

Chapter 8 - Local Governments

Question 1:

Constitution of India visualised village panchayats as units of self-government. Think over the situation described in the following statements and explain how do these situations strengthen or weaken the panchayats in becoming units of self-government.

- a. Government of a State has allowed a big company to establish a huge steel plant. Many villages would be adversely affected by the steel plant. Gram Sabha of one of the affected villages passed a resolution that before establishing any big industries in the region, village people must be consulted and their grievances should be redressed.
- b. The government has decided that 20 % of all its expenditure would be done through the panchayats.
- c. A village panchayat kept on demanding funds for a building for village school, the government officials turned down their proposal saying that funds are allocated for certain other schemes and cannot be spent otherwise.
- d. The government divided a village Dungarpur into two and made a part of village Jamuna and Sohana. Now village Dungarpur has ceased to exist in government's books.
- e. A village panchayat observed that water sources of their region are depleting fast. They decided to mobilise village youth to do some voluntary work and revive the old village ponds and wells.

Answer:

- a. It strengthens the village panchayat as the gram sabha can take decision independently for the welfare of the village people.
- b. It strengthens the village panchayat as it makes more resources available at their disposal. It allows them to spend according to their local needs.
- c. It weakens the village panchayat as it does not have enough funds to maintain and carry out welfare projects in the village. It has to depend on the government officials for funds.
- d. It strengthens the panchayat as it creates new unit of self government and allows more power in the hands of people.
- e. It strengthens the self governance of the village as it shows the ability of the village panchayat to mobilise the village to utilise their own resources without any help from the state government.

Question 2:

Suppose you are entrusted to evolve a local government plan of a State, what powers would you endow to the village panchayats to function as units of self-government? Mention any five powers and the justification in two lines for each of them for giving those powers.

Answer:

Any answer supported with argument or explanation would solve the purpose. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, some sample pointers have been

provided for your reference:

- Allowing panchayats to raise their own funds–This would reduce their dependency on the higher levels of government and make them more active in development process.
- Starting village co-operatives at panchayat level–This would lead to development of village economy and cooperation between various panchayats. It would also generate employment and allow panchayats to directly market village produce and get better prices for the same.
- Authority to create and maintain infrastructure in village–This would lead to less dependence on government officials for funds and consequently, lead to autonomy.
- Control of village panchayat over local resources–Resources like water and pastureland should come under the village panchayat to enable their maintenance and prevent their degradation. This would engage the entire community in their conservation.
- Direct engagement of village panchayats with state government in matters related to development projects–This would allow them to get adequate compensation for development projects and land acquisition and reduce the role of middlemen.

Question 3:

What are the provisions for the reservations for the socially disadvantaged groups as per the 73rd amendment? Explain how these provisions have changed the profile of the leadership at the village level.

Answer:

The socially disadvantaged groups like women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes have been given reservation for various posts in the local government of rural India according to the proportion of their population. One-third of all positions in panchayats are reserved for women while Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes have seats reserved as per the proportion to their population. States can also provide reservation to Other Backward Classes if they think it is necessary.

This has changed the profile of the leadership at the village level by transferring the leadership from the earlier dominant social groups to groups that were previously unable to have a say in the decision-making process. There is now a greater representation of all social groups in the panchayat institutions. Thus, more women and people belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes are now able to play important role in decisions that can bring benefits for their community.

Question 4:

What were the main differences between the local governments before 73rd amendment and after that amendment?

Answer:

The main differences between the local governments before 73rd amendment and after the amendment can be listed as:

- After the implementation of 73rd amendment, the local government has been divided into a uniform three-tier Panchayati Raj structure.
- Earlier the state administration was responsible for conducting elections to the Panchayati Raj institutions but now the state government has to appoint a state election commission for this purpose.
- After dissolution of the Panchayati Raj before its term of five years a fresh election has to be conducted within six months. This was not the case before the 73rd amendment was passed.
- Distribution of revenue between the state government and local government and between rural and urban government is done by the state election commission. This was not the case before the 73rd amendment was implemented.
- Reservation for women, scheduled caste and scheduled tribes and to other backward classes (if the state government thinks it is necessary for OBCs) is implemented for various positions in the local government according to the proportion of their population.
- Twenty-nine subjects that were earlier in the State list of subjects in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution have been transferred to the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Question 5:

Read the following conversation. Write in two hundred words your opinion about the issues raised in this conversation.

