

## INTRODUCTION

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### 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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In this unit you all will be familiarized with aspects of Rural Governance in India. “India lives in its villages”- these words of M.K. Gandhi summarize the significance of villages in Indian society. Until independence, majority of the population lived in villages. After that, the process of urbanization was accelerated and the urban population grew faster. Even till date, according to the Census of Indian (2011), majority of Indian population (about 69 %) live in about 649481 villages. The rural society has its unique social structure and a way of living that is different from the urban society. It must be remembered that Indian society is not monolithic. It is diverse in many aspects. The villages are different in terms of the size of population, social composition, spatial arrangement of houses, economic condition, proximity to cities or even in terms of their location within the cities. It is important to keep this in mind when we study rural society, and not imagine “Indian village” as a homogenous or uniform social entity. Moreover, it is also important to know that there is no single perspective or theoretical framework through which one can see a social entity such as a “village” and understand it in its entirety. There are different perspectives or view-points that enable the students to appreciate the complex nature of social world and different ways of perceiving them. The rural society in India has to be understood through understanding these social institutions, the way they were operating earlier, and the manner in which they have come to function in their contemporary forms. How people marry and how kinship networks are maintained, how economic activities are structured, how political institutions function, and how religious and cultural institutions shape people’s lives- all these are significant themes or windows through which we would be able to see and appreciate the rural society.

Panchayati Raj (PR) is a salient feature of the political and governance system of the Indian subcontinent. As a system of local self-governance, Panchayati Raj has been practiced in India since a long time. However, it

was not necessarily functioning as a true democratic institution in the modern sense. Local caste/class hierarchy was ingrained into it. During nationalist movement, Gandhi had emphasized on village level local self-governance (gram swaraj). His dream for independent India was to establish Panchayati Raj to empower the local people to self-rule, rather than establishing rule from above. After independence, the local level Panchayats operated, but with lot of limitations. The Article 40, one of the articles under the Directive Principles of State Policies in the Constitution, directed the government to enact laws for proper implementation of local self-rule with political and financial authority, and provisions for representation of the marginalized sections and women. Accordingly, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts of 1992 provided constitutional status to our Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Afterwards, the PRIs became recognised as the third level of India's federal democracy.

After studying this lesson, you would be able to-

- To explain the meaning of Panchayati Raj and provide the rationale of its emergence
- To acquaint students with the Constitutional basis of Panchayati Raj in India with particular emphasis on 73rd Constitutional Amendment
- To explain the organization/structure and function/role of Three Tier PRIs
- To highlight the issues/challenges for PRIs to become effective in grassroots democracy
- Analyze comparatively the rural governance of four states of India, i.e., Maharashtra, Kerala, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION:

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Panchayati Raj can be understood as a form of direct democracy at the village or local level in contrast to the practice of representative democracy at the state/provincial and country level. It means that in the PRIs, powers of the government is directly exercised by the common people who are immediately impacted by its decisions. Local people's direct involvement in the decision making process at the village level is a paramount feature of Panchayati Raj. Thus, PRIs are the cornerstones of local self-governments and peoples' participation in India. The idea behind Panchayati Raj is to ensure that democracy becomes more meaningful by making governing institutions functionally more responsive to the local/rural people's needs and aspirations. This makes democracy more substantive at the local or grassroots level. In our democratic system, the PRIs actually materialize the idea of devolution of power from the Central or State government to the periphery or local level. In fact, the practice of Panchayati Raj is driven by citizens' everyday needs and with their active and continuous participation.

The word panch means five and raj means 'rule'; thus, panchayat means the 'governance by five persons'. In India's traditional rural governance framework, panchayats referred to assemblies of respected elders chosen by

the local or village community. Of course, such assemblies exhibited variations. These assemblies of wise village elders settled disputes between individuals and between villages as well. Usually, the leader of the panchayat in rural India was referred to as the mukhiya or sarpanch. This was an elected/nominated or traditionally acknowledged position in villages steeped in traditions and customs. However, we should not equate the modern Panchayati Raj system of India as established by our Constitution with that of either the traditional village panchayat of the past nor with the present-day extra-constitutional/extra-legal khap or caste panchayats found in a few north Indian states. Panchayati Raj can be defined or understood as a system of local self-government in a decentralized democratic framework. We can define the Gram Panchayat as a village level governing institution with the Sarpanch as its elected head. The members of the gram panchayat are called “ward members” or panchs. These ward members are elected by the voters who are all members of the Gram Sabha for a period of five years.

### **The Rationale for Panchayati Raj**

India is the largest democracy in the world. It's a country of sub-continental size with large and complex diversity. India's democratic government is structured as a federation, with the Union or Central Government at the national level and twenty-eight State Governments at the provincial level. Besides, there are 8 Union Territories administered under direct supervision of the Union Government. The governments at both the National and State levels are of Representative nature. It means that the people's representatives chosen to the Parliament and State as well as some UT Assemblies make the decisions and policies of the government. People themselves don't directly make the decisions and policies that impact their everyday life. In fact, it's impossible for all citizens to gather together at one place to directly discuss and decide about their own affairs at the National or even at the State levels. Though the Union and State/UT governments have legislative bodies and executive agencies to take care of people's welfare, the vastness of our country, the complex diversity of our people and the enormity of their issues makes it difficult for them to attend to the every-day life needs, interests and aspirations of the people at the local level. In India, having elected or representative governments at the central/federal and state/provincial levels is not just enough. It doesn't solve people's problems and their everyday needs at the local level. Even at the local level, we always need elected governments to look after our local needs or aspirations more effectively. Hence, our Constitution provides local government in the form of Panchayati Raj Institutions or PRIs at the village, taluk/block and district levels. Local government is that governing institution which is closest to the common people. It deals with the everyday needs and problems of the citizens at the local or grassroots level. That is why the common citizen at the local level are so concerned with what the local government does or doesn't do. It has a direct bearing on their everyday lives. Local government system is built on the idea or belief that local knowledge and local interests are quite important in the democratic decision making process. There are certainly some advantages of the local government; it's relatively closer to the people and thus it becomes convenient for them to approach it to address their grievances promptly and

with lower expenses. Hence, we can reasonably conclude that local government could really provide an administration which is efficient and responsive to people's needs. What is good about a healthy democracy is that it helps foster a sense of agency among people as they meaningfully participate in the decision making about their own lives. It also gives common citizens a sense of confidence as they could hold the government to account. People's active participation and their ability to hold officials to account are critical aspects to make the local governments efficient. Therefore, it's important to strengthen the local governments to make India's democracy more vibrant.

**To-Do-Activity:** Watch two video documentaries from YouTube- Panchayati Raj in India (2014) telecast by Rajya Sabha TV under the episode Nazariya, and For the Dorbar of the People (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India, 2017). Collect information on "Khap Panchayat" as well. Compare both ideas of "panchayat" and discuss what the differences between the two types of Panchayats.

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## 1.2 EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA.

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Panchayats or traditional village councils are quite an old feature of India's political history. They have been a part and parcel of India's long tradition. Readings of India's history tell us that almost every village in India had a Council of Elders or Panchayat that was responsible for managing the village affairs. Local self-governing bodies, with remarkable self-sufficiency and autonomy, had flourished throughout India's civilization. They were a key aspect of public life in India. In our study, we can find the presence of local government in India's long indigenous as well as colonial history. Highlighting the significance of Panchayati Raj in India's political history, Sir Charles Metcalfe observed: "Panchayats seemed to last where nothing lasted. Dynasty after dynasty tumbled down; revolution succeeded revolution; Pathans, Mughals, Marathas, Sikhs and British were all the masters in turn, but the Village Communities and their autonomy remained the same".(Aggarwal & Bhatnagar: 2005). Let's discuss the evolution of Panchayati Raj or local government in India taking two broad time frames: Pre and Post Independence Periods.

### Pre-Independence Period

The evolution of local government and Panchayats before India's Independence is discussed through the following periods: Ancient, Medieval and The British Period.

#### **A. Ancient Period**

India's legacy of Panchayati Raj is quite long. It goes back to the ancient times. We can find references to the existence of rural local self-governing bodies in various forms in the epics of 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata'. The Rig-Veda and Samhitas also contain references to

the existence of such self-governing bodies. The village Panchayat, known as 'Samiti', was the basic unit of administration during the Vedic period. The head of a Samiti was called Gramin. In the 'Arthashastra', Kautilya mentions about the system of governance during the Mauryan period. This great treatise of politics and administration highlights the significance of local self-governing institutions. The principle of administrative decentralization was followed during Chandragupta Maurya's regime. Then the village was regarded as the smallest unit of governance. In Kautilya's scheme of administration, the king had very little interference in the governance of local bodies.

In his book *Indica*, the ancient Greek diplomat, historian and Indian ethnographer Megasthenes, who visited India around the later part of 3rd Century B.C.E., describes India's society and political system as a 'plurality of local rulers and autonomous communities operating under the vague control of the King'. (Bosworth:1996) There is also mention about six committees consisting of five members each were in charge of administering Pataliputra, the capital city of the Mauryan Empire.

Similarly, the government system of the Guptas was known to have a largely decentralized structure. The local authorities and social groups has significant autonomy in their functioning. Villages enjoyed considerable autonomy in administration. The village council popularly known as the Panchayat was managing the affairs of the village. Gramik, the village headman was at the apex of administering the affairs of a village. Village councils, variously known as Pancha-Mandali or Grama-Janapada or Parishad, assisted the Gramik in his work. Almost all functions of the government like looking after village security, settlement of disputes, carrying out public welfare works, collection of government taxes/dues were discharged by village councils. Village Councils also enjoyed the authority of issuing documents under their own seals. Further, provinces and districts had their own administrative setups indicating that local administration was far from the King's regular intervention. Thus, it can be fairly observed that the Village Communities in ancient India were self-sustained as mini republics with minimal control from the central or provincial government. Village Communities and other local bodies enjoyed a greater level of autonomy. This was because the ancient Indian polity was characterised by a distinctive presence of the state and society as independent entities. Ancient customs and traditions had played a vital role in the formation of this autonomy of the village republic. The economic self-sufficiency of village communities was quite evident. Besides, the absence of faster transportation and communication systems compelled the King or central government to allow more space to the local bodies at the village level. Villagers used to elect village assemblies or committees consisting of either the heads of all households or all adult members to manage their own affairs. These assemblies functioned democratically with definite rules and regulations (Venkatarangaiya

and Pattabhiram: 1969). Such Village Assemblies in South India had attained a higher level of organizational development.

The Uthiramerur stone inscriptions in Kancheepuram district of Tamil Nadu speaks of a long history of local self-governance in the region. Historical accounts indicate that these village Councils were levying taxes, improving community life and administering justice in their local areas. The reign of Cholas during 10th and 11th Centuries witnessed the peak of this dynamism of these village communities. Very interestingly, the village members 'used the secret ballot method called "Kuda Olai Murai" to elect members to the Village Councils. With the downfall of Cholas, the State experienced a decline of such Village autonomy and the consequent rise of a centralized administrative system' (Akilandeswari: 2017; Ramakrishnan: 2019).

In North-Eastern India too, there were small republics which were quite independent in the management of internal matters. The Village Panchayats enjoyed sufficient administrative autonomy, and the king's interference was minimal.

## **B. Medieval Period**

The indigenous rural administrative system with self-governing Village Councils (VCs) retained its character in the early phase of Mughal rule. Major changes happened at the higher levels of administration leaving villages at the bottom to themselves. The governance setup of the villages with Village Councils of elected village elders was not much disturbed and remained as the primary unit of decision making. Except the judicial powers and land management, these Village Councils continued to carry out all other previous functions. The villages were incorporated into the larger administrative system of the Mughal rule only as units for revenue collection and police purposes. The Empire's central authority did not involve itself in the day-to-day regulation of the local affairs. Management of village affairs was the responsibility of village officials, who were primarily accountable to the village councils. The village headman known as muquaddam, was responsible for maintaining law and order matters in the villages. In fact, the Sultans in Delhi were aware of enormous difficulty or even the impossibility of governing vast territory under their rule in India. Hence, they were averse to directly and regularly intervene in the local affairs of far off villages. Similarly, the Peshwa rulers constituted local self-government institutions in the rural as well as urban areas of Maharashtra. However, the long heritage of local-self governing institutions and administrative system started crumbling steadily. In due course, the situation worsened with village headmen, the upper castes and rich peasants dominating the village councils. Subsequently, in the aftermath of the fall of Mughals, the rural self-governing councils lost their sheen and disintegrated due to several factors like the developments in transportation & communication, increased commercial contacts of the rural society with the outside



world, rapid changes in the production system, increasing urbanization and the decline in the influence of customs and traditions in people's everyday life, etc.

### **C. The British Period**

Introduction of new legal and judicial systems as well as emergence of newer institutions for revenue collection like Zamindari under the British rule gave substantive blow to Panchayats' significance. Village panchayats lost their autonomy and became weak under the British regime, though India saw the re-emergence of local representative institutions since 1870s. Of course, local self-governance was introduced by the British rulers primarily as an administrative convenience for the imperial Government. It was to protect the colonial interests like reducing the financial burden on the State exchequer rather than to promote self-governing bodies in India for its inherent benefits for Indians.

#### **Lord Mayo's Resolution of 1870**

Famous Mayo's Resolution of 1870 was a milestone in the evolution of local self-governing institutions in India. It proclaimed the need for local interest, local supervision and local care on issues like education, sanitation, medical relief and public works. This Resolution introduced the concept of elected representatives in urban local bodies and emphasized the necessity of associating Indians in local administration. In fact, the Revolt of 1857 had caused considerable strain to the imperial finances and it was convenient to finance local services out of local taxation. Thus, Lord Mayo's resolution on decentralization could be seen as a result of fiscal compulsions of the Colonial rule.

#### **Lord Ripon's Resolution of 1882**

Lord Ripon's Local Self Government Resolution of 1882 was the most important Act on local selfgovernment in British India. It was regarded as the 'Magna Carta' of local self-governance in India. It provided the much needed democratic framework to the municipal bodies as well as local boards in rural areas. As per Ripon's Resolution, the proportion of non-official members in local bodies was increased to not less than two-thirds of total members. The non-official members were to be elected and the chairman had to be only from among the elected non-official members. The government officials were to guide them rather than control them.

#### **Royal (Hobbehouse) Commission on Decentralization of 1907**

The Royal Commission lead by C.E.H. Hobbehouse brought out a Report on Decentralization in 1909. It suggested that local government should start from the village level rather than the district level. It also highlighted about the limitation or scarcity of funds as well as caste and religious disputes standing as primary obstacles in the effective functioning of the local bodies.

## **Montague-Chelmsford Report & Government of India Act of 1919**

The Montague-Chelmsford Report of 1918, which became background paper for the Government of India Act of 1919, suggested that local boards should be filled with elected representative than mere official members. It further advised that the government's intervention in the everyday functioning of these local bodies should be the minimum. The suggestions of the Royal Commission were also incorporated. The municipalities were vested with more powers to impose local taxes. The Village Panchayat Act was passed and Panchayats were established in many provinces as a legal body.

## **The Government of India Act of 1935**

The Government of India Act, 1935 assigned more powers to the elected governments in the Provinces with greater provincial autonomy. Provincial governments were allowed to enact legislation to take the democratic decentralization process to the next level by establishing local selfgovernments including the Village Panchayats.

### **D. India's Freedom Struggle & Gandhi's Advocacy of 'Gram Swaraj'**

The idea of Panchayati Raj was prominent in the agenda and as well as a strategic factor in India's freedom struggle. Post-1920, Mahatma Gandhi had emerged as the principal anchor and architect of India's freedom movement. For him, Panchayati Raj is a swadeshi institution. He set the tone of the nationalist movement on the Panchayats. His vision of a free nation in India was characterised by village self-rule (Gram Swaraj) and all-round development at the grass roots level in the rural areas. Strengthening of village panchayats was an effective means of de-concentrating political and economic power.

As Gandhi famously told, "the independence of India should mean the independence of the whole of India.....Independence must begin at the bottom. Thus every village would be a republic....It follows therefore that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs. In this structure composed of many villages, there will be ever-widening, ever-ascending circles. Life will be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom". Besides Gandhi, many leaders of our freedom movement were also concerned about too much concentration of powers in the Governor General's hands during British rule. Hence, to them, independence of India should also mean decentralization of power and a move towards participatory democracy. The Indian National Congress at its Lahore Session in 1909 had urged the colonial Government to take steps to make all local bodies functional with adequate financial authority.

With the backdrop of Gandhi's emphasis on Panchayati Raj as a crucial component of India's future polity, the Constituent Assembly held detailed discussion on this important question so as to give an



appropriate place to Panchayat system in our new Constitution. However, it was incomprehensible to note that the word 'Panchayat' did not occur even once in the Draft Constitution. Huge controversy emerged on this emphatic miss of Panchayati Raj from the Draft Constitution. Fortunately, with Gandhi's intervention, Panchayati Raj or local self-government got some honourable place in India's Constitutional scheme.

### **Post-Independence Period (Upto 1992)**

The evolution of Panchayati Raj in Independent India is discussed in two parts. The first part is from 1947 to 1992 and it is discussed in this section. The second part is from 1992 (73rd Constitutional Amendment onwards) and it is discussed in the section that follows.

#### **A. From 1947 to 1992 : The Making of India's Constitution and the Panchayati Raj**

In spite of our Freedom Movement's call for decentralization of power and participatory democracy, the subject of local government and panchayats did not initially get adequate importance in our Constitutional scheme. In framing the modern Indian Republic's Constitution, the Constituent Assembly was split between Gandhi's vision of and strong belief in Panchayati Raj and Ambedkar and Nehru's opposition to it. Thus, it was evident that the inclusion of panchayats into the Constitution was not unanimously agreed upon by the Constitution-makers.

