CHAPTER 5
COMPARATIVE STUDY WITH INDIAN SYSTEM

Bangladesh and India are two developing countries and passed through the traumatic experience of British rule. Both of them being parts of the same sub-continent, a comparative study of the local self-governing institutions of these two neighbours would be helpful to get a comprehensive picture of different aspects of these institutions and their role in rural development.

5.1 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INDIAN LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT (POST-PARTITION)

Both Bangladesh and India shared a common history and political-administrative linkage till the partition of India in 1947. The British rulers, as a part of their administrative policy, gradually introduced the institutions of local self-government in India which has been discussed earlier. After independence, these institutions have been freed from their colonial legacy and received proper importance in the new Indian system. It is, however, interesting to point out that in the original draft-document of Indian Constitution, Panchayati Raj or rural local self-government was not included.
Dr. Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, who is regarded as the 'Architect of the Indian Constitution', was unfortunately against the creation of local self-governing institution and regarded it as 'sink of localism', a den of ignorance', 'narrow mindedness and communalism'. But that attitude had severely been criticized by most of the eminent members\(^1\) of the Constituent Assembly and on 22nd November, 1948, K. Santhanam moved a motion regarding Village Panchayat system. Ambedkar had finally to give in to this motion which received a strong support of the members and on that basis the following article was incorporated in the Constitution (that came into operation on 26th January, 1950) which forms a significant part of Directive Principles of State Policy.

**Article 40**

The state shall endeavour to endow village Panchayats with sufficient powers and authority to enable them to

\(^{1}\) Damodor Swaroop Seth, H.V. Kamath, T. Prakasam, Man Mohan Das, Alladi Krishnaswamy Ayyar, M. Ananthasayamam Ayyanger were some of the prominent members of the Constituent Assembly.
function as units of self-government.²

Community Development Project, introduced on 2nd October, 1952, was a first step forward to diffuse more power to the local bodies with the aim of developing the rural sector. It encouraged collective action and community thinking through panchayats and co-operative societies. The various fields in which community development activities were organized are recreation, health, housing, cottage industries, agriculture, etc.³

The main objective of the programme was the assurance of people's participation in the development activities but in practice this system "met with partial success in mobilizing people's participation."⁴

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2. It may be added here that in the Bangladesh Constitution (1972) also, the provision of the local self-government has clearly been stated in Article 9:

"The state shall encourage local-government institutions composed of representatives of the area concerned and in such institutions special representation shall be given, as far as possible, to peasants, workers and women."


To pinpoint the snags and disparities in the existing system, a committee was set up (Balwantray Mehta Committee), officially designated as "Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service", under the chairmanship of the late Balwantray Mehta in December, 1956. This Committee was required to study and report the working of the Community Projects and National Extension Service—rural development schemes adopted by the government and thereby suggest suitable measures for improvement. The Committee submitted its report on 24th November, 1957 which was regarded as the "Foundation of the Panchayati Raj in India".

Mehta Committee was of the opinion that these bodies failed to arise public enthusiasm or create leadership and participation. The Committee reported that:

So long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply the local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality, invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development.5

The Committee further added:

Development cannot progress without responsibility and power. Community development can be real only when the community understands its problems, realizes its responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers through its chosen representatives and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration. With this objective we recommend an early establishment of statutory elective local bodies and devolution to them of the necessary resources, power and authority. ⁶

The Committee in its report made some suggestions for a future local self-government system in India. It recommended a three-tier scheme of rural local self-government village *Panchayat* at the base, *Panchayat Samiti* at the block level and *Zila Parishad* at the district. Under the proposed scheme, the *Panchayat Samiti*, intermediary tier between the *Zila Parishad* and the *Panchayat* was the pivot. A lot of developmental functions as well as financial responsibilities are assigned to it. The *Zila Parishad* would act as the co-ordinating body among the tiers of local bodies and as the channel of communication between the *Panchayat Samitis* and the government.

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The recommendations were accepted by the National Development Council of the government of India on 12th January, 1958 with the note that while broad pattern and fundamentals of the scheme may be uniform but there should not be any rigidity as to the pattern. States would adopt such Panchayat system as suited to their local conditions. This issue was also raised to the fifth session of the 'Central Council of Local Self—Government' at Hyderabad in 1959. The resolution of the Council emphasizes on genuine transfer of power to the people. If this is assured, form and pattern may necessarily vary according to conditions prevailing to different states.\(^8\)

The following five broad principles were formulated in this context:

1. There should be a three-tiered structure of local self-governing bodies from village to district levels with an organic link from the lower to the higher ones.

\(^7\) The National Development Council is the highest planning authority in India. It consisted of the Prime Minister, Chief Ministers of all the State governments and the members of the Planning Committee.

