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1. Panchayati Raj was not a new concept in India.
2. Indian villages had Panchayats, which were having both executive and judicial powers and were used to handle various issues or disputes arising in the village area.
3. Gandhiji also held the opinion of empowerment of Panchayats for the development of rural areas.
4. Thus, recognizing their importance our Constitution makers included a provision for Panchayats in part IV of the constitution.
5. Article 40 confers the responsibility upon State to take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with powers and authority to enable them to function as units of self-government. But it does not give guidelines for

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organizing village panchayats.

6. Panchayati Raj's formal organization and structure were first recommended by the Balwant Rai committee.

7. The Committee, in its report in November 1957, recommended the establishment of the scheme of 'democratic decentralization', which ultimately came to be known as Panchayati Raj.

8. It recommended a three-tier system at the village, block, and district levels and it also recommended for direct election of village-level panchayat

9. Rajasthan was the first state to establish Panchayati Raj in Nagaur district on October 2, 1959.

10. After this, Ashok Mehta Committee on

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Panchayati Raj was appointed in December 1971.

11. In August 1978 submitted its report with various recommendations to revive and strengthen the declining Panchayati Raj system in the country.

12. Its major recommendation were a two-tier system of the panchayat, regular social audit, representation of political parties at all levels of panchayat elections, provisions for a regular election, reservation to SCs/STs in panchayats and a minister for Panchayati Raj in the state council of ministers.

13. Further, GVK Rao Committee appointed in 1985 again recommended some measures to strengthen Panchayati Raj institutions.

14. LM Singhvi Committee appointed in 1986 first time recommended the

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constitutional status of Panchayati Raj institutions.

15. In response to the recommendations of the LM Singhvi committee, a bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha by Rajiv Gandhi's government in July 1989 to constitutionalize Panchayati Raj Institutions, but the bill was not passed in Rajya Sabha.

16. After this PV Narasimha Rao's government introduced a bill for this purpose in Lok Sabha in September, 1991 and the bill finally emerged as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 and came into force on 24th April, 1993.

1. The Zila Panchayat or District Council or Mandal Parishad or District Panchayat is the third tier of the Panchayat Raj system and functions at the district levels in all states.
2. A Zila Parishad is an elected body.
3. Block Pramukh of Block Panchayat is also represented in Zila Parishad.
4. The members of the State Legislature and the members of the Parliament of India are members of the Zila Parishad.
5. The Zila parishad is the top tier of the panchayat raj system and acts as the link between the state government and the village-level Gram Panchayat.
6. Zila parishads are Panchayats at Apex or District Level in Panchayat

Raj Institutions.

1. The Chairman of all the Panchayat Samitis under the district is the ex officio member of Zila Parishad.
2. The deputy chief executive officer from the General Administration department at the district level is the ex-officio secretary of Zila Parishad.
3. The chief executive officer, who is an IAS officer or senior state service officer, heads the administrative setup of the Zila Parishad.

Functions of Zila Parishad:

1. It works as the advisory body for blocks.
2. It approves the budget and plan of blocks.

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3. It allows funds to the blocks.

4. It approves the budget and plan of blocks.

5. Secondary education is the responsibility of this council.

6. It should advise Government in all matters relating to rural development in the district.

01. Village Panchayat:

In the structure of the Panchayati Raj, the Village Panchayat is the lowest unit. There is a Panchayat for each village or a group of villages in case the population of these villages happens to be too small. The Panchayat chiefly consists of representatives elected by the people of the village.

Only the persons who are registered as voters and do not hold any office of profit under the government are eligible for election to the Panchayat. The persons convicted by the court for criminal offenses are disqualified from the election of the Panchayat.

02. Panchayat Samiti:

The Panchayat Samiti is the second on the join tier of the Panchayati Raj. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report

has envisaged the Samiti as a single representative and vigorous democratic institution to take charge of all aspects of development in rural areas. The Samiti, according to the Committee, offers "an area large enough for functions which the Village Panchayat cannot perform and yet small enough to attract the interest and services of residents."

03. Zilla Parishad:

The Zilla Parishad stands at the apex of the three-tier structure of the Panchayati Raj system. Generally, the Zilla Parishad consists of representatives of the Panchayat Samiti; all the members of the State Legislature and the Parliament representing a part or whole of the district; all district-level officers of the Medical, Public Health, Public Works, Engineering, Agriculture, Veterinary, Education

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and other development departments.

There is also a provision for special representation of women, members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes provided they are not adequately represented in the normal course. The Collector is also a member of the Zilla Parishad.

Finance Commission:

1. The formal segment consists of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Public and Private Sector Commercial Banks, Regional Rural Banks (RRB), Land Development Banks (LDB), State Cooperative Banks (SCB), Central Cooperative Banks (CCB), Primary Agricultural Cooperative Banks (PACB), Central and States Governments, Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), Post Office Savings Bank, etc.

2. RBI is responsible for overall monetary policy and provides accommodation to NABARD and IDBI for agricultural and Rural Industries respectively.

3. These institutions, in turn, provide refinance to commercial banks including RRBs and SCB and State Land Development Banks (SLDBs).

4 The refinance from NABARD is distributed to the rural entrepreneurs through two or three-tier cooperative structures respectively for long-term, short-term, and medium-term lending. In the case of commercial banks and RRBs, they refinance directly to the users.

5. Except LDBs and PACs, all financing agencies collect deposits from rural households. Post office saving banks are active in rural areas.

Self-help groups:

1. Self-Help Groups (SHGs) are informal associations of people who choose to come together to find ways to improve their living conditions.

2. It can be defined as a self-governed, peer-controlled information group of people with similar socio-economic backgrounds and

having a desire to collectively perform a common purpose.

3. Villages face numerous problems related to poverty, illiteracy, lack of skills, lack of formal credit, etc. These problems cannot be tackled at an individual level and need collective efforts.

4. Thus SHG can become a vehicle of change for the poor and marginalized. SHG relies on the notion of "Self Help" to encourage self-employment and poverty alleviation.