CHAPTER - VI

REMODELLING GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY
In the preceding chapter, we have given a detailed analysis of the introduction of three-tier panchayatiraj in the state of Orissa in conformity with the recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta Committee. These recommendations were incorporated in two major Acts namely, the Orissa Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad Act of 1959 and the Orissa Grama Panchayat Act of 1964. Consequently, three institutions were created, namely, the Zilla Parishad at the district level, the Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and the Grama Panchayat at the village level. It has also been pointed out that before the new institutions were given a reasonable span of time to function and realise the objectives for which they were established, the Government of Orissa abolished the Zilla Parishad, the apex institution of the Panchayatiraj, a step which signalised a deviation from the all India pattern. A critical appraisal of the possible consequences of the abolition of the top tier and the subsequent policy vacillation has also been presented.

In this chapter, our attempt will be to highlight how these grassroots democratic institutions were marginalised owing to political allergy and bureaucratic neglect. Also, how the proclamation of national emergency posed a threat to grassroots democracy, the subsequent emergence of Janata government at the Centre and the attempts made by the Janata government to revamp and revitalise the moribund grassroots institutions by appointing Asoka Mehta Committee.
Marginalisation of PRIs

In pursuance of the recommendations of the Mehta Study Team, Panchayatiraj institutions in India functioned in different states with varying degree of powers, autonomy and efficiency. Rural people of India felt enthusiastic about the three-tier grassroots democratic institutions. Unfortunately, the hope and enthusiasm of the people were shortlived.

The 1959-64 phase of Panchayatiraj development could not be sustained due to demise of Jawaharlal Nehru. The death of Nehru not only marked the end of Nehruvian era in Indian politics, but reversed the onward march of Panchayatiraj.

Initially, popular participation in Panchayatiraj bodies was achieved but production in agriculture and ancillary sectors did not come up as anticipated. With the acute food crisis in the mid-sixties, the whole approach of Panchayatiraj began to be questioned. The Panchayati bodies became seats of the ugly party politics, and in most cases they had to be superseded due to gross irregularities. Admittedly, their resources were meagre. But this deficiency could have been set right, if there had been the requisite political will. Furthermore, elections to these bodies were not held at regular intervals and these democratic bodies were primarily dominated by the economically and socially privileged classes.
Evidence suggests, observes George Mathew, that "there was a deliberate plan by the bureaucracy, the local vested interests and their elected representatives in the state legislatures and in the parliament to cripple and eventually discard Panchayatraj, because its ascendancy was feared".¹ The roots of this could be traced back to 1960 when the government launched an Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP) bypassing the community development programme. The Jaya Prakash Narayan Committee of 1961 detected double-thinking and contradictory positions developing within the government in the creation of an independent intensive agricultural district programme after having accepted Panchayatraj as the agency responsible for planning and execution of plans.²

Eventhough the CD Ministry felt uneasy with the launching of the above scheme, soon after, schemes like Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA), Drought-Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and Intensive Tribal Development Project (ITDP), which are kept outside the purview of the Panchayats, were launched. Unwanted state government staff had been spared for Panchayats. The resources allocated to the Panchayats had also started declining leading to marginalization of the Panchayats. Even the meagre resource base of the Panchayats remained untapped. The main

forces which played an active role in marginalizing the grassroots democratic efforts were the bureaucracy and politicians at the central and state levels.

With the launching of the so-called government sponsored schemes outside the purview of Panchayati bodies, the focus shifted from weaker sections to 'Target Groups'. This helped the centralised bureaucracy to gain an upper-hand in virtually crippling the panchayatiraj system. Thus, all the development programmes were bureaucracy-centred with hardly any participation of the people. "[The] bureaucracy had probably its own role in dissociating the PRIs from the development process. Several factors seem to have conditioned their perception. The system of line hierarchy would find favour with them as an organisational principle. The officers would feel that they are primarily accountable for results and financial proprieties to the state government. The officials knew no better than to trust their own fraternity. They would, on the one hand, therefore be averse to the PRIs being entrusted with additional functions and, on the other, would not easily get adjusted to working under the supervision of elected representatives".³

Thus, the grand alliance of bureaucracy with state and central level political elite brought down Panchayatiraj to a moribund stage.

