CHAPTER-II

ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF
PANCHAYATI RAJ
INSTITUTIONS IN INDIA
AND ANDHRA PRADESH
Panchayati Raj is an age-old Indian indigenous politico-administrative institution for village autonomy and development. It is a framework to adopt the democratic system in the rural India and ultimately to bring the villagers into the mainstream.

Conceptually, panchayats can be described as an assembly of the village people or their representatives. Gandhiji equated panchayats with 'Village Republics'. He explained his concept of village panchayats thus: "...

The government of the village will be conducted by the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males and females, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense, the panchayat will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its office. Any village can become such a republic without much interference even from the present government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the execution of the village revenue. Here there is perfect democracy based on individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government."

The term 'panchayati' literally means a Council of Five. The principle of 'panchayati' is Panch Parmeshwar, which means God speaking through the Five'. It seems the panchayat was invented with a spiritual tone to take up politico-developmental programmes for the Indian
villages. However, the term 'Panchayati Raj' came into vogue in the late 1950's. It referred to a process of governance, which links the people from village to state (in other words, from the Gram Sabha to Lok Sabha). Precisely, the Panchayati Raj system functions as the rural local government in India, ensuring grassroots democracy and decentralised planning. It devolves power to the villages. In the language of Gandhiji: "When Panchayati Raj is established, public opinion will do what violence can never do. The present power of Zamindars, the capitalist and the rajas can hold sway people non-co-operate with the evil of Zamindari or capitalism, it must die of inanition. In Panchayati Raj only the panchayat will be obeyed and the panchayat can only work through the law of their making". The concept of Panchayati Raj has developed from the idea of a close knit village community to that of an organic base for a three fold revolution social, political and economic. Briefly, Panchayati Raj means a statutory multi-tier institutional structure endowed with a corporate status by a competent (state) legislature performing functions pertaining to local governments. As such the Indian Panchayati Raj institutions have been designed on the theory of rural local government for the civic development of the villages. And "local government is that part of the government of a nation or state which deals with mainly such matters as concern the inhabitants of the particular district, or place together with those matters which the Parliament has deemed it desirable should be administered by
local authorities, sub-ordinate to the central government." As the rural local government, the Indian Panchayati Raj is based on the organised social feelings of common neighbourhood involving the basic necessities of the villagers and also common requirements of rural life. Thus, for the villagers this institution is considered as a necessary good. The rural society is conservative and always feels scarce of the presence of progressive urbanities. That is why the villagers remain united for the common objectives of their own socio-economic development with a separate rural identity. The basic necessity of the Panchayati Raj can be better explained in the Chart:2.1. Accordingly, the basic socio-economic and the common problems of the local villagers necessitate the village local government, i.e. Panchayati Raj in India.

Chart:2.1

**Necessity of Panchayati Raj**

- The Local Villagers
- Basic Socio-Economic Needs
- Common Local Problems
- Agency for Solution
- Village Local Government
Apart from its developmental orientations, the Panchayati Raj system essentially exhibits a political character. The panchayati bodies induct the rural people into the political culture of the nation. In a democratic set-up, they provide the training ground for the village people to participate effectively in the democratic process. In a way, these institutions are the extension cords of democracy to the villages.

**Panchayati Raj Institutions in India: A Retrospective**

Panchayati Raj is an age-old indigenous Indian politico-administrative institution. It owes its origin to the different traditional patterns of governance, in the phases of history, in many parts of India. Being associated with the Indian culture and heritage, the panchayati bodies have been working for the Indian villagers, in some form or other, since ancient times. Villages have been playing pivotal role in the Indian life through the ages and so also the different types of panchayati bodies. A chronological analysis of these bodies will reveal a comprehensive picture of village autonomy and village development in India. However, the Indian Panchayati Raj has been developed on the basis of traditional society and polity of India with a Vedic approach.

**Vedic-Traditional Basis**

Since Vedic days the village (Gram) in India has been considered as the basic unit of local-self administration. The will of the village
people had dominated every village republic. In the words of Dr. Altekar, “form most ancient times, villages in India have been the axle of administration”. The evidences, of primitive republican forms of government, are found in certain parts of ancient India especially during the Rig Vedic period.

In Vedic literature, references are available on the popular village assemblies controlling the kings of the numerous states. These popular assemblies for the villages were known as ‘sabha’ while the ‘samiti’ was a popular assembly for the whole people or the state at the capital. Both of these bodies were treated with high esteem and equated with the twin daughters of 'prajapati'-the creator. The ‘sabha’ was the simplest example of village government and all the village disputes were settled by it in addition to other functions like security, political as well as socio-cultural matters.

As has been mentioned, India had small states with republican structure during the Vedic period. The village republics existed with in these small Republic State-fully autonomous, more or less self-sufficient communities, functionally interdependent but based on patron client-relationship, Even after the kingship came into existence, with elective character, the state remained a republic. The king exercised his powers over the villages through the village
panchayat headman called 'Gramin' or 'Gramik' who had civil as well as military powers and functions for the village. In ancient Hindu polity the activities of the village administration were to manage tanks, pastures, temples, markets, dispensation of justice, taxation, etc.

The Arthasastra of Kautilya gives the examples of some village organizations. Several accounts are also available on the exercise of sovereign functions by the village organization over the king, in election or re-election on behalf of the people. The patriarchs of different families formed the governing class and a number of such families formed a canton. A number of cantons formed a Jana presided over by a Janapati or king. The 'Vayu-Puranas' give an account of 120 Janapadas of Bharatvarsha' organized on the basis of social traditions, racial compositions, geopolitical profile and dialects, etc. These were autonomous and self-sufficient, practising different methods of self-governing.

