



**STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONAL INTEGRITY BETWEEN ANCIENT INDIAN
VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION AND INDEPENDENT INDIAN VILLAGE
ADMINISTRATION**

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Abstract

Village administration or local administration is a fundamental unit which is accountable and responsible for smooth functioning of administration and development of infrastructure at local level. The objective of the present research article is to explore integrity and similarities of local administration between Ancient India and Independent India. The research article explored that the similar executive, legislature and judicial functioning are existed in ancient India and Independent India. The researchers also found that the various similar structural and functional dimensions of local administration in both era.

Keywords: Administration, structural, functional, gramini, headman, village

Introduction

Village administration or local government is a symbol of decentralization nature of administration. It has been shaped social, cultural and traditional regulation, and economic, judicial and security establishment at village level from ancient India to independent India. The existence of structural-functional integrity and similarity may be seen between ancient and independent Indian local administration. Basically, ancient Indian period is considered from Indus Valley Civilization to Gupta period. During Vedic age “the *Ramayana* cites that a village leader of great prestige called *Gramani*. The *Gram Vridhas* (council of village elders) and the whole villagers cooperated with him in collecting dues for the state. The *Gram Vridhas* was a non-official advisory body. The *Gramani* and the village scribe (equivalent to the present *patwari*, *patel*, *kulkarni*, etc.) generally headed the gram *Vridhas*’ counsel” (Zamora, 1965).

After independence, India has adopted comprehensive structure of local government. Through 73rd amendment of the constitution, 11th the schedule was included in the constitution which deals with the village government. According to the constitutional provision ‘the electorate has been “Gram Sabha” consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of a *Panchayat*, in this way representative democracy will be introduced at the grass roots’ (Basu, 2021).

Structural Integrity

Structure of the village administration in the ancient India has various kinds of institutions to regulate the administration. The structure of the administration were categorized among headman, village council or sabha, judicial system, taxation and revenue collection unit, security division etc. from Vedic age to Gupta period. The de-centralization nature of the village administration is found in the ancient India. After independence, similar structure has been adopted at grassroots level as headman called *Sarpanch* and village council called *Gram Sabha*. *Sarpanch* is assisted by some government officials for the development of the village.

Headman: Village headman is considered most important position in the village in ancient time. The *Rmayana* cites that ‘a village leader of great prestige called *Gramini*’ (Zamora, 1965). In the Gupta age ‘in charge of a headman designated as a *Grameyaka* or a *Gramadhyaksha*. He had a clerk to work under him to keep the records. The headman is assisted in his work by none official council (Ketalker, 1956). Banerjea (1916) pointed out

that the *gramini* (headman) and other village official were appointed by the community and were accountable to them.

Sukraniti referred that the four other main officers along with the village headman were part of the village government. *Sahasadhipati* (Magistrate) was associated with the judicial system that resolved the disputes regarding civil and social matters. *Bhagahara* (Revenue Collector) *Bhagahara* was collected land revenue for the state. *Sulkagraha* (Toll Collector) collected the tolls for the village. *Pratihara* (Gatekeeper) was responsible for the security of the village. In independent India, the term (Village Headman) used to refer to the leader of a gram *panchayat* varies by state, but is often called a *sarpanch*, *gram pradhan*, *mukhiya*, or president. The *sarpanch* is responsible for leading the development of the village and making decisions.

The Council or Sabha: Ketalker (1956) explained in his extensive work on the Village Administration in ancient India ‘the *Gram Vridhas* was a non-official advisory body in Vedic age. Village had its own *Sabha* (assembly) which debated all matters relating to the village in *Mauryas* Empire,. Representatives of village family, the elders, and other experienced folk were the part of the sabha’ (Zamora, 1965). Well structured village councils were existed that known as *Janapadas* in the Gupta age. There were some indications shown that the primary village assembly consisted of all the householders in Maharashtra. It is interesting that the different terms were used for the village council. *Mahattamas* were called in U.P. *mahattaras* in Maharashtra, *mahajanas* in Karnatak and *perumakkal* in Tamil country’. According to the Banerjea (1916) ‘members of the village council were not elected, but chosen by a sort of natural selection. They were usually men, by their age, character, and attainments acquired the confidence of the villagers, and their opinions were supposed to represent the collective wisdom of the village’. After independence, *Gram Sabha* is an important institution in the *Panchayati Raj* system. It is a ‘general body of the people of a village, made up of all eligible voters. The *Gram Sabha* is a forum for discussion and decision-making on local governance and development. It also monitors the Gram Panchayat's development projects and provides feedback and suggestions’.

