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Introduction

Local governments play a crucial role in managing everyday affairs within communities, especially in rural areas. In India, with its vast number of villages, ensuring that the specific needs and challenges faced by these communities are addressed effectively is a major task. Panchayati Raj institutions are central to the grassroots level of government. They handle various aspects of village life, such as infrastructure maintenance, resource management, and

Take the example of Lakshmanpur, a small village in the foothills of the Himalayas. With a population of about 700 people, most of whom are farmers, the Panchayati Raj institutions manage essential tasks like maintaining roads, managing water resources for farming, and supporting the local villagers to make decisions on issues directly affecting their daily lives, thereby ensuring that their needs are met efficiently. By bringing governance closer to the people, Panchayati Raj institutions play a vital role in effective administration and democracy, helping communities like Lakshmanpur thrive and

Panchayati Raj System

In every village in India, including Lakshmanpur, there is a system of local government called the 'Panchayat', which is like a village council. The Panchayati Raj system brings governance closer to the people and allows them to take part in making important decisions. This system helps manage local development, and ensures that government benefits reach the villagers.

The Panchayati Raj system operates at three levels: the village level with the Gram Panchayat, the block level with the Panchayat Samiti and the district level with the Zilla Parishad. This three-tier system handles nearly all aspects of life in the district, including agriculture, road maintenance, water management, and social welfare. By working from the village up to the district, Panchayati Raj helps address local needs and promotes community well-being.

Gram Panchayat

Gram Panchayat is the most local level of government in rural areas. It is closest to the people and its members are directly elected by the eligible adults in the village or neighbouring villages who are registered voters. In the Gram Sabha, both men and women discuss and decide on local issues. The Gram Sabha elects a head, known as the 'Sarpanch' or Pradhan, and recently, more women have entered into this leadership role. Additionally, each Gram Panchayat has a Secretary, who handles administrative tasks, and often a Patwari, who manages land records.

Example 1

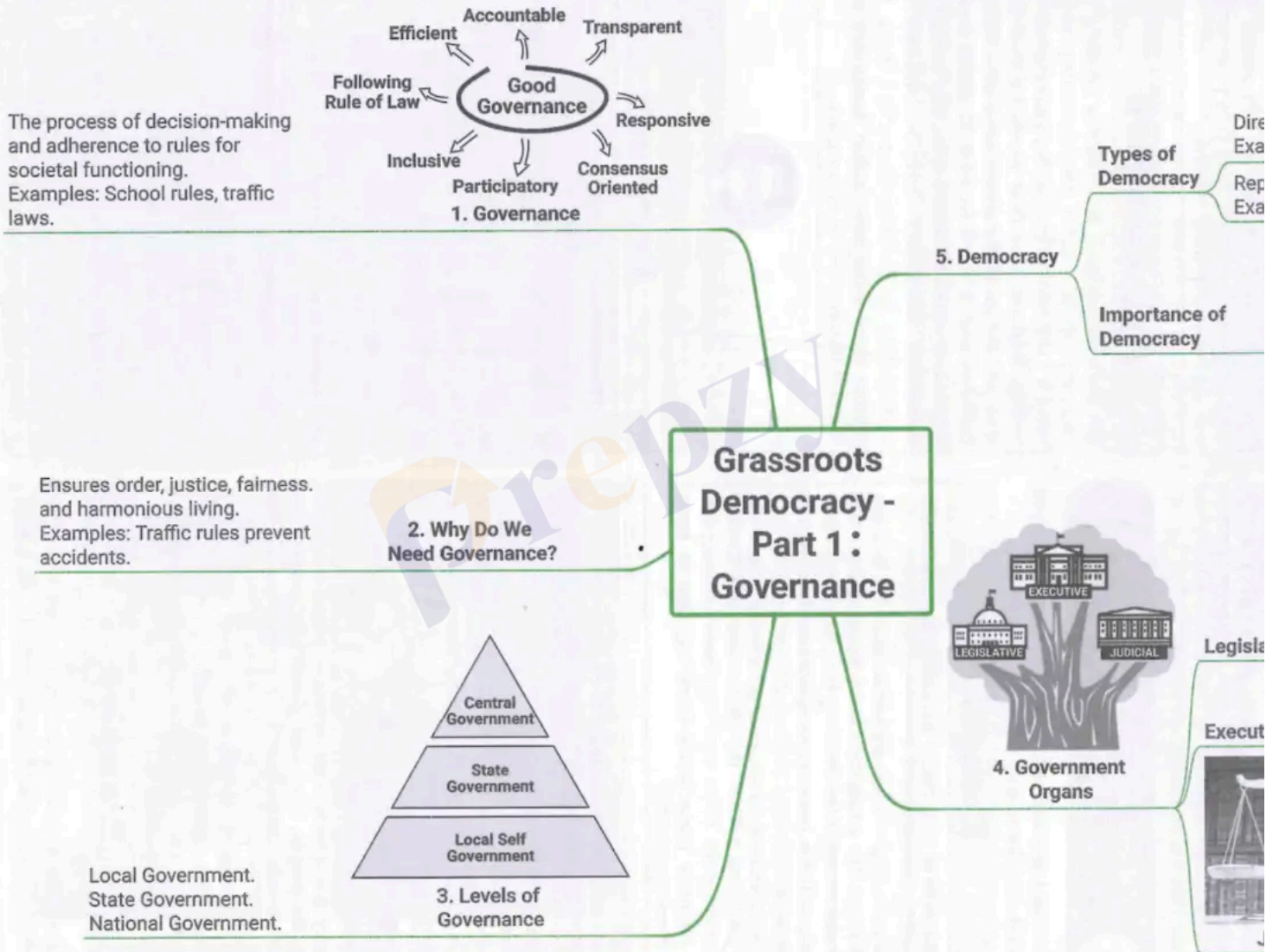
Notable Examples of Exemplary Sarpanchs:

