CHAPTER VII

THE INSTITUTIONAL BEHAVIOUR

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(1) **Institutional Frame Work of Panchayati Raj: Origin of the Concept:**

The term 'Panchayati Raj' came into use after the acceptance of the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Study Team on Democratic Decentralisation. Previously, the terms used were 'Village-panchayat', 'Sub-district board' or 'district local board' self-governing bodies at the village and district levels. Panchayati Raj implies the creation of local government institutions at the village, block and district levels. These bodies play a vital role in rural administration of the present age. In fact, it is the power entrusted to these bodies that really make a state democratic or undemocratic.

The recommendations of the Study Team in favour of a system of democratic decentralisation were considered by the National Development Council in January, 1958. The Council, endorsing the recommendations of the Team, emphasised that the foundation of any democratic structure had to be in the village. It was, however, left to each State to work out the structure, best suited to its conditions. Accordingly, the state governments started evolving their own patterns of democratic decentralisation. Subsequently, the term 'democratic decentralisation' was given up and the term 'Panchayati Raj' was adopted.
(b) The Basic Structure:

There is a basic similarity of structure in Panchayati Raj legislations introduced throughout the country. There are some variations in the pattern as a result of the peculiarities of the historical evolution of the institutions of local self-government, difference in rural setting and the varying politico-administrative views regarding the most suitable unit for devolution. This is to be expected in a big country like India with its geographical, linguistic, social and economic diversities. "The basic principle of genuine devolution of power to local organs has been adhered to throughout the Panchayati Raj legislations passed and promulgated by the States."¹

Most of the States have followed the three tier system as recommended by the Mehta Committee Report (1958). The village Assembly or 'Gramsabha' has been given statutory recognition in most of the States. The intermediate tier at Tehsil or Taluka level is called by various names. In Gujarat it is called 'Taluka Panchayat'. The district-level body is also known by different names in different states. It is called 'Zilla-Panchayat' in Gujarat.

The basic structure is sound according to Henry Maddick.² Even if the objectives are somewhat idealistic, the system can

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be made to work, as can most systems, if the will to work exists.

**Panchayat and Village Community:**

A meaningful relationship between the panchayat and the village community as a whole can exist only where the jurisdiction of the panchayat is not too large and is confined to one or a very few compact villages. Provision for contact between the panchayat and the general public exists in the Panchayat Acts of a number of States, where the panchayat is required to call meetings of the general village body at least twice a year, inform it of its achievements and programme and present to it a statement of its financial position. The principle of consultation between the panchayat and the village body is a commendable one. It is in accordance with the traditions of Western democracy and those of the Indian Village. The practice of village meeting could, if successful, bring the village people and their elected representatives closer and could promote an understanding in the people of the working of the institution.

**Panchayats at Work: A Review:**

The role of panchayats in the development of villages does not need any elucidation. The performance of panchayats has a vital bearing on the functioning of the higher tiers of Panchayati Raj but they have not come up to the expectations
of the people. No doubt there are some good panchayats which have worked successfully, have made a great impact on the development programmes in their areas and have shown commendable enthusiasm. But the general picture is not so bright.

The working of panchayats is not free from faults. There is a scarcity of popular and effective leadership to take over the responsibility of village planning and development. Panchayat meetings are held at irregular intervals and their follow-up programmes are insufficient and irregular. Sarpanchas and members do not have adequate training. Some useful literature in simple language on the subject is not easily available. Panches complain that they are not taken into confidence by the Sarpanch. This results into indifference on the part of panches in the activities of the panchayats. Members from the backward and suppressed classes are not encouraged to actively participate in the deliberations of the panchayat meetings. Similarly, women members do not get adequate encouragement to come forward and participate in the proceedings of the Panchayat.

(c) Panchayat Functionaries: The Sarpanch

The president of the panchayat who is known as the Sabhapati, Mukhi or Sarpanch in Gujarat and by similar other

names elsewhere is by far the most important member of the institution. The most common name is Sarpanch. The office of the Sarpanch combines the functions of a Chairman, a Representative, an Executive-head and a Judge. The Sarpanch presides over the panchayat meetings. He announces decisions on behalf of the panchayat. He is responsible for the safe custody of the panchayat fund. He is a spokesman of the panchayat in the Panchayat Samiti and participates in the elections of the President and members of the various standing committees of the Taluka Panchayat.

