CHAPTER III

POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD
This chapter has been divided into five parts. The first part discusses the introduction of Community Development Programme and National Extension Service. The second part is the study of Balvantray Mehta Committee Report and its implementation in different states. The third part deals with different Committees, set up by centre and by different states, to bring improvements in the panchayati raj system. The fourth part is devoted to the Asoka Mehta Committee Report and other Committees appointed by Central Government from time to time. The fifth part is devoted to the discussion of the 64th Amendment Bill and the causes of its failure to become an Act.

India became independent on August 15, 1947. In the independent India, the role of the local self-government acquired a new significance. The advent of freedom and acceptance of the concept of welfare state posed new challenges. Economic growth and social justice within the framework of parliamentary democracy and secularism raised new issues apart from giving new dimensions to the old problems. It was felt necessary that there should be popular participation in carrying out various programmes and to face the needs of development. Regarding the panchayats, there was a debate as to whether the constitution should give the primary place to village republics from which various tiers of representative institutions could be established to ensure grass roots democracy.

Gandhiji sought to recapture the ideal in the revitalization of village life. He wanted that panchayats should be made responsible for the total development of the villages.¹

A constituent assembly was promptly organized to draft a constitution, for the new nation. But in the first draft of the constitution no mention was made of the village panchayats.

According to Dr. B.R. Ambedkar:

*Village communities have survived surely on a low, on a selfish level. I hold that these village republics have been the ruin of India. I am, therefore, surprised that those who condemn provincialism and communalism should forward as champions of the village. What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance narrow-mindedness and communalism. I am glad that the draft constitution had discarded the village and adopted the individual as its unit.*

The Constituent Assembly did not accept the Gandhian proposal and stressed that stability, unity and economic progress demanded a more centralised government. When our constitution was being framed someone brought to the notice of Mahatma Gandhi, that the constitution did not provide for his most cherished institution of panchayat. Mahatma Gandhi remarked, "It is certainly an omission. It demands immediate attention if our independence is to really reflect the people's aspirations." He insisted on its inclusion in the revised draft because panchayat raj was an important component of his vision of future India in which economic and political power was to be decentralised and each village was self-reliant economically. Therefore, "the greater is the power of panchayat, the better it is for the people."

The omission of village panchayats let loose a wave of criticism and condemnation. The need to make democracy a participatory democracy without the participation of the people themselves other than voting, was not likely to be effective in the regeneration of India and in the revitalization of its rural life.

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Dr. Rajendra Prasad had given expression to the fond hope that there should be a fuller consideration of Gandhian concept of villages as units of self government. But it was difficult to draw up any balance sheet between the opposing views. In 1948, the ministers on local self-government in the provinces met under the chairmanship of the Central Minister for Health. Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru inaugurated this First Local Self-Government Ministers' Conference of free India. At that time he said:

*Local self-government is and must be the basis of any true system of democracy. People have got into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top may not be a success unless you build on this foundation from below.*

After a good deal of thought and discussion, K. Santhanam moved a resolution for the incorporation of the 'panchayats' in the constitution. It was accepted by an overwhelming majority. A place was thus permanently carved out for them in the national frame of the governmental organisation. The new constitution of India provides in Article 40, which was included (at Gandhi's insistence) in the chapter on Directive Principles of State Policy that, "The state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government." Also Article 246 empowers the State Legislature to legislate with respect to any subject relating to local self-government. These provisions in the constitution indicates a clear-cut policy directive with regard to the manner how local government was to be developed. As a result, it became obligatory on the part of the state governments to ensure the proper functioning of the local bodies in the rural areas. The goal of the state was to develop local bodies into efficient instruments of administration, capable alike of formulating policies and of executing them. It

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was felt that the rural reconstruction could be possible only through Five Year Plans and the gram panchayats were the instruments of development in rural areas.\textsuperscript{10}

The inclusion of the panchayats in the constitution gave a new impetus to the growth of this institution. Every state enacted Panchayat Acts with a view to democratising the structure of each village panchayat and also to vest more and more powers of rural development in it. Special departments were established to organise the panchayats and to look after their working. The Governments of Punjab, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh set up separate directorates for them. There was a rapid expansion in this sphere. By 1954, more than half of the villages of the country came to be covered by them, i.e. 294,460 out of the total of 581,184.\textsuperscript{11}

Greater importance was engaging the attention of the whole nation towards the Community Development Programme. India had been a poor country. With the achievement of independence and the subsequent establishment of poor governments at centre and state level, something had to be done to alleviate the traditional hardships of the people. There was a need of some long range programme for the socio-economic reconstruction of the country side. After Independence new national government was facing many problems, such as the rehabilitation of the uprooted millions, the integration of a few hundred native states, the enactment of a new constitution, the acute shortage of food grains, the reconstruction of the civil services etc. All these were most urgent. The effect of all these problems put off the programme of rural development. However, some of the provincial governments made efforts to meet these problems.\textsuperscript{12}

\textbf{Firka Development Scheme}

The Intensive Rural Reconstruction Scheme, popularly known as the Firka Development Scheme, was launched by the government of Madras towards the end of 1946. It was based on the

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Sahib Singh and Swinder Singh, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 88-89.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} S.Bhatnagar, \textit{Rural Local Government in India, op. cit.}, p. 27.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} S.Bhatnagar, \textit{Panchayati Raj in Kangra District, op. cit.}, p. 16.
\end{itemize}
Idea of concentrated development and involved the coordination of work of the various departments. These were two significant features of this plan. Firstly, the newly oriented policy of viewing the welfare work programme from the community angle and secondly the method by which villagers were taught, guided and encouraged to raise their standard of living and welfare. The Firkas or regions selected for development work were placed under trained rural welfare officers. The Gram Sevaks and social service volunteers provided the vital link in the implementation of the plan. The main achievement of this scheme was that small grant of money by government proved of much help and local resources in man and money were attracted in a large measure. Some of the major achievements in providing rural water supply schemes, completing works of urgent importance, encouraging cottage industries and formation of panchayats. The excellent work and the result of the Madras Firka Development Scheme were appreciated by the central government. Later on, in 1953, this scheme was merged with Community Development Programme.\textsuperscript{13}

**Etawah Pilot Project:**

*After the Second World War, a project for rural development and welfare was started in Etawah (U.P.) in September, 1948 with the active assistance of Albert Myer, who came to India during the war and had a background of this type of work in U.S.A. and Horace Holmes. The result of this scheme was encouraging. The Government of India was much impressed by the achievements of this project and considered it a shining example of rural development work.*\textsuperscript{14}

**Sarvodaya Scheme:**

The Sarvodaya Scheme was based on the constructive programme of Mahatma Gandhi. The state of Bombay took active interest in this scheme since 1948-49. This scheme emphasised on co-operative principles and methods in organising Sarvodaya activities and tried to inculcate the habits


of self help, mutual aid, toleration and thrift among the people. This scheme has its working centres throughout the country. It worked under the guidance of Vinoba Bhave and Jayaprakash Narayan. In the then Punjab, Nilokheri was developed as an agro-industrial township. The experiment of Community Development Programme was first started at Nilokheri in Punjab.

In this way, stray experiments were conducted in various parts of the country on different lines and with different results. But all these programmes and projects could not improve the condition of the downtrodden villagers. They lacked uniformity and systemisation and the result was that they did not touch the problem. At this time, the nation was engaged in drafting a constitution for its governance and in preparing its first Five Year Plan - the former to institutionalise the political aspirations of the people and the latter to ensure their simultaneous socio-economic development.

Indian leaders took vigorous steps to fulfil the aims of the constitution through planning and community development. In March, 1950, the Planning Commission came into existence. This Commission entrusted the panchayats with new responsibilities. In 1951, the Ford Foundation expressed through its President to assist India to improve the pathetic conditions of rural masses. It was decided to start 15 pilot projects, more or less on Etawah lines. These projects started functioning in early 1952. In the meantime, Government of United States offered to finance any programme which India launched to develop its country. The Indo- U.S. Technical Co-operation Agreement was signed in January, 1952. The first scientific and systematic programme of Community Development was started in India under this Agreement.

