

7. PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM

The realization that peoples' participation is crucial for successful implementation of programmes like CD and NES, was brought to sharp focus through the report of the team for the study of Community Projects and National Extension Service by Balvantray G.Mehta (1957). The Committee observed that one of the least successful aspects of CD and NES work is its attempt to evoke popular initiative and recommended democratic decentralization.

Democratic Decentralisation

The word 'democracy' is derived from the Greek 'demos' means 'the people'; 'cracy' means 'rule of'. It is the 'rule of people'. It is governance of the people, by the people, for the people. The rule by majority is an important feature of this programme.

Decentralisation means devolution of central authority among local units close to the areas served. Where authority devolves by this process on people's institution, it is 'democratic decentralisation'.

The State of Madras tried this as a pilot project as early as 1957. Based on the success in this State it was Rajasthan which became the pioneer to bring the whole state under democratic decentralisation on Oct. 2, 1959.

Meaning - Panchayat Raj

The concept 'democratic decentralisation' was not easily understood by the people. Therefore, as decided by the then Prime Minister the three-tier administration was introduced in the name of "Panchayat Raj". Panchayat Raj means the system of Government. Horizontally it is a network of village panchayats. Vertically, it is an organic growth of panchayat rising upto national level.

Panchayat Raj was easily accepted because it meant administration by mutual consultation, consent and consensus. It fitted closely into the ancient cultural patterns in India.

Three tiers of Panchayat Raj

The Gram Panchayat: The first formal democratic institution under the directive principle in the Indian constitution is the Gram Panchayat or Panchayat. It is the primary unit of local self-

government. Panchayat is a cabinet of the village elders, directly elected by the adult citizens of the village.

Gram Panchayats are constituted considering their income, population and area. The income varies from mere Rs.500/- kper annum to more than Rs.2.00 lakhs. The population varies from 500 to 25,000. The panchayat membership varies from 5 to 17. There is provision for reservation of seats for women and SC and STs. The panchayat has a tenure of five years and is directly elected. The meeting is to be convened atleast once in six months. It has income through taxes to perform its functions. The main functions of Panchayats are:

- (i) representative function, where the main role is to voice and represent the opinion;
- (ii) regulatory and administrative functions, which consists of regulating the conduct of individuals and institutions and also collection of taxes;
- (iii) service or developmental function, such as promotion of education, health, agriculture, etc.

The Panchayat Samithi or Panchayat Union: This is the second tier of the administration at Block level. It consists of Panchayat Union Chairman, presidents of all panchayats in the area, local MLAs, MLCs, MPs etc., with the right to vote, but not to hold office and nominated persons. Reservation and cooperation are given for women, SCs and STs and persons with experience in administration and public life.

Block Development Officer is appointed by the Government. He functions as the leader of the Block.

Functions of the Block

- (1) It has to instill among people within its jurisdiction a spirit of self-help and initiative and work for raising the standard of living;
- (2) It has to support for the implementation of development programmes;
- (3) It has the welfare and development activities in the fields of agriculture, animal husbandry, health, sanitation, elementary education, cottage industries and social.
- (4) It has to use the village housing project funds and loans.

District Development Council (Zila Parishad)

This is the third tier of Panchayat Raj functioning at district level. The members are all Panchayat Union Chairman, District Collector, MLAs, MLCs, MPs of the district with right to vote but not to hold office and women, SC, ST and persons interested in rural development are also given representation. District Collector leads the work with the help of District Development Officers.

