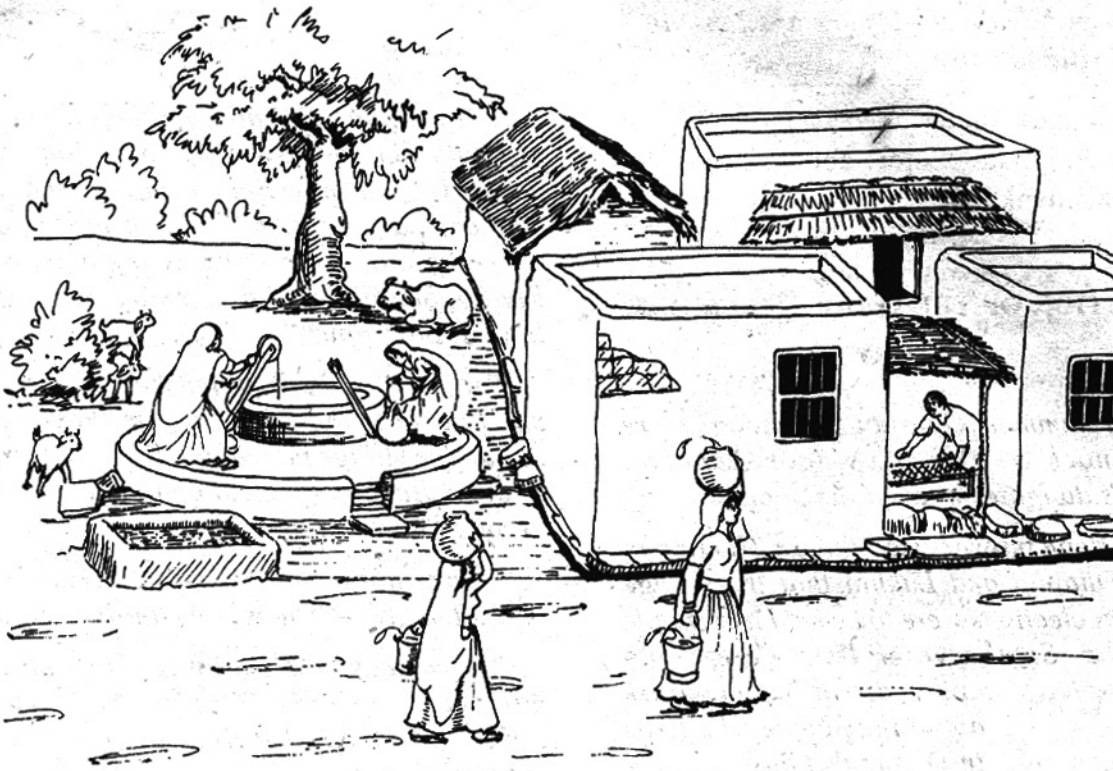


3. VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

This chapter is about the village *panchayat*. Look at the pictures, read the sub-titles and make a brief summary of what you think this chapter is about. If you live in a village, it too, must be part of a *panchayat*. What do you know about your village *panchayat*? Discuss with your friends.



PROVIDING CIVIC AMENITIES FOR ALL

There is a village called Kaniyakhedi. It has ten '*mohallas*'. But one *mohalla* has no drain for the wastewater flowing out of its houses. So the dirty water collects on the road and, as a result, the roads are always full of puddles and mud. Another *mohalla* has a well which has been dry for the past two years. There is another well in the village, but it is too far from the *mohalla*. It is difficult to carry water from such a distance. But what can the people of this *mohalla* do? Everyone needs water to drink. You might ask, 'Why doesn't someone repair that *mohalla*'s own well?' But then, the well does not belong to any one person. Everyone living there makes use of it. Who then should repair it?

Whether it is a road, a well, a bridge or a culvert, they don't belong to any one person or any one family. There are many such **amenities** in villages and towns which serve the needs of all the people living there. Everyone uses them. Such amenities are called **public or civic amenities**.

However, when these amenities do not function well, or break down, who should get them repaired? Who should see to their maintenance? If any one person or family tries to control these amenities and refuses to let anyone else use them, what is to be done? Who should solve this problem?

