1.1.0. Introduction to the thesis

One of the most crucial and recurring debates in the developing world in recent years has been on the degree of control that the central government can and should have over the administration at the national, state and sub-state levels and over the citizens. The debates have taken the direction of arguments for decentralization of power at different levels in various theoretical perceptions, mainly political and economic. Politically, decentralization has been seen as a way of reducing overload and congestion in administration and of ensuring better representation of the people, more efficiency and autonomy at the lower levels. Economically, it has been justified as a way of managing national economic development more effectively through decentralized planning at the lower levels. The arguments favouring decentralization, whether based on political, economic or other factors, have elicited keen interest among administrators, politicians, academicians and others in the developing world. In India too, the issue of decentralization of power has evoked wide interest, though not always for the right reasons and the best of motives. In recent times it has paved the way for several amendments to the Indian Constitution aimed at transferring more power to rural and urban bodies. Since Mahatma Gandhi's name is being invoked in most of the deliberations on decentralization at the national and state levels, his views on the subject, epitomized by the term Gram Swaraj\(^1\), have been taken for a special analysis in this study.

1.1.1. The Concept of Decentralization

The term 'decentralization' literally means 'away from the centre'. It implies not only the devolution of powers, but also a process in which responsibilities and duties are transferred by a higher

\(^{1}\) The term **Gram Swaraj** is synonymous with the village republic. It is an indigenous expression which signifies village self-rule or village self-government. In this expression, the word 'Grama' signifies village and the phrase 'Swaraj' signifies self-rule. Again, the term 'Swaraj' itself is originated from the words 'swa' and 'raj' which mean: self-rule.
or central authority to the institutions or organizations at the lower levels, thereby providing to the latter adequate incentive for autonomous functioning. Accordingly, the term indicates a situation wherein authority and powers are dispersed from one single centre to a number of centres; or it denotes an act of giving greater powers to branches away from the centre. Decentralization has also been understood as a method of implementing ideas and organizing human operations enabling individuals to satisfy their wants as far as possible through personal action involving diffusion and distribution of power among people generally.

Though the concept is mainly used in the context of Public Administration, decentralization has varied connotations—political, administrative, economic, geographical, and functional. The context determines the meaning and aspect of the term. Politically, decentralized policy involves representation or participation of people in administration through elected bodies. The administrative policy includes the delegation of authority and transfer of power to individual units. Economic decentralization envisages the granting of powers related to economic planning and implementation to lower units to ensure higher rate of growth and better distribution. Geographical (or territorial) decentralization concedes freedom of operation to the field units which are away from the headquarters, thereby enabling them to meet the needs of the population promptly. Functional decentralization implies entrustment of decision-making in technical or professional matters to the appropriate units of organization. The objectives of the measures of decentralized policy pursued may, thus, vary and include better efficiency, greater autonomy, area functioning, localized planning and the refinement of administrative machinery.

However, the degree of control over the units of administration and over the citizens, the extent of decentralization and the location of authority— all these have provoked debates among political philosophers and social scientists. The controversy received greater ardour with the advent of the anti-authoritarian school of thought with its exponents advocating extreme forms of decentralization. Henry David Thoreau, for example, conceived a government at the centre which governs the least. Count Nikolayevich Lev Tolstoy condemned a highly centralized state, while William Godwin visualised a central power structure fully circumscribed as a safeguard against tyranny. Thomas Hodgskin desired the absence of political authority, so that people can enjoy their natural rights. Pierre Joseph Proudhon upheld anarchism to ensure liberty and freedom. Josiah Warren held the view that the necessity for government arose only on account of evils in society. Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin emphatically rejected all the institutions of political control. Mahatma Gandhi’s condemnation of the state and his objection to centralized form of government approximate the spirit of Tolstoy’s and Thoreau’s writings.  
1.1.2. Decentralization in two Perceptions; Western and Indian

The concept of decentralization has been generally used in Western countries in the context of an administrative policy of the central authority towards the lower level bodies. The administrative concept of decentralization treats the lower units of administration as ‘limbs and hands’ of the government. This upholds the principle of partnership in administration with the peripheral units functioning as agents of the central government.  
2. Attempts at decentralization in India during the British rule echoed the spirit of the above concept which held sway in England and the West.


