CHAPTER-IX

CONCLUSION

India’s experiments with local self government go back to ancient times. Ancient and medieval inscriptions attest to the marvellous arrangements of local self government. In some form or other this tradition continued even during the British period. The viceroyalty of Lord Rippon had given a new thrust to decentralisation in local administration. But the decentralisation as conceived by the British had given more powers to those villagers who would become the loyal supporters of the British.

Things began to change after India’s independence. Democracy through general elections, emergence of regional political parties and government’s schemes like green revolution, contributed to political awakening in the country side.

So long as the congress hegemony was there up to 1967, the local administration was organised haphazardly in Tamil Nadu. After 1967 the local governments came to be dominated by non-congress parties. It is to be noted that the entry of parties in the village politics coincided with the Dravidian politics and its propaganda against the congress. But when the date was announced of election all the political parties vied with one another to nominate party candidates for the election. Previously the President of the village Panchayat was elected indirectly by ward members.

The functions of the Musiri Panchayat Union are classified into three namely

(i) OBLIGATORY FUNCTIONS,
(ii) DISCREATIONARY FUNCTIONS,
(iii) DEVELOPMENTAL FUNCTIONS
Obligatory functions are more important than the other functions. It fulfils the essential needs of the people. The obligatory functions are as follows,

A. Construction and maintenance of roads and drainages,
B. Lighting facilities in the streets and public places,
C. Protection of drinking water, establishment of maternity and child welfare centres.

A. Planting and preserving trees on public roads of the village,
B. Opening and maintenance of public markets and public libraries,
C. Maintenance of births and deaths in the village, and social education centres.

Developmental functions include all the areas of agriculture, animal husbandry, co-operatives, and health centres.

People benefited through functions of the Musiri Panchayat Union in many ways. Panchayats help the people to improve their standard of life. In the case of women the Panchayats provide loan and improve their standard of life. Group houses for SC/ST were permitted. Loan with subsidy facilities were also provided for unemployed persons in the scheme of self-employment.

People were benefiting through the welfare activities of the Panchayat Unions. For the success of these welfare programmes people’s participation is essential.

The three tier system is one of the best systems for the welfare of the people. It help’s the people to understand the democratic system of government. They have more changes for village development. The three tier systems of local administration have more power. But they do not function more effectively because of financial
difficulties. The smooth functioning of Panchayat union needs a good relationship between the Chairman and Block Development Officer and Commissioners.

Ordinarily the president shall put the amendment to the vote in the order in which they have been moved on any resolution and several points would be discussed. It shall be the discretion of the president to divide the resolution into points and put each of such points separately to the vote. No discussion shall be permitted on a motion for leave to withdraw except with the permission of the president.

Grama Sabha has been granted constitutional status by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. It is the only body in the newly created tiers of PRIs, which provides the citizens a space and opportunity to participate in matters, which concern their lives. The Constitutional Amendment Act defines Grama Sabha as a “body consisting of persons registered in the electoral roles relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level” (Article 243). “Village” means a village specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purposes of this Part and includes a group of villages so specified” [Article 243(g)]. Therefore, Grama Sabha of a particular village refers to “All persons whose names are included in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of a Village Panchayat” [Section 3 (3)]. It is the village assembly of voters. An institution is made synonymous with its members who are the voters in a constituency. This is a revolutionary concept demanding a total commitment to responsive governance.

The three tiers of Panchayats do not provide for direct democracy but continue with the practice of representative democracy. Grama Sabha is the only forum which can ensure direct democracy. It offers equal opportunity to all the citizens of a village
to discuss, criticize and approve or reject the proposals of the Panchayat execute and assess its past performance and is a watchdog of democracy at the grassroots level.

Grama Sabhas are envisaged in the Musiri block, as people’s platform for serving, individually and collectively, their needs, wishes, aspirations, suggestions, plans and solutions to individual and collective problems existing at the village level. Grama Sabha are envisaged as a form of direct democracy where people are given a chance not only in electing their representatives but also in discussing, deciding and participating in the developmental activities of the Panchayat. The elected representative of a particular constituency is the convener of the respective Grama Sabha and in his ability to perform the functions, the Panchayat President may appoint a member representing any adjacent constituency as the convener [Section 3(4)].