Leaders such as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru, Begum Aziz Rasul, Dr. Man Mohan Das, A.D. Gorwala and several Marxists were opposed to the inclusion of the provision of village panchayats in the Constitution. Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee did not favour more power to panchayats. The faction and caste-ridden nature of rural society was considered as to defeat the noble purpose of local self-government. To Ambedkar- "the Indian village was a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism". Besides such negative view on village society, the immediate historical context was the turmoil due to India's Partition which lead many constitution makers to favour a strong Union or Centre.

On the other, leaders such as Seth Damodar Swaroop, H.V. Kamath, Prof. N.G. Ranga, Alladi Krishnaswami Ayyar, Mahavir Tyagi, T. Prakasham, M. Ananthasayanam Ayyangar & Dr. B.N. Rau advocated for the inclusion of Village Panchayats in the new Constitutional scheme. For instance, Ananthasayanam Ayyangar argued in the Constituent Assembly that "In the interest of democracy, the villages may be trained in the art of self-government, even autonomy...We must be able to reform the villages and introduce democratic principles of government there."

Gandhiji came to know about the voices against inclusion of Panchayati Raj in the Constitution. He insisted on including the provisions relating to village panchayats in the Constitution. With Gandhi's strong view favouring Panchayati Raj, a provision on it was included in the Constitution's Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) under Article-40. It stated that "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 self-government".

With the Constitution coming into force, Article 40 in the DPSP and Article 243 empowered the state legislatures to legislate with respect to any subject relating to local self-government. However, as a part of the DPSP, the provisions under Article 40 were non-justiciable. It was not legally binding on the government and was primarily advisory in nature. As a consequence, there was the absence of a uniform structure of Panchayati Raj bodies throughout the country. Besides, the subject of local government was assigned to the State List, meaning that only state governments would be doing something about it. Despite all these inherent constraints, Article 40 of the Indian Constitution can be considered as the key launch-pad towards the revival of Panchayats in post-Independent India.

### **Balwantrai Mehta Committee**

The Union Government had launched the Community Development Programmes (CDP) in 1952 and the National Extension Service Scheme (NESS) in 1953. The goal was to promote people's participation in local development through a range of activities. A Committee under the chairmanship of Balwantrai Mehta was set up to examine the working of CDP. Its Report submitted in 1957 observed that "primary reason for the failure of Community Development Programme was the lack of people's participation".

On the basis of B.R. Mehta Committee's recommendations, a three-tier Panchayati Raj system for rural areas was introduced. It included the Gram Panchayats (GPs) at the village level, Panchayat Samiti (PSs) at the block level and Zilla Parishad (ZPs) at the district level. The plan was to organically link all three levels in the Panchayati Raj system, with chairpersons of lower level bodies to be included as ex-officio members of the higher levels. In explaining the rationale of its recommendation, the Committee observed, "Panchayati Raj system establishes a linkage between local leadership enjoying confidence of local people and the government and it translates the policies of the government into action".

The B.R. Mehta Committee highlighted the potential of Panchayati Raj system as a mechanism to ensure the involvement of local people and their representatives in various development programmes of the government. These local bodies or councils would take up various planning and development works in the rural areas. As recommended,

the village panchayats were considered as subordinate agencies of the government to implement its programs at the local or lowest levels. This was not to make the PRIs as institutions of self-government or Gram Swaraj as Gandhi had envisioned. Subsequently, Panchayati Raj system lost its importance/sheen. Afterwards it was noticed that people's participation gradually weakened as elections to the panchayats were not held regularly.

### **Ashok Mehta Committee**

In 1977, the Janata Party Government came to power at the Centre. The Morarji Desai lead government tried to revitalize Panchayati Raj (PR) institutions and appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta in December 1977. This Committee was to suggest a viable organization of grass-roots councils to mobilize the participation and active support of the people. In its landmark 1978 Report, the Committee suggested PR structures with a development orientation at two levels-District Panchayats and Mandal Panchayats covering 15,000- 20,000 people. It also recommended for open participation of political parties in Panchayati Raj elections and constitutional protection to PR bodies. This was to entrench the decentralization of process at the grass-roots level and strengthen the PRIs to become effective agencies for development in rural India.

### **B. Issues/Factors Keeping the PRIs Weak**

Subsequently, many states like Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh in 1959; Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Punjab in 1960 enacted their own state laws to set up Panchayati Raj Institutions in their respective states. Though elections to PRIs were held for several years in many of these states, powers and functions were not appropriately delegated and finances were not adequately available. The lack of appropriate funds, functions and functionaries kept the Panchayats weak. The PRIs remained dependent on the state and central governments for financial assistance to run their show. Besides, many state governments did not consider it necessary to establish elected local bodies. They continued the provision of indirect elections to most local bodies. In several instances, elected PRIs were indiscriminately or whimsically dissolved before the expiry of their due terms. On many occasions, the local government bodies were taken away from elected representatives and handed over to the government officers. In many cases, elections to the local bodies were postponed persistently. However, the leadership at the national level realized that real development of villages was possible only through active and efficient PRIs.

In 1989, the P.K. Thungan Committee recommended constitutional status to local government institutions. Afterwards, concerted efforts were made to bring the needed Constitutional Amendment so as to give the PRIs a constitutionally guaranteed existence. The intent was to make them function

as institutions of self-government in the real sense of the term as well as to give them an all India uniform pattern.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

- 1) **Critically analyze the evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India with relevant examples.**

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## 1.3 CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK : 73<sup>RD</sup> CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT ACT.

### Constitutionalisation of Panchayati Raj in India

With these varied experiences/experiments from across India, the necessity of constitutional mandate for Panchayati Raj was felt. Many state governments were not sincere about creating durable and efficient Panchayati Raj Institutions and sharing power with them. In fact, some states had taken the devolved powers back from the PRIs. Status and dignity are crucial factors to make PRIs function effectively. This required Constitutional guarantee or Constitutionalisation of the Panchayats. Previously, local self-government or Panchayat Raj was a State Subject. Hence, the Union government could not bring any legislation on Panchayati Raj. This prompted it to amend the Constitution under Article-368 enabling the Parliament to enact laws on Panchayats applicable to the whole of India.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 on PRIs has a chequered history. This Legislative Bill on Panchayati Raj took nearly three years of Parliamentary process to emerge as an Act. Let's find out the notable historical steps taken by successive Governments at the Centre towards Constitutionalisation of the Panchayati Raj system in India. Below are some of these Parliamentary milestones:

- a) The Union Government headed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi introduced the 64th Constitution Amendment Bill in the Lok Sabha in 1989. It proposed to constitute an uniform Three-Tier Panchayati Raj system for the whole of India. Though approved by the Lok Sabha, this Bill couldn't become an Act as it wasn't passed in the Rajya Sabha.
- b) Then in September 1990, the Union Government lead by Prime Minister V.P. Singh introduced the 72nd Constitution Amendment Bill on PRIs. This Bill included the provision to constitute Gram Sabha in each village, direct elections to all seats in Panchayats at the

village level as well as to not less than 50% of seats in Panchayats at other two higher levels. It proposed to confer financial powers and authority on these local bodies like the power to levy, appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees. Significantly, it proposed to constitute a Finance Commission to review the financial position of PRIs, fixing five years tenure for PRIs and to hold elections within a period of six months in the event of PRIs' dissolution. However, this Bill could not be taken up for consideration by the Parliament and lapsed with the dissolution of the 9th Lok Sabha in 1991.

- c) Later, in September 1991, the Union Government headed by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao again introduced this Constitution Amendment Bill, with some modifications, to constitute PRIs. And fortunately, this time with Mr. Rao at the helm, the Panchayati Raj Bill was to see the light of the day as an Act.

“Though PRIs have been in existence for a long time, it's observed that these institutions haven't been able to acquire the status & dignity of viable and responsive people's bodies due to reasons.... absence of regular elections, prolonged super-session, insufficient representation of weaker sections like SCs, STs and women, inadequate devolution of powers & lack of financial resources..Art 40 of DPSP lays down that the State shall take steps to organise village panchayats & endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-govt....In light of experience in last 40years and in view of short-comings..., it's considered that there's an imperative need to enshrine in the Constitution certain basic & essential features of PRIs to impart certainty, continuity & strength to them”

**\*\* Quote from the STATEMENT OF OBJECTS AND REASONS appended to the Constitution(72nd Amendment) Bill, 1991 which was enacted as the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992**

- d) Ramnivas Mirdha lead Joint-Parliamentary Committee submitted its Report on the proposed Bill on PRIs to the Parliament. Both Houses of Parliament conducted extensive debates on it and brought in crucial amendments. With Lok Sabha on 23rd December and Rajya Sabha on 24th December 1992, Parliament almost unanimously passed the Constitution 72nd Amendment Bill.
- e) Afterwards, 17 State Legislatures ratified this Act by 23 April 1994, with the Kerala Assembly as the first to ratify it and West Bengal and Tamil Nadu Assemblies not giving their consent.

- f) On 20th April 1993, the President of India gave his assent to this Bill passed by the Parliament. With this, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 (introduced in Parliament as the 72nd Amendment Bill in September 1991) came into force from 24th April 1993.
- g) Along with it, the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act was passed by the Parliament to create similar three-tier local bodies or councils in the urban or municipal areas. On 1st June 1993, this Amendment Act to establish urban local self-governments was enforced.
- h) This Act also provided for a District Planning Committee with responsibility to consolidate the plans prepared by Panchayats and Municipalities (Article 243 ZD).
- i) This Act inserted Article 243 to Part IX of India's Constitution and gave Constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. As per Article 243 M, all state governments became duty bound to amend or enact their respective State Panchayat Acts in conformity with the Constitutional provisions.

### **The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, 1992:**

Implications for PRIs in India The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 provided constitutional status to PRIs as institutions of local self-government for rural India. It guaranteed fixed tenure and perpetual existence to PRIs by adding Part IX titled as "The Panchayats" to India's Constitution covering provisions of Article 243 and Articles 243 A to O. It added Schedule XI which enlisted 29 subjects as functions and powers of PRIs. This Amendment turned the Constitutional goal mentioned in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy (DPSP) into a reality. It says "States shall 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". In some way, we can say that Article 40 long incubated the seeds of Panchayats and the PRIs' baby was delivered through the surgery of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. 'Local government' is a State Subject as per India's Constitution. Earlier, state governments enjoyed the freedom to make or not make or in whatever form they wanted to make their own laws on this subject. Significantly, this Constitutional Amendment brought generic uniformity to the organization of Panchayati Raj Institutions across the country. With the Constitution being amended, states had to change their laws on local bodies to bring them in conformity with the 73rd Amendment Act.

With this PRI Act coming into effect on 24th April 1993, it became incumbent upon the states either to enact a new state PRI law or conduct full-scale amendment in the existing PRI law. The reason was to bring all State PRI laws in conformity with the amended constitutional provisions, within one year from the Act coming into force, i.e., by 24th April 1994. Government of India's Ministry of Rural Development with technical help from National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD), Hyderabad had prepared a Model Bill. This Model Bill was circulated to the states as a basic



guideline or foundational framework to follow in preparing Stat PRI laws. It was to accelerate the pace of action by state governments on this front. In bringing the new state PRI law, Karnataka became the first state. Then Gujarat, Bihar, Tripura, Sikkim, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh followed suit. Tamil Nadu was the last state to enact its new state PRI law as per the Constitutional mandate on 19th April 1994. The constitutional deadline was 23rd April 1994. All states and Union Territories passed the PRI law by this date to conform to the constitutional requirements.

This Amendment brought a significant change to the Constitution by inserting a new part- Part IX - into the Constitution, which contained provisions relating to PRIs. It gave constitutional recognition to PRIs and their elected representatives. Afterwards, Panchayats became, at least in principle, Institutions of Self-Government in their own right. They no mere remained as mere administrative extensions of the State or Union Government. With it, the magnitude of democratic representation increased manifold as about 3 million representatives get elected to Panchayats in India.

### **Salient Features**

The Salient features of the Seventy-Third Constitution Amendment Act are given below:

The Amendment stipulates for certain compulsory provisions which are obligatory on the part of the State Governments to incorporate in their respective Acts. Some aspects have, however, been left at the discretion of State legislatures.

- A. Three-Tier Structure of PRIs:** Panchayati Raj is organised as a three-tier system - Gram Panchayats at the village, Panchayat Samiti at the intermediate level (block or taluk) and Zilla Parishad at district level. Smaller states with populations below 20 lakhs given the option not to have an intermediate level Panchayat. Constitution in Part IX lays down a broad outline for 3-Tier PRIs in rural areas. It creates a baseline upon which States would enact their own PRI laws taking into account the variations in their population, social structures, economies and political frameworks. While the detailed provisions or features relating to PRIs in different states were not uniform earlier, this Act ensured a great level of uniformity among them. While Article 243B says- "There shall be constituted in every State, Panchayats at the Village, intermediate and district levels", State legislatures finally decide how these are defined, though Art 243 Q of the Constitution provides guidelines for this.
- B. Gram Sabha** refers to all voters or persons registered in the electoral roll of a village within the area of a Panchayat. Gram Sabha is the only permanent body or perpetual entity in the Panchayati Raj system. It does not have a fixed tenure; no such time-frame or period for it to be dissolved. For the Panchayati Raj system, the Gram Sabha is the foundation. But it's not among the three tiers of the PRI system. It's visualised as the soul within the framework of Panchayat Raj System.

State legislatures are free to assign or allocate powers and functions to the Gram Sabha by law, however, its creation is mandatory (Article 243A). People's widespread participation in the Gram Sabha meetings boosts the efficiency of Panchayats. It helps in identifying and consolidating the needs and requirements of beneficiaries at individual and community level. It also prioritizes the tasks for the Panchayat on the basis of people's needs. It's obligatory on the part of Gram Panchayats to consider all suggestions and ideas for planning and expenditure coming from the Gram Sabhas. After filtering and selecting, the Gram Panchayat sends such proposals to the Panchayat Samitis or Block Panchayats for budgetary approval and allocation.

- C. Direct Election of Members from Territorial Constituencies:** Article 243 C (1) lays down the provisions for the composition or organization of Panchayats. Its members are to be chosen by direct election from territorial constituencies. All members of the three-tiers of the Panchayat Raj system are chosen by Direct Election. Moreover, the principle that guides these elections is that "the ratio of the territorial area of the local body to the number of seats it elects should be, as far as possible, the same throughout the state". Further, "the state legislatures are empowered to make specific provisions for the inclusion of other elected representatives such as Members of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies as members in the PRIs". The minimum Qualifying Age for Election to any level of Panchayat is 21 years.
- D. Disqualification for Membership:** Article 243F (1) enumerates the provisions for disqualification of a person for being chosen as or continuing as a member of a Panchayat:— "If he is so disqualified by or under any law for the purposes of elections to the State Legislature". Of course, such disqualification excludes the age bar of 25 years as 21 years is the qualifying age for election to the PRIs. As the 73rd Amendment allowed States to legislate detailed laws on PRIs in conformity with the Union Law, states have enacted laws on the qualification of candidates seeking election or criteria for disqualification from membership. The criteria or norms included educational qualification, number of children and even having or not having a toilet.
- E. The Constitution provides for uniform five-year term** for all levels of Panchayats. It also lays down that elections to constitute new Panchayati Raj bodies should be completed before the five year term expires. In case, the PRI bodies are dissolved before their regular five years' term, the state government is duty bound to compulsorily conduct elections to these PRIs within six months' time. In such cases, the reconstituted Panchayats will serve only for the remaining time period of the five-year term. In this way, by providing a fixed and reasonably guaranteed tenure, the Constitution has protected the PRIs from any whimsical or illegal takeover of Panchayats by the state government. Ensuring such durability has helped PRIs to function more independently and efficiently.

- F. Election of Chairpersons/Presidents Article 243 C (5):** Further, this Act empowers state legislatures to make specific law or regulations for the election of Chairpersons or Presidents of PRIs. Chairpersons of panchayats of the intermediate and district level have to be elected by indirect method from among the elected members. But at the village level, election of the Sarpanch or Chairperson of Gram Panchayat can be conducted by either direct or indirect election as per state's own Panchayati Raj Act. However, the election of Sarpanch of the village Panchayat is usually by direct election in all states.
- G. Reservation of Seats (for Membership & Office of Chairperson) in PRIs:(Article 243 D):** The Act lays down that seats shall be reserved for the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their population at each level of PRIs. Out of the Reserved Seats, 1/3rd has to be reserved for women belonging to the SC and ST Community. It also mentions out of the total number of seats to be filled by the direct elections, 1/3rd has to be reserved for women. Even, 1/3rd seats to be reserved for women out of the reserved seats for SCs and STs. While reservation of SCs & STs is in proportion to their share in population, that for women is at least 33.33%. However, many States have increased the reservation of seats and chairperson posts for women in Panchayats even up to 50%. The Act provides that If a State finds it necessary, it can make provisions for reservations for candidates of the other backward classes (OBCs).
- H. State Election Commission:** As per the Act, states are duty bound to establish an independent State Election Commission for conducting elections to the Panchayats. The State Election Commission would have powers to supervise, direct and control the elections to the PRIs. Earlier, the State administration administrative agencies were performing these tasks. Now, the office of State Election Commissioner enjoys autonomy like the Election Commission of India. ( Article 243 K).
- I. Functions and Powers of PRIs (Article 243G) :** Twenty-nine Functions: Schedule XI added to the Constitution through 73rd Amendment enumerates distribution of powers between the state government and Panchayats. Twentynine subjects, which were in the State List earlier, got listed with the Eleventh Schedule and devolved /transferred to PRIs to prepare plans for economic development and social justice at the local level. State legislatures were mandated to enact laws to endow powers and authority to Panchayats to enable them to function as local self-government. The actual transfer of these subjects depends upon the state legislation. Each state decides how many of these 29 subjects would be transferred to the local bodies. States are to devolve adequate power to Panchayats to prepare plans for economic development and social justice. Eg- Agriculture, poverty allievation programme, Minor forest produce, social forestry, animal husbandry, drinking water, fuel and fodder, rural electrification, libararies, public distribution system, markets and fairs etc.

