

CHAPTER – 4

Organising and Governance of Gram Panchayats: A Study of Organising in Gram Panchayats in Phansidewa Block

4.1: Introduction

In India the Gram Panchayat Institutions are recognised as the appropriate institutional machinery for reconstruction of thousands of villages and achieving the goals of rural development. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has enacted some powerful provisions for streamlining the function of organising in this grass-root institution, particularly in respect of participation of weaker section of the society.

Organising is one of the most important management functions. Our proposition is that there should be appropriate mechanism for organising and making the Gram Panchayats capable of executing their planned activities in an efficient manner. From experience it is seen that if organising is good, governance is good and *vice versa*. From this perspective the pertinent question is - do the Gram Panchayat Institutions know the art of organising? If they know it, how far it is good in managing the programmes and projects assigned to them? With a view to find answer to these questions, making a study on organising and governance of these Gram Panchayat Institutions is considered to be an important area of research.

4.2: Organizing: Defining the Functional Framework for getting things done

At the time of planning management determines objectives and goals that the institution should pursue. Subsequently, how the goals and objectives will be accomplished and who will be taking part in making things happen are spelt out at the time of organizing. At this stage management identifies the activities necessary for attainment of the goals and assigns those activities to different personnel along with necessary power and authority. It also lays down the framework outlining how the different individuals assigned with responsibilities should interact with each other and ensure coordination between them to facilitate proper execution of the plans and schemes to be performed, defining and delegating responsibility and

authority and establishing relationships for purpose of enabling people to work most effectively together for accomplishing their objectives. According to Saul W Gellerman, (1990) there are five steps in the organizing process, which he presented in the form of a flow chart as given below: (See Fig 4.1)

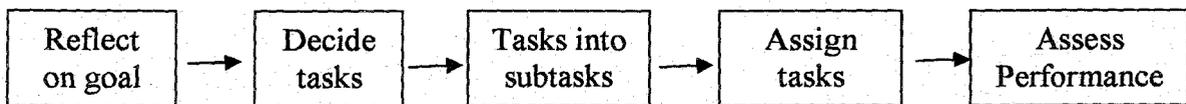


FIG 4.1: STEPS IN ORGANIZING

Given the goals and objectives as outlined in the plans, the tasks of organising involves establishing major tasks, dividing major task into subtasks, assigning subtasks to the subordinates along with resources and directives necessary for performance of the subtasks/tasks and evaluate the results obtained from performance of the tasks.

The inter-relationship between different personnel working in the organisation is depicted by means of a diagram called organization-chart. This shows flow of authority, responsibility and communication taking place between personnel working in different hierarchical levels and horizontal positions of the organization.

Henry Fayol, (1929) in his classic work published in the journal of the Congress of Metallurgical Society spelt out fourteen principles of management, majority of which are devoted to prescribing the principles to be followed in designing a sound organisation structure. Some of the principles are 'division of work', 'assigning of tasks along with balanced authority and responsibility', 'unity of command', etc.

Choosing an organisation structure depends on many factors, such as method of production, number of services the organisation offers, competitive environment in the industry, organisational strategy, availability of manpower, etc. Porter Michel E, (1980) observes that structure of the organisation depends on the types of tasks assigned to the organisation. Chandler, Alfred D, (1962) finds that the structure of the organisation depends on the strategy. Later Porter Michel E, (1980) adds greater support to this point and shows that organisation structure depends on the stage of product life cycle too.

4.3: Line and Staff: Two Pillars of an Organisation Structure

In an organisation structure there are two categories of personnel; they are line personnel and staff personnel. Line personnel are deployed in the main operational activities like procurement, production and selling. The authority-responsibility relationship between line personnel is usually defined as line structure. On the other hand, some personnel are appointed for performance of some support services like record keeping, reporting and advising. They are called staff personnel. Activities of staff people facilitate operation of line departments. There should be good understanding and coordination between these two categories of personnel; however, none of them should encroach upon the other's territory. The nature and success of coordination is one of the determining factors of organisational effectiveness (Crowston, 1997; Stokes & Hewitt, 1976) of a large organisation.