Every meeting of Grama Sabha was presided over by the president of the Village Panchayat or in his absence, the Vice-President, or in the absence of both of them by the convener of the Grama Sabha.

The Village Panchayat shall place before the Grama Sabha (i) a report relating to the developmental programmes relating to the constituency during the previous year and those that are proposed to be undertaken during the current year, (ii) their expenditure, (iii) the annual statement of accounts and (iv) the administration report of the preceding year. The Grama Sabha should, in its ordinary meeting or in a special meeting convened for the purpose, discuss the report referred to in sub-section (6) of Section 3 and it has the right to know about the budgetary provisions, the details of plan outlay, item wise allocation of funds and details of the estimates and
cost of materials of works executed or proposed to be executed within the area of the
Grama Sabha.

When beneficiaries are to be identified according to any scheme, project or
plan, the criterion for eligibility and order of priority are fixed by the Panchayat
subject to the terms and conditions prescribed in the scheme, project or plan and such
criterion was published in the manner prescribed and intimated to the Grama
Sabha[3A(8)]. The priority list prepared by Grama Panchayat after inviting
applications for the selection of beneficiaries and conducting enquiries on the
application received, was scrutinized at the meeting of the Gramma Sabha in which
the applicants were also invited and final list of the deserving beneficiaries, in the
order of priority, shall be prepared and sent for the approval of the Grama Panchayat.
The Village Panchayat has no power to change the order of priority in the list sent by
the Grama Sabha for approval [3A(9)].

The proposals for development programmes are usually initiated at Grama
Sabha based on people’s needs and interests. People are empowered to raise in the
Grama Sabha meetings any question within the items listed in the XI Schedule of the
73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Similarly, people are given opportunities
to raise such issues in the Grama Sabha meetings. Responsiveness of the Grama
Sabha consists in its exercise of the rights, carrying out its functions, fulfilling its
responsibilities and abiding by its duties-all for the benefit of the people .Grama
Sabhas make plans in a limited way for the development of the people and
implement them in the areas prescribed in the XI Schedule.
There are nearly 1,00,000 Self-Help Groups in Tamil Nadu. These Self-Help Groups have not got buildings of their own to conduct meetings, store and display their products and to hold training programmes. It is therefore proposed to provide each Self-Help Group Centre in a Panchayat during 2002-2003. 6309 Centres were constructed at a cost of Rs.47.32 crores. In Musiri Block of Tiruchirappalli District 1000 Self-Help Groups are concentrated in the rural development activities.

Marketing of rural products is presently done in many cases by the rural poor themselves or through Self-Help Groups/Co-operative/Society/Federation of which they are a member. Other channels of marketing are the Government Department or their Agencies, NGOs and private traders. However, the rural poor manufacturing the products units do not get a remunerative price for their products and are thereby deprived of their legitimate income through such economic activities as the middlemen and traders take away the bulk of the margins. The reason for this is that the rural poor have no access to market information and thus do not get a better price for their products through brand building, pricing, production, planning, control and publicity. It is, therefore, now proposed to set up District Information Service Centres in each district which would be located in the District Rural Development Agency which would provide market information and technological updates.

Poor village sanitation and lack of toilet facilities cause untold hardship and health hazards to the rural women and children. Providing such facilities in the rural areas would ensure privacy and safety besides improving general hygiene and health of rural women. Tamil Nadu’s coverage in rural sanitation is at present at 11 per cent only which is lower than national average of 15 per cent. Recognizing that women are
the major stakeholders in the water and sanitation sector, the Government have launched the Women’s Integrated Sanitary Complex to provide toilets and facilities of bathing and washing exclusively for women under one roof. This scheme started in the year 2001-2002 aims to cover the entire 12619 village Panchayats in the state, in order to enable women to have access to sanitation facilities. Each complex is spread over approximately 750 sq.ft with 10 toilets and three cubicles for bathing. Stone paved facilities are also provided where women can wash clothes. Each complex has an independent water connection to ensure that the users have a steady and continuous supply of water. A pump room and water tank are also part of the complex. The unit cost is Rs.2.0 lakhs per complex. This is designed as an enclosed facility where women can bathe and use the toilet facilities without being disturbed. This would have long term impact on women’s health and would result in more hygienic practices.

