CHAPTER-I
INTRODUCTION

Panchayat literally means Council of five elders chosen to look after the welfare of the village. The headman of the Panchayat is called ‘President’ and its Councillors are known as ‘Members’. An ancient village of India was considered more or less a self-supporting, miniature republic. It produced its own food and clothing. It managed its own affairs and meted out justice to the satisfaction of villagers. The Panchayat was responsible for all round development, peace, order and happiness of the community. When the Panchayat decides on something, it was seldom challenged.

This research work was devoted to the study of administrative aspects of the functioning of village Panchayats such as finance, personnel, meetings, Gramasabha and government control. Due attention was focussed on the ethos and demeanour of the village people. The pattern of relationship between Panchayat Raj institutions and State Government has been a subject of controversy, which is in fact related to the nature of Panchayat Raj itself.

The ideological basis of the Panchayat Raj Institutions was provided by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report. After evaluation of the functioning of Common Development Programme, the committee recommended the three tier structure of Panchayat Raj. The Common Development Programme was merged in the scope of Panchayat Raj Institutions. Now the Panchayat Raj Institutions are entrusted

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with the task of rural development. It has completed about five decades of its working. It is necessary to evaluate the working of Panchayat Raj Institutions.

The purpose, strength and success of the Panchayat Raj Institutions depend heavily on the creation and development of the right type of leadership which could hopefully achieve Panchayat Raj organizations to benefit all people including the weaker sections of the community.

**Purpose of Study:**

The purpose of this research work is to highlight some administrative drawbacks of Panchayat Raj planning process and some administrative difficulties faced by Panchayat Raj officials while formulating and implementing rural development plans. This is necessary because the planning process and personnel system are inter-dependent. Scientific and systematic planning, adequate formulation and proper implementation depend on strong and efficient personnel system.

This study concentrated on the following aspects:

(a) Formation of development plans,
(b) Construction of the public roads, school buildings, buildings for balwadis, street light facilities and drinking water facilities.
(c) And also provision of recreation facilities such as the libraries, sports room for youth, open play ground and the computer room.

**The Area of the Study:**

This study is confined to Panchayat administration in Tiruchirappalli district and it specially analyses the importance and the development of Panchayat Raj in Musiri block. It has 14 Panchayat blocks, but this study is concerned with Musiri
block only. Musiri block has 33 Panchayats and 98 villages. This work also concentrated on the functioning of the Women Self-Help groups in the blocks.

**Objectives of Study:**

The following are the objectives of the study.

1. To study in detail and analyse the Panchayat Raj system in Musiri block,
2. To study the origin and development of Panchayat Raj,
3. To study the powers and functions of the Musiri Panchayat Union,
4. To document the processes involved in the Panchayat Raj administration,
5. To study the Self-Help Groups activities in the Musiri block,
6. To examine the problem of finance of the Panchayat Raj Institutions in view of the liberalisation process and resource crunch.

**Review of Literature:**

Panchayat Raj system has been a well researched topic. There are quite a lot of government publications in the form of various committee reports on Panchayat Raj. Apart from government publications, umpteen numbers of scholars have written books on Panchayat Raj. Some studies on Panchayat Raj system has an all India character and whereas some studies concentrate on state, district, blocks and Panchayat level.

After the 73rd constitutional Amendment some scholars have written books on Panchayat Raj system. Let us review the following authors.

Vasanth Desai analysed the link between Panchayats and Rural Development and revealed that Panchayat or the institution of village council is as old as Indian History. From time immemorial, the people in rural India have lived in villages as a
self governing community. According to Sir Charles Metcalf the village communities were little republics, having nearly everything they wanted within themselves.  

Sancheti assessed the impact of various rural development programmes on the economic life of the weaker sections and concluded that the benefits to those sections have accrued more in indirect than in the sense of higher wages owing to better employment opportunities and better bargaining capacity on account of increasing political and economic consciousness. But the direct benefits in distribution of loans, subsidies, improved seeds, fertilizers, implements, etc, have not gone to these sections to any considerable extent.  

Maddick in respect of rural local government in India discussed that the Panchayat raj is playing a great role in certain areas, particularly in promoting social changes, economic development and the intelligent administration of representative government. Finally, he suggested that co-operatives, voluntary associations, private firms and individuals and development agencies dealing with different aspects of rural development all as have contributed to the process of efficient Panchayat administration.  

Khilberg also discussed the role and importance of Panchayat raj for socio-economic development in rural area.

