

# Panchayati Raj System in India – An Overview

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**Abstract:** The implementation of panchayati raj systems during the 1990s has significantly accelerated the process of decentralization and has a stronger impact on India's governance structure. The transformation of the traditional community with the development of democracy has always been accompanied by conflicts. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment granted the panchayats local self-government status in 1992; they are used to ensure that social fairness and economic progress are carried out. These organizations are excited to improve infrastructure amenities and give the weaker groups permission to start the development process in rural India. The idea of panchayati raj is periodically mixed with a political goal in modern times for tactical and financial reasons. The effectiveness of these institutions is hampered by factors like casteism, factionalism, and rivalry. The failure to recognize these difficulties and shortcomings has resulted in complications during implementation. The paper provides a summary of this intuition's history, elements, and problems. Additionally, it seeks to define the roles played by women in the patriarchal society that now exists and the grave danger that this society poses to democracy itself. Our nation's founding father actually had a vision of demonstrating the essence of democracy through the power of the people.

**Keywords:** panchayati raj, decentralization, economic progress, democracy, casteism.

## 1. Introduction

How did Abraham Lincoln view democracy? It is a government "Of the people, by the people, and for the people," to use the popular saying. Every everyone in a democracy, from educated professionals in urban areas to illiterate farmers in rural areas, should be a part of this system. Every voter should have the opportunity to choose their own representatives from that region, who would then oversee the issues with their expertise. The country's largest entities cannot all be under the control of the central government. As a result, the percolation of self-rule to the grassroots level, which results in more effective decision-making and more accountability, is one of the most crucial qualities of a good representative democracy. In order to manage the affairs of India's villages and cities, our Constitution calls for the creation of panchayats, municipalities, and cooperative organizations. A three-tiered Indian administration structure for rural development is called Panchayati Raj. Indian districts, zones, and villages are intended to establish local self-government under the Panchayati Raj system. One of the main objectives of Panchayati Raj is rural development, which has been

accomplished in all Indian states with the exception of Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram, as well as in all Union Territories with the exception of Delhi and a few other locations. The scheduled areas and tribal lands in the states are two examples of these areas. Hilly region in Manipur with a district council. The Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council is located in Darjeeling, West Bengal. On the other hand, the Legislature is free to expand Part IX to some of the aforementioned exceptions. The Constitution grants the Parliament the power to apply Part IX laws to the Scheduled Areas mentioned above. The legislatures of Nagaland, Meghalaya, and Mizoram (apart from the Scheduled and tribal territories) may also decide to extend Part IX [2] to those three states. Because these primarily tribal regions frequently had their own governance methods or had been provided with other unique systems for their advantage, Scheduled Communities were exempt from Part IX. The tribes, however, become more and more exposed as a result of the loss of many of their forests, minerals, rivers, and other natural resources to construction projects. They therefore required a solid system of self-government.

## 2. Panchayati Raj

The foundation of Indian villages has been the panchayat since the dawn of written history. With the implementation of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to encourage public engagement in rural rehabilitation, Gandhiji's vision of every village as a republic has come true. The word "panchayat," which means "institution five," is found in the Mahabharata's Santi parva. It is surprising that in the entire system of self-government, Panchayat, whether in the sense of a village council or a group of five wise people who are members of a self-governing body and are asked for advice on matters pertaining to that body, does not appear in any source related to this time period (Panchavanthaiyah) other than a sloka from the Mahabharata. An entry for "Panchayat" in a dictionary created by Raghuvira references the term "Panchamandali," which was discovered in a Chandra Gupta II-era sanchi stone inscription. The phrases Kula, Gana, Jati, Puga, Vrata, Sreni Sangha, Naigama, Samuhava, Sambhuya-Samuttahana Parishat, and Carana are cited by Radha Kumud Mookerji as examples of well-known Local bodies that existed in the past. This list, which is thorough enough to contain several lesser-known terms, does not include the phrase "Panchayat." The ancient literature on local government in India contains a wealth of

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information that demonstrates the pivotal role that panchayats played in the affairs of the communities there.

