CHAPTER IV
Formation of Panchayat

Tamil country of the Sangam age was divided into Chera, Chola and Pandiya kingdoms¹. Most of the Sangam rulers were despots. However, they adopted the policy of decentralization by giving importance to the local administrative bodies in towns and villages. The village was the fundamental unit of administration. The village assemblies such as Mantram, Avai and Ambalam, managed the local business. Mantram was a local assembly and it met under the shadow of trees². During the Sangam period every village or Ur had an assembly or an Avai to conduct the village administration. The rich experience influential and sufficiently wise men of the locality were the members of the Assembly³.

Local Self Government was a unique feature of Chola administration. In the Chola Empire as Ur and Sabha or

² Ibid. P.63.
Mahasabha, The Ur was the general assembly and the Sabha was the assembly of the Brahma settlement. In some villages the Ur and Sabha were co-existed. The inscription of the Cholas deal mostly with the Saba. The members of the Sabha were called perumakkal⁴. Each village was divided into thirty ward or kudumbus. One person was to be selected for each ward, through kudovolai or lot system⁵. The idea of the Panchayat system takes one back to the Chola age⁶. For the first time in the history of south India, the Chola administration introduced the some through Kudavolai system⁷. According to the kudavolai system each village was divided into various wards called Kudumbus. An area with a population of 168 was viewed as ward and was endowed with a member⁸. Names of eligible persons would be written on palm leaves and put into a

⁷ I bid. P.184.
⁸ I bid. P.185.
pot and shuffled. Each name of the selected persons would be read and shown to others. This kudovolai system may also be studied from a verse of Periyapuranam$^9$.

It proved that the village autonomy and electoral system. The Sabha looked after the village administration through the committees or Varyams$^{10}$. A union of villages was called kurram$^{11}$. However the development of village autonomy was the rare phenomenon of the Chola administration$^{12}$. The villages remained the lowest unit during the time of Travancore administration also. The higher unit was Proverties. The Proverticar was the head of the above unit. The administration of Justice was in the hands of Village Assemblies$^{13}$. They administered charitable endowments, regulated irrigation light,

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$^9$ Chellam. V.T., History of Tamil Nadu, Madurai, 1976, P. 182.


maintained tanks and gardens, managed the temple affairs and collected taxes and remitted them in the state exchequer\textsuperscript{14}.

\section*{1.1 Village Panchayat during British period:}

Before the establishment of the British rule these village Panchayat remained well organized ones. Rulers, administrators and thinkers of the British accepted their importance as institutions. The Montague Chelmsford reforms made local self government a transferred subject and the ministers concerned attempted to broaden the foundation of these local bodies\textsuperscript{15}. In some places village Panchayats were sought to be established on a wide scale.

The idea of village Panchayat and Block offices entered India politics through a resolution in 1881\textsuperscript{16}. This resolution marked a great landmark in the growth of local self Government in the country\textsuperscript{17}. Under the directive of the Government of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Subramanian. N., \textit{History of Tamil Nadu}, Madurai, 1986, P.150.
  \item \textsuperscript{15} Desai Vasanth., \textit{Rural Development}, Vol III, Bombay, 1984, P.570.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Anajawla. C.C., \textit{Op. Cit.}, P.155.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Mahajan. V.D., \textit{Modern Indian History}, New Delhi, 1994, P.480.
\end{itemize}
India Act of 1919, the Department of Local Self Government was transferred into the hands of an Indian Minister, who was responsible to the Provincial Legislature. The Provincial Government passed laws for the growth of Village Panchayats. In 1920 A.D the Madras Presidency formed Panchayat as the basic unit of administration. In 1935 every province passed laws to give more function to local bodies.

In 1947 India attained independence and subsequently provision was made in the Indian Constitution for the establishment of Village Panchayats in the villages. The Government sponsored its community development programme to have the development of rural areas. The first five year plan pointed out that the constitution has provided for democratic institutions at the centre and states. It may also be necessary to work out suitable arrangements for linking Local Self Government bodies at different levels. Like the village Panchayats with District or subdivisions with Local Boards

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18 Ibid. P. 483.
etc\textsuperscript{21}. For the rural areas before the introduction of Panchayat Raj institutions the main local bodies were the District or local board and Panchayats\textsuperscript{22}.

1.2 Panchayat Raj:

Panchayat Raj system came into existence in 1959, with the objectives of democratic decentralization and local participation in plan programs. The states of Rajasthan and Andra Pradesh became the pioneers. The other states followed the first two and by the end of a decade Panchayat Raj had been established in different states of the country\textsuperscript{23}. Panchayat Raj is an important feature of the Indian political system. It ensures the direct participation of people at the gross root level.