Maheswari in his State governments in India, described the structure, personnel, finance and functioning of rural as well as urban local governments. He concluded that inadequate financial resources, low pay seeds, incompetent personnel,

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3 Sancheti, Rural Development (Delhi, 1969), p.11.
4 Maddick, Local Government in India (Delhi, 1970), p.18.
excessive interference by the state government impeding thereby a healthy growth of local government, intervention of the politicians in the day to day administration, widespread corruption, nepotism and favouritism in the local civil services are cited as some of the major causes for ineffectiveness of local governments.\(^5\)

Indira Hirway in his Panchayat Raj at Cross roads, examined how Panchayat raj structures set up in our country were not doing very well and that there was a need to revitalise them. There is basically a need to evolve a comprehensive concept of Panchayat raj which clearly spells out as to what kind of role is expected from it. It is important to realize that representative participation may not lead to mass participation in our kind of socioeconomic power structure. Changing this structure or at least strengthening the position of the poor against exploitation is an important requirement for the success of Panchayat raj.\(^6\)

Singh examined the role of Panchayats in Rural Water Supply and sanitation programme and revealed that the concern expressed by the government to provide basic services to the people was genuine. But it required real devolution of powers and resources. Focusing on the key issue involved in the provision of drinking water and sanitation, Panchayats will be the most suitable vehicle for planning, implementation and maintenance of the programme to make it sustainable. Dissemination of information helps to promote the right perceptions speeding up the process of people’s participation.\(^7\)

MahiPal analyses on Panchayat Raj the hold of bureaucracy and suggested two immediate measures. First, all the district and sub district level state government employees dealings with the Panchayat system should be put under the direct control of these local bodies. Their annual confidential reports should also be written by Chairpersons of the Panchayats. This type of arrangement had already been made in Karnataka during 1987-92 by Ramakrishna Hegde then chief minister. Secondly, those states where enabling provision for recruiting the Panchayat employees of certain categories by Panchayat Raj Institutions themselves has been made, such provision should be invoked immediately.  

Moinder Singh in his study Role of Gram Panchayat After 73rd Constitutional Amendments in Haryana argued that the provisions made in the Act representation given to SC’s, BC’s, OBC’s and women in the gram Panchayat would contribute much more towards improving the lot of rural masses in general.  

Dewal and Chitlangi showed that a unique experiment made by creating vigilance committees by the gram sabha fully accountable to gram sabha in financial matters worked well in Rajasthan. The members of gram sabha had first hand knowledge of what had been proposed and what was actually done. The effective working of Gram Panchayat largely depended on the assistance and co-operation of gram sabha.  

Vasant Desai in his scientific study rural development programme and strategies revealed the meaning and content of rural development at the grass root level. Development by definition is the act or process of developing within the

\[8\] Mahipal, Panchayat Raj (Bangalore 1996), p.12.
framework of available resources. Its primary aim in India is the removal of poverty and all the socio-economic evils which are interred linked with it. Rural Development is, therefore, a conscious effort at raising the standard of living people, living in 5,75,000 villages in India. Rural development implies a fuller development of existing resources, including, the construction of infrastructure such as roads, irrigation works, the introduction of technology, the revival of traditional arts and crafts and the creation of new types of institutions and organization.  

Palanithurai’s study of New Panchayat Raj in Tamil Nadu, analyses cases of Panchayat Leaders of Gram Panchayats, Block Panchayat and district Panchayat especially the Women Leaders. It is well known fact that the success of Panchayat institutions is always influenced by a constellation of factors from the content of the Central Act to the intent of the leaders who assume responsibilities in Panchayats at the grass root level. 

He argues that the Tamil Nadu Panchayat Raj Act is in adequate to enable the local bodies to get adequate administrative and financial powers to declare the local bodies as self-governing institutions. The officials who are all working in the local bodies up to district Panchayats are not accountable to the local bodies. Local bodies are to be equipped to mobilize and generate resources on their own. The local body leaders have to be trained in the art of managing development instead of practicing as contractors to execute the schemes of the governments. Likewise the officials are to be oriented to work in consonance with the objectives and principles of Panchayats.

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People should be given a sense that Panchayats are not Panchayat of officials but of the people. They should be given orientation in preparing plans at the local level to bring development in the rural areas.

Sanjay Prakash Sharma states one of the major strengths of the new dispensation, i.e. the greater participation of women and scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in the process of development through reservations in the Panchayats. He states further that it may take time for these disenfranchised groups to wrest power from the existing elites. But evidence suggests that overtime these groups would have a greater role in the decision making process. Clearly, there is a need to build up the capacity and organisational ability of the Panchayat members to enable them to perform their tasks efficiently and in a effective manner.