4.4: Focus of the Chapter

In the context of issues mentioned above, this chapter seeks to make an in-depth study into various aspects of organising in the institutions of Gram Panchayats. The research questions are – what are the features of Panchayati Raj organizations at the operational level? Do these institutions have a unique organising mechanism? Is the mechanism of organising activities of Panchayats in conformity with the standard principles of organising as enumerated in the literature of management theory? The objectives of the study are:

- i) Finding answer to the questions mentioned above and
- ii) Examining if the practice is consistent with the policy goals of the organisation

4.5: Findings: Controversies and Challenges

The purpose of the organising function is to achieve coordinated effort through the design of a structure of task and authority relationships (Donnelly, Gibson and Ivancevich, 1984). In every organisation there is a necessity to chalk out the way proposed work is to be done. It must specify the personnel to be posted for doing a defined job and authority to be given to him. When an organisation is designed, it clearly identifies the positions, formulates the rules and procedures and prescribes

the authority. If there is any ambiguity or confusion, the organisation is bound to lag behind and fail to execute programmes timely.

The study observes presence of numerous evidences of confusions and ambiguity in the area of organising in Gram Panchayat Institutions. Presenting all the findings in a jumbled up manner under a common heading has been avoided, because it entails the risk of losing the perspective and get lost in the array of findings. To be more precise, the findings have been presented in different sub-heading in the following paragraphs.

4.6: The West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 and Formation of Gram Panchayat

Sections Numbers from '4 to 16' of the West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 stipulate the procedures to be followed in formation of a Gram Panchayat. The Act provides that villagers living within the local limit of the village shall elect members to Gram Panchayat.

The *Gram Panchayat* shall consist of the following members:—

- i. members elected by villagers in Panchayat election;
- ii. members of the *Panchayat Samiti*, not being *Sabhapati* or *Sahakari Sabhapati*, elected thereto from the constituency comprising any part of the *Gram*.

The Act provides for reservation of seats for scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and women. The Act also earmarks that one third of the seats should be reserved for women candidates.

Section 7A of the Act provides that every Gram Panchayat shall, at its first meeting at which a quorum is present, elect one of its members to be the Pradhan and another member to be the Upa-Pradhan of the Gram Panchayat. This needs to be stated that the Pradhan is the official head of the Gram Panchayat. He is to provide leadership and direct the employees of the Gram for performance of the functions assigned to the Gram Panchayat.

4.7: Organizing in Gram Panchayat: A Review with Managerial Perspective

From field investigation it is observed that the organisation of a Gram Panchayat is consisting of a democratic structure dovetailed with an operational structure. The democratic structure is politically mandated and clearly set out in the W.B. Panchayat Act 1973. Besides this, to ensure participation of weaker sections and women, provisions for reservation of seats for scheduled caste, scheduled tribes and women have been made in the Panchayat Act of the state. It should be remembered that all these prescriptions stated so far in paragraph 4.6 are meant for formation of the democratic structure - village council, which generally is a decision making body. This decision-making body is again organized into various Upa-Samitis (sub-committees) as listed below:

- i) Artha O Parikalpana Upa-Samiti
- ii) Krishi O Pranisampad Bikas Upa-Samiti
- iii) Siksha O Janasasthya Upa-Samiti
- iv) Nari, Sishu Unnayan O Samaj Kalyan Upa-Samiti
- v) Shilpa O Parikathamo Upa-Samiti, etc.

The above Upa-Samitis are virtually some functional sub-committees headed by a person called Sanchalak, meaning convener. These Upa-Samitis can be viewed as similar to ministries of union government. Organisation Structure of the Gram Panchayat has been shown in Fig 4.2:

