

Important Structural aspects of Panchayati Raj Institutions and Decision-Making

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Abstract: *As a governance body of democratic India Panchayati raj is the most crucial decentralised system of governance at grass-root level. These decentralised bodies have brought decision-making authorities in the hand of local people and provides the opportunity to take part in the decision-making process of their own empowerment and development. So, it became very important to understand and get familiar with the related concepts and decision-making aspects with in the structure of Panchayati raj Institutions. Aim of this paper is to get an insight into some important aspects of decision-making with respect to Panchayati Raj Institutions. In this paper the structural aspects of these institutions and type of functions performed at all the three levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions are also described.*

Keywords: *Decision-making, Panchayati Raj Institutions.*

Introduction

India is a rural dominated country in which more than 60% of its population lives in villages. Panchayati Raj Plays very significant role in development of villages. These institutions are very responsible authority which can contribute so much for the development at grass-root level. Because these are very decentralised form the authority with respect to democratic politics.

These institutions are closely connected with the local rural population that's why they can deeply analyse the requirements of development at lower level. PRIs are primary pillar of development of our country form base level that's why decision making by these institutions is very important.

Strong decision making can lighten up or strengthen the governance at local level and vice versa.

**“India is poor because villages of India are poor.
India will be rich if the villages of India are rich.
Panchayats should be given greater power, for
we want the villagers to have a greater measure
of swaraj (self-government) in their own villages.”**

Jawahar Lal Nehru

This study focuses on the decision-making aspect of the PRIs. How decisions are made what is the structure of decision-making process, how decisions are made for solving the problems of local people, how disputes among them are resolved and what are the constituency bodies in these institutional structures etc.

Panchayati Raj Institutions

After independence, local government once again got attention specially at rural India. Local govt at grass-root level in our country is known as Panchayati Raj Institution.

In India, Local Self-government was initiated by Panchayati Raj System in 1992. Panchayati Raj System started from the self-governing and self-sufficient village communities. The concept of the sabhas existed from the very ancient times. Those sabhas were worked as the self-governing bodies of the villages.

Later, the conceptualisation of the Panchayati Raj System or the system of local self-government developed through formation and efforts of different committees constituted in between 1957 to 1986.

Article 40 of the Directive Principles of our state policy, Part IV, under the heading of ‘Organisation of village panchayats’ (<https://www.clearias.com/directive-principles-of-our-state-policy/>) states:

“The State shall take steps to organise Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.”

In 1957, Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (BMC) was formed to investigate and regulate Panchayati Raj Institutions effectively. Many other committees were found but in 1957 BMC was most significant to implement and regulate PRIs in India. The committee recommended the democratic decentralisation at local level. The three-tier system at village, Block and District level was also recommended by the committee.

73rd constitutional Amendment, passed by parliament in in Dec, 1992, the act came into force as the 73rd Amendment Act 1992 on April, 1993. This Amendment added one new part to the constitution namely “The Panchayats” (Part IX). The local bodies – “Panchayats” came under Part IX of the constitution after 43 years of India becoming republic. Three tier system of Panchayats at village, intermediate block and district levels was given by this Act (73rd Amendment Act).

Besides this, Ashok Mehta Committee also recommended democratic decentralisation in 1978. But, still not implemented properly and then, in 1992, 73rd amendment and 74th amendment of Indian Constitution was done to structure way back and revive the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

*When Panchayati Raj is Established,
Public opinion will do what violence
could never do
-----Mahatma Gandhi*

Review of Related Literature

The concept of Panchayati raj Institution is very old and decision-making is the one of the major functions that administrators (local representors) have to perform effectively for better results. Here are insights into some already conducted studies related to decision-making and functional aspects of PRIs:

Pal, A. (2017), conducted a study on, “Decision-making process at grassroot level”. The study is fact based evaluative study which focuses on the awareness and exposure of the respondents towards the eight indicators of governance which are: “participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, effectiveness, consensus & orientedness, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability”. This study also local political leadership were also studied by using primary data. He analysed that the decision-making is prominently held by the Sarpanch. “Hold of Sarpanch is extraordinarily prevalent and which is not in tune with the spirit of Panchayati Raj.”

