With the beginning of recorded history local bodies have been the characteristic feature of India’s villages and its importance is still felt in the development process of the country. In the post-independent period, the Indian state consciously took the task of modernisation and development of the society particularly the rural one. This was natural in the sense that independence was energised not only by visions of democracy but also by a desire to modernise and develop the country which for so long had been systematically impoverished by the colonial ruler. Democracy and development were taken to be cardinal principles of the post-colonial enterprise of nation-building. It was earnestly believed that the state had to play a central role in the development of the society in general, and that of the village in particular. In fact, the policy of development and change embarked upon by the Indian state has tremendous impact on the conceptualisation of the village and villagers in post-independence India. The state has come to be seen as a positive agency of welfare and social change. Through a plethora of welfare policies and developmental programmes, the state aims to change the social structure of the village in its entirety.\(^1\)

To do so in a democratic system, decentralisation of political and economic power is essential, because a few centres of power cannot realise or fulfil the needs of the vast multitudes of people. Keeping this in consideration the Indian State has introduced the concept of democratic decentralisation,
which incorporates within itself both the concepts of decentralisation and
democratic local governance.

1.1 Concept of Decentralisation

Decentralisation is recognised as a largely positive aspect of political
development. It is one of the few developmental concepts that have found
supporters within differing ideologies. It finds support within the
neoliberal school because of the latter’s emphasis on dilution of central state
authority and control, while at the same time it finds supporters within
more leftist-Marxist thought because of its inherent potential to distribute
power away from the elite and to include the generally marginalised in
decision making. The realisation that the centralised, bureaucracy-
dependent system of planning and implementation has failed to deliver to
many of the developing world, as well as the fact that common citizens
should have a say in the decisions that affect their lives, has brought
decentralisation to centre-stage within development discourse. By bringing
governance, decision making and implementation of basic services closer to
the people, decentralisation promises both greater efficiency and a more
responsive government.²

The term ‘Decentralisation’ can be usefully understood as a mechanism to
relocate responsibility and authority from an upper political and
administrative entity to the smaller level political and administrative
entities. Decentralisation is very often explained as a political process
whereby administrative authority, public resources and responsibilities are
transferred from Central Government agencies to lower-level organs of
government or to non-governmental bodies, such as Community Based
Organisations (CBOs), ‘third party’ non-governmental organisations
(NGOs) or private sector actors.³ Such transfers can involve the power to
decide the allocation and distribution of public resources, the power to implement programmes and policies and the power to raise and spend public revenues for these and other purposes. The key characteristics of decentralisation essentially involve changes in pattern of authority and in the status of local level institutions. There are three main dimensions of decentralisation that reflect, in general terms, increasing and often sequential stages of progress in achieving the objectives of decentralisation. These are: Political decentralisation (accountability), Administrative decentralisation (functional responsibility) and Fiscal decentralisation (access to resources). So the process of decentralisation involves a shift of power, role, authority and responsibility in the following directions:

a) Vertically from centre to state;

b) From state to the districts downwards to the units of local self-government leading ultimately to peoples’ participation in self-management; and

c) A horizontal power shift from the appointed executives to the elected representatives of people.

Thus, decentralisation is an arrangement by which the ultimate authority to command is concentrated in units located in different parts of the country. It is argued that assigning of functions and responsibility, for their efficient and effective performance, to the decentralised organisation lower levels are allowed to decide many matters and a few cases involving major policies or interpretations are referred to the higher levels of the organisation. However, the term decentralisation is a generic one which covers a number of modes such as the following:
1.1.1 Deconcentration

Deconcentration is referred as the centre ‘relocates’ its offices and officers to places located outside the administrative centre or the capital. Ribot relates deconcentration to administrative decentralisation, i.e. a transfer to lower level central government authorities, or to other local authorities who are upwardly accountable to the central government. Ferguson and Chandrasekharan refer deconcentration to the transfer of administrative responsibility for specified function to lower levels within the central government bureaucracy, generally on some spatial basis. J. A. Sayer et. al. define deconcentration as the process by which the agents of central government control are relocated and geographically dispersed. In short, deconcentration actually redistributes decision making authority and financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. It denotes certain functions to the agent of central or state government in the field.