The working of a panchayat depends to a large extent upon his personality. One major difficulty in the functioning of the panchayats at present is that most Sarpanchas are not qualified by education or training to carry out adequately the duties or to assume the responsibilities entrusted to them under the Panchayat Laws. As their level of education is generally low, a great majority of them do not fully understand their duties and responsibilities. Also, in most states no serious attempt has been made to enlighten them on the provisions of the Panchayat Act. 6

Qualifications etc.: Although this elected head enjoys wide executive powers under the Act, it is interesting to note that the only

qualification necessary for becoming a Sarpanch is the ability to command the confidence of the majority. There are no special educational qualifications prescribed for this office. Any person who is qualified to be a voter and a candidate under the Act can be a 'Sarpanch'. A few States like Rajasthan have provided that the Sarpanch must be able to read and write. It appears desirable that the Sarpanch who is responsible for the executive work of the panchayat, has to conduct the meetings of the panchayats, to issue notices and warrants under his signature and to supervise the work of the Secretary, should at least be able to read and write. 7

The Panchayat Secretary:

Most Panchayat Acts provide for the appointment of a panchayat secretary to maintain the records and accounts of the panchayat and to look after other routine matters. However, there are very great inter-state variations in matters like the procedure of recruitment of the secretary, his status as a government or a panchayat servant or as a full or part-time employee, his pay, educational qualifications, training etc.

The secretary assists the panchayat in noting decisions, keeping minutes, preparing budget estimates, preparing reports, looking after panchayat servants, if required, and doing other sundry works like drafting notices, receiving dues, explaining

circulars or legal provisions, helping in the organisation or gram sabha meetings and so on.

The secretary has no line of promotion and therefore, does not look forward to a bright career in the panchayat. He has very little incentive for improving professional skills. Regarding development functions which are to become the principal concern of the panchayats in days to come, the secretary has neither the skill nor the zeal. He is at home in dealing with routine matters but feels diffident when it comes to preparing village plans.

(d) The Gram Sabha:

At the base of the Panchayati Raj lies the gram sabha or the village assembly composed of all the adult citizens who are eligible to cast vote. Most of the state legislations provide that the gram sabha shall be called to meet at least twice a year, usually after Rabi and Kharif crops are harvested.

The gram sabha is expected to play the role of a parent body to which the village panchayat should owe responsibility. The village panchayat must present its budget, accounts of the last year and annual administrative report to the gram sabha for discussion. Projects of local development, village production plans and proposals for taxation must secure its

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approval before they could be executed by the panchayat. Their implementations should be reviewed before it. To give the gram sabha its real character, it is necessary that the entire village population should feel like one single entity and not led away by considerations of caste, community, groups or other narrow, dividing factors.

So far the gram sabha has been rather dormant body. The attendance is small, perhaps, due to the low level of political education of the members and the diffusive character of its membership. Consequently, its influence on panchayat decisions has been negligible. Commenting on the working of a gram sabha, Inamdar says, "It was rather disappointing that only ten percent of the adult population of the village attended the gram sabha. The woman panch was the only woman who attended it. Only half-a-dozen Harijans were present. The idea of gram sabha, by and large, has not yet struck roots in the minds of the village people. It has so far touched only the prominent persons in the Village." There are several reasons for the lack of interest of the people in the gram sabha and its ineffectiveness. Firstly, the ad hoc and rather irregular nature of work is entrusted to this body. The scope and functions of the gram-sabha at present are very limited. Secondly, the level of political education of the masses is low.

Thirdly, meetings of the gram sabha are not held regularly. And lastly, the citizens' attitude is one of apathy, indifference and unwillingness to spare time and to share inconvenience for any public service. Besides, meetings are sometimes held in the busy agricultural season that does not suit the cultivators. Labourers and service people have no stake in the gram sabha. Panchayat funds are too limited to have any novel and attractive plans that may draw people for discussion. It is also suggested that the size of the gram sabha be limited to a manageable strength.

(2) The Institutional Behaviour of Mogri Panchayat: The Panchayat Office:

Generally, a panchayat appears to be what its Sarpanch can carve out of it. This may be true of its office too. The appearance of his office sometimes betrays the degree of efficiency with which it is held by its incumbent. No doubt, the physical lay-out and surrounding environment play an important role in creating a lively atmosphere in the office.