The operation and maintenance is the responsibility of the Village Panchayat and Self-Help Groups. Infrastructure maintenance including the water consumption charges and the cost of maintaining pump sets are borne by the Panchayats and the day-to-day maintenance is entrusted to women Self-Help Groups. Monitoring committees are formed at the village, block, district and state level. In the Musiri Block these schemes are well planned and established in the developmental manner.

There are many training programmes under the Self-Help Groups in Musiri.

For empowerment of the women, six training courses were sponsored by Tamil Nadu Corporation of Development of Women Limited, in which 201 members of Self-Help Groups were the trainees who were packed with information on various
enterprises, availability of raw materials, marketing facilities and Government schemes to promote them. Three trainings were sponsored by District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) covering the same above areas in which 120 members of Self-Help Groups participated and benefited from the Musiri block.

Training on preparing Soap and Phenyl and two trainings on cloth weaving were conducted with the support of Tamil Nadu Corporation of Development of Women Limited in which 52 Self- Help Groups members participated in 2001 in the Musiri Block. In order to facilitate with more practical knowledge and experience members of Self-Help Groups were taken on a exposure visit to institutions where these enterprise are successfully run. Those who underwent the training in sanitary articles too are in manufacturing process that started to earn some income for the family.

Health care has been a negligible one among the poor families. Tracing employment opportunities have occupied major portion of their time. Hence there is a need to make them understand better on health. Due to the negligence in the childhood the women face tremendous hardship when they grow adolescent. Considering the urgency the DRDA, Tamil Nadu Corporation of Development of Women Ltd., conducted the health programme for the women Self-Help Group members.

An advocacy workshop was conducted in 3 villages (Amoor, Gunaseelam, Vellur) of Musiri Blocks of Tiruchirappalli District for Self-Help Group leaders. The aim of this activity is to make all of them involve in the programme in one or the other way.
With the assistance of Tamil Nadu Corporation for Women’s Development Limited, Government of Tamil Nadu initiated “Mahalir Thittam” programme, DRDA of Tiruchirappalli District promoting Self-Help Groups programmes in Musiri Block also. Under this programme, Self-Help Groups are given two types of training one is exclusively for the animator and representatives of the group and the other is for the whole members in the group.

These trainings have helped the women to realize that a healthy portfolio could open the door to a high level of self-sufficiency at a low cost, through the possibilities for expansion provided by loans. As a result of the training and the women’s commitment, the programmes have not been plagued by delinquency. They have been able to create a culture in which late payment is simply unacceptable. This has been ingrained in by co-ordinators, the Self-Help Group members and farmers. It has been made clear that if women pay back on time, they can have access to further long terms loans.

Apart from the financial problems, another important factor for weak administration in Panchayat level is that the powers given to the Panchayat leaders are less than sufficient. They cannot work freely. Local funds must flow to the Panchayat Raj Institutions. The plan and non-Plan allocation have to be done with view to achieve equality among the three tier system in backward areas.

In Tamil Nadu, Panchayat administration is not free from influences of caste or money power. Four of the five village Panchayats in the Madurai district, where the posts of president were ‘auctioned’, were Ayyanarkulam, S.Keelapatti and Nallaneram and Vagurani, villages. In these villages a deposit of Rs. 1 lakh from each
contender was collected. The method was wherever there was single nomination for
the post, which was usually auctioned.

