CHAPTER IV

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN THOUBAL DISTRICT

Since 1964 the elected representatives of the panchayati raj suffered because neither politicians nor bureaucrats did not take much interest in panchayati raj and rural development. Their erosion was aggravated through the mushrooming growth of Manipur in general and Thoubal District in particular registered societies and corporation for the implementation of specific centrally sponsored schemes in the antipoverty field. District rural development-agencies which came into existence throughout the country were vivid examples. A fairly rigid national grid of such agencies emerged mainly because the Union Government had the financial clout and the State Government had to conform to.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions by and large failed to carry on effectively because of irregular election and frequent supersession and suspension. This chronic problem had rightly been taken care of by the recent amendments and it is now hoped that they will prove to be viable institutions of grass root democracy as there will be periodic election within a time frame. Gram Sabha is an institution which provides opportunity to the rural people who are willing as well as capable of participating in developmental process. Unfortunately gram sabha used to remain passive without doing nothing benevolent works. It was the main problem of the panchayati raj at the grass root level. Certain constraints are cropped up in the proper implementation of panchayati raj and rural development. The Government of Manipur is quite apathetic towards sharing power and responsibilities with the local authorities. Another problem connected with this had been the love-hate relationship between the Block Development Officer and the elected representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Due to the lack of defined roles of the two, both used to move in different direction without any proper co-ordination. This was considered to be one of the important reasons for the failure of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in
Thoubal District. The other problems related to the working of the panchayati raj institutions during the last three decades of panchayat samitis and Zilla parishads, were the inadequacy of finances and lack of co-ordination between Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad as regards released by the State Governments. The present amendment of 2005 envisages to take care of all these problems seeking to cope with a prospective solution.

The panchayati raj has a great role to play in our parliamentary democracy. But the Government of Manipur has not been satisfactorily dealing with the problems relating to it\(^1\). Thus, the panchayati raj in Manipur in general and Thoubal District in particular, hardly achieves any tangible and substantial achievement success in its successful working. In its functioning, some evidential defects are found and these are enumerated below (a) Lack of will, determination, dedication and missionary zeal amongst the members of the gram panchayat, Panchayats samitis and Zilla parishads to take up various development activities; (b) inadequate honorarium or non-payment thereof for the members; (c) lack of co-operation between the members and the bureaucrats; (d) want of proper fund; (e) unreasonable and illegitimate political pressure and interference at all levels; (f) ignorance of the members about their powers and functions and the role of panchayati raj in our parliamentary democracy; (g) presence of the locally dominant persons or groups that are also in most cases socially and economically dominant and co-operation\(^2\).

Besides the above defects, there has been a very poor political background in the State. It is learnt from our history that the characteristics of a despotic form prevailed.

(a) Manipur had a highly centralised system of administration from early times till her attainment of statehood under the Constitution of India on 21st January, 1972.

(b) The All India pattern of panchayati raj under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975 was enforced in Manipur only on 10th January, 1978; prior to
that, the U.P. Panchayat Act, 1947 envisaging only one tier structure namely gram sabha had been in force.

(c) People are poor in social political and economic consciousness and also in the habit of the responsibleness and responsiveness; institutions regarding their powers and functions.

(d) Responsibleness and responsiveness of the concerned Ministry or Department;

(e) Grant of administrative power and autonomy including political non-interference and co-operation. Therefore, the Government of Manipur must make all possible efforts to fulfil these conditions as that panchayati raj, may make a success in Manipur.