- J. Adequate Funds:** The Act mandates that adequate funds shall be allocated to the PRIs to carry out their functions as institutions of self-government. Panchayats' finance consists of the budgetary allocation from State Governments, share of revenue of certain taxes, collection and retention of the revenue it raises, financial support for Central Government programmes and grants, Union Finance Commission grants (Article 243 H).
- K. State Finance Commission: (Article 243 I) -** Limitation of financial resources had been the principal cause for Panchayati Raj's failure in the past. To overcome this financial crunch, this Act authorizes the Panchayats to levy and collect appropriate taxes, duties, tolls, and fees. Besides, the PRIs are entitled to grants-in-aid from the Consolidated Fund of the State. Under this Act's directive, State Governments appoint State Finance Commission each five years to review the financial position of Panchayats.

### **Areas Not Covered under Part IX (Non-Applicability of the 73rd CAA)**

Part IX of the Constitution applies to most parts of our country. But, Article 243M (1) of the Constitution exempts the Scheduled Areas and tribal areas enumerated in Clause (1) and (2) of Article 244 from the application of provisions contained in Part IX. The areas mentioned below are exempted from the operation of the Act due to some socio-cultural and administrative considerations:

- a. "Scheduled areas listed under the 5th Schedule in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Rajasthan.
- b. The Schedule areas of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram.
- c. The hill areas of Darjeeling District of West Bengal for which Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council exists".

The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution deals with the administration of the tribal areas in the four north-eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram as per Article 244. The Fifth Schedule of Constitution deals with the administration and control of Scheduled Areas and Scheduled Tribes residing in areas other than States of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. In this regard, Article 243M (4) (b) "empowers the Parliament to legislate and extend the provisions of Part IX to the Scheduled Areas and Tribal Areas referred to in clause (1), subject to such exceptions and modifications as may be specified in such law".

### **Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996**

Initially, the 73rd Amendment Act was not applicable to the Scheduled Areas inhabited by Adivasis in some states of India. Later on, in conformity with provisions of the 73rd Amendment Act, an Act titled as Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) or PESA Act, 1996 was passed by India's Parliament in 1996. This Act extends the application of

Part IX of the Constitution, with certain modifications and exceptions, to the Fifth Schedule Areas notified under Article 244(1).

There are certain notable exceptions that PESA Act brought in for the Scheduled Areas. The reservation of seats in all Panchayats of the Scheduled Areas shall be in proportion to the population of the concerned community in the concerned Panchayat as per Part IX of the Constitution. But, the reservation for the Scheduled Tribes in these PRIs shall not be less than one-half of the total number of seats. Further, all seats of Chairpersons of Panchayats at all levels shall be reserved for the Scheduled Tribes. Again, the State Government may nominate persons belonging to such Scheduled Tribes who have no representation in the Panchayat at the intermediate or district level. The PESA Act protects the rights of tribal communities to manage their resources in ways acceptable to their longstanding customary practices. With this purpose, the Gram Sabha is vested with more powers compared to their counter parts in non-PESA areas. In their functioning, the elected PRIs have to get the Gram Sabha's consent in many respects. The idea behind this Act is that local traditions of self-government should be protected while introducing modern elected bodies.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

**1) Write a detailed essay on 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act.**

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### 1.4 COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MAHARASHTRA, KERELA, WEST BENGAL AND MADHYA PRADESH.

Panchayat, institution of rural local self-government, forms the last tier of multi order federalism in India. Panchayats derives its power from the sub national government, i.e. the state government which has the responsibility to nurture and develop panchayats. In this process, the Union Government offers the needed support and handhold the States to fulfill their mandated provisions in the spirit of cooperative federalism. This is discernible from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1993 embedded in the Constitution as Part IX.

The Constitution of India has clearly demarcated legislative areas between the Union and the states. It is within the province of state list of the Schedule VII, under Article 246, that local governments have to function. Despite Constitutional status being accorded to panchayats, it is the state legislature which empowers panchayats in any real sense. It is under the Conformity

Acts of the states that panchayats are governed in the respective states and in turn they govern public affairs in their jurisdictions. Under the Constitution Amendment Act (CAA), the state legislature is supposed to devolve responsibilities, powers and authorities to panchayats to enable them to function as institutions of self- government. The legislature of a State may authorise the panchayats to levy, collect and appropriate certain taxes, duties, tolls and fees, etc, and also assign to them the revenues of certain state level taxes subject to such conditions as are imposed by the State government. Further, grants-in-aid may also be provided to these bodies.

In order to expand the scope and powers of panchayats at the local level, the process of reforms have been initiated by various states which helped strengthening of panchayats. While some states have taken measures towards meeting the basic requirements of devolution as specified in the Constitution, other states have taken off to the next level in terms of promoting good governance, efficient service delivery, decentralised democracy, transparency, accountability and econnectivity. Following are the comparative analysis of rural governance of four states of India:

### **Maharashtra:**

Rural governance in India is based on the Panchayati Raj system. It is a three tier system, with the Zilla Parishad at the district level, Taluka panchayat at the Taluka or sub-district level and Grampanchayat (Village Council) at the lowest level. It is governed under the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis Acts 1961 of Maharashtra State. That act was amended with Act XXI to bring it in line with 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution in 1994. Zilla Parishad (commonly known as ZP) is a local government body at the district level in India. It looks after the administration of the rural area of the district and its office is located at the district headquarters. There are 34 Zilla Parishads in Maharashtra. Panchayat samiti is a local government body at the Taluka (sub-district) level in India. It works for the villages that together are called a Block. The Panchayat Samiti is the link between the Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. There are 351 panchayat samitis or block panchayats in Maharashtra. There are 28,813 gram panchayats in Maharashtra. On administrative decentralization the best performer is Kerala, followed by Maharashtra. Maharashtra has devolved control over some staff in some sectors to the district panchayats—primary education, primary health. An assessment report of the Ministry of Panchayati Raj on the devolution index titled, “Where Local Democracy and Devolution in India Is Heading Towards?” was prepared by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences (Unnikrishnan 2015–16). It evaluated the operational core of decentralisation and the support system for devolution in 53 districts, 26 states and six union territories. The report suggested that through the cumulative index of devolution, only a handful of states made substantive progress in the operational core of decentralisation, as well as support systems for devolution. They were mainly Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Gujarat. At a micro level, the inadequacies in departmental coordination are reflected in poor reporting in Schedule V areas, specifi



cally in the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) (PESA) Act areas, highlighting systemic flaws. However, a few states have initiated some positive actions to strengthen PESA institutions in tribal areas. If one is to compare the progress of PESA across states, Maharashtra is seen to be faring better than other states. Maharashtra has modified a number of enactments and incorporated PESA provisions to empower gram sabhas from Scheduled Areas. For example, under the PESA provisions for Maharashtra, the Scheduled Area gram sabhas are empowered to accord consent for land acquisition and grant moneylenders licences in their respective areas. The fishing rights for local waterbodies and minor forest produce collection rights are also endowed on the forest community. In 2015, Maharashtra took an ambitious step to devolve 5% of the Tribal Sub-Plan (TSP) funds to gram panchayats in the PESA districts. The idea behind this fund devolution under the TSP is to allow communities to have access to untied funds, which could be used for their own development. It is in this context that this article is being attempted. This article seeks to explore the response of communities to this control over funds that has been guaranteed to them through the special provisions of the state PESA Act.

Maharashtra is known to have initiated a unique model of TSP whereby in 1992, the Sukhatankar Committee suggested the allocation of TSP (Tribal Sub-Plan) budgets as per the proportion of ST population in the state, with the confidence that this proportionate allocation of the state annual budget will support the development and welfare of the STs. Unfortunately, despite such foresightedness, development indicators suggest that tribal people are faring worse than other social groups (MoWCD 2013; IIPS 2017). There are a number of administrative and political factors that have challenged the TSP to deliver the desired results. The Kelkar Committee report (2013) recommended several changes in approach to achieve optimal results for development and amongst all its recommendations, it drives the basic point of recognition of the rights of people who live at the remotest point of existence, that is, the gram sabha of the primary habitat (which includes hamlets, pada, wadi, tola, pod, mohalla, tanda, etc)<sup>3</sup> (Kelkar 2013). Besides this recognition, the report also recommends the demarcation and allocation of TSP funds to the “neediest and deserving persons.”

Maharashtra is also home to few model villages that have shown excellency in terms of social leadership, community engagement, sustainability etc. Padmashree awardee Anna Hazare was one of the pioneers attaining Gram Swaraj for his village Ralegan Siddhi. He motivated the villagers to conserve water through watershed development and rain water harvesting. With the availability of water, agriculture flourished and so did other allied activities like dairy business. This increased the per capita income of the village and became inspiration to the other villages with similar problems to take up development in their own hands which began with electing visionary leaders like Padmashree awardee Popatrao Pawar and Santosh Tikekar etc. They have now become self-sufficient, economically stable and are even providing employment to other villages. Hiware Bazar, a village in Maharashtra's drought-prone Ahmednagar district, was sliding into an abyss after degrading its environment. But in less than a decade it turned itself around into one of the most prosperous villages of the country. There

was no magic wand, just common sense. It used funds from government schemes, to regenerate its natural resources--forests, watershed and soil--led by a strong village body. It had a role model in the district--Ralegan Siddhi, the village Anna Hazare turned around. Now Hiware Bazar is in turn an exemplar for the whole of Ahmednagar district, where others have used the same scheme to conserve and prosper.

Today, a fourth of the village's 216 families are millionaires. Hiware Bazar's *sarpanch*, Popat Rao Pawar, says just over 50 families have an annual income over Rs 10 lakh. The per capita income of the village is twice the average of the top 10 per cent in rural areas nationwide (Rs 890 per month). In the past 15 years, average income has risen 20 times. Hiware Bazar has scripted this miracle by using eggs funds to regenerate the village's land and water resources, by creating productive assets like water conservation structures and forests. In 1994, the Maharashtra government brought Hiware Bazar under the Adarsh Gaon Yojana (agy). agy was based on five principles a ban on liquor, cutting trees and free grazing; and family planning and contributing village labour for development work. The first work it took up was planting trees on forestland; people were persuaded to stop grazing there. To implement this, the village made another five-year plan. An integrated model of development with water conservation as its core was adopted. An ngo, the Yashwant Agriculture, Village, and Watershed Development Trust, was created as the implementing agency for development. Hiware Bazar's strong, participatory institutional set-up has facilitated success. The gram sabha has the power to decide on a range of issues, including identifying sites for water harvesting structures, sharing water and types of crops to be cultivated. The village voluntary body is its implementing arm. Despite all the bright achievements mentioned above, Maharashtra one of the highest GDP contributing state lags behind in terms of a more robust rural governance model.

### **Kerela**

The State of Kerala in the southern part of India has certain distinguishing features in terms of socio-economic and political characteristics compared to the other States in the country. The process of development witnessed in the State is by now well known as the Kerala Model of Development. The State has been able to attain high levels of social sector development - in literacy, health care etc - even at a relatively low level of per capita income. Consequently, the quality of life indices - based on life expectancy, educational attainment etc - for the State have been high, mostly on par with the middle-income countries. But the other side of the story has been the poor performance of the State in the real, productive sectors of the economy: low productivity levels coupled with stagnation in the agricultural and industrial sectors, high levels of unemployment etc in the State testify to this. The need to reorient the developmental process, in this context in the State today is perhaps well recognised. It may be noted that the social sector development in the State has a long historical basis to it: a complex set of social, political, economic and cultural factors - working cumulatively as well as in parallel - underlie this development in the State. By articulating the demands for education and health care, and organising large sections of

the population around demands for such services, these movements played a central role in generating a demand from below, as it were, for these services, and the provision of these services by the State has, more often than not, been in response to such demands from below.

It is interesting to note that while the left movement in the State, thus has played a major role in its social sector development, its attempts at instituting a process of decentralisation of planning and governance in the State, in the post-independence period in particular, have not met with much success, at least till recently. There were repeated efforts, largely initiated by the left-led governments in the State, to introduce legislative measures for political and administrative decentralisation at various times. Political fragmentation and instability were perhaps partly responsible for this. Unlike in the case of other progressive moves spear-headed by the left movement - like say, land reforms, social sector advances or the public distribution system in the State - the moves towards decentralisation did not become a mass movement, and hence in the absence of popular pressure from below, could not be sustained.

The decentralisation in the State is the People's Campaign for Decentralised Planning, or People's Planning in short, was initiated in August, 1996 by the Left Democratic Front(LDF) government which assumed power in May 1996. This campaign perhaps can be seen as part of a longer term democratic intervention to institute and sustain the process of decentralisation in Kerala. Its immediate genesis perhaps can be traced to a short lived attempt, in the late eighties and early nineties, to bring in decentralisation by a coalition of left parties which came to power in 1987. To operationalise decentralisation, Kerala chose the path of participatory local level planning as the entry point. This succeeded to a considerable extent in harnessing public action in favour of decentralisation. The hallmark of Kerala's administrative decentralization is the transfer of public service delivery institutions to Local Governments. Sanitation including solid and liquid waste management is now totally under Local Governments. Rural Water supply is substantially under the PRIs with the Kerala Water Authority concentrating on larger schemes.

In respect of poverty alleviation Local Governments play the predominant role especially in partnership with Kudumbashree which is a unique poverty alleviation Mission. Under this Mission every family below poverty line along with a few families just above the poverty line is organized into Neighbourhood Group (NHG) at the local level with each family being represented by a woman. NHGs in a Village Panchayat/Municipal/Corporation Ward are networked into Area Development Societies (ADSs) and all ADSs within the jurisdiction of a Village Panchayat / Municipality / Corporation are federated into a registered society called Community Development Society (CDS). The CDS system works in partnership with the Local Government system focussing poverty reduction. All centrally sponsored anti-poverty programmes are planned and implemented by Local Governments.

Planning by the people is perhaps the best known feature of Kerala's decentralization. It follows a definite methodology which has been

continuously refined for the last 12 years. The robustness of the methodology of participatory planning developed by Kerala is testified by the fact that the methodology recommended by the Expert Group on Planning at the Grassroots Level – under Shri V. Ramachandran set up by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has recommended a similar methodology. Fiscal Decentralization initiatives in Kerala constitutes a best practice with the State following the classical principles of devolving funds to Local Governments.

Kerala was the first State in the country to set up a statutory Rural Development Board to raise funds from the market through debentures and channel them to Village Panchayats for commercially viable projects. The Rural Development Board Act was brought into force in 1971. (Incidentally Kerala was the first State in the country to set up an Urban Development Finance Corporation to raise funds from the market and financial institutions for development purposes in Municipal areas on 24th January, 1970). An important and interesting feature of Kerala's decentralization has been the capacity and willingness of the State Government to fully understand the shortcomings, accept deficiencies and go in for basic reforms. At this point institutionalization is the most pressing challenge.

### **West Bengal**

In the Indian context West Bengal assumes a special status in respect of decentralization and local level self government. Among the Indian states West Bengal is unique in being first to give a new facelift to the three tier Panchayat Raj system of local government. It also initiated the integration with the functioning of other departments of the government. After the initial euphoria of the introduction of the new system of local level government the question that naturally comes up is how far it has succeeded from a mere movement to become an integral part of governance in the life and society of rural West Bengal.

In simple terms what have been extent and achievements of the process of decentralization and its impact on the delivery of public goods to the people. The latter is designated to be the ultimate objective of the decentralization process. The existing literature provides some robust evidence on the effects of decentralisation on the delivery of public goods and the impact on the issues relating to governance. But there are not enough empirical studies that can well establish these issues in unequivocal terms. Bardhan and Mookherjee (2003), (2006a) and (2006b), Bardhan et al (2008), Chatterjee and Ghosh (2003), Ghosh and Ghosh (2003) are some of the studies are a few in the list of studies undertaken on these issues. Bardhan and Mookherjee (2003), (2006a) and (2006b) establish that functioning of local level government has been instrumental in the provision of public goods in West Bengal. Bardhan et al (2008) found no evidence of political capture by the rural elites. Bhattacharyya (2006) discussed the role of informal arrangements rather than well laid out government rules in running local level government. While some of these studies employ sophisticated empirical methodologies, they often suffer from inadequate coverage in terms of spatial variation.

Reviving the Panchayat system in the country was one of the mandates in the Constitution as the Article 40, under the Directive Principles of the State policy mentions “the State shall 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”. There was no initiative to form Panchayats by any State after independence. Importance was, however, given on community developments after independence, which was launched on 2nd October, 1952 and Community Development Blocks were established (which are the precursor of the Block Development Offices). To assess the effectiveness of the Community Development programme a committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Mr Balawant Rai Mehta in the year 1957. The Committee recommended in its report that without involvement of the local people the programme will not be successful. On the recommendation of the Committee Panchayats were to be constituted in different states through appropriate Act of the State Legislature, since local governance was a state subject.