In India, however, the concept of decentralization has from very early times, implied more than an administrative system. The Indian view represented by the ancient Panchayat system connotes the functioning of the democratic institutions at the grass-root levels. The Village Panchayats in India have been the living centres of direct and real democracy from very early days.

The Indian rural society was composed mainly of a multitude of villages, each village enjoying an almost independent and self-sufficient existence. The village was administered by a Panchayat which means a council of five members composed of elected or customary representatives of various castes. The Panchayat was the link between the villages and higher authorities. It must, however, be stated that there is a view that the role of the Panchayats in catering to the requirements of the village was negligible. This, however, does not disprove the potentialities of the system. The Panchayat and the headmen maintained peace in the village, settled disputes among the villagers and looked after the sanitation and other matters of common concern. They played a pivotal role in the defence and development of the villages. Thus, from the standpoint of administration, the village was autonomous. The Panchayats functioned as units of local self-government and contributed to social integration and cultural identity. It was this legacy of the Indian villages as the seats of real democracy, and autonomous administrative units that Mahatma Gandhi sought to revive through his vision of Gram Swaraj.

1.1.3. Local Bodies under the British Rule

A historical study of local bodies in India brings to light three specific streams of thought—the colonial concept of local government introduced during the British regime, the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj with its thrust on the ancient Panchayat system, and the concept of Community Development Programme of the post-independence period. One can find all the three streams of thought in greater or lesser degrees in the functioning of rural local government in the present Indian

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1. The term 'grass-root' means originating or carried on by the common people at the local levels. For details see, Webster, New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language, Indian Edn., 1960, p. 795; Also see, Iqubal Narain, 'Democratic Decentralization: The Idea, the Image and the Reality,' in R.B. Jain, ed., Panchayati Raj, New Delhi, 1981, pp. 10-34.

2. The term Panchayat means an assembly of five. This indigenous term originated from the two terms, 'Panch' means five and 'yat' means an assembly. For a detailed presentation of the meanings of the term see, The Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Edn., Vol. XI, p. 126.
The roots of the colonial concept of local administration in India can be traced back to the imperial Government's initiatives as early as 1861, when Samuel Liang, a member of the Viceroy's Executive Council made a statement that local bodies should be entrusted with the task of local expenditure. Nine years later, Lord Mayo envisaged a series of devolutionary measures in financial management. The local bodies were made agents of the Government for raising resources for meeting local requirements. The village officials were made salaried servants of the state. As a result, the Roman system of justice replaced the traditional power of the Panchayats in respect of the more serious judicial cases. The new system of tax gathering and administration made such a violent impact that the corporate life of the village weakened and in most cases ceased to exist. The old time institution, thus received a death-blow at the hands of those who sought the advantage of a centralized uniform system and they applied it without regard to its effects upon the indigenous social structure. In short, the Village Panchayats were linked with the upper tiers of administrative hierarchy by the British administration through a policy of political and economic decentralization.

Ripon's Resolution of May 18, 1882 envisaged the local bodies not merely as units of administration but as avenues for popular and political education. Ripon's promises, however, were implemented only slowly owing to resistance from most of the provincial bureaucrats. Moreover, his scheme involved the process of decentralization upto Municipal and Taluk levels only. The administration of Village Unions (lowest administrative unit) consisting of nominated members and headmen of villages was entrusted to the District Boards. Thus the rural local government became an officially ordered adjunct to the District Administration.