Shriman Narayan, one of the protagonists of Indian Panchayati Raj movement, tracing its origin describes: "It is believed that the system was first introduced by king Prithu while colonizing the doab between the Ganges and the Jamuna. In the Manusmuriti and the Shanti Parva of the Mahabharata, there are many references to the existence of gramsangha or rural communities. A description, of these rural communities is also
found in the Arthasatra of Kautilya who lived in 400 BC. In the Ramayan of Valmiki we read about the Janapada, which was perhaps a kind of federation of village republic. An account of the village common wealth during the 17th century is found in Sukracharya's Nitisara. In fact, the village in India has been looked upon as the basic unit of administration since the earliest Vedic times..."9

With the rise of the Mauryan Empire (324 BC), the republican and representative institutions declined. The few, which survived, collapsed during the Gupta period (320-511 AD). Accounts of early village communities are available even in the middle ages. South Indian inscriptions relating to Tamil kingdoms of 10th century tell us of the existence of several small committees for local administration in the same village, e.g. six committees, viz. Annual Committee, Garden Committee, Tank Committee, Gold Committee, Committee of Justice and Panch-Vara Committee.10 However, the village organizations (panchayats) sustained through the centuries till the Mughal rule (1526-1857), as some kind of consultative machinery.

Under the Mughals, their judicial powers were minimized but the local affairs remained un-administered from the top. The village officers and village level servants remained answerable to the panchayats. Thus, these institutions went into oblivion but certainly could not be scraped.
British period

During the British period, the local government system passed through two distinct phases. The first phase commenced with from the advent of the British rule and lasted till the Constitutional Reforms of 1919 and the second phase from 1919 to the end of the British rule.

First phase

During the first phase, the advent of the British rule saw the slow disappearance of the self-contained village local government system and the emergence of a local government as the direct projection of the British rule. They used this system to extend their own rule. As a result, the attitude of the people changed. People seemed to lose faith in the age old system of local government. Other conditions too had changed. Direct taxation gave way to indirect taxation. As Mathew rightly points out that "the Village Panchayats were not the first priority of the British rulers. Concentrated as they were mainly around the trading centres, their interest in the beginning was limited to the creation of local bodies of nominated members in the major towns." The revolt of 1857 seems to have been largely responsible for creating the conditions for the adoption of Lord Mayo's resolution on local self-government reviving the traditional village panchayati system in Bengal. The transfer of authority to the local institutions, was a financial
necessity in the context of imperial financial strains and stresses in the wake of the mutiny, and that it called for, 'a comprehensive political philosophy involving the transfer of authority from the imperial level to the local representatives with legal, administrative and financial implications.'

**Lord Rippon's Resolution (1882)**

The report of the Famine Commission of 1880, pointing to the absence of institutionalized local bodies, as a major impediment in the process of bringing relief supplies to the affected people, further strengthened the case for the transfer of authority to local bodies. As a result in 1882, the Government of India Resolution on local self-government was announced. It envisaged a comprehensive geo-administrative country-wide principle for the local self-government institutions. "Lord Rippon's government sent circulars to the governments in the provinces on the subject of local self-government, in order to seek the popular, public opinion. The issues in the circular became the basis for the Government of India Resolution (1882). Then came into being the Local Bodies Act of 1885. This was the basis for setting up of local self-governing institutions, but they had a majority of nominated members down to the village level."
Royal Commission on Decentralization

Lord Rippon was liberal in his outlook towards the problem of local self-government. He thought the local self-governing institutions would act as instruments of political and popular education. Another major step in this direction was the report of the Royal Commission on Decentralization. This Commission was set up in 1907 and it submitted its report in 1909. The Commission recommended that it could be desirable for effective decentralization to associate people with local tasks and village affairs through the village panchayats. The Commission recommended that, "it is most desirable, alike in the interests of decentralization and in order to associate the people with the local tasks of administration that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village panchayats for the administration of local village affairs."¹⁴ Both the recommendations contained in the Rippon resolution as well as those made by the Royal Commission on Decentralization, were not implemented and remained on paper only.

Lahore Resolution of 1909

In 1909, the 24ᵗʰ Session of the Congress was held at Lahore. It adopted a resolution urging the government to take early steps to have elected local bodies from village panchayati upwards with elected non-official chairmen for the local bodies and to provide
them with necessary financial support. But all these efforts remained largely on paper.

**Second phase**

During the second phase various reforms were introduced largely as a consequence directed result of the developments that characterized from the first phase. The Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act of 1919, under the proposed scheme of dyarchy, made local self-government a transferred subject. This meant that local self-government was brought under the control of Indian Ministers in the provinces. The idea was to make the local bodies’ representative with popular control. However, it did not make the panchayati institutions truly democratic because of various constraints. A large number of Acts were passed for the establishment of village panchayats, almost in all provinces, in order to fulfill the condition of transferring this subject to the domain of Indian Ministers in the provinces.

In subsequent years, similar laws were adopted by some other states. These were: Bikaner (Village Panchayat Act, 1939), Karauli (Village Panchayat Act, 1939), Hyderabad (Village Panchayat Act, 1940), Mewar (Gram Panchayat Act, 1940), Jasdan (Village Panchayat Act, 1942), Bhavnagar (Village Panchayat Act, 1943), Porbandar (Village Panchayat Act, 1943), Bharatpur (Village Panchayat Act, 1944), Marwar (Gram Panchayat Act, 1945), Wadia (Village Panchayat Act, 1946), Dharangadhra (Village Panchayat Act, 1946), Morvi (Village Panchayat Act, 1946), Sirohi (Village Panchayat Act, 1947), and Jaipur (Village Panchayat Act, 1948). However, these statutory panchayats covered only a limited number of villages and had, generally, a limited number of functions.16

These Acts aimed at looking after the village affairs and their development only. The local self-government even had the powers to try minor cases also. But these bodies were not democratic in the real sense because most of their members were not elected but were nominated by the government. They had few powers given to them and their financial resources were also limited. It was the time when Gandhiji categorically defined his vision of village panchayat thus—his idea of village Swaraj is that it is a complete republic independent of its neighbours for its own vital wants and yet interdependent for many
others in which dependence is a necessity. The government of the village will be conducted by the panchayats of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, men and women, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted sense, the panchayats will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Any village can become such a republic today without much interference even from the present government whose sole effective connection with the villages is the execution of village revenue. Here there is perfect democracy based upon individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government.  

