One of the essential function of a local authority is to hold meetings for decision making. The Assam Rural Panchayat Act 1948 and the Assam Panchayat Act, 1959 provided for direct participation of all adult persons in a Panchayat meeting to review the activities of the Panchayat as well as to suggest the future line of action by it. Under the provision of the Assam Panchayat Act, 1989 a Gaon Sabha meeting must be held at least twice a year and a gap of more than six months should not be there between two consecutive meetings. At least 7 days notice along with the agenda of a Gaon Sabha meeting was to be given by beating of drums or by loud speaker in the village. Written or printed notices had to be hung in conspicuous places or circulated in the villages. The President of the Gaon Panchayat could fix the date, hour and place for a Gaon Sabha meeting. The President had also to convene a meeting on requisition by one fifth of the total Gaon Sabha members or under the direction of the Deputy Commissioner or the Sub-divisional Officer. Any Gaon Sabha member could, after giving three days notice before the meeting, move any resolution on matters of administration of the Gaon Panchayat. It was incumbent on the Gaon Panchayat to carry out the Resolution adopted in a Gaon Sabha meeting as far as practicable.
The Gaon Sabha meetings were not held regularly perhaps due to lack of understanding of the Gaon Panchayat presidents about the role of Gaon Sabha meetings. It was only after issuing Government instructions to the Block Development Officers to ensure regular holding of the Gaon Sabha meetings the Gaon Panchayat Presidents were convening Gaon Sabha meetings. But the attendance of the People in such meetings was very small. Many Gaon Sabha meetings were held without the required quorum of one tenth of total members. I personally observed the Gaon Sabha meetings of Mirjapur, Asara, Panchantra paria and Dharapur Gaon Sabha meetings under the Rani Aneshalik Panchayats in the Kamrup district and found that such meetings were held without recording the attendance and proceedings of the meetings. A few resolutions were taken for requesting the Government authorities concerned to provide some local needs.

The required outlook that a Gaon Sabha meeting should be held in a formal manner and there should be some concrete decisions for direct involvement of the villagers in their own development activities was significantly absent in the minds of the conveners. In order to organise a Gaon Sabha meeting effectively and to make it purposeful certain suggestion may be given. Firstly, the importance of a Gaon Sabha meeting should be propagated
amongst the villagers. They should be properly explained that the Gaon Sabha is the true base of our democracy wherein the people should involve themselves actively and continuously in its working for allround development of the villages. Such realisation of the concept of self help will go a long way to the strengthen foundation of our democratic Government. The Gaon Sabha meeting is the appropriate forum where the efforts of the people can be effectively mobilised for various activities of the people with their general consent and good will.

Secondly the villagers should be motivated with their own interests in a Gaon Sabha meeting. In the year 1969-70 there was much improvement in attendance of the villagers in the Gaon Sabha meetings when the Government entrusted the Gaon Panchayats to prepare lists of landless cultivators and submit the same to the Deputy Commissioner after obtaining the approval of the villagers in the Gaon Sabha meetings.

It was because of the motivation of the villagers with their own personal interests the participation of the villagers in the Gaon Sabha meetings was much greater. A comparative study of the two consecutive years in respect of 56 Gaon Sabhas of the Amrup District has revealed the above fact. Out of 561 Gaon Sabhas in the district the information was collected from 56 Gaon Panchayat Presidents in course of their training at the Kahikuchi Panchayati Raj Training Centre. The following table shows the result of the study.
Number of Gaon Sabha meetings held during 1968-69 and 1969-70 in 56 Gaon Sabhas of the Amrup District.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Gaon Sabha</th>
<th>1968-69 Meetings</th>
<th>1969-70 Meetings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quorum No.</td>
<td>Quorum Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than two times in the year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two times in the year</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only once in the year</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No meeting in the year</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows a distinct improvement in the number and attendance of the Gaon Sabha meetings during 1969-70. This was due to an attempt by Government to activate Gaon Sabhas, involving the Gaon Sabha members in the preparation of the lists of landless people of their respective villages.
Thirdly the Gaon Sabha seating should be organised through the Gaon Panchayat members who should ensure participation of the villagers from their respective villages. This will improve the attendance at the Gaon Sabha meetings.

Fourthly the Gaon Sabha meeting should be business like. In consideration of the importance of Gaon Sabha at the grass root of democracy the Government of India appointed a study team headed by Shri R.R.Divakar in June 1962 to suggest measures necessary to activate the Gaon Sabhas. The study team submitted its recommendations in April 1963. The team observed that in many cases the adult villagers are unaware of their role as Gaon Sabha members and very often they even do not know the difference between Gram Sabha and Panchayat.