The Decentralization Commission of 1907, no doubt, recommended the revival and strengthening of the Village Panchayat system and the revival of the village as the primary territorial unit of government organization. It favoured the constitution of the village as the first unit of administration

with the functionaries like the headman, the accountant and the village watchman forming a village government. As a result, the villages were transformed into units of imperial administration, with the village functionaries turned into government servants and their activities subjected to strict official control. The Commission’s views on the revival of the Village *Panchayats* as popular bodies were, however, cast aside. The Government of India Act 1919, contained several measures towards decentralization of administration and provided for the transfer of the Department of Local Self-government into the hands of Indian ministers in the provinces. Shortage of funds, however, impeded any substantial development of local bodies in the provinces. The failure of the experiment figured prominently in the *Report of the Indian Statutory Commission, 1930*. The Commission conceded that the efforts of the Government at decentralization were, for the Indian masses, part of colonial policy of centralized administration and not genuine decentralization. The attempt to build a system of local administration on the British model was compared to the demolition of parts of an old, established and homogenous building and the erection in its place of a structure designed in an entirely different style of architecture.

Thus, the local government envisioned by the British administrators conformed mainly to the needs of a centralized administrative system. The colonial approach did not involve efforts for the development of popular bodies at the lower levels of administration.

1.1.4. Gandhian Concept of Democratic Decentralization, *Gram Swaraj* and the *Panchayat* System

The issue of democratization of local bodies, which had become part of the demands of Indian nationalists, became alive as the steps for decentralization on the part of the government began to falter. Resolutions were passed time and again urging the government to take urgent and speedy measures to increase the powers and resources of local bodies.¹

The scheme of administrative decentralization with the focus on ancient rural bodies or *Panchayats* owes its currency to the patronage extended by Mahatma Gandhi. A virulent critic of centralized power and a staunch advocate of decentralization, Gandhi had reservations about the official

policy under the British rule relating to administrative decentralization in India. No doubt, Gandhi shared the views of many Western political thinkers who favoured decentralization as a countervailing measure against concentration of political power in the organs of the state. However, Gandhi’s views were inspired by the ancient Indian system of Village Panchayats. The Panchayats, the inner administrative mechanism of the self-reliant autonomous village communities, presented to Gandhi a bulwark against authoritarian rule and exploitation. His vision of parallel layers of governmental systems which existed in ‘ever widening, never ascending oceanic circle’ stood in bold contrast to the colonial hierarchical system of administration, sustained by the numerically preponderant lower units which depended entirely on the goodwill and charity of the upper units.¹

The Gandhian concept of decentralization envisioned the village as the primary unit of self-government. The local bodies, contrary to the Western view, were conceived as self-sufficient and self-reliant units governed directly by the villagers themselves. Village republic or Gram Swaraj with the village as the real repository of power and its government directly controlled by the people, thus forms the central theme in Gandhi’s view of decentralization. He believed that democracy implied freedom to manage one’s own affairs and that it could be achieved only in small units. At the same time, Gandhi’s scheme of Gram Swaraj echoed his holistic view of man and society which integrated the political, economic, social and spiritual development of the individual.

1.1.5. Decentralization during the Post-Independence Period.

The Swaraj of Gandhi’s dream, which envisaged the creation and functioning of self-governing, autonomous village republics, was spurned in independent India by the leaders who were mostly western educated and committed to liberal democratic tradition thereby and also by the other relentless critics of Gandhian principles. The critics of Gandhi’s views on decentralization, and Village Panchayat, regarded the village as a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, and narrow mindedness and

the cause of the ruination of India. They refused to accept Gandhi’s belief that when Indian villages became fully developed they would not be dung heaps but tiny gardens of Eden, inhabited by intelligent folk capable of resisting exploitation and inroads into their freedom. What was more, the Indian psyche had come to be progressively captivated by the urge for material progress that required a centralised administrative system. As a result the Gandhian ideas received nothing more than lip service from the makers of the Indian Constitution.