1.1.2 Delegation

Delegation relates to one form of administrative decentralisation which transfers responsibilities and authority to semi-autonomous entities that respond to the central government but are not totally controlled by it. Scholars like Ferguson and Chandrasekharan refer delegation to the transfer of managerial responsibility for specified functions to other public organisations outside normal central government control, whether provincial or local government or parastatal agencies. However, the Study Team on Community Projects and National Extension Service appointed by the Government of India (1957) observes – it is not infrequently that delegation of power is mistaken for decentralisation. The former does not divest the government of the ultimate responsibility for the actions of the
authority to whom power is delegated; this authority is under the control of the government and is in every way subordinate to it.\footnote{9}

1.1.3 Devolution

By devolution, Manor and Crook mean that the central government gives up some of its power, for example, to tax and spend, and may even have only limited or minor legislative competence. Fergusen and Chandrasekharan also refer devolution to the transfer of governance responsibility for specified functions to sub-national levels, either publicly or privately owned, that are largely outside the direct control of the central government. Devolution relates to one form of administrative decentralisation which transfers specific decision making powers from one level of government to another.\footnote{10} Thus, where devolution system exists local governments have clear and legally recognised geographical boundaries over which they exercise authority and within which they perform public function. Therefore, the terms devolution and decentralisation are often used synonymously.

To be precise deconcentration, delegation and devolution are the technical methods of administration and decentralisation is much wider than these. As a model of development, the concept of decentralisation attracted the attention of a great number of scholars, who have forwarded a variety of arguments. The main points of their arguments are\footnote{11}:

- Decentralisation facilitates greater participation in the local politico-economic affairs that improves the quality and effectiveness of government sponsored schemes and services particularly those ones which are aimed at empowering poor and marginalised groups.
- It overcomes the problems of centralised planning by adopting a developmental path that reflects on the real needs and preferences of the concerned community particularly its vulnerable and marginalised sections.

- It makes conditions for the realisation of specific demands and needs of different regions and groups with minimal chances of public complain and religious, ethnic and minority upsurges.

- It has the capacity to the formation of a new forward-looking self-identity among different sections of society that help in breaking down the iniquitous and hierarchical social order and its ramifications.

- It expands communicative understanding and cooperation between public officials and citizens that help in creating an atmosphere conducive for sustainable development including the management and proper utilisation of common property resources.

- It develops democratic values for resolving fundamental and specific social and economic problems faced by diverse groups and communities in a complex, tradition-bound and culturally and economically diversified society like India.

1.2 Concept of Democratic Decentralisation

The basic idea of democratic decentralisation is sharing the decision-making authority with lower levels. It entails a system of governance in which citizens possess the right to hold local public officials accountable through the use of elections, grievance meetings and other democratic means. On these lines, the democratic decentralisation can be defined as
meaningful authority devolved to local units of governance that are accessible and accountable to the local citizenry, who enjoy full political rights and liberty. Thus, democratic decentralisation possesses two virtues: it is consistent with the democratic trend and it is also technically the most efficient method of formulation and execution of local projects. It is democratic in the sense that the source from which power is decentralised has its democratic base and the body to which power flows is also democratically organised. It is referred as a political ideal and local self-government is its institutional form.

It is now well accepted principle that self-governing institutions at the local level are essential for national growth and for effective people’s participation and that they are an integral and indispensable part of the democratic process. As everything cannot be done by the higher level of government alone, energies of the rural people have to be channelized so as to enable them to participate in the development of their respective area. Hence, popular participation is viewed as an essential instrument which helps in assessing the needs of the people, mobilising local resources, planning and implementation. It is expected that grassroots democracy based on small units of government enables people to feel a sense of responsibility and also inculcates the values of democracy. It provides greater efficiency, transparency, accountability, responsiveness and opportunities for mass participation.

This spirit of democratic decentralisation in Indian context is rooted in the concept of Panchayati Raj, which acts as a vehicle in carrying back to the people the power that really belongs to them. In a country like India where eighty per cent of the population dwells in over five lakh seventy thousand villages, the importance and relevance of Panchayati Raj is self evident.
Gandhiji had dreams of democracy commencing from the villages. He strongly believed that democratic freedoms have to be founded in institutions of self-government in every village of India. As such, Panchayati Raj was an important component in Gandhi’s vision of future India in which economic and political power was decentralised and each village was self-reliant economically. He was in favour of giving power to the people in the villages and seeking their participation in governing the country. In the present scenario, the concept of Panchayati Raj has come to be accepted as an extension of democracy up to the village.