The Mogri panchayat office has an enviable position as it is located in the heart of the village. The place is known as 'Chora' which is commonly understood elsewhere as the central office in the village, also the centre of the village. In fact, the panchayat office in 'Chora' is a gift from the erstwhile Baroda State. Even after the merger of the State, the same place has continued to be the official abode.
of the village administration. It is an old building with traditional vastness of space and comfort. However, there has been no face-lift of the building so far although four Sarpanchas have ruled from it. The main office is set-up in a room measuring 10'x12' with a big window opening out over the main public road. This room is shared by the two functionaries, namely, Sarpanch and the Secretary-cum-Talati. While the Talati sits on the 'gadi', the Sarpanch is provided with a big table and chair. A few more chairs are also placed there for the visitors. In the absence of Sarpanch, an assistant clerk of the panchayat sits there and transacts his business. The clerk is employed by the panchayat to assist the Talati in his work. The Upa-Sarpanch and chairmen of various committees do not enjoy any special facility in respect of accommodation in the office.

A visitor to the panchayat office is likely to be struck with its over-simplicity and clumsy atmosphere. A more discriminate visitor may form an adverse opinion of its set-up and tidiness. The furniture is very old and scanty. There are two almirahs, one for the Sarpanch and the other for the Talati. The object is to preserve the documents. However, no records of panchayat elections, nomination forms, gram sabha meetings or development projects were available at the time of the investigation. In fact, they are not at all maintained. On the left of Sarpanch's table, there is one more exhibit drawing everybody's attention. A bunch of
circulars is seen hanging on the wall for the benefit of the tax-payers. Its utility lies in the fact that it serves as a "ready reference file." One may even get as many as five years' old circulars heaped together.

There is a big hall adjacent to the main office. It is being used for general meetings. In daily practice, it serves the purpose of a common meeting-place. A big table along with a few chairs is permanently kept there. A morning newspaper subscribed by the panchayat is always placed on the table. Local residents start pouring into the room one after another right from eight o'clock in the morning. The newspaper headlines are the starting point of discussion and it generally covers an unrestricted number of topics ranging from international politics to home affairs. In fact, the gathering slowly turns into a mini-grama sabha.

The panchayat office is an old complex of big and small rooms, a cattle-pound and a walled compound with main entrance falling on the side of the public road. It is not very well maintained. The general attitude of the panchayat officials in such matters, is one of indifference if not one of gross negligence.

The Panchayat Functionaries: The Sarpanch:

In all four Sarpanchas have headed Mogri Panchayat since its inception. All of them hailed from the dominant Patidar caste. Fortunately, they were available at the time
of investigation. However, the first and the second Sarpanchas could not be interviewed at length on account of old age and failing health. The third and the fourth Sarpanchas, both in their fifties, were cooperative and helpful.

Though all the Sarpanchas were literate, none except the second had reached the matriculation stage. They all came from the upper income group and enjoyed high social status. Only the second Sarpanch had some administrative experience. Besides being a prominent businessman, he had been a member of the District Local Board for many years. He was also on the managing committees of a number of educational institutions.

**Method of Work:**

All the Sarpanchas were in the habit of attending the panchayat office daily. However, none of them had fixed any particular time for office work. Usually they would visit the office some time in the morning. The second Sarpanch, being a busy man was not in a position to devote much time to the office while the first one did not have many development schemes as they have to-day. In any case they could be sent for, should there be any urgent work. The third and the fourth Sarpanchas were required to give more time to office work as they both belonged to the post-Panchayati Raj era. They were ably helped, as far as routine work was concerned, by the Talati and the office clerk. Between the two, the third Sarpanch was dynamic and showed more initiative in his
work. The fourth Sarpanch was quiet by nature and displayed a sober attitude towards the panchayat-problems. However, both were equally ignorant of the fundamental objectives of the Panchayati Raj. Their reading habits were confined to newspapers only. None of them had subscribed to any magazine pertaining to the problems of Panchayati Raj. In fact, they had read nothing on it. Attending a seminar or conference on the Panchayati Raj was clearly beyond their capacity. On the contrary, both of them were critical of the government for introducing the Panchayati Raj. To the third Sarpanch, the new system appeared to be giving undue weightage to the 'useless people' coming from the backward and suppressed classes. For the fourth Sarpanch, Panchayati Raj appeared as waste of money and time. No doubt such attitudes vitiate the working of the Panchayati Raj. In spite of their critical attitude they had worked hard for the panchayat.

