and aspiration of every member is precious, then in that case one has to work by consensus and not by majority. Hence, according to Sarvodaya the concept of majoritarianism has to be replaced by the concept of consensus. Sarvodaya is not satisfied with the various safeguards of proportional representation that have been devised to protect the interests of the minority. It adheres, rather, to the Gandhian concept that the superficial numerical criteria of many and few have to be replaced by a fundamental adherence to the good of the community. Thus,



Sarvodaya aims to replace the concept of majoritarianism by the concept of fundamental consensus.

### **Sarvodaya and socialism**

Sarvodaya is closely related to socialism in some respect. First of all, both derived their profound moral appeal from their rootedness in the fundamental belief in the good of the whole community in place of the narrow pursuit of the interests of the oligarchical minority of plutocrats. Secondly, both stress that there should be a social appropriation and equitable distribution of the goods of society. But in spite of the some fundamental similarities between socialism and Sarvodaya, there is great difference between them on the question of means and methods. The Sarvodaya concept has also specified that for achieving good ends we should adopt only good means. The good means here represent the path of love, truth and non-violence. The Sarvodaya workers and all those who have faith in the concept of Sarvodaya, should have clarity about their goal and should ensure the purity of means. One has to be vigilant about the ends and means. From the standpoint of Sarvodaya there are two shortcomings in the socialist philosophy. First, the basic technic for effectuating socialism is supposed to be nationalization whereas Sarvodaya holds villagism. Secondly, socialism adheres, at least in some cases, to the concept of violent revolution.

### **Communism and Sarvodaya**

Sarvodaya is more or less different from communism in its approach and methods. The difference between Sarvodaya and communism is far more basic and fundamental. Communism in Russia is a totalitarian system wedded to the cult of regimentation, violence and party dictatorship. Its all-pervasive aim has been the transformation of a backward feudal agrarian economy into a modern industrial-collectivist economy and this immense transformation has been sought to be achieved by the revival, in more intensified forms. Sarvodaya, on the contrary, believes in persuasion and change of heart. Gandhi has taught the ethics of self-suffering to convert the opponent because violence can never be the foundation of a just and equal society. A society of liberty and equality cannot be built by the capture of state power by a monolithic totalitarian party. Sarvodaya, hence, is intensely and trenchantly critical of the methods and techniques of Russian communism.

### **73rd Constitutional Amendment.**

One of the most important aspects of the development process, whether at microlevel or macro-level, is planning. Planning is of two kinds – centralized and decentralized. While attaining higher growth rate of national income is at the core of centralized planning, people development forms the main focus of decentralized planning. Power, authority and governance are the essential factors that are important in ruling a country. In all the countries, power is created, then

structured, maintained and changed from time to time. However, depending on the size, area and geography of a big country, power cannot be vested in one's hands. Hence, it has to be divided to such an extent that the governance of the country can be made efficient. The key to achieving the goal of efficient governance is decentralization. India made a landmark decision by amending the Constitution in 1992 through two amendments related to local governance at the rural and urban levels. In this unit, you will learn about features and implementation of the 73rd constitutional amendment acts.

## **KEY FEATURES**

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 added a new Part IX consisting of 16 Articles and the Eleventh Schedule to the Constitution. The 73rd Amendment Act envisages the Gram Sabha as the foundation of the Panchayat Raj System (PRS) to perform functions and powers entrusted to it by the state legislatures. The amendment provides for a three-tier PRS at the village, intermediate and district levels. Small States with population below twenty lacs have been given the opinion not to constitute the Panchayats at the intermediate level. The Act provides that the Panchayat bodies will have an assured duration of five years, with elections mandatory after this period. However, one thing is to be noted that under the Amendment Act, the

establishment of Panchayats and the devolution of necessary powers and authority on the PRI are vested in the hands of the State Governments. In view of this, it may be said that the success of the PRI as a unit of democracy and thereby ushering an all-round development of rural areas will much depend on the intention of support of the State Governments. These institutions would be misused by rural rich and the poor and illiterate masses will remain mute supporters as it is happening in Parliamentary and State Assembly elections in the country. Criminalization of politics is threatening the very foundation of democracy. The Government should ensure that these evils should not affect the functioning of PRI. Some of these provisions were discussed in Unit 3 as well.

**Gram Sabha:** Article, 243A provides that the Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the legislature of a state may by law provide. The 73rd amendment thus envisages the Gram Sabha as the foundation of PRS. 'Gram Sabha' means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level.

**Constitution of Panchayats:** Article 243B visualises a three-tier PRS. It provides that in every State, there shall be constituted Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district levels. Small States having a population not exceeding twenty lacs have been given an option not to constitute the Panchayats at the intermediate level.

**Composition of Panchayats:** Article 243C provides that, subject to the provisions of this part, the legislature of a State may by law make provisions with respect to the composition of Panchayats. However, the ratio between the population of the territorial area of a Panchayat at any level and the number of seats in such Panchayats to be filled by election shall, so far as practicable, be the same throughout the State. All the seats in a Panchayat shall be filled by the persons chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies in the Panchayat area. For this purpose, each Panchayat's area shall be divided into territorial constituencies in such manner that the ratio between the population of each constituencies and the number of seats allotted to it, so far as practicable, be the same throughout the Panchayat area. The legislature of a state may by law provide for representation of following persons in Panchayats:

- (a) The Chairpersons of the Panchayats at the village level, in the Panchayats at the intermediate level or in the case of a State not having Panchayats at the intermediate level and in the Panchayats at the district level.
- (b) The Chairpersons of the Panchayats at the intermediate level and in the Panchayats at the district level;
- (c) The members of the Lok Sabha and the Legislative Assembly of the State representing constituencies which comprise wholly or partly a Panchayat area at the level other than the village level, in such Panchayats;

**Disqualification for membership:**

A person shall be disqualified for being a member or Panchayats:

(a) If he is so disqualified by or under any law for the time being force for the purpose of elections to the legislature of the state concerned. (b) If he is so disqualified by or under any law made by the legislature of the State.

**Reservation for backward classes:** The legislature of a state is empowered under clause (6) to make provision or reservation of seats in any Panchayat or office of chairperson in the Panchayat at any level in favour of backward classes of citizens.

**Duration of panchayats:** According to Article 243E every Panchayat, unless sooner dissolved under any law for the time being in force, shall continue for five years form the date appointed for its first meeting.