Although the last few decades of the British rule witnessed a large number of state acts being passed for the establishment of village panchayats, the situation remained more or less the same till India achieved her independence.  

Post-Independence period  

All through the freedom struggle, the Indian National Congress perceived the Panchayats as people's institutions. Local self-governance was seen as the true voice of democracy. Village Panchayats were central to the ideological framework of India's
national movement. Many of our leaders, mainly Mahatma Gandhi were wedded to the concept of Gram Swaraj. The idea was to have democratic process operating at the grass roots level as much as at the state and national levels. However, all this could not be translated into action, when India got her independence.

Article-40 of the Indian Constitution - 'Organisation of Village Panchayats'

It is what Mathew (1994) calls a "sad commentary on India's national commitment to democratic decentralisation that despite the village, having a history as the basic unit of administration and despite the nationalist movement's commitment to panchayats and Gandhiji's unequivocal propagation of the ideal, the first draft of India's Constitution did not include a provision for panchayats."¹⁸ This was in spite of the fact that Gram Swaraj (village self-rule) was a major slogan in the national liberation movement. It is unfortunate that the founding fathers of our Constitution did not take notice of these facts, while preparing the first draft of the Constitution.

It is said that 'When Gandhiji came to know about it, he felt both disturbed and depressed'. Rightly so, because 'Gram Swaraj' was the post-independence model of governance in rural India that Gandhiji had dreamt of presumably, noticing his distress, an amendment was
moved for inserting Article 40 in Part IV of the Indian Constitution—Directive Principles of State Policy which says that, “the state should take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.” This provision of the Constitution was primarily advisory in nature and therefore not taken seriously both by the Central and the State Governments. It is a fact that the Indian State, immediately after attaining independence, was more committed to industrialization and rural transformation through economic growth than democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj. As a result, what followed was not an effort to usher in Panchayati Raj in the country, but to bring about socio-economic transformation through the 'Community Development Programme (CDP)', a bureaucratically controlled state funded development intervention.

The First Development Initiative—CDP

The introduction of Community Development Programme (CDP) in 1952 with people's participation as its central concern was thus conceived as an instrument to transform the social and economic life of the village community. Right from the beginning, the programme was blown out of proportion as one of the most beneficent revolutions (Toynbee) and one of the major experiments of the 20th
century (UN Mission). The CDP was soon strengthened by a National Extension Service to tackle the problems of growth and development at different local and functional levels. Even this could invoke only token public participation. It is, however, true that CDP was the first comprehensive programme for socio-economic transformation of rural areas. It is also a fact that it succeeded in establishing, for the first time, an organized administrative set-up at the national, state, district and block levels for the implementation of development programmes. It is equally true that the objective of self-reliance and people's participation could not be achieved through CDP, as it did not pay adequate attention to the objective of developing responsible' and responsive leadership. The CDP followed a 'top-down' approach; thus, there was, relatively speaking, only token public participation effected through nominated representatives of the public.

The programme raised immense expectations. The expectations so raised could, however, not be fulfilled. There was also a lack of enthusiasm among people in the Community Development Programmes because of the non-association of the people, particularly the disadvantaged rural poor and their representatives, in the planning and execution of development schemes meant for them. The people were not sufficiently motivated and there was a lack of
strong commitment to the interests of the people among the inadequately trained development workers. As a result, dependence of the people on the government for material resources continued, and self help did not take roots at the expected level. People continued to ask the government for material resources.

There was a growing feeling among the policy makers that the development schemes would perhaps work only if the masses participated in them. It became increasingly self-evident that socio-economic transformation could not be achieved without democratic participation. Thus a study team on Community Projects and National Extension Service was set up in January, 1957 to assess the situation and to make necessary recommendations.

**Birth of the Panchayati Raj System in Independent India**

The study team on 'Community Projects and National Extension Service' headed by Balwanth Roy Mehta was set up in January, 1957. In its report the study team observed that, "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." It will be pertinent here to refer
to some of the observations made by the study team in its report, which are relevant even today. On the state of resources the report states that, “one of the most important reasons for comparative lack of success of our non-urban local self-governing bodies is their exceedingly limited and inelastic resources.” Similarly, on the role of panchayati samities the report mentions that, "the establishment of the panchayati samities with a wide devolution of power by the State government has to be an act of faith-faith in democracy." The team expressed concern about the lack of popular participation in the Community Development Programme and made a strong plea for establishing elected local bodies as soon as possible and for the devolution of power to lower levels through Panchayati Raj. Basic principles suggested by Mehta team were:

- It should be a 3-tier structure from village to the district bodies having organic linkage with each other.
- There should be genuine transfer of powers and responsibility to them.
- Adequate resources should be transferred to the new bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibilities.
- All development plans/programmes at these levels should be channelled through these bodies.
➤ The system evolved should be such as will facilitate further devolution and transfer of powers and responsibilities in future, and

➤ The higher level body, the Zilla Parishad, would play an advisory role.