The office of a Sarpanch is considered a prestige-symbol by the members of the dominant caste. Hence, all try to capture it. The aspirations, if unfulfilled, turn into hatred and jealousy, which breed factions and groups. For the first Sarpanch, it was a result of a political game played between the two factions. For the second, it was in keeping with his high status in society. To third, it was a matter of traditional leadership and family function. It was only in the case of the fourth Sarpanch that the office went to him in a straight democratic way without any background.
This does not mean that all the occupants of the office of the Sarpanch were devoid of service-motto. It might be said to the credit of all the Sarpanchas that they had done their best to serve the people through the office they occupied. On the whole, their contributions have left lasting impression on the history of Mogri panchayat.

Panchayat Secretary:

The secretary cum talati is the most important functional in the panchayat office on whose shoulder lies the burden of running the whole show. He is as much a part of the government machinery as he is of the panchayat organisation. As talati, he is responsible for the collection of revenue and as secretary for the administration of the panchayat.

The secretary cum talati whom the investigator had occasions to deal with during the period of investigation, was an experienced hand. He was in government service for more than two decades. He was middle aged and modest in his manners. He stayed in a nearby village. Usually he would come to the office at about eight o'clock in the morning and leave in the afternoon. He used to attend office even on Sundays to ease the pressure of work. The common impression about him was that he was always found doing some work -- filing returns, preparing statements, collecting data, issuing notices etc. He never lost temper with people and always answered their queries with a smile. Surprisingly enough,
he was never found interested in the panchayat work. That was left to the assistant clerk employed by the panchayat. It was a wonderful division of work and responsibility.

The talati had his education up to primary level. However, he was a bit conversant with some technical English words due to his long service in the government. Although he knew his business well his universe was very small. It was not possible for him to grasp all the technicalities of the Panchayati Raj especially in its developmental role. His major training was on the revenue side. It would be too much to expect him to grasp the meaning of the high sounding phrases like 'leadership role' and 'development planning.' Indeed, he was modest enough to admit his ignorance on this score. In fact he had neither read any book nor was he in the company of any periodicals on the subject. He had not even gone through the Act. Although a hard working man, the talati lacked both perspective and orientation of the task he was entrusted with.

The Panchayat at Work:

Although the Sarpanch is the chief spokesman of the panchayat, it is the panchayat council where real deliberation takes place and important decisions are made. The Sarpanch without the strong backing of the panchas is a crippled and ineffective leader. The smooth working of the panchayat depends to a great extent upon the amount of cohesiveness secured among the members of the panchayat. Frequency of
meetings and number of decisions taken also reflect upon the quality of deliberations in the panchayat. A decision taken after the free discussion and with the widest possible concurrence of members will naturally strengthen the hands of a Sarpanch. Usually, a panchayat conducts its business through meetings. There is a statutory requirement for every panchayat that it should meet at least once in a month for transacting business.

The following table gives us the frequency of meetings held by Mogri panchayat:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total No. of meetings</th>
<th>Non-quorum</th>
<th>Urgent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>1963-64</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>1964-65</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>1966-67</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>1968-69</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total 64 3 2

Note:—(1) Records for the years preceding 1963-64 were not available.
(2) 'Year' means financial year from April to March.
Table 19 shows that in all 64 meetings were held in six years, i.e. from 1963 to 1969. It means on average 10 meetings a year were held. From the point of statutory requirements, it falls short of 2 meetings on an average. The common explanation was that since most of the members happen to be farmers, meetings during monsoon and harvest season were cancelled. Another reason put forward was that the panchayat members very often used to meet each other informally and therefore, the formality of calling statutory meetings was abandoned. The highest number of meetings (14) were held in 1966-66 because a new board had come into being after the elections. The ratio of non-quorum meetings (1:21) is very low indeed. In all, there were three occasions in the total period of six years when quorum was not available. Out of 64 meetings only three (i.e. 4.08%) were non-quorum. Most of the non-quorum meetings took place in the year 1964-65, the period of the election of a new board.

