

Panchayati Raj Institutions



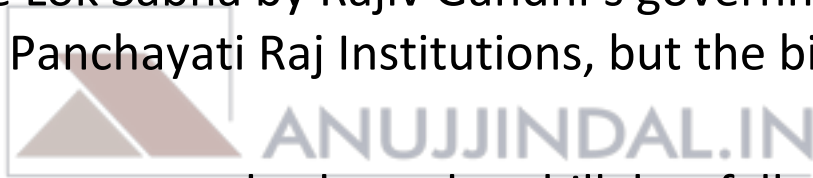
Panchayati Raj Institutions

- Panchayati Raj is a system of rural local self-government in India.
- It has been established in all the states of India by the acts of the state legislature to build democracy at the grass root level.
- It is entrusted with rural development and was constitutionalized through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992.
- Constitution makers included a provision for Panchayats in part IV of our constitution (directive principles of state policy).
- Art. 40 confers the responsibility upon State to take steps to organise Village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.

- Its formal organisation and structure was firstly recommended by Balwant Rai committee,1957 (Committee to examine the Community Development Programme,1952).
- The Committee, in its report in November 1957, recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralisation', which ultimately came to be known as Panchayati Raj.
- It recommended for a three tier system at village, block and district level and it also recommended for direct election of village level panchayat.
- Rajasthan was the first state to establish Panchayati Raj at it started from Nagaur district on October 2, 1959.

- Ashok Mehta Committee on Panchayati Raj was appointed in December 1977 and in August 1978 submitted its report with various recommendations to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj system in the country.
- Its major recommendation were two tier system of panchayat, regular social audit, representation of political parties at all level of panchayat elections, provisions for regular election, reservation to SCs/STs in panchayats and a minister for panchayati raj in state council of ministers.
- G V K Rao Committee appointed in 1985 again recommended some measures to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions.

- LM Singhvi Committee appointed in 1986 first time recommended for the constitutional status of Panchayati Raj institutions and it also suggested for constitutional provisions to ensure regular, free and fair elections to the Panchayati Raj Bodies.
- In response to the recommendations of LM Singhvi committee, a bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Rajiv Gandhi's government in July 1989 to constitutionalize Panchayati Raj Institutions, but the bill was not passed in Rajya Sabha.
- The V P Singh government also brought a bill, but fall of the government resulted in lapse of the bill. After this P V Narashima Rao's government introduced a bill for this purpose in Lok Sabha in September, 1991 and the bill finally emerged as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 and came into force on 24th April, 1993.



Features of 73rd Amendment Act 1992

- It added a new part-IX to the Constitution.
- It also added a new XI schedule containing list of 29 functional items for Panchyats (not all are binding on states to devolve).
- Organization of Gram Sabhas;
- Creation of a three-tier Panchayati Raj Structure at the District (Zila), Block and Village levels;
- Almost all posts, at all levels to be filled by direct elections;
- Minimum age for contesting elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions be twenty one years;
- The post of Chairman at the District and Block levels should be filled by indirect election;

- There should be reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes in Panchayats, in proportion to their population, and for women in Panchayats up to one-third seats;
- State Election Commission to be set up in each State to conduct elections to Panchayati Raj institutions;
- The tenure of Panchayati Raj institutions is five years, if dissolved earlier, fresh elections to be held within six months; and
- a State Finance Commission is to be set up in each State every five years.

Composition of Panchayats

- Three- tier structure based on direct elections at all the three tiers: village, intermediate and district.
- Exemption from the intermediate tier is given to the small States having less than 20 lakhs population. (can do away with intermediate level)
- All members in a panchayat are directly elected.
- The normal term of a Panchayat is five years. If a Panchayat is dissolved earlier, elections are held within six months.
- The middle-level panchayats are generally known as Panchayat Samitis. Provisions have been made for the inclusion of the chairpersons of the village panchayats in the block and district level panchayats.

- Sarpanchs of Gram Panchayats are ex-officio members of Panchayat Samitis.
- Chairpersons of Panchayat Samitis are, elected indirectly- by and from amongst the elected members thereof.
- Zila Parishad or district Panchayat is the uppermost tier of the Panchayati Raj system.
- This institution has some directly elected members whose number differs from State to State as it is also based on population. Chairpersons of Panchayat Samitis are ex-officio members of Zila Parishads.
- Members of Parliament, Legislative Assemblies and Councils belonging to the districts are also nominated members of Zila Parishads.