These amenities need to be looked after and maintained. If everyone uses these amenities, then the responsibility of maintaining them should also be shared by everyone.

A method has, indeed, been devised to solve such public problems and to provide for public amenities. In villages, it is the village *panchayats* which have been set up to provide such public amenities. In towns and cities, the *nagar panchayats* or the municipal councils (*nagar palikas*) or municipal corporations (*nagar nigams*) perform these functions.

• What public amenities are available in your village / city?

We will learn about the *gram panchayat* in this chapter. To know more about it, come let us go to Kaniyakhedi.

FORMATION OF THE GRAM PANCHAYAT A STORY

It was summer. One hot afternoon, there was a knock on Dhanna's door. Lakhiya, Dhanna's daughter opened the door.

The village patwari stood there. Coming in he told Dhanna and Lakhiya that the village panchayat elections were to be held in a couple of months. So the voter lists were being updated. He began to ask about the people who lived in Dhanna's house.



Voter List

Lakhiya had heard that there was something called a village panchayat. She wanted to know more about it. Many questions were bubbling in her mind. But before she could say anything the patwari asked Dhanna the names and ages of all the members of his family.

"Patwari uncle, why do you want to note their names and ages?" Lakhiya asked curiously.

"Didn't I tell you that the village panchayat elections are to be held soon? So I have to make a list of the names of all the people who will be casting their votes for our panchayat. This list is called the voter list," replied the patwari.

"Okay," said Lakhiya, "write my name first. I, too, shall vote."

"No, Lakhiya, you cannot vote as yet," said the patwari, smiling. "Only those above the age of 18 years can cast their votes. Now, tell me the names of all the members of your family who are over 18 years of age."



Lakhiya was disappointed to hear this. Her father, Dhanna, patted on her head and told her to answer the questions of the patwari. "You know Bapu's name and age. My mother's name is Sukhi Bai. She must be about 40 years old. Then there is my elder sister, Phatto. She is married and stays with her in-laws at Sailanpur."

The patwari interrupted her saying, "No, no. Phatto's name will be included in the Sailanpur village panchayat list. The voter list of our village panchayat can have the names of only those who live here."

"What about my sister in law, Tijiya?" asked Lakhiya. "She is from another village."

"Now that your sister in law lives here, she will vote only in Kaniyakhedi village panchayat. Who else lives in your house?" asked the Patwari.

"My elder brother, Bhaiyalal. He's 8 years older than me. Then there is my nephew, but he's too small. Apart from them there's my grandmother. Her name is Chunni Bai. But she is very old. Why should she vote?" asked Lakhiya.

"Why not?" replied the patwari. "Remember, I told you that all those who are 18 years old and above can vote."

"And your grandmother always votes in the elections," said Dhanna.



The Area of the Village Panchayat

Many questions about the village panchayat came to Lakhiya's mind even as she recited the names of her family members to the patwari. So before he could get up to leave, she asked him, "Does every village have a

gram panchayat?"

"A gram panchayat is set up wherever there is a population of at least 1000 people," replied the patwari.

"But only big villages have so many people," pointed out Lakhiya. "Does that mean that only big villages have village panchayats? What about smaller villages with a population of just 300-400 people?"

"Small villages are usually clubbed with larger villages," said the patwari. "So a village panchayat generally functions for about two to four villages. Take the example of our Kaniyakhedi village panchayat. It also has three other villages under it – Paganwa, Noonpur and Manigaon."

Panchs and Wards

"Patwari uncle, aren't the members of the village panchayat called Panchs?" asked Lakhiya.

"Yes, you're right," said the patwari. "Each village panchayat has 10 to 20 panchs."

"But, what do these panchs actually do?"

The patwari replied, "These panchs or ward representatives together oversee the functioning of civic amenities in the village. This includes all things such as roads, sanitation, water, etc. If the roads are bad or there is no water or any other such problem regarding public amenities, then the panch of that ward or mohalla is supposed to inform the panchayat. The panchayat then tries to repair or provide these facilities."

Lakhiya asked, "If all the panchs are elected from one mohalla or village, then who will look after the needs of the other villages and mohallas of the panchayat?"