Most recent work edited by political scientists has covered a wide range of subjects, ranging from local government, leadership, finance to more effective devolution of powers.11

Methodology:

The methodology adopted in this study is partly descriptive and partly interpretative. The study is based on the analysis of the working of Musiri Panchayat Union, mainly on four village Panchayats.

Various methodological tools were adopted for data collection. Data was collected from primary and secondary sources. A fieldwork was conducted to collect data pertaining to various aspects of the study from different levels. To analyse trends in flow of funds and composition of finances of Panchayats at each level, five-year

data was collected from the selected units. Besides, to gain deep insights, discussions were held with the concerned officials and elected functionaries of Panchayat bodies at each level including officials. Also, to obtain perception and viewpoints of the people with regard to the finances of Panchayats and issues relating to it, discussions were also held with the cross-sections of the society in the sample area. Apart from this two Gram Sabhas were convened in two village Panchayats to have free and frank discussions on the issues pertaining to the study.

For this purpose the following sources are used.

1. Published literature on the subject includes books, government publications, Census Reports, District abstracts, and articles published in leading journals.

2. Documents included the reports of various committees and study teams constituted by union and state governments and Panchayat union office reports and budgets of the local bodies. The documents of Gazetteer of Tiruchirappalli district, Annual Report of Musiri Panchayat Union Office and Administrative Reports are also included.

3. Field visits to a District headquarters block and village level headquarters in the district for obtaining a picture of administrative problems through discussions on the basis of interviews with the officials and non-officials engaged in the task of rural development and planning. More than half a dozen meetings of Village Panchayats in the district are attended to get first hand information on the working of the Panchayats.

The following are the villages within Musiri block of Tiruchirappalli District.

Selected officials, non-officials and citizens at each level were interviewed by administering three different sets of questionnaires.

The Gazetteer of Tiruchirappalli district, and the Census Reports of India and Records in Tamil Nadu State Archives are more valuable sources for the effective study of this area. The primary sources included Annual Reports, Administrative Reports and Work Done Reports. The newspapers like The Hindu and The New Indian Express were also consulted. The personal interview was also conducted to get response of the personnel invaded in decision making.

In addition to the above primary source materials, the secondary sources are also used for this research work. The books and articles written by many scholars form the basis of the secondary sources.

Plan of the Study:

The entire research work could be divided into nine chapters. The first chapter is “Introduction”. The introduction deals with the background of the Panchayat Raj administration. This section also deals with the objectives of the study, purpose of
study, methodology, area of the study, review of literature, sources of data and plan of
the study.

The second chapter “Origin and Development of Panchayat Raj Upto-1993” narrates the existence of the Panchayat raj from ancient time to modern period, and also deals with the growth of local administration, the importance of Uthiramerur inscription of Cholas, Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report, Ashoka Metha Committee Report and the salient features of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act.

The third chapter “Musiri and its Environs” focuses on the historicity of the Tiruchirappalli. It also discusses the geographical features of Musiri, number of Panchayats and population in the region.

The fourth chapter “The Musiri Panchayat Union Under 1958 and after” describes the basic principles of Panchayat raj, functions of Musiri Panchayat Union and the administrative setup of the Musiri Panchayat union.

The fifth chapter “Working of Grama Sabhas in Musiri Block” describes the functioning of four Grama Sabhas namely Evoor, Gunaseelam, Ayyampalayam and Vellur. To what extent the Grama Sabhas in Musiri block responded to the needs of the local people by providing a platform to discuss the twenty nine subjects included in the eleventh schedule, a review was made of the recorded and available minutes of 33 Grama Panchayats identified from the four distinct areas of the District. The minutes covered a period of 8 years 1994-2001. The review exercise involved an examination of recorded minutes of 160 Grama Sabha meetings.

The sixth chapter “Mahalir Thittam of Tamil Nadu” emphasize the women’s movements, mahalir thittam project, characteristic features of Self-Help Groups,
vocational training programmes and the advantages of the Self-Help Groups in Musiri block.

The seventh chapter entitled “Leadership in Gram Panchayats” discusses the Pappaatti and Keeripatti syndrome and the powers of the Panchayat presidents and their activities in that area particularly in Ayyampalayam and Gunaseelam Panchayats and its performances in the villages. The resources, socialization process, accounts, educational institutions, political parties, Gramasabha meetings and the difference and similarities selected village Panchayats between the Ayyampalayam and Gunaseelam Panchayats are discussed. Evoor and Vellur Panchayats also discussed.

The eighth chapter is “Financial Powers of Panchayats” examines revenues raised by Panchayats includes revenue from assigned taxes, share in taxes and grants from higher levels of government. The budget estimate of Musiri Panchayat Union of the year 1995-2000 also included.

The final chapter is the summary of the arguments with some suggestions.