CHAPTER I

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The word ‘Panchayat’ is a very old one and is deeply ingrained into Indian tradition and culture. ‘Panchayat’ implies a discourse on a particular issue relating to the community of a segment. The traditional Panchayat system was mainly concerned with maintenance of peace and order in the community. However, today Panchayati Raj Institutions are basically concerned with over all development of village community and empowerment of rural people.

The concept of Panchayati Raj has been provided with various interpretations. The emphasis is on maximum local self-Government and minimum supervision and controls by the higher authority especially the state Government.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions are chief instruments of decentralisation at the grass root level and assume importance owing to the requirement to deal with the relentless demographic pressure and full use of scarce resources for development.

The main aims of Panchayati Raj are to create institutions, at village, Block and district levels to provide opportunities for self-expression and political representation at this level, to mobilise public support and local resources for the development of programmes and to decentralise decision making and thereby, allow local experience, need and aspiration of development programmes. This visualised a three-tier structure of local self-government institution—at basis, the village Panchayat, at the block level— the Panchayat Samiti and at the district level the Zilla Parishad.

**Traditional Panchayat in Manipur:**

Panchayat is an old institution which has been in vogue from time immemorial in this part of the country. In the early days, in the valley of Manipur, the king administered his country in pursuance of a system called ‘Lallup’. For this system entire population was divided into ‘Pannas’. The Pannas are like districts or sub-divisions in a modern state. Each Panna consists of a number of families, selected from his family or tribe the men who can render service (Lallup) to the king for and on behalf ‘Panna’ to which they belong.

The liability to ‘Lallup’ commenced as soon as a man reached the age of seventeen when he also became entitled to cultivate one Pari of land with tax in kind exacted by the Raja (king). A man liable to ‘Lallup’ had to attend ‘Loishang’ (Royal office) ten days and to do work according to his skill and grade. ‘Lallup’ covered all the state works. In time peace it did work for economic development of the country; in times of war it did military services. For due and efficient working of the ‘Lallup’, the ‘Pannas’ were minutely divided. The total number of divisions reached the high figure of 107. Nearly all the divisions had an office headed by an officer known as the ‘Lallup Chingba’ who was an active intermediary between the officers at the capital and the men in the village.¹

From time immemorial, the ‘Lallup’ system had been in practice in Manipur. It was abolished only when Manipur came under the British control on 29th September 1892 A.D., at the time of the coronation of Sir Churachand Singh. Besides the ‘Lallup’ system there was another system of work- allocation called ‘Yumnak Mashin’. Under this system each Yumnak (clan) of each of the seven salais had its own ‘Mashai’ (work). Thus ‘Yumnak Mashin’ was the work done by each ‘Yumnak’ and the name of the ‘Yumnak’ was given according to the work that the ‘Yumnak’ had been doing.²

Panchayat during the British period:

The process of decentralisation had started in the administration of Manipur from 1892. On 14th Hiyangei (October-November) 1892 A.D. Village Panchayat were established and on 30th Hiyangei 1903 A.D. Panchayats were set up in the villages of Kakching Khulen, Kakching; Sekmai Khunbi, Sekmai; Shikhong, Ningen. In each of the Panchayats there were five numbers and all were elected by the Political Agent. Two of the members had to retire every two years by rotation. The functions of these Panchayats were mainly adjudicatory rather than administrative.

After the Anglo-Manipuri war 1891 A.D. the State of Manipur was taken over by the British government of India; minor Churanchand Singh was appointed the chief of Manipur. During his minority, the administration was looked after by the political agent as superintendent of the state. He was given the powers to adopt such measures, beneficial to the people but with instructions to respect the existing customs and traditions and institutions. After the attainment of majority age, Churachand Singh assumed the reign of administration of the state. He aided and advised by a Darbar comprising a council of Ministers to assist in day-to-day administration. The ministers were appointed by the Rajas. Each Darbar member was responsible for the department of which he was in charge.

1. N. Ibobi Singh, 'The Manipur Administration (1709-1907), Horizon Printers, Imphal, 2003, p 197
3. Ibid
Thus the process of the decentralisation started in Manipur during the British period starting from 1891 onwards. The valley of Manipur was divided into four circles, in each circle, there was a Panchayat court. Each circle contained about 1000 houses. These court tried civil suits in which the subject matter in despite did not exceed Rs.50 and criminal offences of a minor degree i.e. simple hurt, assault, trespass, adultery and minor thefts.¹

The names of the four courts were:

1. Town Panchayat.
2. Rural Panchayat.
3. Mahammadan Panchayat.

**Town Panchayat:** The town Panchayat has jurisdiction over the town areas of Imphal. It tried minor criminal and civil cases. It had the power to heavy fine up to Rs. 100. The court was instituted on 15th November 1891.²

**Rural Panchayat:** Rural Panchayats were established at Sekmai, Kaklong, Foiching, Moirang, Wangoi, Kakching, Chairel, Ningae and Bamon Kampu. These places are all in the valley of Manipur. The Members of these Panchayats were paid as a grant one pari of rice land free of revenue while in office.³

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² Ibid
³ Ibid p 179
Mahammadan Panchayat: The Mahammadan Panchayat was special court at Lillong for trial of cases between the Muslims and the Manipuri (Meiteis) or for the trial of cases between the Muslim subjects of the state. There were 5 Muslim members in the Panchayats.