### **Unit III**

#### **Panchayat Raj system in India - Development from 1947-2001- Panchayat finance - and Administration.**

Functions of Panchayat Raj Institutions: All Panchayat raj institutions perform such functions as are specified in state laws relating to Panchayat raj. Generally speaking the functions are as under: Functions of Gram Panchayat Some States distinguish between obligatory (compulsory) and optional functions of Gram Panchayats while other States do not make this distinction. The civic functions relating to sanitation, cleaning of public roads, drains and ponds, public toilets and lavatories, primary health care, vaccination, supply of drinking water, constructing public wells, street

lighting, social health and primary and adult education, etc. are obligatory functions of village Panchayats. The optional functions depend on the resources of the Panchayats. They may or may not perform such functions as tree plantation on road sides, setting up of breeding centers for cattle, organising child and maternity welfare, promotion of agriculture, etc. After the 73rd Amendment, the scope of functions of Gram Panchayat was widened. Such important functions like preparation of annual development plan of Panchayat area, annual budget, relief in natural calamities, and removal of encroachment on public lands, implementation and monitoring of poverty alleviation programmes are now expected to be performed by Structure of Government Panchayats. Selection of beneficiaries through Gram Sabhas, public distribution system, non-conventional energy source, improved Chullahs, bio-gas plants have also been given to Gram Panchayats in some states.

#### **Functions of Panchayat Samiti:**

Panchayat Samitis are at the hub of developmental activities. They are headed by Block Development Officers (B.D.Os). Some functions are entrusted to them like agriculture, land improvement, watershed development, social and farm forestry, technical and vocational education, etc. The second type of functions relates to the implementation of some specific plans, schemes or programmes to which funds are earmarked. It means that a Panchayat Samiti has to spend money only on that specific



project. The choice of location or beneficiaries is, however, available to the PanchayatSamiti.

### **Functions of ZillaParishad:**

ZillaParishad links Panchayatsamitis within the district. It coordinates their activities and supervises their functioning. It prepares district plans and integrates samiti plans into district plans for submission to the State Government. ZillaParishad looks after development works in the entire district. It undertakes schemes to improve agricultural production, exploit ground water resources, extend rural electrification and distribution and initiate employment generating activities, construct roads and other public works. It also performs welfare functions like relief during natural calamities and scarcity, establishment of orphanages and poor homes, night shelters, welfare of women and children, etc. In addition, ZillaParishads perform functions entrusted to them under the Central and State Government sponsored programmes. For example, JawaharRozgarYojna is a big centrally sponsored scheme for which money is directly given to the districts to undertake employment-generating activities.

### **Developments After 1947**

In the wake of India's independence, the trend was towards making local bodies autonomous and effective. Gandhi's idea of 'GramaSwaraj' articulated this concern. This idea had its own impact on

Karnataka. After independence, the princely state of Mysore came under the category of part 'B' state in the Indian Union. Later, with the reorganization of states, several areas were added to Mysore. It was renamed as Karnataka in the year 1970. The erstwhile princely state of Mysore had to adjust itself to the changed conditions and the requirements of the new political system. In this situation, the government formed a Committee under the president ship of V Venkatappa in the year 1949. It was asked to suggest measures regarding the changes to be brought about in the local governments. This integration and coordination committee recommended two tier systems that are gram Panchayat at the local level and the district committee at the district level. Venkatappa Committee submitted its report in the year 1950. On the basis of this report the Mysore Village Panchayats and District Boards Act, 1952, was formed. But the Act could not achieve expected results. In the year 1953, with the intention to strengthen local governments, a Local Board Enquiry Committee, popularly known as D H Chandrashekariah Committee was formed. This committee submitted its report in 1954 and suggested three tier systems with taluk Boards at the intermediate levels, adding to the earlier system. But the suggestions were not implemented.

#### **The Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act 1959:**

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report provided a new impetus to the system of Panchayat Raj. Taking note of this committee as well as the

historical evolution of local government institutions in the state, a new local self government set up was introduced considering all parts of the recognized states. The Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act, 1959 was enacted. The Act introduced three tier Panchayat Raj systems with directly elected bodies at the village and taluk levels and indirectly constituted body at the district level. A directly elected village Panchayat was constituted at every village or group of villages with average population of 2500 people. Members of the taluk development board ranging from 15 to 19 were also directly elected. Seats were reserved for S.Cs and S.Ts at both the taluk and village levels according to the population in the area, while two seats each were reserved for women at both levels. The district development council consisted of MPs MLCs, TDB presidents, women members and district government officials. The district developmental council was essentially a co-coordinating and supervisory institution. Under this Act, about 8,411 Village Panchayats and 96 Town Panchayats, 175 Taluk Developmental Boards and 19 District Developmental Councils were established. Comparatively, this new act was an improved attempt at strengthening Panchayat Raj Institutions. But this act had its own defects. It did not make provision for financial autonomy and development programme for local institutions. The district council was only an advisory, supervisory body and taluk became the basic unit of administration.

**Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993:**

The passing of the Constitution Act of 1993 (seventy-third amendment) by the Parliament gave constitutional status to Panchayat Raj Institutions. It made holding of elections to the Panchayat Raj Institutions mandatory on the part of the state governments. It appended the 11th schedule to the constitution which broadly defined the functions of these bodies. It laid down formula for reservation of seats and defined the powers of state government vis-a-vis the Panchayat Raj Institution. In fact Karnataka was the first state to implement it. The Karnataka government introduced the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 in the legislature on 1 st April, 1993. With the approval of both the houses it came in to effect from 10th May, 1993. The Act established three tier Panchayat Raj Institutions with ZillaPanchayat at district level, talukPanchayat at taluk level and gram Panchayat at village level. The Act which received the governor's assent on 13th April, 1993 reads as follows: 'An Act to replace the present enactment relating to Panchayats by a comprehensive enactment. Whereas it is expedient to replace the present enactment to establish a three tier Panchayat raj system in the state with elected bodies at the grama, (village), taluk and district levels, in keeping with the constitution amendment relating to Panchayats for greater participation of people and more effective implementation of development programmes'.