The State official argues that generally the elected representatives of the Panchayats have little knowledge of their rights and duties. Most of the elected representatives are illiterate, lacking of administrative knowledge and selfish in nature. Psychological warfare is being ensured lingering on between bureaucracy or political leaders and the elected representatives of the panchayati raj system in Manipur and it has its impact in Thoubal District too. There is delay or slow pace in its implementation. State politics is apathetic towards the panchayati raj and rural development in Manipur in general and in Thoubal District in particular. Without proper assessment of the weakness in the planning process, without identifying the operational constraints and also without ascertaining convincing vision, a new two tier system has been introduced in 1997 under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. The erstwhile Panchayat Samiti has been replaced by the Zilla Parishad. In other words, this is an attempt to establish direct functional link between village and district. In fact no concrete attempt has been made to consolidate the foundation of earlier experiment i.e. the development experience with village panchayats and panchayat samitis. The level of and capacity for development have not been properly analysed. Besides, attempt also has not been made to strengthen
district administration. The recommendations of the State Finance Commission, it appears were made without comprehensive exercises on development needs, fiscal potential and pattern and rate of development of the State. Hence Shri Maheta advised the elected representatives and the officials to work together for the success of the panchayati raj system. The present scenario does not project a very good picture which may be for the following reasons –

1. Both the groups are not very aware of their rights, responsibilities and duties to be performed.

2. The officials perceive the elected representatives to be lacking in administrative knowledge, semi-literate and cannot forgo their selfish desires.

3. On the other hand the elected representatives think that since they are elected by the people they are independent, whereas the officials are servants of the government and are proud, inefficient and corrupt.

4. The two functionaries disturb each other and not find it congenial to work together.

5. Both the groups do not possess a sense of sacrifice and forget that they are working for the people.

6. The functionaries are not eager to learn and do not work with interest and undertaking.

7. Both the groups do not know the limits of the responsibilities and powers conferred on them.

The government servants should know what their jobs and should have full knowledge and skills required for the job. It is his or her duty to advise and guide the elected representatives on the basis of his knowledge. The elected representatives should have no hesitation in learning and accepting advice from the officials and should feel free to ask for help in case of any doubts. The development of rural areas and the people wholly depends in the close co-ordination of two functionaries i.e. officials and non-officials. In the
implementation of community development programmes, planning and implementation to the programme are entrusted to the officials with the involvement of the panchayati raj bodies. However, there are various factors which led to the bad relation between the officials and elected representatives of the panchayats in the following way:-

i. The elected representatives of the panchayats have little knowledge of his rights and duties.

ii. Officials think that most of the elected representatives are illiterate, lack of administrative knowledge and selfish in nature.

iii. Non-officials have the pride that they are elected by the people and free in nature but the officials are public servants, proud, corrupted and irresponsible in nature.

iv. Both functionaries have no trust towards each other and they don’t like to work together.

v. Both functionaries have been lacking to work for the people with devotion.

vi. They cannot perform the works assigned to them with sacrifice.

vii. They do not know the limit of their responsibilities.

The two main functionaries under the panchayati raj system namely one appointed by the government i.e. public servant and the other being representatives of the people. The work is the same so is the aim. Since, the functionaries are different it is essential that they work with proper understanding. The functionaries are different it is essential that they work with proper understanding. In this regard, the words of Shri Maheta known as the Father of panchayati raj may be recalled. “The weak socio-economic condition can be compared to a sick child. The mother with all her love and attention cannot cure the child alone nor a doctor with all his knowledge of medicine. It can only be cured by the love and affection of the mother combined with the knowledge of the doctor. Similarly, the love and well wishes of the elected
representatives combined with the administrative and technical know how of the government servant only can bring the improvement of the socio-economic structure of India. Since the elected representatives are the flag bearers of the system, the elected representatives possesses the qualities of a leader for enhance kindness, knowledgeable capability, active, powerful, efficiency, resourceful, honesty, hardworking, tolerance etc. If the elected representatives have these qualities in them they will not only be able to work successfully but will also get co-operation from others. Thus, both the groups should refrain from back-biting, believing in rumours of third parties. They should work with full understanding and commitment and a sense of sacrifice considering that they are serving the people. Only then the panchayati raj system could be implemented successfully. The Congress (I) Government under the Chief Minister ship of R.K. Jaichandra Singh, made an assurance that the Government of Manipur would improve the working condition of panchayati raj in Manipur K.V. Krishna Rao, the Governor of Manipur also assured decentralised planning by delegation of more power to the field offices for speedier execution of schemes. R.K. Jaichandra Singh also participated in the CMs’ meet on Panchayati Raj on May 5, 1989 presided over by the late Prime Minister of India, Rajiv Gandhi. He introduced the 64th constitution Amendment Bill, 1989 popularly known as the Panchayati Raj Bill in the Lok Sabha on May 15, 1989. It paved the way of improving the panchayati raj system of India including Manipur. But the Bill could not be passed by the Rajya Sabha on 13th October, 1989. At the same time, the Congress(I)Government in Manipur did little in the field. But the bill again failed in the Rajya Sabha on 13th October, 1989. The United Left Front (ULF) Government in Manipur did not take up anything substantial in the field, except performing the fifth panchayat elections on 7th September 1991[d]. The Congress (I) Government under the Prime Minister ship of P.V. Narasimha Rao had returned at the Centre after the tenth Lok Sabha election. The Prime Minister had assured top priority to rural development. The
problems relating to panchayati raj and rural development should be tackled and solved. But the success of any institution largely depends on those who run it. Panchayati raj in Manipur is no exception to this role. Of course, its success directly lies with the Government of Manipur and indirectly with the involvement of the people. As we all know, panchayati raj bodies should be clothed with such administrative and financial powers as may suit their local conditions and problems and they should be allowed to function as self-governing bodies in our parliamentary democracy. Only a sound system of panchayati raj shall realize the dream of rural development in Manipur in general and in Thoubal in particular.

