

Grassroots Democracy – Part 2

Local Government in Rural Areas

1. Rural Area

A **rural area** is an area mainly made up of villages and their surrounding countryside. Agriculture, fishing, animal rearing and other occupations are common.

2. Urban Area

An **urban area** is a town or city where there is a higher concentration of population, buildings, businesses, industries and services.

Rural Area	Urban Area
Mainly villages	Towns and cities
Agriculture is an important occupation	Business, industries and services are common
Local government: Panchayati Raj Institutions	Local government: Municipalities / Municipal Corporations

3. What is a Panchayat?

A **Panchayat** is a local self-government body that works for the development and administration of a rural area. It deals with matters such as roads, drinking water, sanitation, street lights, cleanliness and local development.

Simple definition: A Panchayat is a local government body that looks after the needs and development of villages.

4. What is a Village Council?

A **village council** is a group of representatives who take decisions and carry out local administration for a village. In India, the village-level elected local government is generally known as the **Gram Panchayat**.

5. What is Panchayati Raj?

Panchayati Raj means the system of local self-government in rural areas. It allows people in villages to participate in decisions about local development.

6. Three-Tier System of Panchayati Raj

Level	Local Government
Village level	Gram Panchayat
Block / Intermediate level	Panchayat Samiti
District level	Zila Parishad

Remember: Village → Gram Panchayat → Block/Intermediate → Panchayat Samiti → District → Zila Parishad

A district can contain both rural and urban areas. Urban areas have their own urban local bodies.

7. Gram Panchayat – Village Level

The **Gram Panchayat** is the local government at the village level. Two terms should not be confused:

- **Gram Sabha:** The people of the village who are registered as voters.
- **Gram Panchayat:** The elected body that works for the village.

Easy way to remember: Gram Sabha = People | Gram Panchayat = Elected representatives

8. How Does the Gram Panchayat Work?

1. Village People
2. Gram Sabha
3. Discussion of village problems and needs
4. Election of local representatives
5. Gram Panchayat
6. Development planning
7. Implementation of development works
8. Local services and reporting

9. Election of Gram Panchayat

People of the village elect representatives through local elections. The elected representatives are commonly called Panchayat members or ward members. The head is generally called the **Sarpanch/Pradhan**, although terminology varies between states.

10. Functions of the Gram Panchayat

- Drinking water
- Roads and drainage
- Street lighting
- Sanitation and cleanliness
- Support for public-health programmes
- Village development projects
- Implementation of government schemes
- Maintaining certain local records and carrying out local administration

11. Role of Gram Sabha

The **Gram Sabha** gives ordinary villagers a direct opportunity to participate in local democracy. Villagers can raise local issues, discuss needs and priorities, and participate in village-level planning, according to applicable state rules.

12. Where Does the Money Come From?

- Government grants
- Panchayat's own revenue
- Taxes or fees where permitted
- Funds connected with government schemes

13. Complete Example – Drinking Water Problem

Step 1: Villagers face a drinking-water problem.

Step 2: The issue is raised in the Gram Sabha.

Step 3: The Gram Sabha discusses the problem.

Step 4: The Gram Panchayat considers the need and prepares a plan.

Step 5: Funds are arranged through appropriate sources.

Step 6: The Panchayat implements the project.

Step 7: The work is monitored and the facility is provided.

14. Gram Sabha vs Gram Panchayat

Gram Sabha	Gram Panchayat
Consists of eligible voters of the village	Consists of elected representatives
People participate directly	Representatives perform local administration
Discusses village issues	Carries out development work and local functions
Wider body	Smaller elected body

Quick Revision: Rural Area → Panchayati Raj → Three Tiers → Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, Zila Parishad

Village-level flow: People → Gram Sabha → Elected representatives → Gram Panchayat → Local development