According to Tocqueville “local institutions constitute the strength of free nations\textsuperscript{24}. Mahatma Gandhi preached the ideal


\textsuperscript{23} Panchayat Raj at a Glance, Government of India, Ministry of Agricultures, Department of Rural development, New Delhi, 1989.

\textsuperscript{24} Mahajan. V.D., \textit{Op. Cit.}, P. 480.
of Grama Swaraj or village Republic\textsuperscript{25}. According to Rabindra Nath Tagore. "The problem of rural reconstruction required not only the removal of poverty, but also to provide jobs to the villagers"\textsuperscript{26}.

After India's Independence, the framers of the constitution gave importance to organize the Village Panchayats. Following this directive, the various State Governments took steps to organize village Panchayat as units of rural self-government. Greater importance was given to the Panchayat system after adoption of the five year plans\textsuperscript{27}. The local finance enquiry committee submitted its report in A.D. 1951. It referred to the hopeless financial conditions of local bodies and made recommendation to improve the same\textsuperscript{28}. On October 2, 1952 the government of India established Community Development programme and National Extension Service\textsuperscript{29}. The Government


\textsuperscript{26} Catlin. E.G., \textit{Rabindranath Tagore}, New Delhi, 1953, P.72.


of India soon realized that something more than the existing Panchayats. In A.D. 1956 the National Development Council appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Balwantrai G. Mehta to suggest measures for the better working of the Community Development Programme and the National Extension Service. The committee submitted its report in A.D. 1937\(^3\)0.

**1.3 Panchayat Raj in India:**

Panchayat Raj was introduced in 1959 as a three tier system in self government at the village, block and district levels. At District level - Zilla parishad, at Block level - Block Panchayat Samities and at village level - Gram Panchayat\(^3\)1.

**1.4 A Grama Panchayat or village Panchayat:**

In the structure of the Panchayat Raj the Village Panchayat is the lowest unit. The general body of Village Panchayat is the Grama Sabha consisting of the entire adult population of the


Village. Grama or Village Panchayat is the statutory body covering one or more villages, with an average population varying between 1000 to 3000 people and an average area of about six square miles. It is a body of elected representatives. The number of members varies from 5 to 31. Each ward sends its representative to the Panchayat.

Reservation for women and for schedule castes scheduled tribes are provided in most states. Every Panchayat elects a President is directly elected by the Gram sabha either through raising hands or through secret ballot while in some the mode of election is indirect\textsuperscript{32}. The direct election is in Assam, Bihar, parts of Madhya Pradesh, the Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh. The term of office is five years in Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Orissa and West Bengal and three years in other States\textsuperscript{33}.

The main functions of the Grama Sabha such are:

(i) Provision of Water Supply.

\textsuperscript{32} I bid.

\textsuperscript{33} I bid. P.59.
(ii) Maintenance of minor irrigation

(iii) School building etc.

(iv) Family Planning

(v) Development and Co-operation

(vi) Construction of wells latrines etc.

1.5 Block level Panchayat Samities:

The Panchayat Samiti is the second tier of the panchayat Raj. It is called Anchalik Panchayat in Assam, Panchayat union council in Tamil Nadu, Taluka Development Board, Anchal Parishad in West Bengal. The members are directly elected. There is a provision for co-option of or reservation for women, scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes and for special interests, such as co-operative societies and banks. The MLAs and MPs represent the constituencies are generally without voting rights. The term panchayat samiti is Vice-president is

34 Desai, A. R., Rural Sociology in India, Bombay, 1984, P.584.
selected from among the elected members. In Tamil Nadu and Punjab panchayat has to elect from among its members its\textsuperscript{35}.

The functions of the Panchayat Samiti include Agricultural Improvement, Development, co-operation, Sanitation, Primary Education, Social Education, Sanitation, Social Education, Cottage Industries, Emergency relief etc. It works through standing committees for:

(i) Production programme
(ii) Social service and Finance
(iii) Taxation and administration\textsuperscript{36}.

1.6 Zilla Parishad:

At the topmost tier, that is the District level, there stands the Zilla Parishad. This is primarily a co-coordinating body supervising the activities of the Panchayat and Panchayat Samities. To ensure necessary Co-ordination between the Panchayat Samits, a Zilla Parishad, should be constituted consisting of the presidents of these samitis. MLAs and MPs


representing the area and the District level officers. The Collector will be its chairman and one of his officers will act as secretary. Functions of the parishad may include examination and approval of the budgets of the Panchayat Samitis where funds are allotted by the Government for the District as a whole, their distribution between the various blocks, Co-ordination and consolidation of the Panchayat samitis etc.\(^{37}\) The functions of the Zilla Parisad include co-ordination and consolidation of the plans of the Panchayat Samiti supervision of the activities distribution among the Panchayat samities of the adhoc grants allotted to the District by the state Government etc.\(^{38}\)