Dnyaneshwar Kamble became the Sarpanch of Tarangan village in Maharashtra in 2017. As a transgender person, Kamble broke barriers and

the village is service to the public." By defeating six other candidates, Kamble demonstrated the power of dedication and service in local gov

Vandana Bahadur Maida made history as the first female Sarpanch of Khankhari village in Madhya Pradesh. Despite facing societal challenges, she encouraged women to participate in Gram Sabha meetings and addressed important issues such as education and sanitation, showcasing how women can lead and transform their communities.

Popatrao Baguji Pawar served as the Sarpanch of Hiware Bazar in Maharashtra and implemented effective rainwater harvesting, watershed management, and tree planting. His efforts rejuvenated the village's environment and agriculture, leading to Hiware Bazar's recognition as a green and prosperous village. He was honoured with the Padma Shri in 2020.



The image is a mind map explaining "Grassroots Democracy - Part 1: Governance." It outlines key ideas about governance, including what it is, why we need it, the levels of government, the main parts of government, and types of democracy. Step-by-step explanation for students: 1. Governance means making decisions and ensuring they are followed, like school and traffic rules. 2. We need governance to keep order, fairness, and justice, for example, to prevent accidents that happen at three levels: local government, state government, and central (national) government. 3. The government has three main parts: Legislative (like Parliament), Executive (enforces laws like Prime Minister), and Judiciary (interprets laws and ensures justice like courts). 4. Democracy is a system of governing where people have a say in how they are governed. - Direct democracy where people vote on issues directly (e.g., local referendums). - Representative democracy where people elect representatives to govern on their behalf (e.g., national elections).

Panchayats are local government groups that listen to everyone's concerns, including children's. The Child-Friendly Panchayat Initiative helps with worries about their well-being. In many states, children are invited to join Bal Sabhas and Bal Panchayats, where they can speak up about issues.

Example 2

Notable Examples of Child-Friendly Panchayat Initiative:

- **In Maharashtra**, Bal Panchayats have made a big difference by working to end child labour and child marriages. They help bring children back to school to let their children study instead of arranging early marriages.
- **In Sikkim**, the Sangkhau Radhu Khandu Gram Panchayat has made schools safer by building walls around them and adding kitchens to provide nutritious meals. For these efforts, it was named a child-friendly Panchayat.
- **In Rajasthan**, the 'Children's Parliament' created by Bunker Roy's Barefoot College helps underprivileged kids learn about democracy and let them participate in mock elections, manage school activities, and work on issues like education and sanitation. This initiative has been praised worldwide for empowering children including the World's Children's Honorary Award in 2001.

Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad

Apart from village-level Panchayats, there are also institutions at the block and district levels. These include the Panchayat Samiti at the block level and the Zila Parishad at the district level. The Panchayat Samiti connects the Gram Panchayat (village level) with the Zila Parishad. Members of these institutions are elected from the village level. They include village Sarpanchs and local State Legislative Assembly members.