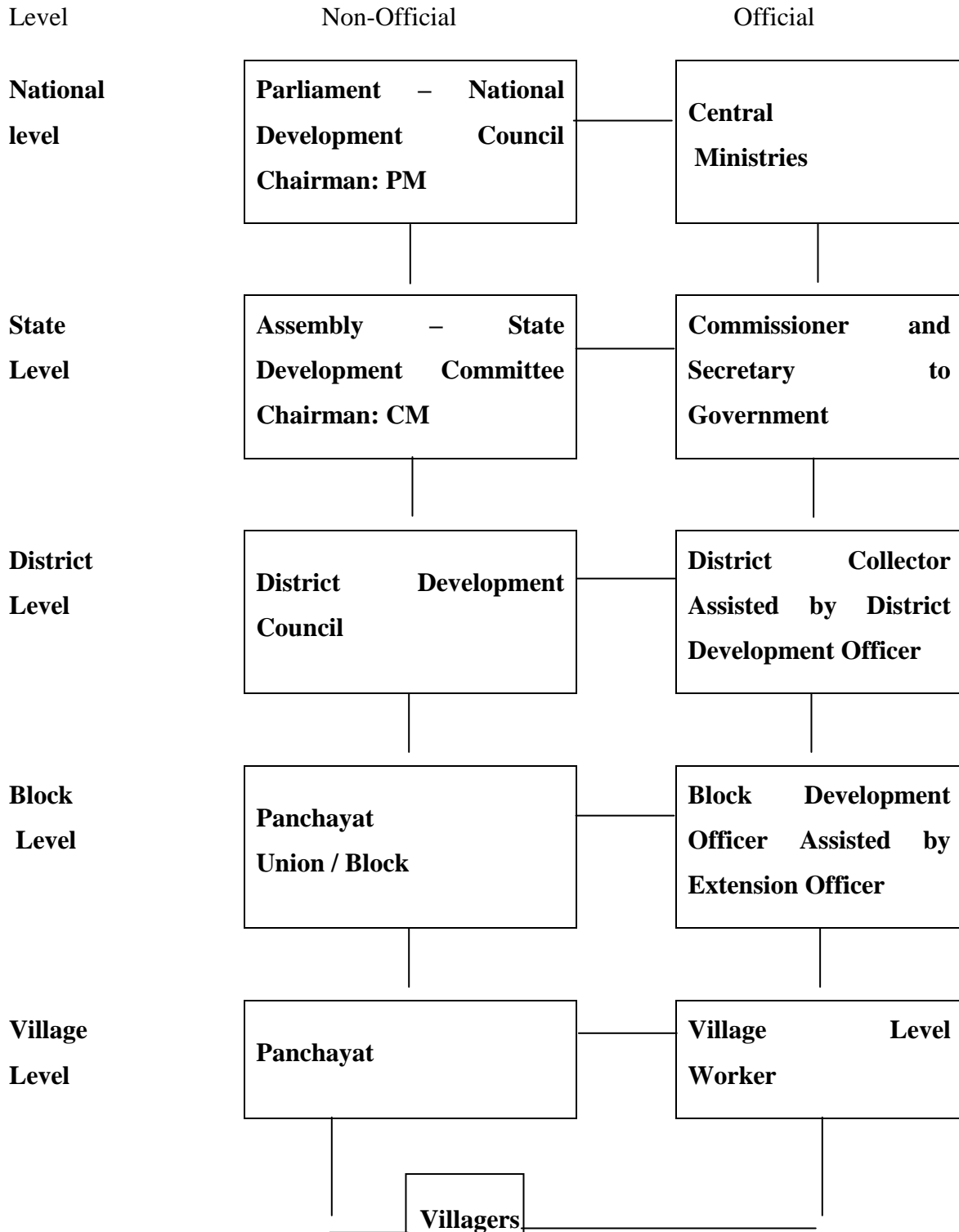
Functions

It works as advisory body for blocks. It approves budget and plan of blocks. It allots funds to the blocks. It approves budget and plan of blocks. It allots funds to the blocks. Secondary education is the responsibility of this council. It should advise Government in all matters relating to rural development in the district. It has to review the results achieved under various items in all the blocks.

The functions of Panchayat Raj Institutions can be summarised as below:

	Panchayat		Panchayat Union		District Development Council
1.	Sanitation, conservation and water supply	1.	Administration of blocks	1.	Approval of panchayat union budget
2.	Construction and maintenance of roads, bridges, drains etc.	2.	Execution of all programmes under CDP	2.	Distribution of funds of Panchayat Union
3.	Promotion of agricultural cooperative, cottage industries etc.	3.	Approval of panchayat budget	3.	Coordinating the plans and supervising it
		4.	Management of elementary schools.	4.	Advise the Government for all the district rural development works
		5.	Promotion of agriculture, cottage industries etc.	5.	Secondary education