Panchayati raj in Manipur is still a burning issue defying its actual role although it has achieved a great success in other states of India⁵. Therefore, certain important requisites may be suggested for the successful working of Panchayati Raj in Manipur:-

a) Proper education on Panchayati Raj and its role in our parliamentary democracy and in our economic planning and process;

b) Proper training to the members of Panchayati Raj.

The following suggestions are made for having a sound relationship between the two functionaries for overall implementation of the rural development programmes:

1. Training the non-officials, especially the panchayat pradhans, regarding the details and the methodology of implementing the welfare schemes, before introduction of any new scheme programme in its special area.

2. Wide publicity about new programmes through mass media in detail.

3. Fixing the responsibility on the non-officials for lapse of any programme which they initiated in their own jurisdiction.

4. Frequent meetings at Block level between the middle level officers of development and the non-officials.
5. Utilisation of the people’s representative only for identifying the beneficiaries and not for final selection of the beneficiaries.
6. Fixing minimum educational qualifications for the non-officials to contest elections.
7. Village level planning.
8. Developing service-mindedness among the non-officials, particularly among the panchayat Union chairman and Panchayat pradhans.
9. Implementation of any kind of rural development programme in the village only with the knowledge of rural welfare officers.
10. Joint decision of officials and non-officials in implementing the rural development programme in a particular rural area and
11. Frequent touring of the officials to villages. When the non-officials visit the office and made enquiries that indicate the interests of the non-officials in a particular programme, with the result the officials also call on the non-officials to get their help, co-operation and assistance in the implementation of the various programmes. Their jurisdiction has got positive correlation and significant contribution to the interface index of the officials that means when the jurisdiction of particular official is more, he has the possibility of meeting many types of non-officials. Hence, it suggested that the non-officials should be motivated to visit the various offices of the development departments so that they could be taken into confidence by the officials and vice-versa for better implementation of the development programmes.

At the bold and encouraging imitative of the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi the Panchayati Raj Sammelans were held at New Delhi, Calcutta and Bangalore. He assured on 27th January, 1989 at the Panchayati Raj Sammelan of 12 north-western States of India at New Delhi, that the Eighth Plan would be formulated according to the new concept of grass roots planning. He further conceded that the government had failed over the past decades to fulfil the
promises made by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru to involve people in the planning process through panchayati raj system. Adequate powers were either not given to the panchayati raj bodies or were cleverly withdrawn. As a result, the system had little role to play in the formulation and implementation of development programmes. The Central and State level administration had become strong over the years at the cost of local institution. Hence, the need of the hour is decentralised planning including the strengthening and revitalization of Panchayati Raj Institutions. In order to implement the above assurances in respect of panchayati raj and decentralised planning, he introduced 64th Constitution Amendment Bill, 1989, popularly known as the Panchayati Raj Bill in the Lok Sabha on May 15, 1989 \[Which is cited above.\]

The latest development thinking is that the people have the right to development. Such development will be best possible only the right to development. Such development will be best possible only when the people themselves participate in their own development works. The concept of people's participation in such works mean:

a) Participation in implementation.

b) Participation in decision making.

c) Participation in the sharing of benefits of development programmes.