One major impediment to the acceptance of the Gandhian concept of decentralisation was the precedence of the model of development over the process of policy formulation in independent India. The development strategy followed by Jawaharlal Nehru and the political elite of his time was based on a blind dependence on science and technology and large scale and heavy industrialization. This, in turn, implied the creation of an administrative structure with a centralised bureaucratic apparatus. Naturally, the social welfare schemes and the programmes of rural reconstruction were crippled by over-centralization. The Community Development Programme launched in 1952 is a typical elucidation of the point.

The launching of the Five Year Plans added a new dimension to the theme. No doubt, the First Five Year Plan was quite explicit about the need for people’s participation. The second Five Year Plan, too, sought to articulate the administrative translation of the idea at the district level, while the third Plan referred to development along socialistic lines through widespread public participation. However, the Panchayat Raj System envisioned only administrative decentralization and that too only to a very limited extent. The emphasis was shifted from the village to the Block as the unit of the development and administration, with an increased role assigned to bureaucrats. This meant a negation of the Gandhian concept of Gram Swaraj which implied an eventual weakening of the state apparatus and its adjuncts like the bureaucracy, and the rejection of a model of development wedded primarily to material progress. The Gandhian ideal was ignored even in the process of rural reconstruction, under the influence of the industrial model of social organization. Thus, the post-1947 period evidently betrayed

   Dilip Kumar Chatterjee, "Gandhi and Constitution Making in India," New Delhi, 1984, pp.72-75.
the Gandhian model of democratic decentralization although expectations about this model were raised by the Asoka Metha Committee in 1978 and the L.M. Singhvi Committee in 1986. The Sarkaria Commission of 1989 which was constituted to redefine the contours of powers and responsibilities between the Union and State also advocated the strengthening of Panchayati Raj Institutions by conferring on them more powers in order to realise the objectives of decentralized planning.

The passing of the Indian Constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Act -1993 relating to Panchayati Raj Institutions has heralded a definite advance towards the Gandhian view of decentralization. The Amendment which came into effect on April 21, 1993, provides for a uniform system of Panchayati Raj for the entire country with the exception of some specific tribal and hilly regions. In essence, the Amendment seeks to constitutionalise Panchayat as a third stratum of Government at and below District level. The States are enjoined to reformulate the Panchayati Raj structure in accordance with the size and the population of Panchayats, ensuring a certain degree of uniformity in the design of self-government at the third level of decentralized administrative set-up. The Amendment, thus, furnishes constitutional backing to Panchayati Raj Institutions. It lays down a five year term for the Panchayat Councils and includes a Schedule containing specific powers and functions of Panchayats. The powers listed in the Schedule are to be structured and implemented at the Grama Panchyat level, i.e., the grass-root level, where people live and work. The vistas opened by the new constitutional amendment hold promises of taking the country closer to the Gandhian ideal of Gram Swaraj seeking the empowerment of the rural local society.

Efforts at administrative decentralization at the Central and State levels following the Indian Constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Act form part of contemporary history.¹

1.1.6. Administrative Decentralization in Kerala

A study on the rural local bodies in India in their historical perspective reveals situations of ideological inconsistencies resulting in unclear and hesitant governmental initiatives and popular sentiment. The conflicting views on decentralization which characterise debates at the national level,

have percolated down to the provincial level. Small wonder that in the state of Kerala, pattern of *Panchayati Raj* system functions largely on the models evolved at the national level. The system, though not dissimilar in fundamentals, can, however, claim important differences with regard to details.

The functioning of local bodies at the village level was a familiar feature in the erstwhile Princely States of Travancore and Cochin and the Malabar District of Madras Presidency, which were integrated in 1956 into the State of Kerala. Cochin was the first Princely State to enact a *Panchayat* Act by which statutory *Panchayat* bodies were formed as early as 1914. Travancore followed the example in 1925. The history of local government in the Malabar area is essentially the history of the government legislation enacted in Madras Presidency under the British rule. Statutory bodies at the sub-district level began to function in Malabar as early as in 1871 when the Local Fund Act of Madras was passed. Thus, Kerala State inherited models of local government introduced through the Residents and Administrators both in the native principalities and in the segment of British India.