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16 Avinash Kamal Jain, Community Development in Haryana, Kurukshetra, Vol. XX, No. 20, July 16, 1972, p. 11.
17 S.Bhatnagar, Panchayati Raj in Kangra District, op. cit., pp. 16-17.
18 S.R.Maheshwari, Rural Development in India, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1985, p. 35.
The Community Development Programme (CDP) was started on October 2, 1952, with 55 Community Development Projects under the Indo-U.S. Operational Agreement. Each of the 55 projects was to cover about three development blocks or 300 villages and a population of about three lakhs. The objective of the Community Development Programme was four fold: (a) transformation in the outlook of the people, (b) inculcation of the spirit of self-reliance, (c) generation of the habit of cooperative action through popular bodies, and (d) these three to lead to new enlightenment, strength and hope.\(^{21}\)

Fifty five Community Development Projects were started. This programme soon caught the imagination of the people and there was a demand to increase the number of blocks. The Enquiry Committee which was set up earlier by the Government of India to look into the causes of the failure of the Grow More Food Campaign. At this time, this committee submitted its Report. The Committee stressed the urgent need of agricultural development and drew the attention of the government and the planners to the fact that no programme of agricultural development can be successful. Therefore, there is a need to bring out all round improvement in the socio-economic conditions of the people to make this programme successful. This demanded immediate extension of the Community Development Programme. But the resources at the government disposal were not sufficient to sustain a comprehensive programme. But the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee suggested in its Report for the creation of an extension service. The Government accepted the recommendation and introduced another programme, called the National Extension Service on October 2, 1953.\(^{22}\)

Rural development now consisted of both, Community Development Blocks and National Extension Service Blocks. The original view of these two schemes was that Community Development would mark an intensive phase of rural development lasting for three years, and was thus not permanent, whereas the National Extension Service was to be permanent multi-functional extension

\(^{20}\) S.Bhatnagar, op. cit., p. 17.


\(^{22}\) S.Bhatnagar, op. cit., p. 17.
agency in the block. It was a major development in the sphere of rural reconstruction in India. The basic idea of both these programmes was the same and the two were integrated under one agency at the centre as well as in the states. Both the programmes were complementary and ran concurrently. The idea of NES programme was to cover the entire country within a period of 10 years or upto 1963.24

The first Five Year Plan states, "Community Development is the method and rural extension the agency through which the Five Year Plan seeks to initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life of the village."25

India was the first country to use Community Development as an extension method and the first to avow the great mass of illiterate, poverty-ridden villages as a development resources.26 This was done because it was fully realised that no plan could have any chance of success unless the millions of small farmers in the country accepted its objective and were prepared to make sacrifice necessary for implementing it. Suitable administrative machinery was created at all levels to guide and assist the planning and implementation of the programme. However, the main responsibility for improving the socio-economic conditions in the village, was to rest with the people themselves. It was also argued that unless people considered community development as theirs, and valued it as a practical contribution to their own welfare, no substantial result could be gained.28 The principle objective of Community Development Programme was to bring about social and economic advancement through the creation of a new psychological process intended to wean the village people away

24 Rajeshwar Dayal, op. cit., p. 25.
25 First Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, 1951, p. 139. Quoted in Rajeshwar Dayal, ibid, p. 25.
from their reliance on the traditions of the past and to create in them a full acceptance of science and technology in their ways of living and making a living. In other words, the central objective of CDP was to develop the capacity of the common man and woman and to organise themselves for working for their own development and the progress of the country, by making the best possible use of the available technical know-how.29

During the first Five Year Plan (1951-1956) Community Development Programme was launched throughout the country. Therefore, the whole country was divided into blocks and various developmental activities including animal husbandry and agriculture extension, social education, construction of roads and buildings, health programmes, etc. were started in the rural areas. Each block was put under the charge of a ‘generalist’ called the Block Development Officer, who was to be assisted by a team of extension officers, gram-sevaks and gram sevikas. Efforts were made to seek people’s participation in these programmes through the help of village panchayats also.30 Each of these experts was expected to help the people by providing them guidance in solving their problems. The programme was to be developed by the people themselves on voluntary basis. The role of the government was limited only to advice and financial assistance. Advisory bodies with citizen membership were set up at various levels to abstract people’s participation. The block level advisory committees, the members of the state legislature and parliament, representatives of cooperative societies, progressive farmers etc. The district level committee comprised of heads of various technical departments and a few citizens.31

The programme had an encouraging start. There was enthusiasm among the people and development officials. The scheme seemed to work in the early years of its introduction. But in three

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to four years, it lost its initial momentum and the participation and the involvement of the people showed a considerable decline. It was also noticed that the CDP, instead of being people’s programme with government’s assistance was becoming more and more government’s programme with varying degrees of people’s participation. The village panchayats were found weak and ineffective in mobilizing the masses in support of the programme. The Block Advisory Committee, created as the main body to enlist popular support and participation in the programme, lacked capacity, vitality and power to represent people’s point of view on development matters of their areas. Besides this, in many states, there was no organisation at the block level to represent the people’s will. The District Planning Committees were also powerless and ineffective.

Democratic systems are mainly based on the effective participation of the people in the process of decision making and in its implementation. But there were various reasons that this movement could not generate enthusiasm in the people and had a retarded growth. Following were the reasons for sorry state of affairs: (1) Lack of consciousness among the rural masses (2) Too much emphasis on Shramdan, (self-labour) (3) Lack of financial resources, (4) wrong approach in the training process (5) absence of proper local leadership (6) neglect by political parties (7) lack of proper propaganda.

Therefore, both these programmes met only with limited success. There was an impression that democracy is not functioning properly at the grass roots level. This compelled the government to review the performance of CDP and NES, because both these programmes had failed to mobilize the rural masses in the task of rural reconstruction. The political apathy of the villagers also caused serious concern to the government. Dissatisfied with the existing arrangements (CDP and NES), the government...

ment sponsored rural institutions in mobilizing people's participation, the planners in India began a search for better structural alternative. Therefore, the Planning Commission urged the National Development Council to have the whole issue investigated by the team of experts.

II

The National Development Council constituted a Committee on Plan Projects which, in turn, appointed a Study Team for Community Projects and National Extension Service in 1957, headed by Balvantray G. Mehta, as its Chairman. The Study Team was to assess, along with other things, the extent to which Community Development Programme had succeeded in utilising local initiative and in creating institutions to ensure a continuity in the process of socio-economic change. The Team submitted its Report in late 1957. The Committee observed that the CDP and NES programmes had failed to evoke popular initiative, that local bodies at the level higher than the panchayat had evinced but little enthusiasm in the Community Development Programme and even the panchayats had not come into the field of community development in any significant way.

The Team came to the conclusion:

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 to the needs and wishes of the locality, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local initiative in the field of development.

The team also recommended that:


40 Ibid, p. 5.
such a body, if created, has to be statutory, elective, comprehensive in its duties and functions, equipped with the necessary executive machinery and in possession of adequate resources. It also recommended devolution of power to a body which, when created, will have the entire charge of all development work within its jurisdiction. While the government should reserve to itself the functions of guidance supervision and higher planning and to provide the necessary grants.

Neither of the two (CDP and NES) existing institutions possessed these qualities. It was, however, decided that the 'panchayat' with necessary organisational and functional modifications, should form the basis of our democracy and should also act as an agency of the community development. The Balvantray Mehta committee recommended the introduction of the some of 'Democratic Decentralisation' symbolised by the establishment of Panchayati Raj institutions.

The Balvantray Mehta Team offered two broad directional thrusts; first it argued that there should be administrative decentralisation for the effective implementation of the development programme and that the decentralised administrative system should be under the control of elected bodies. The committee itself considered that inefficiency and corruption in democratic institutions at local level are only short term problems. Once these bodies have real autonomy and power to make mistakes and learn by making mistakes under the guidance and supervision of the higher bodies, these difficulties would disappear. The authors of the Report put it:

*Development cannot progress without responsibility and power. Community Development can be real only when the community understands its problems realises its responsibility, exercises the necessary power 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.*

41 *Ibid, pp.6-7.*


44 Quoted in *L.C.Jain, op. cit.,* p. 31.
The committee recommended that the old district boards to be replaced by a three tier system of rural self-government with each tier linked by indirect election and genuine transfer of power and responsibility of planning and development activities to these bodies done at the state level. The three tiers suggested were: Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level. The team suggested direct elections at the Village Level and indirect elections for Samitis and Zila Parishads. Out of these three, the most effective body was visualized at the block level.45

Block was recommended as the Unit of Planning and Organisation on the basis of the Aristotelian principle of being neither too large to defeat the very purpose of its creation, nor so small to militate against efficiency and economy. The traditional units taluka and tehsil were considered unstable for the development activities. Panchayat Samiti - the middle tier was an innovation. At the district level, a new body Zila Parishad was to replace the district boards. The committee also described the organisation, various functions and sources of revenue to be assigned to these bodies.46 Following are the details of organisation, functions resources and relationship between different tiers.