Dwivedi, R. (2015), in his study on “Functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India: A status paper”, analysed different structural aspects related with Panchayats at grass-root level. He has done comparative analysis based on different parameters (Election, devolution of functions, representation of women, own financial resources, audit of

panchayats, gram sabha meetings, social audits etc.) between five states. The researcher found that there is huge structural inefficiency prevailed in Panchayats. People are not aware about the true meaning of people's participation. According to researcher, "There is urgent need of removing the legislative and procedural problems that constrain the Gram Sabha, greater devolution of funds, functions and functionaries, putting in place mechanisms of audit and accountability and strengthening the participation of women for improving governance and functioning of Panchayats." He also found that there is major inconsistency in conduct of elections which clearly shows lack of willingness of states.

Ramachandran, P. (2004), in his study on "Study of decision-making process in selected Panchayats and Municipalities under people's planning programme", aims at the decision-making process in people's planning in Kerala in selected Panchayats. The study depicted that the institution called Gram Sabha is very important institution which proposes the people's planning by following these functions: "identifying the felt need of the people at local levels; evaluation, prioritisation and implementation of local plans; selection of beneficiaries; mobilisation of local resources including voluntary labour for plan implementation; and social audit." He analysed the awareness level of the people about different decision-making related aspects and found that there is huge gap of awareness and understanding among people about the real participatory decision-making approach.

Reddy, G.R. (1970), in his study "Some aspects of decision-making Panchayati Raj", specified the different factors or pressures which influences the local leaders at the Panchayat samiti level (tier II), and the executive officers working with them to sidestep all the problems and barriers set up through regulations. The study highlighted the various factors which operates decision-making factors in these samitis. This study also highlighted the role of group politics in resource allocation. The researcher divided the decision-making process into following five stages: (1) Initiation, (2) Fact gathering, (3) Inspection, (4) Processing, (5) Consultation and Submission.

Singh, H. (1994), in his article on "Constitutional Base for Panchayati raj in India", highlighted the evolution of PR and Conceptual and structural aspects of PR. As a result of recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), PR was introduced at three levels: Gram Panchayat at Village level, Panchayat Samiti at Block level and Zila Parishad at District level. The 73rd Amendment dispense the flexibility in structure for PR because flexibility such as two tier or three tier system and extent and mode of reservation can cause great harm that's why these are set in uniform pattern for the entire country.⁴ "Panchayati raj system establishes linkage between local leadership enjoying the

confidence of local people and the government, and translates the policies of the government into action.”¹¹

Research Methodology

Purpose of the Paper are:

1. To study the structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions
2. To study the decision-making aspects of Panchayati Raj Institutions
 - This study is intended to gain familiarity with the structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana and achieve insight into it.
 - This study is conceptual in nature which aims to understand some prevailed aspects of PRIs especially related to decision-making.
 - To support this study some most related research papers, annual reports of ministry of Panchayati Raj Institutions, GOI; Local Govt Directory, GOI etc. were referred.

Structure of Panchayati Raj System

So, as you see the 3 levels were already made before the Balwant Rai committee decided on it, (the top level being above the block level). There were no strict rules to follow for the governance in these three levels. In fact, freedom was given to adopt their own pattern for effective governance.

This three-tier system is very strong and empowered system of PRIs which is intended to the development of panchayats and then development of local people. Division of functions and disbursement of funds became very easy and systematic due to these systems; and which automatically minimises the chances of any corruption and real beneficiaries can benefit by maintaining transparency. Panchayati Raj Institutions works at three levels which is called three-tier system-Gram Panchayat, Panchayati Samiti and Zila parishad at Village level, Block level and District level respectively.

Three tiers of Panchayati raj institutions

Following are the three levels which is called three tiers of Panchayati raj institutions:

1. At District level it is called Zila Parishad
2. At block level it is called Block Samiti or Panchayati Samiti
3. At village level it is called village Gram Panchayat

(Different Levels of Panchayati Raj Institutions)**District Level (First Tier)**

- Zila Panchayat or
- District Council or
- Zila Parishad or
- District Panchayat