After publication of the reports Panchayat Acts were passed in different states. The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 was passed for establishing Panchayats in the state. The Act recommended constitution of four tier bodies by splitting the earlier Union Board in to Gram Panchayat and Anchal Parisad. In 1963 West Bengal Zilla Parisad Act was passed to replace the District Board by Zilla Parishad and provided for constitution of Anchal Parishad at the block level. However, the system never took root because of lack of political will resulting in little assignment of responsibilities and flow of fund to those bodies as well as political unrest during the period. Ultimately, all the representatives of 15 Zilla Parishads and 315 Anchal Parisads were removed in the year 1969 and Administrators were engaged. All those local bodies remained under the Administrators till election was held in the year 1978. The legal framework for the second generation of Panchayats was established through passing of the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973. The Act provided for establishment of three tier Panchayats. Thus, Gram Panchayat (GP) was to be constituted for a cluster of villages; Panchayat Samiti (PS) was to be constituted at Block level and Zilla Parishad (ZP) was to be constituted at the District level.

Functioning of any form of government requires legal authority and institutional framework to exercise the authority and to discharge its responsibilities. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, as amended from time to time, provides the basic legal framework for functioning of the Panchayat system of the state. The West Bengal Panchayat Election Act, 2003 provides the legal framework for election to Panchayat bodies. The procedural details of the Acts are provided in the Rules and Executive Orders. Conducting election to the Panchayat (& Municipalities) is the responsibility of the State Election Commission. The Commission is a statutory organization and it functions independently. However, the Commission utilizes the services of the DM, SDO and the BDO and officials associated with them for all election related activities.

The District Council for Panchayats has been introduced by the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment Act), 1994 and its basic role is of a watchdog and a monitor. Chairperson or Adhyaksha of District Council is the leader of the recognized political party in opposition having largest



number of members in Zilla Parishad. All members of the Zilla Parishad including exofficio members elect Chairperson and other five members. The Additional Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad acts as Member-Secretary to the Council. Thus, the District Council enjoys the unique position of overseeing all the financial transactions, maintenance of accounts, and inspection reports for all the tiers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and has the capability of identifying the lacunae, weakness, loopholes and deficiencies in the system as well as suggesting ways for their removal and improvement. The District Council will prepare a report in the prescribed form and submit to the Sabhadhipati, who will place it in the next meeting of the Finance Standing Committee for discussion. The Report along with decision of the Finance Standing Committee shall be forwarded to the concerned Panchayat for discussion in its General body meeting and taking corrective measures. The Panchayat concerned shall send report to the Zilla Parishad and the District Council on the actions taken by them.

The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 was amended in the year 2003 to make provision for constitution of Zilla Sansad and Block Sansad, in line with the Gram Sansad, as forums for wider participation of elected representatives of other tiers and making the ZP and the PS accountable towards them. Every Panchayat Samiti shall have a Block Sansad consisting of all members of Gram Panchayats pertaining to the Block and all members of that Panchayat Samiti. Similarly every Zilla Parishad shall have a Zilla Sansad consisting of Prodhans of all Gram Panchayats, Sabhapatis, Sahakari Sabhapatis and Karmadhyakshas of all Panchayat Samitis and all members of Zilla Parishad. Such Sansad will hold a half-yearly and an annual meeting every year. All information related to functioning of the Panchayat, including details of accounts in Form 27; own source revenue earned; observations of the audit and its compliance; comments of the District Council, if any, and its compliance; list of individual beneficiaries, number of posts lying vacant and action taken on the decisions of the previous meetings are to be discussed in the meeting. In order to ensure proper participation of the members, all such information is to be passed on to the members well ahead of the meeting. The Sansad will guide and advise the PS/ZP for all matters relating to development including preparation of annual plan and budget, implementation of development programs, schemes or projects and for under taking such activities for economic development and ensuring social justice as are undertaken by the Panchayat body concerned.

While programmes are monitored and progress is assessed through utilization of fund, measuring physical progress as well through various evaluations it is difficult to monitor the institutional processes of the Panchayats. An innovative system of self assessment of the Panchayats for watching their institutional processes and services delivered have been introduced in West Bengal. A questionnaire has been developed to capture the extent and quality of services being provided by the Panchayats, the objectively verifiable institutional practices in place and the status of financial management including mobilization of own resources for that purpose. The questionnaires are different for different tiers. The institutional aspects of functioning of the Panchayats include transparency, accountability, vertical and lateral decentralization, financial discipline, promptness in decision making and also implementation of such decision,



proper functioning of the Standing Committees / Sub-Committees, involvement of the members in opposition in the decision making process, increased participation of people in the development process as partner, greater mobilization of resources and effective utilization of all available fund and other resources. Ability to discharge specific responsibilities by the respective tier of Panchayat for delivering various services is also captured to the extent possible. The officials and the elected functionaries jointly take up the self-assessment exercise by filling the questionnaire based on actual status. Each question, indicating certain aspect of performance or process, has a score and the total score indicates the overall functioning of the Panchayat.

The best performing Panchayats in each tier is given financial award for encouraging them to function better and the exercise also helps to identify the strength and weakness in functioning of the particular Panchayat making it possible to take appropriate corrective measure. The result of the Self Assessment report is a very important document for the supervising authorities to know the actual status of functioning of the Panchayats and helps to take up measures for building up institutional capacities for due improvement. Sharing the same with all Panchayats and exposure visits to the best performing Panchayats helps to motivate the Panchayat functionaries to improve their functioning.

Development of human resources is one important thrust area in developing countries like India, which are lagging in human development. People living in rural area generally lag behind their urban counterpart, which is to be bridged as fast as possible. Also, human development concerns every individual and, therefore, requires participation of the entire population, particularly those belonging to the weaker sections and living in remote areas in the programmes. Panchayats can play a very important role in reaching out to the entire population and to mobilize them. Keeping that in mind the Panchayats have been given important role in facilitation of delivery of services related to human development as well as directly delivering some of the services in West Bengal.

### **Andhra Pradesh**

In conformity with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj (APPR) Act was enacted in 1994 repealing all existing Acts, to establish a three tier system at the Gram Panchayat, Mandal Parishad and Zilla Parishad level. The Government may by notification and in accordance with the rules in this behalf declare any revenue Village or Hamlet thereof or any part of a Mandal to be a Village for the purpose of the APPR Act, 1994 and specify the name of the Village. For every village the State Government shall constitute a Gram Panchayat. Every village shall have a Gram Saba (GS) consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls pertaining to the area of the village.

**Mandal Parishad-** A district may be divided into Mandals comprising of such contiguous villages as may be specified in the notification by the State Government, and for every Mandal there is a Mandal Parishad which is divided into many territorial constituencies having a population between three and four thousand. One member shall be elected to the Mandal

Parishad from each territorial constituency. The ZP consists of one elected member from each Mandal besides Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) of the State representing the constituency, Member of House of People (MP) representing a constituency, Member of the Council of State (MLC), who is a registered voter in the district concerned and two co-opted members belonging to minorities. Each ZP has seven Standing Committees (Planning and Finance, Rural Development, Agriculture, Education and Medical Services, Women Welfare, Social Welfare and Works) and the Chairperson is the Ex-officio member of all standing committees. The District Collector, who is a permanent invitee, shall be entitled to participate in all the standing committee meetings without right to vote.

The State and Central Government funded the PRIs through Grants-in-aid for general administration and development activities. The Gram Panchayats generate tax revenue from property and water taxes and non tax revenue from various fees such as tap connection fee, rent from properties, etc. The Mandal Parishad and Zilla Parishad do not generate any tax revenue and depend mainly on Grants-in-aid. The funds are utilized by the PRIs for providing civic amenities and welfare measures. Though the accounts are prepared by the PRIs individually, there is no system in place to consolidate the revenue and expenditure figures under various heads of accounts of all the PRIs, due to which effective monitoring of the finances was not possible and an overall picture of finances of PRIs could not emerge. With the available information and figures furnished by the Director of State Audit, the following financial analysis has been made.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

**Note:** i) Use the space given below for your answer.

- 1) **Comparatively analyze the rural governance of Maharashtra, Kerela, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh.**

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP (SUMMARY/ CONCLUSION)

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In this module we discussed the Rural governance in India, discussing right from evolution to comparing the panchayat systems of few states. From mid-twentieth century to the second decade of the twenty-first century, Indian village society has travelled a long distance. Rural economy has been transformed to ensure upward mobility for certain sections, yet it has also brought in severe agrarian crisis. Panchayat is the most ancient institution at the village level in our country. Panchayats have been functioning as primary institutions of democracy at the grassroots level. The 73rd amendment gave them constitutional status. The task of rural development

now rests on panchayati raj institutions. The involvement of hitherto underprivileged sections, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes and women in the participatory process will further strengthen the grassroots institutions. Although the panchayat raj system in the entire country is not the same but, by and large, Structure of Government most of the States have the three-tier structure: zilla parishad at the district level, panchayat samiti at the intermediate or block level and gram panchayat at the bottom or village level. Active participation and vigilance on the part of the rural public is a must for the sustenance of democratic decentralisation.

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## **PRIS: CENTRAL PROCESSING UNITS OF DEMOCRACY**

### **Unit Structure**

- 2.1 Objectives
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Government Initiatives to empower Local: Reservation and Social Audit
- 2.4 Fiscal Decentralisation
- 2.5 Decentralised Planning
- 2.6 Summary and Conclusion
- 2.7 References

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### **2.1 OBJECTIVES**

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The unit aims to familiarise you with the concept of Panchayati Raj Institutions as a central processing unit of democracy. After studying this unit, you should be able to –

- Know about the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India.
- Understand Government Initiatives to empower Panchayati Raj Institutions such as the provision of Reservation and Social Audit systems.
- Explicate Fiscal Decentralisation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Explain the Decentralised Planning in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

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### **2.2 INTRODUCTION**

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Panchayati Raj Institutions are also known as Rural Local Self-Governing Institutions in India. Panchayati Raj institutions have been constitutionalized with the passage of the 73rd constitutional amendment act of 1992. The major aim of introducing this third tier of government was the decentralization of the governing process. It is basically entrusted to build democracy at the grass-root level. This democratic decentralization is essential wherein people can directly participate in the process of governance. It has given voice to the people which in a way enabled a better decision-making process at the local level. It has helped to reduce the gap between the decision-making process of governance on one hand and citizens on the other. The 73rd constitutional amendment act established three levels at the local level – Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the intermediate level, and Zilla Parishad at the District Level. Such a system of local governance ensures decentralization and promotes democratic representation.

“When Panchayat Raj is established, Public Opinion will do what violence can never do” – Mahatma Gandhi .

Pris: Central Processing  
Units of Democracy

Mahatma Gandhi was also in favor of the establishment of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. He was of the opinion that the beginning of independence should start from the bottom level. The focus should be on creating self-sustaining villages. He meant that achieving Swaraj means creating a self-sustaining rural economy. Villages should be capable of managing their own affairs. They will act as “Republics”. Then only we can realize the true value of democracy (Gandhi, 1947). Dr. B. R. Ambedkar had exactly opposite views on the Panchayati Raj system. Increasing the dominance of the Dominant Caste is one of the reasons why Dr. Ambedkar was against the establishment of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. He opined that the villages are the source of oppression of weaker sections of society. Creating the panchayats would mean continuing India’s dominant caste’s hegemony. If we want to establish panchayats then it should be representative of all the sections of the society therefore, he fought rigorously in the constituent assembly to provide reservations to the weaker sections of the society (Sarabu, 2019).

The World Bank published a report “Governance and Development”, in which they had come up with 8 principles of good governance . Among them “Consensus Oriented” and “Participation” are two basic characteristics of Good governance (Bank, 1992). The establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions helps ensure good governance as it caters to both the Participation and Welfare of the people in general. Also, India is a multi-religious, multi-ethnic, multilingual, and multicultural country. This diversity is ultimately reflected in the demands made by various communities whose socio-ethnic practices differ. Here, Institutions of local self-governance can play a major role to cater to the aspirations of people at large at the local level.

Fiscal decentralization constitutes an important aspect of democratic decentralization. It ensures the devolution of financial powers between the central state and local levels of government. It basically promotes the proper distribution of resources at the local level as well as efficient means of implementing programs and policies by the local government. For the effective functioning of Panchayati raj institutions, they should be given financial autonomy. It is important for achieving the greater goal of good governance.

These rural local self-governing institutions should be representative of all the sections of society to cater to their varied needs and demands. To ensure this representative nature of local self-governing institutions, a special provision of reservation to marginalized sections of the society has been added by the constitution of India in 1992. With this provision of reservation, we have achieved a quantitative representation of marginalized sections such as SCs, STs, and Women at the local level of governance. But, the real challenge lies in the efficacy of their representation. Now, we need to ensure the efficiency in the working of all the local representatives to achieve the goals of representation and empowerment in a real sense.

So, this module talks about democratic decentralization in form of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It also focuses on the measures needed to strengthen these rural local self-governing institutions through the provision of reservations to the weaker sections of the society, and social audits to keep a check on financial matters, thereby reducing corruption in the process of governance. Moreover, it also stresses on the decentralized planning process in India along with fiscal decentralization and its overall impact on the welfare of the people at large. Let's try to understand all these aspects in detail.

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## **2.3 GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES TO EMPOWER LOCAL GOVERNMENT: RESERVATION AND SOCIAL AUDIT**

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Local Self-Governing Institutions are primarily meant for democratic decentralization. Here, citizens have an opportunity to participate in the process of governance directly. The concept of local self-governing institutions is not new to India. Since ancient times we can see evidence of the presence of local government. In the post-independence era, many steps were taken in the form of establishing various committees such as the Balwantrao Mehta Committee, Ashok Mehta Committee, C.H. Hanumantrao Working Group, G.V.K Rao Committee, L.M Singhvi Committee, etc. to give constitutional status to these local bodies in India. These committees have recommended democratic decentralization in India. It has created a necessary buzz to provide constitutional status to the local self-governing institutions in India. Finally, the 73rd Constitutional amendment was passed in 1992. Through this amendment, a three-tier system of governance was established in rural areas (Nayak, 2016). This amendment was historic in nature as it has taken several measures to empower these local bodies. Let's try to understand two of the most important initiatives taken by the government:

### **Provision of Reservation:**

India is known as a country with 'Unity in Diversity'. This diversity can be seen in the demands made by various sections of society. If we wish to cater to the demands of such a varied population, the service-providing institutions need the involvement of all the sections. Therefore, Local self-governing institutions need to be representative of all sections of society. Constitution makers took immense efforts to include weaker sections of the society in this process of democratic decentralization through the provision of reservation to scheduled castes, and scheduled tribes in every panchayat (i.e. at all three levels) as per article 243D of the Indian constitution. This provision of the reservation is according to the proportion of their population. The 73rd constitutional amendment act also provides for the reservation of the office of chairpersons in the panchayats at the village or any other level for the SCs and STs. Further not less than one-third of the total number of offices for chairpersons at all levels of the panchayat to be reserved for women. Social inequalities existed in Indian villages for centuries. Therefore, Post-Independence constitution makers sought to



provide social justice for the development of all sections of society. The reservation policy in the panchayat seats for the SCs, STs, and women has proved to be an important step towards achieving the larger goals of empowering weaker sections and ultimately increasing the efficiency in the working of local self-governing institutions. It has helped them to establish their identities. 100% participation of women in village panchayat was found in Gangadevipally Village in the Warangal district of Andhra Pradesh. A special characteristic that was observed there was the formation of parallel committees by the women leaders which would act as watch bodies to the Gram Panchayat in the village. So basically, this political power has imbibed a sense of responsibility as well as the sense of importance among these women leaders. Similarly, it has helped SCs and STs to have a proper share of representation in the political sphere as per their population. Because of this reservation policy, the representatives of weaker sections of the society are able to assert the issues of their community through a proper platform (Venkatesha, 2019).

But, despite providing reservations to weaker sections they are still not empowered. One major indicator of the empowerment of weaker sections in society is their share of representation in the political sphere of the country. The important aspect to note here is that the reservation does not guarantee effective participation and empowerment of weaker or marginalized sections of society especially SCs, STs, and women. Dalit representation faces many challenges such as lack of education, enhanced atrocities, and violence against Dalit representatives, especially in Panchayati Raj Institutions (Thirupathi, May 2021). On the other hand, women representatives face even more challenges. Such as challenges put forth by patriarchy, male dominance in the political sphere in general, and lack of social status for women. The word “Sarpanch-Pati” is very prominently used at the Panchayati level to denote such women representatives who work in the political sphere according to the dictate of their husbands. In all, their representation in the real sense is questionable (Commission, 2019).

The 73rd constitutional amendment act was very revolutionary to provide for the reservation of weaker sections of society. But, the intended benefits of this scheme could not be achieved in a real sense. Therefore, effective implementation of reservation policy, capacity building, and proper training for the representatives at the local level is the need of the hour.

### **Social Audit:**

In simple terms, the social audit can be described as the process through which information is gathered regarding the financial and non-financial resources used for developmental initiatives by any public agency. The audit can take place in various sectors such as health, water, companies, organizations, financial institutions, and the like. It is basically an indicator to measure the performance of the institution. Social Audit helps to narrow the gap between the policy objectives and its outcome, i.e. the goal and the reality.