The patwari answered, "To avoid such a situation, a gram panchayat is divided into smaller units. These are called **panchayat wards**. The people staying in each ward elect their own panch. Anyone wishing to become a

panch can **contest** the elections to the gram panchayat from the village. The people of the ward cast their votes in favour of the person they want. Whoever gets the largest number of votes from a ward is elected the



panch of that ward."

"Does the elected person then remain the panch of that ward forever?" was Lakhiya's next question.



Replied the patwari, "No. Village panchayat elections are held after every five years, and new panchs can be elected every time."

"Oh! It's getting late!" exclaimed the patwari, looking at his watch. "I must be going. I have to complete the voter list of Paganwa today."

• Which of the following statements are true? Correct the false statements –

- Every village has a panchayat.

- A new village panchayat is elected every year.

- The elected members of a village panchayat are called panchs.

- A village of only 450 people cannot have a village panchayat all by itself.

• What is a voter list?

• Why didn't the patwari include Phatto's name in the voter list?

• Why can't Lakhiya vote?

Sarpanch and Deputy-sarpanch

Apart from the panchs, each gram panchayat has a sarpanch or president. All voters of the village, that is everyone whose name is in the voter list can cast their vote to elect the sarpanch of their panchayat.

It is the duty of the sarpanch to call meetings of the village panchayat and to oversee its working.

Each village panchayat also elects a deputy-sarpanch. The deputy-sarpanch is elected by the panchs from amongst themselves. This means that the deputy-sarpanch is first elected by the people as a panch and then by the panchs as the deputy-sarpanch. In the absence of the sarpanch, the deputy-sarpanch looks after the work of the sarpanch.

Reservation in Panchayats

Some posts of *sarpanch* and *panch* are kept aside, i.e., **reserved**, for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes. Some posts of *sarpanch* and *panch* are also reserved for backward classes. Similarly, there is also reservation for women. One third of the posts of *sarpanch* of all the *panchayats* in a district are reserved for women. Besides, one third of the *panchs* in every village *panchayat* have to be women.

In this way, there is reservation for four categories of people. These are scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes and women.

- *Why is reservation for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes and women necessary? Discuss with your teacher.*

The Secretary

Every village *panchayat* has a **secretary**. The secretary is not elected. She or he is appointed by the government. The secretary maintains the accounts of the village *panchayat* and writes the **minutes** of the *panchayat* meetings.

- *Find out with the help of your teacher*
 - *What is the population of your village, or, if you live in a city, of a nearby village?*
 - *How many wards are there in that village panchayat?*
 - *If you live in a village, in which ward is your house and who is the panch of your ward?*

THE KANIYAKHEDI GRAM PANCHAYAT

There are several mohallas in Kaniyakhedi village – Ghasitola, Chinkhitola, Nond mohalla, Gandhi mohalla, etc. Apart from these mohallas, there are three other villages, too, in the Kaniyakhedi *panchayat*. These are divided into different wards. Each ward elects its own *panch*. Lakhiya's sister-in-law, Tijiya

was elected *panch* from Ghasitola ward. The *panchs* then elected her as the deputy-*sarpanch*.

A meeting of the Kaniyakhedi *panchayat* is scheduled for the 10th of December at 10:30 A.M. Tijiya Bai received the notice of this meeting through the Kotwal.

THE MEETING OF THE VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

It was 10:30 in the morning when Tijiya reached the *panchayat bhawan*. Apart from Khairati Singh, the *sarpanch*, and Harimohan, the secretary, seven other *panchs* had already arrived.

"Come, come, Tijiya Bai," said Khairati Singh, the *sarpanch*. "It's good that you've come. Now we can begin the meeting."

Kaniyakhedi *panchayat* has 17 members – 16 *panchs* and one *sarpanch*. A meeting of the village *panchayat* can be held only when more than half the members are present. If less than half the members are present, the meeting has to be cancelled.

The Work of the Gram Panchayat

Everyone present first signed in the register.

The meeting began with Harimohan, the secretary, reading out the **minutes** (record of discussions and decisions) of the previous meeting. The minutes were agreed upon by all before the *sarpanch* signed them. A discussion on the work done by the *panchayat* in the previous months followed.