Office of the Chaukidar: For the maintenance of law and order the Panchayat circle had been found to be very convenient and suitable. An officer called a rural chukidar had been appointed for every 100 houses. He had report the daily happenings to the Panchayat of his circle. According to 1921-22 reports the number of chaukidars was 202.¹

The number of members of each village Panchayat was five including the village head man. All of them were appointed by the Political Agent. The main function of the Panchayats was judicial in nature rather than administrative. All these Panchayats continued to function till 1955.²

Panchayats after Independence:

In 1948 a democratic government was established in Manipur under the Manipur state constitution Act 1947. There was a council of six Ministers who were elected by the members of the Manipur state Assembly.

¹. Government of Manipur (Directorate of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj), A Note of Panchayati Raj in Manipur, 1987, p 22
The members of the Assembly were elected on the basis of adult franchise by the people of Manipur and on principle of joint electorate from general, hill and Mahammadan constituencies at the ratio 30:18:3. There were additional seats for the representatives of educational and commercial interests. The Ministers were in charge of their own portfolios. But the Chief Minister was appointed by the Maharajah in consultation with the minister. The appointment of the Chief Minister by the Maharaja had acted as a link between the monarchical system and the newly established democratic Government of Manipur. But the democratic government thus established did not last long, as the Manipur state was merged with the India Dominion on 15th October 1949 under the Manipur Merger Agreement 1949.¹

Manipur was placed as a part of state when the constitution of India was enforced on 26th January, 1950. The administration was carried on under a chief commissioner. There was no Assembly as a law making body. During the period of Advisory council and Territorial council from 1950 to 1956, the Central Government was responsible for the legislative and financial matter of the state. The Central government could extend to Manipur or any part there of any enactment which is in force in a state.²

². Ibid
Modern Panchayat system was first introduced in Manipur in 1960 by adopting the U.P. Panchayat Act 1947. The Hill areas, the Municipal area, cantonment areas and the notified areas were excluded from the jurisdiction of this Act. The first election to 227 Gram Panchayat and 43 Nyaya Panchayats had been entrusted with some development work as agents of state Government in the execution of plan schemes. The Nyaya Panchayats were engaged in judicial matters. The rules necessary for carrying out the purpose of the said Act were also framed in the year 1962. After the second election in 1970, the number of Gram Panchayaats came down to 221 and Nyaya panchayats increased up to 44.¹

The people of Manipur were not satisfied with the working of Gram panchayats and Nyaya panchayata. They demanded for the introduction of higher level Panchayats like Panchayat samitis and Zilla parishad. In response to the aspirations of the people, the Manipur panchayati Raj Act, 1975 was passed by the Legislative Assembly of Manipur.²

¹ M. Ibohal Singh Op. cit p 4
² L. Gouragopal Singh Op. cit p 29
Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975:

The Manipur Panchayat Raj Act, 1975 was a turning point in the history of Panchayat Raj in Manipur. Necessary rules have already been framed under the Act. There shall be Gram Panchayat, Panchayati Samiti and Zilla Parishad. But in Manipur only two-tier system of Panchayat Raj i.e. Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti was introduced. Steps have been taken for the establishment of Zilla Parishad also. Under the Act, 107 Gram Panchayat, 37 Niyaya Panchayats and 6 Panchayat Samiti were constituted.\(^1\) Elections to these bodies have been held regularly and they started functioning properly in the state. The state Government keenly considered for the establishment of zilla parishad under the provisions of Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975. The first elections under the Act to these bodies were held in May 1978. The 2\(^{nd}\) and 3\(^{rd}\) general elections to the Panchayat bodies were held in May, 1985 and September 1991 respectively.\(^2\)

The advantages given to women under the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975 were the reservation of one seat for women in every gram Panchayat. Women especially in rural area are the deprived section of the society. But after the enforcement of the Act women were encouraged to

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2. Manipur State Panchayat Parishad, Panchayat Paojel, Imphal 1994 p-34
participate freely in the Panchayats in Manipur. But the Panchayat Raj Act 1975 was not free from drawback. The process of development was found to be slow at level of Panchayats affecting the welfare of the rural people in the state.¹