1.3 Concept of Panchayati Raj

The principle of democratic decentralisation as projected by the Study Team headed by Balwantrai Mehta was sought to be realized through the organisation of Panchayati Raj institutions at the different levels. This experiment is projected as keeping with the principle and practices of democracy. Panchayati Raj is often termed as self-governments by the people at the grassroots level. It aims at improving the socio-economic as well as political standards by introducing the element of People’s participation. It is essential because in a democratic set up this alone can sustain the (development oriented) programme on a long-term basis. Today when the people oriented concept of a welfare state is gaining acceptance it is also becoming clear that people and only people are ends and all else is means. The very concept of democratic decentralisation or Panchayati Raj is directly related with making welfare state a reality.

The concept of Panchayati Raj has a variety of interpretations viz., as an institutional mechanism for rural development; institution of self-government at the lowest level, an agency of state government and an institutional vehicle for rural development. Though the concept is in
existence since long but it has taken a concrete shape only in the post-independent period particularly in the last decade of the twentieth century.

It was during the 1950’s that there was a need felt by the Government of India to initiate the decentralise governance and devolve power by introducing the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as institutions of local self governance, following the Balwantrai Mehta Committee’s recommendations after reviewing the Community Development Programmes, to enable the rural masses to participate in the micro-planning and implementation of the various development schemes. However, the entire discourse on democratic decentralisation got numbed during the regime of Indira Gandhi as she followed a path of deliberate centralisation of power culminating in the National Emergency. It was only when the electorally triumphant newly formed Janata Party assumed power that we find the Asok Mehta Committee(1977) once again given the responsibility of reopening the issue of Panchayati Raj. First formal proposal for ‘providing constitutional sanction to Panchayati Raj’ was put forth by this Committee with a view to make the Panchayati Raj ‘an organic integral part of our democratic process and (that) they should be accorded appropriate constitutional status and recognition.’ Later, in the 1980’s some other committees like G.V.K.Rao Committee, L.M.Singhvi Committee and Thungan Committee were constituted to suggest means for revamping rural local self government. Consequently, the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha, during the Prime Ministership of Rajiv Gandhi. But the Bill could not receive a two-third majority support in Rajya Sabha. Again, during P.V.Narasimha Rao’s tenure the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill was introduced in a diluted form and finally it was passed by the Parliament in December 1992. It
became an Act on 24 April, 1993 known as the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992.

The passing of Seventy-third (73rd) Amendment Act is a major step in the process of making Panchayati Raj a reality. It made an attempt to prescribe certain national principles in developing local self-government bodies in rural India which will ensure effective participation of the people in the composition and functioning of the local bodies. Following this there has been changes in the composition and functions of the PRIs in every state. Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are also no exception.

In the present study Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) would be examined from democracy and development perspective. As a part of the democratic process PRIs have opened up new vistas for different groups and thereby resolving basic social and economic problems faced by the diverse communities. In its developmental aspect the PRIs have been assigned important role in the implementation of rural development programmes. The states like Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have also assigned important role to the PRIs through their respective Panchayat Acts and thereby started operationalising democracy at the grassroots level.

To fortify the process both the states conducted elections under their respective Panchayat Acts. Unlike in the past the present PRIs elections in both the states create much enthusiasm among the people. They are now taking part in developmental functions as well as decision-making process at the grassroots level. The new functions and responsibilities entrusted upon PRIs are diverse in nature involving planning, monitoring and implementation of the development projects. The present study, therefore, makes an attempt to explore the working of the PRIs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in a comparative perspective with an emphasis on
impact of socio-economic factors on its functioning, role of women elected representatives in the decision making process and also the financial position.

1.4 Survey of Literature

A large number of literatures on Panchayati Raj have appeared in the past and also after the passing of 73rd Amendment. The studies are presented in chronological order with regard to the publications with a view to show the shifts in the interest and prominence of the scholars that occurred from time to time vis-a-vis the working of Panchayati Raj in India as well as in the various regions including Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

A Hundred Years of Local Self Government in Assam\textsuperscript{21} deals with the historical background, constitutional structure, functions, local finance inter-governmental relations etc. in Assam. There is a historical narration of provisions of the different Acts passed from time to time. In explaining the local self government in Assam actually the author has followed mainly the historical approach.