#### **The Three-Tier Panchayat Raj System and Gram Panchayat:**

According to the Act, a gram Panchayat is constituted for a population between 3000 and 5000. The area covered by a gram Panchayat included group of villages. There will be one member for every 400 persons. The adyaksha and upadyaksha (president and vice president) are elected from among the elected members. There are three Standing Committees in the gramPanchayat, namely: Production Committee, Social Justice Committee and Amenities Committee. A secretary is appointed by the government as the administrative head of the gram Panchayat. The main function of the gram Panchayat is to promote economic and social welfare, education and health in the gram Panchayat.

**TalukPanchayat:**

For each taluk, there shall be a talukPanchayat consisting of local representatives from the state legislature and parliament apart from one fifth of the gram Panchayat presidents in the taluk are chosen by lots every year (in rotation). Members are directly elected from the separate territorial constituencies at the rate of one member for every 10000 population. The elected members of talukPanchayat must choose two members from among themselves to the post of president and vice president. The talukPanchayat has the following Standing Committees: General Standing Committees, Finance, Audit and Planning Committee and Social Justice Committee. Group A officer of the state civil services is the administrative

head of the talukPanchayat. TalukPanchayats are empowered to supervise the activities of gram Panchayats in their jurisdiction.

**ZillaPanchayat** Each district will have ZillaPanchayat consisting of members of parliament and the legislature from within the district, the presidents of talukPanchayats in the district and elected members in accordance with the scale of one member for 40,000 of the population. The elected members shall choose two members from amongst them to the post of president and vice president. The ZillaPanchayats will have the following StandingCommittees: General Standing Committee, Finance, Audit and Planning Committee, Social Justice Committee, Education and Health Committee, Agriculture and Industries Committee. A chief executive officer, not below the rank of Deputy Commissioner is to be the administrative head of the ZillaPanchayat. The Act reduced the powers of ZillaPanchayat substantially. It may be noted that the Janata Dal government, through an ordinance made the presidents of Zilla and talukPanchayats executive heads and gave them executive powers.

### **Gram Sabha:**

The gram sabha is a statutory body of gram Panchayat today. It is obligatory on the part of the gram Panchayat to convene gramasabha meeting at least once in six months. All the adults who are in the voters list of the village are the members of the gram sabha. Thus confirming to the mandatory requirement of the 73rdAmendment, Karnataka became the

first state to implement the Panchayat Raj Act on the basis of this amendment and holding elections to the Panchayat under the act. Since its enactment, it has been amended on many occasions, leading to some important changes in the Act. The Janata Dal party which came to power in 1994, constituted an expert committee [The Nayak Committee] in the year 1995 with the intention to revamp the Act of 1993 and to restore autonomy of the kind obtaining under the earlier 1993 Act. The committee recommended many changes to the Act. The amendments were incorporated in the year 1997. It incorporated provisions for consequential arrangements with regard to the position of the new bodies, division of funds and liabilities. In the year 1998 seven new districts were formed. Therefore, the number of Zilla Panchayats has gone up from 20 to 30. A more significant development has been the issue of an ordinance in February 1999, reducing the number of gram Panchayats. Under the ordinance, the population limit of a gram Panchayat was raised to 10000 to 16000 as against 5000 to 7000 people. The reason given by the government is that under the earlier pattern the Zilla Panchayat was too small. They had limited financial resources and manpower and they were not capable of becoming effective instruments of development. The system of Panchayat Raj in Karnataka has a long history originating from about 6th century A.D. The system has undergone considerable changes since then. The history of democratic decentralization in Karnataka has generally been of a promise and hope, although there are certain disappointments. The functioning of

Panchayat Raj Institutions in the state shows that they have not fully emerged as peoples institutions. New class of power centers usually occupied by elite is emerging. Gram sabha has not been successful in ensuring downward mobility. In the recent years any change in government has resulted in changes in Panchayat Raj system. Every government seeks to strengthen its support at the grass root level against the opposition.

### **PanchayatRaj Finance**

Panchayats can discharge their functions efficiently only if they have sufficient financial resources. For resources, Panchayats depend mainly on grants from State Government. They also have taxation powers and have some income from owned or vested assets. They may get a share in the taxes, duties, tolls and fees that are levied and collected by the State Government. Let us now see what financial resources Panchayats have to perform their functions. Gram Panchayat: In most States the power of levying taxes is vested in gram Panchayats. House tax, tax on cattle, immovable property, commercial crops, drainage tax, sanitation fee, tax on produce sold in village, fee for supply of water to households, lighting tax are some of the taxes and fees levied by Panchayats. Panchayats can also levy entertainment tax on temporarily stationed theatres, taxes on animals and non-mechanically propelled vehicles plied for hire. Gram Panchayats also receive funds as income from property owned by them as common grounds, jungles, cattle ground etc. The sale proceeds of dung refuse and



carcasses (dead bodies of animals) are also retained by gram Panchayat. They also receive their share in land revenue from the State. PanchayatSamitis: PanchayatSamitis can impose tax on facilities provided by them as water for drinking or irrigation purposes, lighting arrangements, tolls for bridges maintained by them. The property of PanchayatSamitis includes public buildings, public roads constructed or maintained out of their funds and all land or other property transferred to them by the government. Panchayats receive income from the property vested in them. They also receive grants from the State Governments. Funds are transferred by ZillaPanchayats or State Governments along with schemes to be implemented by the intermediate institutions of Structure of Government Panchayat raj.

**Unit IV :** Urban Local Government - Financial Administration - State Control over Urban Local Government - Balwant Roy Mehta Committee - Ashok Mehta Committee.

**Objectives:**

- ❖ To analyze the composition, functions, and financial administration of urban local bodies such as Municipal Corporations, Municipal Councils, and Nagar Panchayats.
- ❖ To assess the extent and nature of state government supervision and control over the functioning of urban local governments.

## **Urban Local Government - Financial Administration**

Local Government means the management of local affairs by the representatives of the locality itself. It deals with the problems, chiefly of local concern. It plays an important role in solving the local problems of the people. It provides the foundation on which the democratic structure of a country stands. It is in and through these institutions that the citizens get training and necessary experience for running higher representative institutions such as the State Legislatures and the Union Parliament. De Tocquaville, a noted French writer pronounced "A nation may establish a system of self-government, but without the spirit of municipal institution it cannot have the spirit of liberty". Former Prime Minister of India, the late Jawahar Lal Nehru remarked "Local self government is and must be the basis of any true system of democracy. We have got rather into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top will not be a success unless you build on its foundation from below." Thus local institutions constitute the strength of a free nation. At the local level, India is governed by two different sets of institutions, namely, the Rural Governments and the Urban Local Governments. The former covering the rural population, comprises a three-tier structure from the village to the district. It was recommended by Balwantrai Mehta Committee. It is formed on democratic principles and organically linked. The urban local governments cover urban population.