If this was the pattern of elections in the dominant caste villages, situation in
reserved constituencies was pathetic. No Dalit had filed papers in both the Papapatti
and Keeripatti reserved village Panchayats in the Usilampatti block. No nomination
was filed even for the wards of these two villages.

The Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) on March 28, 2002, brought two villagers to
file nominations for election to the post of president of the reserved village
Panchayats of Pappapatti and Keeripatti, where polls were to be held after seven
years.

The State Election Commission notified elections for these village Panchayats
as many as nine times, but no one filed nominations. While Nattarmangalam elected a
president in 1997, it did not allow any Dalit to file papers this time. Their papers were
delayed minutes after the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) managed to enter the fray,
overcoming strong caste-Hindu resistance. Caste-Hindu resistance to Dalit
empowerment has manifested itself in various forms since elections to local bodies
were first held in 1996 under the revised Tamil Nadu Panchayats Act, 1994.

When civic elections were held in 1996 and 2001, in several places caste-
Hindu groups attempted to get their village panchayats removed from the reserved
category. When such attempts failed, they tried to derail the electoral process itself by
preventing Dalits from filing nominations. If Dalits managed to file their papers, they
were not allowed to campaign in non-Dalit areas. Non-Dalits also resorted to poll boycott and even used force to scare away Dalits from polling booths. Caste-Hindu resistance continued after the elections. In several places, non-Dalits refused to cooperate with the elected Dalit presidents and ward members and humiliated them with the tacit approval of "upper caste" government officials.

The crudest expression of caste-Hindu intolerance was witnessed in the massacre of Murugesan, president of the Melavalavu village panchayat in Madurai district, and five other Dalits on June 29, 1997. Murugesan's crime was that he got elected as Panchayat president, a post reserved for Dalits, after defeating the caste-Hindu group's efforts to sabotage the election.

Besides Pappapatti and Keeripatti, elections to two more Panchayats reserved for Dalits, Nattarmangalam in Madurai district and Kottakachiyendal in Virudunagar district were not held in 1996 and October 2001 because of opposition from the predominant caste-Hindu groups in the villages - Piramalaikkallars (a sect of the Thevar caste).

If the Panchayat Raj bodies are to be transformed into effective units of Local Self-Government, they should be financially sound. Grants from the State Government for specified schemes initiated at the State level form the bulk of the Panchayat Raj budget. The Panchayat Raj bodies have practically no choice in the utilisation of these resources. It is imperative that these bodies are encouraged by providing them with adequate state funds.

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The strength of the Panchayat Raj Institutions depends to a large extent on their ability to mobilise local resources through taxation and other measures. At present, the only source or revenue to the Panchayats is the cess or surcharge on land revenue. The Panchayat Raj Institutions have to be effectively involved in the entire planning process, its formulation, implementation and resource mobilisation.

Most of the villagers are aware of the existence of Panchayats and the response of the villagers is quite favourable to Panchayats and their elected representatives. The people are closer to the Panchayat programmes than to the Community Development Programmes. The Panchayat Unions play an indispensable role in coordinating, directing and implementing the various rural development programmes initiated by the Government.

Panchayat Raj, as a development mechanism, primarily rests on power mechanism. Power to people for true democracy and development is the real objective which needs be fulfilled through devolution of powers and finances to the Panchaya Raj Institutions. Only then, people of all classes can participate in democracy in an effective manner. Rural people will get the opportunity to plan and administer their own affairs.

The powers now vested in the Panchayat are not commensurate with the duties and responsibilities assigned to them. As a result of this, many of the proposals, even on trivial matters, have to be sent to higher authorities for their approval. Lack of cooperation from some of the Government departments with which the Panchayats have to deal creates another difficult situation for the latter. In order to avoid these and other difficulties, the Panchayats should be given more powers, on administrative and
financial fields. It is in this connection that the government of Tamil Nadu has initiated a number of moves to effectively decentralise powers to the villages at every level.