But participation in development works or programmes mean all these aspects. Such participatory process has three roles; educative, integrative and empowering. It increases the feeling of belongingness and thus derives integration. It may also foster a sense of competence at the local level which then spreads to the national level.\(^7\) If the people are to participate in their own development works or programmes, they must participate through their own local bodies-urban and rural. This will require decentralisation which means inter alia, decentralisation of administrative, financial and law-making power\(^8\). This will in turn micro level planning instead of macro level planning. This is to say, a systematic study of the vocational implications must precede the
implementation of the plans and programmes. The planning efforts should start from the grass-roots level, the top down planning system must be avoided. Decentralised planning is indispensable to speed up especially rural uplift because as pointed out recently by an Asian Development Bank document, the planners, Ministers and bureaucrats have little idea about the conditions in which the rural poor lives. No doubt, no substantial progress is made in the field. Now the Panchayat Samiti is abolished in Manipur. If rural development, especially in the interior rural areas of Manipur, is to be speedily brought about, decentralised planning is a must. But the Government of Manipur must provide the necessary technical skill, expert knowledge, adequate fund and proper guide for such a planning. Manipur is a late starter as far as democratic decentralisation is concerned. Much remains to be done in concrete form. Manipur model of rural development should be evolved based upon district realities in the State. Panchayat institutions should now be made a very powerful vehicle of economic development and social change. Now a time has come for all gram panchayats and zilla parishads to prepare potential linked development plans for all villages and districts in Manipur. Non-extension of the provisions of the Act in the hill areas of Manipur is another major drawback, or shortfall of the progress of panchayati raj in the State. The Manipur Village authorities in Hill Areas Act, 1956 prevails in the hill villages. Development works are carried out through the blocks at their levels. The District Council under the Manipur Hill Areas District Council Act, 1971 takes up development works at the District level in the hill areas. Without having organic linking between these institutions at different levels these independent bodies, without-linkage cannot become institutions befitting self-governing institutions under the structure. Such separate system in the development administration hampers the general progress of the whole State. Hence steps for extension of Panchayati Raj Institutions in the hill areas may be considered by the Government.
The area covered by Panchayats is too small to be viable. Out of 31 Development Blocks in the 9 Districts in Manipur Panchayati Raj is extended only in 9 Valley Blocks in 4 Valley Districts only excluding 22 Hill Blocks in 5 Hill Districts. No major and medium type of scheme can be implemented within the area of a gram panchayat. The transfer of power and responsibilities to the Panchayati Raj bodies are not upto the mark as expected inspite of the Manipur Government's earnest effort due to lack of resources. It is hoped that some of the development works will be entrusted to the Panchayats and their involvement in all rural development works to be ensured. Involvement of panchayati raj bodies in the implementation of rural development programme is not so effective. All Development Programme should be channelled through the panchayati raj bodies. Along with the removal of constraints mentioned above, the following suggestion may be taken into account for revitalisation of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Democratic federal structure of India exists between the Centre and States. The Panchayati Raj Institutions as local self-governing institutions should find proper places in the Constitution of the country. Article 40 of the Directive Principles of the State Policy is not adequate. The Constitution of the country should be amended giving Panchayati Raj Institutions proper places so as to maintain uniformity, homogeneity strength etc. There should be Central List, Constitution along with the Concurrent List as already provided. This means that the Panchayati Raj institutions should be given constitutional status instead of keeping the same at the whims of the State Government under the existing system. Block is the most suitable unit of administration. Establishment of Block authorities with well defined responsibilities, funds, resources etc. will be helpful to co-ordinate all activities. Funding is the most acute problem. Proportionate share of the Central Government fund may be released to the State Governments for taking up panchayati raj schemes and for strengthening them. Arrangements may be made to tap local resources. Vast resources lying in the countryside need
proper exploitation. The Panchayati Raj bodies may be empowered to harness these resources lying dormant. Training is an input. Adequate training arrangements for both the official and non-official functionaries at different levels should be made to awake the intelligence and awareness of the people and that panchayati raj may be made ‘A way of Life.’ Hence the strengthening of the existing training institution is required and also establishment of other training institutes for imparting training to rural development functionaries be ensured.

