



## STRUCTURE OF PANCHAYATRAJ SYSTEM IN KARNATAKA

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### ABSTRACT :

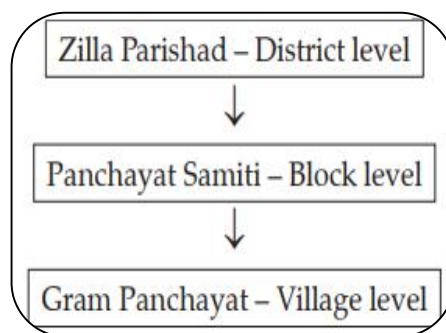
India is no doubt a land of villages. Hence there is always need of the efficient rural administration. Since ancient times there are examples of rural government. Therefore India has been considered as 'the cradle of rural local government' which continued to flourish from the time of vedic period to the advent of British rule.

**KEYWORDS :** Biodiversity-mollusca-Bori tanks.

### INTRODUCTION :

In Indian history the village was the basic unit of government whether the central government was monarchical or republican. It is really interesting to note that the rise and fall of the empires or the external aggressions were not able to abolish this system. It shows how much importance was given to them in those days.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to deal with the growth of the Panchayati raj institutions from ancient to British period. This chapter has been divided into 3 parts. The first part is concerned with the analysis of Panchayati raj institutions in the ancient period, while second part discusses the Panchayat system in medieval period and third part examines the Panchayati raj institutions during the British period. The contribution of Mahatma Gandhi towards panchayati raj system has also been considered in this chapter.



### 1. Village Administration in Ancient Period:

Local government had deep roots in India. The village in India has been considered as the basic unit of local self administration since the ancient period. The earliest references to local government institutions found in the vedas. in the epics of Ramayan, Mahabharat, Manu smriti, in the literature of Buddhism and Jainism and in Koutilya's Arthashastra. Vedas reveal that the ancient Indians used to lead a corporate life. They used to live in small traditional guilds. The life and activities of these guilds were controlled and regulated by popular institutions. The study of village system and their administration during different periods like Vedic period, Mouryan period, Gupta period and Chola's age give an idea of growth of local self institutions during ancient period.

#### Village Administration in Vedic Period

Village was the basic unit of the local self administration since the vedic period. In the Regvedic period, the Aryans lived in small villages and they were living in joint family. The family (Kula) was the basis of their political and social organisation. It was headed by the eldest male member.

During vedic period number of grama's formed a group called as Visya under the Visyapati. Number of visyas collectively formed Jana, which was headed by the King. During that time Grama was the lowest

unit of the administration and it was the composition of the group of the families. Grama was a definite political unit under the headman who was called as 'Gramini'<sup>1</sup>, He was an important officer of village. It is not clear whether the headman was elected by the village council or assembly. According to Manu the head man was appointed by the king'. But R.C. Majumdar who was a greatest historian, is of the opinion that, "some times he was directly appointed by die king, but that does not seem to have been the universal practice"\* . However the post of the Gramini was hereditary one and he usually belonged to the Kshatriya caste, some times Visyas also succeeded in acquiring this position.

As far as the village administration was concerned whole village administration was carried out under the supervision of the headman. He played a very important role in the administration of the entire village. The main function of the headman was first of all, to preside over the meetings of the village assemblies and to exercise both civil and military powers. The other two functions of the headman were defence of the village and collection of government revenue. His primary duty was the defence of the village against the attacks of robbers and other enemies. The whole village assisted him to discharge his duties, headman was also considered as the militia leader. He provided the militia in the time of emergency and external attacks. Apart from the defence function. Headman was also responsible for the collection of government revenue and kept the necessary records for the administrative purpose. He also saw that the order of the king was properly followed by the people under him. Totally at the village level, headman occupied a very important position. In fact, the headman exercised his powers in consultation with the village assemblies. It is necessary therefore to describe the structure and Functions of the village assemblies.