There were two occasions when urgent meetings were called. One of them was held on Sunday. The first urgent meeting had on its agenda the consideration of the unauthorised construction done by a resident of the village. The second was called to find out ways and means to deal with those persons who were causing obstruction in panchayat's efforts to recover dues.
The attendance record of the panchas is given in Table no. 20. In all there were four meetings which attracted hundred percent attendance. Out of these four two were held in the year 1964-65 and one each in the year 1965-66 and 1966-67. It should be noted that the year 1964-65 was the election year of the new board and therefore there was more enthusiasm on the part of the members to attend meetings. The attendance-percentage appears to be declining with the years passing by and the zeal of the members receding. In terms of the percentage, it comes to 6.02 which must be considered a poor consolation.
However, the largest number of meetings attended by the highest number of members happen to fall in the next group of categories i.e. between 99 and 75%. From among the meetings held 34 attracted the presence of more than 75% of the members. In terms of percentage 53% of the total meetings were attended by more than 75% of the members. The trend was certainly encouraging in the sense that more than half of the meetings were completely successful as far as the problem of attendance was concerned. In view of the social, economic and educational background of the members who happened to be either farmers or agricultural labourers or women, this is not a bad performance.

A total of 23 meetings drew 74% to 50% attendance of members. In terms of percentage, 36% of the total meetings drew the attendance of more than 50% but less than 75% of the members. In fact, attendance of more than 50% members in the meetings cannot be considered low if we take an overall view. It is only in the case of three meetings out of 64 that the attendance was less than 50%. In other words, these meetings were the only non-quorum meetings. One of the reasons given for the non-quorum meetings was that the members had lost interest in the work as the term was coming to a close. The years 1964-65 and 1968-69 were certainly 'term' ending years. To sum up, it might be said that almost 95% of the total meetings were attended by more than 50% of the members, which by itself speaks of the enlightened interest.
shown by the members in attending the meetings.

Attendance of Women-Members:

Poor attendance of women members in the panchayat meetings is causing concern everywhere. It is observed that women members in Mogri rarely attend the panchayat meetings. Although the panchayat records show signatures of women members, only a few of them would be genuine. They follow a peculiar practice. As soon as the meetings is over, the register is sent to the women members to their homes for their signatures. They attend only those crucial meetings where the decision is to be taken on the show of strength. Their participation in the process of decision-making and policy formulation is almost minimum. The problem is more difficult in a village like Mogri where both the communities—dominant as well as dormant—are conservative and tradition bound.

Agenda:

Table 21 shows items on the agenda of the panchayat meetings. The items are split into two categories, namely routine and special.

In all there were 183 items on the agenda with an average of 30.06 items per year. Out of 183 items, 120 were routine and 63 were special. It means one-third of the total items happened to be of special significance. It also indicates that the important items were given highest
### Table 21

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Routine</th>
<th>Special</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963-64</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-65</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-67</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968-69</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>120</strong></td>
<td><strong>63</strong></td>
<td><strong>183</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

consideration by the panchayat, and received the attention of the whole body. Table 21 also gives year-wise break-up of routine and special items. Among the special items, there were 7 in the year 1963-64, 12 in the year 1964-65, 17 in the year 1965-66, 7 in the year 1966-67 and 10 each in the years 1967-68 and 1968-69, respectively. Once more it shows that the period preceding and following the election year (i.e. 1965) was important in as much as the highest number of special items were brought on the agenda during these years. Table 22 provides further break-up of special items.

Table 22 shows that the special items are split-up under five heads namely, financial, administrative, developmental, political and disputes. It is obvious that the highest number of items (28 out of 63) should be under the head 'financial'.
TABLE 22

Break-up of Special Items

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Financial</th>
<th>Administrative</th>
<th>Developmental</th>
<th>Political</th>
<th>Disputes</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1963-64</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964-65</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1965-66</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966-67</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1967-68</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1968-69</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next comes 'Administrative' with 21 out of 63 items. Then comes 'Developmental' with 9 items followed by the 'Political' and 'Disputes' each with 3 and 2 items, respectively.