**Government’s plans for Effective Decentralization:**

The Government of Tamil Nadu is committed to ensuring that the Panchayat Raj Institutions function as effective institutions of Local Self-Government. In 1996, soon after the conclusion of the first ordinary elections to the three tiers of Panchayats, the Government constituted the First High Level Committee under the Chairmanship of Thiru L.C. Jain, the then full-time Member of the State Planning Commission to give recommendations on the entrustment of powers and functions to the three tiers of Panchayats. The Committee submitted its report to the Government in April, 1997. The L.C. Jain Committee used 12 notations viz. Advise, Assist, Coordination, Establish and set up, Implementation, Identification of persons to be assisted, Inspection, Management and maintenance, Planning, Review, Supervision and Take over in respect of all the 29 items for demarcating roles and functions of the 3 tiers of Local Bodies. To operationalize its recommendations, the Committee suggested the following:

- Establishment pattern of Village Panchayats, Panchayat unions,

- Engagement of professionals and consultants for speedy development, right from village level up to district level.

- Human Resource Development for PRIs (Training, Sensitization and Attitudinal change).
• Scheme review powers to be given to Local Bodies.
• Need for efficient Accounts and Audit arrangements for Local Bodies.
• Preparation of Works Manuals for Local Bodies.
• Guidelines for Maintenance of Assets created and handed over to the Panchayat bodies.
• Creation of proper Management Information System.
• Constitution of various Committees of PRIs.
• PRIs to be given clear working instructions on how to exercise the functions transferred to them.

Many of the recommendations of the L.C. Jain Committee have been crystallized into action towards empowering the Panchayats. Apart from the Rural Development Department, other departments such as Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Forests, Social Welfare, Revenue, Khadi and Village Industries, Education, Health and Family Welfare, Adi-Dravidar Welfare, Co-operation, Food and Consumer Protection, have issued Government Orders for devolution of powers and functions in their respective spheres to the three tiers of Panchayats.

Ko. Si. Mani Committee:

Again, the Government constituted the Second High Level Committee under the Chairmanship of Thiru.Ko.Si.Mani, the then Minister for Rural Development and Local Administration with experienced persons including sitting MLAs of various political parties as members of the Committee to recommend more

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3 G.O. Ms. No. 320, Rural Development (C1) Department, dated 11.11.1997.
devolution of powers and functions to the Panchayats. This High Level Committee submitted its report on 11.1.1999 with 1209 recommendations to the Government. The Government accepted 718 recommendations and issued orders for their implementation.

The key recommendations of the Ko. Si. Mani Committee are:

• Strengthening and convening Grama Sabhas more frequently than the existing four times in a year.

• As in Panchayat Unions, appointment of engineers, junior assistants, water supply Maintenance staff in major Village Panchayats.

• To train the Panchayat staff in carrying out minor repairs for street light maintenance.

• Village Panchayats to be empowered to constitute Standing Committees.

• Collection of licence fees for Dangerous and Offensive Trades to be entrusted to Village Panchayats.

• Rural Welfare Officers to be redeployed for field work.

• The appointment of noon-meal staff like cook, ayah to be made by Appointment Committee in Panchayat Unions.

• A full time Secretary to be appointed for District Panchayats.

• Guidelines to be framed for five standing committees of District Panchayat.

• District Panchayat Chairperson to be made as a member of District Purchase Committee.

• District Collector to continue as the Chairperson of the District Planning
Committee.

- Direct Elections to elect Panchayat union Chairpersons and District Panchayat Chairpersons.
- Concurrent Audit and Continuous Audit to be introduced in all Local Bodies.
- All the assets created under R.D. schemes to be handed over to Village Panchayats and Panchayat unions. An asset maintenance grant may be allocated to Village Panchayats and Panchayat Unions.

M.K. Stalin Committee:

This Government, in continuance of its commitment to devolve greater powers and responsibilities to rural and urban Local Bodies, constituted the Third High Level Committee under the Chairmanship of the Hon’ble Minister for Rural Development and Local Administration, Thiru. M.K. Stalin in 2007. It had select District Panchayat Chairpersons, Panchayat Union Chairpersons and Village Panchayat Presidents besides certain subject experts as members. The Committee was required to study the duties, functions and powers already entrusted to the rural and urban Local Bodies and make recommendations for further devolution of the same in order to make them more effective.