\(^8\) Quoted in Panchayati Raj (pamphlet), Ministry of Community Development and Co-operation, Government of India, 1961, P.2.
2. There should be a genuine transfer of power and responsibility to these bodies.

3. Adequate financial resources should be transferred to the bodies to enable them to discharge these responsibilities.

4. All development programmes at these levels should be channeled through these bodies.

5. The system evolved should be such as to facilitate further decentralization of power and responsibility in the future.

Thus different states were given considerable freedom to introduce a system of Panchayati Raj consistent with their own conditions. In this way, to make the spirit of democratic decentralization familiar to Indian people a short translation to Indian words Panchayati Raj was given. On the basis of Mehta Committee report, rural local self-governments were constituted in different Indian States.

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5.2 LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT
IN WEST BENGAL

In this section, a comprehensive study of rural local self-government of West Bengal has been made. Bangladesh, having an uniform pattern of rural local self-government throughout the country cannot be compared with the diversified structures of different states of India. Hence, a particular state has been selected. West Bengal has been chosen as the study area because most probably it is the only state in India where rural local self-governing institutions are running properly. These institutions have been, to a great extent, smoothly functioning in this state for more than 12 years. The first Panchayat election was held on 4th June 1978. Since then two more elections of Panchayati Raj institutions took place (31st May, 1983 and 28th February, 1988) and the whole system of rural local self-government may be claimed to be proceeding towards maturity.

5.2.1 GENESIS

In 1956, a draft of the Panchayat Bill was initiated in West Bengal Legislative Assembly on the basis of Balwantray Mehta Committee's Report and accordingly the
West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 was passed. This Act abolished the erstwhile Union Board and introduced a two-tier rural local self-government i.e., Gram Panchayat at Gram level and Anchal Panchayat at Union level. Later on, in 1963, an attempt towards remodeling the structure of Panchayati Raj was completed through the enactment of the West Bengal Zila Parishad Act, 1963. This Act replaced the old District Board, and also established another new body i.e., the Anchalik Parishad at the newly created administrative level of the Community Development Block. So, a four-tier structure of rural local bodies were established, viz., Gram Panchayat (at village level), Anchal Panchayat (for a combination of villages), Anchalik Parishad (for a block) and Zila Parishad (for a district).

Almost all the states of India accepted a three-tier system except West Bengal. The Anchal Panchayat in between the Gram Panchayat and Anchalik Parishad was the additional tier, the only innovation in West Bengal scheme. West Bengal government was interested to adjust the system under the new arrangement of Panchayati Raj framework because of the fact that the institution was in operation in this state from long since and became a
familiar well-established democratic institution. So the government was not willing to destroy such a living institution\(^\text{10}\).

These institutions, however, could not successfully work later on. Factors like consecutive political instability, imposition of President’s rule over the state, financial constraints, stagnant socio-economic condition and lack of political initiative did not allow them to flourish as a stable rural local self-government. On the whole, the process of democratic decentralization was halting, confusing and lacked clarity of purpose.\(^\text{11}\) In 1973, when the State government was run by the Congress, the *West Bengal Panchayat Act* was passed in the Legislative Assembly. This Act established a three-tier


system of rural local self-government instead of four-tier. The tiers under the new system are *Gram Panchayat* at the bottom, *Panchayat Samiti* at the middle and *Zila Parishad* at the apex. The ruling Congress Party did not take effective step towards implementation of stable rural local self-government as the Party itself was suffering from intraparty conflicts and factionalism. In 1977, Left Front government came into power in West Bengal and arranged *Panchayat* elections in June 1978 on the basis of the Act of 1973.

The present three-tier *Panchayat Raj* as envisaged in 1973 consists of 15 *Zila Parishads*, 329 *Panchayat Samitis* and 3227 *Gram Panchayats*. At present there is no *Zila Parishad* in Darjeeling district, as the *Parishad* was dissolved after the enforcement of Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council Act in 1988. Gorkha Hill Council is functioning in Darjeeling replacing the erstwhile *Zila Parishad*. The district-wise distribution of the *Panchayat*
bodies has been shown by the following table:

**TABLE 20**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DISTRICT</th>
<th>ZILA PARISHAD</th>
<th>PANCHAYAT SAMITI</th>
<th>GRAM PANCHAYAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bankura</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Birbhum</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burdwan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooch Behar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoogly</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Howrah</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jalpaiguri</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malda</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Midnapore</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murshidabad</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nadia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purulia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North 24 Parganas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South 24 Parganas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Dinajpur</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DARJEELING</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>329</strong></td>
<td><strong>3227</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Directorate of Panchayats, Government of West Bengal.
5.22 STRUCTURAL BASE

**GRAM PANCHAYAT**

*Gram Panchayat*, the lowest tier of *Panchayat Raj* System, has been provided for a *Gram*\(^1\) which has been defined as a village or a group of contiguous villages, as declared by the State government for this purpose. Each *Gram Panchayat*, on the average, has 12 villages and its population would not exceed 15,000\(^2\) (5000 in hilly areas).