There are 16 members in the Thoubal Zilla Parishad. They have been facing internal problem, such as no-confidence motion. In this regard, Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha can be removed by more than half of the Zilla Parishad members. If the meeting for no-confidence motion is not convened by the Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha within 7 days from the date of receipt of the motion. The movers may apply to the Deputy Commissioner concerned. The Deputy Commissioner should instruct the Chief Executive Officer within 7 days to convene the meeting within 7 days from the date of receipt of the letter. The concerned authority fails to do the same, the movers can seek legal aids as per Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. In this convention nine members of the Thoubal Zilla Parishad moved no-confidence motion against Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha for holding a special meeting under Section 57 (4) of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. As a consequence, the Chief Executive Officer, Thoubal Zilla Parishad welcomed all the members present and read out the motion of the No-Confidence moved by 9 (nine) members of the Thoubal Zilla Parishad along with the meeting notice No. 2 | ZP (TBL)/ NCM / 99 (Pt.) of 7th January, 1996 issued under the signature of C.E.O. Thoubal Zilla Parishad. The C.E.O also read out Section 57(4) (ii) of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 vide M.P.R. (4th amendment act 2005) and after ensuring that the quorum of the meeting as mandated by the said Section of the Act is fulfilled and read out the provisions of the same wherein it is provided that a member
from amongst those present in the meeting if the motion of No-confidence is against both the Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha. Accordingly, the members present initiated the meeting and Shri. M. Rameshwar Singh, member Heirok Zilla Parishad, Thoubal as proposed by Ch. Brajamohan and seconded by T. Ratan Singh accepted by all the members present was elected to preside over the meeting as provided under Sec. 57(4) of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 as the motion of No-confidence is against both the Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha of Thoubal Zilla Parishad. Thereafter, Shri M. Rameshwor Singh, Chairman of the meeting took the chair and welcomed all the members present.

The Chairman read out the meeting notice dated 7th January, 2006 issued by the C.E.O. Thoubal Zilla Parishad duly served fixing the meeting on 13th January, 2006 at 1 p.m. at the Conference Hall of District Rural Development Agency Thoubal to consider the no-confidence motion against the Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha of Thoubal Zilla Parishad. During the course of the No-confidence motion, out of the 9 members present in the meeting, 9 members supported the No-confidence motion against the Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha and agreed to remove both of them as per Section of the Manipur panchayati Raj Act, 1994. Further, it was decided that a new Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha of Thoubal Zilla Parishad will be elected on the date and time fixed by the Deputy Commissioner, Thoubal (Prescribed Authority). It was fixed on 20th January 2006 at 2 p.m. As a consequence, the said election for Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha were held in the Chamber of the Adhyaksha Zilla Parishad, Thoubal on the same day. N. Anaoubi Devi and Th. Santa Singh were re-elected a new Adhyaksha and Up-Adhyaksha respectively. Oath taking also had been done on the same day by the Deputy Commissioner, Thoubal.