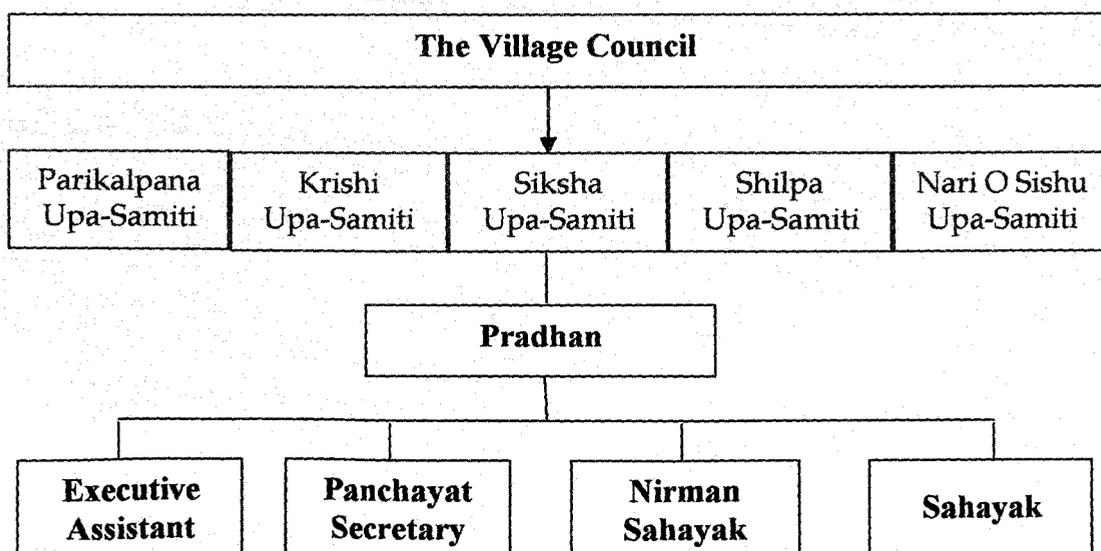


FIG 4.2: ORGANISATION STRUCTURE OF A GRAM PANCHAYAT

In the structure shown above the position of the Pradhan is located at the middle. The part above the position of the Pradhan shows the *democratic structure*, which consists of the members elected from various village constituencies. The lower part of the structure is *operational structure*. It consists of *Pradhan* and 'staff personnel' working under him. The decisions taken in various Upa-Samitis are subsequently forwarded to the Pradhan for implementation, who in turn uses the services of the staff personnel for implementation of the decisions. In West Bengal a Pradhan can use service of four personnel: those are Executive Assistant, Panchayat Secretary, Nirman Sahayak and a Sahayak. [See Fig 4.2] One additional Sahayak is due for those Panchayats, where MGNREGA related schemes are under implementation. Besides this, there are some Group D employees called *Panchayat Karmis*, who work as peon or record supplier. There is no job description in terms of rural development for them in the Gram Panchayat Administration Rules. Hence in the organisation structure they have not been assigned any position.

4.8: A Glimpse of Grass-root Governance: An Empirical Evaluation

In this paragraph a glimpse of governance has been presented in quantitative terms. Here account balances of reports prepared by the Gram Panchayats have been used as an index of their performance. Figures of total receipts, expenses and closing balances have been taken from annual accounts of respective Gram Panchayats. Compiled data on these variables can be seen in Table 4.1. The data in the table reflect that the Gram Panchayats are not able to administer all activities delegated to them. On an average the Gram Panchayats fail to implement 20% of their assigned / budgeted activities. Jalas Nizam Tara Gram Panchayat has a closing cash balance of Rs 43, 36,102; from the stand point of rural resource base, backwardness and rural poverty, this amount is abnormally high. This figure, in true sense, is an index of the inefficiency of the Gram Panchayats. These figures of closing balances apparently indicate that the Panchayat is saddled with inability (unspent amount). This shows that democratic decentralisation cannot be taken as instant guarantee of efficiency and welfare.

TABLE 4.1: RECEIPTS AND EXPENSES OF GRAM PANCHAYATS OF PHANSI DEWA BLOCK FOR THE YEAR 2012-13

Name of the Gram Panchayat	Total Receipts (Rs)	Expenses incurred in the year (Rs)	Closing Balance (Rs)	Closing balance as % of total receipts
1. Bidhannagar – I	1,77,30,195	14,539,029	3,191,166	18.0%
2. Bidhannagar – II	1,52,49,426	1,25,11,291	27,38,135	18.0%
3. Chathat Bansgaon Kismat	1,60,48,308	1,31,64,671	28,83,637	17.9%
4. Ghoshpukur	1,66,85,158	1,41,55,494	25,29,664	15.1%
5. Hetmuri Singhijhora	1,73,12,107	1,44,09,957	29,02,150	16.7%
6. J alas Nizam Tara	1,65,21,527	1,21,85,425	43,36,102	26.2%
7. Phansidewa Bansgaon Kismat	89,68,488	70,88,318	18,80,170	20.9%

Source: G.P Annual Income Expenditure Report

Democracy is not a guarantee that assigned schemes will be successfully implemented and problems of poverty and unemployment will be automatically solved. Looking at Indian experience it is observed that even after running a democratic government since 1947, along with launching of dozens of anti-poverty programmes, poverty is still a critical problem to the planners and government. What is true is that every government needs a thorough institutional mechanism which should be based on well defined organization structure with clearly spelt authority-responsibility relationship as well as the rules and guidelines for getting the things done by its employees. It is felt that for getting better results the Gram Panchayats are required to be empowered with good operational structure. Planning, organising, coordination and controlling in the institutions should be revamped with the progress of time. Keeping this perspective in mind organising in these institutions of Gram Panchayats should be reviewed and revamped.