**Membership**

The *Gram-Panchayat* consists of following categories of membership:

1) The elected members of the *Gram Panchayat* whose number would not be less than seven or more than twenty five, would be directly elected by the electorate.


2) The Act of 1973 made a provision of appointment of two members from the womenfolk and two from scheduled tribes by the State government in those cases where at least two scheduled caste or scheduled tribe and two women members have not been elected to the Gram Panchayat.\textsuperscript{14}

**Term**

The term of the office of the Gram Panchayat is 5 years.

**President and Vice-President**

Every Gram Panchayat, would at its first meeting at which a quorum is present, elect in the prescribed manner one of its member to be the Pradhan and another member to be Upa-Pradhan of the Gram Panchayat. All executive powers are vested to the Pradhan and he is assisted by the Upa-Pradhan.\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{14} The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, Sec. 4 (2).
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., secs. 7(2) & 9(1).
PANCHAYAT SAMITI

The middle tier of the Panchayati Raj institution is known as Panchayat Samiti. The State government shall constitute a Panchayat Samiti for every Block.

Membership

The Panchayat Samiti would consist of the following categories of members, namely:

1) Pradhans of Gram Panchayats within the Block, ex-officio.

2) Elected members, elected from the area of Gram Panchayats fall within the Block by secret ballot. The number of such members would not be more than three from each of the Gram Panchayat area.

3) [a] Members of the Loksabha (House of the People) and the Legislative Assembly of the State elected thereto from

16. The State Government, by notification, divides a district into several Blocks, each of them comprises some contiguous grams.
a constituency comprising the Block or any part thereof not being Ministers; and (b) members of the Rajyasabha (Council of States) [excluding ministers], having a place of residence in the Block. ¹⁷

Like Gram Panchayat and Zila Parishad, there is a provision of co-option of two women and two schedule caste members in the Panchayat Samiti where they are not properly represented.

Term

The office of the members of the Panchayat Samiti (other than ex-officio, Gram Panchayat Pradhans, elected Loksabha and Rajyasabha members) would be for a period of five years.

President and Vice-President

Every Panchayat Samiti shall elect at its first meeting at which a quorum is present, one of its members to be the Sabhapati and another member to be Sahakari Sabhapati of the Panchayat Samiti. ¹⁸

¹⁷. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, Art. 94 (2).

¹⁸. Ibid., Art. 96 (2).
Functionaries

A number of officials are working in the *Panchayat Samiti* for the performance of its various activities. There is a post of Executive Officer for every *Panchayat Samiti* and the Block Development Officer is the ex-officio Executive Officer. The Extension Officer, *Panchayats* acts as ex-officio Secretary.¹⁹

The Executive Officer exercises general control over all officers and employees of the *Panchayat Samiti*. The Extension Officer, *Panchayats*, mainly combines the duties of inspecting and educating the *Gram Panchayats* and their *Pradhans*. The Services of block level government officials and employees have been placed by the State Government at the disposal of the *Panchayat Samiti* in order to render necessary assistance for the execution of different schemes of the *Panchayat Samiti*.²⁰


²⁰. The *West Bengal Panchayat Act*, 1973, Secs. 119 & 120.
Every Panchayat Samiti would hold a meeting in its office at least once in every three months on such date and at such hour as the Panchayat Samiti may fix at the immediately preceding meeting\(^{21}\).

**Committees**

The Panchayat Samiti would have the following nine *Sthayee Samiti*\(^{22}\) (standing committees):

i) Finance, Establishment Development and Planning

ii) Public Health

iii) Public Works

iv) Agriculture, Irrigation and Co-operative

v) Education

vi) Cottage and Small Scale Industries

vii) Relief and Social Welfare, Fisheries and Animal Resources Development

viii) Forest and Land Reforms

ix) Food and Supplies.

\(^{21}\) *Ibid.*, Art. 105

\(^{22}\) *The Handbook of the Members of Panchayat Samiti*, pp.25-27.
Besides these, special committees required for particular purpose can be constituted subject to the approval of the State government. 23

ZILA PARISHAD

Zila Parishad, the top tier of the rural local self-government institutions, shall be constituted in every district.

Membership

The Zila Parishad according to the Act consists of the following categories of members:

(a) Sabhapatis of the Panchayat Samitis within the district, ex-officio.

b) Two persons directly elected by the voters of each block 24 area within the district.

c) The Loksabha MPs and MLAs elected from the district (excluding ministers).


