

Chapter 7

Urban Administration



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A city is much bigger than a village and more spread out. A city has crowded markets, many buses and cars, water and electricity facilities, traffic control and hospitals. Have you ever wondered who is responsible for running all this? Do you know how decisions are made? How the planning is done? Who are the people who do all the work? Read this chapter and find some answers.



One lazy Sunday afternoon Mala and her friends Shankar, Jehangir and Rehana were playing a game of cricket in the street.

Shankar had bowled a good over and although he nearly managed to get Rehana out, she was still batting. Frustrated, he bowled a short ball and hoped she would hit it for an easy catch. Instead, Rehana hit the ball so hard and so high that the street light broke. Rehana screamed, "Oh no, look what I've done!" Shankar said, "Yes! we forgot to make a rule that if you break the street light you are automatically out."

But Mala, Jehangir and Rehana were more worried about what had happened and they told Shankar he'd better stop thinking about the wicket.

Last week they had broken Nirmala Mausi's window and had spent their pocket money to have it replaced. Would they have to dish out money again from their pockets? But who would they pay this to? To whom did the lights on the streets belong? Who changed them?

Rehana's house was the closest and they ran and told her mother what had happened. Rehana's mother said, "I don't really know these things in great



detail but I do know that it is the Municipal Corporation of the city that takes care of replacing lights. The best person to ask would be Yasmin Khala. She just retired from the Municipal Corporation. Go and ask her, and Rehana come back home soon."

Yasmin Khala lived in the same lane and she and Rehana's mother were good friends. The children ran to Khala's house and when she opened the door they began to tell her what had happened all at once! When they asked about the street light, Yasmin Khala laughed and said, "There is no one person that you can pay the money to. There is a big organisation called the Municipal Corporation that takes care of street lights, garbage collection, water supply, keeping the streets and the market clean."

"I've heard about the Municipal Corporation. They've put up signs around the city to inform people about malaria," said Mala.

"Yes, you are quite right. The Municipal Corporation is also responsible for ensuring that diseases do not break out in the city. It also runs schools, hospitals and dispensaries. And makes gardens and maintains them," said Yasmin Khala. Then she added, "Our city Pune is a big city and

List at least four different tasks that the Municipality does:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



so here it is called a Municipal Corporation. In smaller towns it is called a Municipal Council."

The Ward Councillor and Administrative Staff

"Yasmin Khala, I'm curious. Who decides where a park should go? Did you have to make interesting decisions like this when you worked in the Municipal Corporation?" asked Rehana.

"No Rehana, I was working in the accounts office of the Corporation so I just worked on pay slips. Cities are usually quite large so the Municipal Corporation has to make a lot of decisions as well as do a lot of work to keep the city clean. The decisions like where a park or a new hospital should go are usually made by the Ward Councillors."



The city is divided into different wards and ward councillors get elected. The complicated decisions that affect the entire city are taken by groups of councillors who form committees to decide and debate issues. For example, if bus stands need to be improved, or a crowded market-place needs to have its garbage cleared more regularly, or there is a 'nala' or drain that cuts through the city that needs cleaning etc. It is these committees for water, garbage collection, street lighting etc. that decide on the work to be done.

When the problems are within a ward then the people who live in the ward can contact their councillors. For example, if there are dangerous electrical wires hanging down then the local Councillor can help them get in touch with the electricity authority.

While the Councillor's Committees and the councillors decide on issues, the Commissioner and the administrative staff implement these. The Commissioner and the administrative staff are appointed. Councillors are elected.

"So how are these decisions made?" asked Rehana who never gave up on her train of thought.

"Well, all of the Ward Councillors meet and they make a budget and the money is spent according to this. The Ward Councillors try and ensure that the particular demands of their wards are placed before the entire council. These decisions are then implemented by the administrative staff," said Yasmin Khala, enjoying the questions

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below:

1. In a panchayat the elected members are called _____.
2. The city is divided into several _____.
3. In a municipal corporation the elected members are called _____.
4. Groups of councillors deal with issues that affect the _____.
5. Elections are held once every _____ years for the panchayat as well as for the municipality.
6. While the councillors make decisions the administrative staff led by the Commissioner _____ these.

How does the Municipal Corporation get its money?

Providing and running so many services requires a lot of money. The Municipal Corporation collects this in different ways. A tax is a sum of money that people pay to the government for the services the government provides. People who own homes have to pay a property tax as well as taxes for water and other services. The larger the house the more the tax. Property taxes however form only 25-30 per cent of the money that a Municipal Corporation earns.

There are also taxes for education and other amenities. If you own a hotel or shop then you have to pay a tax for this as well. Also the next time you go to see a movie look carefully at your ticket because you pay a tax for this as well. Thus while rich people account for property taxes, a much wider population pays more general taxes.



that the children asked. No adults asked her about her job and the children's questions provided her an opportunity to relive some of her experiences.

"But the city is so large. It must take a lot of people to look after it. Does the Municipal Corporation have a lot of workers?" asked Shankar curiously. He had by now luckily forgotten about the cricket match and his incomplete over.

"Yes, the work in the city is divided into different departments. So there is the water department, the garbage collection department, a department to look after gardens, another to look after roads. I worked on accounts in the sanitation department," said Yasmin Khala and then went on to offer the children some kababs to eat.

Jehangir ate his kababs at top speed and as he wolfed them down he asked loudly from the kitchen, "Yasmin Khala where does the garbage that the Municipal Corporation collects go to?". The others were still eating when Yasmin Khala began to answer, "This question has an interesting answer. As you know you can usually find garbage lying all over the street. Earlier even our neighbourhood used to have garbage lying all over, and if this



Recycling is not a new thing. People like the man in the photo above have been recycling paper, metal, glass and plastic for a long time. The kabadi wallah plays a major role in recycling household plastic and paper, including your note books.

remains uncollected it attracts dogs, rats and flies. Also, people get ill from the smell. At one point things became so bad that children even stopped playing cricket in the street because their parents were afraid that they'd get sick from staying on the streets too long."