The Third High Level Committee decided to get the views of as many stakeholders as possible before formulating its recommendations. In this context, the following strategies were adopted:

(i) Conduct of State Level Conference: A State Level Conference of Chairpersons of District Panchayats and Panchayat Unions, besides the urban Local
Bodies were held in the presence of the Hon’ble Chief Minister on 18.03.2007 at Chennai. A total of 27 District Panchayat Chairpersons and 363 Panchayat Union Chairpersons, besides the heads of urban Local Bodies participated in the Conference. Various issues pertaining to effective functioning of Local Bodies were deliberated upon and discussions held in this Conference.

(ii) Conduct of Regional Conferences of all Village Panchayat Presidents:
Recognizing the fact that 12,618 Village Panchayats represented the bottom of the three tier that performs some of the most important functions - the Hon’ble Minister for Rural Development and Local Administration, Thiru. M.K. Stalin, convened Regional Conferences of all Village Panchayat Presidents at Erode on 24.07.2007 at Tiruchirapalli on 25.07.2007 at Tiruvannamalai on 03.08.2007 and at Virudhunagar on 23.08.2007 to ascertain their views on devolution and the difficulties, if any, in their functioning. 11,984 Village Panchayats Presidents out of a total of 12,618 Presidents in Tamil Nadu participated in these Regional Conferences and made 47,108 recommendations.

(iii) Internal meetings were held to deliberate on various issues brought forth to the Committee through various forums, including the State Level and Regional Conferences of Local Body representatives.

(iv) Meetings were also held by the Chairman of the High Level Committee with Secretaries and Heads of Departments of various departments to deliberate upon devolution of further powers of rural Local Bodies on 11.10.2007 and 12.10.2007.

The Committee presented its report to the Chief Minister M. Karunanithi on 10.12.2007 and submitted a total of 99 recommendations categorized under 39
Some of the important recommendations of the third High Level Committee are highlighted below:

• Grama Sabha to act as a forum of Social Audit for all the schemes implemented by various Departments.

• Approval of the list of all individual beneficiary schemes to be done by Grama Sabha.

• Conversion of multi-member wards into single member wards in all the Village Panchayats as is there in the case of the Panchayat Unions and District Panchayats.

• Stability of tenure of rural and urban Local Body representatives by making the moving and passing of No Confidence Motions more stringent.

• Designating November 1st of every year as the “Local Bodies Day”.

• Empowering weaker Village Panchayats by enhancing their State Finance Commission grants and allocating the entire Central Finance Commission grants to Village Panchayats so as to enable them to meet the expenditure relating to water supply, electricity charges and sanitation.

• Pooling of assigned revenues of Local Cess, Local Cess Surcharge, and Surcharge on Stamp Duty and Entertainment tax at State Level and apportioning it to the districts thereafter.

• Giving Panchayat Raj Institutions greater operational independence by enhancing administrative sanction powers of Village Panchayats, Panchayat Unions and District Panchayats for works taken out of their General Funds.
• Rationalisation of Village Panchayat Accounts.

• Issue of Identity Cards to the Heads of three tiers of Panchayat and for the Members of Panchayat Unions and District Panchayats.

• Making BDOs (Village Panchayats) as separate Pay Drawing Officers.

• Provision of Telephone facility to all Village Panchayats.

• Provision of Wireless set to Panchayat Unions.

• Vehicles for Panchayat Raj Institutions and key functionaries of Rural Development Department.

• Revival of Namakku Naame Thittam.

• Formulation of Panchayat Union School Renovation Programme.

• Setting up of Libraries and Sports Centres in all Panchayats under AGAMT.

• Designating Village Panchayats as ‘Village Level Committee’ for selecting the beneficiaries and implementing the schemes of various other departments at Village level.

It is important to note that most of the recommendations have already been accepted by the Government and necessary orders issued.

