

Greetings!!!

Panchayat and Municipality are the generic terms for the governing body at the local level. Both exist as three tier systems – at the lower, intermediate and upper levels. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act provides for a Gram Sabha as the foundation of the Panchayati Raj system. It is essentially a village assembly consisting of all the registered voters in the area of the Panchayat. The state has the power to determine what kind of powers it can exercise, and what functions it has to perform at the village level.

Similar to the Panchayati Raj system, the Nagar Palika Act or the Municipalities Act, 1992 set up through the 74th Amendment Act also provides for a three tier municipal system namely:

1. Nagar Panchayat for a transitional area between a rural and urban area.
2. Municipal Council for a small urban area.
3. Municipal Corporation for a large urban area.

Municipalities represent urban local self-government. Most of the provisions of the two acts are parallel, differing only in the fact that they are being applied to either a Panchayat or a Municipality respectively. Each Gram Sabha is the meeting of a particular constituency called ward. Each ward has a representative chosen from among the people themselves by direct election. The chairperson of the Panchayat or Municipality at the intermediate and district level are elected from among these representatives at the immediately lower level by indirect election.

Municipal governance in India has been in existence since the year 1687 with the formation of Madras Municipal Corporation and then Calcutta and Bombay Municipal Corporation in 1726. In early part of the nineteenth century, almost all towns in India had experienced some form of municipal governance. In 1882, the then Viceroy of India, Lord Ripon's resolution of local self-government laid the democratic forms of municipal governance in India. In 1919, a Government of India Act incorporated the need of the resolution and the powers of democratically elected government were formulated. In 1935, another Government of India Act brought local government under the purview of the state or provincial government and specific powers were given.

The purpose of municipal governance and strategic urban planning in a country is to create effective, responsive, democratic, transparent, accountable local governance framework organised according to a rational structure that promotes responsiveness and accountability; to provide responsive policy guidance and assistance to sub-national entities; to strengthen the legal, fiscal, economic and service delivery functions of municipalities and to foster greater citizen participation in the governance of local bodies.

As a result of economic development in India, urbanization is proceeding at a very rapid rate. Cities and towns contribute to more than 60% of the GDP, so one can understand the strong correlation between urbanization and economic development. So it is imperative to develop an efficient urban or municipal government. The conceptualization of Smart City, varies from city to city and country to country, depending on the level of development, willingness to change and reform, resources and aspirations of the city residents. A smart city would have a different connotation in India than, say, Europe. Even in India, there is no one way of defining a smart city. Some definitional boundaries are required to guide cities in the Mission. In the imagination of any city dweller in India, the picture of a smart city contains a wish list of infrastructure and services that describes his or her level of aspiration. To provide for the aspirations and needs of the citizens, urban planners ideally aim at developing the entire urban eco-system, which is represented by the four pillars of comprehensive development-institutional, physical, social and economic infrastructure. This can be a long term goal and cities can work towards developing such comprehensive infrastructure incrementally, adding on layers of 'smartness'.

The Government of India has launched the *Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT)* with the aim of providing basic civic amenities like water supply, sewerage, urban transport, parks as to improve the quality of life for all, especially the poor and the disadvantaged. The focus of the Mission is on infrastructure creation that has a direct link to provision of better services to the citizens. The purpose of "AMRUT" mission is to (i) ensure that every household has access to a tap with assured supply of water and a sewerage connection (ii) increase the amenity value of cities by developing greenery and well maintained open spaces e.g. parks and (iii) reduce pollution by switching to public transport or constructing facilities for non-motorized transport.

On the other side, it is noteworthy that rural development implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. In order to provide the rural people with better prospects for economic development, increased participation of people in the rural development programmes, decentralization of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit are needed.

This issue presents a good number of articles on the cover story theme 'Municipality, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development' by distinguished experts and authors. We look forward to constructive feedback from our readers on the articles and overall development of the journal. Please send your mails at editor@icmai.in. We thank all the contributors to this important issue and hope our readers enjoy the articles.

