A **Gram Panchayat** is the **basic unit of local self-government at the village level in India**, functioning as the **grassroots democratic institution** under the **Panchayati Raj system**.

1. Meaning and structure

- A **Gram Panchayat** governs **one village or a group of small villages** and is the **lowest tier** of rural local government, above which are the **Panchayat Samiti (block level)** and **Zila Parishad (district level)**.
- It is an **elected body** with a fixed term (usually **five years**); if dissolved, fresh elections must be held within a specified period (often six months).

2. Key members

- **Sarpanch** – the **head of the Gram Panchayat**, elected (sometimes directly, sometimes by fellow members), and acts as the executive head.
- **Ward Members / Panchayat Members** – elected from different wards; they form the **Panchayat body** and take decisions through resolutions.
- **Secretary (Gram Sevak / Panchayat Secretary)** – a government-appointed officer who maintains records, prepares budgets, and assists the Panchayat in administration.

3. Main functions and responsibilities

Gram Panchayats perform both **mandatory** and **discretionary** functions for village welfare:

- **Infrastructure and services**
    - Construction and maintenance of **village roads, footpaths, drains, bridges, and street lighting**.
    - Supply and maintenance of **drinking water** and **sanitation facilities (toilets, public latrines, drainage)**.
- **Health, education, and welfare**
    - Supporting **public health, cleanliness, immunisation, and control of epidemics**.
    - Helping with **primary education**, school maintenance, and welfare schemes like pensions, housing, and food-security programmes.
- **Administration and records**
    - **Registration of births, deaths, and marriages.**
    - Maintenance of **village records** (population, crops, cattle, assets, etc.) and **community property** (schools, Anganwadis, offices, ponds, etc.).
- **Finance and taxes**
    - Preparing the **Gram Panchayat budget**, collecting **local taxes and fees**, and spending funds as per approvals.

- Ensuring **proper use of government grants and schemes** related to rural development.

4. Role in governance

- Gram Panchayat acts as a **bridge between the government and villagers**, implementing state and central rural-development schemes at the local level.
- It holds **periodic meetings** to discuss problems, approve works, and pass resolutions, promoting **participatory democracy** and local decision-making.