Democracy in NEFA\textsuperscript{22} made a detailed analysis of almost all tribal village councils in Arunachal Pradesh (erstwhile NEFA). Elwin viewed that the village councils were democratic agencies of the people. He made his study before the introduction of modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh but he assumed the likely effect of it on traditional village councils.

Patterns of Panchayati Raj in India\textsuperscript{23} presents a comprehensive account of PRIs in several Indian states. The book emphasises the nature, character and scope of local government institutions. It evaluates the experiences of various states with politico-administrative structures to mobilise local participation in development programmes. The author finds that the PRIs
have been usually beneficial to the rural population. Moreover, he observes that casteism and communalism stands in the way of the proper operation of the panchayat administration and the remedy lies in recognising the political parties for the administration of villages.

**New Partnership in Rural Development**\(^\text{24}\) presents a critical assessment of both community development and panchayati raj bodies. The book emphasises the need for voluntary organisation in rural development. It describes the methods of working with people and extending consultancy service and guidance. Finally, the book urges for co-ordinating the people through voluntary agencies for rural development activities.

**Panchayat Raj and Rural Development: A Study of Tamil Nadu**\(^\text{25}\) has made a detailed study of the Panchayats of Tamil Nadu and observed the wide gap between resources and functions at the local level resulting in the neglect of both maintenance and development activities. The author also observes that the local institutions are very much economy minded and given the necessary support they are quite capable of mobilising effectively the resources that have been earmarked for them. He also finds that the developmental activities like education, health, water supply and general welfare can be dealt effectively by the panchayat institution.

**Political Transition in the Grass-roots in Tribal India**\(^\text{26}\) made a micro study of East Siang and West Siang districts of Arunachal Pradesh highlighting the political transition at the grass root level. His focus was on the political awareness and participation of the people of Arunachal Pradesh.

**New Horizons in Rural Development**\(^\text{27}\) is a comprehensive work on rural development in India, where the author viewed that the country is yet to be
prepared for the acceptance of a broader and more integrated concept of community development and the implications which flow from it. The book argues that to realise the meaningfulness of democratic decentralisation at village level, constitution should provide financial independence to PRIs at the grassroot level.

**Village Panchayats in India**\(^2^8\) is an empirical study to unfold the leadership pattern in the village Panchayats of Assam and their role in the realisation of the objectives of Panchayati Raj. The study is confined to three Gaon Panchayats in the Dibrugarh District of Assam. It is in the context of the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972. The author observed that there exists a gap between the theory and practice of Panchayati Raj and if these institutions are to play an effective role in the transformation of rural society some urgent steps need to be taken to invigorate the PRIs in the country.

**Financing of Panchayat Raj Institutions**\(^2^9\) is a detailed work on the financial system of PRIs in the state of Bihar. The author finds that the existing system is not conducive for accelerating economic development and socio-political institutions are responsible for poor financial conditions of the PRIs in Bihar.

**Grassroot Politics and Panchayati Raj**\(^3^0\) is a study based on an empirical survey of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh. It is a study to understand the growth of local bodies from past to present, socio-economic determinants of the present Panchayat leadership and also the voting behaviour. It reveals that election and politics at the grass root level in Himachal Pradesh is mainly dominated by upper and middle class section, while people having upper caste identity monopolises leadership at the Panchayat level.
New Panchayati Raj in Action is a study on the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Madhya Pradesh (M.P). The study has focussed on the functioning of new Panchayati Raj in M.P and attempted to measure the success or failure of the system on various empirical parameters. It has made a brief analysis of the growth of PRIs in India in general and the Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act (1993) in particular. In this study attempt was also made to understand the position of women and it observed that though women have come on Panchayati Raj bodies in their full strength yet they are dominated by the male members of their family in looking after the functions PRIs. It has also presented the perception as well as awareness of the Panchayat representatives in M.P. and concludes that in spite of legal formalities and various efforts made by the state governments for devolution of power, the vision as envisaged by the Seventy-third Constitution Amendment Act has not been fulfilled.