The requirements for an urban area are:

- a) a minimum population of 5,000
- b) a population density of not less than 400 per sq. km., and
- c) three-fourth (75%) of the occupations of the working population should be outside agriculture.

The urban local governments are of mainly six types, namely:

- a) Municipal Corporation
- b) Municipalities
- c) Notified Area Committee
- d) Town Area Committee
- e) Improvement Trust
- f) The Cantonment Board.

The first five are created under state Municipal laws while the Cantonment Boards are established under central Act, called Cantonment Act, 1924. Since local government is a state subject (entry 5, state list, seventh schedule of the Constitution of India), local bodies are created by the respective state governments. The pattern of local governments, therefore, varies from state to state. Even within the state all the six types are not found in every state. But municipalities are found everywhere. Financial administration in urban

governments is as important as finance. It consists of those operations the object of which is to make the best use of available resources and channelling them into proper fields of expenditure. Under democratic government, the elected institutions (i.e., Municipal councils in case of Municipalities) vote the taxes and authorise expenditure. It has to ensure that these representative institutions do not place more tax burden on the people and the money voted by them for expenditure is used according to their wishes with due regard to economy and efficiency. An ill-organised financial administration can be a handicap resulting in inadequate finances.

Financial administration in urban governments falls into the following divisions: i) Preparation of the budget i.e., estimates of revenue and expenditure for ensuing Y financial year

ii) Getting budget passed by the Municipal council or other competent authority

iii) Regulation of the expenditure and raising resources according to it

iv) Custody of funds raised and their disbursement

v) Rendering of the accounts by the Executive Officer and the audit of these accounts

The machinery concerned with financial administration in urban governments varies from state to state. But generally it comprises the following components:

- i) The Municipal council
- ii) Executive Officer along with the departments concerned mainly with financial administration
- iii) The main financial officers in the administrative departments
- iv) Examiner, Local Fund Accounts (Audit Department)
- v) The committees of the municipalities particularly the committee on Finance and Taxation.

## **ECOLOGY OF URBAN LOCAL FINANCE**

The form of local polity, size and level of local units, local functions, government control and the economic conditions of local inhabitants are important factors which contribute to determining the ecology of local finance. The financial position of the local government is significantly determined by the form of local polity.

Another important factor which determines the adequacy of local finance is the size of the local authority. A local unit, big in terms of its area and population, has a better financial position in comparison to the one that is comparatively small in terms of physiography and human settlement. Take for example, in comparison to a Municipal Corporation, a Notified Area Committee has limited sources of income because of its small area and population. Such types of local authorities look to upper levels of

government for help to keep themselves financially in a viable condition. Responsibilities given to the local government are yet another prominent factor for determining the local finance. The government allocates resources to the local governments commensurate with their functions. Where the local government fails to carry out its responsibilities within the available resources, the government has to either provide extra revenue or withdraw such responsibilities. In India, for example primary education is a local function. But sometimes inadequate local finance does not permit most of the local authorities to perform this function inviting government intervention. Moreover, when new responsibilities are assigned to local bodies, adequate funds are made available to the local government in the form of government grants.

The financial control exercised by the government is also an important factor in determining the scope and scale of local finance. The government provides a broad base for local finance through local government Act in respect of sources of income, pattern of expenditure (compulsory and optional), mode of preparation, enactment, and execution of budgetary proposals, custody of funds, accounts and audit. At times, the government comes to the rescue of the local governments for the performance of their responsibilities, in case of insufficient local resources as well as for their involvement in national obligations. Besides, government also helps the local authority to raise loans, to meet their needs of capital expenditure such as land and heavy machinery. Last but not least the

general poverty of our people is undoubtedly a potent factor in the matter of local finance. People in our country have very little taxable capacity. A simple study of the annual national per capita incomes of countries like - UK, USA, Canada and Japan and that of India will amply prove the point. Thus, general poverty\of people may not help to contribute much towards local revenues.

## **PRINCIPLES OF URBAN LOCAL FINANCE**

**Independence and Responsibility** The principle of independence means that urban governments must have freedom of financial operations for fulfilling their obligations. The canon of responsibility which flows from independence implies that the responsibility for raising and spending money should be with the same authority. The authority which has the pleasing job of spending money should also do the unpleasant job of raising it. Taxing autonomy and spending autonomy must go hand in hand.

The entire financial system of urban governments should be well-integrated and all fiscal arrangements should combine into a consistent whole. The integration of central, state and local revenue and expenditure should be done in such a way that promotes development. The coordination of central, state and local finance should not only be in taxation but should also cover the current budget, capital outlay programmes, credit operations of the various authorities and should be accompanied with a coordination of their administrative activities as well.

## **MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT: SOURCES OF REVENUE**

In India, Finance is the basic problem of urban governments. Adequate finances constitute the life-blood of the whole system of local government. Without sufficient finances, urban governments become mere subordinate units of state government and fail to cater to the civic needs of the community. Their income is derived from local taxation, enterprises, or the wealth of the citizens, located the limits of 1 municipal body. Direct taxation is common in municipal Administration. In addition, they impose special levies, commonly termed as "betterment levies" charged for improvements on property made by them. Besides, they receive assistance from state and central governments for their obligatory duties. International agencies through state governments also provide financial assistance for projects of urban development, such as, water supply, housing, roads etc.

i) Tax-revenue ii) Non-tax revenue iii) Grants-in-Aid, and iv) Loans

**Tax-Revenue** The major proportion of income of urban governments flows from taxes. It ranges between two-fifths and three-fourths of total income.

The main taxes are:

a) Octroi or terminal tax b) House tax c) Tax on trades, professions , d) Tax on dogs e) Tax on advertisements other than those published in the newspaper f) Bazar tax g) Tax on vehicles h). Tax on theatres i) Toll tax.



**NOR-tax Revenue** It includes receipts from rents of municipal property, interest on investments, profit from public utility undertakings like-water supply, passenger transport, electricity , supply, fee for issuing licences or permits, fines realised for offences against municipal bye-laws, rules, regulations etc. For example in Punjab and Haryana this source of revenue fetches about 30 per cent of revenue.