**Block Level (Second Tier)**

- Janpad Panchayat or
- Panchayat Samiti

**Village Level (Third Tier)**

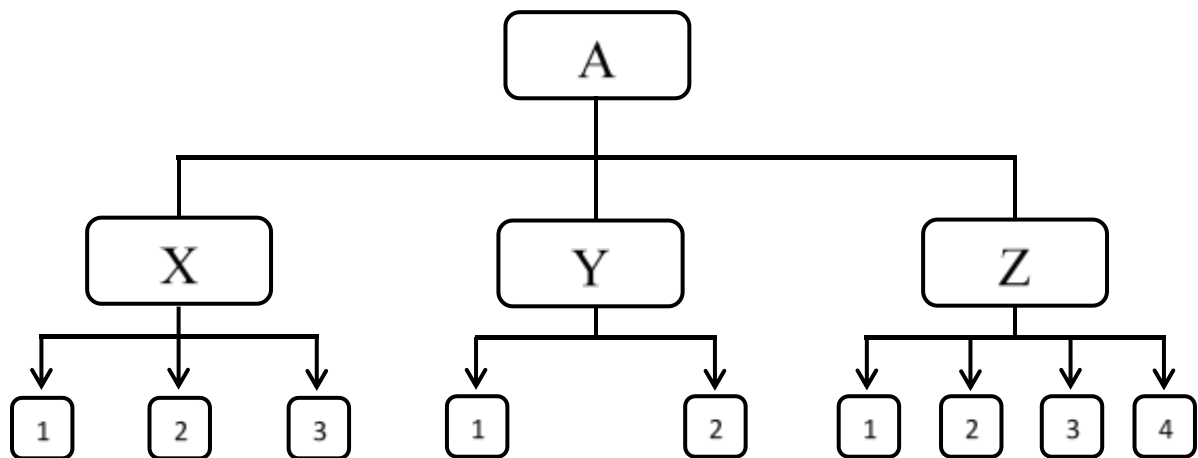
- Gram Panchayat

Zila Parishad: Top body in this structure is called Zila Parishad. It is the highest body under the Panchayati Raj which coordinates various activities of the various Panchayat Samiti. It is a composition of Chairman of Panchayat Samiti within district; BDOs, MPs, MLAs of that district; one representative from each of the cooperative societies of the district. Functions of Panchayat Samiti are categorised into three categories: (1) Civic Facilities & Welfare Functions, (2) Supervisory Functions, (3) Delegated Functions.

Panchayat Samiti: Panchayats at block level are called Panchayat Samiti. It is an Intermediate body which coordinates the activities of all village panchayats in each block. It is a composition of sarpanch of Panchayats within the block; BDO, MPs, MLCs of that area; and chairperson of Town Area Committees or Nagar Panchayats of that area. Functions of Panchayat Samiti are categorised into three categories: (1) Civic Facilities & Welfare Functions, (2) Supervisory Functions, (3) Delegated Functions.

Gram Panchayat: Panchayats at the village level are called Gram Panchayat. Members of Gram Panchayat are elected by Gram Sabha. Gram Panchayat is a composition of Sarpanch (president) and Panch (vice president). Functions of Gram Panchayat are categorised into four categories: (1) Civic Facilities & Welfare Functions, (2) Developmental Functions, (3) Regulatory and General Administrative Functions, (4) Judicial Functions (Nyaya Panchayat).

The structure of these panchayats can be understood with the help of this diagram:



- Here 'A' indicates Zila Parishad which has three Panchayat samitis under it (X, Y, Z).
- 'X' indicates Panchayat Samiti – I which has three Gram Panchayat under it (1,2, & 3).
- 'Y' indicates Panchayat Samiti – II which has two Gram Panchayats under it (1 & 2).
- 'Z' indicates Panchayat Samiti – III which has four Gram Panchayats under it (1, 2, 3, & 4).

No. of Panchayats at 3 Levels/Tiers

	District Panchayats	Intermediate Panchayats	Village Panchayats
Haryana	21	126	6199
India	654	6716	26

(Source: Local Government Directory, Government of India, 2019.)

Above diagram is shows the no. of panchayats at different levels in Haryana in comparison to India

Decision-Making aspects in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Decision making the essential part of management process. There are five main functions of the organisation which are planning, organising, staffing, directing and controlling. Each and every function requires decision making at every level of the management (top, middle and lower). Decision making is the core of the very first function of the organisation which is planning. There are lots of decisions which have to made for planning, like what is to be done, how is to be done, when is to be done etc. So, we can say that not even a single function is possible without decision making and it shows how much decision making is

important for an organisation. It helps in solve the problem, handling the difficult situations and resolving the conflicts between different levels of management or different parties.