Dynamics of New Panchayati Raj System - Reflections and Retrospections presents an insight in the problems of grassroots democracy in general and Panchayat administration in particular. In this book an attempt was made not only to survey historically the growth and decay of ancient Panchayats but also to discuss analytically the present structure, functions, powers, financial management and people’s participation. The author has also laid special attention to discuss the role of PRIs in connection with pollution problem and weaker sections.

Panchayati Raj in West Bengal-Democratic Decentralisation or Democratic Centralisation focuses on the Panchayat Raj Institutions in West Bengal. The study highlights the need for democratic decentralisation for developmental activities, participation of the people and elected representatives in the decision making process and the involvement of the
political parties in the activities of GP. It reveals that the participation of the people and their development are the precondition for flourishing local self-governments at rural areas.

Planning and Management for Rural Development\textsuperscript{34} observes that after implementation of the 73rd Amendment two critical dimensions of rural development emerged - people management and project management. His study mainly focuses on the planning process and practice at the grass root level. The study identifies the developmental goals, motivations and orientation of Gram Panchayat organisation and also emphasised on the management problems as perceived by the elected functionaries of Gram Panchayat in planning, financing, organising, leading, and controlling the rural development projects/work in Uttar Pradesh.

Arunachal Pradesh – Past and Present\textsuperscript{35} has made an attempt to portray the different facets of Arunachal Pradesh, i.e., the past history, culture, tribal ethos, society, administration, rituals and festivals. It has also taken note of present administration, development efforts, politics and modernisation.

Rejuvenating Panchayati Raj\textsuperscript{36} is an inclusive study to find out the answer of certain issues like how and why Gandhi constructed the notion of ‘self-sufficient village republics’ emphasizing Panchayats and also tried to find out the reason for refusal of nationalist leadership in accepting the Gandhian principles when nationalism reached a more matured stage, and finally consign the Panchayats to the Directive Principles. The study also made a brief analysis of the Seventy-third amendment and also the historical antecedents of the process of decentralized administration that grew in Assam prior to colonial administration. Highlighting some of the issues like immigration and land reform, it analyses the probable role of
Panchayats in resolving the issues. In the course of the study several Panchayat functionaries of Kamrup, Golaghat and Goalpara districts were interviewed in reaching the conclusion. The study revealed that the experience with PRIs in Assam has clearly exposed that many of the concepts like democratic decentralization, transparency, accountability and devolution have very little practical relevance. In practice, the PRIs in the state have been surviving at the mercy of the DRDAs, without witnessing any qualitative breakthrough from the past. In a nutshell, the factors that hindered the process in the past are still influential.

Panchayati Raj has made an empirical analysis of grassroots dynamics in the context of pre-1997 developments, in Lohit district of Arunachal Pradesh. The author has highlighted the nature and dynamics of Panchayati Raj in India along with tribal situation with a reference to Village Council of various tribes existing in the state. He examined the problem of adjustment of modern Panchayati Raj Institutions into an indigenous tribal framework. He observed that by participating in the panchayat elections and panchayat activities the political consciousness of the tribes has been raised considerably. The study explored different aspects of relationships among the key panchayat functionaries. It makes use of the historical process as well as politico-administrative dynamics contributing to the development of Panchayati Raj System in India.

Panchayati Raj System and Development Planning has analysed the structure as well as functioning of Panchayati Raj in the state of Sikkim. It made a comprehensive study of important issues like empowerment of women, participation of weaker sections of people in the developmental process, devolution, resource mobilisation by the GPs. In addition to these, it also focuses on role of bureaucracy, the extent of autonomy enjoyed by
the GPs and benefits enjoyed under various developmental schemes. It highlights the need for training of the Panchayat representatives in social responsibilities relating to PRIs.

**Tribals and Panchayats of Central India**\(^{39}\) has analysed the various dimensions of relationship between traditional tribal Panchayats and the modern PRIs. The author has made an empirical survey of the modern PRIs in two districts – Bastar and Jhabua – of united Madhya Pradesh, which are mainly tribal dominated. The study reveals that although officially the traditional Panchayats were replaced by the modern PRIs in Post Seventy-third Amendment period, but in actual practice they still hold remarkable influence among the tribal peoples of the two districts. People still show their allegiance to the traditional Panchayat bodies. It has been mentioned that the lack of coordination between the officials and Panchayat representatives is a major barrier in the working of the PRIs.