From the first panchayat general election 1964 to 5th panchayat general election 1991 had been conducted by the Directorate of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj, Imphal. In those days, the panchayat general election could not be done timely by the above Directorate. Its office building was shifted very
frequently such as, Lamphel to Babupara, Babupara to Dewlahland, Dewlahland to Lamphel, Lamphel to Porompat due to the convenient of the government of Manipur. Most of the important documents were found missing. It shows that according to Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975, the panchayat general elections indicated above were conducted by the above Directorate and after that the State Election Commission took the charge of conducting panchayat general elections as per Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, 73rd amendment of the Indian Constitution. Its main purpose was to held the panchayat general election in Manipur timely. In this regard, 6th and 7th panchayat general elections had been conducted by the State Election Commission in 1997 and 2002 respectively. In Thoubal District there were many problems in the panchayat general election compared with other districts of Manipur, such as, snatching of the ballot boxes, public mob, force voting, booth capturing, destruction of ballot boxes, mass public violence, group clash etc. Besides the documents of the panchayat elections in Thoubal District were not easily available because of the devastation of Sub-Divisional Officer office Thoubal on 16th September, 1992. All the documents were burnt in that incident. Some other means were gathered from other sources, such as questionnaire or personal interview. The first panchayat general election of Thoubal District was held on 13th January, 1964. The second panchayat general election of Thoubal District was held on 31st January, 1970. The third panchayat general election of Thoubal District was held on 24th May, 1978. There were no documents of panchayat general elections of Thoubal District in 1964, 1970, 1978 respectively. It was very unfortunate as well as handicapped in regard to collection of data for three periods of Thoubal District. The fourth panchayat general election of Thoubal was held on 7th April, 1985. It was delayed for two years after normal schedule of general election of panchayat. The fifth panchayat general election of Thoubal District was held on 7th August, 1991. Unfortunately election of 2 gram panchayats was not held on the same day
which was rescheduled on 10th September, 1991 due to booth capturing. Repoll took place in some gram panchayats such as Wangoo, Sandangkhong, Kakching C.D. Block and Sangaiyumpham, Thoubal C.D. Block. The sixth panchayat general election of Thoubal District was held on 31st January, 1997. Unfortunately 15 gram panchayats under Thoubal C.D. Block and 13 gram panchayats under Kakching C.D. Block, was not held on the same day which was rescheduled on 7th February, 1997 due to public mob. It was delaying for the arrangement of the police department about election. The people used loud speaker against the Superindent of Police. The people insulted the Superindent of Police Thoubal District, for lathi charge to the officials of the election. Repoll took place at some gram panchayats of Tural Ahanbi Atoukhong, Oinam Sowombung, Malbam Uchiwa, leirongthel Ningel, Charangpat, Khangabok, Khangabok pt III, Heirok pt II, Heirok pt III, Sangaiyumpham pt I, Sangaiyumpham pt II, Tentha, wangjing, Samaram, Langathel under Thoubal C.D. Block and Wabagai, Keirak, Hiyanglam, Mayenglamjao, Hayel Hangoon, Sekmaijin, Arong Nongmaikhong, Langmeidong, Waikhong, Pangaltabi, Wangoo, Chairel, Serou under Kakching C.D. Block.

The State Election Commission moved the Government of Manipur for holding the simultaneous general election to the gram panchayats and Zilla Parishads before expiry of normal term of 5 years of the panchayat bodies submitting a programme fixing on 31st January 2002, as the date of poll on the failure of the attempt of the State Election Commission to conduct the election in the month of January, 2002. A fresh tentative programme was submitted to the Government on 13th February 2002 as the date of poll and the programme was approved by the Government. However, that time also the elections could not be conducted according to the programme consequent upon deferment of the election to 6th March 2002 during the President’s Rule by the meeting of the Governor in Council held on 23rd January 2002. The election fixed on 6th March 2002 also could not be conducted due to non-finalization of
the work of division of Gram Sabhas Territorial Constituencies or modification on to delimitation gram panchayat and Zilla parishad constituencies, reservation of seats etc. by the Government of Manipur in time and also holding of the 8th General Assembly Election, 2002 poll scheduled on 16th February, 2002 and 21st February, 2002 under the compelling circumstances the panchayat election was deferred since die\textsuperscript{18}. The Government of Manipur in compliance of the direction or orders passed by the Hon’ble Gauhati High Court, Imphal Bench\textsuperscript{19} decided to conduct the pending panchayat election on 31st August, 2002. The Election Commission proposed on 30th September, 2002 as the date of poll in place of 31st September, 2002\textsuperscript{20}.