A Community Protest

Yasmin Khala continued, "The women were very unhappy about the situation and even came to me for advice. I said I could try and speak with some officer in the department but I wasn't sure how long it would take. Then it was Gangabai who said that it is the Ward Councillor who we should go to and protest since we are the ones who



What has changed since Khala retired?

What Yasmin Khala did not mention to the children was that in recent times, in order to save money the Commissioners of several municipalities across the country had hired private contractors to collect and process garbage. This is called Sub-Contracting. This means that the work that was earlier being done by government workers is now being done by a private company.

These contract workers get paid less and their jobs are temporary. Collecting garbage is also quite a dangerous job and often these contract workers do not have any access to safety measures and are not taken care of if they are injured while working.

elected him. She gathered a small group of women and went to his house. They began shouting slogans in front of his house and he came out and asked them what was wrong.

Gangabai described the situation in the locality to him. He promised to go with them the next day to meet the Commissioner. He asked Gangabai to get a petition signed by all of the adults in the locality saying that garbage was not being collected. He suggested that taking the local sanitation engineer with them the next day might be a good idea. The sanitation engineer could also speak with the Commissioner and tell him how bad the situation was. That evening children ran from house to

house making sure that as many families as possible signed the petition.

The next morning a large group of women and the Ward Councillor and the sanitation engineer went to the Municipal Corporation office. The Commissioner met with this large group and began giving excuses saying that the Corporation did not have enough trucks. But Gangabai smartly replied, "But you seem to have enough trucks to collect garbage from the rich localities".

"That must have left him lost for words," quipped Jehangir.

"Yes, he said that he would take care of it immediately and Gangabai threatened that if it was not done in two days a larger group of women would protest in front of the Corporation," said Yasmin Khala. "So did the streets get cleaned?" asked Rehana who never let things remain unfinished.

"Well not within two days and then after another larger and more noisy protest the sanitation service in this locality became more regular."

"Wow this sounds just like a Bollywood film with a happy ending,"

What was Gangabai protesting about?

Why do you think Gangabai decided to approach the Ward Councillor?

What did Gangabai say when the Commissioner said that there were not enough trucks in the city?



said Mala who already began imagining herself in the lead role of Gangabai.

The children enjoyed hearing Gangabai's story immensely. They had sensed that Gangabai was much loved and respected and now they understood why. They got up and thanked Khala for answering their questions and then, before they left, Rehana said, "Oh, I have one last question Khala. The two dustbins that we have at home now, are they also Gangabai's idea?"

Khala began laughing. "No, not really. The Municipal Corporation was the one who suggested that we do this to help keep our streets clean. When we sort our own garbage it reduces their work."

The children thanked Khala and walked back down the street together. It had become quite late and they needed to get back home. For some reason the street seemed darker than usual. They looked up and then looked at each other smiling and ran right back to Khala's house...

The city of Surat had a plague scare in 1994. Surat was one of the dirtiest cities in India. Houses, hotels and restaurants would dump their garbage into the nearest drain or street which made it very difficult for sweepers to collect and transfer the garbage into selected dumps. In addition to this, the Municipal Corporation did not collect the garbage as often as it should have and this led to the situation getting worse. Plague spreads through the air and people who have the disease have to be isolated. In Surat, several people lost their lives, and over 300,000 deserted the city. The scare of the plague ensured that the Municipal Corporation completely cleaned up the city. Surat continues to remain one of the cleanest cities in India.

Do you know when and how often garbage gets collected in your neighbourhood? Do you think it is the same for all neighbourhoods of the city? Why not? Discuss.

Did you know that your taxes enable the government to provide roads, bridges, parks, and street lights? List three more benefits that the taxes help in funding, after discussing with your family:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



QUESTIONS

1. Why did the children go to Yasmin Khala's house?
2. List four ways in which the work of the Municipal Corporation affects the life of a city-dweller.
3. Who is a Municipal Councillor?
4. What did Gangabai do and why?
5. How does the Municipal Corporation earn the money to do its work?

Photo 1



Photo 2



6. Discuss

In the two photographs you see different ways of collecting and disposing garbage.

- i) Which way do you think provides safety to the person disposing garbage?
- ii) What are the dangers of collecting garbage in the manner shown in the first photograph?
- iii) Why do you think that proper ways of disposing garbage are not available to those who work in municipalities?



7. Several poor people in the city work as domestic servants as well as work for the Corporation, keeping the city clean. Yet the slums in which they live are quite filthy. This is because these slums seldom have any water and sanitation facilities. The reason often given by the Municipal Corporation is that the land in which the poor have set up their homes does not belong to them and that slum-dwellers do not pay taxes. However people living in middle class neighbourhoods pay very little in taxes compared to the amount of money the corporation spends on them in setting up parks, street lighting facilities, regular garbage collection etc. Also as you read in this chapter, the property taxes collected by the Municipality makes up only 25-30 per cent of its money. Why do you think it is important that the Corporation should spend more money on slum localities? Why is it important that the Municipal Corporation provide the poor in the city with the same facilities that the rich get?
8. Look at the image below.



The Government of India launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on 2 October 2014 to promote cleanliness in both rural and urban areas all over the nation. Under the “Swachh Bharat, Swachh Vidyalaya” campaign, many activities are also being carried out in schools to generate awareness on sanitation and hygiene amongst students. Observe the ways in which “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan” is being implemented by municipality / panchayat in your locality. Prepare a poster and display it in your school.