Most of the items under the head 'Finance' include (i) consideration of tax-proposals, (ii) preparation and presentation of budget, (iii) auction-sale of babul trees, etc. There were also some individual items like proposals for the construction of staff quarters, extension of village site and purchase of machinery and spare-parts for water-works. Similarly, administrative items include (i) appointment of various committees, (ii) delimitation of wards, (iii) preparation of voters' list, (iv) appointment of panchayat personnel, (v) convening of gram sabha meeting and (vi) correspondence.
with external agencies. Items under the head 'Developmental' included (i) fixing of water-posts, (ii) erection of street lights, (iii) construction of school rooms, (iv) purchase of school materials, (v) construction and enlargement of water-works and (vi) construction of approach-road.

There were three items under the head 'Political'. All of them were of a peculiar nature. One was concerning a resolution passed by the panchayat criticising the conduct of a local excise official, who was alleged to have harassed a member of the Patidar community. The second item was regarding a resolution passed by the panchayat asking the Charotar Education Society, Anand, to take over the management of the local High School. In the third case, the dominant Patidar members of the panchayat got passed a resolution suggesting changes in the local wards for the purpose of panchayat elections.

In all the three cases it appears that the resolutions were passed with certain political motivations. In the first, it was indeed rare for a panchayat to go to the extent of impeaching a government official without conducting a thorough enquiry. It is doubtful whether the panchayat would have passed such a resolution if it were a case of a Bariya or a non-Patidar. Similarly, it was also unique for a panchayat to pass a resolution where its authority did not reach. However, the resolution seems to have been passed under the
influence of a local congress leader and a prominent businessman who was also a major donor in the High School. The Charotar Education Society of Anand is also controlled by the congress workers. The Charotar Education Society of Anand was established by Shri Motibhai Amin, the famous educationist of this region. It has its headquarters at Anand. The main campus of the society is spread over a very large area in the heart of Anand town. At present, it runs about 20 institutions, including a Science college and Primary Teachers' Training Institution, in and out of Anand town. From its inception, it has received blessings from the top leaders of the Congress. A number of persons has dedicated their lives to this Society as "life-servants" and live on the campus. One of them is Shri Ishwarbhai Patel, Ex-Vice Chancellor of Sardar Patel University, Vallabh Vidyanagar. They all are wedded to educational philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi. The society has done pioneering work in the field of primary and secondary education in the Charotar region.

In the third case, local politics played an important part in the passing of such a resolution. Mogri panchayat is dominated by the members of the Patidar caste. But as time passes the Bariyas, next to the Patidars in numerical strength, are politically articulating themselves in a bid to strike a balance of power in the village politics. Patidar members got a resolution passed in the panchayat with the
help of their majority and thus tried to delimit the wards in such a way that the Bariyas would be ineffective. However, the resolution was ordered to be cancelled by the district authorities.

Items covered under the head 'Disputes' were of general nature. In all there were only two items. In one case, a local resident had done some unauthorised construction while in the second case, a person had diverted water from the pipelines for agricultural purposes without permission of the panchayat. Two cases in a period of six years is not a high incidence of disputes. This has been due to the attitude adopted by the panchayat for directly resolving conflicts without taking recourse to the formal machinery of the Nyaya panchayat.

In the course of investigation by the researcher, it was pointed out that so far no complaint was registered before the Nyaya Panchayat. The explanation given was that they (i.e. leaders) did not encourage the parties to bring their disputes before the panchayat. On the other hand, they laid stress on directly resolving the conflicts by mediation, arbitration or any other means suitable to the parties. They feared that once the dispute came to the panchayat, the groups would give political colour to it. Instead of resolving the conflict to the satisfaction of the parties, they would perpetuate rivalries between them. In the end,
perhaps, they might go to higher courts of law, leaving behind the panchayat brusied by group-fighting.

The Gram-Sabha:

Gram Sabha is conceived of as the foundation on which the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj is erected.

Statutory Base:

Gram Sabha was accorded statutory recognition in Gujarat with the passing of the Gujarat Panchayats Act, 1961 which sought to introduce democratic decentralisation as visualised in the Balwantraile Mehta Report. Section 6 of the Gujarat Panchayats Act, 1961, reads as follows:

"There shall be a gram-sabha for a gram for performing such functions as may be prescribed."

It further reads:

"All persons whose names are included in the list of voters maintained for a gram shall be deemed to constitute the gram-sabha of the gram."

Responsibility for convening gram-sabha is placed on the panchayat. However, Taluka Panchayat and District Panchayat are not kept out of the picture as it is the case in some other states e.g. Rajasthan.  