Each State has slightly different rules for the Panchayat Samiti, but its main role is to bring together plans from different Gram Panchayats and help in obtaining funds for development projects and government schemes like the Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, which promotes road construction in rural areas.

To ensure everyone's voice is heard, especially those from disadvantaged groups, special rules are in place. There is also a rule that one-third of the seats in Panchayats are reserved for women by the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of the Constitution.

Keywords

- **Local Governance:** Local governance involves the management and decision-making of community affairs at the village, town, or city level and implementing policies effectively.
- **Panchayat:** A Panchayat is a village-level governing body in India that manages local issues, resources, and development activities through the Gram Sabha.
- **Gram Sabha:** The Gram Sabha is a village assembly consisting of all registered voters, which meets to discuss and make decisions on local issues.
- **Panchayat Samiti:** The Panchayat Samiti is a block-level institution that coordinates and supports the activities of Gram Panchayats and implements development projects.
- **Zila Parishad:** The Zila Parishad is a district-level governing body that oversees and supports the work of Panchayat Samitis, manages the district's finances, and ensures effective implementation of policies at the district level.

Solved Examples

Example 1: Role of Gram Panchayat in Village Development

Question: How does the Gram Panchayat contribute to the development of a village like Lakshmanpur?

Answer: The Gram Panchayat manages local issues such as maintaining roads, managing water resources, supporting schools, and resolving disputes. It holds regular meetings called Gram Sabha and is led by a Sarpanch, ensuring that villagers have a say in decisions affecting their daily lives.

Example 2: Importance of Panchayat Samiti

Question: What is the role of the Panchayat Samiti in rural governance?

Answer: The Panchayat Samiti operates at the block level, coordinating plans from various Gram Panchayats and presenting them at higher levels. It manages development projects and government schemes, ensuring effective implementation at the block level.

Practice Set

Easy

- What is a Gram Panchayat?
- Who elects the Sarpanch?

Moderate

- Explain the three levels of the Panchayati Raj system.
- What are the roles of the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad?

Challenging

- Discuss the significance of the Child-Friendly Panchayat Initiative in promoting children's participation in local governance.
- How do reservation policies in Panchayati Raj institutions promote inclusivity?

Answer Key

Easy

- A Gram Panchayat is the village-level local government body responsible for managing local affairs.
- The Sarpanch is elected by the Gram Sabha, which includes all registered voters in the village.

Moderate

- The Panchayati Raj system has three levels: Gram Panchayat (village), Panchayat Samiti (block), and Zila Parishad (district), each handling its responsibilities at their respective levels.
- The Panchayat Samiti coordinates plans from Gram Panchayats and secures funds, while the Zila Parishad oversees district-wide development.

Challenging

- The Child-Friendly Panchayat Initiative allows children to participate in governance through Bal Sabhas and Bal Panchayats, addressing their needs and thus empowering young voices in decision-making.
- Reservation policies ensure that women and disadvantaged groups have representation in Panchayati Raj institutions, promoting inclusivity.

Quick Reference

- **Gram Panchayat:** Village-level elected body managing local affairs.
- **Panchayat Samiti:** Block-level institution coordinating Gram Panchayats.
- **Zila Parishad:** District-level body overseeing development projects.
- **Sarpanch:** Elected head of the Gram Panchayat.
- **Gram Sabha:** Assembly of all registered voters in a village.
- **Child-Friendly Panchayat:** Initiative to involve children in local governance.
- **Reservation:** One-third seats reserved for women in Panchayati Raj institutions.

Glossary

Local Governance

Management and decision-making of community affairs at the local level.

Panchayat

Village-level governing body managing local issues and development.

Gram Sabha

Village assembly of all registered voters discussing local matters.

Panchayat Samiti

Block-level institution coordinating Gram Panchayats and development projects.

Zila Parishad

District-level governing body overseeing Panchayat Samitis and district development.

Sarpanch

Elected head of the Gram Panchayat.

Child-Friendly Panchayat

Initiative to include children's voices in local governance.

Chronology of Panchayati Raj System

Time Period / Year	Event / Change	Importance
1950s	Initial establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions	Foundation of local self-government in rural India

1992	73rd Constitutional Amendment Act	Provided constitutional status to Panchayati Raj institutions and mandated disadvantaged groups
2001	Children's Parliament initiative by Barefoot College	Promoted children's participation in local governance
2020	Padma Shri awarded to Popatrao Baguji Pawar	Recognition of exemplary leadership in rural development

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