Apart from granting reservation to the marginalized section of society, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act also gave legal status to social audit. With the passage of this amendment, gram sabha has been empowered to conduct social audits, and thereafter the importance of social audits can be seen on the rise. Wherever there is a use of funds, the chances of its misuse and corrupt practices are not something new. Overall, it affects the functioning of local governance. Therefore, it is necessary to keep a check on these malpractices. Keeping this in mind, a special structure was evolved as a measure to check the financial matters of local self-governing institutions. It was in the form of a social audit which serves as an instrument to measure the social accountability of an organization. It basically works as an anticorruption and a mechanism to enhance the efficiency of an organization. In simple terms, we can say that Social Audit is a way to measure, understand, report and ultimately improve the social and ethical performance of the administration.

Social Audit is based on the principle that citizens have the right to know about the execution of government policies i.e. how the government implements a particular policy and what impact it will have on the citizens. After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, Gram Sabha is empowered to regularly conduct the social audit of all its policies. It shall make available all the relevant documents including the muster roll, bills, vouchers, and other books of accounts to the panchayat for the purpose of conducting a Social Audit. It checks whether the benefits of the scheme are reaching the citizens or not. The basic aim of Social Audit is to maintain transparency in the system and to make the authorities more accountable to the people in general. It finds the gap in the administrative system and also suggests measures to overcome the same. Thereby, it helps in developing the regime of social transparency (D., December 2016 ). It ensures the enhancement of local governance and adds value to the mechanism of good governance.

But, there are several limitations of social audit. Most importantly, there is a lack of apathy among politicians and the administrative wing to institutionalize this mechanism to deal with the issue of corruption. Therefore, the existing social audit units get politically influenced. It is very difficult to conduct social audits as there is a lack of trained auditors to conduct social audits and the resistance faced by the social audit facilitators. Also, the lack of action on such audit reports and findings is evident. There is no structure that will act independently to review the findings of such audit reports. People are not able to take part in the process due to less knowledge and less awareness about it. To overcome such challenges first and foremost, there is a need to establish an institutionalized framework to make the social audit system work effectively and then the institutional capacity of the local self-governing institutions must be increased.

To sum up, through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act the government has taken some important steps in the form of granting reservations to marginalized sections of the society and conducting the social audit of the schemes under gram panchayat. The purpose was to ensure the efficient functioning of the local self-governing institutions and empower them to perform more effectively for the welfare of the people.

## Check Your Progress Exercise 1

**Note: Use the space given below for your answer.**

- 1) Describe the initiatives taken by the government to empower the local self-governing institutions.**

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### 2.4 FISCAL DECENTRALISATION

Fiscal Decentralisation means the devolution of finances from the central government to the local levels of government. The basic motive of fiscal decentralization is to enable local governments to provide public services according to the needs of the people. Fiscal decentralization covers two important aspects:

- a) Division of Expenditure
- b) The amount of discretion to be given to local self-governing institutions in order to determine their expenditure and revenue.

According to the World Bank, Fiscal Decentralisation entrusts substantial revenue and expenditure authority to local levels of government. Fiscal decentralization means the allocation of resources from central to local governments as well as the generation of resources by local governments. In India, the provision of fiscal decentralization has been mandated by the constitution. Before the 73rd constitutional amendment act, several committees were constituted to recommend some measures of financial autonomy of the local governments. For example, the financial inquiry committee (1951), the Taxation inquiry committee (1954), and the like. All these committees more or less recommended fiscal decentralization. Constitutional measures were taken in this direction by considering these recommendations.

Article 243A of the Indian constitution talks about democratic decentralization. Article 280 (3) (bb) provides for the establishment of a central finance commission to suggest measures needed to augment the consolidated fund of the state to supplement the resources of the panchayats in the state. Article 243H of the Indian constitution empowers states – a) To authorize a panchayat to levy, collect and appropriate such taxes, duties, tolls, and fees; b) To assign to a panchayat, certain taxes, duties, tolls levied and collected by the state government; c) To provide for making grants-in-aid to the panchayats from the consolidated fund of the state; and d) To provide for the constitution of such funds for panchayats and also the withdrawal of such money therefrom; as may be specified by law.

As per Article 243-I of the Constitution, each state shall set up the State Finance Commission (SFC) after every five years. The two major objectives to set up such SFCs are - to review the financial position of the panchayats and to make recommendations to the Governor as to I) The governing methods through which the net proceeds of the taxes, duties, tolls and fees levied by the state gets distributed between the state and local government. a) It shall get divided between the state and the local government under this part and the allocation of the respective shares of such proceeds between all the three levels of the b) The determination of the taxes, duties, tolls, and fees which may be assigned to, or appropriated by the panchayats; c) The grants-in-aid to the panchayats from the consolidated fund of the state I) The measures needed to improve the financial position of the panchayats; II) Any other matter referred to the finance commission by the Governor in the interests of sound finance of the panchayats (Sen, 1996).

Sources of revenue – There are various sources of revenue for the local government. Such as local taxation, user charges, intergovernmental transfers, and capital finance. Let's discuss some of the important sources of revenue of Panchayati raj institutions: a) Revenue from the central government, b) Revenue from the state government which includes allocation as per the recommendation of the state finance commission and scheme-specific grants, c) Internal resources of revenue such as taxable income and fees and non-taxable income from property resources, sales of goods and services, etc. (Sen, 1996)

Recently, Niti Aayog has come up with the term 'Competitive and Co-operative Federalism'. This was basically to redefine the structure of federalism in India. Co-operative federalism meant that the central government and the state government will cooperate with each other to implement various policies. Competitive federalism means the states will have to compete among themselves as well as with the center in order to attract funds and investment. Here, developed states get more preference from investors. The Central government also devolves funds to the states. This devolution is primarily based on how much previously allotted funds have been utilized by the states. This concept has given a new dimension to the concept of fiscal decentralization in India (Aayog, 2017).

To sum up we can say that, fiscal decentralization is very important to achieve the objective of democratic decentralization in India. In order to implement the policies and programs at the local level, they need to be given proper financial autonomy and flexibility. This fiscal decentralization would help attain the larger goal of good governance. But, in the Indian context, such fiscal autonomy has not been effective in improving the services provided by the local governments. The problem is twofold – the first is with respect to design. It means that rural local bodies simply implement the schemes designed by central or state governments, they do not take any decisions on policy design. The Second is concerning implementation. The rural local bodies are not empowered to raise revenue which ultimately affects the implementation of policies and programs. Now, there is a need to improve the revenue model of rural local self-governing institutions to enhance their fiscal autonomy. Improving the revenue

structure would help reduce the gap between revenue and expenditure decisions which eventually help promote efficiency in providing services to people. Each state should come up with its decentralized planning system as per the need of the region, state of land distribution, the capacity of local bodies to implement the policies and programs, etc. (M. Govinda Rao, May 2011). A proper activity mapping can resolve these challenges and will help ensure the smooth and effective functioning of these rural local self-governing institutions.

## Check Your Progress Exercise 2

**Note:** Use the space given below for your answer.

- 1) Explain the constitutional provisions of fiscal decentralization in India.

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## 2.5 DECENTRALISED PLANNING

In recent years, we can see the worldwide trend of decentralization. In simple terms, it means the devolution of administrative, political, and Fiscal responsibilities to the local levels of government. The prevailing centralized system of administration could not function effectively. The service provided under such a system was not satisfactory. Therefore, to overcome such challenges put forth by the centralized system of governance, and to deepen democratic principles, countries started adopting a decentralized system of governance. Policy-makers see the decentralized system as a one-stop solution to many problems faced by society. They perceived it as an efficient means of allocation of resources to reduce poverty, empower marginalized sections of society, to achieve gender equality. All this will eventually help improve governance and accelerate the economic growth of the country. Decentralized planning also means perspective planning. It basically bridges the gap between the people and administration and thereby brings governance closer to the people in general. The major goals to be achieved under decentralized planning are the welfare of the people at large and ensuring social justice for all in society.

In 1939, M. Visvesvaraya published a document titled 'District Development Scheme: Economic Progress by Forced Marches'. It was the first attempt to have micro-level planning in India with an aim of rural economic development. A district economic council was set up in India to achieve this goal. So, in a way, it was the first step towards decentralized planning as far as India is concerned. After Independence, India opted for centralized planning through a five-year planning system. Though the first and second five-year plans argued for decentralized planning, they did not create a proper framework for the same. The Third and Fourth Plans took some initiative to prepare the district plan, but they could not integrate properly within the state plan. Similarly, the fifth five-year plan advocated block-level planning. During the same period, Ashok Mehta Committee

was constituted which stressed on the district as a unit of development. The importance of local-level planning was reiterated in the sixth five-year plan. Recognition of micro-level planning was given in this phase. During the same period, a working group on district decentralised planning was set up. It provided proper guidelines for the preparation of district plans. After that, the seventh five-year plan stressed the need for district planning as per the guidelines of the working group. The Eighth and ninth five-year plans also sought decentralized planning in India. The District Development Plans were to be prepared with the help of the District Planning Committee. Article 243ZD has a provision for the establishment of a district planning commission. We can see that decentralized planning was discussed and debated over a period of time. But, could not get much success due to many practical reasons.

It is evident that the Central government used to direct the terms of policies to local levels of government. It was a top-down approach to governance. This centralized system has too many drawbacks. For example, it cannot make sectoral level planning which is needed to cater to the diversity at the local level, the needs of the local level could not get proper representation, and their concerns were neglected. Inequality increased and regional imbalance grew with the centralized system of planning. To overcome these drawbacks, India has also adhered to the global pattern of a Decentralised system of Planning in governance. Since the 1990s India seems to have devolved greater powers to the rural and urban local governing institutions. Indian policy planners realized the importance of the participation of citizens in the success of the policy. People's participation can only be achieved with a decentralized system of planning. It is very essential to associate people at all levels of policy-making. Also, they felt the need for a decentralized system for having an effective system of planning. It was Mahatma Gandhi who advocated mainly for decentralized planning in India (Management, 2008).

As we have already noted, the 73rd Constitutional amendment act has given constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj as a rural local self-governing institution. It is the third tier of governance in India after the central and state level. The Panchayati Raj system also has three levels – at village level Gram panchayat, at Block or intermediate level panchayat Samiti, and district level Zilla Parishad. As per article 243G of the 73rd CAA, the state legislature is required to transfer such powers, functions, and responsibilities to village block and district-level bodies of Panchayats. It enables them to function as self-governing institutions. The amendment act has added schedule 11 to the constitution. This schedule contains a list of 29 broad functions of Panchayati Raj institutions. The important functions include Agriculture, Land Improvement, Rural Housing, Drinking Water, Family and Social welfare, Public Distribution System, poverty alleviation programs, and the like. State government devolves these functions to the panchayats at their discretion and then the Panchayati raj institutions carry out these functions.

But, there exists a gap in these 29 functions intended to devolve to the local institutions as per the constitution and its implementation by the states. Most states have devolved only a few out of the 29 functions and that too with limited powers. Also, states have created parallel or independent agencies



which makes it even more difficult to strengthen local institutions. Now, proper activity mapping of all these institutions is the need of an hour. It will help ensure that the specific needs of the people can be achieved, efficient utilization of the resources, and greater sustainability can be achieved. Political leaders and bureaucrats should show some willingness to implement the principles of decentralized planning and share responsibilities with the local governments to improve their efficiency (Mahipal, 2008).

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

**Note:** Use the space given below for your answer.

- 1) **Explain the Decentralized planning in India after the 73rd Constitutional amendment act.**

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## 2.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To summarise the discussion, the creation of the Panchayati Raj Institutions through the 73rd constitutional amendment act was a historic move to ensure democratic decentralization in India. Some peculiar features of this amendment include establishing a three-tier system of governance at the local level, providing reservation of seats to SCs, and STs according to their population, reserving 1/3rd of seats to Women, conducting the social audit, etc. these were some of the initiatives taken by the constitution makers to strengthen the Panchayati Raj institutions and make it more representative and efficient in its functioning.

Earlier there were many challenges and loopholes in the centralized system of administration. To address these challenges decentralized planning was adopted in India. It means the devolution of powers from central to local governments. It includes the devolution of administrative, political as well as financial functions to local governments. Such devolution of functions brings people closer to the governance of the country. It is important for the welfare of citizens in general. Fiscal decentralization is one major aspect of it. It ensures financial autonomy to the local self-governing institutions. In recent years, the term Co-operative Competitive Federalism has changed the dynamics of fiscal decentralization in India. This decentralized planning helps bridge the gap between the citizens and the administration. It involves people in the administrative process of the country which is very essential for a healthy democracy.

Still, there remain many challenges such as red-tapism, corruption, lack of apathy on part of the central government to adhere to the norms of democratic decentralization, inefficiency in the representation at the local level as well as in the proper use of resources, and the like. Now, these problems should be addressed immediately to ensure good governance in the country. It will definitely lead to sustainable development in the country.

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## **RURAL DEVELOPMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRI)**

### **Unit Structure**

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Objective
- 3.2 Employment: National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
- 3.3 Implementation of Mgnrega
- 3.4 Roles and Responsibilities of Stakeholders
- 3.5 Evaluation
- 3.6 Health: National Rural Health Mission
- 3.7 Features
- 3.8 Approaches of Nrhm
- 3.9 Strategy of Nrhm
- 3.10 Implementation Framework
- 3.11 Evaluation
- 3.12 Education: Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
- 3.13 References

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### **3.0 INTRODUCTION**

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As of 2021, according to the World Bank about 64.61% of population in India lives in its villages. The central government has prepared and expanded several schemes of social security for their welfare. This is in tune with the ideal of social and economic justice laid down in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution. By backing the schemes with legislations, the government has guaranteed the services to the intended target population that can approach courts if their right is violated.

In this chapter we shall be learning about 3 sectors- Employment, Health and Education. Under each of the schemes, governance has been decentralized and the Panchayati Raj Institutions are assigned responsibility to contribute towards the planning as well as monitoring the execution of the schemes.

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### **3.1 OBJECTIVE**

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- Understand the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in particular schemes for rural development
- Analyse the working of PRIs and other stakeholders in meeting the objectives and goals of the policies

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## 3.2 EMPLOYMENT: NATIONAL RURAL EMPLOYMENT GUARANTEE ACT

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The National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) is the legislation that guarantees the 'right to work' for people in India. It is a perfect marriage between labour law and social security. The Act was passed on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2005 and was enacted in September 2005. The aim of the Act is to enhance livelihood security in the rural areas. This employment programme guarantees at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to a household. The precondition is that adult members must volunteer to do unskilled manual labour.

### History

The Act was proposed by former Prime Minister P. V. Narsimha Rao in the year 1991. In several sessions of the Parliament, the programme was discussed. However finally on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2005, the Indian Parliament passed the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act. Its nomenclature was prefixed with 'Mahatma Gandhi' on 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2009 to make it MGNREGA.

The FAQ section of MGNREGA gives a brief summary of the paradigm shift brought about by the program in the following words:

*MGNREGA is demand driven wage employment programme and resource transfer from Centre to States is based on the demand for employment in each State. MGNREGA is bottom-up, people-centred, demand-driven, self-selecting and rights-based programme. It provides a legal guarantee for wage employment by providing allowances and compensation both in cases of failure to provide work on demand and delays in payment of wages for work undertaken. Plans and decisions regarding the nature and choice of works to be undertaken, the order in which each worksite selection etc., are all to be made in open assemblies of the Gram Sabha (GS) and ratified by the GP. Social audit is a new feature, which creates accountability of performance, especially towards immediate stakeholders. Thus MGNREGA also marks a break from the relief programmes of the past towards an integrated natural resource management and livelihoods generation perspective.*

From the above we understand that the Gram Sabha is the primary unit of the execution of the programme. It is instrumental in developing plans for the village and submitting to the gram Panchayat. The Gram Sabha also ensures availability of machinery and human resources for the registration of individuals into the programme. With the Gram Sabhas and the entire Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) involved in the planning and implementation of the programme, it takes into account the democratic nature of functioning and brings governance to grassroots.

The core objectives of the MGNREGS are:

- (a) Providing not less than one hundred days of unskilled manual work as a guaranteed employment in a financial year to every household in rural areas as per demand, resulting in creation of productive assets of prescribed quality and durability;
- (b) Strengthening the livelihood resource base of the poor;
- (c) Proactively ensuring social inclusion and
- (d) Strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The goals are:

- i) Social protection for the most vulnerable people living in rural India by guaranteeing wage employment opportunities.
- ii) Enhance livelihood security of the rural poor through generation of wage employment opportunities in works leading to creation of durable assets.
- iii) Rejuvenate natural resource base of rural areas.
- iv) Create a durable and productive rural asset base.
- v) Empowerment of the socially disadvantaged, especially, women, Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), through the processes of a rights-based legislation.
- vi) Strengthen decentralised, participatory planning through convergence of various anti-poverty and livelihoods initiatives.
- vii) Deepen democracy at the grassroots by strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions.

While creating rural development plans for hiring of villagers, the planning authority keeps in mind the needs of the village, and creates plans for construction of durable assets like roads, canals, ponds and wells. There is a set of guidelines to approve a plan and fund it.