organization structure of Gram Panchayat is that there is no defined structure of line personnel. The real challenge is lying here. Elected representatives become puzzled to see that there is no defined person to shoulder the tasks of developments. As there is no structure of line personnel, the success of the GP entirely depends on Pradhan's skill in getting things done by people around him. In many Gram Panchayats the Pradhan makes the **staff people perform the tasks of line personnel**. In some cases where there is strong political will, the Pradhan uses his leadership skill to organise elected members as a coherent team committed to achieve the goal. Thus, the study unfolds some wonderful experience of democratic governance by Gram Panchayats.

4.11: One Structure, Many Functions

According to Porter, (1980) structure of an organization depends on the functions it does. In this perspective it appears reasonable to see the function and activities the PRIs are expected to perform. The 73rd constitutional amendment of 1992 annexed a schedule (Schedule XI) of twenty-nine areas of functions, including agriculture, irrigation, health and education to the Gram Panchayats. In addition to this, the Government of West Bengal has made a list of 15 different types of functions for the Gram Panchayats in the West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973. Those include sanitation, drainage, supply of drinking water, rural defence, community work, etc.

This is not the exhaustive list of the functions. The functions which have not been included in the list are literacy campaign, attestation, certificate issue, disaster management, relief and rehabilitation. Under pressing situation these institutions are compelled to do many functions, hitherto not enlisted anywhere. For example, local arbitration and dispute settlement is one of the major functions of Gram Panchayat; it is immaterial whether PRIs are empowered to do it or not, Panchayats used to do it in the long past and they are doing it still today.

There is a popular belief among the policy-makers that Panchayat is very cost effective and efficient instrument. Thus, many agencies and departments are eager to transfer more and more programmes to the PRIs without having any care for its time and ability. Roy Dipen, (2011) observes that given the limitations of existing

4.9: West Bengal Gram Panchayat Administration Rules: A Step towards Bureaucracy

The study records the State government's effort towards initiation of bureaucratic approach to organising the Gram Panchayats. This effort is reflected in the formulation of rigid guidelines as enumerated in the West Bengal Panchayat (Gram Panchayat Administration) Rules 2004. Max Weber (1947) advocates bureaucratic organisation, which is based on strict disciplines, rigid guidelines and clear job description. The West Bengal Panchayat (Gram Panchayat Administration) Rules 2004 contains the provisions, which are almost of bureaucratic in nature.

According to these rules Panchayat personnel like Executive Assistant, Gram Panchayat Secretary, Job Assistant (or Nirman Sahayak) Sahayak of Gram Panchayat are subject to the direction and control of the Pradhan of the Gram Panchayat.

Rules from 55A to 55D provide a clear outline how the personnel should work and what will be their assigned duties or job description. Given the twenty-nine tasks listed in the Eleventh Schedule to the constitution and the tasks delegated by the central and state government, it needs to be stated that since the Gram Panchayats do numerous tasks of non-repetitive nature, bureaucratic organisation is inapplicable to them.

4.10: Operational Structure: No Line Structure, Only Staff Structure

Survey findings reveal that democratic structure of the Gram Panchayat, viz., the Village Council is duly defined as well as properly structured. However, operational structure is vaguely defined and inconsistently structured. The part of the organization structure placed under the Pradhan is distinctly a structure of staff organisation. Jobs assigned to the four Sahayaks are of the nature of measuring, record keeping, reporting and filing

In an organisation structure there are two components; these are line structure and staff structure. Line personnel are engaged in the main operational activities like procurement, production and selling. Staff personnel perform the support services like record keeping, reporting and advising. The extraordinary characteristic of the

Panchayat structure and the ever-expanding list of functions, PRIs may find it beyond their capacity. While they are able to perform some of the functions assigned to them, they are unable to implement many other tasks for want of time and manpower.

It is apparent from the list of functions mentioned in the above paragraph that as a national government needs a team of strong ministry for doing a variety of tasks; a Gram Panchayat too needs a strong organisation structure to enable them to execute variety of tasks assigned to them.

Finally, each function is much different from the other. Since the functions are not identical, not of repetitive nature, prescribing a standard organisation structure is not justified. The Gram Panchayats treat each function as a separate job/project and design temporary organisations and procedures for doing them.