**Panchayat at Work**

The New Panchayat Raj System came into being in Tamil Nadu after enacting a new law for local body institutions in the year 1994. The DMK came to power in 1996 and it had decided to conduct the election as per its promise to the people during
the campaigning. The conduct of elections to local bodies has given life to grassroots democracy.

The salient features of the new Act are as follows:

a) A three tier system;

b) Gram Sabha;

c) Establishment of Election Commission;

d) Constitution of Finance Commission;

e) Reservation of seats for SC/ST proportionate to their population;

f) One-third reservation of seats for women; and

g) Constitution of District Planning Committee.

**Gram Sabha:**

Gram Sabha is the nucleus of the New Panchayat Raj System. All the registered voters are the members of the Gram Sabha of that village Panchayat. As per the Act it has to meet thrice a year and at least once a year. Gram Sabha has to give approval to the budget approval to the annual plan of the village Panchayat. Further it has to give approval to the annual audited statement on the expenditure of the village Panchayat. One third forms the quorum to transact the business of the Gram Sabha as per the Act. In Tamil Nadu Gram Sabha is a unit in the local body arrangement as both elected leaders and the officials has now shown an interest in it. As per the Government orders, even beneficiaries for many government schemes are to be selected only in the Gram Sabha. But in reality it does not happen.
Beneficiaries are selected not in Gram Sabha but in Panchayat council which is violative of the provision of the Local Body of Tamil Nadu. Government of Tamil Nadu emphasizes the transparent activities in all government’s programmes and schemes but there is no way to execute it as Gram Sabha is made default. It is a nightmare to many who have been enjoying power and resources all along. In order to strengthen the Gram Sabha recently government passed an order that all Gram Panchayats have to convene Gram Sabha meeting four times in a year on 15th August, 2nd October, 26th January and 1st May and transact the activities as per the provisions available in the Act. Further quern of Gram Sabha has been reduced from one-third to one-tenth. Officials from all the Government offices akin to development will also participate in the Gram Sabha meetings as observer of the meeting and he/she will report the proceeding to the inspector of Panchayat.

**Village Panchayat:**

A village Panchayat or Gram Panchayat is constituted for a minimum of five hundred populations. Village Panchayat has got members ranging from of five maximum of five fifteen. For Village Panchayat the ward members and the president are to be elected directly by the voters. Vice-President of the Village Panchayat is elected indirectly among the elected ward members of the village Panchayat has to look after the following subjects:

a) Construction, repair and maintenance of village Panchayat roads;

b) Lighting of public roads and public places;

c) Providing drainage facilities;
d) Cleaning of streets;

e) Providing public latrines;

f) Providing burial and burning grounds;

g) Providing water for washing by the Government then and there.

To enable Village Panchayat to perform its functions the following decisions have been taken and notified through Government orders:

a) All village Panchayats will get financial resources from the Government directly without any intermediary. Panchayat Union or Block Panchayat will not interfere in the process;

b) Gram Panchayat President has been designated as Executive Heads and they have been entrusted with powers and responsibilities;

c) Village Panchayat roads can be taken up for works with the resolution of the Panchayats;

d) Facilities like street light, water supply can be maintained and attended to if there is any damage;

e) Part time clerks can be appointed by the Panchayat president.

f) House construction plan approval has to be given by the village Panchayats;

g) Beneficiaries for the central government schemes and programme have to be selected by the Gram Panchayat in the Gram Sabha;

h) New Library and information centre in the village has to be established by the village Panchayat.
Panchayat Union:

For each development block a Panchayat union is formed. Each Panchayat union has a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson elected indirectly by the members of the Panchayat council. Union Council Members are elected directly by the people. For every 5,000 population, one union council member will be elected by the people. Member of Parliament and Legislative Assembly elected from that area are ex-officio members of the Panchayat union council.