Managers in any Institution make decisions, wherever they have to cope up with the situations like all kinds of internal and external situations. They have to deal with all kinds of problems, opportunities, threats, issues etc and that makes decision making the most important part of management.

According to Mac Farland “A decision is an act of choice wherein an executive form a conclusion about what must be done in a given situation. A decision represents a course of behaviour chosen from a number of possible alternatives.”¹²

So, decision making in PR is directly related to the structure of these institutions. To understand the decision making in these institutions firstly we have to understand the structure of PR and then the type of functions performed at different levels of the structure. Decision making in these institutions is delegated from top to bottom that is from Zila Parishad to Panchayat Samiti and from Panchayat Samiti to Gram Sabha.

Functions at each level

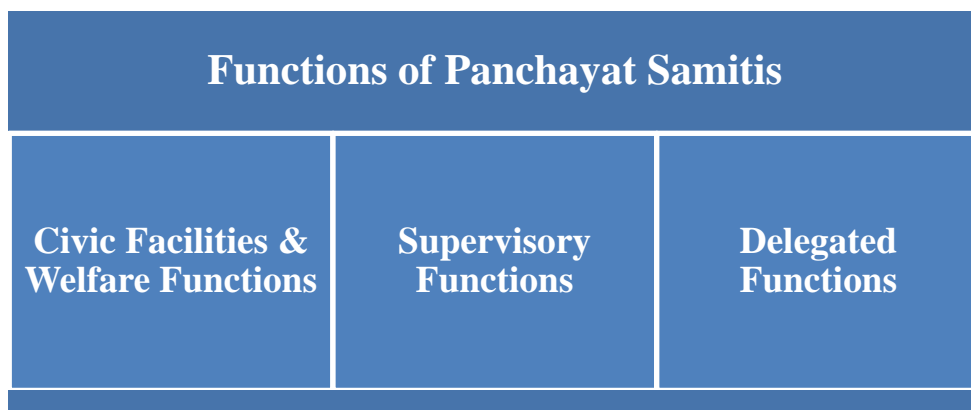
As mentioned earlier there are three tiers or levels in PRIs, which are- Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat. Each tier has its own functions, roles & responsibilities and duties to perform. While performing these duties they have to take certain decisions. So, to understand their decision-making aspects at each tier/stage first we have to understand their functions or type of work they have to perform.

- 1. At Zila Parishad Level:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:

Functions of Zila Parishad			
Civic Facilities & Welfare Functions	Coorfnation & Supervisory Functions	Advisory & Financial Functions	Developmental Functions

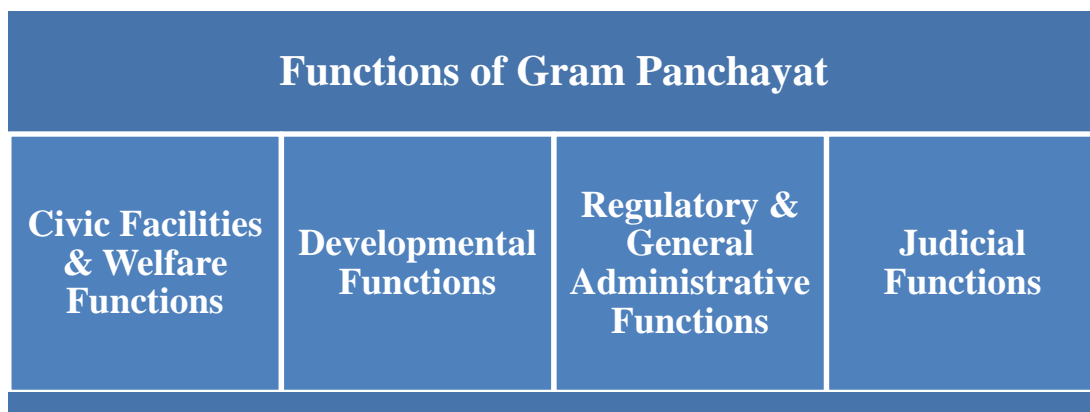
- I. Civic Facilities & Welfare Functions:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:
- Maintain and construct roads, bridges etc.
 - Develop land, water, human resource of the area.
 - Build library, hospital, dispensaries, educational institutions etc.
 - Provide relief during emergencies and to promote welfare scheme for weaker sections of the society.
- II. Supervisory Functions:** These functions include main three types of functions which are:
- Supervises the work of Panchayats Samitis under it.
 - Examines the budget of Panchayats Samitis under it.
 - Government promotes e-governance in order to monitor the functioning of Panchayat Samitis.
- III. Advisory & Financial Functions:** These functions include main two types of functions which are:
- Advice State Government regarding needs of the people in rural areas.
 - It receives funds from Union or State Government which it distributes among the Panchayat Samitis.
- IV. Developmental Functions:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:
- Irrigation & Electrification
 - Develop industries & employment opportunities
 - Public Housing
 - Introduce programmes to removing poverty