"What all was done in the various wards last month?" *sarpanch* Khairati Singh asked the secretary.

"Work began on the Chinkhitola culvert. The well in Nond mohalla has been cleaned. Some roof tiles of the *panchayat bhawan* were replaced. A total of about three thousand rupees were spent last month," replied the secretary.

Rahmat Ali, the *panch* from Chinkhitola, was then asked to report on the progress of work on the culvert – how much had been completed, how much still needed to be done?

"All right, now, what work is to be done this month?" asked, the sarpanch. "Let's first ask Tijiya Bai about the problems in her ward."

"Who doesn't know the problems of our ward?" said Tijiya. "The well in Ghasitola has been dry for the past two years. We women have to fetch water every day from Chinkhitola at the other end of the village. If our well is deepened or a hand pump is installed in our mohalla, it would save us a lot of sweat and discomfort."

The panch from Paganwa intervened, "All the work is done only in Kaniyakhedi. Our little village, too, is in this panchayat. The well and the drains in our village have not been cleaned for years. The village pond has silted up. First get our well cleaned and our pond deepened. This won't cost much money either."

Encroachment and Fines

A discussion on two or three other issues followed. Someone in Nond mohalla had extended his house right onto the road. The panchs decided that if he didn't pull down the new room, the panchayat itself would do so.

The case of Ramprasad from Gandhi mohalla was then discussed. Lachhu, the panch from Gandhi ward, reported that Ramprasad lets the dirty water from his house flow to the road and also threw garbage from his house on the road. The panchayat decided to levy a fine on Ramprasad for spreading filth in the village.

Income of the Gram Panchayat

The secretary, Harimohan, then placed the income and expenditure accounts of the previous month before the panchs for discussion. The collection of taxes on sanitation, electricity and markets was lower than usual. Some people had not yet paid their house tax.

Harimohan said, "Last month, a part of the grant for the Chinkhitola culvert was received from the janpad panchayat. From April till November a total of about Rs. 10,000 has been received."

The village panchayat gets money from various sources for public works. It collects taxes on sanitation, electricity and private houses.

All those residing within the area of the village panchayat have to pay these taxes. Apart from the taxes, the village panchayat also collects some money as fines from those who do not comply with its rules and regulations.

Some major public works like the construction of wells, culverts, drains or school buildings are done by the village panchayat. The amount of money collected through taxes and fines is not enough for undertaking such work. The village panchayat can then ask the janpad or block panchayat for grants of money for these purposes. The government gives money for such things to the janpad panchayat. Panchayat can also collect some contribution from the people of the panchayat.

Funds for the Work of the Panchayat

Some of the public work to be done by the village panchayat had already been discussed in the meeting. Now the panchayat had to decide how to get the money for new work.

"It will be expensive to deepen the Ghasitola well or to get a hand pump installed there. Our panchayat does not have that much money. This is a difficult situation," said the sarpanch.

"It is not all that difficult," one panch spoke up. "There are many programmes of the



government for the poor or the scheduled castes. The janpad panchayat should get money for such work. We can apply to the janpad for money for the hand pump. We can speak to the janpad member of our area. He can put forward our demand at the next meeting of the janpad."

"When will we apply to the janpad, and when will the money come?" interrupted Tijiya. "It'll take another year for all this. Let's just do whatever we can with the panchayat money itself. For the rest of the money we can collect contributions from the people."

Arguments went back and forth for a long time on what the money already with the panchayat should be used for. It was finally decided that the village panchayat would ask the janpad panchayat for money for the Ghasitola hand pump. Harimohan, the panchayat secretary, would send an application to the janpad panchayat giving the details of how much the hand pump would cost. It was decided to use the panchayat's existing money to repair the Paganwa road.

All discussions finally came to an end about 4 P.M. The secretary, Harimohan, had been carefully noting down all the points discussed in the meeting. The minutes of every meeting of the panchayat are written by the secretary.

How Often the Panchayat Should Meet

As they were leaving the panchayat bhawan, one of the panchs pointed out that the previous panchayat used to be called for meetings only once in a while. The new sarpanch, Khairati Singh, however, was very regular about meetings. Not a single month had gone by without a meeting.