4.12: Voluntary organisation

Given the limitation of organizational structure, under pressing circumstances voluntary temporary structure like *Saksarata Prasar Samiti* (Literacy Promotion Committee) is created, which gets automatically dissolved after the task becomes complete. These temporary organizations are created with **loosely defined authority-responsibility relationship**. Somebody may work as a dedicated member, while another can quit on a simple excuse. Another voluntary organisation is **Beneficiary committee**, consisting of the recipients of benefit. This is formed for successful implementation and supervision of a scheme by the villagers.

4.13: Organisation Structure of Gram a Panchayat: A Matter of Confusion and Academic Ambiguity

The concept of organizing in Gram Panchayats is not clear to stakeholders, - its direct participants, functionaries and beneficiaries. There is lots of confusion regarding true shape, structure and interaction of constituent parts. Some people understand it as an organisation confined to the limit of Gram Panchayat Office; to others it means the village council of elected representatives, who will conduct the

government of the village. Balwant Rai Mehta, (1957) views it as a “statutory and elective body, comprehensive in its duties and functions, equipped with the necessary executive machinery and in possession of adequate resources”. The framework of the executive machinery, in true sense, is the subject matter of organising. This confusion can be understood from the following organisation structures prepared by academicians and experts in the field. These organisation structures have been shown in Fig. 4.3, Fig.4.4 and Fig.4.5.

In popular sense Gram Panchayat refers to Local Self-Government at the grass-root level. The word governance is a comprehensive terms encompassing the process of decision-making as well as the process through which these decisions are implemented. Whenever the point of implementation is concerned, organising is felt essentially integral to planning and execution.

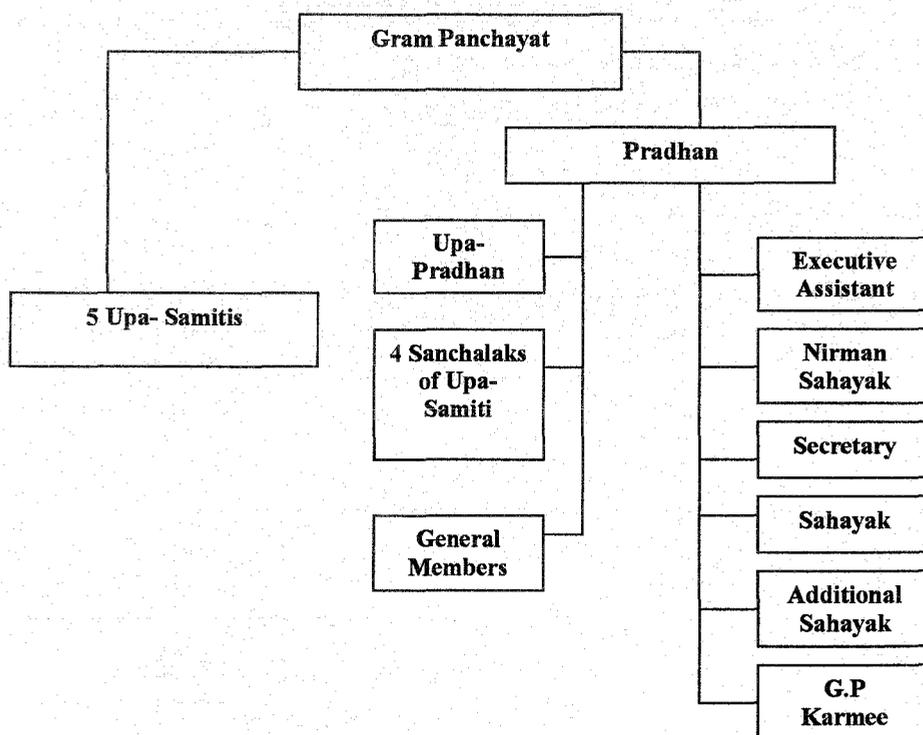


FIG 4.3: STRUCTURE OF A GRAM PANCHAYAT

(Source: Training Book for the Gram Panchayat Pradhans, Upa-pradhans, Sanchalak, Members, Employees, etc, Government of West Bengal (2011), pp.3.)

What should be the organisation structure of a Gram Panchayat? There is no consensus on this issue, because different scholars and experts draw different organisation structure of the same Gram Panchayat according to their own

understanding and perception. (See Fig 4.3). It follows that that there is no conceptual clarity about the true organisation structure of a Gram Panchayat. Roy Dipen, (2011) found that majority of people understand Gram Panchayat Structure as given below in Fig 4.4: this reflects essentially a narrow idea about the true organisation structure of a Gram Panchayat.