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### 3.3 IMPLEMENTATION OF MGNREGA

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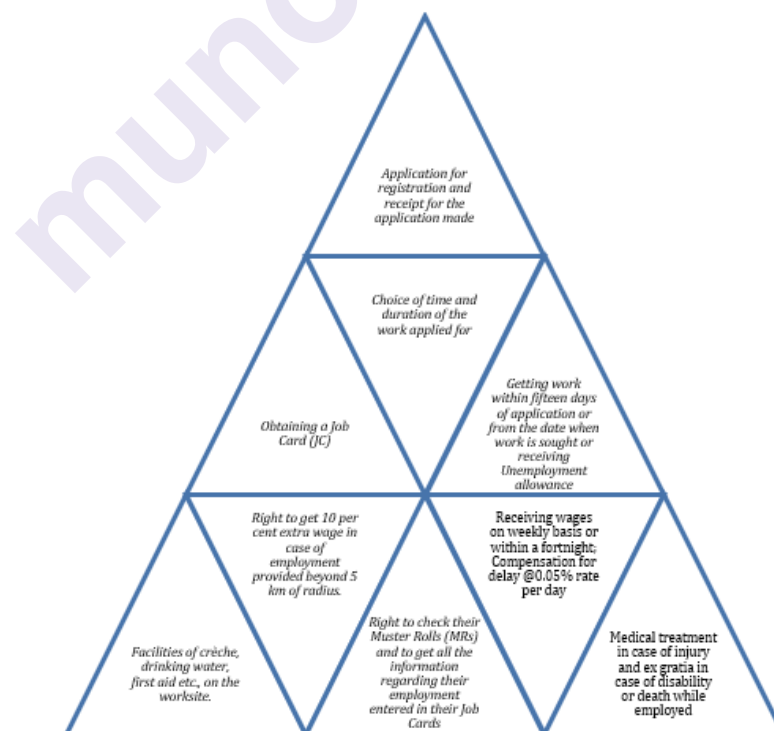
The Gram Panchayats (GPs) implement the programmes under MGNREGA as mentioned above. The Panchayati Raj Institutions are endowed with sole responsibility of planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the completion of work against plans. The engagement of contractors/middlemen is strictly prohibited in the programme. NREGA not only provides economic security and rural assets but also helps in protecting the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural-urban migration, fostering social equity etc. The MGNREG Act has elaborately described the principles and agencies for execution, list of allowed works, financing pattern, monitoring and evaluation and quintessentially the detailed measures to ensure transparency and accountability.

The key stakeholders of the scheme are illustrated below:



With the wage seeker as the primary beneficiary, all the other stakeholders have designated roles and responsibilities towards the attainment of goals under the Act.

The Act recognizes the Right to Work of the individuals living in rural areas. And the policy has hence enlisted the Rights and Entitlements of wage-seekers under the scheme.



Along with the mandate of providing atleast 100 days of employment, the state is required to provide employment within 5 km of an applicant's home



and to pay minimum wage. There is a caveat for the vulnerable women, disabled and senior citizens to seek less tedious work close to their homes. If the applicant does not get any work within 15 days of applying, s/he is entitled to receive an unemployment allowance. Hence, it is a legal entitlement to be employed under MGNREGA.

All this data of programme execution is uploaded by the programme officer and technical assistants in a specially designed web-app named NREGASoft hosted at the portal accessible as <http://nrega.nic.in>. The backend is enabled to calculate wages of worker after approval of work completion by the Work Mate – a female supervisory officer who records attendance in the muster, takes measurements of work at the end of the day and updates the wage-seeker's job card. Payment of wages shall be done on a weekly basis or within a fortnight before closing the muster. In case of delay in payment, the software will calculate wages including 0.05% interest per day which will have to be borne by the State Government. The wage seeker also enjoys the right to get 10 per cent extra wage in case of employment provided beyond 5 km of radius.

### **3.4 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF STAKEHOLDERS**

Each of the stake-holders from the government side have very specific roles to play for streamlined execution of the policy. The chief functions of each of them are stated below:

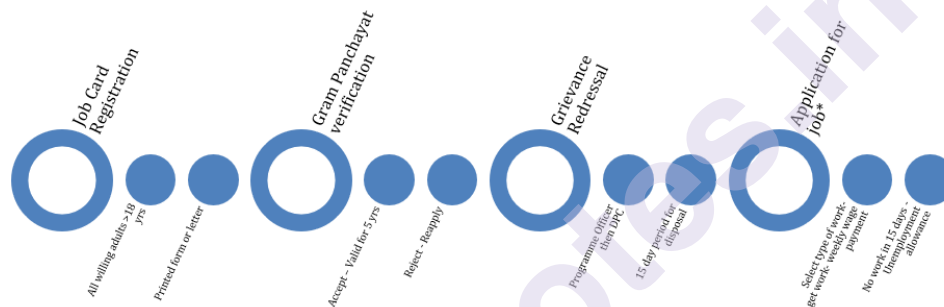
- Gram Sabha
  - Determine priority of projects
  - Monitor projects and be prepared for audit
- Gram Panchayat
  - Receiving applications for registration, verifying them
  - Registering households, Issuing JCs
  - Receiving application for work and issuing dated receipts for them
  - Conducting periodical surveys to assess demand for work, Planning work, developing shelf of projects, determining priority
  - Executing work, monitoring implementation, preparing annual report, disclosing details of work to Audit machinery
  - Awareness generation, social mobilisation, Organize Rozgar Diwas at GP level
- Programme Officer (Designation: Block Development Officer)
  - Coordinator of scheme at Block Level

- Consolidating all applications from all GPs, submitting record to District Panchayat
- Monitoring work of GPs
- Ensuring prompt and fair wage payment to labourers; Maintaining accounts
- District Programme Coordinator (Designated: District Collector)
  - Assist the District Panchayat; Review, monitor and supervise the performance of the POs
  - Add new projects after time sanction
  - Ensure timely release and utilization of funds
- District Panchayat
  - Approving works with expected outcomes
  - Consolidate annual block plans
- State Employment Guarantee Council
  - Advice State Government
  - Evaluate and monitor the Scheme
  - Review the redressal mechanism
- Central Employment Guarantee Council
  - Establish central evaluation and monitoring system
  - Prepare annual report to be laid before Parliament by the Central Government
- Ministry of Rural Development
  - Frame Rules under the Act
  - Review list of permissible works
  - Set up and operate National Employment Guarantee Fund
- Civil Society Organisations and Self Help Groups (SHGs)
  - Awareness generation among wage seekers
  - Capacity building of GPs and State Govts
  - Supporting planning, implementing and social audit
  - Assisting in door-to-door survey

- Other stakeholders
  - Members of Social Audit Unit, Vigilance and Monitoring Committees,
  - Technical Staff of implementing agencies,
  - Departments with whom MoU has been signed for convergence with MGNREGA, viz, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Forest & Environment, Ministry of Water Resources, Department of Rural Development, Department of Land Resources and Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation

As students of political science, we must appreciate the neat hierarchy and clear designation of roles for each layer of the government and supplementary stakeholders. We must acknowledge the assistance of civil society organizations in the execution of the scheme

### Process for Wage seeker



### Funding of the Scheme

While designing a plan at the GP level, a 60:40 ratio for wage and material cost needs to be mentioned. The Gram Sabha is also to deliberate upon and set a priority for the projects as per local area needs and available resources while aiding the Gram Panchayat in making the Gram Panchayat Development Plan including preparation of the Labour Budget.

The Development Plan takes into account the assessment of labour demand, identifies work to meet the labour demand, estimates cost of work and calculates wages, and foresees benefits in terms of employment generation as well as physical improvements. The Labour Budget is expected to project quantitative data on the households that will get employment, persondays of labour, expenditure on wages and material expenses.

While allotting a fund for the scheme, the Central government needs to bear the full cost of unskilled labour and 75% of the cost of material. The balance cost of materials is borne by the states. Additionally, the workers are expected to carry along the implements for work. Under this scheme, no labour displacing machine is allowed for utilization.

On an annual basis, the below given timeline is followed for the planning and labour budget preparation task-

Date	Action to be taken
15th August	Gram Sabha to approve GP Annual Plan and submit to PO
15th September	PO submits consolidated GP Plans to Block Panchayat
2nd October	Block Panchayat to approve the Block Annual Plan and submit to DPC
15th November	DPC to present District Annual Plan and LB to District Panchayat
1st December	District Panchayat to approve District Annual Plan
15th December	DPC to ensure that shelf of projects for each GP is ready after approval of labour budget and list of works of the respective GP should be entered in MIS before 15 <sup>th</sup> December of each year (as mentioned below)
31st December	Labour Budget is submitted to Central Government
January	Ministry scrutinises the Labour Budget and requests for compliance for deficiencies, if any
February	Meetings of Empowered Committee are held and LB finalised
February, March	Agreed to LB communicated to States. States to feed data of month-wise and district-wise break-up of "Agreed to" LB in MIS and communicate the same to districts/ blocks/ GPs
Before 7th April	States to communicate Opening Balance (OB), Centre to release upfront / 1st Tranche.

*Source: FAQs on MGNREGA Operational Guidelines – 2013*

### 3.5 EVALUATION

The MGNREG Scheme is one of the most effective in ensuring rural development. It focuses on not only economic development of residents by mandating timely payment of wages in return for labour, but also providing for community assets to be built as per local needs, while also ensuring environment conservation.

It benefits rural masses with dignified life through earning their means of livelihood. The scheme specially empowers rural women who get to work at a location close to their house and can avoid having to travel long distances. They also get to join or form self-help groups which help them in socio-economic development.

Principally, the scheme also aims towards social inclusion and equity as it designates the State Government to include vulnerable groups such as women who face the threat of trafficking, primitive tribals, de-notified tribes, senior citizens above 65 years of age, persons with disabilities, HIV positive persons, internally displaced persons and rehabilitated bonded labour. It is responsible for formulating specific plans to include the special groups in the MGNREGA. While in some cases closer location of employment is offered, for others a special job card of a distinct colour is given for 'special protection in providing work, work evaluation and worksite facilitates'.

The scheme has the potential to reduce rural-to-urban migration in search of jobs. It gives economic security to households by being employed in the same locality. Additionally, for transparency, the web app NREGASoft has been developed for all Gram Panchayats, Program Officers and Social Audit Agencies alike to enter data of wage seekers and work evaluation reports. For accountability, there are multiple levels of checks and grievance redressal mechanism provided within the Scheme.

On implementation, it is seen that the minimum wage may not suffice for the entire household. Therefore wages seem to be low, especially as inflation is not taken into account. There have also been several instances of delayed payments. The States do not keep a separate budget for wage liabilities, thus denying the labourers their economic right. In many states, the entire allotted money gets exhausted within the first six months of the financial year and thereafter there are no funds to carry out more works. Certain states have shown low demand for work while workers are being turned away in reality.

A few recommendations that have been put forth include increase in wage rate as per inflation, increase in minimum number of days of guaranteed employment upto 150, timely payment of wages as stated in the Act. There is also a demand for integrating insurance of all members of the families that hold Job Cards. Since the COVID-19 pandemic broke out, there has also arisen a need to include health hazard prevention protocol at work sites.

MGNREGA is regarded as “the largest and most ambitious social security and public works programme in the world.” The World Bank has acknowledged the benefits of the scheme and coined the term ‘stellar example of rural development’.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 1

**Note: Use the space given below for your answer.**

- 1) Explain the objectives of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme.

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- 2) What is the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in employment guarantee at the rural level?

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### 3.6 HEALTH: NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH MISSION

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India's health sector was an area of concern since pre-independence. During the colonial rule, the Britishers were apathetic towards the outbreaks of epidemics that raged across the province of Bengal. Problems such as lack of doctors, nurses, lack of hospital beds, inadequate supply of essential drugs and poor allocation of funds led to high death toll.

A few years before granting independence to India, a committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Sir Joseph Bhore. It was known as the Health Survey & Development Committee. The committee submitted its report in the year 1946 making comprehensive recommendations as below-

1. Integration of preventive and curative services
2. Development of PHCs
  - i. Short-term measure: 1 Primary Health Centre per population of 40000
  - ii. Long-term: 75-bedded hospitals for population of 10000-20000, 650-bedded at the block level, 2500-bed at the district level
3. Medical education to include 3-month training to prepare 'social physician'

Even after independence, the investment in the health sector was negligible. Health indicators were measly. It was in 2005 that the National Rural Health Mission was launched with the aim to achieve '*universal access to equitable, affordable & quality health care services that are accountable and responsive to people's needs.*'

National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) was launched in April 12, 2005 to address the health needs of the underserved rural population especially women, children and vulnerable sections of the society and to provide affordable, accessible and quality healthcare.

The Goal of the Mission is to improve the availability of and access to quality health care by people, especially for those residing in rural areas, the poor, women and children. Universal access to public health services such as Women's health, child health, water, sanitation & hygiene, immunization, and Nutrition.

The National Rural Health Mission was launched in 2005 for a period of 7 years. In 2012, it was subsumed under the newly drafted National Health Mission with two Sub-Missions including National Urban Health Mission. The validity of this Mission was for 5 years subject to extension by the Central Government. It was continued by the cabinet. On 1st April 2017. It was further extended till 31st March by the Ministry of Finance. On the 10th of January 2020 and finally it has been extended from the first of April. Till the year 2026 on the 1st of February 2022 till further review.



### 3.7 FEATURES

The features of the National Rural Health mission include making public health delivery system fully functional and accountable to the community. It includes augmentation of human resources by employing women from the village to work as voluntary health workers. It also includes community involvement and decentralization of decision making for health care of the villagers.

The implementation is through members of the community. One of the most important is the accredited social health activist [ASHA] She is an honorary volunteer who promotes universal immunization. She refers and escorts individuals for health services. She also ensures that construction of household toilets is completed, among many other tasks that are assigned to her. Another feature of the Health Mission is to strengthen the Primary Health centres. Some of these have been existing even before the scheme was planned. However, there were several issues such as inadequate supply of essential drugs and equipment through the scheme. This is expected to be addressed. Community health centers are now becoming the first referral and shall include the posting of anaesthetics.

Disease Control programme shall we strengthen, for example, the number of people suffering from and the mortality rate by diseases like malaria, tuberculosis, Kala Azar, filaria, blindness and iodine deficiency needs to be reduced as per the targets set by the Mission.

The features include making public health delivery system fully functional and accountability under community. It includes augmentation of human resources by employing women from the village to work as voluntary health workers. It also includes community involvement and decentralization of decision making for health care of the villagers.

The role of ensuring healthcare services and planning healthcare priorities is designated to the Panchayati Raj institutions who are local decision makers on behalf of the Community. The National Rural Health Mission also includes rigorous monitoring and evaluation of each district's health standards against the Indian Public Health Standards.

Another important feature of this mission is convergence of health and related programs from village level upwards till the central government. Infact all the health related programs which were run by the central government work be brought under the umbrella of the National Rural Health Mission. The Mission encourages innovative schemes for public health management. It also sets of Rogi Kalyan Samiti at every district levels.

Love coming to medical education? Learn NRHM reorients health education where in it? Recommends inclusion of social medicine as an integral part of the curriculum and. Seeks medical students to serve in under the NRHM in rural areas of the country. Also, a Medical Grants Commission is recommended to be setup in order to ensure that medical health education is being supervised.

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### 3.8 APPROACHES OF NRHM

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NRHM has 5 main approaches. They are as follows:

1. Communitize
2. Improved management through capacity
3. Flexible financing
4. Innovation in human resource management and
5. Monitor progress against standards.

Below we are going to look at each of these approaches in detail.

**Communitize:** Village health plans are submitted to the district wherein they are consolidated to prepare the respective District Health Plan. The hospital management committee or the Panchayati Raj institutions at all levels are expected to handle the healthcare services at the local level. Untied grants are given to the Community or to the PRI bodies. They can utilize it for the Plans that are made at the district level. Funds, functions and functionaries are given to local community organisations. This means that the civil society organizations also become an integral part of the execution of this mission. There is decentralised planning where in village health and sanitation committees take on the mantle of ensuring that health standards are maintained and pick in a converged approach of improvement of sanitation to improve the health indicators.

**Improved management through capacity:** Efforts made by the state to improve the management skills at the block and District health office. NGOs aid in capacity building programmes. There is continue skill development support offered to all the members of the District Health Committee and the other committees that are set up for the execution of the program.

**Flexible financing:** Untied grants are given to institutions. The NGO sector for public health goals also gets a part of this amount for the services offered. They are used as implementers of the programs. For this purpose, a set of guidelines has been laid down by the Ministry of health and Family Welfare. There is also risk pooling wherein money follows the patient. By covering all individuals of the village under a health insurance scheme, the group's medical cost is combined to calculate premium.

**Innovation in human resource management.:** More nurses are to be hired window criteria that they must be local residents 24/7. Emergencies are to be attended by nurses at the Public Health Centre. AYUSH doctors are considered equivalent to the doctors from the mainstream. This was enabled after a petition, which they won when the Supreme Court declared that their end-role is the treatment of patients. Even in the Community health centre level. Medical emergencies are to be treated 24/7. Investment is made by the scheme to multi-skill the health workers.

**Monitor, progress against standards:** Indian Public Health Standards are to be set in order to check the achievements of targets under this program. Facility service are carried out at different districts while auditing machinery. Independent monitoring committees are also set up at the Block, District and state level.

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### 3.9 STRATEGY OF NRHM

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The strategies employed by the National Rural Health Mission can be broadly divided into 2 main categories.

1. Core strategies:
  - i. Capacity building of Panchayati Raj institutions is considered one of the core strategies under NRHM as this level of government constitutes the planning and executing authority of the scheme.
  - ii. Household health care improvement is carried out through ASHA workers. They enable door to door survey and awareness of the healthcare facilities.
  - iii. A health plan is created for each village for an annual basis.
  - iv. Also, developing capacities for preventive healthcare measures is one of the important strategies under this mission.
2. Supplementary strategies involve –
  - i. Regulating the private sector. By taking the help of the private sector to attend the goals of universal health coverage, it is the mandate of the government to ensure that persons are not exploited as accessibility, affordability and being equitable are important principles of this mission. The public private partnership is one of the supplementary strategies under this mission.
  - ii. This came about after a case was filed by the AYUSH doctors that they receive substandard treatment when it comes to promotion.
  - iii. Social health insurance coverage of the people under this Scheme is a supplementary strategy, as risk pooling allows many individuals to come under the same scheme and thus money will follow the patient.