#### **POPULAR ASSEMBLIES IN VEDIC PERIOD:**

In vedic period, though headman enjoyed higher power but he could not use it arbitrarily, without the consent of the people. His power was restricted by the two popular assemblies. One was sabha and another one was samiti. The nature and composition of these assemblies are point of controversy. According to most of the scholars samiti was the national assembly, where as sabha was at the village level. In the view of Zimmer - "Samiti was an assembly of the whole tribes and the sabha was an assembly of the village"<sup>2</sup>. Altekar also holds same view that - "the sabha was a village or clan assembly, meeting for social and political purpose. The member of the sabha transacted simple items of village, government took steps for the communal safety and decisions in the matters of the village disputes. Most of the historians accepted the view of Altekar and Zimmer.

Sabha has a limited membership. Only rich people and the priests were the members of sabha. Sabha exercised the full powers in village administration. Village assembly carried out both civil and executive functions. It assisted collection of revenue from villagers by the village headman. And it provided security to the village against external attack of robbers and other enemies. Apart from these two main functions, village assembly also discharged the some village welfare functions such as, education, health, sanitation, water supply and many emergency measures during the time of famine. It also enjoyed certain judicial powers and acted as the 'National Judiciary'. Headman of the village and the people in an assembly could dispense justice to village people.

Totally, in those days when means of communication were very poor, the importance of village and village assemblies was naturally great. Thus these villages grew in strength and functioned in a democratic manner.

#### **Village Administration In Mouryan Period :**

During Mouryan period (324 BC - 236 BC) village was a small unit of administration. The village under the Mouryan was efficiently organised. The traditional elders were still powerful in the village as was in the vedic period.

The village administration was carried under the supervision and direction of the village headman. He was called as Gramika or Adhyaksha. Apart from Headman, other officers were also involved for the good administration, For e.g. Anikastha (Veterinary Doctor), Samkshayake (Accountant), Jamgha Karika (Village

courtiers) Chikitska (Village medical officer), all these officeis were responsible for the service to the community in their respective field. During this period village was self governed unit. The sketch of village life under the Mouryans is illuminating.

"Every village had its own Sabha (assembly) which debated all matters relating to the village; rules helpful to the entire community were framed, and offenders were punished through regular trials and judgement. The Sabha was the centre of the multifarious activities of the village. It discussed the religious and social matters. It arranged the numerous types of entertainment the sabha met under the shady tree representatives of village families, the elders, and other experienced folk gathered there. The Indian people lived independently in these self-governing village republics .

Above explanation shows that, Mouryan village administration was not only a very efficient and successful one; but also much in advance of it's time. During the ancient period, India was perhaps the most efficiently administered country where as under the Mourya's. Village community functioned like a self-governing republic giving people a healthy chance to run their government and manage their own local affairs. Thus, the Indian polity in those days was broadly based on truly democratic institutions.

### Village Administration in the Gupta period 300 - 500 A.D.

In Gupta Period, Villages were the lowest units of administration as in the Mouryan administration. In several aspects village administration under Gupta age was similar to that of the Mouryan period.

Village administration was carried out under the headman who was called Gramika. The Gramika was the important figure in the village administration. He had a clerk to work under him to keep the records. It is considered that the new development in the village administration where in a mention about the clerk to assist the headman has been made which was not there in the earlier period and also the headman was assisted in his work by a non official council. This village council was known as 'Janapada' under the Gupta administration. The members of this body were known as Mahattaras<sup>1</sup>. Mahattar means great men of the village. But there is no definite information as, how the members of Janapadas were elected. Yet there is a opinion that those who had acquired highest position in the village and who had experience were selected as the members of the village council.

The main responsibilities of the village council were settlement of village disputes, collection of revenue and to remit it to the treasury, settlement of boundary pillars for the village defence, etc. The village council also looked after the organised work of public utility and it acted as a trustee for minors. And village lands were carefully measured and the boundaries were fixed by the village council. The duties performed by the village council has been shown systematically in the following diagram.