The lowest rung of this ladder was to be the Gram Panchayat which was to be elected periodically by all the adults of the village. The members of all the Gram Panchayats of Community Development block were to elect the members of Panchayat Samitis.47 The village panchayat was to be constituted purely on an elective basis, with a provision of two women members and one member each from the scheduled caste and scheduled tribes. The maximum powers were to be delegated to this body for the implementation of the Community Development Programme falling within territorial jurisdiction of the village. The main sources of the income of the panchayats recommended by the team were property or house tax, tax on markets and vehicles, octroi or terminal tax, conservancy tax, water and lighting rate, income from cattle ponds, grants from the panchayat samitis and fees charged

47 S.Bhatnagar, Panchayati Raj in Kangra District, op. cit., p. 20.
from the registration of animal sold, etc. The village panchayat was to be used as an agency for the
collection of land revenue and be paid a commission. In addition, it was entitled to receive from the
panchayat samiti a statutorily prescribed share, upto three fourth of the net land revenue assigned to
the latter.

The compulsory duties of the panchayats were to include provision of water supply, sanitation,
lighting, maintenance of roads, land management, collection and maintenance of records and other
statistics and the welfare of backward classes. It was also to act as an agent of the panchayat samiti
in executing any scheme entrusted to it. Secondly, panchayat samiti should be formed for an area
included in a block to be constituted by indirect election from the villages. Panchayats within the block
area can be grouped together in convenient units and the panches of all the panchayats in each of
these units shall elect from amongst themselves person or persons to be members of panchayat samiti,
about twenty in number. These elected representatives again were to co-opt two women who were
interested in the work of women and children. A representative from the scheduled castes and another
from the scheduled tribes have also been provided for, if they are not otherwise represented. The
panchayat samiti may co-opt two local residents having special aptitude in rural development work.
An elected Chairman for this body was recommended. Vast powers have been entrusted to this body
which should be the main agency for development work in that area with sufficient resources, both
central as well as provincial at its disposal. Samiti was to be the chief agency for the formulation of
development plans for the whole block.

Then there should be a Zila Parishad at the district level, to replace the district boards and
mainly to achieve the necessary co-ordination between the panchayat samitis within the district.

It was to consist of the Presidents of the Panchayat Samitis, members of Parliament and state
legislature and district level officers of the development departments. The Parishad was to be an
advisory-cum-supervisory body. It was not to have any executive functions because such powers

cit., p. 128.

49 Ibid., p. 126.
might kill local initiative. The functions of the Parishad may also include examination and approval of
the budgets of the panchayat samiti, the distribution of funds, between the various blocks were funds
are allotted by the government to the district as a whole, co-ordination and consolidation of the block
plans, supervision of the activities of the Panchayat Samitis etc. The team further pointed out:

*If this experiment of democratic decentralisation was to yield maximum results, it was
necessary that all the three tiers of the scheme, viz., village panchayat, panchayat samiti
and zila parishad should be started at the same time and operated simultaneously in
the whole district.*\(^\text{50}\)

The recommendation about the establishment of three tier system was discussed in the
parliament as accepted by the National Development Council in January, 1958. For evoking popular
appeal among the masses, the name of democratic decentralisation was changed to Panchayati Raj.
The states were given option to adopt it with such modification as suited their special conditions.\(^\text{51}\)
Now every state was free to have its own legislation and to set up panchayati raj institutions of its own
choice suited to the local genius conditions, environment and needs and requirements.\(^\text{52}\) It, however,
recommended the following basic principles for acceptance by all states:

1. There should be three tier structure from the village to the district level, each tier linked to
the other.

2. There should be adequate transfer of power and responsibilities to these bodies.

3. Keeping in view the transfer of power and responsibilities, adequate resources should be
placed at their disposal.

4. All development programmes at each level should be entrusted to these bodies.

5. The system ultimately evolved should be such that further devolution of powers will be
facilitated.\(^\text{53}\)

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\(^{50}\) Ibid., pp. 127-128.


\(^{52}\) Vishvajit P. Singh, *Populism or Panacea?* Seminar Journal, 360, August, 1989, p. 34.
The central council of Local Self Government at its fifth meeting at Hyderabad in 1959 accepted the basic principles of the institutional pattern suggested by the team.\textsuperscript{54}

Panchayati Raj movement started with fanfare and enthusiasm having laudable objectives and high hopes. It was thought that panchayti raj would bring democracy at the doors of the rural people, that it would evoke people’s participation in the decision making and implementing programmes and schemes which by and large determine their destiny, that it would accelerate the process of social and economic development and thus it would encourage development oriented leadership in the rural areas.\textsuperscript{55}

The principles laid down by the Mehta team were more or less accepted by all the states in the country. Steps have since been taken by almost all the states for implementation of the scheme of decentralisation with slight variations depending upon local circumstances.\textsuperscript{56}

The implementation of the scheme was hailed by prominent persons of the country. To Jaya Prakash Narayan, it was a matter of great satisfaction that in our country a beginning had already been made in laying the foundation of participatory democracy in the shape of panchayati raj.\textsuperscript{57} S.K. Day, also observed that in panchayati raj, the people of India would govern themselves through their representatives in institutions from the panchayat to parliament and thus the democracy would travel from Lok Sabha to Gram Sabha.\textsuperscript{58} The author of the scheme of panchayati raj, Balvantray Mehta, observed after three years of the inauguration of the scheme:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Quoted in K.V.Srivastava, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24, \textit{Kurukshetra}.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Fifth Meeting of the Central Council of Local Self-Government Proceedings, Government of India, June 1959, p. 44. Quoted in S.R.Maheshwarl, Local Government in India, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 80.
\item \textsuperscript{56} Haridwar Rai and Sakendra Prasad Singh, \textit{Current Ideas in Indian Administration: A Development Perspective}, Uppal Publishing House, New Delhi, 1967, p. 162.
\end{itemize}
The whole conception behind panchayati raj has been a realisation that people in the villages should be asked to undertake the responsibility of governing themselves. I wish we can permit the people in the villages of this country to feel the glow of Swaraj. They must be imbued with a feeling of participation in the great democratic adventure on which the nation has embarked.  

The Balvantray Mehta Study Team's Report was widely welcomed and influenced significant changes in the organisational set up of the CD Programme. This, however, has been responsible for lack of uniformity in its implementation as some states follow two tiers and some even one tier system. The three tier system is in existence in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Arunachal Pradesh and Chandigarh. In the remaining States and Union Territories, either a two tier or one tier system is in existence.

In 1957, Madras started on an experimental basis a pilot block of democratic decentralisation in its own way. Then Andhra Pradesh introduced it in twenty selected blocks, one in each district. But Rajasthan was the first to give the practical shape to this scheme throughout the state. Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru inaugurated it in Rajasthan on Mahatma Gandhi's birthday October 2, 1959. Then followed Andhra Pradesh with full scale implementation of the new scheme on November 1, 1959. Madras followed it on October 2, 1961. As on March 31, 1984, there were 217319 Gram Panchayats covering 561135 villages and about 95 per cent of the rural population, 4526 panchayat samitis and 297 Zila Parishads.

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60 Sita Ram Singh, op. cit., p. 5.