Altekar makes reference to the Yajnavalkya Smriti reservation, which states that village council decisions are properly endowed with judicial authority. The following is how the Buddhist script writers give a vivid account of the rural Panchayats: “Neither the village headman nor the village accountant exercised their sweet will on the local community. The Vedic Sabha was a village social club and village council; at its meetings, the members discussed social issues, engaged in indoor games, and also conducted business of the village government. This shows that they were guided in their administration by the opinion of the village public, which manifested itself through the village elders. The Jatakas also tell us that in those days, peasants handled all of their business on their own. They make no mention of any regular councils or standing committees formed specifically for this purpose. Normally, the headman took the initiative, but if he acted inexplicably or in violation of the region’s or realm’s accepted conventions, the village elders might rectify the situation by calling his error to his attention. Village councils made up of a few elders used to plan public works projects and recreational activities, resolve conflicts among local citizens, and serve as trustees for minors’ property during the Mouryan period. However, they had not developed the structure to carry out the duties of typical councils. The Artha Sastra mentions about the organizations of village elders who acted as trustees and not any village council or its sub-committee [3].

The village committees are like miniature republics with everything they need and are essentially autonomous of any international contacts. They appear to endure when nothing else does. Dynasty after dynasty falls, revolution follows revolution, but the village communities each exist as a tiny independent state. Additionally, they made a greater contribution than any other institution to the preservation of India through all the revolutions and upheavals that they had to endure, and they did it in a way that was highly beneficial to their happiness and the enjoyment of a significant amount of freedom and independence.

The destruction of these organizations during the British era is explained in more detail in the following passage from the village Panchayat Committee report of the Indian National Congress (1954), which reads, “The excessive greed of East India Company caused slow but steady disintegration of those village Panchayats. The intentional implementation of landlordism and the Ryothwari system as opposed to the Mauzawari or village tenure system delivered the village committee’s corporate life a fatal blow. By eradicating the long-standing customs of village Panchayats and attempting to replace them with their officers, whose only motivation was to appease the foreign rulers by taking advantage of the Indian populace to the fullest extent, the British rulers inflicted the most harm to this nation. The importance of village Panchayats and their revival were emphasized by leaders during the Independence movement, including Gandhiji. Gandhiji emphasized that the Panchayats should be made in charge of the village’s overall development, meaning they should be

concerned with the community’s physical, mental, and moral development as well as its socioeconomic advancement. If the Panchayats do not closely resemble this image today, we will need to make serious efforts to change it.

The institution of Panchayats, along with other local bodies, underwent a profound alteration after Independence. The Panchayats were given a new responsibility in the local development process. Through the course of our nation’s history, the village Panchayats were essential to the functioning of the administrative system. Given the extensive rural development initiatives carried out by both the state and federal governments under various strategies, such as the Integrated Rural Development Program (IRDP), the significance of these organizations has increased both recently and in the past. For the purpose of eradicating rural poverty, there are programs like the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY), Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWACRA), Velugu Scheme, and Indiramma Scheme.

### 3. Panchayati Raj System in India

During the Vedic period in ancient India, Panchayat Raj was in place and functioning well because individuals were doing their private and official obligations in accordance with “Dharma.” Due to the people’s few desires, their way of life was tranquil and fruitful. In the Middle Ages, Panchayat Raj became less important as dictatorial feudal systems took control of local affairs. They only ever thought about themselves and never gave a thought to the masses. There were attempts to establish local government throughout the British era. An crucial turning point in India’s history of local self-government occurred in the year 1882. In order to educate the populace about politics and encourage their participation in the democratic process at the local level, Lord Rippon passed his renowned resolution supporting the progressive enlargement of local self-government during this year. The resolution gave particular attention to the expansion of non-official and elected members in local authorities. Rippon, however, supported bolstering regional organizations at the district and taluka levels. As a result, the resolution did not call for the resurrection of the village Panchayat system or any significant changes to it.

As a result, a two-tiered government with District Boards at the district level and Taluka Boards at the Taluka level was created as a result of the decision. Following this, efforts were made to enhance local governments through Acts. Following Independence, the Panchayat Raj System was incorporated into the Purna Swaraj and Gram Swaraj ideologies that the Nationalist leaders used to achieve Independence from foreign rule. Panchayat Raj was given momentum in the fight for independence by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, who saw it as inevitable, practical, and patriotic. As a result, it joined the nationalist movement. Panchayats were a significant topic after independence in the course of constituent assembly debates.