Now, it may be asked: Why did the political elite play to the tune of bureaucracy? The reason is very simple. The politicians would not like to see the erosion of their power by a new brand of local leadership. Therefore, it is legitimate to conclude, observes George Mathew, "that a combination of the bureaucracy, commercial interests, the professional middle class, the police and the political elite 'ganged up' against democratic decentralisation. A thesis was developed and popularised that a centralised bureaucracy can benefit the rural poor better than local elected 'vested interests'."\(^4\)

Thus, the democratic institutions at the grassroots level instead of emerging as units of self-government as envisaged in Article 40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy, were made a conduit of the Central and the State governments to implement their respective schemes.

The short duration rule of Lal Bahadur Shastri as Prime Minister had no positive or negative impact on the nascent Panchayatiraj in the country. During the premiership of Mr. Indira Gandhi, in 1966-68, the Ministry of Community Development of Nehruvian era was reduced to the status of a department and brought under the Ministry of Food and Agriculture. Thus, not only C.D. Ministry, but C.D. Projects as such had been downgraded and the focus shifted from grassroots democracy to agriculture. In 1971, the very title, 'Community Development' was dropped and replaced with

by 'Rural Development'. "This was not just a cosmetic change. It marked the end of the 'community' and 'panchayats' as agents of change and agencies of development".  

By the late seventies, the machinery at the block level was in shambles. At the district level, there was a multiplicity of institutions - new departments, development corporations, co-operative agencies, specialised agencies, statutory bodies, registered societies, all intended to serve essentially the rural people, especially the poorer sections. The Panchayatiraj institutions were clearly pushed to the background. Again, political leaders paid only lip service to local self-government as they were determined to end the threat to their leadership from the village, block or district leadership. Soon, they began to discredit the new system by highlighting its shortcomings. They saw in these bodies the domination of the upper castes, corruption and total ineptitude. Thus, PRIs in particular and grassroots democracy in general had failed to reach a 'take off' stage and were existing more in a 'survivalistic' sense than in a developmental sense. Lack of political will, bureaucratic indifference and financial anaemia dampened the steady growth of grassroots democracy, and from 1964 onwards, grassroots democracy was made spurious by those who wanted to discredit the decentralisation of power.

National Emergency and emergence of Janata Government

Right from 1965, political environment in the country as a whole and states in particular, had not been congenial for the grassroots democratic movement. During the fag end of Indira Gandhi's rule, Indian politics witnessed unprecedented centralisation of decision making powers and this ultimately led to the proclamation of National Emergency. During this emergency, the entire country was heading towards a totalitarian regime, threatening the very base of democracy. The popular voice of the people was silenced; democratic processes, values and institutions were subdued. Democracy in the country as a whole was in peril and the bureaucracy got an upper hand and these grassroots institutions lost much of their vitality and significance. Panchayatiraj in many states appeared to be taking last breath on the death bed of history and centralizing forces in the entire political system became too strong to be resisted effectively.

The idea of grassroots democracy of Gandhiji's vision was first shattered by our Constitution makers when they put it only in the directive principles of the Constitution. Again, in the early fifties, India's development was planned without taking cognizance of Gandhiji's idea of Gram Swaraj. And, lastly democracy in the country, in general and grassroots democracy, in particular, became moribund during national emergency.
It did not take long to realise the folly of this line of approach. The old guards of the Congress were united in a new political alliance, the Janata Party, formed before the Sixth Lok Sabha elections, and the first ever, non-Congress government was installed at the centre. Being committed to 'decentralisation of power and authority', revitalization of grassroots democratic institutions and rural development, the Janata Government raised high hopes. The very belief of the Janata Government in a 'Polity that ensures decentralisation of economic and political power' had provided another opportunity for re-invigoration of grassroots democracy in India so as to make it a suitable vehicle for democratic management of politico-economic programmes of nation-building. In view of pronouncements about a 'new village movement' or 'dynamic approach to rural development', contained in the 1977 election manifesto of the Janata Party, the Janata government after assuming power constituted in December 1977 a National Committee on Panchayati Raj institutions, popularly known as the Asoka Mehta Committee. Though the Janata Government survived for a short period, it could generate sufficient awareness about the need of reforms in Panchayatiraj. The report of the said committee was academically sound and contained a good number of practical remedial measures for strengthening grassroots institutions of democracy. It would be appropriate now to consider the Asoka Mehta Committee report in some detail.
Re-modelling Grassroots Democracy: The Asoka Mehta Committee Report

As pointed out earlier, by mid-seventies grassroots democracy, that is Panchayati Raj, had reached almost a moribund stage. The Janata Party which came to power at the centre early in 1977 had given in its electoral pledge highest priority to all-round rural development. Hence it appointed the Asoka Mehta Committee to suggest ways and means to revamp the grassroots democratic institutions.