24. A block area being divided into two single member constituencies, each comprising some contiguous grams.
d) And the Rajyasabha MPs having a place of residence in the district (excluding ministers).25

Two female members, and two members from scheduled caste and scheduled tribe are to be co-opted by the State government where at least two scheduled caste or scheduled tribe and two women members have not already been elected to the Parishad.

Term

The members of the Zila Parishad other than the ex-officio members shall hold office for a period of five years from the date of poll in the general election for constitution of Zila Parishad.

President, Vice-President and other functionaries

Every Zila Parishad shall, at its first meeting at which a quorum is present, elect in the prescribed manner, one of its member to be the Sabhadhipati and another member to be the Sahakari Sabhadhipati.26

25. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, Sec. 140
26. Ibid., Secs. 141 & 143.
Magistrate is the Executive Officer of Zila Parishad. Moreover, there will be a full time Additional Executive Officer of Zila Parishad of the rank of Additional District Magistrate. A senior State Civil Service (WBCS) Officer acts as the Secretary of the Zila Parishad. Some technical officers of the rank of Executive Engineer and below have also been placed at the disposal of the Zila Parishad. In addition, each Zila Parishad had its own clerical, technical and account set-up.

Committees

Like Panchayat Samiti, Zila Parishad had also nine standing committees of the same kind for the execution of its different functions.

5.23 POWERS AND FUNCTIONS

Rural local self-governing institutions in West Bengal have been entrusted with a lot of functions under the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973. The areas of

27. Pashchimbange Panchayat (Bengali), p.5.
activities of the different tiers have been discussed below.

The functions of the Gram Panchayat are broadly classified into two heads, i.e., obligatory and discretionary. Its obligatory functions are generally the civic responsibilities. Sanitation, conservancy and drainage, and prevention of public nuisance, curative and preventive measures in respect of malaria or an epidemic, vaccination, supply of drinking water, cleaning and disinfecting sources of supply and storage of water, maintenance, repair and construction of public streets etc., are among the obligatory functions of the Gram Panchayat.

The discretionary functions of the Gram Panchayat are lightening of public street, planting and maintaining trees on roadside and public place, construction and regulation of markets and many other works of that type29.

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In addition to the above two categories, the State government may assign to this body some functions in respect of primary, social, technical or vocational education, rural dispensaries, maternity and child welfare centres, irrigation, grow more food campaign and management of ferries etc.

**PANCHAYAT SAMITI**

_Panchayat Samiti_ has been empowered to undertake different development schemes on agriculture, livestock, cottage industries, co-operative movement, rural credit, water supply, irrigation, public health and sanitation including establishment of dispensaries and hospitals, communications, primary or adult education including welfare of students, social welfare and other objects of public utility. The _Panchayat Samiti_ is to co-ordinate and integrate development plans and schemes prepared by _Gram-Panchayats_ fall under the Block. It also examines and sanctions budget estimates of _Gram Panchayats_ in the Block. The Samiti may make grants to any school, or public welfare organization under the Block. As a higher tier, the _Panchayat Samiti_ has some supervisory power over _Gram_
Panchayats within its jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{30}

**ZILA PARISHAD**

Zila Parishad is authorized to undertake schemes and adopt measures relating to the development of different fields.

It holds power of distribution of relief materials among the distressed. This body may also sanction grants for Panchayat Samitis, Gram Panchayats, schools and different public welfare institutions, and award stipend or scholarship for the furtherance of technical or other education. Maintenance of roads, ghats, wells etc. and granting licence for fair and mela are its important functions. Being placed at the apex of the Panchayati Raj the Zila Parishad possesses general power of supervision over the lower tiers.

**5.24 FINANCE**

A sound financial organization is necessary for the successful operation of local self-governing bodies. This point perhaps has received proper attention while the

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., Secs. 109 & 116.
West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 was passed which specified the sources of income of all the three tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions.

GRAM PANCHAYAT

Gram Panchayat has following sources of income:

1. Contribution and grants if any, from
   a) the State or Central government and
   b) the higher two bodies, viz., Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad.
2. Loans, if any, granted by the state or central government.
3. All receipts on account of taxes, rates and fees levied by it.
4. All sums received as gift or contribution and all income from any trust or endowment made in favour of Gram Panchayat.
5. All receipts in respect of any schools, hospitals, dispensaries, buildings, institutions or works vested in, constructed by or placed under the control and management of the Gram Panchayat.
6. Fines and penalties:
   a) on land and buildings
   b) taxes in profession, trade, calling and employment.\(^{31}\)

**PANCHAYAT SAMITI**

The largest portion of the *Panchayat Samiti* fund comes from the contributions and grants given to it by the State or Central government. In West Bengal, a *Panchayat Samiti* receives two types of grants from the State government. It receives 75 percent of the 'augmentation grant' for the purpose of sanitation and public health and also 5 percent of the land revenue levied and collected by the state. *Panchayat Samiti* also receives grants from the *Zila Parishad*.