Planners and policy makers realized that the development efforts in rural areas could be fruitful only if the development strategy is based on invoking people's participation through panchayats as recommended by the study team. The study team report aptly sum up its findings in the following words, "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."


The states of Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh were the first to adopt this system. On the occasion of inaugurating Panchayati Raj System in the country on 2nd October, 1959 at Nagaur in Rajasthan, Pandit. Jawaharlal Nehru hailed it as the most revolutionary and historical step in the context of new India.
By 1959, all the states had passed Panchayat Acts, and subsequently panchayats were set up in all parts of the country. "More than 2, 17,300 village panchayats, covering over 96 per cent of the 5, 79,000 inhabited villages and 92 per cent of the rural population had been established. On an average, a panchayat covered a population of about 2,400 in two to three villages. There were 4526 Panchayat Samities at the Block/Tahasil level covering 88 per cent of the blocks in the country. On an average a Panchayat Samiti covered about 48 Gram Panchayats. There were 330 Zilla Parishads covering about 76 per cent of the districts in the country and each Zilla Parishad had on an average 13 to 14 Panchayat Samities and about 660 Gram Panchayats."24

No doubt it was an impressive beginning. "There was a lot of enthusiasm generated in rural India and the people started feeling that they could have a say in affairs affecting their daily lives. Those were the promising days of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India."25 Thus the period between 1959-1964 (some call it Nehru...S.K. Day period) was a period of ascendancy as far as the Panchayati Raj system in India is concerned.

Stagnation and decline (1965-1977)

Unfortunately this enthusiasm could not be sustained as it did not develop the requisite democratic momentum and failed to cater to the needs
of rural development. The system was faced with several problems. These among others included,

i). change in development priorities,

ii). lack of clarity about the concept of local self-government,

iii). lack of funds,

iv). the Panchayati Raj system adopted by the various states was not uniform, and

v). political and bureaucratic resistance at the state level in to the sharing of powers and resources with the local level institutions. One explanation given is that, “strengthening of local government institutions and adoption of community development approach did not go hand in hand with adequate delegation and devolution of powers, particularly in respect of planning and administration.” On the other hand, national development planners were busy experimenting with other development initiatives, like Green Revolution in the 1960’s and Target Group Approach in the 1970’s. This was partly due to their anxiety to show over night results in food situation and partly to reach target groups to contain poverty. As a result, the Panchayati Raj system passed through a period of stagnation between 1965 and 1969 and went through a phase of decline from 1969 to 1977. It seems that perhaps power holders were not ready to share power with people. With the possible exception of

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Maharashtra, Gujarath, Karnataka and West Bengal, elsewhere these institutions were either superseded or allowed very little freedom to operate, which inevitably led to their decline.\textsuperscript{27} As a result, local self-government system nourished through history and promised through the Constitution of India started languishing. It was only when development planners again realized that community participation in development planning was not forthcoming on expected lines and the poverty situation was showing little signs of recovery that they started looking back at local self-government through Panchayati Raj during the late 1970's as a possible way out to catalyze rural development. With the change of government at the national level in 1977, Ashok Mehta Committee was constituted to have a fresh look at the Panchayati Raj System.\textsuperscript{28}

\textbf{Ashok Mehta Committee, 1977}

The appointment of Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977 marked a turning point in the growth of Panchayati Raj.\textsuperscript{29} It recognized the importance of the recommendations of earlier committees and reviews undertaken and clearly defined its focus stating that India has gathered wide experience in the practice of democratic decentralization in the wake of recommendations of Balwanth Roy Mehta study team.
The committee, after a comprehensive review of the literature and the situation, provided a definite philosophical treatment to the Panchayati Raj system. On the performance of Panchayati Raj during 1959-1977, the Committee observes: “The story of Panchayati Raj has been a story of ups and downs. It seems to have passed through three phases—the phase of ascendancy (1959-1964); the phase of stagnation (1965-1969) and the phase of decline (1969-1977)”.

It observed that rural India was the backbone of all development programmes. The future of India would depend on the welfare of the villages. Panchayati Raj as a system should contribute to the philosophy and functions of rural life in India. The main recommendations of the Committee were the following:

- The district should be the first point of decentralization and tender popular supervision below the state level. Below the district there should be Mandal Panchayats comprising a group of villages with a total population of 15,000 to 20,000. The Block level Panchayat Samities should be converted into non-statutory executive committees of Zilla Parishad, and most of their functions would be taken up by Mandal Panchayats when the latter becomes active. At the village level, the people would be involved in Mandal Panchayats through Village Committees which would look after municipal functions and the related welfare activities.
Election to Panchayati Raj bodies should be conducted by the Chief Election Officer of the State in consultation with the Chief Election Commissioner. Political parties should be allowed to participate in the elections as it would "facilitate healthier linkages with higher level political process."

With the district as the strategic level for economic planning, the Zilla Parishad should be made responsible for planning at the district level. A professionally qualified team should be stationed at the district level for the preparation of district plans.

The Zilla Parishad should consist of six types of members, viz., members elected from suitably demarcated electoral divisions, Presidents of Panchayat Samities as ex-officio members, nominees of bigger municipalities, nominees of district level cooperative federation, two women who get the highest number of votes in the Zilla Parishad elections and two co-opted members. They are, one who is especially interested in rural development and the other drawn from University/College teachers.

All the development functions relating to a district would have to be placed under the Zilla Parishad. Some of the functions which could be so decentralized including agriculture and allied sectors, health, education, communications, rural industries, marketing, welfare of backward classes, family welfare, etc.
➤ Mandal Panchayats would be responsible for implementation of schemes and projects assigned by the Zilla Parishad.