Extension Organisation in Panchayat Raj Set-up



Some special features and advantages of Democratic Decentralisation

- a) Previously the sanction of most of the works and schemes was invested in the hands of officials at higher levels. As a result of devolution of these powers, panchayat samithis and their standing committees can themselves now sanction most of the schemes in the overall programme of community development. Government are also advancing loans to the panchayat samithis so that they in turn pass them on to panchayats according to needs and the latter may sanction to individuals and institutions.
- b) Most of the functions which were hitherto implemented by the Government through the Heads of Departments are now performed by and under the administrative control of the Panchayat Samithis. Thus, there is a single agency at Block level for all development programmes.
- c) The power and functions of the District Boards are allocated among the parishads and the samithis, which are within the reach of rural people.
- d) Panchayat samithis have all the technical assistance required at the block level itself.
- e) Elementary education is now the sole responsibility of the panchayat samithis.
- f) Rural medical institutions in the Block are under the administrative control of the panchayat samithis.
- g) Members of the panchayat samithis have the right to inspect institutions or works in the Block with a view to ensure efficient working and execution and draw the attention of the executive to any defects.
- h) All state aid and assistance from the All India Boards for various non-official organisations in the Blocks are routed through the samithis.
- i) Personnel functioning within the Block are pooled together so that they function in a coordinated way under the samithis.

- j) The responsibility for maintenance of minor irrigation works which was hitherto vested with Collectors and the Public Workers Department belongs to samithis now.
- k) Panchayat samithis provide financial and technical assistance and supervision to panchayats.
- l) Previously at village, block and district levels, especially the later two levels there were advisory bodies constituted by various departments. Now the functions of all these different advisory bodies are performed by the three statutory bodies and their standing committees.
- m) Block plans will be based on village plans and district plans on block plans, and the district plans will be made the state plans. Thus the state plans will be built up from the village panchayat upwards. This will make out plans truly reflect needs of the people.
- n) Panchayats and panchayat samithis have better finances.
- o) The panchayat samithis are given power to levy surcharges on taxes levied by the panchayats. This will help the panchayat samithis to build up their resources.
- p) The main function of the popular institutions will be planning and execution of all schemes of rural development on the twin principles of self-help and mutual co-operation.

Role of Officials: No doubt that any programme is peoples' programme. Local leaders knew the people and know the local needs and potentialities. However, the officials are the most competent persons to judge what is good for people. So, their roles are:

1. to identify the felt needs of the people.
2. To fix priorities for peoples' needs, with their assistance;
3. To list out the local resources available;
4. To harness available and potential resources;
5. To encourage peoples' involvement in programmes;
6. To develop a community outlook among the people;
7. To educate the people to think in terms of planned development;

8. To mobilise required resources
9. To act as SMS at the time of programme development and implementation; and
10. To assist people in evaluating their progress.

Role of Non-officials

- 1) to offer suggestion for block development;
- 2) to arrange priorities for maximum advantage within minimum period of time.
- 3) To organise work voluntarily;
- 4) To raise additional resources, if necessary;
- 5) To execute the plan;
- 6) To assist the official, in evaluating the progress of the programme etc.

Sources of Income for Panchayat Raj Institutions

The main source of income is from Government grants. Some income are also derived from local taxes on property and profession or trade, etc. Some revenue kare also accrued from surcharges or cesses on land revenue, water rates, etc. Income are also received from fees for local services, and rent or income from owned land and property. On the whole most of the Institutions have meagre incomes from taxes and other local resources. They are mostly depending upon the Government grants.

Salient Features of Panchayat Raj

Achievements

- (1) Panchayat raj system gave significant progress in the fields of primary and secondary education, communication, agricultural extension, cooperation, health, etc.
- (2) People could get drinking water. In some places people had protected water supply. Village streets, electric light provision, village sanitation, etc., had enough resources.
- (3) Rural awakening was brought up among rural people, as a result villagers became conscious of their rights and improved their standard of living.

Shortcomings and failure

- (1) Panchayat raj representative had a feeling that there is a dilution of their authorities and responsibilities in actual functioning.
- (2) There were cases which utilised directly the services of block level technical staff without involving the non-official.
- (3) Frequent transfer of staff gave poor image to the bodies.
- (4) Failure to mobilise resources to the extent necessary.