- 2. At Panchayat Samiti Level:** These functions include main three types of functions which are:



- I. Civic Facilities & Welfare Functions:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:
- Rural Health Programme (PHC & CHC).
 - Social Welfare: improves status of women, children, welfare of SC/ST, setting up 'Anganwadis'.
 - Support Agriculture, Animal Husbandry & Fisheries.
 - Develop Cottage, Handloom, Handicraft village industries.
- II. Supervisory Functions:** These functions include main three types of functions which are:
- Supervises the work of Gram Panchayats under it.
 - Examines the budget of Gram Panchayats under it.
 - Government promotes e-governance in order to monitor the functioning of Gram Panchayat.
- III. Delegated Functions:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:
- It serves as a link between Gram Panchayat and Zila Parishad.
 - To contribute a number of centrally sponsored schemes with funds shared on 50:50 basis between the centre and the states. IRDP Integrated Rural Development Programme one such major Programme of the Government.
 - State Government assigns functions to District agencies and then these District agencies assign functions to Panchayat Samitis.
 - Improve overall quality of life in rural areas.

- 3. At Gram Panchayat Level:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:



- I. **Civic Facilities & Welfare Functions:** These functions include main six types of functions which are:
 - a. Primary and Secondary Education.
 - b. Roads, footpaths, drainage, street lights etc.
 - c. Welfare Programmes for expectant mothers and their babies.
 - d. Welfare programmes for women, children and youth.
 - e. Safe drinking water, well, tanks etc.
 - f. Health centres & Dispensaries.
- II. **Developmental Functions:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:
 - a. Irrigation & Electrification.
 - b. Develop cottage and small-scale industries
 - c. Rural Housing (Specially for poor & needy).
 - d. Vocational Education
- III. **Regulatory & General Administrative Functions:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:
 - a. Registration of Births Deaths & Marriages.
 - b. Maintenance of Watch & Ward services.
 - c. Maintenance of the Village's common property
 - d. Helping the government to maintain Law & Order
- IV. **Judicial Functions:** These functions include main four types of functions which are:
 - a. In expensive and speedy justice to villagers, Panchayat may act as court or may setup Naya Panchayat.
 - b. It handles only petty civil cases.
 - c. Cases like petty theft, property, cheating, assault, trespass etc. falls under the jurisdiction of Nyaya Panchayat.
 - d. They have no power to imprison & can fine only up to Rs. 1000.

This democratic system at village level is the only system that gives opportunity of decision-making in the hands of villagers. They can take part in governance and decide their future. Since all the decisions are related to their problem or welfare etc., people take actively participation in decision-making process with the help of panchayats so that they can serve themselves better.

PRIs provides an opportunity to villagers to participate in governance and in their own development as well as to implement different welfare and poverty alleviation programme at the grass-root level for their own benefit and for the benefit of their society. The Panchayats have taken the action for deepening the decentralized governance to foster efficiency, transparency and accountability of local/traditional bodies/institutions, and to strengthen the governance at grassroots level. The three-tier system of PR was introduced to channelise the self-governance and revive PRIs.

Conclusion

The continuous efforts are made by ministry to regulate Panchayati raj system properly at local level. It has improved local governance at grass root level across country. However, there is a great need of improvement in governance at local level. Awareness about their rights and importance of participation in decision making activities is the key to success of the structural implementation of the policies. There should be participatory approach but the participation level has been relatively low. Although, Sarpanch and other representative of Panchayati Raj and some people are aware about the participatory approach of decision-making in Gram Sabha, but they are not responsive/active about it. PRIs are closest unit in decentralisation in governance for local people/ rural people and development, peace, security can be done effectively with the help of these institutions. Panchayati raj is a system of maximum welfare of maximum people. So, it is very important to study the Decision-making of managers of these institutions and also the factors affecting their decision-making.

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