### Village Administration in the Chola Period (900 - 1300 A.D.)

In South India, the village institutions were organised on democratic lines during the Chola period which has been described as the 'Golden age' of the village assemblies. 'Uttermerur' inscription of the Chola dynasty enable us to present a more detailed picture of the village assemblies and their executive committees.

In Chola dynasty the lowest administrative units were 'Kurram' (Union of Villages) and 'Grama' (village), each under iis own headman who was assisted by assemblies.

In those days there were two types of assemblies. The primary assembly of the village was known as *Ur*<sup>1</sup>. While the \**Ur*' was the group of ordinary villages. Another assembly known as sabha, which consisted agrahara villages. Here assemblies member were known as perumakkal.

The " *Ur*' consisted of all the village resident. This assembly elected the village executive. It was chosen after obtaining the consent of all the villagers assembled at the '*Ur*<sup>1</sup>. The village assemblies exercised full powers in administration. As regards the functions, collection of revenue was one of the important work of these assemblies. And also they were absolute owners of village lands, evictcJ cultivators for non payment of taxes. They enjoyed certain judicial powers also.

'Uttermerur' inscription gave us valuable information about the existence of village committees of Chola dynasty, such as the Gold committee, panchayat committee, General committee, Land survey committee, Temple committee, Education committee, Committee on village gardens and orchards, committee on village tank and distribution of water etc. Such a type of committee system indicates how much importance was given to the village administration in Chola period. This type of committee system was not there in the earlier period.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that in ancient period, village administration was well settled. The central government did not interfere in the local affairs. It had guaranteed perfect autonomy to them. Popularly elected sabha and samiti functioned on the democratic basis.

## 2. The Growth of Panchayati Raj System during the Mughal Period

During the 712 A.D. India came under the administration of the Sultan of Delhi. Sultan's administration was in the form of centralisation, all powers vested in Sultan. Therefore there was no place for the local-self institutions. But under the Mughal rule village administration again acquired their olden days position to some extent. Because Mughals realised that they had no better alternative to substitute in its place.

The Mughal rulers were always conscious of their duties towards the rural people. But they did not take the responsibilities of village administration. On the other hand the whole village administration was carried out by village councils.

There were no changes in the village organisation: that is the headman, accountant, village councils and other traditional officers were still continued under the Mughal rule.

In Mughal rule, each village had number of hereditary officials. Here most important figure was the headman. In Northern India village headman was known as "Moquddam", in Deccan, he was called as Patel<sup>1</sup>. Normally headman's position was hereditary one. Richer peasants would assume the role of the headman. He was not a government official. Yet higher authorities could remove him in case of faulty administration. Headman played a very important role in village administration. He was the spokesman of the village community and he was responsible for the collection of the revenues from villagers. Not only that, he also distributed the taquvi loans to the farmers and also collected certain taxes from the peasants. Headman solved the land disputes between the villagers. He was invariably answerable of a more serious nature such as murder, larceny and he was responsible to produce the criminal and treasonable activities.

In Mughal village administration, accountant was another important figure. He was called as patawari. Abul Fazl stated that "the duty of patawari was to keep an account of the income and expense of the village. He maintained records of the land revenue of the individual peasant and actual payment of revenue"<sup>6</sup>. Apart from patawari, the superintendent of tanks, the priest, the smith, carpenter, washerman, and a host of their minor functionaries formed the staff of the village organisation.

Village councils under the Muslim rule had the state support. During that time village council did have various subcommittees to deal with different activities of the village affairs. The village council looked after the security, sanitation, education, settlement of disputes, public works, poor relief, medical relief etc.

Generally the structure of the village remained the same as in ancient India. The village council with village elders was the main body of the village organisation. The practice of constituting committees for specific function continued. In Mughal period also interference of the state was less. It shows that Muslim rules also gave much importance to the village councils.

## 3. The Growth of the Panchayati Raj system during the British period:

By observing the political history of India, one can come to know that local self-government in India has a long history. Historical research has now conclusively proved that almost every village in the country in ancient times had a self-governing body of its own. Local government then was more real and successful than during the British regime. Succeeding paragraphs prove this opinion.

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