61 B. Maheshwari, op. cit., p. 11.

Balvantray Mehta Committee proposed a three tier (Village Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad) system of panchayati raj. But there is no uniformity regarding the tiers in all the states. It is true that there is panchayati raj of some kind or the other in almost all the states. But the structure and functions have been changing over the years. 63

In Andhra Pradesh, three tier system is functioning under the Andhra Pradesh Act 1964 (amended in 1988) and the Andhra Pradesh Mandal Praja Parishads, Zila Praja Parishads and Zila Pranalika Abhivrudhi Mandals Act, 1986. Andhra Pradesh has conferred limited executive functions upon the Zila Parishads. The Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972 provides for a two tier system viz Gaon Panchayats and Mohkuma Parishads at the sub-divisional level. In Bihar, three tier system was adopted by the state in December, 1961. 64 In Gujarat, levels of panchayati raj tier as provided in the Act, 1961, is village, taluk and district. The Zila Parishad has been made the effective point of decentralisation. In Haryana, three tier system of panchayati raj was working under the two separate Acts, Gram Panchayat Act of 1952 and Punjab Panchayat Samiti Act, 1961. The upper tier Zila Parishad in Haryana was abolished in 1973 by a amendment. Here the last elections to the panchayats were held in June, 1988. In Himachal Pradesh, Panchayat Raj Bodies were established in November, 1952 giving shape to three tier system. The new Himachal Pradesh Panchayat Act, 1968 came into force on 15th November, 1970 and provided for a three tier system of panchayati raj. Elections to these bodies were held in 1985. 65

The minister of state for Panchayats, Sadhu Ram introduced yet another Bill in Himachal Vidhan Sabha, for making a number of significant changes in the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Amendment Bill. A committee was headed by M. Kashmir Singh Rana M.L.A. B.J.P. It prescribed only two tier system in Himachal Pradesh. This Bill has become an Act. 66

64 S.R.Maheswari, Rural Development in India, op. cit., p. 53.
Jammu and Kashmir has been fully covered by Gram Panchayats. The only one tier - village panchayat is in existence. Election to the panchayats were held only in 1977 and since then there have been no elections in the state. In Kerala also the state has only the Gram Panchayats in functioning order. Elections to the panchayats were held in 1987. In Karnataka, three tier system is contemplated in the Act of 1983. Three tiers are Mandal Panchayats, Taluk Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads. Under this Act, elections were held in 1987. In Madhya Pradesh, the Act was enacted in 1962. Now, under the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Act 1981, the three tier system is in existence. These tiers are Gram Panchayat, Janpad Panchayat and Zila Parishad. Election to these bodies were held in the year 1983, 1984 and 1985 respectively. Zila Parishad was constituted for the first time only in 1985.67

In Maharashtra, panchayati raj bodies have been functioning under the two different Acts, Bombay Village Panchayat Act, 1958 and Maharashtra Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Act, 1961. Levels of panchayati raj tiers as provided in the Acts are village taluka and district. Late in 1962, Maharashtra went beyond the Balvantray Mehta scheme, and provided for like Gujarat a strong zilla parishad, with the panchayat samiti as the executive committee of the zilla parishad.68 In Orissa, under the Orissa Gram Panchayat Act, 1964, panchayats have been in existence in the state. The state introduced three tier system under the Orissa Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1959. This Act was enforced on 26th January, 1961. Now only lower two tiers are in existence and Zilla Parishad were abolished in 1967. Elections to these lower tiers were held in January-February, 1984.

In Punjab, before 1959, two legislations, the Punjab Gram Panchayat Act, 1952, and the PEPSU Panchayati Raj Act, were in force. The Punjab Gram Panchayat (amendment) Act of 1959 was extended to the entire state. Three tier system was introduced under the Punjab Gram Panchayat Act, 1952 and Punjab Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act, 1961. Upper two tiers Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti in the state have been superseded since 1979. Rajasthan, alongwith Andhra Pradesh

was a pioneer state as far as the pattern recommended by the Mehta team was concerned. Rajasthan Panchayat Act, 1953 and Rajasthan Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad Act, 1959 provided three tier system in the state. Election to these three tiers were held in June-July 1988 after a gap of seven years. In Tamil Nadu there is also a three tier system.69

In Uttar Pradesh, Gram Panchayats have been in existence since 1947. In the State three tier system is functioning under the Uttar Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1947 and Kshetra Samiti and Parishad was visualised on the lines of that in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh, but it did not enjoy comparable support. The block level Kshetra Samiti fared better. In West Bengal, Panchayats started their career in 1964. There is a three tier system Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat.70

Panchayati Raj institutions have got universal coverage. All the states and Union Territories have opted for these bodies, if not all the tiers, at least Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis suited to local conditions are existing. The remaining Union Territories are small or have a major urban component (e.g. Delhi). While Pondicherry has a different system (Communes), Daman & Diu, Delhi, Andaman and Nicobar have Gram Panchayats. Dadra and Nagar Haveli has a national two tier system with the higher "Varishta Panchayat" being an advisory body and Chandigarh, to which the Punjab Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act has been made applicable, has a three tier system. The states of Nagaland and Meghalaya do not have the statutory panchayats but traditional panchayats are operating there.71 Today, in Nagaland, each village has a Village Council and Village Development Board (VDB)- corresponding to a regulating and an executive body. The traditional Institution of the Village Council (corresponding to the statutory Gram Panchayat) was given a legal status in 1968. Subsequently in 1978, the traditional Village Councils were given powers to deal with development

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69 Surat Singh, op. cit., p. 20.
71 Surat Singh, op. cit., p. 21.
matters. As a result, a Village Development Board (VDB) was created by the Village Council of each village during 1980 under the VDB Rules 1980 framed under the Village and Area Council Act of 1978.\(^{73}\)

When democratic decentralisation was being introduced at the one level, there were parallel moves within the government initiating a shift away from the community or area development concept in favour of a sectoral, professional approach. In 1960, the government launched an Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) initiated on the advice of a Ford Foundation sponsored team on 'India's Food Crisis'. It followed disappointment with the CD’s performance in raising agriculture production. In 1960, a group was appointed under the Chairmanship of Jaya Prakash Narayan to study, how far and in what manner the Community Development Organisation and or panchayati raj institutions at village, block and zila level can promote the economic development and welfare of the weaker sections of the community.\(^{74}\)

The group made some suggestions to improve implementation arrangements which, among others, included that the block, have been accepted as the unit of planning and developments and panchayati raj as the agency responsible for planning and executing of plans. Therefore, there is no longer any valid reason for the continuing individual allocations subject-wise even it serve as a guide. Delegating the powers to the states, it pointed out that these have been insufficiently transmitted to district and block levels. The result is that in many states, irksome restrictions still exist and impede progress and efficiency.\(^{75}\)

The first phase of panchayati raj was the period of first and second Five Year Plans 1952/61. The First Five Year Plan recognised the National Extension Service as the agency for bringing technical services to the villagers and Community Development as method for rural reconstruction. The second Five Year Plan was marked by the acceptance of this concept and its implementation over the bulk of

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the country. It also witnessed the emergence of panchayati raj. Therefore, this period (1952-61) was called a period of ascendancy.\footnote{Anna Sahib P.Shinde, Community Development and Panchayati Raj-Vehicles of Rural Development, Kurukshetra, Vol. XIV, July, 1966, p. 6.}

The second phase of panchayati raj is the period of Third and Fourth Five Year Plan: The principal task in the Third plan was to ensure the growth and consolidation of panchayati raj institutions so that each area could realise its maximum development potential.\footnote{Ibid, p. 6.}

By the beginning of third Five Year Plan, Panchayati Raj Legislation had been enacted in most of the states, defining relations between state organisation and the panchayats at different levels and providing for administration of CD programmes by panchayat samiti. The programme reached at its zenith by the middle of the sixties. The Annual Report of the Ministry of Community Development for the year 1964-65 recorded an all round progress. The entire country was covered by Community Development blocks and panchayati raj institutions in all tiers (village, block and district). It was found that people were satisfied with the working of panchayati raj institutions. A decrease in caste tension was noticeable and the weaker sections were also getting representation in these bodies.\footnote{L.C.Jain, op. cit., p. 39.}

When the programme was at its peak, the mounting food shortage of this period and these crop failures of 1966-67 led to reshuffling of priorities in the Community Development Programme itself and resulting in a overriding emphasis on agriculture production. The Ministry of Community Development was reduced in 1966-67 to the status of a Department and lost its independent status.