**Local Government in India**\(^{40}\) is a study which explores the functioning of PRIs in Kerala. The study has observed that Gram Panchayats in Kerala are more responsive and accountable than other macro level governmental institutions. It has also found that Panchayat representatives are from the ordinary section of the people and do not represent the elite class. Besides, about fifty per cent of the Panchayat representatives in the state belong to the category of daily wage-earners. The study also made a reference to the representation of SCs, STs and Women through reservation.

**Social Base of Grassroots Politics in Assam**\(^{41}\) has studied the PRIs of Assam with a special reference to the district of Kamrup from a sociological perspective. The author has grouped some very relevant issues through an inquiry of social background of the Panchayat representatives. His observation is that though a huge amount of government funds under
various holistic and major Rural Development Programmes for the implementation of targeted schemes both for individual benefit and common welfare, and for economic empowerment of village people, have so far been allocated by the Central and State Government, the achievement is far from satisfactory. The politico-authoritative and bureaucratic combine coupled with dominant-party oligarchic stronghold retain the earlier hold in concurring and implementing developmental programmes and the system of power decentralization. The author has observed that there is certain overlapping of works and almost similar functions have been entrusted to both AP and GP in one hand and on the other hand, similar functions have been entrusted to the ZP and DRDA. Lack of coordination between these institutions and absence of a clear line of demarcation of jurisdictions lead to conflicting situations among the institutions and this in turn hampers the functioning of grassroots governance.

**Research Articles:**

**Democratic Decentralisation: The Idea, The Image, and The Reality**\(^\text{42}\) pointed out that new leadership is power-oriented, not development-oriented. Sarpanchas and Pradhans have become new monopolists of power and there is political consciousness without civic consciousness among the leaders.

**Panchayati Raj and the Citizen: The Myth of Participatory Democracy**\(^\text{43}\) highlighted that at the village Panchayat level leadership continues to be in the hands of comparatively old, moderately educated, tradition bound, upper caste and rich people of the village.

**Land Management and Development of Panchayats Institution in Sikkim**\(^\text{44}\) made an attempt to trace the evolution of Panchayat Institutions
in Sikkim as well as land management of the state. It finds that the institution of Panchayat in Sikkim has evolved out of the primitive land holding system and there is gradual curbing of the power of the landlord in relation to the Panchayat System.

**Reforms in Panchayati Raj: A Comparative Analysis of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and West Bengal** tried to find out the differences among the Panchayat Raj models of Karnataka, West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh, where differences relate mainly to the extent of power devolved to PRIs, and financial and administrative autonomy. The article also made an attempt to understand the attitude of the legislators towards PRIs of the three states. The scholars opined that reforms in Panchayati Raj could be a catalyst for a much larger process of decentralisation and distribution of power and resources.

**Decentralisation in India: An Appraisal** finds that devolution of functional role of Panchayats in planning and implementation of various rural development programmes has essentially galvanized these bodies from the stage of dormancy to performance. The study observes that though there are variations across the states in respect of functional devolution and performance of these bodies, the overall results can be seen in the positive direction.

**Panchayati Raj in Assam-Understanding the Politics of Democratic Decentralisation and Rural Development** has made an attempt to examine how far rural people have been able to effectively exercise the powers given to them through the institution of Panchayat. It has also studied the growth of PRIs in Assam starting from the British days to the post 73rd Amendment period. It has argued that although a number of PRIs have been created at the grass-root level in order to operationalise the
concept of democratic decentralisation and devolution of power to the marginalised people, wide-spread poverty and illiteracy of the people have facilitated the dominance of corrupt politicians and bureaucrats and the privileged class of the society monopolise the political power. It further observed the argument that ‘democratic decentralisation makes possible the extension of democracy at the grassroots level’, ‘decentralisation lies at the core of democracy because it aims at making democracy real by bringing the millions into the functioning of representative government at the lowest level’ are nothing but lip services made for perpetuating and concentration of power in the hands of authoritarian regime at the centre controlled by the bureaucratic capitalism. Empowerment of the rural people may be meaningful only if a drastic change of the existing socio-economic structure of the country could be made for which the masses need to be educated to the extent of generating political consciousness.