Alok: Our Constitution guarantees equality between men and women. Reservations in local bodies for women ensure their equal share in power.

Neha: But it is not enough that women should be in positions of power. It is necessary that the budget of local bodies should have separate provision for women.

Jayesh: I don't like this reservations business. A local body must take care of all people in the village and that would automatically take care of women and their interests.

Answer:

Any answer supported with argument or explanation would solve the purpose. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, one sample solution has been provided for your reference:

It is correct that the Constitution has guaranteed equality between men and women. Reservations have ensured the participation of women in decision making process at the local level. There are almost 200 women Adhyakshas in Zila Panchayats, 2000 women are Presidents of the block or taluka panchayats and more than 80,000 women Sarpanchas in Gram Panchayats. More than 30 women hold the positions of Mayors in Corporations, over 500 women Adhyakshas of Town Municipalities and nearly 650 women are head of Nagar Panchayats. Women have gained more power and confidence in the society. They have developed better understanding of the politics and have helped other women to know about their rights. In many cases they have given a new perspective and sensitivity to the discussions held at local bodies. However, the social status of women can only be increased through their economic independence and funds are required for this purpose. Therefore, the budget of local bodies should have provisions for women, particularly their health, education and livelihood.

It is also correct to say in theory that reservations go against the nature of equality. However, there are certain issues that are best represented by the members of the particular group which is affected by them. Reservation also provides a chance to these groups to make their voice heard. Thus, reservation for women is required in the context of their socio-economic status.

Question 6:

Read the provisions of the 73rd Amendment. Which of the following concerns does this amendment address?

- a. Fear of replacement makes representatives accountable to the people.
- b. The dominant castes and feudal landlords dominate the local bodies.
- c. Rural illiteracy is very high. Illiterate people cannot take decisions about the development of the village.
- d. To be effective the village panchayats need resources and powers to make plans for the village development.

Answer:

- d. To be effective the village panchayats need resources and powers to make plans for the village development.

Question 7:

The following are different justifications given in favour of local government. Give them ranking and explain why you attach greater significance to a particular rationale than the others. According to you, on which of these rationales the decision of the Gram panchayat of Vengaiwasal village was based? How?

- a. Government can complete the projects with lesser cost with the involvement of the local community.
- b. The development plans made by the local people will have greater acceptability than those made by the government officers.
- c. People know their area, needs, problems and priorities. By collective participation they should discuss and take decisions about their life.
- d. It is difficult for the common people to contact their representatives of the State or the national legislature.

Answer:

1st Rank: c. People know their area, needs, problems and priorities. By collective participation they should discuss and take decisions about their lives. Local government by definition is meant for the local people of a particular area. It is based upon the assumption that the problems of an area are

best understood and resolved by the local people. These decisions would be more rational and close to their problems. Thus, it is the most important aspect of local government.

2nd Rank: b. The development plans made by the local people will have greater acceptability than those made by the government officers. This is because the decisions of local people are based upon an accurate knowledge of local requirements. This makes it the second most important aspect of local government.

3rd Rank: d. It is difficult for the common people to contact their representatives of the State or the national legislature. This is because common people may not have the time or resources to approach authorities at state or even district level about issues that have been pending for a long time. This makes it the third most important rationale behind local government.

4th Rank: a. Government can complete the projects with lesser cost with the involvement of the local community. Community involvement lessens the cost of projects. However, it is a less important aspect compared to the relevance of the development activities for local people. Thus, it is ranked fourth.