It was appended to the already large and unwieldy Ministry of Food and Agriculture. This change in status gave rise to serious apprehensions in the CD Department about government policy towards Community Development.\footnote{S.R.Maheshwini, Rural Development in India, op. cit., p. 57.} At this juncture It becomes necessary to redefine the future approaches of community development and panchayati raj. To gain support at the grass roots level,
the CD Department intensified the pursuit of the recommendations of Balvantray Mehta Committee. The 1967-68 Annual Report of CD Department claimed that panchayati raj was in force in the entire country except a few states.\textsuperscript{80}

### III

Rural local Government came under the scrutiny of many committees set up by both the central government and by individual states. The credit of first seeding the concept of panchayati raj, in its modern sense and visualising its administrative structure goes to Balvantray Mehta Team, which has already been summarised. The study team on Nāya Panchayats (1962) recommended the setting up of Nāya panchayat for a groups or villages and for administration of justice in petty civil and criminal cases. The members of the Nāya panchayats were to be elected directly by the people themselves, one third members retiring every two years to provide continuity in its functioning. The Committee forbade the appearance of legal practitioners before this body.\textsuperscript{81} The study team on Panchayati raj Finances (1963) made recommendations for strengthening the resource base of panchayati raj bodies. The team argued that the levy of taxes served to highlight among others the self governing nature of panchayati raj.\textsuperscript{82}

The Study Team on the position of Gram Sabha in Panchayati Raj Movement (1963) recommended that Gram Sabha should be statutorily recognised and encouraged to play a more active role in village affairs. The study team on the Audit of Accounts of Panchayati Raj Bodies (1965) suggested measures for activating the system of the financial transactions of panchayati raj institutions. It emphasised that audit was not be confined to a voucher check, it was also to satisfy itself that the necessary sanction to any expenditure was in order and was related to performance. The Committee on Panchayati Raj Elections (1965) made recommendations on the size and composition of, and the mode of election to the panchayati raj bodies at the village, block and district levels. It suggested the

\textsuperscript{80} L.C.Jain, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 40.  
\textsuperscript{81} S.R.Maheshwari, \textit{State Government in India}, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 258-259.  
size ranging between nine and nineteen for the panchayats twenty and forty for the panchayat samitis and forty and sixty for the Zila Parishads.  

Some of the State Governments also appointed various committees to improve the structure and machinery of panchayati raj and to examine the recommendation made by the Balvantray Mehta Committee. The Madhya Pradesh Rural Local Self-Government Committee (1959) stood for a three tier system of panchayati raj. The village panchayat at the village level, Janapada panchayat at the block level, the Zila,panchayat at the district level. The Intermediate body was made responsible for the planning and execution of all development activities. The Gujarat Democratic Decentralisation Committee (1960) recommended the establishment of a high powered body at the district level and it was to be called district panchayat.

The Naik committee (1961) appointed by Maharashtra government was the most outstanding. This committee made out a strong case for democratic decentralisation. It was of the view that it could be effective only when the zila parishad, not the panchayat samiti was given the central or local place in any scheme of decentralisation. It recommended indirect elections to zila parishad. It advocated a system under which all District Officials connected with development work would be placed under the direct control of the zila parishad.

The Committee on panchayati raj (1963) set up by Karnataka Government suggested the creation of an executive body at the district level, observing that the zila parishad would implement all schemes and works of a district character, to guide and to supervise of the technical personnel at the district level to the lower bodies and assume overall responsibility for planning and development in the district. The Andhara Pradesh High Power Committee (1964) on the recognition of panchayat Samiti

83 S.R.Maheshwari, op. cit., p. 259.
Block and Allied Matters was in favour of enlarging the size of the block, consisting of a larger number of panchayat provides a built-in corrective against the excessive prevalence of local factions which is all the more necessary when the block are recognised as units of planning and panchayat samitis are evolving as agencies to implement the various development programmes of the government.\textsuperscript{87}

In Rajasthan, Sadiq Ali Committee (1964) was to analyse the functioning of grass roots democracy, cited specially the examples of Zila Parishads in Maharashtra and Gujarat and advocated that adequate resources and powers should be entrusted to the Zila Parishads for certain original executive functions and for this purpose district level officers should be transferred under the zilla Parishad.\textsuperscript{88}

The Ram Murthy Committee (1965) for the appraisal of panchayati raj institutions in Uttar Pradesh, recommended enlarging powers of the zila parishads. These powers include agricultural activities and promotion of small scale industries. It felt that the power of disbursement of loans should be given to the zila parishad and it was in favour of entrusting completely the executive functions to the officials. The chief executive officer should be an IAS officer. The Committee suggested powers of levying taxes to the zilla parishad.\textsuperscript{89} In Punjab, the Punjab Administrative Reform Commission (1966), the Rajinder Singh Study Team on Panchayati Raj (1966) and the Prakash Singh Badal Study Team on Panchayati Raj (1970) have made a number of recommendations to improve the working of panchayati raj institutions and greater decentralisation of powers to it.\textsuperscript{90}

The Haryana Ad hoc Committee on Panchayati Raj (1972) recommended that more powers and funds should be given to panchayat samitis and zila parishad should be abolished.\textsuperscript{91}


\textsuperscript{89} \textit{Ibid}, p. 96.


\textsuperscript{91}
High Power Committee (1973) recommended strengthening of the zila parishad in the three tire system of panchayati raj. It observed that in the present set up of decentralised powers, the panchayat samiti emerges as the strongest tier. The committee after detailed study came to the conclusion that the first tier should be strongest instead of the middle tier.92

There are many other Committee also to assess the panchayati raj. There are: Uttar Pradesh : Govind Sahai Committee, 1959; Karna Basha: Basappa Committee, 1963; Rajasthan : Mathur Committee, 1963; Andhra Pradesh : Purushotam Pal Committee, 1965; Himachal Pradesh: Hardayal Singh Committee, 1965; Maharashtra : Bongiwar Committee, 1965 and Andhra Pradesh: Nara Simahan Committee. 1972.93

Panchayati Raj reform or re-modelling of panchayati raj institutions has been a recurring subject for debate since 1960. Various states constituted commissions and committees from time to time to probe into structural deficiencies and functional maladies in panchayati raj institutions and to suggest appropriate corrective measures.94

All these studies and reports uniformly found the lack of coordination among departmental functionaries continuing to hunt an thwart the progress of the panchayati raj institutions too as it did the community Development Programme. Introduction of democratic decentralisation could not bring about much improvement in the administration of the block organisation.95


The trend of Indian political system has been centrist since the mid sixties when the prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi came into power. The pace towards centralisation of power got considerably accelerated, under her prime ministership the state governments were being made subservient to the Central government in general and to her in particular.96

Elections to panchayati raj bodies have been deferred from time to time in various states in one context or the other. Floods, famines, national or state elections first and panchayati raj elections later and national emergency have been staple pretexts, to count a few since the Congress party was in power, the opposition parties alleged that the Congress party wanted to consolidate its position through maintaining status quo of leadership in panchayati raj institutions. Deffering elections to panchayati raj bodies and allowing the leadership to continue in definitely in these bodies had given rise to misgivings in the minds of the people in the one hand and authoritarian trends in administration on the other. All this was bound to undermine the very legitimacy of these institutions. As far as functioning of panchayati raj institutions in various states is concerned was not much encouraging. The political environment was not good for the growth of these bodies.