As ill luck would have happened the panchayat election process has been greatly hampered by flood havoc in Thoubal District. It was reported that office of the Deputy Commissioner, Thoubal District could not be properly functioned by flood water. Report received that most of the villages of Thoubal District in low lying areas have been inundated by flood water and there was no sign of complete receding of the flood water within a short span of time. The position in the same areas badly affected by flood holding of the election may be deferred for some time under provision of Rule 48 of Manipur Panchayati Raj Election Rules, 1995 on account of natural calamity beyond human control. As a consequent, there were three gram panchayats under Thoubal C.D. Block and four gram panchayats under Kakching C.D. Block which were rescheduled on 12th September, 2002. The name of repoll of Gram panchayats were Turel Ahanbi Atoukhong, Oinam Sawombung, Maibam Uchiwa under Thoubal C.D.Block and Hayal Hangoon, Sekmaijin, Arong Nongmaikhong, Wangoo under Kakching C.D. Block. The Government of Manipur was well aware that accountability and responsiveness to people’s problems could be effective by decentralisation of functions, funds and functionaries to the local bodies, it had been following it only in letter, not in spirit. It may be noted that the Manipur Panchayati Raj Bill was passed in 1994 giving effect to the 73rd Constitution
Amendment Act, 1992 strengthening the status of the panchayati raj institutions. In Thoubal District the first election under this new act was held in 1997, the second round being held in 2002 and the third is due to come up within a short period. This Act provided gram panchayats and Zilla parishads in Manipur. However, the intermediate levels of panchayat samitis were abolished. Now, the Government of Manipur is trying to implement its middle tier. Besides when there is talk of adequate of women representatives in any people's elected bodies in Thoubal District, the panchayats are the only ones which have good numbers of women elected in the general seats with an estimated average of 40 percent.  

For such a long time, the Government of Manipur has been talking about the devolution of power and functions in line with the eleventh schedule of the constitution. In this regard, the Government of Manipur issued a gazette notification in September 1998 devolving 22 items to panchayats. However, the same has remained only on paper as the concerned departments failed to issue the necessary orders. In the recent time, during the year of 2005, after the State Cabinet decided to hand over some power and functions to the panchayats altogether 15 departments had issued required orders for handing over some of the selected items mostly concerned with the development activities related with the rural development schemes and projects. Even the Government of Manipur had given approval for the sanction of finance relating with the functions to be performed by the panchayat bodies. But as the panchayats have no proper infrastructure for functioning and there is the need for streamlining the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Thoubal District, there is no devolution of power as yet. In Thoubal District, panchayats are involved mainly in implementation of Central development schemes and are yet to take control of the implementation of State programme. Moreover, the whole purpose of decentralisation like making of field staff accountable to the public, could not be brought to its proper conclusion as panchayats cannot
monitor or supervise the functioning of primary schools and health centres even though these are items included in the devolution of power to the local bodies. The tenth finance commission had awarded Rs. 2.30 crores to panchayats and autonomous hill district councils. But physical financial devolution has not taken place even as the state government has agreed to sanction the same. It is also pertinent to mention that with the expanding scope of local self-government in due course of time, the need for devolution of power to the panchayats was felt which made adequate the provision under the 1947 Act. Considering the inadequacy of the provision, the Manipur panchayat Raj Act 1975 was enacted. The Act had given broader responsibility for broadening the base for village level development, disseminating information, awareness and responsibilities of the concept of local self-government and help in the implementation of government policies and programmes. Further in 1994, the Manipur Panchayati Raj Bill was passed to give effect to the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 which strengthened the status of the panchayati raj institutions. The history of panchayati raj in Manipur goes back in 1960 when it was decided to implement the United Province Panchayati Act, 1947 later known as Pradesh panchayati Raj Act, 1947. However, only in April 1964, 227 gram panchayats and 43 Nyaya panchayats were formed. The implementation got delayed because of the India-China war in 1962. It was only two years later, in 1966 that the State government decided to allow the panchayat pradhans to become members of the block development committees when the government was satisfied with the performances of the panchayats. Henceforth the gram panchayats become active partners in the implementation of development programmes.