The most significant recommendation of the Committee was the two-tier Panchayati Raj system. According to this recommendation, the Zilla Parishad at the district level was to be established as the first point of decentralization. It recommended the formation of Mandal Panchayats. A Mandal Panchayat was conceived to cover a group of villages, which would make necessary links with the system in developing focal points. It was also expected to develop links between rural and urban areas. One major weakness of the Ashok Mehta Committee was that it ignored the importance of the Gram Sabha.32

The States of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal passed new legislation based on the Committee's Report. Even though the experiences of Karnataka and West Bengal were encouraging there was hardly any follow up at the Central level. The Chief Ministers' Conference in 1979 rejected the idea of two-tier system and favoured the continuation of the three-tier system.
G.V.K. Rao Committee, 1985

The G.V.K. Rao Committee was set up in March, 1985 by the Planning Commission to review the then existing administrative arrangements for rural development and poverty alleviation programmes, and to recommend appropriate structural mechanism to ensure that they are planned in an integrated manner and implemented effectively. The terms of reference of the committee, among other things included the study of the role of Panchayati Raj bodies and their relationship with the proposed administrative set up, and to make appropriate recommendations in this regard. The Committee noted "States have been generally lukewarm to the process of democratic decentralization. In most states the Panchayati Raj bodies have been allowed to languish without powers and resources. The Committee is of the opinion that there should be a significant decentralization at the district level." The major recommendations of this committee were:

a. The Committee felt that the time had come to take a total view of rural development, so that it encompasses all economic and social development activities handled by different agencies at the field level,

b. Panchayati Raj institutions have to be activated and given all support needed so that they can become effective organizations for
handling people's problems. Elections to these bodies should be held regularly,
c. The district should be the basic unit for policy planning and programme implementation. The Zilla Parishad should, therefore, become the principal body for the management of all development programmes that could be handled at that level,
d. Panchayati Raj institutions at the district level and below should be assigned an important role in respect of planning, implementation and monitoring of rural development programmes,
e. Some of the planning functions at the state level might have to be transferred to the district level for effective decentralized district planning.

Dr. L.M. Singhvi Committee, 1986

The Government of India set up a committee in June, 1986 headed by Dr. L.M. Singhvi to prepare a concept paper on the revitalization of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The Committee felt that the concept of Panchayats was a part of the philosophy of Purna-Swaraj and Gram Swaraj. It considered Panchayati Raj institutions as basic units of self-government. The Committee was of the view that, “It has been a fundamental error to regard Panchayati Raj institutions primarily as convenient tools for administrative programmes and
development projects. That error had the effect, in greater or lesser measure, of devaluing and downgrading the role of these institutions as units of self-government and relegating them to a secondary position, harming and hampering both democracy and development.\textsuperscript{35}

The committee believed that the concept of Panchayati Raj institutions must draw its inspiration from the quintessential concept, of Gram Swaraj. This according to the committee is the explicit mandate and background of Article 40 of the Constitution. The committee was of the view that the concept of village panchayats as units of self-government is central and integral to the Constitutional mandate and is vital in terms of the living rural reality. The Committee attached a lot of importance to Gram Sabha and considered it as the embodiment of direct democracy.\textsuperscript{36} Some of its major recommendations were:

- Local self-government should be constitutionally recognized, protected and preserved by the inclusion of a new chapter in the Constitution. Local self-government and more particularly, Panchayati Raj institutions should be constitutionally proclaimed as the third-tier of government.

- Elections to the Panchayati Raj bodies should be held promptly at the end of the specified term. A Constitutional provision should be made to ensure, regular, free and fair elections for Panchayati Raj bodies and the task should be entrusted to the
Election Commission of India operating through State Commissions or similar apparatus. No Panchayati Raj institution should be allowed to, remain superseded for more than six or seven months.

➢ In order to avoid apprehensions and charges of political bias or interference, the Committee recommended that Panchayati Raj Judicial Tribunal should be set up in every state to adjudicate controversies in relation to elections, suspensions, supersessions, dissolutions and other matters relating to the working of Panchayati Raj institutions and their elected personnel.

➢ Ways and means should be found to ensure availability of adequate financial resources for Panchayati Raj institutions to function effectively. The Committee suggested that the Finance Commission appointed by the Union Government under the Constitution should make an adequate earmarked provision for Panchayati Raj institutions.

➢ Participation of individuals attached to political parties should be discouraged. The Committee noted that it is neither practicable nor desirable to inject the participation of individuals associated with political parties in Panchayati Raj institutions by law.
The Nyaya Panchayat should be given the functions of mediation and conciliation in addition to adjudication. The committee was of the view that the institution of Nyaya Panchayats is a valuable aid to the development of social habits of self-government and rule of law. It suggested that there may be a Nyaya Panchayat for a cluster of villages constituted by election or appointed from a special panel to be prepared for the purpose.

P.K.Thungon Committee, 1988

By the end of 1988, a sub-committee of the Consultative Committee of Parliament under the chairmanship of P.K. Thungon made recommendations for strengthening the Panchayati Raj system. One of its important recommendations was that Panchayati Raj bodies should be recognised constitutionally.

V.N.Gadgil Committee, 1989

Similarly, a Congress Committee headed by V.N. Gadgil was set up in 1989. The committee recommended a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj, a fixed term of 5 years and reservation for Scheduled Castes/ Scheduled Tribes and women. These recommendations became the basis for drafting the constitutional amendment bill.
The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1993

The amendment phase began with the 64th Amendment bill (1989), which was introduced in Parliament for constituting panchayats in every State at the village, intermediate and district levels. It proposed that the Legislature of a State could by law endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. Unfortunately, though the Bill got a two-thirds majority in the Lok Sabha, it was struck down in the Rajya Sabha on October 15, 1989, by just two votes.