During the period of national emergency, bureaucracy got the upper hand and these institutions lost much of their vitality and significance.97 Panchayati raj in many states appeared to be taking the last breath on the death bed of history, centralising force became too strong to resist with. National emergency ended in 1977 and the Janata Party swept the Lok Shabha polls. With that the first phase of restoring democracy at national level was over. Lok Sabha and Assembly polls had changed the political spectrum of the country. With the coming of Janata Party in power in 1977 at the centre and in many states, hopes for restoring democracy at all levels in the political system, became strong. Decentralisation of power and authority had been one of the planks of Janata Party during Lok Sabha and Assembly elections.98

96 B.S.Bhargava, Panchayati Raj and the Janta, op. cit., p. 10.
98 S.N.Mishra, New Horizons in Rural Development and Administration, Mittal Publications, Delhi,
There were many special resource development programmes like the Area Development Programme (ADP), Intensive Agriculture Development Programme (IADP), Drought Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) Command Area Development Project (CADP) and special economic programmes designed for target groups like the Small and Marginal Farmers’s Development Agency (SMFDA), Intensive Tribal Development Programme etc. All these programmes were financed and operated by the central government and these have no relationship with the panchayati raj institutions. These programmes also lacked an area approach and important components like infrastructure and social service units were outside the purview of these programmes. However, these programmes could not come up to expectations as a number of undesirable elements crept into it at the stage of plan formulation. Even the Employment Guarantee Scheme (EGS) started by the Maharashtra government was controlled by the district collector, and the zila parishad was kept completely out of the picture. Although some services and facilities were provided under these programmes in the rural areas, yet they have failed. It may be appropriate to say that India is on way to having a strong rural administration but not rural government. 99

It was observed by several state level committees and regional studies that the panchayati raj system was suffering from a number of weaknesses. Therefore, with a change of government at the centre in 1977, there was a revival of interest in panchayati raj in the context of emphasis in the Draft Plan (1978-83) on the removal of rural poverty and unemployment within a time bound period of 10 years. 100 The Central Government appointed a High Level Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1977 under the Chairmanship of Asoka Mehta. The Resolution reads:

*The Government accords the highest priority to rural development so as to increase agricultural production, create employment, eradicate poverty and bring about all round improvement in the rural economy. The government considers that the maximum*


100 Report of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Institutions, Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation, Department of Rural Development, Government of India, New Delhi, 1978, (Hereafter known as Asoka Mehta Committee).
degree of decentralisation, both in planning and in implementation, is necessary for
the attainment of these objectives. It has accordingly territories, to set up a committee
to enquire into the working of the panchayati raj institutions and to suggest measures
to strengthen them, so as to enable a decentralised system of planning and develop-
ment to be effective.

The Committee submitted its Report in August 1978 and made 132 recommendations.101

Reviewing the functioning of these institutions way back in 1977, the Asoka Mehta Committee
found three interesting phases of panchayati raj institutions, (i) the period from 1959 to 1964 a period
of ascendancy when the grass root institutions took roots, (ii) the period from 1964-1969 which was
called a phase of stagnation, (iii) the period from 1969 to 1977 was called a stage of non-perfor-
mance.102 The Committee concluded that the grass roots institutions are the grass without roots and
caricature of local governments.

It is, therefore, essential that in the proposed decentralisation, all safeguards must be taken
so that the ideal of "power to people" does not degenerate into "power to the powerless".103

The Committee observed that the institutions of panchayati raj are dominated mostly by the
socially and economically dominant people of the society and have facilitated the emergence of
oligarchic forces which gave no benefit to the weaker sections of the village society. It also observed
that these institutions are influenced by caste considerations and are suffering from corruption,
inefficiency, political interference and power concentration.104

The committee asserted the basic soundness of the panchayati raj institutions and suggested
a large number of long term measure to protect the interests of the weaker sections of the society. The

102 K.D. Gangrade, Revamping Panchayati Raj Institutions, Yojna, XXXIV, No. 14 & 15, August
103 Quoted in R.S. Rajput, The Concept of Village Republics and the Spirit of Article 40, in Rajput
and Meghe, op. cit., p. 55.
Committee recommended that implementation of the development programme should be planned in a decentralised way from below rather than from above. The political parties should participate effectively in panchayati raj affairs as their participation may ultimately convert their mutual competition into constructive cooperative for rural development.\textsuperscript{105}

This Committee viewed the role of panchayati raj system slightly different that this system is not only meant for decentralisation of power and people’s participation, but it is also for supporting rural development and strengthening the planning process at the micro level. Therefore, the committee wanted panchayati raj institutions to participate in development activities in the area of agriculture, forestry, cottage industries, welfare activities etc. The major recommendations of the Committee included a two tier system of panchayati raj in place of earlier three tier system adopted on the basis of Balvantray Mehta Committee Report. It suggested that a district is the obvious choice for being treated as the first point of decentralisation below state level. It also felt the need of an institution to provide popular participation and supervision in the management of new demands of development emerging in the context of growth centers, rural urban continuum and marketing which require local level programme. It envisages Mandal Panchayats consisting of cluster of villages covering a population of 15000 to 20000. The Committee favoured continuation of the reserve quota system of representation in panchayati raj institutions to protect and promote the interest of weaker sections both these tiers should be directly elected but linked up with each other through the intermediate tier of panchayat samiti.\textsuperscript{106}

A few of these recommendations were accepted by some states but most of the recommendations were not implemented. Between the two - Balvantray Mehta and Asoka Mehta Reports, lie two decades of the functioning of this grass roots government. Both can be considered as landmarks in the history of local government in India. The Balvantray Mehta Committee made the block as the level of decentralisation and thus laid the corner stone of panchayati raj structure. The Asoka Mehta Committee proposed new pattern of district level zilla parishad.\textsuperscript{107}

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid, p. 177-178.

\textsuperscript{106} Thirty D. Patel, Panchayati Raj - A Review, In Rajput & Meghe, op. cit., p. 64.
However, the Report of the Asoka Mehta Committee could not be implemented because of the change of ruling Congress party headed by Indira Gandhi at the Centre in 1980. A potentially viable and useful structure of panchayati raj existed in form but its effectiveness had been limited in practice.  

As long as the Community Development Programme (CDP) funds and projects were at the disposal of panchayati raj institutions, they were able to play the role of agencies of development but as soon as the CD programme resources began to taper, the role of the panchayti raj institutions became insignificant. The CDP funds and projects were designed to taper over a period of 10-12 years.

There was an idea that all development activities should frame strong PR institutions but in practice there has been a movement in the opposition direction. Schemes like Small Farmer’s Development Agency (SFDA); Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Intensive Tribal Development Programme (DPAP); Intensive Tribal Development Project (ITDP) etc., were not brought within the perview of zila parishad and panchayat samiti. Some of these agencies like SFDA were organised on the target group approach and some like Command Area Development, Hill Area Development and Drought Prone Area Programmes were based on the area development approach. Thus the functional panchayati raj institutions has been over-shadowed by the new uni-functional agencies charged with technology intensive schemes and projects.  

With the change of government in 1980, the Draft Sixth Plan (1978-83) was replaced by the Sixth Plan (1980-85). During the Sixth Five Year Plan, it was proposed to strengthen the process of Democratic Decentralisation. Irrespective of whatever structural pattern that is in existent or that may be devised, efforts will be to devolve on these institutions all such functions, appropriate to each level, which are capable of being planned and implemented at the level. These institutions will be particular

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ly involved in the planning and execution of Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP) and the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP). They will also have prominent role in District and Block level planning and in the planning of Minimum Need Programme for their operation.\textsuperscript{110}

The question of the involvement of panchayati raj institutions became an important issue of debate since the beginning of 1980's when the question of district planning modalities became important aspect of the decentralisation of planning process.\textsuperscript{111}

With the expansion of anti poverty programmes and setting up of district rural development agencies and other related organisations at lower levels, the need for integration of panchayati raj system with development programmes and administration was felt. Different states started experimenting with the district planning modalities.\textsuperscript{112}

The Planning Commission appointed a Working Group in 1983 known as the Hanumantha Rao Committee to suggest measures for making decentralised planning at the district level more effective. The Committee stressed the need for public participation at the local level. The people's participation being a necessary ingredient of the planning especially at the grass roots level, the PRI's have, naturally, significant contribution to make in the formulation, execution, and evaluation of the planning at the local level. Panchayati raj institutions are supposed to provide the framework for the popular participation and organising development programme.\textsuperscript{113}

Rural development as an integrated concept for growth, social justice and poverty alleviation continues to be one of the principal area of emphasis in the Seventh Five Year Plan. The development


\textsuperscript{111} Indira Hindway, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 1663.


strategy of the Seventh Plan aims at the direct attack on the problems of poverty, unemployment and regional imbalances. The success of this depends on effective steps for the decentralisation of planning and development administration on the one hand and involvement and participation of the people in the formulation and implementation process through elected grass roots level institutions process through elected grass roots level institutions voluntary agencies as well as organisations of the poor.\textsuperscript{114}

Therefore, the Planning Commission set up the G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985) to review the existing 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 Committee recommended strengthening of Zila parishads and district level planning as well as better integration of block and lower level of planning with lower level panchayati raj institutions.\textsuperscript{115}