Section 83 of the Gujarat Panchayats Act, 1961 reads:

"The Sarpanch shall if required by the Taluka..."

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Panchayat or District Panchayat call a meeting of the gram-sabha."

It further reads—

"Any officer authorised in this behalf by the Taluka panchayat or District panchayat by general or special order shall have the right to speak in, and otherwise to take part in, the proceedings of a meeting of the gram-sabha but shall not be entitled to vote."

Thus, officers deputed by the Taluka Panchayat or District Panchayat have been given some say in the conduct of gram-sabha. However, no specific provision has been made for making it compulsory on the part of the panchayat to implement the decision taken by the gram-sabha or to act according to the views expressed at its meeting. Even higher authorities do not have more than an advisory role to play in this respect.

Gram-Sabha Meeting:

Section 82 of Gujarat Panchayats Act, 1961 provides—

"There shall be held at least two meetings of the gram-sabha every year on such date, time and place as may be prescribed ... The first meeting of the gram-sabha every year shall be held within two months from the commencement of that year!"

However, in practice, it is found that in Mogri gram-sabha meetings are called only once a year. This shows that the minimum number of the meetings laid down statutorily
do not take place in Mogri. The way in which the gram-sabha meeting is held in Mogri may be called unique. There is a tradition in Gujarat Village for the people to assemble at one place on the New Year and convey greetings to each other. The celebration of the New Year is in continuation of the Diwali festival. The Mogri panchayat takes full advantage of this occasion and turns the congregation into a meeting of the gram-sabha. This practice has now assumed a permanent form of tradition with the result that it has rendered the calling of gram-sabha by beat of drum or special announcement superfluous. People now know well in advance about this occasion and hence come prepared. There is also no confusion about the venue and timing. As soon as the Sarpanch and other members of the panchayat accompanied by the elite of the village arrive on the scene, the congregation takes the shape of a meeting. The occasion being the New Year, people are in a mood of 'joy' and 'forgiveness'. Even children are there making a great fun out of the occasion. Traditional enemies surcharged with emotion and sentiments of forgetting the past would ask for forgiveness on the New Year Day.

The main hall of the panchayat office is decorated with Ashopatay leaves. The floor is covered by carpets, and a small dias is prepared for the occasion. A gadi, supported by a few takias (big pillows). A small writing desk is also placed in front of the Sarpanch's seat. A person like CB, the elderly man of the village, will be received by the Sarpanch
himself and escorted to his place. With the arrival of CB, the gram-sabha's work starts. In a sense it is more than a gram-sabha since it reviews all kinds of problems including those handled by the panchayat. For example, it raises contributions every year for the village dispensary which runs into deficit although it is not a concern of the panchayat.

The practice of holding gram-sabha on the New Year Day has solved the problem of attendance. The occasion attracts the highest number of people from the village. However, the occasion prevents the officials like the President of Taluka Panchayat and the Taluka Development Officer from attending the meeting. Being a public holiday, they are not even expected. The women members and other ladies of the village hardly show enthusiasm to remain present on such occasions.

The Procedure of Work:

Section 84 of Gujarat Panchayats Act, 1961, prescribes the following agenda for the gram-sabha. It says that gram panchayat shall place before such meeting-

(1) The annual statement of accounts;
(2) The report on the administration of the preceding financial year;
(3) The development and other programme of work proposed for the current financial year;
(4) The last audit note and replies (if any) made thereto;
(5) Any other matter which the Taluka Panchayat and the District Panchayat require to be placed before such meeting.

It further says-

"It shall be open to the gram-sabha to discuss any or all of the matters placed before it and the panchayat shall consider suggestions, if any, made by the gram-sabha. Gram-sabha is also asked to carry out other functions as may be prescribed by the government. The questions before such gram-sabha shall be decided by a majority of votes of the members present."