The decision of the gram panchayat of Vengaivasal village was based upon the knowledge of people about their local area, needs, problems and priorities. Collective participation enabled the people to discuss and take decisions about issues that affected their life. The decision of the government was taken without the consent of the Panchayat. Thus, it was violation of the right of the people to decide upon issues that affected them.

Question 8:

Which of the following according to you involves decentralisation?

Why are other options not sufficient for decentralisation?

- a. To hold election of the Gram Panchayat.
- b. Decision by the villagers themselves about what policies and programmes are useful for the village.
- c. Power to call meeting of Gram Sabha.
- d. A Gram Panchayat receiving the report from the Block Development Officer about the progress of a project started by the State government.

Answer:

- b. Decision by the villagers themselves about what policies and programmes are useful for the village.

Rest of the three options do not involve decentralisation because elections can be held, meeting can be called and projects can be monitored even in a centralised form of government. These features are not related to the decision-making process, which is the most important aspect of decentralisation.

Question 9:

A student of Delhi University, Raghavendra Parpanna, wanted to study the role of decentralisation in decision-making about primary education. He asked some questions to the villagers. These questions

are given below. If you were among those villagers, what answer would you give to each of these questions?

A meeting of the Gram Sabha is to be called to discuss what steps should be taken to ensure that every child of the village goes to the school.

a. How would you decide the suitable day for the meeting? Think who would be able to attend / not attend the meeting because of your choice.

(i) A day specified by the BDO or the collector

(ii) Day of the village haat

(iii) Sunday

(iv) Naag panchami / sankranti

b. What is a suitable venue for the meeting? Why?

(i) Venue suggested by the circular of the district collector.

(ii) Religious place in the village.

(iii) Dalit Mohalla

(iv) Upper caste Tola

(v) Village school

c. In the Gram Sabha meeting firstly a circular sent by the district collector was read. It suggested what steps should be taken to organise an education rally and what should be its route. The meeting did not discuss about the children who never come to school or about girls' education, or the condition of the school building and the timing of the school. No women teacher attended the meeting as it was held on Sunday.

What do you think about these proceedings as an instance of people's participation?

d. Imagine your class as the Gram Sabha. Discuss the agenda of the meeting and suggest some steps to realise the goal.

Answer:

Any answer supported with argument or explanation would solve the purpose. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, one sample solution has been provided for your reference:

a. (iii) Sunday. It would allow all the adults of the village to attend the meeting.

b. (v) Village school would be the suitable place for the meeting because the meeting is regarding education irrespective of the caste, gender and religion of the children.

c. It is not an instance of people's participation as women teachers did not attend the meeting, girl's education was not discussed and children who had never been to school were not considered. The condition of the building and timing of the school were also ignored. Thus, most issues that were vital to the participation of people were ignored as issues related to all groups were not considered.

d.

Any answer supported with argument or explanation would solve the purpose. It is strongly recommended that you prepare the solution on your own. However, some sample pointers have been provided for your reference:

Agenda of the Gram Sabha

- Age of children: All children of the village from the age of 5 years should be enrolled in the school.
- School Building: The school building should be renovated with proper seats and blackboards in all classrooms.
- Water and sanitation facility: The Gram Pradhan is made responsible for the water supply and better and separate sanitation facility for boys and girls.
- Syllabus: Sports and extra co-curricular activities will be included to lessen the pressure of the study and cultivate physical development.
- Mid-day meal: School principal would be responsible for the quality and quantity of the food provided to the students.
- Free education: Every child till 14 years of age is eligible for free education.
- Appointment of the staff: Helping staff can be recruited from the village and secretary would be responsible for the appointment of the teachers.
- Residential facility: Gram Pradhan has to approach the Block Development Officer for appealing to provide residential facility to the teachers.
- Hostel facility: Gram Pradhan has to approach the BDO to ask for hostel facility near the village school to accommodate students from distant villages.
- Compensation: Villagers whose land will be taken will be provided with appropriate compensation from the government.