In Kerala State, too, the history of decentralization during the post-independence period was characterised by alternating phases of progress and regress.

In 1960, a *Panchayat* Act was passed replacing all the earlier legislations which had prevailed over Travancore, Cochin and Malabar areas. It stated that the *Panchayat* should be the only organization at the village level between the government and the people, and that it should be the medium through which the villagers come into contact with the government. The legislation resulted in enlarging the functions and financial resources of the local bodies. The duties and powers assigned to them mainly relating to civic amenities and municipal undertakings, comprised two categories—mandatory and discretionary. The mandatory functions were those over which *Panchayats* would have full delegation of powers, while the discretionary functions were selective and regulatory. *Panchayats* were to perform duties assigned to them as agents of the government.

The association of the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions with developmental activities tended to retard their progress as autonomous local bodies. Thus, Village *Panchayats* came to be treated as agents of the government discharging executive and advisory functions, rather than as democratic bodies. Small wonder that the image of *Panchayati Raj* Institutions as units of *Gram Swaraj* drew a low profile.
1.1.7. Prospect of *Gram Swaraj* in Kerala

Although the general trends in administrative decentralization in Kerala present a bias towards the British model, the Gandhian vision of *Gram Swaraj* has been revived time and again by various statutory committees and commissions. The relevance of the Gandhian model of rural local administration was recognized even when administrators remained hesitant at the stage of implementation.

While the Balvantray Mehta Study Team was at work at the national level in 1957, the Government of Kerala constituted a committee under E.M.S. Namboodiripad, the then chief Minister of Kerala, to suggest measures and methods for decentralization of power at various levels with the avowed objective of effective participation of local bodies. The approach of the Committee, according to its own testimony, was aimed at realizing the Gandhian dream of *Gram Swaraj* in Kerala State. The views of the Committee reflected the general enthusiasm for a model of decentralization envisioned by Gandhi, which was echoed in the proceedings of the state legislature while introducing the *Panchayat* Bill in 1960. Opinion was almost unanimous that the *Panchayats* should form the basis of the decentralized popular government in the State, and that the villages should be made self-sufficient and autonomous as visualized by Gandhi, “The *Panchayat* and *Gram Swaraj* envisioned in this Bill”, it was stated, “acknowledge the right of the people to govern themselves, the legislation is expected to be an inducement for great changes in the life of the people, as the *Panchayat* will have more voice in deciding how a citizen should manage his life from the cradle to the grave.”

The appointment of statutory commissions in 1957, 1959, 1965 and 1988 by the Government of Kerala represented efforts at decentralization with a view to ensuring greater participation of the people.

The efforts at decentralization in Kerala have been bolstered by the passing of the Indian Constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Act of 1993. The general enthusiasm in the state is conspicuous by the measure of commitment to the principle implied in theory as well as in practice. Earnest efforts are already afoot towards setting up a three-tier *Panchayati Raj* system in the state. The

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initiatives already taken at all levels indicate that the state of Kerala is favourably disposed to a trial of the scheme of decentralization as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi.

1.2.0. Chapter Divisions

This study contains nine chapters including the Introduction and Conclusion. The opening chapter includes an introduction to the thesis, chapter divisions, review of literature and a short account of the research problem. It presents the hypothesis, importance and scope of the study, objectives, study area, methodology and includes a note on the style of the dissertation.

Chapter 2 attempts a detailed analysis of, and an examination of the major approaches to administrative, political, geographical and functional decentralization. The focus, however, is on democratic decentralization which implies the transfer of the responsibilities of the central government to subordinate agencies or units managed by the people at the lower levels.