The Cabinet Secretariat in their Resolution No.14/1/2/77-CF dated 12th December, 1977 appointed the Committee on Panchayatiraj institutions, popularly known as the Asok Mehta Committee, to inquire into the working of the Panchayati Raj institutions and to suggest measures to strengthen them for making decentralised planning and development effective. 6

6. The Asok Mehta Committee was composed of the following members:

1. Shri Asok Mehta, Chairman
2. Shri Karpoori Thakur, Chief Minister, Bihar
3. Shri Prakash Singh Badal, Chief Minister, Punjab
4. Shri M.G. Ramachandran, Chief Minister, Tamil Nadu
5. Shri B.Sivaraman, Member, Planning Commission
6. Shri Mangal Deo, M.P.
7. Shri Kunwar Mahmood Ali Khan, M.P.
8. Shri Anna Saheb P. Shinde, M.P.
9. Shri E.M.S. Namboodiripad, Trivandrum
10. Shri S.K. Dey, New Delhi
11. Shri Siddharaj Dhadda, Jaipur
12. Prof. Iqbal Narain, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur
13. Shri Vallabhabhai Patel, President, Zilla Panchayat, Rajkot
14. Shri S.K. Raju, Member-Secretary of the Committee

For details, see

The Committee submitted its report on 17.8.78. It covered the entire gamut of Panchayati Raj in as many as 301 pages, covering 132 recommendations. The report contains 11 chapters and four notes, annexures and statements.

The recommendations were more or less unanimous. M.G.Ramachandran, E.M.S.Namboodiripad, S.K.Dey and Siddharaj Dhadda did not, however, concur with certain recommendations. They recorded their differences of opinion in their Notes of Dissent which formed part of the Report.

The terms of reference of the Committee, inter alia, required it to examine the working of the Panchayatiraj institutions in regard to mobilisation of resources as also planning and implementation of the schemes for rural development in an objective and optimal manner and in looking after the interests of the weaker sections of the society. The Committee was also required to:

(a) examine the methods of constituting the Panchayatiraj institutions, including the system of elections, and to assess their effect on the performance of the Panchayatiraj system;

(b) suggest the role of Panchayatiraj institutions, and the objectives which could be attained through them, for integrated rural development in the future;

7. Hereinafter referred to as the 'Report'
(c) suggest measures for reorganising the Panchayatiraj system, and removing the shortcomings and defects, with a view to enable these institutions to fulfil their future rule; and

(d) recommend the form and content of the relationship that should exist between the Panchayatiraj institutions, the official administrative machinery and the co-operative and voluntary institutions involved in rural development.  

As viewed by the Committee the story of Panchayatiraj has been a story of ups and downs. According to the Committee, Panchayatiraj seems to have passed through three phases: the phase of ascendency (1959-64); the phase of stagnation (1965-69); and the phase of decline (1969-77).

In reviewing and evaluating the working of Panchayatiraj in different parts of the country, the committee found that a number of development in the past had conspired to undermine the Panchayati Raj structures and made them ineffectives. Over the years a number of structural deficiencies and dysfunctionalities came to be identified in Panchayati Raj system. In brief, "the miniscule programmes, the disillusionment with performance, emergence of oligarchic forces, weakening of political will, situational compulsions, shrinkage of financial resources, bureaucratic meddling and the organisational dilemmas and conflicts side-stacked the real role of these institutions and they were hardly

given a chance to serve as a vanguard of development in village India. Worst of all there was lack of clarity in regard to the concept of Panchayati Raj itself and the objectives for which it should stand.  

The committee also rightly emphasised the gains of decentralised democracy. It would be wrong to think that Panchayati Raj should be viewed as a 'God that has failed'. It had many achievements to its credit. "Politically speaking, it became a process of democratic seed-drilling in the Indian soil, making an average citizen more conscious of his rights than before. Administratively speaking, it bridged the gulf between the bureaucratic elite and the people. Socio-culturally speaking, it generated a new leadership which was not merely relatively young in age but also modernistic and pro-social change in outlook. Finally, looked at from a development angle, it helped rural people cultivate a development psyche."

Major Recommendations

It is in the context of this broad perspective that the Committee's proposals for decentralised development management and the other aspects of Panchayati Raj have to be necessarily viewed.

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The Committee expressed its preference for a two-tier pattern with the Zila Parishad and the Mandal Panchayat as the basic unit of Panchayati Raj. The district, as the first point of decentralisation, under popular supervision below the state level, was regarded as a functional imperative. A mandal panchayat covering a population of 15,000 to 20,000 and the Zila Parishad playing a pivotal role were recommended by the Committee.