### **Grants - in -Aid**

It is another important source of income of urban governments in India. Grants represent subsidies given by the state government in aid of certain services rendered by urban governments. Grants can broadly be divided into two categories, namely, recurring and non-recurring. The former are provided by the State Government to meet the gap in their recurring expenditure. The latter are given to municipalities to meet the initial cost of some specific projects such as water supply, school buildings, health centre etc. The amount of grant is determined on the basis of the matching formula, per capita income and expenditure etc.

### **Urban**

Urban governments also meet their needs of capital expenditure such as purchase of land, heavy machinery and long-term projects by raising loans. Borrowings are regulated by the central law known as Local Authorities Loans Act, 1914. Loans are raised with prior sanction from the

state government. In certain cases, the permission of the central government is also needed. The urban governments are permitted to borrow loans from banks, Life Insurance Corporation and other financial institutions. All proposals concerning loans from open market or LIC are required to be cleared, by the Reserve Bank of India. For all practical purposes, urban governments except municipal corporations have to depend largely upon loans from their respective state governments. Every loan has its own rate of interest, term, mode of repayment

## **STATE CONTROL OVER URBAN**

Urban local bodies are not sovereign bodies. As mentioned earlier, local government is a state subject and as such state government is empowered to legislate on various aspects of local bodies. It determines their structure, powers, functions, financial resources etc. In fact, urban local bodies are regularly controlled, supervised, directed and occasionally penalised by the State Government for their acts of omission and commission. In India, the forms of government control over urban bodies are many and varied. Such control is of four broad varieties, namely, (a) legislative, (b) judicial, (c) administrative, and (d) financial. In this unit, we are mainly concerned with financial control. Government control over the finances of urban governments may be grouped under the following heads.

### **Control over Taxation**

The government is empowered to exempt any person or property from the payment of any tax. Every resolution of a municipality increasing or decreasing or abolishing an existing tax, requires the approval of the state government and in certain cases, of central government as well. For example, in case of tax on profession, the Constitution of India had prescribed a limit of Rs. 250 per annum in 1949. In view of the price rise and other factors some state governments when demanded by local bodies, had to request the centre to revise the ceiling. The rate was, therefore, enhanced to Rs. 2,500 per annum in 1988 by the Sixtieth Amendment Bill of the Constitution. The state government is empowered to suspend or prohibit, or remedy a tax unfair in incidence or injurious to the interests of the general public. State government may allow urban bodies to add supplementary rates to the existing government taxes. For example, in India, when state governments had abolished octroi, they permitted the urban governments to impose a surcharge on the sales tax which is a state tax: Besides, a local tax may be administered by the government, although it is actually enjoyed by the urban governments. For instance, in Andhra Pradesh entertainment tax which is basically a local tax is imposed by the government but the entire proceeds are given to urban governments after retaining the collection charges amounting to Rs. 5 per unit of the collections. Similarly, from motor vehicle tax, which was formerly a local tax in India, certain percentage of the collections are made over to the urban authorities by the state governments.

### **Control over Municipal Expenditure and Fund**

The state government is empowered to regulate municipal expenditure by fixing limits on expenditure to be incurred on various items, laying down regulations and procedures for incurring expenditure. If the work involved exceeds a particular limit of expenditure, the urban bodies are required to obtain administrative and technical sanction from the competent authorities as determined by the state government. It can also require a municipal body to pay for any service. The purposes to which municipal fund can be applied are specified by the State Government through an Act and its application to any other purpose requires the government approval.

### **Control over Budget ,**

The urban bodies are required to prepare their budgets in the manner and form as determined by the state government from time to time. The budget approved by the municipality cannot be executed without the prior sanction of the state government which in turn has the power to make alterations in budgetary proposals. As mentioned in the preceding section if municipality does not agree with the modifications made, the decision of the state government is final and binding on the municipality. In some states, the budget is not subject to the sanction of the state government. In such states the approval is needed only in those cases where municipalities are indebted. Besides, prior sanction of the state

government is also needed for re-appropriation from one head to another head of the budget, that is, the money granted for education can be put to use for public works with government approval.

### **Control over Loans**

As mentioned earlier, the borrowing powers of urban bodies are regulated by the central law known as the Local Authorities Loans Act, 1914. Before approving any proposal to borrow, the state government thoroughly examines the scheme, reviews the entire financial position of the urban local body, fixes the period of repayment, determines the mode of borrowing etc. For example, the Uttar Pradesh Nagar Mahapalika Adhiniyam, 1959, lays down the following restrictions:

### **Control over Accounts and Audit**

Accounting and auditing are important instruments of state control over municipal finances. The municipal bodies maintain accounts in the form and manner as prescribed by state government. As stated earlier, in Punjab, the municipal bodies are required to follow the Punjab Municipal Accounts Code, 1930, which lays down detailed procedures for all sorts of financial transactions. Any departure from the form and manner requires the sanction of the state government. Besides, the state government may at any time direct special examination and conduct audit of municipal bodies by Auditors appointed by the state government. The main aim of the state

government control through an audit is to ensure that public money is properly utilised and no amount is paid for any expenditure without the proper authority and provisions of the funds in the budget.

### **BALWANTRAI MEHTA COMMITTEE, 1957**

The recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta came to be known as the Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report (BMCR). For the first time in the postIndependence phase, the Committee spoke the need for democratic decentralisation and its relevance for rural reconstruction. The Committee emphasised the need for statutory support to people's representations as: "Public participation in community works should be organised through statutory representative bodies" (Ministry of Panchayati Raj). In fact, the Committee asserted that without an agency at the village level to assume leadership and responsibility for community development programmes, real rural construction could not be realised. The recommendations of BMCR have been mentioned below:

i) To establish a 3 tiered/layered Panchayati Raj system vis-à-vis Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. And the role of BDO is to act on behalf of village panchayat. All the three tiers/layers should be linked together. The role of Gram Panchayat would be to execute public services and routine administrative tasks. The role of Panchayat Samiti would be to plan and

execute all development schemes, and the role of Zila Parishad would be to supervise and coordinate the Panchayat Samitis.

Genuine transfer of power and responsibility should be enabled to the functionaries so as to achieve the development targets.

Besides transfer of adequate resources to the panchayat bodies, all development and welfare schemes should be implemented through these bodies.