Panchayat union has the following duties and responsibilities:

a) Construction, repair and maintenance of public roads;

b) Establishment and maintenance of dispensaries;

c) Construction and maintenance of elementary schools;

d) Preventive and remedial measures connected with any epidemic;

e) Conduct of fairs and festivals;

f) Veterinary relief;

g) Opening and maintenance of Panchayat Union markets;

h) Extension of village sites and regulation of building;

i) Maintenance of statistics related to births and deaths;

j) Improvement of agriculture and agriculture stock;

k) Promotion and encouragement of cottage industries; and

l) Other duties and responsibilities entrusted to Panchayat Union by the Government through Government notification.
To enable the Panchayat union to perform its duties the Government of Tamil Nadu has issued notification to take up the following activities:

a) Construction and maintaining Panchayat union roads, irrigation tanks, and lakes, initiating family welfare activities, executing noon meal schemes and implementing schemes for Adi-Dravidas.

b) Works have to be identified from Employment Assurance schemes and they are to be executed;

c) Draught relief works have to be identified and executed;

d) M.P and M.L.A area development schemes akin to union have to be executed;

e) Panchayat union buildings have to be maintained by the union itself;

f) Panchayat union can supervise the activities in the domain of public health, primary education, drinking water supply, roads, small culverts, khadi and village industries works, technical training education, libraries, rural electricity and non-conventional energy.

Panchayat union administrative arrangement has been classified into two divisions and entrusted to Block Development Officer and Assistant Block Development Officer. Two sections work independently with their supporting staff. Infrastructural facilities have also been divided and attached to two divisions.

**District Panchayat:**

District Panchayat is constituted with the directly elected members for every 50,000 population and indirectly elected Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson among the council members. Members of Parliament and State Legislative Assembly of
that area are the ex-officio member of the District Panchayat Council. District Panchayat will have to perform the following functions:

a) Advise the government in all matters concerning Panchayat Raj institutions particularly on services and development programmes;

b) Watching the progress of the measures undertaken by the government, village Panchayat and Panchayat union councils in the districts as under the administrative control of the districts;

c) Classification of markets fairs and public roads under Panchayat Raj control, and

d) Collection of data, publication of statistics, demanding any information from village Panchayats and Panchayat union councils.

To enable the district Panchayat to perform the earmarked functions, an administrative change has been effected and by which the Divisional Development Office which is nearer to the district head quarters will supervise the district Panchayat activities. Yet another office which is away from the head quarters will look after auditing of the district Panchayat activities and the third one will be attached to district Panchayat.

**District Planning Committee:**

Government of Tamil Nadu shall constitute in every district a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the district Panchayat, Panchayat union councils, village Panchayats, municipal councils, and municipal corporations in the district and to prepare a draft development plan for the district as a whole. The
committee shall consist of the Collector of the district, members of the House of people who represent whole or part of the district, members of the council of states, members of Legislative Assembly whose constituencies lie within the district, Mayor of the city municipal corporation and all Chairpersons of the municipalities of the district, Chairperson of the district Panchayat, one-fifth of the total number of Chairpersons of town Panchayats and Panchayat union notified by the government every year by rotation, and such number of persons not less than four-fifth of the total number of the committee as specified by the government elected from among the members of district Panchayat, town Panchayat, municipal councils and corporation in the district in proportion to the ratio between the population of the rural areas and of the urban areas. The District Collector is the Chairperson, district Panchayat president is the Vice-Chairperson and Chief Executive Officer of the district Panchayat is secretary of the District Planning Committee. The Committee shall allocate funds to various schemes to the Panchayat and Panchayat union and shall monitor the implementation of schemes. Now the Government has changed the Chairmanship of District Planning Committee from the Collector to the President of District Panchayat.

M.K.Stalin Committee’s suggestions for effective decentralization are more in tune with changing times. It may take some years to put all of them into practice and realize their goals. But attempt, though late, is already being made. This is good trend and in right direction for the real empowerment of the people and strengthening of democracy at village level where caste and communal interests predominate. Political
churning has made a dent in the age old institution and this is the beginning of the end of vested interests in village India, more particularly rural Tamil Nadu.