Ever since its birth in 1885, the Indian National Congress gradually evolved as a mainstream forum of struggle for independence from foreign rule. Under the radical leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, the ideal of the movement came to be identified with Swaraj. Swaraj as interpreted by Gandhi and his followers meant not only self-government at the levels of the centre and the states but also self-government enjoyed by the people living in the villages. This called for introduction of democratic government at all levels. When India attained independence the founding fathers of the Constitution provided for representative democratic government of the parliamentary model at the national and state levels of independent India but did not establish any institution which would enable the people to operate Swaraj or self-government at the village level. Only a provision was made in the Directive Principles of State Policy enjoining upon the State to take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government. Thus the ideal of swaraj cherished in the long course of struggle for independence was adopted only half-way, leaving scope for centralisation of all power and authority at the higher levels of the centre and the state thereby sidetracking decentralisation or devolution of power to the people, which was of the essence of the meaning of the concept of Swaraj.

The Gandhian concept of Swaraj in its broader connotation meant economic freedom from poverty and exploitation through economic development and prosperity of the rural masses. So when after independence planning was made for rural development little progress
was noticed for lack of association and involvement of the village people with schemes and programmes of rural development. The change and development brought about at the macro level did not percolate to the common man at the micro level. Seen in this context, the need for institutionalisation of the democratic process of decision making at the grassroots level has been increasingly felt right from the closing years of the first decade of independence till the last decade of the twentieth century.

The new phase of grassroots democracy partially inaugurated in the State of Orissa in early 1990s had to be remodelled structurally and functionally in terms of provisions of 73rd amendment during 1995-1997. This raises the question as to what extent the restructured Panchayats have been able to incorporate the spirit of the seventy-third constitutional amendment. Also, the question arises as to how far the recent resurgence of a three-tier Panchayatiraj lives up to the expectations of the people of Orissa. A critical probe into these questions forms the main theme of the present work.

The present study is developed through nine chapters. An humble attempt has been made to show in some detail the meaning, nature and importance of grassroots democracy, its genesis and gradual growth right from the Vedic age, its place and status in the original republican constitution of India, and its progress in the first decade of Independence. While developing the study, sufficient attention has been given to all India trend in grassroots democracy and the subsequent development in the State of Orissa.
In the subsequent chapters, we have dealt with the circumstances that led to the abolition of Zilla Parishad, the apex body, in the State of Orissa and its substitution by an advisory body. It has been necessary also to discuss the steps taken by the Central Government to revamp grassroots democracy by setting up a national level committee, the Asoka Mehta Committee, and the growing demand to bring grassroots democracy within the purview of the constitution, the efforts of late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to give a constitutional footing to grassroots democracy and the final culmination of all these efforts in the enactment of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment on the Panchayats. How these resulted ultimately in the inauguration of the new phase of grassroots democracy in the State of Orissa has been dealt in some detail in a separate chapter.

The present work seeks to provide a comprehensive study of the rise, decline and resurrection of Panchayatiraj system in Orissa containing the latest information on the subject with proper acknowledgement of the sources of information, quotations and facts used in appropriate chapters. For seeking clarification on points of investigation we have also tried, where possible, to have personal discussion with officers associated with the Panchayats at different levels. On this basis the shortcomings in the structure and process of Panchayatiraj system in Orissa have been pointed out and measures have been suggested for streamlining the Panchayat administration in the State of Orissa.
The method adopted in this study is historical and analytical. For determining the genesis and the gradual growth of the grassroots democracy of Panchayatiraj, we had to depend upon such books or periodicals which could provide us with relevant information.

For analysing the structure and composition and the mode of functioning of the three-tier Panchayatiraj system in Orissa, we had to analyse important Primary sources like Acts of the Government of Orissa, its Resolutions and Circulars issued from time to time.

Another important source from which we have collected primary data lies in the discussions which we have had with the pro-Panchayatiraj analysts and academics of Orissa from time to time.

Even though Panchayatiraj in particular and grassroots democracy in general, has now been an important and much discussed issue in India in recent years, the Government of Orissa has slept over the issue and there has not yet been any official review of its functioning so far, nor also it has attracted the attention of any scholar of Orissa. Hence, we had to depend more upon our own observation. This is the important limitation of the study.

Despite the above limitation, the author can only claim that his is a pioneering attempt in making a systematic study of the Panchayatiraj system which in Orissa in particular and in India in general has come to stay as a third stratum in the Indian federal setup, providing ample opportunities for the rural people to participate effectively in their decision making process in order to
make and shape their destiny. What we have attempted to show is to what extent, the new Panchayatiraj system in Orissa functions as true 'institutions of Self-Government' as denoted by 73rd Amendment at and below the district level, and how far these devolved institutions function as a real and effective platform for people's participation. As a student of political science, I am fully convinced that democracy, in order to be effective and meaningful, should evolve from the grassroots through a proper utilisation of human materials and by considering people as an important factor for its successful functioning. Hence, we have shown keen interest in this subject, namely, "grassroots democracy" and have tried to highlight its importance in the present scenario. The actual working of the Panchayat institutions in successive terms of their existence will, it is hoped, provide much more fascinating materials for a more critical and indepth study of grassroots democracy in Orissa.

**********