The Committee envisaged that adequate people's participation in community welfare projects should be channelized wherein vulnerable sections including women would get adequate space to involve.

Above all, the Committee recommended for co-opting two women members in development works related to women and children. Unlike male members who were to be elected, the Committee emphasized the relevance of women members to be co-opted. And one member each representing the Scheduled Caste/Schedule Tribe community.

### **ASHOK MEHTA COMMITTEE**

In 1977, the Government of India constituted the Ashok Mehta Committee to study the causes for poor performance of Panchayati Raj system. Unlike BMCR, the Committee recommended for a two-tier Panchayati Raj vis-à-vis Zila Parishad and Mandal Panchayat and asserted the need to have compulsory taxation powers to mobilise their own

financial resources. It also asserted the need to protect Panchayati Raj and decentralisation of powers. For perspective, the Committee stated: “the establishment of democratic bodies below the State level is an imperative from the political and sociodevelopmental perspectives. Democratic institutions with periodic elections at all levels will provide a forum for the assertion of their strength in large number by the weaker sections” (Ashok Mehta Committee Report). Indeed, it was one of the major Government appointed committees to talk about social justice perspective at the local level. For instance, it focused on inclusion and representation of weaker sections of the society into the local politics.

To sustain the momentum of rural development, technical expertise should be made available at all levels below the state. In fact, the Committee considered district as the first point of decentralisation which would come under popular supervision. It proposed that the decentralised structure needs to be big enough to cater to the technical, administrative, and financial requirements but also small enough to ensure accountability to the grievd citizens. To materialise this arrangement without any practical difficulties the Committee recommended for grouping of villages. These group of villages were referred as Mandal Panchayats with a population of 15,000 to 20,000. In fact, the recommendation regarding grouping of villages corresponded with the already enacted legislations of Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972, and West Bengal Panchayati Raj Act, 1973.



Coming to the block level (Panchayat Samitis) agencies, the Committee suggested them to function as transitional units until the Committee's recommendations get implemented at a full swing. In fact, major change in their recommendation was in the abolishment of Panchayat Samitis. One of the reasons for recommending the abolishment of Panchayat Samitis was the growing disconnection between development programmes and panchayats between 1964-1977 (Mitra, 2015)

At the village level, people would be involved in Mandal Panchayats through Village Committees. The Committee left it to the discretion of the states to make structural arrangements of Panchayati Raj, nevertheless, they emphasised on 'directly elected element' to prevail over any administrative agencies. In terms of elections, the Committee had recommended for inclusiveness wherein Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) would get adequate representation based on their population. It also suggested that the Chairman of Zila Parishad would be indirectly elected. Similarly, the President of the Mandal Panchayat would be either directly or indirectly elected, as decided by their respective states. When it comes to elections, the Committee had recommended that once in four years elections should be conducted and it should be simultaneously held.

**Composition of Zila Parishad** With regard to the composition, the Committee had recommended for six types of members vis-à-vis elected members from electoral divisions, Presidents of the Panchayat Samitis as

an ex-officio member, nominated members of large municipalities, nominees of district level co-operative federation, two women who secured the highest percent of votes in the Zila Parishad elections. In case of no women contenders, the Zila Parishad can coopt for two women. Two other co-opted members vis-à-vis one University/College teacher and another member with special interest in rural development.

**Composition of Mandal Panchayat** The Mandal Panchayat would comprise of vis-à-vis 15 members directly elected on village-cum-population basis, representatives of Farmers' Service Societies, and two women who secured highest proportion of votes in the Mandal Panchayat elections. In case of no women contenders, the Mandal Panchayat can co-opt for two women. Reservation would also be made available for SCs/STs. The President of Mandal Panchayat would be elected by the directly elected members or the post may be directly elected by the state. Besides, there would be a committee led by all women members in the Mandal Panchayat to ensure that all decisions connected to development programmes of women and children were made by women themselves.

The Committee suggested that the following functions to be decentralised: agriculture and allied sectors, health, education, communications, rural industries, marketing, welfare of backward classes, family welfare, etc. However, the Committee recommended that certain functions mentioned above can be retained by the respective state governments depending on its

significance. The Committee was quite sure that those items that transcend district boundaries/jurisdictions need not be transferred to Zila Parishads, rather, retained by the states.

### **Minister for Panchayati Raj**

Owing to the increase in complexity of development works, the Committee recommended for a periodic study of state-level departments that caters to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). To ensure efficiency to the development works undertaken, the Committee recommended for a Minister for Panchayati Raj whose task would be to ensure:

- i) enactment of Panchayati Raj legislation;
- ii) conduct of elections to PRIs;
- iii) training of elected representatives and administrative officials;
- iv) administration of all training centres that caters to the training needs of PRIs;
- v) promotion of audit of Panchayati Raj accounts;
- vi) review of Panchayati Raj activities and present a report to the respective state legislatures; and
- vii) promotion of camp training of panchayat elected members.

#### **Self Assessment Questions**

1. What are the key recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee?
2. Explain the financial administration of urban local governments.
3. Discuss the role of the state government in controlling urban local bodies.

**Unit V : Rural Local Government - Income of Rural Local Governments -  
74th Constitutional Amendment - Role of people in Panchayat Raj  
institutions.**

**Objectives**

- ❖ To analyze the composition, powers, and responsibilities of Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural governance.
- ❖ To identify and evaluate the various sources of income that fund the activities of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zilla Parishads.

## **Rural Local Government**

The concept of local Government is based on the principle of subsidiarity because it extends complements and discloses the principle of separation of powers. A common interpretation is that the decentralised Government is closer to the people and is better suited to respond to the preferences or needs of its citizens in certain subject matters. As the Local Government is a state subject, Article 243G of the Indian Constitution mandates that the Legislature of a State may by law endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of Local Self - Government. Accordingly, following broad responsibilities have been entrusted to the Panchayats at the appropriate level for the subject matters specified in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA): i) The preparation of plans for economic development and social justice; and ii) The implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the XIth schedule.

Rural Local Government bodies in India, unlike in the urban areas, are organically linked at the village, block and district levels. Hence, the

responsibilities are also distributed among them. The three-tier system owes its genesis to the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, which was constituted in 1957 to strengthen the Panchayat system to take over the entire general administration and development of the district or the sub division, excluding functions such as law and order, administration of justice and selected functions pertaining to revenue administration. Thus, Panchayati Raj Institutions, i.e. Gram Panchayat (GP), Block Panchayat and District Panchayat, are envisaged to deliver governance. In this Unit, we will focus on the structure, role and responsibilities of the Rural Local Government.