The following are some of the recommendations of the team in respect of the Gaon Sabha meetings.

1. The Gram Sabha should be statutorily recognised and its meetings should be held at least once in every three months.

2. The Gram Sabha should consider in its meetings the agenda -
   (a) Plan and budget of the Panchayat.
   (b) Reports and accounts of the Panchayat.
   (c) Implementation of village production plan, village volunteer force and defence labour bank.
3. There should be a question hour in a Gram Sabha meeting so as to enable the members to raise questions regarding the Panchayat matters.

4. The Gram Sabha meetings should be held by rotation in each of the constituent villages.

5. The Gram Sabha meeting should be held in a day when the villagers are generally free from their own works.

6. A recreational programme or film show should be organised to perform immediately after the Gaon Sabha meeting.

7. There should have a quorum of 10% for a Gaon Sabha meeting.

The Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972 does not provide for the statutory Gaon Sabha meetings. Instead, there is a provision for holding an annual general meeting of the voters of a Gaon Panchayat for the purpose of reviewing the activities of the Gaon Panchayat during the proceeding year and to consider the working plan and programme for the current year. An attendance of 100 persons will form the quorum of the general meeting. Such general meeting of about 10,000 voters in a Gaon Panchayat can never be held as effective and purposeful.

GAON PANCHAYAT MEETING.

The Assam Panchayat Act, 1959 provided that a Gaon Panchayat meeting should be held once in every month.
The quorum was one third of its total membership. If there was no quorum the meeting should be adjourned and the adjourned meeting required no quorum. It appears from a study of records of 23 Gaon Panchayats in the Kamrup district for the year 1969-70, 146 meetings were called for and 54 of them had to be adjourned for want of quorum.

This shows that on the average not even one meeting was held once in two months and the number of adjourned meetings was quite high. It also shows that the members of the Gaon Panchayat were not interested in its meetings. Some of the Gaon Panchayat members informed me that they were not interested because Panchayats had no funds and no power to carry out their functions.

Some of the Gaon Panchayat Secretaries revealed an interesting fact about the manipulation of the proceedings of the Gaon Panchayat meetings. They regularised the Gaon Panchayat meetings held without quorum by obtaining the signatures of the absentee members in the proceeding book, as if they were present at the meeting.

The President of the Gaon Panchayat convened and presided over a Gaon Panchayat meeting. All decisions were arrived at by a majority vote. Voting was by show of hands. The President had no book. He had only a casting vote in case of equality of votes. Mostly the decisions were arrived at by a unanimous vote.
The business of a Gaon Panchayat was transacted in
the language of the region. The minutes of the proceedings
were recorded and signed by the President.

ANCHALIK PANCHAYAT MEETING.

The meeting of an Anchalik Panchayat was to be
called for by the Secretary of the Anchalik Panchayat in
consultation with the President. But meetings must be
held at least once in two months. The quorum was one third
of the total membership. For an adjourned meeting no quorum
was necessary. The decision of the majority members was
binding on the Panchayat. In case of difference of opinion
the majority decision was taken by show of hands. The
President presided over and signed the minutes of the
meeting.

An examination of the records in respect of
Kamalpur, Boko and Dimoria Anchalik Panchayat in the
Kamrup district it appears that the meetings were held
regularly and the proceedings of the meetings were quite
sound and business like. The attendance of the elected
members in these meetings was quite satisfactory but
the attendance of the ex-officio members including
the District and Sub-divisional level Officers of the
Development departments was considerably poor. This was
perhaps due to the fact that these officers were busy
with their departmental duties and they might not be in
a position to attend every meeting of the Anchalik Panchayats. It is suggested that instead of inviting all ex-officio members only those whose advice was necessary should have been called for.

**MOHKUMA PARISHAD MEETINGS.**

The meetings of a Mohkuma Parishad are called by the Secretary in consultation with the President. At least one meeting should be held once in three months. The Mahkuma Parishad could take any decision of advisory nature on any matter pertaining to the development of the Subdivision and forward such resolution to the Government, or Gaon Panchayat concerned for taking necessary action. It appears from the records of the Gauhati Mahkuma Parishad that the meetings were held regularly and the attendance of the members was very satisfactory.

In order to improve attendance at the meetings the Act was amended and it is laid down that any one would cease to hold office if he absented himself from three consecutive meetings without reasonable ground. This provision however, was not effective because no procedure was prescribed for the removal of defaulters. We find a similar provision in the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1972. The proceedings of a Gaon Panchayat meeting must be signed by the President before the meeting dispersed. It should be at the next meeting.
The Secretary may also call a special meeting on requisition by not less than one fifth of the total number of councillors or under the direction of the Government. One third of the total number of councillors will form the quorum in a meeting but no quorum is required for an adjourned meeting. The proceedings of the Mahkuma Parishad meeting must be signed by the Chairman before the meeting disperses and the same should be confirmed in the next succeeding meetings.