**Panchayati Raj Movement in India: Retrospective and Present Status**\(^{48}\) has made a sketch of how PRIs evolved and undertakes a stock taking exercise. It underlines the fact that many of the continuing problems stem from the fact that despite the 73rd Constitutional amendment, the authority to Panchayats is a delegated one and is therefore contingent upon state-level commitment and action, as exemplified by the provisions on gram sabhas, elections, dissolution, reservations, devolution, district planning committees, relationship among the three layers of PRIs institutions. The study examines the role of Panchayat in rural development and the functioning of centrally sponsored schemes. These schemes, in principle, are to be delivered through PRIs, thereby improving accountability and efficiency, but in practice these continue to be delivered through the bureaucratic system or parallel institutions.
Panchayati Raj and Political Parties' Participation\(^4\) presents the various dimensions of the multi-faceted crisis of Panchayati Raj System prevailing in India. It made a broad analysis of the historical roots of the evolution of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. Highlighting the nature of political parties’ participation in Panchayati Raj election, it concludes that if Panchayat elections are contested on political lines then the emergence of grassroots leaders is apparent.

Panchayat Finances in India: A Macro Study\(^5\) makes an analysis of Panchayat finances and economic rationale for decentralisation in India. It observed that fiscal provisions as incorporated in the Constitution and in the State Panchayati Raj Acts have not been followed sincerely. It goes on highlighting that the local bodies have become mere spending agencies, always dependent upon the State Government for the transfer of grants.

Panchayat Finance: The Case of West Bengal\(^6\) highlights the financial position of the Panchayats in West Bengal. It has pointed out that functions are assigned to Panchayats without sufficient support to functionaries and funds. When fund flows to the Panchayats, conditionalities are attached and it underlies the fact that State government believes that local bodies are only implementing agencies. In order to make the local bodies self-governing institutions, their own tax base has to be expanded. The Panchayats should have more of untied funds by which people needs can be met and this will also ensure people’s participation in the development activities.

Revenue Mobilisation, Financial Devolution and Expenditure by Village Panchayats in UP\(^7\) has focussed on the potentiality of the Panchayats in mobilizing the resource through tax and non-tax revenue legitimized through law. It has studied the financial position in the
backdrop of the entrustment of responsibilities to the Gram Panchayats. The study highlights that the village Panchayats have not fully utilized the potentials of mobilizing the internal resources.

The above overview of the literature on Panchayati Raj focus either on the functioning of these institutions in one state or the other or on various dimensions of PRIs like planning, people’s participation, finance, political parties, leadership, district administration and the like. However, comparative study of PRIs either in the same state or inter-states has been hardly dealt with by researchers interested in this area. It is here pertinent to note that so far no detailed comparative study has been made covering the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Thus under the present study an attempt has been made to explore the working of Panchayat Raj Institutions of both the states in a comparative perspective and this bridges the gap in the field of studies on Panchayati Raj Institutions.

1.5 Objectives of the study: The main objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To trace the history of PRIs in Assam as well as to understand the transition of traditional system of local governance to modern PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh.

2. To study the working of the PRIs in both the states in a comparative perspective.

3. To find out the role of marginalised groups mainly women in the decision making process at the grassroots level in both the states.

4. To explore the degree of similarities / dissimilarities between the PRIs of both the states.
1.6 Research Questions:

1) Do the Socio-economic factors determine the working of the PRIs?

2) To what extent do the PRIs facilitate the development of their respective areas in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh?

3) What is the role of women representatives in PRIs vis-a-vis the decision making process?

4) Is the financial position of the PRIs in both the states adequate enough to meet their needs?

1.7 Methodology

For the purpose of the study, data are collected both from primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources include books and research articles, internet materials, records from State Election Office for election information, records available at the District Statistical Office, Block Development Office, study of the booklets and reports published by the respective State Governments with regard to powers, functions and responsibilities of PRIs, Government files and publications.