Chapter 3 traces the genesis of decentralized functionality of local bodies in India. The chapter also deals with the administration of Rural Local Bodies under the British rule and the transformation of the colonial system in independent India. Early British attempts to revive the ancient rural institutions with a view to making them units of imperial administration, the note of dissent sounded by Indian nationalist leaders, particularly Mahatma Gandhi, and the divergent views and perspectives involved in the debates have been examined in the chapter. The narration also inquires into the metamorphosis of the Panchayat system in India since 1947 and appraises the recommendations of the numerous study teams and statutory committees, constituted by the Government of India, to suggest measures and methods to strengthen the Panchayat system and the efforts at administrative decentralization, culminating in constitutional amendments in 1989 and 1993.

Chapter 4 has been devoted to a specific inquiry into Gandhi’s views on decentralization and his vision of Gram Swaraj. Mahatma Gandhi’s defence of the ancient Indian Village Panchayats which traces India’s acquaintance with the self-governing system to the vedic times, and his idea of a commonwealth of autonomous and self-reliant village republics have been studied in the background of his views on individual freedom and on a non-violent and non-exploitative social order.

Chapter 5 presents the antecedents of local government in Kerala and therefore, includes a
history of rural local bodies in the region from the earliest days down to 1950. Kerala State was formed by integrating the Princely States of Travancore and Cochin and the Malabar District which was part of British India. Hence, the narration attempts a peep into the annals of local administration in the three units during the yester years and seeks to examine the nature of the agencies of rural administration and their functioning in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar.

Chapter 6 deals with the initial phases in the history of the local bodies in Kerala after the attainment of Indian independence, marked by great enthusiasm for administrative reforms and a positive bias for strengthening local government and extending the concept of decentralization to rural areas. The various attempts at functional and structural decentralization during the period from 1950 to 1970 and the development of Panchayat administration in the state form the main targets of study in this chapter.

Chapter 7 traces and analyses the strides made towards decentralization in Kerala following the introduction of the Kerala District Administration Act in 1971. The different measures suggested to strengthen Panchayat system in the state and the role of the District Councils vis-a-vis the functions of the Panchayats have been examined in this section. A comparative study of the Panchayat administration in Kerala and the models of Panchayat systems in the states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat and West Bengal has also been attempted in this chapter. The inquiry into the progress and regress of decentralized functionality of administration in Kerala is reinforced by a case study on the functioning of a Panchayat in Ernakulam revenue district.

Chapter 8 attempts a critical analysis of the efforts at the decentralization of power at the Panchayat level in Kerala and their proximity to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi embodied by the term Gram Swaraj. The focus is on the varied factors which have impeded progress in administrative decentralization and have impelled distortions in the concept resulting in deviations from the path delineated by the Mahatma, despite profession of allegiance and commitment to the Gandhian objective.

Chapter 9, the concluding part, converges on the prospects of a quantum leap towards democratic decentralization and on the favourable conditions in Kerala which facilitate progressive realization of the Gandhian ideal of Gram Swaraj. Measures for strengthening the rural local bodies,
capitalizing on the advancement made in essential prerequisites, have also been suggested.

1.3.0. Review of Literature

For the study of rural local government and the process of decentralization of power at the Panchayat level in India/Kerala the literature available is vast and comprehensive. These include official records, reports of statutory committees and commissions, books, journals, newspapers, academic studies and research papers, proceedings of legislative assemblies, of seminars and conferences etc. These studies cover a wide spectrum of the history of rural local government in India since the vedic times. The focus, however, is on the introduction of statutory Panchayats, their structural patterns and variations, the evolution of varying and divergent views on decentralization and the consequent alteration of the local bodies in independent India. Besides the above, studies on decentralization relevant to different contexts also form part of the sources consulted for the preparation of this dissertation.