The non-establishment of Zilla Parishad as a Panchayati Raj Institution at the district level is found to be a gap presenting a broken link in the chain of the Panchayat Raj Structure. The absence of this highest tire of Panchayat cannot animate the principles and working of the system. The non-extension of the previous of the Act in the Hill areas of Manipur is another major drawback, or shortfall of the progress pf Panchayati Raj in the State.²

The area covered by Panchayats is too small to be viable. So, no major and medium type of scheme can be implemented within the area of a Gram Panchayat. The transfer of power and responsibilities to the Panchayati Raj bodies are not up to the mark as expected in spite of the state resources. Because of this reasons, the involvement of Panchayati Raj bodies in the implementation of Rural Development programme is not so effective.³

¹ Manipur State Panchayat Parishad, Panchayat Panjel, Imphal 1994 p-34.
² Govt. of Manipur (Directorate of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj), Panchayati Raj, 1987 p-19.
In accordance with the provisions of the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 was enacted on 23rd April 1994. The Act extended to the whole area of the state excepting those areas covered by the Manipur (Hill Areas) District Council Act, 1971 or the Manipur (village Authorities in Hill Areas) Act, 1956, Municipality and Cantonment areas.  

The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act 1994 has provided for the establishment of two tier system of Panchayats i.e. Gram Panchayat at the village level and Zilla Parishad at the District level. Accordingly, 166 Gram Panchayat and four Zilla Parishads had been established. Elections to these Panchayats have been held on 31st January 1997. And Consequently 166 Gram Panchayats and three Zilla Parashad in the three districts namely, Imphal District, Thoubal District and Bishnupur District have been constituted in the month of March, 1997. However, with the bifurcation of the erstwhile Imphal District into Imphal East District Imphal West District, one more Zilla parashad was formed.  

The main objective of this enactment is to re-organised Panchayats at two levels i.e. Gram Panchayat at the village level and Zilla Parashad at the District level in the rural areas of the state. The Gram Sabha is a larger body consisting of all voters in the area and the Gram Panchayat is its executives.¹

The Act has provided enormous functions to the Gram Panchayat in the matters relating to Agriculture, Animal husbandary, fisheries, social and farm Forestry, Khadi and Cottage industries, Rural Housing, Roads, Poverty Alleviation programme, Education, both Primary and Secondary, adult Education, libraries, Cultural Activities, Public distribution system etc. The Gram Sabha is given general functions like rendering assistance in the implementation of development Schemes, identification of beneficiaries for the implementation of development schemes, mobilisation voluntary labour, promotion of adult education, promotion of unity and harmony among all sections of society etc. The work of the Gram Panchayat is mainly to manage and implement the functions entrusted assigned or delegated by the government from time to time. The amount of functions is also to be decided by the Government. The main function of the Zila Parishad is to prepare plan for economic development and social justice in matter like Agriculture, Irrigation, Horticulture, statistics, Marketing, health and Hygiene, Education,

Social welfare, Drinking water, Rural Electrifications, Social reform activities etc. One notable feature of the Act is the one third reservations of seats for women in addition to the reservation of seats for the Scheduled tribe and Scheduled cast.¹

The Manipur Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 has been enacted in conformity with the 73rd constitutional amendment Act, 1992. In some other states the Panchayat Raj Act has already been implemented by holding elections. In Manipur also this Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 has been implemented in 1997 before the expiry of the term of existing Panchayat under the Manipur Panchayat Raj Act, 1975.²

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has the noble intention of giving power to the common people. It provides not only for decentralised administration through local self-governing bodies for direct participation of the people themselves in the Gram Sabha.³ The objective of the 73rd Amendment Act is to empower people to have a greater say and role in their own affairs at the grass root level. It encourages the participation of people in the formation and implementation of various development

² Govt. of Manipur 'Commemoration of 50th Anniversary of India's Independence, DIPR, 1997, p 72-73.
Programmes in order to bring a meaningful socio-economic change particularly in rural areas. The Act has reserved seats for Schedule Casts and Schedule Tribes in proportion to their population in that panchayats. It also reserves 33 percent seats in all panchayats for women. It has bestowed attention upon the issues of finding resources especially financial resources to enable the panchayats so as to discharge the functions as expected of them.¹

The 73rd Amendment also mandates the establishment of a Finance commission by each state, every fifth year to assess the financial position of the panchayats. Under this, the panchayats are authorised to raise resources on their own together with allocation of resources obtained on the recommendation of the state finance commission.²

The Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 has also provision for the establishment of Finance Commission. The Finance Commission, thus established assess the financial resources of the Panchayats from time to time and authorise the Panchayats to raise its own resources.

Thus the modern Panchayat system in Manipur is working since 1960's through different phases women started to participate in the working of Panchayats after the implementation of the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1975 by enjoying reservation provided under the Act. This trend was further encouraged by the Manipur Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 by providing 33 percent reservation for women in the Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parishad.