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### 3.10 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK

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As stated above the implementation framework includes. Planning at the local level, which is the village itself, as the main unit of initiation of the scheme. Under each village level we see an ASHA worker i.e. Accredited Social Health Activist. You will also see AWW i.e. Anganwadi workers in

every village. A village health daily needs to be organised and a drug kit needs to be available. There is also referral change which is created so that patients are referred to the Public Health Centre rather than visiting quacks. The Village Health and Sanitation Committee is also setup as the village level. This set up works for a population of under 1000 persons.

At the next level, which is a combination of around 5 to 6 villages, at the gram panchayat level we see the sub health centre. Here there is skill upgradation of educated rural medical practitioners, also known as registered medical practitioner or 2 ANMs- Auxiliary nurse midwives. At this level there is also one mail multi purpose worker for the 5 to 6 villages. There is a telephonic link between all the villages and grama panchayat. The mother and Child Health Program is run Alice. Level which designates certain immunization days were in the Asha, worker encourages. Windows to get their children for vaccination. Drugs are also dispensed and the gram panchayat level and the mother and child Health Clinic is run here.

The Public health centre level is the next level, which is a cluster of gram panchayats which is a collection of 30 to 40 villages, and this level we see 3 staff nurses. Including one lady health worker for 4 to 5 some health centre. There is also an ambulance or a hired vehicle. The Mother and Child Health/ immunization clinics is scheduled on fixed days. The AYUSH doctor is posted at PHCs. Also, emergencies can be handled by nurses 24/7, that is round the clock. Services are available here. To work losses and malaria tests are conducted here and there. Drugs are also dispensed to the patients. Finally. At the block level hospital we see that ambulance services telephonic connectivity is available. This is for a population of 100 villages where the population is around a lakh. There is also obstructive and surgical facilities available and all such medical emergencies are attended 24/7, that is round the clock services are available at the block level hospital.

This hierarchy is headed by the Chief Block Medical Officer who is stationed at the Block Level Health Office. He is assisted by a health manager and accounting and storekeeper. Efforts are also made on this level to strengthen ambulance transport services. Increase availability of nurses, provide telephones and encourage fixed date clinics. The Block medical officer also networks for accreditation of private health care providers to meet the public health goals.

Low Health Department of every state government has their own mechanism for the overseeing of the execution of HRM. With regards to funding the central government aims to increase public health expenditure by 10% annually during the mission failure, and the states are expected to contribute 15% of the outlay annually towards health. After the states submit their State Program Implementation Plan to the National Program Coordination Committee, the national committee approves this plan and funds are released for the financial year. The funds are transferred to the State Health Society in 4 components on submission of Utilization Certificate and other documents. The state outlay of 15% is also received by the State Health Society.

The Mission envisages the following roles for PRIs:

- States to indicate in their MoUs the commitment for devolution of funds, functionaries and programmes for health, to PRIs.
- The District Health Mission to be led by the Zila Parishad. The DHM will control, guide and manage all public health institutions in the district, Sub-centres, PHCs and CHCs.
- ASHAs would be selected by and be accountable to the Village Panchayat.
- The Village Health Committee of the Panchayat would prepare the Village Health Plan, and promote intersectoral integration
- Each sub-centre will have an Untied Fund for local action @ Rs. 10,000 per annum. This Fund will be deposited in a joint Bank Account of the ANM & Sarpanch and operated by the ANM, in consultation with the Village Health Committee.
- PRI involvement in Rogi Kalyan Samitis for good hospital management.
- Provision of training to members of PRIs.
- Making available health related databases to all stakeholders, including Panchayats at all levels.

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### 3.11 EVALUATION

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Studying this policy would be incomplete without an evaluation of the National Rural Health Mission.

A few benefits of the NRHM haven't seen by a boost in the employment sector. Wearing locals have been employed to serve the public interest. There's also. All soul. A strengthening of the public health system. In the first 3 years we have seen effective and coordinated KO with 19 response they under 5 mortality rate in India has declined from 49 in the year 2013 to 36 in the year 2018. The number of people suffering from tuberculosis (TB) has come down from 234 per one lakh population in the year 2012 to 193 in the year 2019. Similarly even the death rate due to TB and malaria has come down drastically.

However, all is not well will the implementation of the program. If we look at the status of communicable diseases, it seems like number has come down. However, there is inadequate reporting at certain places. Thus the data is not captured right from the start. Also certain social reforms are necessary which regards to early marriages and teenage pregnancy in certain states of the country. There is some optimal awareness of mothers on childhood illnesses such as diarrhoea and pneumonia. They try home remedies and visit quacks before approaching village health centres, certain times too late. Additionally, certain villages face a dearth of infrastructures such as electricity and internet services. Additionally, there have been

instances where tablets and other essential drugs have not been available at the Health Centre at the required time. This defeats the purpose of the program.

The way forward would mean that there is community awareness of the affordable health services. It is necessary that vacancies of necessary staff are filled up at the earliest. The engagement of private labs and facilities could be done for reporting of data. Active screening and testing of symptomatic cases is required. Also, tele- psychiatric services under National Mental Health mission would benefit society at large. okay

There is a need for investment. In public health insurance. Policies as out of the pocket expenses are very high and unaffordable value comes to accessing healthcare services. If we look at statistics, about 70% of the total health expenditure in the year 2005. Was out of pocket. Thus it places a considerable financial burden on poor households and also the middle class. Utilised many people miss work. Suffer from recurrences or premature deaths which could have been avoided. Many infectious diseases are also taking the chronic form and we see a rise in lifestyle diseases being suffered by young patients. In order to address these challenges in the government is expanding formal health insurance such as the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana nationally and several states have implemented their own, such as Arogyasri in Andhra Pradesh.

### Check Your Progress Exercise 2

Note: Use the space given below for your answer.

1) What is the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the rural health sector?

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2) What are the approaches implemented for the execution of NRHM?

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## 3.12 EDUCATION: SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN

The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) was launched in the year 2001 under the regulation of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India. The core objective of the SSA Programme is to attain



the Universalization of Elementary Education (UEE) in the country. The overall goal of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is to include universal access and retention, bridging gender and social gaps in education and enhancing levels of learning for children.

The suggestion for universalization of education was mentioned in the recommendations made in the National Education Policy 1986. The predecessor of the SSA was the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP). It was launched in 1994 as a centrally-sponsored scheme to revitalize the primary education system. It was the first programme that aimed to universalize elementary education. DPEP had an area-specific approach with a district as a unit of planning.

The features of DPEP were:

1. 85 percent of the project cost was aided by the Central Government and 15 percent by the concerned State Government.
2. This program covered 18 states
3. International Organisations such as the World Bank and UNICEF assisted the Central Government externally.

The passage of the 86<sup>th</sup> Amendment Act in 2022 inserted the Right to Education as Article 21A in Part III (Fundamental Rights) of the Indian Constitution by the words '*The State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of six to fourteen years in such manner as the State may, by law, determine.*' The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan thus received legal backing for its execution. At the same time, the eleventh fundamental duty was added in Part IV of the Constitution stating '*Who is a parent or guardian, to provide opportunities for education to his child, or as the case may be, ward between the age of six to fourteen years.*'

What began as an ambitious project in 2002 to increase the coverage of the DPEP which had shown several benefits, has now become a large scheme with several initiatives covering over 200 million children aged between 6 and 14. In fact the program has been expanded in the year 2009 to include secondary education as well under the program Rashtriya Madhymamik Shiksha Abhiyan. The scheme also includes education imparted in Madararas. On similar lines, an adult education scheme called 'Saakshar Bharat' was also initiated.

## Objectives

The official websites of State Governments have enlisted the objectives of SSA as follows:

1. To provide Free and Compulsory Elementary Education for all children in the 6-14 age group.

2. To bridge social, regional and gender gaps with the active participation of community in the management of schools at elementary education level by 2010.
3. To allow children to learn about and master their natural environment in order to develop their potential both spiritually and materially: Satisfactory quality of education with emphasis on education for life.
4. To inculcate value-based learning that allows children an opportunity to work for each other's well being rather than to permit mere selfish pursuits.
5. To realize the importance of Early Childhood Care and education and looks at the 0-14 age as a continuum.
6. All children in school. Education Guarantee Centre, Special Training, 'Back-to-School' camp by 2003.
7. All children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007.
8. All children complete of elementary schooling by 2010.
9. Universal retention by 2010.

#### **Goals under SSA**

1. To open new schools in those habitations where there are no schooling facilities
2. To strengthen the existing school infrastructure;
3. To maintain school improvement grants for additional classrooms, toilets, drinking water facilities in the schools
4. To promote education of girls', differently-abled or children with special needs or those belonging to SC, ST, Muslim minority, landless agricultural labourers etc.
5. To provide free textbooks, uniforms to the children
6. To fill up vacancies for teachers and enhance their skills and capacity
7. To provide life skills to the students and offer computer education to bridge the digital divide

#### **Role of PRIs**

Community participation is sought to mobilize the population for creating access and enrolment in elementary education. They also constitute the various committees required for the execution of the scheme, namely- Village Education Committee (VEC), School Management Committee (SMC) and Parents' Teachers' Association (PTA). Vigilant participation of the community members would also ensure that the allocated funds are utilized well and not wasted.

The various above-mentioned committees also play a role in ensuring that the objectives of SSA are fulfilled. They aid in preventing gender discrimination with maximum enrolment of girl students and providing gender sensitive infrastructure. They also bear the mantle of keeping a tab on the quality of education being imparted by monitoring student progress reports and auditing of the facilities provided.

### **Initiatives**

- Padhe Bharat Badhe Bharat/ Padhna Likhna Abhiyan: Early reading and writing with comprehension
- Mid-day meal Scheme: Providing calories and nutrition through cooked food to students enrolled in school.
- Samagra Shiksha: This Programme subsumed the SSA, the Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan of universal coverage and retention of children from pre-school to class 12 and Teacher education under 1 one umbrella.
- Shagun: Portal launched in 2017 to monitor SSA progress
- Shaala Siddhi: School Standard Evaluation Programme
- Swaccha Vidyalaya: To ensure clean premises, well maintained water, sanitation and hygiene facilities

### **Evaluation**

There are varied results of the evaluation studies of each school and district and state. However below is stated a consolidated list of the findings of a few reports-

- Positive
  - Universal education
  - Participation of PRIs
  - Increase in enrolment of differently abled
  - Availability of Teaching Learning Materials
- Negative
  - Quality of education variance b/w states
  - Free uniforms not for urban, Rural need Transport from unserved habitations
  - Seasonal High absenteeism
  - Infrastructural deficits – Blackboards, drinking water, separate toilets for girls etc
- Way forward
  - Reforms in education
  - Reforms in evaluation + No detention

- Awareness in urban areas
- Recruitment and Reforms for teachers- reduce non-teaching activities

### Check Your Progress Exercise 3

Note: Use the space given below for your answer.

1) How can Panchayati Raj Institutions ensure education for all?

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2) What are the objectives of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan?

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## **RURAL GOVERNANCE: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

### **Unit Structure**

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Capacity Building at grassroot level
- 4.3 Capacity Building of Gram Sabha as Civil Society
- 4.4 Capacity Building of Elected Representatives
- 4.5 Capacity Building of Elected Representatives on Vertical and Horizontal Linkages
- 4.6 Capacity Building of Other Actors
- 4.7 People's Participation
- 4.8 Role of NGOs
- 4.9 Role of Self-Help Groups
- 4.10 Globalisation, Localisation and Rurbanisation

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### **4.0 OBJECTIVES:**

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- To understand capacity building at grassroot level and understand the real problems
- To analyse people's participation in development and understand why people fail to participate
- To understand the role of NGOs and SHGs in rural development
- To study and evaluate the terms Globalisation, Localisation and Rurbanisation

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### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Local governance is being promoted in India because it is believed that it provides a structural arrangement through which local people and communities can participate in the fight against poverty at close range. However, it is acknowledged that various capacities of a multiplicity of stakeholders and actors need to be strengthened to meet the requirements of effective and responsive local governance. The most vibrant democratic institution at the grassroots level in India is Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) which is figured to be participatory, accountable, responsive, and transparent and citizen friendly local self-government. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments provided the constitutional provisions for constructing and operating of such bodies at the local level in India. Some

of these provisions are inclusive and democratic in nature such as one-third reservation of seats for women and scheduled castes and tribes and decentralisation of power, etc. But the nature of functioning of these bodies for the last few years exposed ineffectiveness and inefficiency in governance and delivering of services to the local people. The effective local self-governance indeed is still a distant dream and needs enormous interventions to realise its potential. In this chapter, key issues and challenges of rural governance shall be discussed.

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## 4.2 CAPACITY BUILDING AT GRASSROOT LEVELS:

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There is a lack of consensus on the meaning of capacity. Capacity is a multi-dimensional aspect consisting of awareness, knowledge, skill, self-confidence and actions. Capacity can be defined as the totality of inputs needed by an actor to realise its purposes. Applied to local bodies, this will ensure that such institutions are able to function effectively as institutions of local self-governance in true sense.

Capacity of such institutions can be seen in three distinct though interrelated aspects:

- i) **Intellectual Capacity:** implies capacity to think, reflect and analyse reality independently and in pursuit of self defined purposes of local self-governance.
- ii) **Institutional Capacity:** includes procedures, systems, structure, staffing, decision-making, transparency and accountability, planning, implementation and monitoring. It also includes mechanisms for building linkages with other institutions and actors.
- iii) **Material Capacity:** consists of material resources, physical assets, funds, systems and procedures to mobilise revenues; access and control over physical and natural resources and infrastructure; systems and procedures required for adequate management of funds and infrastructure.

In this sense, capacity building comprises consistent training of individuals (involved in local governance) for organisational strengthening, institutional learning, exposure, horizontal sharing and solidarity. Capacity building is also a long-term process of strengthening a local body based on systematic learning of new knowledge, skills and attitudes. In other words, capacity building comprises a broad set of interventions which promotes the development of competent, responsive and accountable local self-government, the establishment of mechanisms by which different population groups can equally participate in local decision making process and evolution of civil society players and organisation.



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### 4.3 CAPACITY BUILDING OF GRAM SABHA AS CIVIL SOCIETY:

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Effective functioning of local self-governance requires decentralisation of policies, strategies, legal frameworks, programs and activities, the transfer of authority, responsibilities and resources from central government to local government structures and the empowerment of grass-root communities which enable them to determine plan, manage and implement their socio-politico-economic development. It also needs active, engaged and organised citizenry. But in reality, the families and communities are increasingly divided on the basis of caste, religion, ethnicity and gender in the society. The marginalised (women, dalits and tribals) sections of the community are systematically excluded from political participation by rural elites or higher castes in support with local authority and strong patriarchal system. Therefore the most significant involvement needed is to strengthen Gram Sabha as contemporary civil society formation in each village.

A strong Gram Sabha requires institutional mechanisms to function effectively. Large scale Pre-Election Voters Awareness Campaigns (PEVAC) are organised in partnership with other voluntary organisations, State Election Commission and local bureaucracies. After the election, a series of orientation meetings explaining the roles of Gram Sabha as a collective entity, discussing problems and issues and identifying needs and priorities of the people are also organised. These orientation meetings serve the purpose of initiating dialogue between various marginalised groups and elected representatives of PRIs (Gram Panchayat). However, in most cases citizens, particularly the marginalised, are not aware about dates and places of such meetings. The very first step of participation – attendance in the decision making meetings have been purposefully obstructed by the vested power lobbies in the villages. In many places campaigns are organised to inform the local citizens before the actual Gram Sabha meetings.

There are many informal local community based associations in the villages. Some of them are traditional associations based on caste or kinship, cultural-religious associations, and many new associations like self-help-groups, women's groups, youth groups, village education committee, forest protection committee, watershed committee, etc. formed by government or NGO development programs. Strengthening the local demand system requires capacity building of these traditional and contemporary local associations. For which, a series of orientation meetings with these community based organisations need to be conducted on a regular basis. This enables the traditional and contemporary local associations to work collectively with the Gram Panchayat and the Gram Sabha.

There is a vast arena of public education for society that is required so that different individuals and institutions such as the media, academic institutions, youth groups, human rights organisations and others are oriented to the challenges faced by local bodies in building their capacities to accomplish their constitutionally mandated purposes. Society at large, needs to be made aware of their rights and the problems faced by them so that local governing bodies can work in the right direction of development.

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## **4.4 CAPACITY BUILDING OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES**

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The elected representatives of Gram Panchayat represent a village or a cluster of villages. In addition, there is a Sarpanch - elected as Chief of Gram Panchayat directly by all members of Gram Sabha. In some ways, this body is the first and most direct representative body of local self-governance. However, Gram Panchayat as a vehicle for exercising representative leadership with transparency and accountability to Gram Sabha is a distant ideal. These newly elected leaders, especially from the marginalised community, are experiencing political participation in public space for the first time in their life. Thus, they lack basic skills and information about the functioning of these systems. Capacity enhancement interventions are required to strengthen these leaders and inform them about their roles and duties for the effective functioning of these systems.