The Singhvi Committee (1986-87) had prepared the concept paper on Panchayati Raj. The Committee wanted panchayati raj institutions to be closely involved in planning and implementation of rural development programmes at lower levels. This Committee recommended that village panchayats (of group of small villages if necessary) should be made viable by combining 2-3 villages in one panchayat and by strengthening their finances. It had also supported the G.V.K. Rao Committee for integrating administrative structures with panchayati raj institutions. The Singhvi Committee and Asoka Mehta Committee suggested suitable amendments for the purpose.\textsuperscript{116}

The Report of the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-State relations (1988) also deals with the panchayati raj. The Thungton Committee (1988) [a sub committee of the Consultative Committee attached to the Ministry of Personnel] also made exhaustive recommendations\textsuperscript{117}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{114} \textit{Ibid}, pp. 1-3.
\item \textsuperscript{115} Concept paper on Panchayati Raj, Ministry of Agriculture, Government of India, New Delhi, 1986-87.
\item \textsuperscript{116} Vishvajit P. Singh, Populism or Panacea ? \textit{op. cit.}, p. 34.
\item \textsuperscript{117} D.D.Guru, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 2.
\end{enumerate}
The linking of the socio-economic development programme with the functioning of panchayati raj institutions has been a matter of great debate over the years. But there has been a lack of political will to provide a fitting shape to the set ideas. The concept of panchayati raj was given a concrete shape by Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru with the formation of panchayati raj Institutions. The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi was trying his best to revitalise these grass roots institutions having a fragile structure which was forgotten or utilised according to the convenience of the power-wielding politicians or the power brokers. These institutions have become ineffective bodies shattering the dream of our national leaders of the freedom struggle.

The Central Government had initiated important economic policy in 1989 for more efficient tackling of the problem of poverty and unemployment in the country. These were Jawahar Rozgar Yojna (1989) and the reinforcement of panchayati raj system at the grass roots level which came in the form of 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill 1989. Both the policies were most important.

Rajiv Gandhi extended the coverage of this programme to all the panchayats of all districts in the country. The government announced that this programme will incorporate National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGp) as well as the intensive employment programme in identified backward districts.

Jawahar Rozgar Yojna aims at placing in the hands of village panchayats around the country adequate funds to run their own rural employment scheme in the interest of the vast masses of the rural poor who constitute the bulk of rural India. This yojna aims at reaching every single panchayat. The government expectation was that, on an average, a village panchayat with a population of 4000 would receive between Rs.80,000 to one lakh rupees a year to implement the programme. The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was trying his best to revitalise these grass roots institutions having a fragile structure which was forgotten or utilised according to the convenience of the power-wielding politicians or the power brokers. These institutions have become ineffective bodies shattering the dream of our national leaders of the freedom struggle.

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Jawahar Rozgar Yojna aims at placing in the hands of village panchayats around the country adequate funds to run their own rural employment scheme in the interest of the vast masses of the rural poor who constitute the bulk of rural India. This yojna aims at reaching every single panchayat. The government expectation was that, on an average, a village panchayat with a population of 4000 would receive between Rs.80,000 to one lakh rupees a year to implement the programme. The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, was trying his best to revitalise these grass roots institutions having a fragile structure which was forgotten or utilised according to the convenience of the power-wielding politicians or the power brokers. These institutions have become ineffective bodies shattering the dream of our national leaders of the freedom struggle.
Minister Rajiv Gandhi stated in parliament, the intention to provide employment to at least one member of each family to one hundred days a year at a work place near his home.\textsuperscript{122}

Consequently, it was decided to merge existing NREP and RLEG into one scheme. This Yojna being a programme for all the villages and for all the rural areas was certainly unique in its approach and thrust and was bound to make its impact in the socio-economic lives of the rural population. This programme had been named after the first Prime Minister, Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru who had great compassion for the poor and was concerned with the problem of poverty in the country. It would provide a real break through and will have helped the process of decentralisation of planning machinery.\textsuperscript{123}

After struggling for about 30 years, the government of India suddenly found the solution in the form of the constitutional 64th Amendment Bill to all the weaknesses of panchayati raj. It was argued that this bill sought to enshrine democracy at grass roots, as it intended to give power to people, and it would end corruption and fight and finish power brokers and middlemen in politics. The Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi had claimed that this Bill was a historic and revolutionary Bill and its introduction in Lok Sabha was the single greatest event after the enactment of the constitution.\textsuperscript{124}

It appeared from the speeches of the leaders and newspaper reports that the government had felt the need for the constitutional amendments mainly because of two reasons: (1) It was felt that state governments are not very enthusiastic about implementing panchayati raj in their respective states. They are also not prepared to share power with lower level bodies. In fact, it was argued that some state governments had grabbed the power back from panchayati raj bodies gradually. (2) Local self government and panchayati raj bodies are in the state list in the present constitution, with the result that the centre cannot pass any legislation in these areas unless the constitution is amended for the purpose.

\textsuperscript{122} D.D.Guru, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{123} Times of India, May 11 and May 16, Economic Times, May 11, and Indian Express, May 11, 12 and 13, 1989.
\textsuperscript{124} Indira Hinway, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 1663.
Therefore, there was a need to amend the constitution to ensure power to PR bodies.\textsuperscript{125}

The credit goes to late Rajiv Gandhi that he came out with concrete and specific proposals to make panchayati raj institution really powerful and effective enough to involve themselves directly in the development and planning process. The decentralisation of planning process at the district and panchayat level was going to be a reality by making the PRI at district and village level as the third tier of government in addition to the central government and the state governments.\textsuperscript{126}

It must have been for the first time in the world that a Prime Minister proposed a constitutional amendment on a subject of local self government in a federal democracy. This Panchayati Raj Bill had to cover the entire country consisting of 2,25,000 gram panchayats and 300 million rural voters. Again it was for the first time that a Constitutional Amendment Bill had been prepared after the Prime Minister met almost 400 odd district magistrates in different states. Then again it was for the first time that three regional conventions of panchayati raj leaders were called by the government before preparing a Bill on democratic decentralisation. Regional workshops were held earlier to discuss the Asoka Mehta Committee Report. The proposal for giving statutory representation to women in panchayats through reservation was another pioneering one. Such a Bill could have far reaching implications.\textsuperscript{127}

Rajiv Gandhi introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill (1989) in the Lok Sabha on the last day of extended budget session, in the face of stiff resistance from the Opposition, which challenged both the legislative competence of the House to enact the law, and the constitutional validity of the proposed amendment. P. Shiv Shankar, the then Union Minister for Human Resources Development, mounted his party's constitutional defence of the Bill that any state failing to enforce the constitutional amendment would have to face the consequences under Art 356 of the Constitution, which deals with the imposition of President's rule.\textsuperscript{128}

\textsuperscript{125} D.D.Guru, \textit{op. cit.}, p.2.


\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Indian Express}, May 16, 1989.
The major objectives that panchayati raj has to realise were democratic decentralisation and to act as an effective catalyst of social transformation. In many states elections were not held for more than ten years. The autonomy of panchayati raj institutions was compromised by several state governments, officials and district level government structures like district planning and development boards in Maharastra and district planning boards in Gujarat. Panchayati raj could hardly succeed in bringing marginal groups like the SCs, STs, Other backward classes and women to the Centre of democratic local level power structures. They remained on the periphery in the processes of rural development and social transformation.\textsuperscript{129}

However, the process of renewal of panchayati raj was reactivated in 1980's in Karnataka and West Bengal. Along with Gujarat and Maharashtra, these two states have helped rekindle our hope in panchayati raj. The 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill draws upon the experience of these states.

For example, the district panchayats in Karnataka have, in a way, become district governments with an effective share in local level planning and with liberal transfer of powers and resources, to the elected office bearers of the panchayati raj institutions. In West Bengal, the village panchayats have helped in the implementation of land reforms and measures of distributive justice.\textsuperscript{130}

The main provisions of the proposed Constitutional 64th Amendment Bill were as follows:

(i) All states will have three tier panchayati raj system which will include panchayats.