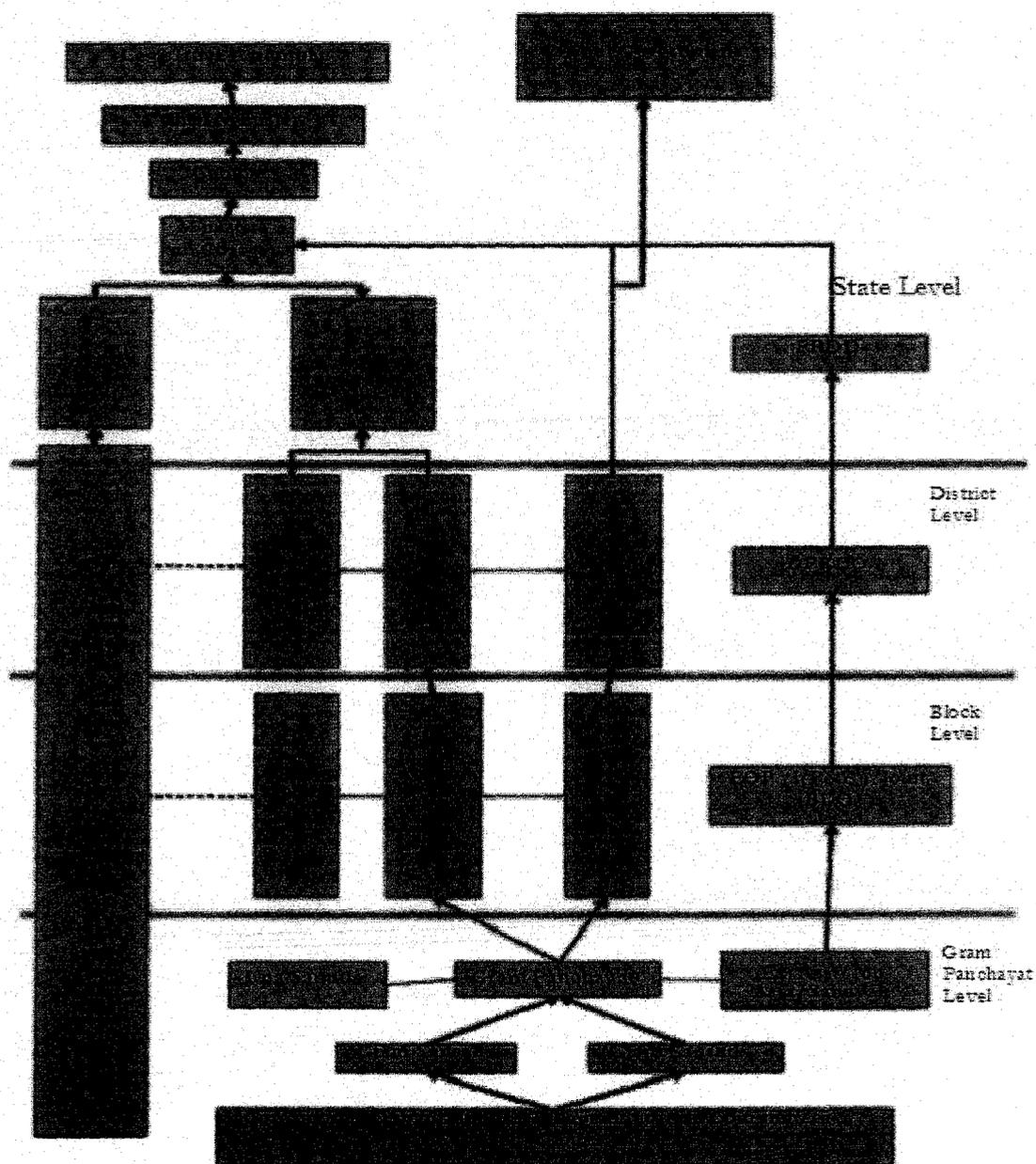


FIG 4.4: ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF DIFFERENT LEVELS OF OFFICIALS OF THE PANCHAYAT SYSTEM.

(Source: Chakrabarti Bhaskar, et al. (2011). Local Governments in Rural West Bengal, *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance*, Issue 8-9, pp. 33-51.