The next government headed by V.P. Singh also made an abortive effort to provide Constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj system through the introduction of 74th Amendment. These failures notwithstanding, the government declared its commitment to the philosophy of Power to the People and to achieve this objective provided the much needed constitutional status to panchayats. The then Congress-I government headed by P.V. Narasimha Rao initiated the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution in 1991. A comprehensive amendment was introduced in the form of Constitution (72nd Amendment) Bill in September 1991, which was subsequently referred to a Joint Select Committee of the Parliament in December 1991 for a detailed examination.
Finally, after including the necessary amendments, the amendment was passed with near unanimity in the Lok Sabha on December 22, 1992 and in the Rajya Sabha on December 23, 1992. The bill got the President's assent on April 20, 1993 and the Constitution 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment Act came into effect from April 24, 1993. This Amendment has, in effect, made the transfer of power to Panchayats a part of the most basic document of this nation the Constitution of India.

The Seventy-Third Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, poured new vigour to Panchayati Raj Institutions in all parts of rural India. As per the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the Panchayati Raj Institutions are working in 28 States and 7 Union Territories of India with slight modifications. The Map: 2.1 gives a clear picture of States and Union Territories.
MAP -2.1

Map of India Showing States and Union Territories
Development activities and 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment

Act gives powers and responsibilities to the panchayats to plan and execute economic development programmes. It involves making plans for economic development, social justice and the implementation of schemes listed in the XI Schedule. The activities earmarked for Panchayat Raj institutions may be grouped under five categories for academic purposes.

1. **Economic Development:** There are 11 items which talk about economic development. One of them relates to anti-poverty programmes, such as JRY, IRDP, etc. Other areas are agriculture, land improvement, minor irrigation, animal husbandry, fishery, social forestry, minor forest produce, small scale and cottage industry, fuel and fodder.

2. **Education:** There are five items under this category. Primary and Secondary Schools, non-formal education, libraries, technical training, cultural activities, etc.

3. **Health:** There are two items related to health, such as health and sanitation and family welfare,

4. **Welfare, including Women and Child development:** There are four items which include social welfare: welfare of weaker sections, public distribution system, women and child development.
5. **Infrastructure Development**: There are seven items here such as roads, housing, drinking water, markets, electrification, maintenance of community assets, etc.

Among these, there are certain items (apart from the items on anti-poverty programme) which are meant for the poor or the underprivileged. Schemes for weaker sections or programmes for women and child development fall under this category. The benefits of public distribution system should also go to the poor. Land reforms is central to all, particularly distribution of waste-land enforcement of the tenancy laws constitute a frontal attack on poverty.

**Evolution of Panchayati Raj System in Andhra Pradesh**

**Ancient and Medieval Period**

Often it is claimed that the panchayati raj of today has descended from the panchayats of ancient India. Much of the inspiration for the system of rural local government comes from the panchayats that existed in the past. Information on the subject is, however, not easily available. It is from a close study of the inscriptions of the time and of stray references it found in literature that historians have been able to get some idea of it. Historical records reveal that panchayats were flourished in villages from the days of the Satavahanas, who ruled Andhra from 271 BC. to 174 AD. to the days of the Kakatiyas, from
whom power was wrested by the Muslim invaders in 1323 AD. Although this long period villages enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in the sense of freedom from the control of the state. Even though the ruling dynasties changed tune from time to time, there was not much of a change in the nature and degree of village autonomy, through the internal structure. The village was the lowest unit of settlement and administration in early times.

The people in each village were divided into a number of castes and professional groups. The principle of mutual duties and obligations was accepted and all worked together in a spirit of harmonious unity. There was little room for caste and personal rival. The spirit of unity was responsible for the construction of many works of public utility—wells, tanks, choultries, schools and hospitals without any consideration as to which caste or class would be benefited by it.

Every village had a number of functionaries known as Ayagars or Grama Bhatas. The normal number of Ayagars was twelve but it might be a little less or more according to size of the village, its population and its prosperity. The twelve Ayagars were: (1). Reddy or Peda Kapu (2). Karanam (3). Talari (4). Purohit (5). Blacksmith (6). Goldsmith (7). Carpenter (8). Potter (9). Washerman (10). Barber (11). Vetti and (12). Shoe-Maker.37

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Among the Ayagars, the Reddy occupied a position of primacy. He was the Pedda Kapu or the Head Man of the village. He was the successor of the Gramani, the Gramunda, the Gramika, the Gramakuta or the Pabbalika, the names used for the holder of the headship of the village at different times and in different places. In early times the Reddy represented the villagers in their dealings with the state ruler and he also represented the ruler in dealings with the villages. He, thus, served as a link between the two. He was responsible for the collection of all taxes due from the village to the ruler.

The Talari was the policeman of the village working under the Reddy. It was his duty to go on rounds day and night and bring offenders and bad characters to book. In addition to him there was also a Barikapu (corrupt form of Prahari Kapu) the person keeping a watch over the Prahara or boundary wall of the village and over the cultivated fields.

There were many territorial divisions above the village like Nadu, Mahanadu, Vishaya, Seema, Rajya, Sthala, etc. But the information available on these divisions is scanty.

The biggest local assembly was known as Mahanadu which brought
different local corporations under its organization and created common understanding among them in pre-Vijayanagar Andhra. Mahanadu was the largest assembly corresponding to Mahanadu in medieval Karnataka and Periyanadu in Tamil Nadu. G.S. Dikshit says that, the Mahanadu was the district assembly, while K.V. Subrahmanya Ayyer calls it the largest provincial organization. The Mahanadu met occasionally. Merchants took initiative in holding its meeting. Thus, its leadership remained with them.