The Government of Manipur, finance department has given clearance for the allocation of Rs. 2530 lakhs for five years from 2005 to 2010 at the rate of Rs. 506 lakhs per year for the panchayati raj institutions. The allocation of the amount was based on the recommendation of the Twelfth Finance Commission said an official source stating that the distribution of funds between Zilla
parishads and gram panchayats is 15 percent and 85 percent respectively as per the recommendation of the 2nd Manipur Finance Commission. Mention may be made that there are four Zilla parishads functioning at present in the four valley districts of Manipur and 165 gram panchayats extending to the four valley districts. The Zilla parishads and the gram panchayats are functioning under the provisions of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. Panchayats are not extended to the hill areas of Manipur where Manipur Hill Areas District Council Act, 1971 or the Manipur Village Authorities in Hill Areas Act, 1956 is in operation. As per allocation of the State finance department based on the 2nd Manipur State Finance Commission recommendation, the four Zilla parishads will get a total fund of Rs. 75.90 lakhs. Out of this total fund allocated, Imphal east Zilla parishad is to get an amount of Rs. 25,86,520, Imphal West Zilla parishad an allocated amount Rs. 18,60,090, Thoubal Zilla Parishad Rs. 20,09,518 while Bishenpur Zilla Parishad will get Rs. 11,33,872. The source also said that the sub-allocation of funds among the Zilla Parishads is according to the population. The 85 percent funds share of gram panchayats i.e. Rs. 450.10 lakhs is to be sub-allocated to 165 gram panchayats based on the population within each gram panchayat in the same fashion as that of Zilla parishads. While informing about the type of schemes or works to be taken up by the local self –governments in the state, the source stated that priority is to be given to the operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation in the rural areas as per the provisions of the 12th finance commission. However at present, the panchayati raj institutions in the state have no resources of their own to implement these schemes. As such a major portion of the allocated grants under the 12th Finance Commission is to be utilised in the repairing and rejuvenation of water supply assets and operation and maintenance costs of the scheme. That is, out of the total allocated amount of Rs. 1481.30 lakhs for five years at the rate of Rs. 296.26 is earmarked by the 12th Finance Commission for the same.
For the improvement and construction of latrines in the rural areas and under the sanitation programme to be implemented by the panchayati raj institutions Rs. 422.50 lakhs for five years, i.e. Rs. 84.50 lakhs per year and that of improvement and renovation of sanitary drains Rs. 169 lakhs for five years at the rate of 33.80 lakhs per year were earmarked by the state government as grant from the 12th Finance Commission. The total provision earmarked for the sanitation programme for improvement of sanitary drains or canal systems and improvement and construction of latrines is Rs. 591.50 lakhs for five years. In compliance to the recommendation of the 12th Finance Commission high priority is also being given for creation of database and maintenance of accounts at the grass root level and a provision of Rs. 424.20 lakhs is earmarked for database on finance of local bodies at the rate of Rs. 50,000 per gram panchayat and Rs. 58,500 to Zilla Parishad of Thoubal District.
NOTES and REFERENCES

1 The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975 section 10 and 11

2 M. Ibohal Singh : A Study of Local Self-Government in Manipur p.96

3 The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975 Section 14

4 M. Ibohal Singh : A Study of Local Self-Government in Manipur p.97

5 Op. Cit p. 96

6 The Times of India January 28, 1989, p.8 : The Telegraph November 5, 1988, p.1; also Kurukshetra, August 1989; pp. 8-11

7 Kurukshetra, May 1991, pp. 7-9

8 For the implication of decentralisation, Yojana 26th January, 1989, pp. 90-91

9 Kurukshetra Volume No. XXXV No. 4 January 1987, pp. 13-17

10 Yojana Volume 32 No. 3 February 16-29; 1988; pp. 28-29 & 32

11 Personal interview with – Kh. Indramani Singh, Upper Division Clerk of Deputy Commissioner, Thoubal.

12 Commission’s letter No. 5 | 3 | SEC | 95 (pt.) / 5422

13 Government letter No. 15 | 10 | 200 | - DEV (P)

14 Writ Petition Civil Nos. 404 of 2002

15 Government letter No. 5 | 3 | SEC | 95 (pt.)