The *Samiti* can levy tolls on ferry, vehicles, or animals, and fees for licence of hat or bazar and also for sanitary facilities at places of worship, pilgrimage and *mela*. It can borrow money from the State government or from banks or other financial institutions with the previous sanction of State government.

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ZILA PARISHAD

The sources of income of Zila Parishad are mostly similar to those of Panchayat Samiti. Zila Parishad is a recipient of contributions and grants from the government.32

A substantial portion of the proceed of road cess and 5 percent share on land revenue raised by the State government constitute an important source. The other sources of revenue are almost similar to those of Panchayat Samiti. State government often advances loan to Zila Parishad to meet temporary financial crisis.

From different studies it has been found that the overall financial position of Panchayati Raj institutions is not satisfactory. This has been very clearly reflected in the report of Asoka Metha Committee (1978). Its observation on the financial matters was that part of the inability of Panchayati Raj institutions to come up to expectation lay in their weak financial

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32. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973, Secs. 133 & 179 (1).
resources. Internal resource-mobilization picture is very meagre. However, recently an uprising tendency is found, still it is not satisfactory. The total tax-collection of the Gram Panchayat in West Bengal have gone up from Rs. 4.7 millions in 1973-74 to Rs. 30.7 millions in 1985-86, perhaps because of the moderate tax rate at the Gram Panchayat level.

5.25 LOCAL LEVEL PLANNING

The importance of local level or decentralized planning has already been elaborated in details in the previous chapter for the overall development of a locality or zone. In India, decentralized planning has been endorse at the highest level as a part of planning mechanism since the Seventh Five Year Plan. However, as a concept, the reference of decentralized planning came into the Report on the Second Five Year Plan. The formulation of State plans for rural development on the basis of district level


34. Directorate of Panchayat, Government of West Bengal.
and block level plans was proposed in the Third Plan. A detailed guidelines regarding district-level planning were issued in the Fourth Plan period. The Fifth and Sixth Plans included a series of rural development programmes, especially anti-poverty ones. Since 1985-86, with the coming into effect of decentralized planning, the Panchayat bodies have assumed a greater status in planning and implementing rural development programmes.³⁵

In the spirit of Seventh Five Year Plan, West Bengal took a positive step towards decentralized and co-ordinated local level planning. The state involved Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samitis in the District Planning machinery of the State government in 1985-86 (vide, Development and Planning Department Notification No. 3230/P-16-6/85, dated 24th May, 1985. Accordingly, District Planning Committee at district level and Block Planning Committee at block level have been constituted.

Block Planning Committee (BPC) consisted of :
(a) Gram Panchayat Pradhans and block level officials concerning development programmes as members.

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³⁵. Ibid., p. 140.
(b) Block Development Officers as Member-Secretary and
c) as Chairman, The *Sabhapati* of *Panchayat Samiti*

Similarly, the member of District Planning Committee (DPC) are:

(a) The *Karmadhyakshas* (Chairmen) of *Zila Parishad*'s standing committees.
b) *Sabhapatis* of all the *Panchayat Samitis*,
c) Chairmen of all municipalities in the district,
d) representatives of statutory development authorities functioning in the district, and
e) the district level officers of the State government connected with development programmes.

The District Magistrate acts as the Member-Secretary and it is chaired by the *Sabhadhipati* of *Zila Parishad*.

There is also a higher co-ordinating body called 'District Planning and Co-ordination Council (DPCC) which includes the following members:

(a) *Zila Parishad Sabhapati* and *Sabhapatis* of all *Panchayat Samiti*  
(b) Chairmen of municipalities in the district,
(c) MLAs and MPs from the district, 
(d) district level officers of the State government connected with development.

The Council is generally headed by the minister hailing from the area. The District Magistrate acts as its Member-Secretary like that of DPC.

PLANNING PROCESS

Block Planning Committee (BPC) places Block Plan to the District Planning Committee (DPC) for its approval. DPC prepares the District Plan determining priorities among plans prepared at different levels on the basis of assessment of local needs and available resources. District Planning and Co-ordination Council (DPCC) co-ordinates and approves District Plan which is absolutely a formal sanctioning authority. The State Planning Board, at the state level, examines and interacts with District Plans but exclusively on an advisory capacity.