During these discussions, several viewpoints regarding the Panchayats were presented. Dr. Ambedkar made the observation that “the love of the Intellectual Indians for the village community is of course infinite if not pathetic” during

his address introducing the draft Constitution. I believe that India has been destroyed by these tiny republics. Describe a village. It is nothing more than a geographical disaster brought on by ignorance, prejudice, and communalism. I'm pleased that the proposed constitution has chosen the individual above the village as its basic unit. A prominent member of the constituent assembly named H.V. Kamath criticized Ambedkar's treatment of local Panchayats and vehemently argued in favor of the village's improvement through the efforts of the village Panchayat.

Professor N.G. Ranga makes the following statement in the same context: "I am quite disappointed that Dr. Ambedkar should have spoken what he has said regarding the village Panchayats. I would like to remind the house, Sir, of the importance of having as many political institutions as possible so that our villages can gain as much experience as possible with democratic institutions and fulfill their obligations through adult suffrage in the new democracy that we are going to establish. Without this, our nation's rural Panchayats would not exist. How would the general populace be able to participate as they ought to in our democracy?"

The establishment of local organizations was nevertheless left to a general directive found in Article 40 of the Constitution for the following terms: "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 unit of self-government." The true potential of Article 40 actually lies in its significant concomitant mandate that Panchayats should be given "such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government," which is a significant directive to the Indian State at all levels as part of Directive Principles of State Policy.

The Panchayati Raj system of local self-government in India strives to advance grassroots democracy and give rural communities more control. Three layers of elected bodies—at the village, intermediate (block), and district levels—make up this system. Here is a quick summary:

**Town Panchayat:** Village Panchayats, the lowest level of government, are in charge of a single village or a group of villages. They are in charge of administration and local development.

The next level is the Intermediate Panchayat, which includes a collection of villages included inside a block or taluka. At this level, it coordinates development efforts.

District Panchayats are in charge of several blocks within a district and are the highest level of government. They assign funds for development and take on a supervisory role.

To decentralize authority and decision-making and give local people a say in local governance, the Panchayati Raj system was established. To ensure democratic accountability, elections are held on a regular basis to choose representatives at each level.

Please be aware that as Panchayati Raj is a state-level issue and different states have implemented the system in different ways, the precise structure and roles may alter from state to state in India [4].

#### 4. Provision of Panchayati Raj

In the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992 was passed to enhance the panchayat system in villages in order to establish democratic institutions at the local level. The overall objective is to make panchayats prosperous local government and self-governance organizations in rural areas so they can provide services to the throngs of millions of residents that dwell there. The Amendment is important historically because it supports a robust, efficient local administration. Programs for rural development are expected to be executed more swiftly as a result. Up to the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution was adopted, the panchayat system operated inconsistently and was only based on state law. By ensuring that it is governed by the law, the constitutional amendment seeks to improve the system [5].

#### 5. Significance of Panchayati Raj System

The Eleventh Schedule, which includes the 29 functional items for panchayats, as well as Part IX, "The Panchayats," are both added to the Constitution by the Act. Article 243 to Article 243 O are included in Part IX of the Constitution. The Amendment Act gives shape to Article 40 of the Constitution (directive principles of state policy), which calls for the state to set up village panchayats and grant them the authority and powers necessary for them to function as self-governing units. The justiciable section of the Constitution now covers panchayati raj systems and mandates that governments implement them. Additionally, elections would be held in Panchayati Raj institutions without regard to the views of the state administration. The Act is divided into required and voluntary sections. The creation of new Panchayati Raj systems is one of the required parts that must be included in state legislation. On the other hand, optional provisions are at the state government's discretion. The Act represents a significant advancement in the nation's attempts to build grassroots democratic institutions. As a result of the Act, participatory democracy has taken the place of representative democracy.

##### A. Constitution

According to Article 243(d) of the Indian Constitution [6], a panchayat is a rural self-government organisation. Article 243B specifies the creation of a three-tiered Panchayati structure.

At the Gram Panchayat level, or the village

At the Panchayat Samiti level, which is intermediate Zila Parishad, the district-level government body

On the other hand, states with a population of above 20,000 are the only ones that have intermediate-level panchayats.

##### B. Gram Panchayat

The gram panchayat is the bottom level of the panchayat pyramid structure. A hamlet is divided into wards, which are even more discrete units that each elect their own representative. Members of the Panch are ward members, also referred to as the Panch. The Gram Sabha also elects the Sarpanch, who serves as the head of the Gram Panchayat. As a result, the Sarpanch and the Panch make up the Gram Panchayat. The construction and maintenance of schools, roads,

and drainage systems, as well as the assessment and collection of local taxes, are among the Gram Panchayat's principal tasks. The two tiers of government above, as well as the Gram Sabha, the village's broad group of voters, are accountable to the Gram Panchayat.