Another panch said, "The new rules are very strict. A meeting of the panchayat has to be called every month. Khairati Singh knows that if he doesn't call a meeting of the panchayat for three months at a stretch, he can be dismissed."

"The Birjankhedi sarpanch never calls a proper meeting of the panchayat," said Rahmat Ali, the Chinkhitola panch. "He just calls the secretary to his house and gets all

the papers done. He then sends the attendance register to all the members' houses and gets them to sign it. No one says a word. Everyone is afraid of the sarpanch."

"It is not enough to make rules. People of the village and the panchs should question the sarpanch about not not conducting the meetings. Then only the sarpanch would stop breaking the rules." said Lachchu.

- Who was Tijiya?
- How many members were there in the Kaniyakhedi village panchayat?
- Which villages fall under the Kaniyakhedi village panchayat?
- What is the role of the secretary in the meetings?
- The panchayat meeting had not begun till Tijiya reached the panchayat bhawan because – (Choose the right answer)
 - She was a woman panch and the meeting could not begin in the absence of women panchs.
 - There were less than half the panchayat members present before she reached.
 - She was the deputy-sarpanch, and the meeting could not begin without the deputy-sarpanch.
- What are the sources of income of the Kaniyakhedi village panchayat?
- What were the problems of Ghasitola and Nond mohalla? What did the Kaniyakhedi village panchayat decide about these?
- How often does the Kaniyakhedi village panchayat meet?
- If you live in a village, under which janpad panchayat does your village panchayat come? List the public works done by your village panchayat in the last one year.
- Do you think it is necessary for the panchs to attend the meetings regularly, Why? Discuss.

DIFFICULTIES IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE PANCHAYAT

Delay in Procuring Funds

Several months passed since the meeting in which the installation of the Ghasitola hand pump was first discussed. Tijiya regularly attended the panchayat meetings and each time she would enquire about the money for the hand pump. She was told that the proposal for the hand pump would be sent to the janpad in March along with the budget and plans for the next year. The money for the hand pump would be released along with the other money for that year.

The Kaniyakhedi village panchayat got the money from the janpad in the month of September. The money for the Ghasitola hand pump was included in this. In the October meeting, Tijiya asked the sarpanch about the money so that the work on the hand pump could begin. Ramdeen, one of the panchs, said, "Tijiya Bai, it will be difficult for you to get this work done. A contractor from the town will have to be given the contract for this work. I keep going to the town, I'll get this work done." Tijiya agreed to Ramdeen's offer of help.

Two-three months passed, but the work on the hand pump still did not begin. Whenever Tijiya asked Ramdeen about the pump, he would make some excuse.

Misuse of Funds

One day, when Tijiya was going to fill water from the Chinkitola well, she saw some long pipes lying in front of Ramdeen's house. She went to Ramdeen and asked, "Bhaiyaji, what are these pipes for?"

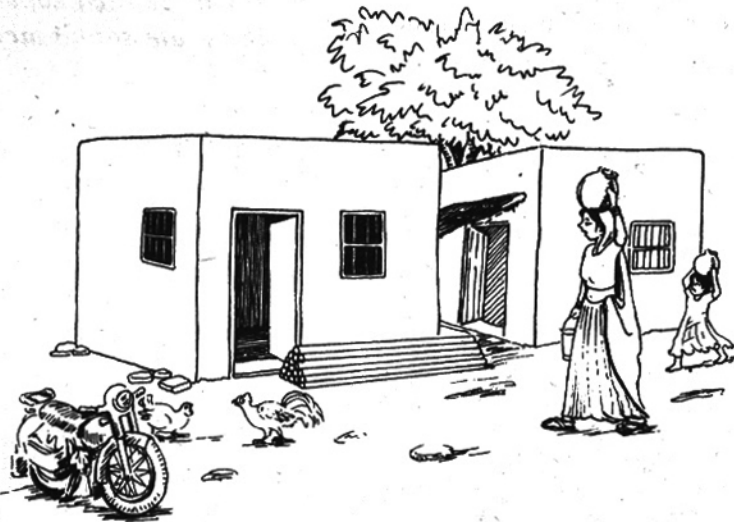
"What business is it of yours?" Ramdeen replied irritably. "Someone must be getting his hand pump installed."