(ii) Regular mandatory elections will be held after every five years for these panchayati raj bodies under the control and supervision of the chief election commission. If a panchayati raj body is dismissed for some reason, it must be reconstituted through a proper election within six months.

\textsuperscript{128} Pravin Sheth, \textit{A Renewal}, Seminar 360, August, 1989, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid, p. 44.

\textsuperscript{130} Indira Hirway, \textit{op. cit.}, 1666.
(iii) All seats in the panchayati raj bodies will be through direct elections, and office bearers will be from the directly elected members only. State legislatures may appoint MPs, MLAs and others on PR bodies for their representation in the panchayats.

(iv) 30 per cent seats will be reserved for women in panchayati raj bodies. Reservation of seats for SC/ST will be in proportion to their population in the total population.

(v) Panchayati raj bodies will prepare plans for economic development, social justice and social welfare of their population as per the given guidelines. These plans will be incorporated later on in state plans.

(vi) Strict accounting procedures will be laid down to central corruption and misuse of funds by panchayats. Comptroller and Auditor General of India will supervise the accounts.131

All these provisions will go towards strengthening the panchayati raj institutions. The devolution of power to panchayats for organising and executing various programmes of socio-economic development and providing adequate financial support for the purpose will be making the plan formulation and their execution through people's participation more realistic and efficient. The strengthening of panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) through specific provisions in the constitution will greatly help this process of transfer of planning functions from the state level to the district and panchayat level. For the creation of a real third tier, government was going to be greatly facilitated by the provisions of election to these bodies for five year term conducted by the Election Commission. Such elections will strengthen the roots of democracy at the grass roots level and will also provide budgetary propriety in the raising and utilisation of the financial resources. The discussion about the appropriate use of financial resources would be helpful in bringing about financial discipline at the panchayati raj institutions. The irregularity of holding the panchayat elections has been one of the weak points in their functioning. This irregularity made the working of panchayats uncertain and unrealizable.132

The environment prevailing in the rural areas during 1980's was far different from those prevailing earlier especially in the 1950's. The rural environment was more conducive to the growth

and successful operation of PRIs. It was, therefore, quite proper that Bill for Constitutional Amendment for creating and strengthening the third tier, government through panchayati raj institutions had been placed before the country. The dream of Gram Swaraj of Mahatma Gandhi was going to be realised in the years to come.\textsuperscript{133}

The Bill was criticised on various grounds. Most important criticism of the Bill was that if it becomes an Act, the panchayati raj institutions all over the country will fall directly under the control of central government because of the election procedure and also because of the disbursement of the funds to these institutions by the Centre, either directly or through the state governments.

The second major criticism of the Bill has been the argument that such institutions will be under the control of well to do persons of the area and their dominance will be going against the interests of the general masses especially the poor and under privileged. The provision in the Constitutional Bill regarding the reservation of seats for women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes will not solve their socio-economic problems but the PRIs will become a source of harassment for these weaker sections. Again it was argued that strengthening of PRIs should come after the successful implementation of the land reforms.\textsuperscript{134} But the Central Government has never been serious about the implementations of the land reforms.

The proposed Bill tended to increase the power of the centre and reduces the same of state governments. First of all this Bill has taken the panchayati raj out of the state list and put it in the concurrent list so as to allow the centre to pass legislations in this area. Secondly, the provision of holding panchayat elections under the supervision of the Chief Election Commissioner and not under state governments once again gives more powers to the centre. Thirdly, the provision of providing finances to panchayats through the finance commission and not through state governments also reduces the power of the states (giving funds to Jawahar Rozgar Yojna directly to panchayats is indicative of the same trend). Fourthly, the power of dismissing panchayats with the governors, which

\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid.} p. 2.

\textsuperscript{134} Indira Hinway, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 1666.
also increased central control over panchayat bodies. And lastly, the provisions like 30 per cent reservation to women, proportionate representation to SC and ST, etc., which were decided at the centre without consulting state governments was another encroachment on powers of state governments.

This kind of reduction in the power of states and increase in the powers of the centre was an unhealthy trend leading to more and more centralisation in the country. It not only strengthens the present trend of over centralisation of power but it also endangers the federal character of our union.\textsuperscript{135}

But the government headed by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi suffered a major setback when the two constitutional Amendment Bills on the panchayati raj and nagarpalikas fell through in the Rajya Sabha.

This was the first occasion since 1952 when Constitutional Amendment Bills moved by the government have been defeated in the Upper House. The Bills, already passed by the Lok Sabha, were defeated in the Upper House by 158 to 83 and 157 to 83 respectively after the opposition pressed for division. The 64th and 65th Constitutional Amendment Bills failed to receive the requisite two third majority needed for passage of constitutional amendment measures. On both the occasions there was a short fail of 4 and 5 votes respectively. In 1969, Mrs. Indira Gandhi’s Privy Purse Abolition Bill was defeated by a fraction of a vote in the Rajya Sabha.

The opposition demanded the immediate resignation of the Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi following the defeat of the Bills. It was through the two constitutional Amendment Bills, defeated in the Rajya Sabha, the government wanted to take democracy to the rural masses and toiling people in the urban areas.\textsuperscript{136}

\textsuperscript{135} The Tribune, October 15, 1989, Indian Express, October 15, 1989.

Both these bills deserved to be defeated not because they were bad in law or concept but because Late Rajiv Gandhi, saw them solely as instrument of party propaganda and as showpieces of his government’s achievements for the coming elections.

Summary of Arguments.

The Indian government launched vast programmes of Community and National Extension Projects. These programme were designed to free rural India from poverty, ignorance, disease and mismanagement. But these programmes did not succeed and the government had to appoint a team headed by Balvantray Mehta partly to investigate the causes of failure of these two schemes and partly to make suggestions to strengthen people’s participation in grass roots level democracy. Balvantray Mehta Team gave a Report for three tier system of panchayati raj. Government Planners thought that the people’s participation in rural improvements could be much more effective through these panchayats. There was, therefore a shift in the role of the panchayats from administrative and regulatory functions to those of development. As community development projects increased and more villagers actively cooperated, the government introduced more innovations to cope with current needs and problems. One such innovation of far reaching importance is the democratic decentralisation programme. Several states in India are now Inaugurating and implementing decentralisation schemes. 137

But the concept of panchayati raj had undergone many changes over the years. Though it started as a narrow concept, it has expanded to cover areas of rural development and economic planning to some extent. In spite of this expansion, however, the concept still suffers from a number of limitations. First of all, the concept is still very narrow as it does not view panchayati raj bodies as bodies which can play an important role in the overall development of over rural areas. Secondly, there is not much clarity about the inter-relationship between panchayati raj bodies and development administration. As there is no separate cadre of administration for panchayati raj bodies, the dual

137 Indira Hirway, op. cit., pp. 1663-64.
responsibility of the administration creates a lot of confusion and complications. Thirdly, there is also no clarity about how to involve the weaker sections in the functioning of panchayati raj bodies. On the one hand there is a feeling that panchayati raj leaders do not involve the poor in these bodies and therefore, administration has to intervene to reach the benefits of growth to the poor. While on the other hand the involvement of panchayati raj office bearers in rural development activities is increasing continuously. There is, therefore, considerable confusion about the role of panchayati raj bodies in rural development programmes especially anti poverty programmes. Lastly, there is no clear trend emerging in the context of decentralisation of power. On one hand, there is a lot of talk about decentralisation of power to district and lower level bodies. While on the other hand central schemes are increasing both in number and size. One cannot really make out what kind of decentralisation we are heading for.  

It is true that panchayati raj structures set up in our country are not doing very well and that there is a need to revitalise them. There is basically a need to evolve a comprehensive concept of panchayati raj, which clearly spells out as to what kind of role is expected from it. It is also important to realise that representative participation may not lead to mass participation in our kind of socio-economic rural power structure. Changing this structure or at least strengthening the position of the poor against exploitation is an important requirement for the success of panchayati raj. The proposed constitutional 64th Amendment Bill, was at best a partial and weak attempt to save panchayati raj. But it was more likely to be misused by the centre than help the process of decentralisation.  

In spite of these limitations of the present concepts underlying panchayati raj system in India, one cannot deny the potential of panchayati raj in India. Panchayati raj has to play a very important role in the overall development of the country.  

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