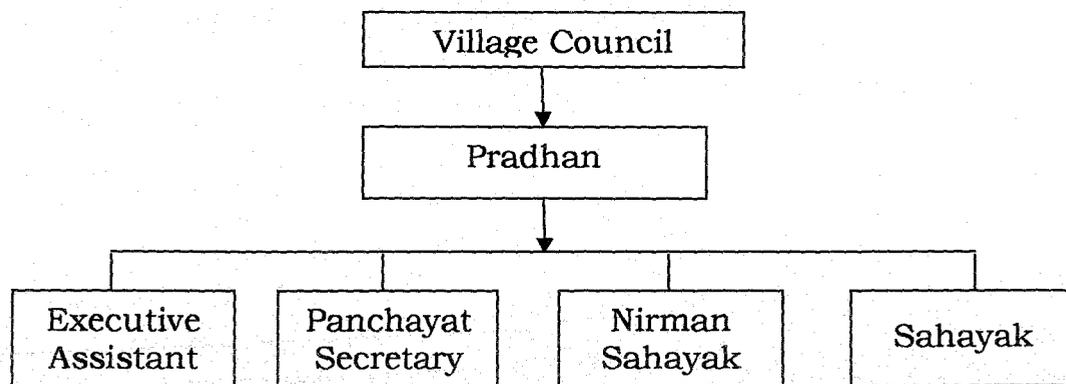


FIG 4.5: CONVENTIONAL IDEA OF GRAM PANCHAYAT ORGANISATION

As there is no clear idea about true organisation structure of a Gram Panchayat, people do not understand their responsibilities. Elected representatives become puzzled and fail to assume responsibilities. Aslam M (2007) observes that the villagers and their leaders will assume their respective responsibilities when they clearly understand the role of the Gram Panchayat functionaries and that of the community. The situation has become further complicated due to lack of idea about the way assigned responsibilities may be carried out. Indeed it is a fact that when there is no clarity about structure of organisation, leaders will definitely be faltering in getting things done for their electorates.

World Bank (1994) study observes that while India is among the best performers on political decentralization, it ranks close to last on administrative decentralization. According to the Bank, electing local governments seems to be much easier than vesting them with administrative power over significant functions and fiscal autonomy. Unless India makes significant progress on the line of administrative and fiscal decentralization, Indian states are unlikely to achieve desired progress in the process of people's empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions.

As per vocabulary of management literature, structuring of administrative machineries comes under the purview of organising. Therefore, now emphasis should be focused on organising, coordination and controlling of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

4.14: Organising the Gram Panchayats: Thinking for the Day Ahead

In this segment an effort has been made for designing an organisation structure suitable for making operational management of the Gram Panchayats efficient and effective. Before presenting this framework, it is necessary to make brief review of the ideas expressed by Gandhiji on Panchayati Raj and decentralisation. In the following paragraph the views of Gandhiji (1942) has been presented.

“My idea of village swaraj is that it is a complete republic. ... *The Panchayat* of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, male and female, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications will conduct the government of the village. These institutions will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. *this Panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate* for its year in office. Any village can become such a republic without much interference.

Balwant Rai Mehta (1957) endorses the vision of Gandhi. He argues that there should be administrative decentralization for effective implementation of the development programmes and that the decentralised administrative system should be under the control of elected bodies. If the above ideologies are accepted, then a *miniature government* similar to union government with its necessary ministries (conveners) is required to be formed at Gram Panchayat level.