Tijiya sensed from Ramdeen's tone that something was fishy. She met a number of women from Ghasitola at the Chinkhitola well. Tijiya told them that she had seen a number of pipes outside Ramdeen's house. "When I asked him about them, he tried to evade the question. I think there is something odd about it," said Tijiya.

"Let us all go to Khairati Singh and talk to him," said one woman. All the women then went to Khairati Singh's house and told him the whole story.

Sarpanch Khairati Singh called Ramdeen and warned him in front of everyone, "If you can't begin the work on the hand pump within the next two days, return the money. Tijiya will get the work done herself."

After two days, work on the Ghasitola hand pump began. Holes were bored and the pipes fitted. But the work stopped again after some days.



- What was the reason for the delay in getting the hand pump fixed in Ghasitola? Give two reasons in detail.
- Write down one sentence each said by Tijiya, Ramdeen and Khairati Singh.

GRAM SABHA

Two-three more months passed after the work on the hand pump stopped. The gram sabha was to meet in April. Tijiya thought that now it was best that she bring up the matter of the hand pump before the gram sabha. Voters from the villages Kaniyakhedi, Paganwa, Manigaon and Noonpur came for the meeting. People from the village discussed their problems with the panchayat in the gram sabha.

The people of Ghasitola angrily raised the

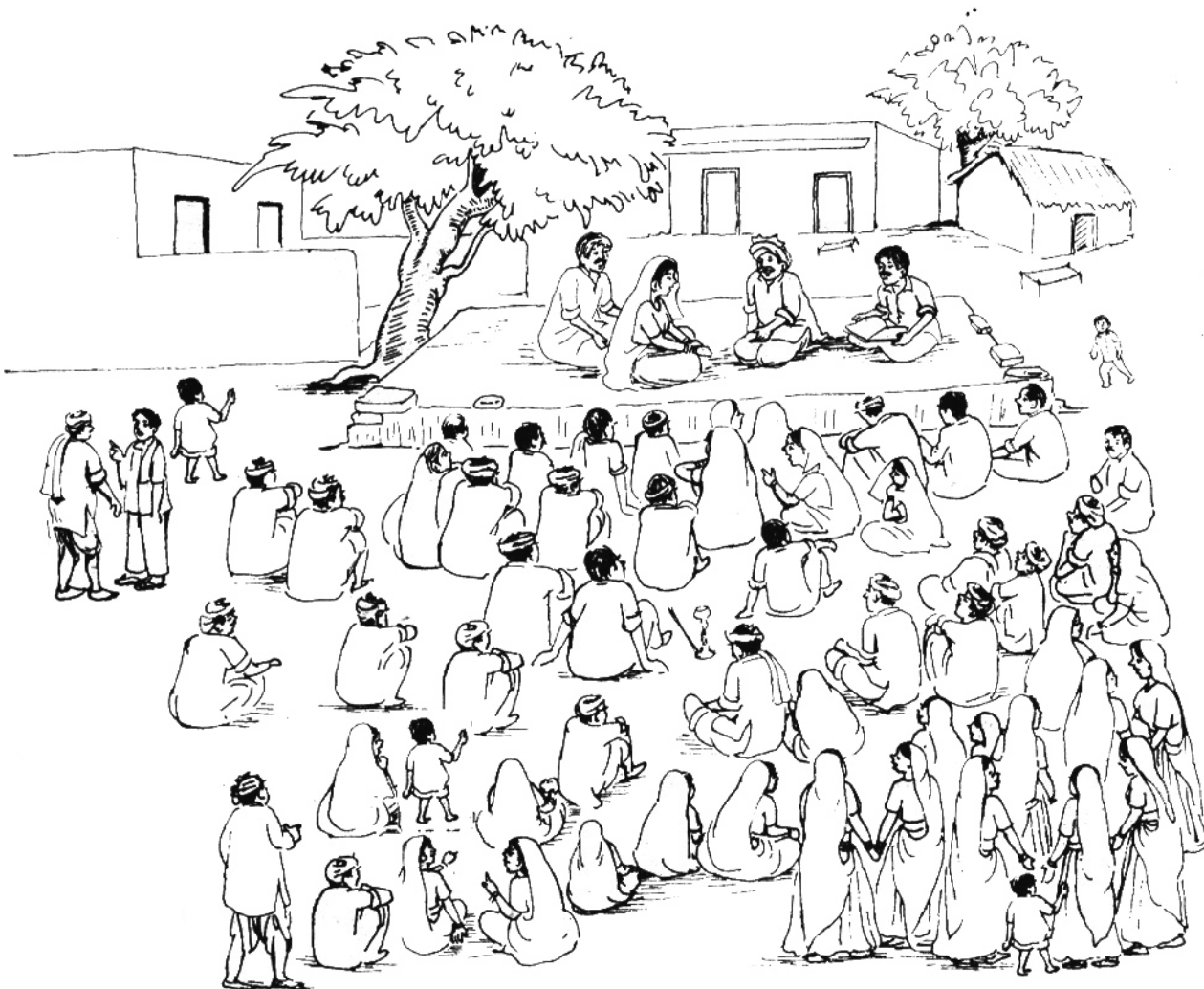
question about the delay in the installation of their hand pump. Tijiya said that the money for the hand pump had reached the village panchayat after so much difficulty, but the people were yet to taste its water. She also said that if the hand pump was not ready within 15 days, the people of Ghasitola would complain to the collector. Khairati Singh assured them that he would get the hand pump installed soon.