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## **4.5 CAPACITY BUILDING OF ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES ON VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL LINKAGES**

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There are different tiers of local bodies, vertical linkages across them and horizontal linkages between different tiers of local bodies and commensurate tiers of local administration are also needed to be strengthened by involving the primary school teachers, village level workers, anganwadi workers, multi-purpose health workers, forest guards, etc. According to constitutional provision, all the above-mentioned government functionaries should be accountable to Gram Panchayat. However, this is not a reality anywhere in India so far. Gram Panchayats need to learn how to assert their rights and supervision over the concerned government functionaries and relevant government development programs and resources. They lack strong control over other government functionaries and it creates the problem of accountability and smooth functioning of these units.

Another area of horizontal networking is building relationships and support mechanisms with other elected representatives in neighbouring villages, blocks and districts. Capacity building here needs elected representatives to enhance their practical understanding about local governance. In addition, structured educational events on-site support for undertaking participatory micro planning and budgeting exercises, administration and financial management of Gram Panchayat, informational materials like posters, handbills, manuals in local languages and simplified version of the State Act can be prepared and disseminated among the elected representatives.

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## 4.6 CAPACITY BUILDING OF OTHER ACTORS:

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Firstly, orientation and attitudinal change for government officials at all levels has been a major challenge in working with responsive and accountable bureaucracy. Sensitization and attitudinal changes are a major arena of capacity enhancement for political leadership at all levels. Barring a few individuals, the political culture in most political parties and among active and elected politicians is one of disregard for the activities and motivations of ordinary people to take responsibility for village level development.

Secondly, government officials lack specific skills needed to work with Panchayati Raj Institutions. For example, in the system of top-down development interventions, lowest level government officials have no skill in planning and monitoring since all of that has been centralised. They need to learn skills in promoting micro plans as well as social audit and community monitoring of implementation of these plans.

Capacity enhancement interventions are most urgently needed to sensitise and re-orient donors. Despite general discussions, concrete shifts in donor policies, resources and programs towards strengthening institutions of local governance need to be carried out. Carefully selected communication strategies, meetings, dialogues and workshops should be utilised for such capacity enhancement interventions. The political leadership shall be invited to participate in many multi-stakeholder dialogues at the local, district and state levels to change their attitude towards the rural governance and development programs.

The major obstacles to capacity building at various levels and promoting public participation are cultural, systemic, institutional and human. A significant change is needed at various levels to solve these problems and enhance the working of these local self- governments.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- Exercise 1:**

- 1) Explain the term Capacity Building with reference to rural governance in brief.**

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- 2) What are the major problems faced in capacity building of Gram Sabha?**

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**3) What is capacity building at grassroots level? Explain key challenges to it.**

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## **4.7 PEOPLE'S PARTICIPATION**

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Rural development is a dynamic, unified, democratic process of social action for development. People's participation in terms of the objectives, ideology and methodology of rural development is a necessary and highly desirable component in it. Participation requires that all groups, particularly those most vulnerable, have direct or representative access to the systems of government. This manifests a strong civil society and citizens with the freedom of association and expression. It determines that all men and women should have a voice in decision making, either directly and indirectly through elected representatives that represent their interest. Such a participatory environment is formed when there is a freedom as well as capacity to participate constructively.

People's participation, in a broader sense, means their total involvement with development agencies in deciding the programmes and activities, fixing up of priorities, taking initiative and carrying out the projects as partners by the contribution of their ideas, interest, material, money, labour and time. People's participation is an educational process. It is to create a sense of awareness, a sense of participation, a sense of belonging, a sense of possession and ownership. It is to develop self-reliance, self-confidence, competence and managerial capacity. It is to train rural people to take initiative, accomplish and sustain their activities. It is to build up and re-invigorate communities and generate social action. It is to enable rural and marginalised people to discover their strength, increase their aspiration level, mobilise and channelise their resources for productive purposes. Participation is bringing people to the core from the periphery, to activeness from passiveness, and to be thinkers, decision makers, doers and implementers from acceptors.

The Local self Governance Act of India provides spaces for direct participation of people at grassroots through the Gram Sabha. The provisions of these acts have the potential of establishing good governance; this act also provides the reservation for marginalised groups of the society. The constitutionally decentralised institutions have come into being but the reality is quite different. Rigid patriarchal structure inhibits women participation in public affairs. Moreover, majorities of the elected representatives are first timers with little or no prior knowledge of functioning of PRIs. Many of the women PRI members are illiterate and have to comply with social taboos and patriarchal values.. It is not easy for the rural weaker section to actively participate in the development process. The literacy level among the rural areas is low. The distribution of rural

assets and powers is heavily skewed, the bottom 39 % of rural households (belonging to lower castes) own only 5 % of all assets, while the top 5 % own 46%.

People's participation also depends upon the social and class structure of the rural community, the patterns and traditions of decision-making and carrying out communal and individual activities, the way people perceive the programmes and projects initiated by the development agencies, and people's own ability. Further, and importantly it depends upon what the development agencies expect from the people with respect to participation, the stipulations they make and the manner in which the agencies mobilise, motivate, encourage and facilitate people's participation. A major issue is why people fail to participate in the development process? Ignorance and lack of motivation is a factor of non or negligible participation. When matters are of technical nature beyond the understanding and outside the experience of the people, participation is less. People look for immediate and tangible benefits.

Sometimes, group rivalry, cliques, conflicts within the community, vested interests, conflict in values, opposition to the programmes, resistance to change and poor local leadership are factors as to why people fail to participate. Centralisation of authority also weakens popular participation.

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## 4.8 ROLE OF NGOS

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NGOs or Non-Governmental Organisations are difficult to define, and the term 'NGO' is rarely used consistently. As a result, there are many different classifications in use. Today, any kind of private organisation that is independent from government control can be termed an "NGO", provided it is not-for-profit, non-criminal and not simply an opposition political party. Civil Society, when organised in structure and specialised in function, takes the form of NGOs. They are organised on community, national and international levels to serve a social or political goal such as humanitarian causes or the environment.

NGOs have more benefits of working in rural areas as compared to governmental organisations because NGOs are more flexible, NGOs are specific to a particular locality and moreover these are committed towards serving the public and community as a whole. As the task of development is massive, many NGOs play a vital role in the rural development of India in collaboration with the government. NGOs act as planners and implementers of developmental plans. They help in mobilising the local resources to be used for development and build trust amongst the people. NGOs help in building a self-reliant and sustainable society. NGOs help in motivating people and increasing public participation in the development process. These agencies play the role of mediator between people and government. NGOs are actually the facilitator of development, education and professionalisation.

A major problem that NGOs are facing is their dependency upon government funds or external donations. With this dependency, NGOs are

less flexible in carrying out their task as most of the tasks depend upon funds. Moreover, the structures of NGOs have become bureaucratic in nature leading to a decreased effectiveness in the overall development.

The traditional thinking of people, their poor understanding, and low level of education for comprehending new technology and efforts, lack of awareness are people related hurdles that NGOs are facing. Villages also lack infrastructure facilities like water, electricity, educational institutes, communication facilities that leads to their slow development. Apart from these, there are certain problems like economics such as high cost technology, underprivileged rural industries, social and cultural differences, conflicts between different groups, administrative problems like political interference, lack of motivation, interest and participation of people acts as hurdles on the way to rural development.

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## 4.9 ROLE OF SELF-HELP GROUPS:

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Self-Help Groups (SHGs) is a programme initiated in collaborative effort of government and non-government organisations (NGOs) in the year 1992. SHGs organise the poor and the marginalised to join hands to solve their problems and the method has been very successful. The poor collect their savings and save it in banks. In return they receive easy access to loans with a small rate of interest to start their micro unit enterprise. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have become the vehicle of change in the rural areas, transforming the lives of the marginalised.

The Self-Help Groups have contributed a lot in the development of socio-economic status of the rural people. These groups help the rural economy of India. Self-Help Groups help in women empowerment as well as work participation of women in the rural economy. Self help groups are voluntary, small group structures for mutual aid and the accomplishment of a special purpose. They are usually formed by peers who have come together for mutual assistance in satisfying a common need, overcoming a common handicap or life-disrupting problem, and bringing about desired social and/or personal change. The initiators and members of such groups perceive that their needs cannot be met by or through existing social institutions. Self help groups emphasise face to-face social interactions and the assumption of personal responsibility by members. They often provide material assistance, as well as emotional support: they are frequently “cause” oriented, and promulgate an ideology or values through which members may attain an enhanced sense of personal identity. They help in social and financial inclusion of people and generate more participation of people in the process of development. SHGs have effectively helped in empowering women. SHGs have facilitated the process of micro credit for the rural woman folk thus improving their bargaining power in day-to-day decision making of the household, and finally in the community.

There has been uneven distribution in the spread of SHGs in India. Socio-cultural factors along with government support and presence of NGOs have been major reasons for that. One of the major hurdles in working of SHGs is lack of support from family members. Due to male dominated society,



women members cannot uplift their business followed by lack of social mobility. Most of the SHGs work at the local level and are engaged in agricultural activities. SHGs in rural areas should be introduced to non-agricultural businesses too and should be provided with state-of-the art machinery. Political affiliation and interference has become a serious problem with SHGs. Political affiliation is also a major reason for group conflicts. The poorest of the poor are excluded from the benefits of SHGs as they cannot even arrange the minimum amount of money required to be deposited as weekly/monthly thrift. Those who are relatively well off are getting the best out of the program as they are able to get more economic benefits by investing the loan or profit in their already existing enterprise. Participation in SHGs existing in different revenue divisions has differential potential to empower women.

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#### **4.10 GLOBALISATION, LOCALISATION AND RURBANISATION**

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Globalisation has the tendency to make the earth a “global village”. It sees the whole world as one family. However, it too has gainers and losers because of its own unusual appearances of unbalanced progress, exploitation, defoliation of social costs as well as ecological subsystems. Retaliating to this ongoing process of globalisation, the concept of localization is developing in different forms in different parts of the world. The theme of localization is based on self-reliance by developing economy of the neighbourhood, especially considering the needs of local peoples. This means to ensure freedom by protecting the rights and interests of weaker sections vis-à-vis eradicate exploitation by means of globalising forces, particularly the ‘free market’ economy.

Local action is the remedy to solve social and economic problems. It represents the beliefs of so forth ‘localization’ would mean in its positive aspects. This includes delegation of economic controls and decisions, opposite levels of self-reliance, fulfilment of all basic needs, and preservation of natural resources. Localization provokes comradeship and co-operation. This reflects the economics of neighbourhood, independence, and generation of employment. It is a belief of regionalized economy, revitalization of village economy and the public. Localization not only improves the quality of local production but also spreads its boundaries. The use of indigenous skills, resources, manpower and technology, and the lesser need for transport, packaging, storage and marketing leads to cost reduction.

The world is being shaped by the pulls and pushes of two forces often in opposite directions i.e. globalisation and localization but localisation gives more glow than globalisation. Globalisation has many benefits. It stimulates growth of economies and businesses. However, localization is not only expected, but it has the ability to provide solutions to numerous problems that must be addressed globally such as inclusive economic growth, protection of the ecosystem, food security, and women empowerment. It helps in rural development by being more inclusive and recognizing the

rights of small farmers or indigenous businesses that lose a platform on a global level. Globalisation is a major hurdle in the development of rural areas as the indigenous products cannot stand in the global market, thus being left out of the financial system which makes them more and more dependent on the government for basic needs as well. Financial inclusion eventually leads to social inclusion and the poor become a part of the larger society. All the factors are interconnected and impact each other simultaneously. It is wise to deliberate facets like culture, religion, and local preferences to produce a product that can feel the local sensations and meet the local expectations. Localization means tailoring several components resembling currency, time format, colours, icons, and every part of the product that could make it feel foreign to our community.

The compulsion for business localization is well-known to all business leaders. "Think global, act local" is a common slogan in multinational corporations. The companies with localised products and management grew both their revenues and profits. They delivered to local customers' requirements, took advantage of local capabilities, and enabled innovations to emerge in many places, whereas their competitors with more centralised and standardised approaches were slow to hit the mark.

There should be engagement of the local community to provide ultimate solutions to the local problems. The needs of small farmers must be considered by the interventions of agricultural production. Apart from this investment must be made for women producers who are processing and supplying several food products in different regions.

The basic needs like energy security, food security, and water security are becoming much more important, global economic processes are not effectively controlled by the national government. Basic needs are underestimated by greed and consumerism, and self-exaggeration is capturing national control over the economy. Integrated global economy asks for more competencies from existing international institutions whereas the interests of the poor and weak are overlooked.

The conventional economic theory of international trade is based on 'comparative advantage'. It is engrossed with profit maximisation instead of basic needs, mutual aid, employment and fair distribution of profits. It allowed trade among unequal and supports who have purchasing power for endless wants and luxuries. This exploits the weaker economies by the stronger like rural poor by the urban elite. Economic and political power is vested with the ruling elites, delivered by the economic institutions, divide the society into 'haves' and 'havenots', and produce a multiple clash that retains all apprehensions and disappointments. Power and resources are not mutually equitable that affect the growth of GDP as well as human development and environmental sustainability. It imparts more benefits to the rich and powerful by providing access to education, health, opportunities, travel, etc. GDP indicators are best served when individual greed is tailed in the 'market' freed by governmental regulation for social good. Therefore, poverty, social conflict, harassment, slums, and exploitation co-exist with prosperity. The consumption pattern has been

changed due to globalisation and thus intensifying inequalities and scarcity by declining the production of 'basic' goods on which the poor bank on.

With growing globalisation whereby economic controls become ever more remote and less accountable and profit motive as greed seeks to colonise the whole earth, the concept of localization becomes ever more relevant. Ethics, social good of all, peace, prosperity, ecological concerns, co-operation and brotherhood cannot be globalised without the concomitant of swadeshi. Localization is a solution-multiplier. It can restore democracy by reducing the influence of big businesses on politics and holding representatives accountable to people, not corporations. It can reverse the concentration of wealth by fostering the creation of more small businesses and keeping money circulating locally. It can minimise pollution and waste by providing for real human needs rather than desires manufactured by the consumer culture, and by shortening distances between producers and consumers.

localization redistributes economic and political power from global monopolies to millions of small producers, farmers and businesses. It thereby decentralises political power and roots it in community, giving people more agency over the changes they wish to see in their own lives. The exponential growth in localization initiatives from food-based efforts like community gardens, farmers' markets, community-supported agriculture schemes and urban agriculture, to local business alliances, decentralised renewable energy schemes, tool lending libraries and community-based education projects, attests to the fact that more and more rural people are arriving at localization as a systemic solution to the problems they face.

Rurbanisation is the process of rural areas taking on urban characteristics, whether through conscious government policy action or gradual dispersal of economic growth. Rurbanisation refers to the process of providing urban amenities to rural areas. The 'rurban' design seeks to integrate the elements of the urban in the rural by providing rural areas the opportunities and infrastructure hitherto restricted to urban areas. In a nutshell, as also articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Rurbanisation seeks to connect the rural to the urban "where the rural soul is bent with a touch of urban".

The most prominent policy measure to promote Rurbanisation, was launched in 2016 in the form of the Shyama Prasad Mukherji Rurban Mission or National Rurban Mission (NRuM) under the Ministry of Rural Development. The Mission aims at developing villages by ensuring access to equitable and progressive services, which would ultimately reduce the gap between rural and urban areas. The initial goal of the Mission was to develop approximately 300 rurban clusters over a period of three years. A 'rurban cluster' would be classified based on population — 25000 to 50000 people in plain areas and 5000 to 15000 in tribal, desert or hilly areas. But the status of work in the approved clusters has also been slow and skewed.

A major consequence of Rurbanisation, intended or otherwise, is that it can keep in check the high rate of rural-to-urban migration for economic

reasons, particularly in a country like India. The unequal distribution of development outcomes has been a key driver of the movement of working-age individuals to urban areas. In many cases, this movement is forceful, also known as distress migration. According to Census 2011, most working-age males move to urban areas because of employment-related reasons. Underpaid work, poor housing, and low access to services characterise the life of rural migrants in cities, making them one of the most vulnerable groups during civil emergencies such as natural disasters and epidemics. Rurbanisation, as a process and a policy measure, has the potential to reduce rural-to-urban migration by bridging the gap between the urban and the rural.

The major problems with the Rurbanisation are that the private sector organisations need to be encouraged to invest in rural areas; it may not always be profitable for businesses to invest in underdeveloped markets and so they may choose to not participate. . Hence there is a need for better coordination among the central, state and local governments in order for implementation of PPP models to take place more effectively.

Another hindrance is the governance structure prevalent in villages. There is a difference in the administrative structure of statutory towns (or cities) which are administered by Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) and villages which are administered by village councils or Gram Panchayats. This difference plays a decisive role when it comes to providing urban services to rural or semi-urban areas. Village clusters have a higher combined population and density as compared to a single village. Providing networked urban services in clusters might require greater resources as well as planning, for which a gram panchayat might not have the necessary capacity.

There is also the issue of replicating the current urban development model for the development of village clusters. The Rurban Mission seeks to develop rural clusters by taking the urban figure as an example. But urban infrastructure development in India still faces issues of finance and investment. Thus, using the urban spending figure as a model to prepare development plans for villages might lead to under-funding.

A holistic approach needs to be adopted towards the development of rural clusters based on their characteristics and specialities instead of replicating urban financing models. The governments at the centre and the state level need to identify the roadblocks and there needs to be robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms at the district and state level.

### **CHECK YOUR PROGRESS- Exercise 2:**

- 1) What do you understand by People's participation in rural development and why is it important?**

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**2) What is the role played by NGOs in rural development?**

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**3) What is the role of SHGs in rural development and increasing people's participation?**

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**4) Explain Globalisation, Localisation and Rurbanisation.**

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