For the collection of primary data, empirical study has been conducted in the selected PRIs. It covered interview and interaction with the officials and people’s representatives. For the selection of the districts purposive sampling has been used in order to make the study more representative. As such, three districts of South Assam viz., Cachar, Hailakandi and Karimganj and three districts of Arunachal Pradesh viz., Papampare, Lower Subansiri and West Kameng have been selected. From each selected district, two AP/AS have been randomly selected. Thus, Udharbond and Borjalenga AP are selected from Cachar district; Lala and Hailakandi AP from
Hailakandi district; North Karimganj and South Karimganj AP from Karimganj district; Borum and Doimukh AS from Papumpare district; Yazali and Reru Kalung AS from Lower Subansiri district; Rupa and Blaklupong-Jamiri AS from West Kameng district. Then from each selected AP/AS, 25% of total GPs have been randomly selected and from each selected GP, five (5) respondents - President, Vice-President, one Female Member and two other Members have been selected for the field study. But in case of Arunachal Pradesh, a minor deviation has been made. This is because, in Arunachal Pradesh, there is no provision for the post of Vice-President, so in lieu of this, another member has been interviewed. Besides, unlike Assam, as the number of members of GPs in Arunachal Pradesh is not uniform, so at the time of selection of the respondents those GPs having five members or less than that, all of them have been selected for interview. Hence, the total number of respondents from Arunachal Pradesh is less than Assam. Thus, a sample of 43 (24 from Assam and 19 from Arunachal Pradesh) GPs and 197 respondents (120 from Assam and 77 from Arunachal Pradesh) from both the states have been finally selected for the survey. The details of sample structure are presented below:

### A1: Details of Sample Structure

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>AP / AS</th>
<th>GP</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cachar</td>
<td>Udharbond</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Borjalenga</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
<td>Hailakandi</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lala</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karimganj</td>
<td>South Karimganj</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>North Karimganj</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Papumpare</td>
<td>Borum</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doimukh</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Subansiri</td>
<td>Yazali</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reru Kalung</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Kameng</td>
<td>Rupa</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Blaklupong-Jamiri</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>12</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In addition to the elected representatives, Secretary of each sampled GP and other official staff of the PRIs are interviewed for collecting detail information on the working pattern, as well as other aspects of the GP. Data thus collected are tabulated and classified and for presentation and analysis, simple percentage method and one way tables are used.

1.8 Rationale for the study

Though the concept of democratic decentralisation started with the dawn of independence in both the states, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, it was not achieved in truest sense as the responsibilities were not given to the people. With the 73rd Amendment Act and its consequent implementation by both the states the responsibilities of making plan, implementation, execution and monitoring have been entrusted to the PRIs at different level. Since then a number of studies were conducted on different facets of Panchayati Raj but nowhere an attempt has been made to study the working of the PRIs in a comparative perspective covering the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. Thus, this study has been undertaken with a view to compare both the systems of local government, since a comparison illuminates different aspects of each system. It enables us to know not only what a system is, but also what it is not, and why it is not.

1.9 Chapter Scheme

The study has been divided into six chapters:

Chapter-I introduces the study, specifies the Conceptual Framework, Literature Review, Objectives, Research Questions, Methodology and Rationale for the study.

Chapter-II discusses the development of Panchayats in India in general and in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in particular. The
Chapter has four Sections. Section I focuses on the evolution of present Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India. Section II has been designed to deal with the development of Panchayats in Assam. Section III explores the development of Panchayats in Arunachal Pradesh. In Section IV an attempt has been made to analyse both the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 and the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1997 in a comparative perspective. The current status of PRIs in both the states has also been examined.

Chapter-III covers a brief profile of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in general and the selected sampled districts in particular. The Chapter also includes the socio-economic profile of the respondents in a comparative framework.

Chapter-IV explores the working of the PRIs in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in a comparative perspective on the basis of the primary data. The Chapter is divided into two sections. Section I titled as Panchayati Raj in Action highlights the working of the PRIs particularly GS and GP. It also focuses on the capacity building measures taken up for the ERs and highlights the involvement of the PRIs in the various Rural Development programmes. Section II titled as Women Representatives and the functioning of GPs tries to explore the extent of involvement of the Women elected Panchayat representatives in the decision making process of the GPs.

Chapter-V explains the financial status of the PRIs of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh in a comparative perspective. The Chapter is divided into two sections. Section I titled as Sources of Revenue of PRIs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh highlights the
taxation powers of the PRIs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh;

Section II titled as *Assessment of Finances of PRIs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh - A comparative Study* focuses on the present status of finances in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh on the basis of the data collected from the respondents.

Chapter VI presents the major findings, suggestions and conclusion.

**References**


8. Ibid


10. Elizabeth Linda Yuliani, *op cit*


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