### C. Panchayat Samiti

The Panchayat-Raj system's hierarchy continues with the Panchayat Samiti. It oversees the activities of each Gram Panchayat in the villages under its purview. The Panchayat Samiti is under the direction of the Pradhan. He or she is chosen by a group that consists of all Panchs of the Gram Panchayats that are under the control of the Panchayat Samiti.

### D. Zilla Parishad

In the system of rural self-government known as District Panchayat, this is the highest level of panchayat. It oversees all of the Gram Panchayats that are under the control of the Panchayat Samitis in the district within its authority. Additionally, it is in charge of funding all Gram Panchayats. Planning for district-level development falls under its purview. The Zila Parishad is under the Chairman's control. The Chief Executive Officer is one of its other members, who is chosen by the State government.

## 6. Committees in Panchayati Raj System

The committees appointed are as follows:

- 1) Balwant Rai Mehta Committee
- 2) Ashok Mehta Committee
- 3) G. V. K. Rao Committee
- 4) L. M. Singhvi Committee [7]

### A. Committee for Panchayati Raj Balwant Rai

In 1957, it was founded with the task of examining and making recommendations for enhancements to the National Extension Service and Community Development Program. The committee's suggestions were: Panchayati Raj should be a three-tiered structure, with Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. All duties related to planning and development should be handled by these organizations. While the village panchayat would be made up of directly elected representatives, the panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad will be composed of members who were chosen indirectly. The Panchayat Samiti should act as the advisory, coordinating, and supervisory body, and the Zila Parishad, whose head is the District Collector, should act as the executive body.

### B. Ashok Mehta Panchayati Raj Committee

The Indian government established the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 to make suggestions on how to improve and revitalize the country's failing Panchayati Raj system. The principal recommendations were: The current three-tier Panchayati Raj structure will be replaced by a two-tier one, with the Zila Parishad at the district level and the Mandal panchayat below it, made up of a collection of villages with a combined population of 15,000 to 20,000. Decentralization below the state level must begin in the district and be overseen by the

public. Planning at the district level would be supervised by the executive body, Zila Parishad. The Panchayati Raj institutions should be forced to impose taxes in order to raise money, and a district-level organization should regularly maintain social audits.

### C. G. V. K. Rao Panchayati Raj Committee

The committee was established by the planning commission in 1985. It accepted that bureaucratization had kept development from extending to the grassroots level, giving rise to the characterization of Panchayat Raj institutions as "grass without roots." As a result, it provided the following crucial advice: According to the plan for democratic decentralization, the Zila Parishad is the most important organization. Zila Parishad was the main entity in charge of managing the district-level development programs. The district and the lower tiers of the Panchayati Raj system would be given specific planning, implementation, and monitoring responsibilities for the rural development programs. The establishment of a District Development Commissioner position. As president and CEO, he will be in charge of the Zila Parishad.

### D. L. M. Singhvi Panchayati Raj Committee

The Indian government formed the committee in 1986 with the main objective of offering suggestions for reviving the Panchayati Raj institutions for democracy and development. The following recommendations were made by the committee: The group suggested that the constitution recognize the Panchayati Raj systems. Additionally, it promoted including provisions in the constitution that would acknowledge fair and free elections for institutions under the Panchayati Raj. To improve the viability of the gram panchayat, the committee advised restructuring villages. It was suggested that local panchayats get more money to run their institutions. To handle cases relating the elections for Panchayati Raj institutions and other matters pertaining to their operation, each state will set up judicial tribunals.

All of these factors lend credence to the idea that panchayats are highly effective at identifying and resolving local problems, involving village residents in development initiatives, improving communication between different political levels, cultivating leadership qualities, and generally assisting with basic state development without undergoing significant structural changes. The first two states to establish Panchayati Raj were Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh in 1959, and other states quickly followed.

## 7. Conclusion

We can get the conclusion that the Panchayati Raj is essential to India's rural development. It is created by a village assembly, whose members are chosen by the community. On the other hand, the Indian government needs to keep an eye on how Panchayats are operating. The political party is insufficiently capable of defending the fundamental rights of common folk. The head of the constitutional branches has also been seen in India's governance.

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