The meetings of the Executive Committee of the Mahkuma Parishad may be called by the Secretary with approval of the Chief Executive Councillor.

The Chief Executive Councillor must preside over the meeting. The quorum is half of the total strength of the executive council. According to the Assam Panchayati Raj (Administrative Rules) 1973, the Executive Committee is to transact the following business in a meeting:

1. To recommend any matter where necessary for approval of the Mahkuma Parishad.
2. To control expenditure and decide matter on execution of scheme or programme.
3. To approve appointments, transfer, posting and disciplinary action of the Mahkuma Parishad employees including those working in the Gaon Panchayats.
(4) To scrutinise and place the annual budget, bye law and subsidiary rules of the Mahkuma Parishad for approval in a meeting of the Parishad.

(5) To control and guide the officers and staff placed by the Government at the disposal of the Mahkuma Parishad.

(6) To exercise such other powers and carry out such other functions of the Mahkuma Parishad as may be delegated by the Mahkuma Parishad.

(7) To examine and approve proposals of different standing committee and undertake implementation of such proposals through respective standing committees.

**THE SUBCOMMITTEE MEETINGS.**

The Assam Panchayat Act 1959 provided for subcommittees meetings in the Gaon Panchayats and Anchalik Panchayats. The members, and duties of the Sub-committees were to be determined by the respective Gaon Panchayat or Anchalik Panchayat. In actual working almost all the Gaon Panchayats did not appoint subcommittees. It was perhaps due to the limited functions which a Gaon Panchayat could undertake with its own funds. But in the case of Anchalik Panchayats all of them formed subcommittees to deal with different subject matters.
There were subcommittees for Budgets and Finance, Agricultural production, Public works, Education and Culture, Health and sanitation cooperation, veterinary and Animal Husbandry and cottage industries. The sub-committees and meetings were held as and when necessary. The attendance of members at the subcommittee meetings was good like that of the Anchalik Panchayats. The Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1972 has similar provision of sub-committees in respect of the Gaon Panchayats. According to this a Gaon Panchayat is to form such number of sub-committees with such powers and functions and members as may be considered necessary by the Gaon Panchayat. The President and Secretary of the Gaon Panchayat are to function as the President and Secretary respectively of the sub-committees.

As such there is no uniformity in the formation of sub-committees, their duties and functions.

**STANDING COMMITTEE MEETINGS.**

The Assam Panchayat Act 1959 provided for the formation of standing committees by the Mahkuma Parishad. The President of the Mahkuma Parishad was to conduct the meetings of every standing committee. The Mahkuma Parishad could determine the members, duties and the mode of conducting business in a standing committee meeting. The Assam Panchayat (constitution)(Amendment) Rules 1984 had specifically provided for the formations of standing
committees for planning, distribution of funds, Budget scrutiny, coordination and supervision etc. Later on this provision was not considered to be sufficient in a larger interest of coordination of different departments and closer association of the district administration. The study team on the Panchayati Raj Assam (1963) in its report suggested that the Deputy Commissioner should be the President of the Mahkuma Parishad. If this was not possible for some reasons or other, he should be made a member of the Mahkuma Parishads and Chairman of the standing committees dealing with planning, Administration, and Agricultural Production. According to which the Assam Panchayat (Amendment) Act 1966 provided for the Constitution of statutory standing committees on planning and Administration, Agricultural Production, and Finance. The Deputy Commissioner was made the Chairman of the first two standing committees and for the later a non official member was the Chairman.

The Sub-divisional Officer was made the Vice-Chairman and all the Sub-divisional heads of the connected development department were made members of the first two standing committees. These standing committees did not meet regularly. As regards conduct of meetings of such standing committee no procedure was prescribed in the Rules.

It may be said that the Mahkuma Parishad was not happy with the constitution of such standing committees with the official predominance.
Obviously there was a general tendency in the Mahkuma Parishads to treat these standing committees as subordinate bodies under the Mahkuma Parishad and set aside their recommendations. Therefore the Deputy Commissioner and other officials did not take much interest in the affairs of the Mahkuma Parishad. Since there was general dissatisfaction in the Mahkuma Parishads of these committees the Act was amended and the President and Vice-President of the Mahkuma Parishad were made respectively the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of these standing committees.

The Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1972 attached greater importance to the standing committees of the Mahkuma Parishad. The Assam Panchayati Raj (constitution) Rules 1973 provided for the formation of 6 standing committees on different subjects. According to these rules the Mahkuma Parishad should form these standing committees with such number of members as it thinks fit. The members of the standing committee are elected by the councillors from amongst themselves. The elected members of every standing committee must elect a President from amongst themselves. The standing committee meetings must be called for by the Secretary of the committee in consultation with the Chairman. The quorum is one half of the total strength of the committee. The meeting of the standing committees are held as and when necessity arises.
MEETING OF THE PLANNING AND REVIEW BOARD.

The Assam Panchayati Raj Act 1972 has provided for the constitution of a subdivisional level Planning and Review Board by the Government. The Board consists of all M.L.A.s, M.Ps., Chairman and Chief Executive Councillor of the Mahakuma Parishad, the Deputy Commissioner or Sub-Divisional Officer and all the Sub-Divisional or District heads of the connected Development Departments.

The meeting is called for by its Secretary on such date, time and place fixed by the Chairman. The notice of a meeting must be served on each member at least 7 days before, but non receipt of the notice by any member will not invalidate the decisions of the meeting. In case of any difference of opinion on any issue amongst the members in the majority decision is binding on all. The quorum is one-third of the total membership. However no quorum is necessary for an adjourned meeting. The Chairman of the Board must preside over the meetings and in his absence the non official members of the Board must choose one Chairman from amongst themselves to conduct the meetings.

A meeting of the Board may be convened at any time fixed by the Chairman or as may be directed by the Government. The Secretary of the Board is to record the minutes of the proceedings in the meeting and after obtaining signature of the Chairman thereon be should forward the relevant extracts to all concerned for necessary action.
Some critics say that the Planning and Review Board is a super body over the Mahkuma Parishad and it may interfere in the working of the Mahkuma Parishad. There is however no room for such apprehension as this Board cannot control the activities of the Mahkuma Parishad directly. It may only suggest in respect of the Budget or on any matters to the Mahkuma Parishad and also advise the Government.

As a matter of fact, this Board is contemplated to be an effective link between the Government and the Mahkuma Parishad. The decisions taken in a meeting of the Board on any matter relating to the Mahkuma Parishad is supposed to reflect the judicious views of an expert body consisting of the administrators, specialists and popular leaders. This Board is an advisory body to the Government in matters of supervision, control and guidance of the Mahkuma Parishad. For an example the following proceedings of a Board in the Kamrup district will reveal the position.

Proceedings of the meeting of the Planning Review Board, Barpeta held on 26-11-76 at 11 A.M. in the Mahkuma Parishad Hall Barpeta.

The Chief Executive Councillor, One M.P., 3 M.L.As, Chairman, Review Board Barpeta and Sub-divisional Officers of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary, Irrigation and Sericulture Weaving Departments attended the meeting.
The meeting was presided over by Shri A. Rahman, M.L.A., Chairman.

1. At first the progress of works of the Irrigation Department of the Sub-division was reviewed. The difficulties faced by the Department were explained by the Sub-divisional Officer (Irrigation) Barpeta, who also stated that the progress of water supply for the ensuing Rabi crop is bleak. He further disclosed that he had no funds at his disposal for the operation of the Diesel pump. The Board referred this situation to the Department concerned.

2. The activities of the weaving Department of the subdivision was discussed. It was decided that a scheme for the training of the weavers to the non-weaving areas, particularly at Mandia and Kalgachia area be drawn up by the weaving Inspector Barpeta and put up for discussion in the next meeting.

3. It was decided to invite the Public Health Department for discussion on its scheme in the next meeting.

4. The Board then took up discussion of the supplementary Budget of the Mahkuma Parishad for the year 1975-76 and made the following observations.

   Budget Item 10(2) opening of 5 new medical sub-centres. The provision of Rs.25000.00 as made is approved, but so far as the proposed Barbhita (Hostinapur) site is concerned the Board requested the Chief Executive Councillor of the Mahkuma Parishad to have an enquiry made
as to the suitability of the place in view of the existence of checki and Puthimari dispensaries nearby and select the site accordingly. Item 10(3) Bund/Dong :- In future, necessary provisions should be made for installing shallow filter points in preference to Bunds and Dongs.

The Budget is approved subject to the above observations.

Sd/ A. Rahman,
Chairman,
Planning & Review Board,
Barpeta.

In conclusion it may be said that the planning and Review Board can contribute to a great extent for efficient and successful functioning of the Mahkuna Paishad rather than coming in the way of their progress.