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36. If there is no minister from the district, the state government could nominate any of the ministers as the Chairman of DPCC.
From the brief discussion on local level planning in West Bengal it appears that existing planning process is to some extent satisfactory. Still it is not flawless as the most indispensable requirement of a good plan i.e., sufficient planning expertise has yet to develop. The necessity of such expertise has been reflected in a report of the workshop of District Magistrate/Collector on Responsive Administration, Panchayati Raj and Planning.37

5.26 PANCHAYATS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN WEST BENGAL

It is notable that in the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 and in other government documents the three-tier Panchayati Raj institutions have been assigned many functions related to rural development. The attempt of the researcher here would be to evaluate the actual role of Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat in rural development. This is, by and large, based on field study and informal discussion with functionaries and academicians.

37. The workshop was arranged by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions, Government of India.
The District North 24 Parganas was chosen as an area under study. To ascertain an overall picture of development activities of the rural local self-governing institutions in the district, the Zila Parishad President (Sabhadhipati), the President (Sabhapati) of Barrackpur II Panchayat Samiti and some of its members, and the Block Development Officer, and also the Pradhan and some members of Bisharpara Gram Panchayat were interviewed.

The local people generally expressed their satisfaction with the system and referred to various development works done since the elections were held first in 1978 e.g., construction or extension of roads, agriculture, fisheries, livestock, water supply, education etc. The people of West Bengal are politically conscious and the introduction of the new set up of the Panchayati Raj institutions has made them more alert about their rights and duties through greater participation.

The President (Sabhadhipati) of the Zila Parishad of North 24 Parganas informed the researcher that he received all kinds of co-operation from district level government officials including the District Magistrate in
the activities of Zila Parishad. In this way, public representatives and bureaucrats are jointly involved in development activities. The President (Sabhapati) of the Barrackpur II Panchayat Samiti feels the same way about the block level officials. Block Development Officer (BDO), who is the executive officer of the Panchayat Samiti is conscious about his power, functions and accountability to the Panchayat Samiti.

It has also been realized through discussions with the President of the Zila Parishad of North 24 Parganas that the Left Front government is adroitly working to bring welfare to the people. One senior retired government official of the area admired the system and was of the opinion that this model should be introduced throughout India.

Considerable amount of money has been granted to these bodies by the State government for welfare activities. In 1978-79, about Rs. 700 millions was given for the implementation of different schemes through Panchayati Raj institutions. In 1978, after the devastating flood, these rural local bodies successfully undertook relief and rehabilitation works. In fact,
without their spontaneous co-operation immediate rescue of a number of flood affected people could have become impossible. After that from 1978-79 to 1980-81, they undertook some post-flood reconstruction works with the help of Food for Works Programme. The main objective behind this programme was creation of employment opportunities among the flood-affected people and restoration of rural community assets. Subsequently, during drought time (1980-81 and 1982-83) Panchayat Samitis were entrusted with drought relief employment generating schemes.

In addition to this, the rural local bodies in West Bengal concentrate on different socio-economic activities. In 1979-80, Rural Housing Programme had been entrusted to the Panchayat Samiti for the reconstruction of houses for the homeless persons and 67,153 houses have so far been constructed. Achievement of last several years in this area is that 4,250, 4,200 and 4,004 houses were constructed during the years of 1985-86, 1986-87 and 1987-88 respectively for implementing loan-based Rural Housing Programme.

Rural water-supply was another important activity of the panchayats during the year of 1979-80. Sinking tube-wells, re-excavating, repairing and maintenance of existing tube-wells were undertaken at large scale. For this type of effort during the last several years many villages have been successfully brought under the drinking water supply programme. In 1988-89, a decision was taken to entrust the pipe-linked water supply programme to the Zila Parishad and accordingly, this work has been started in some Zila Parishads.

Education has received proper attention of the Panchayati Raj institutions. The extension of school building, establishment of new school, distribution of text books, revitalizing the attendance committee of primary schools etc. are being done by these institutions. Besides, distribution of mini-kits in agriculture, social forestry etc. are their direct responsibilities. The Panchayats have different social security schemes like widow allowance, old age allowance, peasant allowance etc.

Panchayati Raj institutions have been rendering a good deal of help to the disadvantaged classes of the
society, i.e., scheduled caste and scheduled tribe. The total number of beneficiaries under economic rehabilitation programmes stood at 259,000 in 1987-88.

_Panchayats_ have taken some revolutionary steps in land reform. With that aim they first tried to detect the _benami_ (anonymous) land and distribute them among the poor farmers and the recording _bargardars_. The role of elected _Panchayat_ leaders in the process of land reform is praise-worthy. They have been jointly working with the government officials in distributing vested land and in recording the titles of share-croppers or _bargardars_. Their success is, of course, worth mentioning as, till 1988-89 they succeeded to distribute more than 0.9 million hectares of vested land among 1.727 million eligible beneficiaries and also to record the names of 1.4 million _bargadars_.