In Mogri, so far as the working of the gram-sabha is concerned the above procedure is not strictly followed. However, the spirit of the law is observed. In the beginning, the Sarpanch reads out the statement of accounts, puts the audit notes before the Sabha and then takes up the problems of the panchayat. There is hardly any discussion on the statement of accounts or audit reports. The Sarpanch requests the people in general and the leaders in particular to ponder over the problems of village development and find out new resources. The Sarpanch's speech remains as brief as possible. By and large people are sympathetic to the Panchayat's difficulties. Generally, the audience will look at CB. Before he rises to speak, CB will persuade one or two leaders to speak on the occasion. It is, however, CB who sets the tone of the meeting. Judicious and careful he knows the mood of
the people. If required, he would make some concrete proposals. Most of his donations have been declared in this way. A few more speakers will follow. If contributions are to be made for a particular project, they will be declared on the spot. Most of the development work that has been done in Mogri had its origin in the gram-sabha. At about 11 a.m. the meeting comes to an end. The closing ceremony is celebrated with distribution of sweets.

Sometimes, the decisions taken in such meetings are not implemented, e.g. it was decided to impose a levy of Re. 1.00 per maund on the sale of tobacco in 1968-69. This was supposed to fetch at least Rs. 20,000 a year to the panchayat exchequer. However, the proposal was shelved after strong opposition by the powerful tobacco businessmen.

Conduct of the Meeting:

Apart from the statutory provision of the agenda for gram-sabha, it is left to the ingenuity of the Sarpanch and the initiative of the people attending the meeting to evolve their own procedural details of such meetings. In most of the cases gram-sabha meetings were conducted by the presiding officer in the manner he liked, subject to the mood of the people at that time. At almost all meetings, the presiding officer had no difficulty in maintaining peace and order. Of course, this does not mean that all the participants pay equally keen attention to its proceedings. Generally, most
of the people are content with sitting quietly and paying little attention to the deliberations while those in the rear busy gossiping in small groups. This is likely to happen when the occasions of different nature are combined together.

The gram-sabha meetings as indicated earlier seldom follow a pre-planned agenda. This results in a free discussion on any topic which people want. On many occasions items of local interest are discussed at length while budget and the progress reports are paid only cursory attention. This happens especially when some extra-ordinary event has taken place and people want to show their concern about it. As for example, the discussion in the year 1968-69 centred round the task of meeting the situation that had arisen as a result of drought. In the following year, the discussion centred round the sale of agricultural land possessed by the Ramji Temple, which was certainly not a panchayat problem but affected the fate of large number of tenants.

Summing Up:

The Mogri panchayat has failed to give an impressive outlook to its office, due to lack of interest shown by its occupants. In all, four incumbents, all Patidars, have held so far the office of the Sarpanch, a prized post for a member of the dominant caste. Four factors -- ascriptive status, group politics, economic position and popularity -- have played an important part in the selection of a Sarpanch. It
is not necessary that all these factors should combine in one person. Group-politics has been found to be the most important factor that has influenced the choice of three of the four Sarpanchas, although no co-relation can be established between these factors. The fact is that, whoever becomes a Sarpanch, has got to work within the constraints of factional politics and caste rivalries. This imposes many limits on his working.

The innovation of combining two positions -- those of talati and panchayat secretary -- has proved a failure. The talati-cum-secretary needs thorough orientation in his new task if he is to contribute anything to the success of the Panchayati Raj. A person trained for revenue with different goal perception is quite unsuitable for the job in the panchayat, which is essentially development oriented.

Business of the panchayat is conducted through its meetings. One meeting per month is the minimum statutory requirement. Work experience of the Mogri Panchayat shows that it has not always been possible to adhere to this schedule. Informal rather than formal meetings often suit them well. There have been only three non-quorum meetings as against 95% of the total meetings being attended by more than 50% of the members. This indicates their sense of responsibility.
As agendas of the meetings show, Mogri panchayat handles 5 items per meeting, out of which 1 turns out to be special and 2 of general nature. Election period provides the busiest schedule of the agenda for the meetings. Financial and administrative matters alone consume 80% of panchayat's time. Next comes development functions. The political items on the agenda clearly prove that the Patidar members do not feel inhibited in using the panchayat machinery against their rivals. Unauthorised construction and recovery of arrears seem to be external problems with the panchayat administration. In cases of breach of regulations, the panchayat seems to have adopted the attitude of 'conflict avoidance'.

The experience of Mogri proves that so far the gram-sabha has remained an ineffective body, with the result that its influence on panchayat decisions has been rather negligible. Its recommendations are not seriously taken up and implemented. Participation in the discussion is confined to a few elders and members from the lower class generally occupy back-seats. However, it provides valuable occasion to the people to discuss their problems, openly and under common roof.