That the Gram Sabha will continue to have an important role in activating the democratic process at the grassroots has been duly appreciated. But, it was envisaged that the village committees, which are to replace the existing gram panchayats under the proposed setup, would be required to convene two gram sabha meetings every year with a view to explain to the people the programmes being executed in their areas and to channelise the people's feedback to the mandal panchayat.

The Zila Parishad emerged from the Committee's Report as the key unit of Panchayati Raj, endowed with a comprehensive range of developmental responsibilities. All developmental functions relating to a district that were so far being discharged by the state were proposed to be entrusted to the Zila Parishad. Its functional area would be enough to cover agriculture, marketing, health, education, communications, rural industries, welfare of backward classes, family welfare etc. In addition to developmental responsibilities assigned to the Zila Parishad, another vital function sought to be devolved upon it was that of planning. The
committee was emphatic that this function must be assigned to the Zilla Parishad and the necessary competence built up.

In order to enable the Zilla Parishad to undertake the planning process, the Committee suggested that a professionally qualified team would have to be stationed at the district level for the preparation of district plans. Such a district planning cell is to consist of an economist, an engineer (irrigation/civil), industries officer and a credit planning officer. It was envisaged that this planning cell would function under the direct supervision of the chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad.

An important recommendation relating to the structural and functional designs of Panchayatiraj institutions in general and the Zilla Parishad in particular was the introduction of the committee system. It was envisaged that the Zilla Parishad would function through a number of committees; the important ones are on agriculture, education, small industries, finance, public works and social justice.

Regarding the Mandal Panchayat, the committee envisaged that it would have to administer, co-ordinate and provide institutional supervision of on-going field level projects. It was also visualised that some of the block level functions would have to be moved upwards as only the district level body would be competent to discharge them. It will be noticed that the committee's recommendation regarding the constitution of mandal panchayats as
the second basic tier of panchayatiraj marks a departure from the existing pattern as in most of the states, the block has, over the years, become the base level organisation for developmental and administrative activities. The committee has also suggested that election to the Panchayatiraj institutions would have to be conducted by the Chief Election Officer of the state in consultation with the Chief Election commissioner.

As regards popular election to these local bodies, the committee specifically put emphasis on regular elections to the Panchayatiraj institutions and recommended participation of political parties in these elections in order to ensure clearer orientation towards development programmes and facilitate healthier linkage with higher level political process. The committee hoped that direct elections coupled with programme-based contests, would offer great scope to weaker sections for availing of the opportunities offered by the political system.

In dealing with the role of Nyaya Panchayats, the committee feels while there is a great deal of consensus in favour of decentralisation of justice, there is lack of enthusiasm for Nyaya Panchayats as they are functioning now in different parts of the country. The committee favoured the view of the Bhagwati and Krishna Iyer Committee that a qualified judge should preside over the Nyaya Panchayat and the elected Nyaya Panchayat be associated with him in the administration of decentralised justice. Further, the
Elected nyaya panchas will not be entitled to seek re-election, and they should serve in an area other than that from which they have been elected.

Other recommendations of the committee mainly included: representation of SCs and STs should be on the basis of their population, formation of Social Justice Committee with Chairman from SCs and STs; a committee of the Legislature with majority representation of MLAs/MLCs belonging to SCs/STs; reservation of two seats for women in each Zila Parishad and Mandal Panchayat.

As regards the role of the District Collector, it has been recommended that the District Collector will continue to play an important role in the district set-up, notwithstanding the transfer of all developmental functions to the Zila Parishad. It has been recommended that the regulatory functions will remain with the collector. He will continue to exercise the regulatory, revenue and other functions assigned to him by the state Government. The Collector has also been made responsible for organising the conduct of social audit as the representative of the state Government. The committee has felt that the issue relating to transfer of regulatory functions to the Zila Parishad and to place the collector under it (Zila Parishad) should be reviewed in due course. The consequences of such arrangement would be that the Collector has to please two masters, elected non-official Chairman of the Zila Parishad and the Government (high-ups in hierarchy).
Another equally important issue as to whether Panchayati Raj institutions should have a more elaborate reference in the Constitution and be made a part of the organic law of the land was also considered. The Committee deemed it expedient to transmit the proposals formulated by 21 eminent citizens containing their specific suggestions to the Government of India for their careful consideration.