Structural-functional Integration of Village Administration

Aspects	Ancient India	Independent India
Nature	De-centralization	De-centralization
Head	Gramani, Gramadhyaksha	Sarpanch, Gram Pradhan, Mukhiya etc.
Council	Gram Mahattamas, Mahattaras, Mahajanas, Perumakkal,	Vridhas, Gram Sabha
Sources of Revenue	Land Tax, Fine imposed by the community,	Land Tax, Sales Tax,
Judicial System	Council was Autonomous body	Establishment of Gram Nyayalayas

Functional Integrity

Village headman and members of the council have right to take every decision for well-being of the villagers. Village council was functioned as an advisory body. Village headman has right to take decisions regarding revenue collection, infrastructure of the village, social, cultural and religious activities etc. with consultation of the village council. The functions the *Gram Panchayat* have been distributed in the three categories; mandatory, voluntary and developmental. *Panchayat, sarpanch, gram sabha* and member ward are played comprehensive role at functional level in modern India.

Infrastructure: The *sabha* of the Uttarmerur had received two permanent endowments to the expenses of removing silt from its big tank. An endowment was also received by the village *sabha* for digging a well for drinking water” (Ketalker, 1956). During Maratha period, village has right to utilize 10 to 15 percent of the village revenues for works of public utility and village defense. Infrastructure related works are completed with the coordination between *gram sabha* and *gram panchayat*, at village level. It is mandatory for *Gram Panchayat* to establish rule of law and peace, and looked after health, primary education, water facility and agricultural development after independence.

Revenue Collection: *Sabha* acted as a trustee for minors, collected government revenues and paid them into the treasury in ancient time. There is sufficient evidence that the village council has right to spend a small percent of the revenues collected in the village for financing its own activities. *Gram Panchayat* has multiple sources to collect revenue for the village in modern India. *Gram Panchayat* can be imposed home and land tax on the villagers.

It is collected revenue from the agricultural land and animal sales tax which is also helpful in increase revenue of the village.

Judicial System: The village council looked after the village defense, settled village disputes, organized works of public unity in ancient time. The theory of some early writers shows that the village councils or *Panchayats* owed their judicial powers to the prevailing anarchy. Village council was fully autonomous body in the matter of judicial system and powers of the center were not intervened in the local judicial system in ancient India. Government has established *Gram Nyayalayas* (2009) for resolving the civil and criminal matters at local level in 2009. The *Gram Nyayalayas Act*, (2008) to provide for the establishment of *Gram Nyayalayas* at the grass roots level for the purposes of providing access to justice to the citizens at their doorsteps and to ensure that opportunities for securing justice are not denied to any citizen by reason of social, economic or other disabilities. The State Government shall, in consultation with the High Court, appoint a *Nyayadhikari* for every *Gram Nyayalaya*. The *Gram Nyayalaya* shall exercise both civil and criminal jurisdiction in the manner and to the extent provided under this Act.

Discussion

It can be said on the basis of comparative overview of structural-functional integrity between independent and ancient Indian village administration, similar characteristics is existed at the local level of government. The role and responsibility of village head and village council, sources of revenue collection and functions of judicial system are similar in the both administration. Most of the people of the village were members of the village council in ancient time. Similarly, all the people those who have crossed eighteen years age and included their name in the electoral rolls are also members of the *Gram Sabha* in independent India. On the other hand, some kinds of differences are also found in both the administration. A strong communication system found between the center and local government in independent India but, large communication gap existed in the ancient age. It is found that a big difference existed in the center's financial support system for the development of infrastructure of the village between both the levels of local administration.

Conclusion

To sum up, the study shows that the traces of a well designed unit as a village administration for the smooth functioning of rule of law, establishment of peace and justice have been existed at local level. Integrity and similarity has been existed in various aspects of village

administration like; nature of decentralization, functions of headman, council, judicial system etc from ancient age to present era.

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