Andhra passed through several political vicissitudes after the fall of Warangal in 1323 AD. Part of the country came under the rule of Muslims, part under that of Vijayanagar, the Gajapatis of Orissa and several other dynasties. In the later days of Kutub Sahis the whole of Andhra came under their control and after their overthrow the rule of Mughals was established. Then came the rule of Nizam-ul-Mulk, who made himself independent of the Mughal emperor in due course and of his successor Nizams of Hyderabad. But the latter, like many other Indian rulers of the day, proved themselves incapable of defending their territory against the superior military strength of the British with the result that by 1300 AD a large part of Andhra (coastal area and Rayalaseema) came under the rule of the British. Telangana alone continued to be ruled by the Nizam. During the five centuries following the fall of Warangal there were no
changes of any appreciable character in the system of rural local self-government. The situation, however, underwent a change with the establishment and consolidation of British rule.

**Panchayati Raj Institutions in Andhra Pradesh under Colonial Rule**

During the period of British rule the isolation of the village had completely broken and with that, age long economic self-sufficiency and the community spirit received a serve blow. The administrative policies pursued by the British strengthened the force leading to the disintegration of the village as a community. One prominent feature of British rule was the establishment of direct connection between the Central and Provincial governments on one side and the individual inhabitants of each village on the other.

The structure of rural local self-government created in Andhra region of Madras Presidency was along the lines suggested by Lord Rippon though on a restricted democratic foundations. In the Telangana region of the present state of Andhra Pradesh rural local governments similar to those established in the Andhra region of Madras Presidency were created since the promulgation of the Dastur-Ill-Amal in 1888AD. However, in Andhra region the members of the local bodies were elected by those who possessed property or education while the local bodies of Telangana consisted of nominated non-officials only. There was considerable
official domination over the local bodies in both the regions. Starting from
1920 villages panchayats have come to be established in the Andhra
region, while legislation for the creation of similar institutions in
Telangana was undertaken only in 1941. A close examination of the
political events since the 1930’s reveals that with the intensification of
the freedom struggle, the issue of local self-government receded
completely in to the background. However, one important development,
viz., the abolition of the Taluq Boards took place in the Andhra region in
1936. At the time of independence the rural local bodies were completely
managed by the government officials with the District Collector directly
taking over the charge of the District Board.40

Three-tier System of Panchayati Raj

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithi and Zilla Parishads
Act, 1959 was an important landmark in the evolution of panchayati raj
in Andhra Pradesh. This act was the outcome of the recommendations
made by the Balwanth Roy Mehta team. The Government of Andhra
Pradesh accepted almost all the recommendations of the Mehta team. A
white paper was issued by the State government in November, 1957
pronouncing their new policy relating to rural local governments. Adhoc
panchayat samithis at the rate of one for each district were created in
May 1958. Satisfied with the working of the adhoc bodies the
Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads Act was adopted on September 15, 1959. According to the provisions of the Act, 235 panchayat samithis started functioning from 1st November, 1959, formation Day, and 20 Zilla Parishads from 1st December, 1959. The powers and functions discharged by the erstwhile District Boards along with their assets and liabilities were vested with the Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samithis. By 1962-1963, the entire state was covered by the three-tier system of panchayati raj with 448 panchayats are concerned two separate acts were in force in Andhra and Telangana regions. They were amalgamated with the passing of the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayats Act in 1964.

Reforms to Panchayati Raj Institutions

Initially, people evinced keen interest in the system and the representatives of the people participated in various development activities, by offering liberal contributions in cash and kind for laying roads, providing drinking water facilities, establishment of primary schools, primary health centres and for provision of various other amenities in the rural areas. The initial euphoria did not really last long. As Prof. Ram Reddy, a serious analyst of panchayati raj noted that, "the enthusiasm lasted about a decade and was then followed by a decade of criticism". The initial enthusiasm and public participation which were in evidence in
the earlier period of panchayati raj seem to have gradually diminished on account of politicization of these bodies.

In 1960’s several bureaucrats of the top and middle echelons who had all along been irked by the erosion of their authority, seized the opportunity to convey to the political chiefs about the need for reform. Accordingly, a scheme envisaging the formation of Zilla Development Boards was introduced in 1967. Under the scheme a Zilla or District Development Board (ZDB) was constituted with the District Collector as Chairman and Chairman of the Zilla Parishad as a Member. The Zilla Development Board was made responsible for the formulation and implementation of policies relating to the agricultural and industrial growth of the district. This measure went contrary to the country wide trend of devolution of development functions to elected rural local bodies. To that extent, it subordinated the Zilla Parishad to the Zilla Development Board.

There was disenchantment with the structure and functioning of panchayati raj in Andhra Pradesh, particularly after the introduction of ZDB Scheme. So there is a growing concern for reform of rural local government. Perhaps, the attempts at reform and their fruition are characterized by a high frequency. Several steps were
taken to improve the functioning of the rural local bodies and attempts were made to remove the structural bottlenecks in the functioning of these bodies since the early 1960's.

Committees were appointed to go into the working of these institutions and suggest changes in their organizational structure. The important committees which expressed views on various aspects of the panchayati raj are the J. Vengal Rao Committee (1968) and the C. Narasimham Committee (1972 and 1981). While reiterating their faith in the pandhayati raj these committees had suggested structural changes to make the panchayati raj institutions more democratic and also more effective as instruments of rural development.