Asok Mehta Committee Report: A Critical Appraisal

The Committee's report was indeed bold and significant in its entirety. But sceptics raised their eyebrows and expressed their reactions to the radical recommendations of Asok Mehta Committee. Broadly speaking, the pattern suggested by the committee, observes, K.B. Shukla, "is modelled on the Maharashtra-Gujurat experience".11

The principal thesis of the Committee is the functional necessity for decentralisation of administration. It is called 'new approach' towards Panchayati Raj. Such a philosophy or approach towards Panchayati Raj creates a feeling that Panchayati raj is a mere administrative contrivance whose justification lies only in terms of rural development. It may have been more secular if Panchayati raj or rural local government had been regarded like its counterparts at the State and Central levels, as a system of government having a measure of autonomy in the matter of its functioning and existing in its right. The committee had a too

closely focussed definition of rural local government and it needs to be liberalised and made more open-ended. 12

The suggestion for the creation of Mandal Panchayats (which are to be implementing bodies) as second tiers in the model, covering a population of 15,000 to 20,000 is a novel one. A Mandal Panchayat (a unit of villages), as argued, "would alone be able to ensure a balance between technological requirements and possibilities of popular participation in decision making". 13

S.K. Sharma, while reviewing the recommendations of Asok Mahta Committee, observes, "In Asok Mehta two-tier structure of Zila Parishads and Mandal Panchayats, the Gram Panchayats and village as a unit are casualties. Villagers come in contact with Gram Panchayat directly, therefore, making it more effective and useful should have been attempted...Efforts all through have been to strengthen the grassroot level but the present committee has thought it wise to shift the power and focus of activities to cluster of villages or Mandals. To talk of decentralisation from the state to the Zila Parishad level but to recommend the shift of power and activity from a village to a cluster of villages appear to be contradictory in spirit". 14


The dichotomy between 'developmental' and 'regulatory' functions has been reaffirmed by the committee as the Collector would continue to exercise the regulatory, revenue and other functions assigned by the State Government. So, "the ancient duality in Indian field administration", observes Mohit Bhattacharya, "is kept in tact. A kind of sub-state federalism on the Maharashtra model would work under which there would be a set of 'state functions' in the hands of the state-run field administration and another set of 'Panchayati raj functions' in the hands of the Panchayati raj institutions". The distinguished author concludes that, "the dual system of field administration with the collectorate and the panchayati raj institutions is theoretically untenable and practically cumbersome. Democratic theory is in support of panchayati raj. In practice also the duality creates problems of co-ordination which are not easy to resolve. The prospect of unified, elective and popular units at the field level in the future would depend on the political choice at higher levels between 'field administration' and 'sub-State government'".

In spite of the criticisms, the recommendations of Asoka Mehta Committee definitely constitute a landmark in the history of grassroots democracy. To quote Ensminger, "At this time in India's history, the committee report may turn out to be second only to the

16. Ibid., P.1188.
Indian Constitution in terms of its significance to the future of democratic institutions and the workings of democracy in India.\textsuperscript{17}

The recommendations of the Asoka Mehta Committee led to the country-wide controversy. In December 1978, the All India Panchayat Parishad - a non-official national association, at its 9th Annual convention, held at Delhi, resolved for the continuance of the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj. It also vehemently opposed the Committee's recommendations in favour of the direct participation of the political parties in the elections to the rural local bodies.

The conference of the Chief Ministers was held on 19th May, 1979 for the purpose of discussing the Asoka Mehta Committee's Report on Panchayati Raj with a view to evolving a national consensus on the main recommendations. There could, however, be no unanimity among the Chief Ministers on the main recommendations made by the Committee. On subjects like the role of political parties in the panchayati raj elections, the organisation and the functions of the panchayats, Chief Ministers expressed disparate views. The recommendations of the Asoka Mehta Committee, thus, were almost unceremoniously turned down by the conference of the Chief Ministers. Thus, the radical recommendations of Asoka Mehta Committee - a model bill and a seminal document on panchayati raj - were not acted upon by the Janata Party Government during its

\textsuperscript{17} Douglas Ensminger, 'Panchayati Raj and Decentralisation', \textit{The Indian Express}, Bangalore, March 5, 1979, Editorial page.
short tenure at the Centre; and grassroots democracy again received a setback.