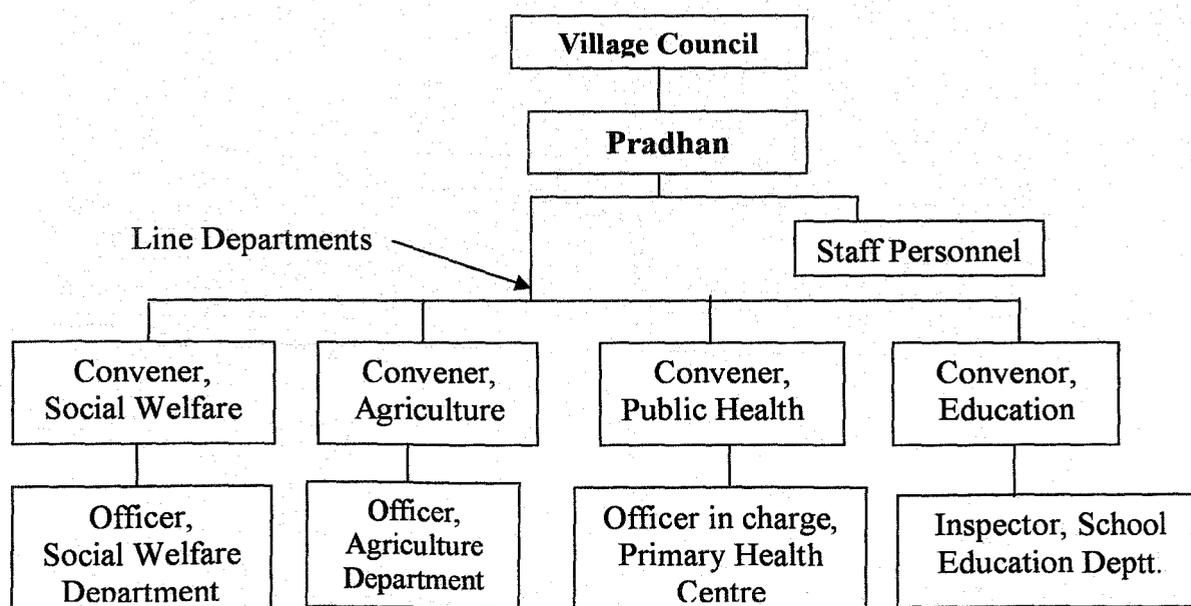


FIG 4.6: PANCHAYAT'S ORGANISATION STRUCTURE FOR THE DAY AHEAD

If the broader view of Gandhiji on Panchayati Raj is accepted, then all administrative institutions located within the jurisdiction should come under the control of the Gram Panchayat. Then, offices of Public Health Engineering, agriculture, forestry, industry, veterinary and animal husbandry are supposed to work as executive machinery (line department) of the Gram Panchayat under supervision of conveners (Sanchalaks). Making all government offices work for the benefit of the villagers becomes the basic management task of the Gram Panchayat. Based on this logic the organisation structure of the Gram Panchayat should be as above shown in Fig. 4.5.

It is realised that unless there is an established structure of line personnel under direct supervision of Panchayat, making successful implementation of programmes of rural development is sure to remain unachieved. In the light of the above realisation, in the structure given above line departments have been put under the conveners of Upa-samitis, who will be responsible for getting things done by the concerned officer in charge of the respective departments.

Panchayat is a government. Some people confuse and imagine that a Gram Panchayat is limited to the Gram Panchayat Office only. In this context it needs to be stated that as the national government is not confined to parliament, a Panchayat in true sense is not confined to the physical limit of the Gram Panchayat Office only. All administrative departments like schools, hospitals, agricultural extension services, irrigation, etc., located within the jurisdiction of Village Panchayat, are adjunct parts of the village government called Gram Panchayat. A Gram Panchayat capable of using its power on controlling the offices for the benefits of villagers can make the Panchayat meaningful. So, it is strongly recommended that village level junior offices of various line departments should be placed under the direct supervision and management of the Gram Panchayats. If the junior officers are accommodated in the office of the Gram Panchayat, *office of the Gram Panchayat will turn into a mini secretariat*. If the recommendation is implemented, elected members will get clear idea as to which office and which personnel they should deploy to get things done and provide facilities of better governance to the people of villages.

The organisation structure recommended above should be experimented before putting it into operation. Medical officers as well as other officers are under direct supervision of their respective heads: they receive instructions from their senior officers of their respective departments. These officers primarily feel accountable to their immediate seniors and government (viz., State Government) appointing them.

Because of the factors mentioned above officers of line departments may initially react to this recommendation. However, soon they will realise that as bureaucrats at the Central and State level can listen to the elected representatives, there is virtually no flaw in listening to the elected representatives at the grass-root level.

4.15: Summary and Conclusion

Gram Panchayats are overburdened with dozens of tasks assigned to them, for which they need a good organisation structure. However, the study observes the presence of poorly manned limited operational structure. Roy Dipen, (2011) also notes similar observations. According to him, given the limitations of existing Panchayat structure and the ever-expanding list of functions, PRIs find it beyond their capacity. While they are able to perform some of the functions assigned to them, they are unable to implement many other dozens of tasks for want of time and manpower.

There are many flaws, confusions and conflicts in respect of Gram Panchayats' function of organising and governance. The paper tries to find a way how organising and governance can be made better at this grass-root level. We have recommended that the line departments should be directly placed under the control of Gram Panchayats. Obviously it needs formulation of new by-laws, procedures and manuals. It is hoped that newly recommended organisation will streamline the operations and resolve the confusions and difficulties faced by the elected representatives at the grass-root level.

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