#### **RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT: VILLAGE LEVEL**

Democratic decentralisation is manifested in the establishment of the Panchayats. Under the 73rd CAA, the GP has a primary role to play in the socio-economic development of the Panchayat area.

**i) Structure** GP is an elected body, which is responsible for making decisions such as approving plans and budgets, implementation of programmes and reviewing their progress. It consists of the Panchayat members (elected from each ward in the village) and the Sarpanch. It is accountable to the Gram Sabha, which is an assembly of all the registered voters of that GP. The Sarpanch/ President of the GP is its executive head. He convenes and presides over the meetings of the Gram Panchayat. All the elected representatives of the GP with the help of functionaries of

various line departments, and Panchayat functionaries collectively deal with the various aspects of the local development such as public health, livelihood generation, education, provision of drinking water, sanitation etc.

### **Standing Committees of the Panchayats**

The states through statutory enactments or rules have provided for the constitution of various standing committees, which are depicted in table 8.1 (in

Rajasthan) to enable them to pay focused attention to the specific subject matters. For example, Village Education Committee looks into all education-related matters at the Panchayat level. The Standing committees may also be formed, if a programme of Union Government guides so. For example, Village Water and Sanitation Committee has been constituted in each Panchayat for the implementation of Swachh Bharat Mission.

### **Functionaries**

GPs are assisted by two types of employees & own employees and employees of various line departments. In some states, the State Government has provided them more employees whereas, in some, one finds only a skeleton staff. For example, in Karnataka, the GPs have one Panchayat Development Officer (PDO), one Secretary and one Accounts Assistant, whereas in Rajasthan there is only one Village Development Officer and one Assistant. The village-level Officer is supposed to keep

records of the GP standing committees, other committees, Gram Sabha, and Ward Sabha. They are also supposed to coordinate the preparation of the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP). They submit monthly accounts to the GP. The Secretary normally assists the PDO in general administration. The GPs may also hire contractual staff as per requirement, depending on the resource availability.

## **ii) Role and Responsibilities of the Gram Panchayat**

The role and responsibilities of Panchayats have seen tremendous changes over the years. Village Panchayats were envisioned as units of self-Government when the Constitution was framed. In pursuance to that, they were given responsibility for the socio-economic transformation of village life through people's own democratic and cooperative organisations with the Government providing technical services, supply and credit under the Community Development Programme (CDP), which was launched on October 2, that is on birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. The programme was based on the experiences within the country and abroad, the recommendations of the Fiscal Commission, and the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee, 1952. The CDP had laid emphasis on the all-around development of the whole community with special emphasis on weaker and underprivileged sections through the use of area development, selfhelp and integrated approaches. However, it could bring neither the expected changes in improving the conditions of rural masses nor much



development in the area of agriculture. The reasons were attributed to it not becoming a people's programme. The people did not get a sense of ownership. Moreover, the untrained extension workers lacked coordination. Additionally, there was a lack of functional responsibility at the block level that led to a good deal of confusion and inter-departmental jealousy.

### **RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT: BLOCK LEVEL**

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee envisaged Panchayat Samitis (PSs) at the block level to look into the functions in an area that is "large enough for functions which the Gram Panchayat cannot perform and yet small enough to attract the interest and services of residents". They are also known as Block Panchayats (BPs). The BP/PS is responsible for integrating and prioritising the GPDP and helping in the implementation of those plans.

#### **Structure**

All the Panchayats in the block are represented in the PS. A PS, typically consists of (i) directly elected members from the territorial constituencies, (ii) all members of the Legislative Assembly of the State representing constituencies which comprise wholly or partly the BP area, and (iii) chairpersons of all the Panchayats falling within the PS. It functions as a link between the Gram Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat. The principal

function of the Panchayat Samiti is to coordinate the activities of the various Panchayats within its jurisdiction. It may also advise the Panchayats on measures for improving functioning of the Panchayats. The President of the BP has prime responsibility for its effective functioning. For example, in West Bengal, it is the Sabhapati who shoulders all the administrative and financial responsibilities of the Panchayat Samiti. It is her/his duty to maintain and preserve all the important documents and necessary papers of the Samiti. The Sabhapati may have to discharge any other special duty as well that the State Government may entrust. The President also convenes and presides over the meetings of the PS.

### **Standing Committees of the Block Panchayats**

The BP also functions through various standing committees. However, the number varies in states. For example, West Bengal has provided for 10 Standing Committees at the Samiti level: Economic Development and Planning• Public Health and Environment• Public Works and Transportation• Agriculture, Irrigation and Cooperative• Education, Culture, Information and Sports• Women and Child Development, and Social Welfare• Forest and Land Reforms• Fisheries and Animal Husbandry• Food and Public Distribution• Cottage Industry, Electricity and Non-conventional Power.• Rajasthan has provided for 5 standing committees, with the option to the BP to constitute an additional one, if deemed necessary.

## **Functionaries**

The Block Development Officer and the officers of various line departments at the block level provide the necessary support to the Panchayat Samiti in all matters relating to planning, execution and administration of development work.

**Role and Responsibilities of Block Panchayats** Since their inception, they had limited powers and resources and the essential idea that all developmental activities should flow only through the BPs lost ground. Moreover, important schemes like Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and Institute for Transportation and Development Policy (ITDP) were not brought within the purview of the elected institutions even in states like Maharashtra and Gujarat, where effective financial decentralisation had taken place. Centralising tendencies seen in due course resulted in existence of these bodies without adequate functions and authority. The position of these institutions was further weakened due to the creation of a large number of parastatals, which were assigned many other functions legitimately envisaged in the domain of PRIs (Second ARC, 2007).

**Block Panchayat Development Plan** In the latest scheme, the PSs are responsible for the preparation of the Block Panchayat Development Plan (BPDP) through a participatory, inclusive and transparent process with a modified bottom-up approach. The PSs need to assess the development

needs by consolidating gaps ascertained in the GPDPs through the Mission Antyodaya data. The BPDP process, just like the GPDP, envisages need based planning, supplementing the GPDPs. Further, it would also strive to contribute to national commitments e.g. SDGs and national priorities. Those projects and activities, which are to be implemented in more than one GP area and which should be implemented at the BP level because of its higher institutional capacity and technical competence, are to be considered by the BP for the BPDP. The plan activities of the line departments operating at the BP level have also to be integrated into the BPDP, although the same may be implemented by the line departments themselves.

