Chapter VI

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As a Gross root institution, the Panchayat Raj existed in the ancient days. But there were no political parties as of now a days. Yet Local Self Government was elected/nominated/selected institution and was an effective instrument in creating public opinion and making the people to be conscience of their rights and responsibilities. Although monarchy was the form of Government, the monarchy gave almost absolute freedom or autonomy in respect of Local Self Government. As already mentioned Chola Local Self Government is an outstanding example. Today India being the largest democracy in the world, Local Self Governments are being victimised by religious, linguistic and caste factors. Further the illiteracy, ignorance and poverty are taken as advantage by the politicians and bureaucrats to dominate panchayat raj institutions. Commenting on the style of functioning of the village panchayats, Balwant Rai report remarked that Panchayats are not seen by the states as instruments of transformation of social and economic life. He pointed out that mere election is not democracy. Devolution of power is absent
as responsibility was exercisable only at close quarters. Panchayats are meant for progress and not for drum beating. The inefficiency of Panchayats are due to absence of close and intimate relationship with the government, scanty or meager finances, very little power and large jurisdiction.

Ashok Mehta's report on the working of panchayats are even more critical. It summarised panchayat governments as ascendancy (1951-65), stagnation (1965-69) and decline (1969-77). "Siddharaj Dhadda a Gandhian member of the Ashok Mehta Committee remarks “The very foundation of the structure of Panchayat Raj is missing. The purpose of decentralisation is not merely for development but the creation of an integral structure of self governing institutions from village upwards to National level. Panchayat Raj is the foundation of swaraj till their development shall remain a chimera”

It may be pointed here that on 02-08-1997 in the Chief Ministers conference on Panchayat Raj the then Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral said “the states should give up the cynical attitude that panchayats cannot govern themselves”. The introduction of Panachayat Raj in India has created a good deal of awakening on the part of the people regarding the fault distribution of

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administrative and developmental benefits to all the sections of rural society.

The three-tier system has been working in various parts of the country since 1959. But certain drawbacks in the system were evident viz., lack of clear and scientific distribution of functions at various levels, predominance of higher structure, undue interference of state governments, curtailment of autonomy of these institutions, inadequate finances, meagre attention to the views and aspirations of the people by the officials, presence of ex-officio members not in consonance with democratic principles and the authoritative control of the government over the panchayat raj institutions.

According to some scholars, though the panchayat raj institutions have awaken the rural masses to certain extent towards political consciousness, at the same time it has paved the way for the tensions and feuds among rural population and still worse it had vested power in the hands of a few.

The majority of the rural people who are poor, remain mostly isolated from the Panchayat Raj activities except for participating
in periodical voting. Their involvement is generally seen only in the next election. This should be ended. The end is possible only when the villagers are made responsible for their governance.

The perspective of the political interpreters were that the objective of decentralisation of the administration and socio-economic development of the rural section has remained a myth. The reason for this is, the panchayat raj institutions have no discretionary power but it acts merely a dispensing agency of the state government and the inadequacy of finance, without which nothing functions.

For ages Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes have suffered from social prejudices and have led a relatively isolated life and continue to remain the most backward section of the society.

Panchayat Raj leadership in several states has been captured by members of the dominant community and rich landlords. Before the introduction of Panchayat Raj system in Karnataka, leadership was the monopoly of a few people who had an advantage of family background, caste or economic status. Now there is a transformation in the very base of leadership.
In July-August 1989, the Congress (I) Government under Rajiv Gandhi introduced a 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill in Lok Sabha on May 16, 1989 with a view to revitalise and rejuvenate the Panchayati Raj Institutions. However, the Bill was defeated in the Rajya Sabha. The 64th Amendment Bill had sought to decentralise functions, power and authority to local government and to strengthen it through holding Panchayati Raj Insitutions elections under the supervision of Election Commission, appointment by the Centre, for Finance Commission to regulate taxes and grants-in-aid and introduction of auditing of the Panchayati Raj Institutions accounts by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India who was to submit his report to the Governor. The proposed changes in the bill affect the basic federal fabric of the nation. Certainly it would affect the centre state relation. Though the bill was passed in Lok Sabha it was unfortunately fell in the upper house.

The National Front Government soon after assuming power in 1989 proclaimed that it would bestow powers to the rural democratic institutions to make them more effective bodies.

Narasimha Rao Government introduced Constitutional
Amendment Bill on September 16, 1991 making it mandatory to establish a directly elected three tier structure of panchayat raj institution. The states under the act are required to modify their existing panchayat raj legislation and replace them with the requirements such as adequate representation to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes in proportion of their population, reservation of 1/3 seats to women and fixing the term of the panchayats for 5 years. In the event of supersession of Panchayats, elections should be held within six months. The 73rd Amendment Bill seeks to put on a firm footing the relations between state government and local bodies.

The bill was passed by the Parliament in its winter session in December 1992. After its ratification by the requisite number of states. The Bill became operative in May 1993.

The success of Panchayat Raj institutions entirely depends on proper infrastructure that the State Government provides. At the outset the Government should provide an atmosphere for awareness. This awareness is not merely by implementing different schemes such as Ashreya/Ambedkar and etc. The basic infrastructure
is to generate employment by eradicating poverty. Provide the illiterate, ignorant and fear stricken villagers, the opportunities for employment in his own village to get his livelihood. This must be followed by free education to his children. Once the problem of food is solved not only to his children but also to the parents, the parents dare not send his/her wards for employment. Incessant hunting for food by parents and wards right from young age deprive them the basic needs. Of course in this direction some measures like mid day meals have been taken up by the State Government to ease the hunger and attract children. But this is not enough. Parents must be made to involve in different occupations besides agriculture (which is seasonal). Then he realises the utility of his employment and schemes undertaken by the Government for rural development. Different occupations are many like village and Khadi industries etc. This gross root reform creates an awareness automatically among the village people to involve in their own administration. Participatory democracy is the cardinal principle of Panchayat Raj institutions. Since independence commission after commission, Reports after reports, Recommendations after Recommendations are being experimented to make local self-government more self reliant and democratic. Yet the bureaucracy at the behest of politicians continue to exercise their authoritative power and there is no active involvement of the people.
Amidst rampant corruption, red tapism, political parties interference and bureaucrats aggressive and passive attitude, the Panchayat Raj institutions are making some advancement. A lot more is remaining to achieve.

A personal interaction with village people and random survey carried out as discussed earlier in the V chapter have exposed certain inherent and deep-rooted problems. They impair the Rural Development.

The problems are the following :-

1. Illiteracy

2. Caste groupism

3. Corruption

4. Most of the elected members are first generation politicians. They because of inexperience and lack of maturity fail to understand the problems.
5. Panchayat Raj Institutions lack sufficient financial resources.

6. Interference by the political parties.

7. Bureaucratic high handedness and Redtapism.

Remedial measures to overcome these problems are listed here for further improvement and development of the rural people.

1. The grant-in-aid amount to Panchayats should be increased.

2. Panchayat Raj Institutions should not work only administrative units but their work should mainly be connected with social and economic development.

3. Complete freedom should be given to Panchayat Raj Institutions to work in their areas.

4. People should be encouraged to participate in the development programmes.

5. Panchayat Raj Institutions should be treated as the single agency particularly for development of the rural local levels.
6. Political Parties should not interfere in Local Self Government.

7. Women are to be motivated to participate in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

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