**Grassroots Democracy Between the Two Mehtas**

The two Mehtas 'Balwantrai and Asoka' headed two national level committees at two different points of time in order to recommend decentralised administration to ensure people's participation in the management of their own affairs for an effective realisation of grassroots democracy. But, it seems that 'Panchayati raj' as a system of devolution of power - a genuine transfer of power to the people - has not been given an honest trial. Committees were instituted and enquiries were made; but in case of crisis, bureaucracy was taken into confidence and was relied upon more than people's representatives. And again, people as an important factor for rural development had not been considered seriously by the two committees.

No doubt, the terms of reference of both these committees were different but difference was there in case of recommendations of both these committees. While Balwantrai Mehta preferred a three-tier interlocking and organically linked institutions, Asoka Mehta's emphasis was on a two-tier model. Again, in case of B.Mehta Committee the block, the intermediary institution, was the first point of decentralisation; and the apex-tier, the Zila Parishad, was merely an advisory and supervising body. In the case of Asok Mehta Committee the Zila Parishad was the first point of decentralisation and the Mandal Panchayats were only implementing bodies.
Attempts were really made by the B. Mehta study team for institutional innovation in order to evoke institutionalised participation of the people at the grassroots. In A. Mehta Committee, Panchayatiraj was not viewed as the institutionalisation of 'Swaraj' and the said committee seemed to have ignored the due importance of the village community as the primary level of decentralisation.

The two Mehtas had not shown sufficient courage to recommend genuine decentralisation of administrative powers. The ancient collectorate model was preferred and the position of the district collector in the administrative scheme of the country was accepted. The regulatory functions had not been sought to be decentralised. Moreover, the technical staff, associated with development administration, had been left to work under a sort of diarchy viz., elected Panchayat boss and technical departmental boss. "This dualism", argues Mohit Bhattacharya, "in field administration has worked to the detriment of the representative system... So long as this trend persists, we would be having regular cycles of committee reports on the ailments of Panchayatiraj and prescriptions to restore it to health". 18

In comparison to B. Mehta study Team, A. Mehta committee scored slightly better in highlighting the importance of Nyaya-Panchayat - a system of decentralised justice and recommending for a constitutional status of Panchayatiraj.

18. Mohit Bhattacharya, op.cit., P.1187
The two committees, at two different junctures of India's development process, perhaps failed miserably in highlighting the real essence of grassroots democracy, that is, enabling the rural poor to have rightful participation in the process of their development and Panchayatiraj, "whether of the apolitical B.Mehta variety or the political A.Mehta one, will no longer do, because the 'raj' element is wholly missing in both".19

Summary and observation

We may attempt now a brief summary of the findings we have recorded in this chapter and the observations made by us in course of our analysis.

The end of Nehruvian era in Indian politics marked the steady decline of grassroots democracy in India. The three-tier interlocking institutions functioned at the sweet will of the political leaders, bureaucracy and privileged classes. These democratic bodies were very often superseded, and elections to these bodies were frequently shelved.

During mid sixties in order to meet the acute food crisis, in the name of 'Green Revolution', the Government of India launched a series of schemes out of which some were meant for the rural poor while others were meant for poorer areas. Although, it was conceived initially that all developmental projects should be

channelised through the block, interestingly, in actual practice, they were kept outside the purview of Panchayati Raj. These special projects had no linkage with the Panchayati bodies, and if at all they had any linkage, they were the 'window dressing' type virtually leading to the marginalisation of these grassroots democratic bodies.

In course of our survey, we have observed that the political leaders both at the centre and the state and the bureaucracy developed an allergy for these nascent institutions and did not want to share power with these institutions. And again, the states which were starving, failed to look after financial health of these newly born institutions. Moreover, it was believed that a centralised bureaucracy would take care of the rural poor more than the people's representatives.

During seventies, the country as a whole witnessed an over centralisation in decision making power which paved the way for the proclamation of National Emergency. This Emergency eventually crippled these people's democratic bodies at the grassroots.

Thus, as we have noted political allergy, bureaucratic meddling, financial anaemia and lack of clarity were the main factors which were mainly been responsible in bringing down these bodies to a moribund stage.
Being committed to rural development, the first ever non-Congress ministry at the Centre, the Janata Government, constituted a national-level committee, known as Asoka Mehta Committee to suggest remedies for revamping these institutions. But, the bold and radical recommendations of the said committee were turned down by the Chief Ministers and were not acted upon.

Thus, in course of our analysis, we come to the conclusion that political leaders, bureaucracy, the vested interests and the privileged classes, apprehending a real threat to their power and position, deliberately planned not to transfer genuine power to the people and thereby put to cold storage the valuable recommendations made by the Asok Mehta Committee for decentralising decision-making power in planning and development.