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West Bengal government has been trying to implement its poverty alleviation programme in the rural areas by involving the local self-governing bodies. This area has received serious attention of the State government as almost 48% of the total population are living below the poverty line. The *Panchayats* have been adequately empowered to take necessary measure for freeing the rural people from the curse of serious poverty. If the present process works smoothly, it may be expected that there would be a noticeable change in this sector within a few years.

From the foregoing discussion on the *Panchayati Raj* institutions in West Bengal, it appears that the three-tier system of these rural local bodies are functioning, to a great extent, satisfactorily. An overall picture of *Panchayati Raj* institutions in West Bengal is summed up in the Chief Minister's letter to the Prime-Minister of India. A passage from that letter is quoted below:

The performance of the *Panchayats* in all these programmes has been noteworthy. In the field of land reforms, as you know, our State occupies a special position of pride in the country and this has been made possible in no small measure by the participation of local common people through the *Panchayats*. The
same kind of participation has played a significant role behind the success of implementation of the Food for Work/National Rural Employment Programme and the Rural Land-less Employment Guarantee Programme in our State. In the Final Report of Evaluation Organization of the Planning Commission, it has been observed that the involvement of Panchayats has led to a much better co-ordination in the planning and implementation of the programme in West Bengal. The report has further stated that in West Bengal the village Panchayat call meetings for preparing schemes for the villagers and the priority of works was also decided in these meetings.41

Briefing the success of West Bengal Panchayats in different sectors, the Chief Minister in his letter, suggested the Prime-minister to see the possibility of introducing such a mechanism throughout India.

Panchayat system of West Bengal has been highly appreciated in home and abroad42. The unutilized potentiality of Panchayati Raj has been highlighted by a foreign observer of the Indian political system:

The revival of the panchayats, their extension to most of the villages of India, their legal recognition as basic administrative units of governments and their

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41. Chief Minister's Letter, p.5.

association with community development programme and other efforts at rural uplift, are significant new departures in Indian politics and administration and they may indeed mark the revitalization of rural India and the beginning of a true popular awakening. If the villager really gains a sense of participation in a co-operative enterprise of social rejuvenation and nation-building, then a revolution will truly have come to the Indian countryside and to India as a whole. In this gigantic enterprise the panchayats could play a central role.

5.3 COMPARISON BETWEEN THE TWO SYSTEMS, BANGLADESH AND INDIA (WEST BENGAL)

If a comparison is made between the local rural self-governing bodies in Bangladesh and India (West Bengal) both resemblances as well as differences are found. In both places, there exists a three-tier system of local self-government, viz., in Bangladesh, Zila Parishad, Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad, and in India, Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayat.

Local self-governing bodies in both the systems are meant for rural development and accordingly, a lot of works have been entrusted to them.

Though in both West Bengal and Bangladesh there exist three-tier system of rural local self-government, a significant difference would be found between the two systems regarding composition, powers, functions of the different tiers. In West Bengal, all the three - tiers, Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat, have got more or less equal importance and it cannot be said that in development activities any particular tier surpasses others, whereas in Bangladesh, Upazila Parishad, the intermediary tier, has been entrusted with most of the development works of rural area. The other tiers, i.e., Zila Parishad and Union Parishad, have practically become handicapped since the introduction of upazila system in 1982. Upazila Parishad is now treated as the focal point of rural development.

Regarding the formation of local bodies, there are some differences between West Bengal and Bangladesh.

Heads and Deputy Heads

In West Bengal, the heads and deputy heads of the three local self-governing bodies viz., Sabhadhipati and Sahakari-Sabhadhipati of Zila Parishad, Sabhapati and
Sahakari-Sabhapati of Panchayat Samiti, and Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan of Gram Panchayat are elected by the elected members of the respective bodies from amongst themselves. In Bangladesh, the Chairmen of Upazila Parishad and Union Parishad are directly elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage. But there is no provision of election for the post of Chairman of Zila Parishad. He is appointed by the government. At present, there is no provision of deputy heads for the rural local bodies of Bangladesh as it is found in Indian System.

Membership

Some points of resemblance and difference are found in the membership of the three rural local bodies of West Bengal and Bangladesh. Both have the provision of ex-officio membership under which the head of the lower unit becomes the member of the higher council by virtue of his position e.g., in West Bengal the Gram Panchayat Pradhan is an ex-officio member of Panchayat Samiti and President of Panchayat Samiti is the ex-officio member of Zila Parishad. Similarly in Bangladesh, the Chairmen of Union and Upazila Parishads are the members of Upazila and Zila Parishads respectively.
The representation of women are ensured in rural local self-governing bodies of both the countries. In West Bengal, two women members may be co-opted in all the three tiers, whereas in Bangladesh in Union Parishad (lowest tier) and Upazila Parishad (intermediary tier) two women members may be nominated. In Zila Parishad their number is not fixed. The Local Government Ordinance (Zila Parishad) 1988 has mentioned that the number of such members cannot exceed the number of representative members of the Parishad.