## **RURAL LOCAL GOVERNMENT: DISTRICT LEVEL**

Zilla Parishad is the third tier of the Panchayati Raj system, which functions at the district levels in all states.

### **Structure**

A Zilla Parishad (ZP) or District Panchayat (DP) normally consists of - (i) directly elected members from as many territorial constituencies, (ii) all members of the Lok Sabha and of the State Legislative Assembly representing constituencies which comprise wholly or partly the Zilla Parishad area, (iii) all members of the Rajya Sabha registered as electors

within the Zilla Parishad area, and (iv) chairpersons of all the PSs falling within the Zilla Parishad area.

### **Standing Committees of the District Panchayats**

Just like the GPs and PSs, the ZPs also constitute the standing committees. In this regard, rules are provided by the respective State Government. The nature of the standing committees as well as their number differ from State to State. For example, Kolar Zilla Panchayat in Karnataka has the following Standing Committees:

i) **General Standing Committee** It performs functions relating to the establishment matters; and communications, buildings, rural housing, village extensions, relief against the natural calamities and allied matters and all miscellaneous residuary matters.

#### **ii) Finance, Audit and Planning Committee**

It looks into: a) finances of the Zilla Panchayat, framing of budgets, scrutinising proposals for an increase of revenue, examination of receipts and expenditure statements, consideration of all proposals affecting the finances of the Zilla Panchayat and general supervisions of the revenue and expenditure of the Zilla Panchayat; and

b) the Plan priorities, allocation of outlays to developments, horizontal and vertical linkages, implementation of the guidelines issued by

the State or Union Government, regular review of planned programmes, evaluation of important programmes and small saving schemes.

### **iii) Social Justice Committee**

It performs the functions relating to: a) promotion of educational, economic, social, cultural and other interests of the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes and Backward Classes; b) protecting them from social injustice and all other forms of exploitation; c) amelioration of the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes and Backward Classes.

### **iv) Educational and Health Committee**

a) The Committee is in-charge of all educational activities of the Zilla Panchayat; b) undertakes the planning of education in the district within the framework of the National Policy, and the National and State plans; c) surveys and evaluates the educational activities of the Zilla Panchayat; d) performs such other duties pertaining to education, adult literacy and cultural activities .

Zilla Panchayat may assign to it; and e) looks into health services, hospitals, water supply, family welfare and other allied matters.

### **Role and Responsibilities of the Zilla Parishad**

The preparation of the District Panchayat Development Plan (DPDP) for rural areas is a time-bound process. It is an essential part of a

chain of plans to be prepared in cascading mode. It is to be prepared after the completion of GPDPs by the GP and Block Panchayat Development Plan by the PS, in their respective area. As per the guidelines, it should provide building blocks to Draft the DPDP to be prepared by the District Planning Committee for the district as a whole. The DPDP should ideally match with people's needs, basic services and their aspirations, prioritised in accordance with the available resources. It should be prepared through a participatory, inclusive and transparent process (GoI, 2021). After the preparation and approval of GPDPs and BPDPs at GP and PS levels respectively, they are to be forwarded to the DP. Those projects and activities, which are to be implemented in more than one GP area but cannot be accommodated in the BPDP and also those projects and activities, which are to be implemented in more than one block area but cannot be included in the BPDP for want of technical competencies or lack of resources, are to be considered by the DP for inclusion in the DPDP. Besides, the Plan would include those activities, which the DP needs to implement following the principles of subsidiarity

#### **74th Constitutional Amendment and the Role of People in Panchayat Raj Institutions**

The **74th Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992** established a framework for urban local governance by introducing **Part IX-A** and **Schedule 12** to the Indian Constitution. It focuses on the creation of Municipalities and

their role in urban governance, while empowering local bodies to function effectively as self-governing institutions.

### **Key Provisions of the 74th Amendment:**

#### **1. Formation of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs):**

- Three types of municipalities were introduced:
  - **Nagar Panchayat** (for transitional areas)
  - **Municipal Council** (for smaller urban areas)
  - **Municipal Corporation** (for larger urban areas)

#### **2. Composition of Municipalities:**

- Members are directly elected by the people.
- Seats are reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and women (not less than one-third of the total seats).

#### **3. Duration of Municipalities:**

- The tenure is **5 years**.
- Elections must be conducted before the expiration of the term or within 6 months in case of dissolution.

#### **4. Powers and Functions:**

- The 12th Schedule contains **18 functional items** that municipalities are responsible for, including:
  - Urban planning



- Regulation of land use
- Water supply, sanitation, and waste management
- Public health and education

### **Role of People in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)**

Though the 74th Amendment primarily deals with urban governance, **Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs)**, governed by the **73rd Amendment (1992)**, have a similar framework for rural local governance. The role of people in PRIs is vital in the following ways:

#### **1. Direct Participation in Elections:**

- People elect their representatives at different levels:
  - Gram Panchayat (Village level)
  - Panchayat Samiti (Block level)
  - Zilla Parishad (District level)

#### **2. Participatory Governance:**

- **Gram Sabha:** The most important forum for direct democracy, where the electorate participates in decision-making, approving plans, and monitoring the activities of the Panchayat.

- **Social Audits:** People have the right to monitor and audit the developmental programs and funds allocated for village development.
3. **Accountability and Transparency:**
- People ensure that Panchayats function transparently and remain accountable to their needs by attending Gram Sabha meetings and voicing their concerns.
4. **Role in Development Planning:**
- Villagers contribute to the preparation and implementation of local development plans, ensuring that the schemes address the actual needs of the community.
5. **Ensuring Inclusivity:**
- By electing representatives from marginalized sections and ensuring women's participation, people promote inclusive governance in PRIs.

**Conclusion:**

The 74th Amendment has strengthened democratic governance at the grassroots level by empowering municipalities, while the role of people in Panchayat Raj Institutions ensures participatory democracy and accountability in rural governance. Through direct elections, Gram Sabha

participation, and community involvement, people play a significant role in shaping the development and governance of their local areas.

**Self Assessment questions**

1. List the main sources of income for rural local governments.
2. Explain the role of people in Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs).
3. What are the key provisions of the 74th Constitutional Amendment?