**Jalagam Vengala Rao Committee (1968)**

The creation of the new institution of District Development Board and the enhanced role of bureaucracy was bitterly criticised and resented by the politicians. It was alleged that the functioning of the above Board was counter to the recommendations of Balwanth Roy Mehta and further never synchronized under these circumstances a committee of the Congress Legislature Party under the headship of J. Vengala Rao consisting of 13 Members of Legislative Assembly was set up in 1968 to consider all aspects relating to the Panchayati Raj and to suggest improvements and amendments to the concerned Acts. It felt that the
DDBs could not justify their existence or claim superiority of performance by merely planning castles in the air.

The committee identified certain factors that accounted for public dissatisfaction with Panchayati Raj. It pointed out that Panchayati Raj had,

(a). lost its dynamism mainly because of paucity of funds.

(b). that the mode of constitution of its different tiers and the pattern of Election to its bodies left much to be desired, and

(c). it suffered from lack of functional freedom.

Further, the committee felt that strengthen of the hands of the bureaucracy at the district level had demoralized the entire setup. Lack of independent and adequate financial resources had also made mockery of the concept of local self-government. Hence, committee made the following recommendations:

➢ MPs and Legislators should be debarred from holding elective posts in the two upper tiers. They could have membership in the Zilla Parishads but with out voting rights.

➢ The Sarpanch, the Samithi President and the chair person of the Zilla Parishad should not have any independent powers and should act strictly in accordance with the decisions of the committees of the respective bodies.
Use of party symbols should not be permitted in elections at any level, and

The Panchayats should be provided with adequate resources so that their perpetual dependence on the government for funds can be removed. For this purpose government lands, road margins, tank bunds, and similar other areas within a Panchayats territory ought to be handed over to the Panchayats for plantation, fisheries and other income generating activities.

The major recommendation of the committee to improve the financial position of the Zilla Parishads was that the annual per head grant to them be raised from 25 paise to one rupee. However, very minor changes were made in the Panchayati Raj structure in the state.44

Narasimham Committee

In 1971 the Government of Andhra Pradesh appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Sri C.Narasimham to examine the working of Panchayati Raj system and make proposals for reorganising it. This Narasimham Committee submitted its report in 1972. Here are some important recommendations made by the committee.

(1). The members of legislative members of parliament should be kept out of Panchayati Raj system.
(2). The Panchayati system must be modelled on that of the Maharastra pattern.

(3). In the place of District Collector, another IAS officer should be appointed as the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad.

(4). The Village Panchayat Sarpanch be elected directly by the people.

(5). The members of Panchayati Samithi be elected directly by the people.

(6). The members of Zilla Parishad should also be directly elected by the people.

The Ashok Mehta Committee had also submitted its proposals for reorganization of panchayati raj so as to equip it to play a larger role in planning and implementation in the field of rural development. Keeping the recommendations of these committees and also the views of the panchayati raj functionaries the state government amended the Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads Act of 1959 and Gram Panchayats Act of 1964 several times.

Andhra Pradesh Mandala Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Pranalika Abhivrudhi Mandals Act, 1986

A Cabinet Sub-Committee was set-up by the Telugu Desam Party government to suggest measures to reorganize the Panchayati
Raj institutions in the state. The Cabinet Sub-Committee examined the mandal system, recommended by the Ashok Mehta Committee, and also the functioning of the panchayati raj administration in Andhra Pradesh and other states and made its recommendations. Based on the recommendations of the committee, the Andhra Pradesh Mandal Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Pranalika Abhivrudhi Mandals Act was enacted and the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads Act, 1959, was repealed in July, 1986. Under the provisions of the act 1104 Mandal Praja Parishads (MPPs) came into existence on 15th January, 1987, the pongal day of sankranti in the place of 330 panchayat samithis. In other words, there are 3 or 4 Mandal Parishads in the place of one panchayat samithi. The Mandal Parishads were constituted for a population of 35,000 to 55,000 covering 20 to 25 villages with certain relaxation in tribal areas. Ranga Reddy District bordering state capital has the minimum number of 33 Mandal Parishads while the maximum number of 65 in the Southern district of Chittoor, closely followed by Mahaboobnagar district in Telangana with 64 Mandal Parishads. The changes brought by 1986 act continued till the enactment of Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act in 1994. The Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 (Act 13 of 1994) came into force with effect from 27.05.1994. The present structure of the Panchayati Raj institutions is based on this act.
Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994

In order to incorporate the mandatory provisions as envisaged in the 73rd Constitutional amendment, the Government of Andhra Pradesh enacted a comprehensive law on Panchayati Raj institutions entitled Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 and the salient features of this Act are as follows:

1. There will be Gram Panchayati at the village level composed of members elected from the wards carved out on territorial basis.

2. The Sarpanch for every Gram Panchayati shall be elected by the persons, whose names appear in the electoral roll for the Gram Panchayati and his term of office would be five years.

3. There will be a Gram Sabha consisting of all electors in the village, which will meet twice a year.

4. There will be Mandal Panchayati to every Mandal composed of the members directly elected from the territorial constituencies carved out for the purpose (MPTCs).

5. The President of Mandal Parishad would be elected from among the elected members of the Mandal Panchayati.

6. There will be Zilla Panchayati for every district consisting of

7. All members elected from the Mandals in the district and each Mandal will be a territorial constituency for the purposes (ZPTCs).

8. Only the elected members of the Zilla Parishad will elect the
Chairman of the Zilla Panchayati.

9. There will be reservations of seats of members as also the offices of Sarpanch, President, Mandal Panchayats and Chairman, Zilla Panchayats for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women as provided in the Constitutional Amendment Act and at 33 per cent to Backward Classes.

10. There will be election commission for the conduct of elections to conduct elections for Panchayati Raj bodies headed by a person, who is holding or has held an office not less in rank than that of a Principal Secretary to Government.

11. There will be Finance Commission headed by a persons who has experience in public affairs.
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