Representation of the scheduled caste/scheduled tribe is found in India. But in Bangladesh, there is no such provision.

Tenure

The tenure of all the three-tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions in West Bengal is of 5 years. In Bangladesh, for Union Parishad it was initially fixed at 5 years and later it was reduced to 3 years. Again the government has started rethinking to extend the period to five years. But the matter is still under consideration. The tenure of Upazila Parishad is five years. But about the tenure of Zila Parishad the concerned Act is silent.
In West Bengal, members of Parliament and members of State Legislature would be the members of *Panchayati Samiti* and *Zila Parishad* of their respective constituencies. In Bangladesh, the provision is a bit different, here only *Zila Parishad* is represented by the member of Parliament.

In Bangladesh, the elections of the different tiers are held separately, whereas in West Bengal the election of all the tiers are held simultaneously--the voters cast three votes at a time for electing three members of the three tiers.

**Working**

In West Bengal the rural local self governing institutions under the banner of *Panchayati Raj* set up are functioning satisfactorily. Since the introduction of the present set up in 1978, with the first election of *panchayats* under the *West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973*, *panchayat* system has been arousing people's as well as scholar's enthusiasm. The effectiveness of the *Panchayati Raj* bodies has inspired the West Bengal government to contemplate seriously for delegating more powers and functions related to rural development to the *Panchayats.*
The fund-position of these bodies are not very sound, still they are trying to utilize the available fund properly. In Bangladesh the picture is a bit different. After the introduction of new set up in 1982, which also includes the re-organization of administration at the upazila level, Upazila Parishad is supposed to play the key role in rural development. And, it has already been pointed out that the Zila Parishad and Union Parishad have been left with a little scope to undertake development schemes. In the early years of Upazila system Upazila Parishad had been receiving considerably huge amount as grants from the government to implement its different development schemes. For the last several years, government grant has severely been cut short. It is, indeed, very difficult now to initiate development schemes with such a poor amount.

Local Level Planning and People's Participation

In the plan preparation, Upazila Parishad in Bangladesh has been given much independence in the preparation of Upazila Development Plan. There is no such hard and fast rule that upazila plan has to be approved
by the higher authority i.e., Zila Parishad or the Ministry of Local Government. Upazila Parishad is itself competent enough to approve it. In West Bengal, the parallel body of the Upazila Parishad is Panchayat Samiti. At that level there is a planning body known as Block Planning Committee (BPC). The plan prepared and coordinated by this committee needs approval of the higher authority and Zila Parishad has got sufficient power of alteration of such plan.

In West Bengal there are two planning bodies at the district level, District Planning Committee (DPC) and District Planning and Co-ordination Council (DPCC). In Bangladesh, there are no such bodies at the district level.

The appreciating feature which West Bengal developed is a regular participatory mechanism in formulation of schemes at grass-root level, and that has been made statutory there, mentioned in the West Bengal Panchayat Raj Act. Gram Panchayat has also to arrange half-yearly and annual public meeting where the budget, audit of accounts and its report are placed. But this type
of meeting is not convened in Bangladesh. It has been clearly mentioned in the Planning Commission's Guidelines for Upazila Parishad that the local development schemes should be undertaken on the basis of articulated needs of the inhabitants of respective localities for which meetings of the local people are to be arranged, but it is hardly seen in practice.

However, in both the countries more expertise is needed for successful local level planning, and steps are to be taken to ensure the collection of comprehensive data on resource, demography, socio-economic condition etc.

Process of Finance

The process of government grants for the rural local self-governing institutions in Bangladesh is different from West Bengal. In Bangladesh, Upazila Parishad, the intermediary tier, directly receives grants from the government, Union Parishad, the lowest tier, gets it through Deputy Commissioner, and a separate allocation is made for the Zila Parishad. But in West Bengal, government grants for the Panchayat bodies come through the Zila Parishad. It is the responsibility of Zila Parishad to distribute them among the Panchayat
Sami falling under its jurisdiction. And Gram Panchayat receives its share from the respective Panchayat Samiti.

Items on which taxes, rates, tolls and fees can be levied and the process of their realization are almost same in Bangladesh and West Bengal. In both the places, a huge amount remains unrealized because of the poor economic condition of the rural people and others who are capable, even are unwilling to pay. Moreover, the concerned authorities are not often ready to pressurize the people for the payment of outstanding dues at the cost of their popularity.

A common feature that found affecting rural local self-governing bodies of both West Bengal and Bangladesh, is their meagre income and inadequate resources compared to their responsibilities.

At the end, it may be said with objectivity that the Panchayat Raj institutions in West Bengal are functioning more effectively and smoothly than the rural local self-governing bodies in Bangladesh.