It was a month after the gram sabha that the Ghasitola hand pump was finally ready.

Every panchayat has its own gram sabha. All the voters of the village panchayat are members of these gram sabhas. A meeting of the gram sabha must be called at least four times a year. The accounts of the previous

financial year and the budget and plan for the coming year must be placed before the gram sabha for approval. The members of the gram sabha have the right to question the members of the village panchayat and to demand explanations from them. The people can ask for the cancellation of the decisions of the panchayat. They even have the power to recall the surpanch.

- **Who were the members of the Kaniyakhedi gram sabha?**
- **How often should the gram sabha meet?**
- **What did the people of Ghasitola do in the gram sabha meeting?**



EXERCISES

1. What is the meaning of civic amenities? Which of the following would you include in civic amenities – school, cycles, books, hospitals, provision of water, clothes, markets.
2. How is the village *panchayat* formed? Write four main points about this. Under which sub-title will you find these points?
3. There are two villages in Malpura gram *panchayat*: Malpura and Sailanpur. There are 12 wards in this *panchayat*. Based on this information answer the following questions.
 - a. In the voter list of Malpura *panchayat* names of those people would be written whose age is _____.
 - b. The total number of *panchs* elected in this *panchayat* will be _____.
 - c. The total number of *sarpanchs* will be _____.
 - d. The total number of seats reserved for women will be _____.
 - e. If the last elections were held in 1998, the next elections will have to be held in the year _____.
 - f. In that election Phatto got 442 votes while Dhiru got 330 votes from their ward for the post of panch. Who do you think would have become the panch.
4. What does the village *panchayat* do? What are the income sources of *panchayat*? Locate five sentences about each of these from the text.
5. If you live in a village and your locality does not have drains and the dirty water flows on the roads, what will you do? Write in your own words.
6. *Janpad panchayat* has been mentioned a number of times in this chapter. Find out what the *janpad panchayat* is? How is it formed? Who are its members?
7. What are the problems faced by the *village panchayat*? What can be done to solve these problems?
8. Correct the false sentences –
 - a. The people of the village elect the secretary of the village *panchayat*.
 - b. It is necessary that the sarpanch of every village *panchayat* should be a woman.
 - c. Anyone living in the area of the *panchayat* can cast a vote in the *panchayat* election.
 - d. The Patwari did not want Lakhiya to vote, so he did not write her name in the voter list.
 - e. There are at least three villages in each village *panchayat*.
 - f. Every resident of the village, whose name is there on the voter list casts two votes for the *gram panchayat* - one to elect the ward member i.e. *panch* and another to elect the *sarpanch* of the *panchayat*.
9. Do you think the *gram sabha* has an important role to play in the functioning of the *panchayat*? Explain your answer with reasons.