This survey of literature does not include all the source materials used for this study, but refers only to those sources which are relevant to the broad classification given below. The literature relating to the study has been classified as follows:

* Literature on Public Administration with specific reference to the concept of decentralization;
* Studies on local government;
* Literature on Gandhian thought with specific reference to decentralization, Panchayati Raj and Gram Swaraj;
* Literature on Panchayati Raj system;
* Literature on the village system in Travancore, Cochin and Malabar;
* Studies on rural local government in Kerala.

1.3.1. Literature on Public Administration with specific reference to the Concept of Decentralization;

Studies on decentralization by Indian and foreign writers have been used for the exposition and analysis of the concept. They include S.K. Chatterjee, M.P. Sharma, Shriman Maheswari, S.L. Sikri, R.C. Aggarwala, P.R. Krishna Iyyer, Russel W. Maddox and Robert F. Fuquay, Louis Schneider et al.,
Rajni Kothari and others. The book edited by Stewart Ranson, George Jones and Kieran Walsh, Edward P. Wolfers, et. al., L.S Sharpe and B.C. Smith deal with the concept of decentralization in the Western countries. A major study conducted under the Indian Institute of Management, examines the concept of decentralization vis-a-vis local bodies in India. In this category can be included the works of M.A. Muttalib and Mohammed Akbar Alikhan, who jointly published a work on theories of local government. The study, split into eleven chapters, is in the nature of a preface that lays down conceptual analysis of the term ‘local government’ along with its ideological base, decentralization.

The study of these books helps one to distinguish between the ideological differences between the Gandhian vision of a non-exploitative society and the Western concept of political and administrative institutions created through the application of the principle of decentralization. The famous political analyst, G. Shabbir and his team have edited a work on decentralization policy in the ‘Third World’ countries.

Reference should also be made of the studies made by Ravindraprasad, et al., Ms. Padma Ramachandran and M.A. Oommen. They present the agonies of social problems generated by the faulty centralized system of administration at the top, and suggest that the process of decentralization should go down to the grass-root levels. It seems that most of the writers come closer to the Gandhian concept.

The team under Ravindraprasad also provides various facets of administrative thought related to

Kauliya, Wilson, Fayol, Taylor, Weber, Gulick, Urwick, Follet, Mayo, Barnard, Simon McGregor, Argyris, Lickert, Herberg, Riggs-Dron and Mark. Among them the name of Fayol is specially noted for a new theory of Public Administration. According to him the term ‘Gangplank’ refers to the need for level jumping in a hierarchical organisation.

1.3.2. Studies on Local Government

There are many books which deal with the historical background of the Village Panchayats and the evolution of the village communities in ancient India. B.H.Baden Powell, Sir Henry Maine and Charles Metcalfe are the great pioneers who gave comprehensive accounts of India’s grass-root level bodies. K.P.Jayswal, A.S.Altekar, R.K. Mookerji, S.K.Dey, D.D. Kosambi, S. Bhatnagar, Beni Prasad, D.R. Bhandarkar, A.K. Sen have praised the self-governing nature of the ancient Panchayats in their historical background. H.D. Mallaviyya (appointed by the All India Congress Committee) has presented chronologically how the issue of Village Panchayat became a part of the nationalist movement in India. He also refers to the role of Mahatma Gandhi and the other stalwarts of the freedom movement in keeping alive the question of the revival of the Panchayat system. John Mathai has portrayed well the role of Panchayat as the most efficient, self-governing and popular administrative unit competent to adjudicate upon questions, for effecting major settlements at the lower levels.¹

a. Panchayats and Rural Development

Books that examine Panchayat bodies and rural development in their historical perspective are many. G.R. Madan makes a comprehensive survey of rural development in its sociological background. Another book co-authored by him throws light on the impact of the rural bodies on the

life of villagers. A.R. Desai’s book, also written in the social background of India, portrays the rural local bodies of India. In this category can be included works by G.L. Gomme, S. C. Dube, R.V. Jathar, D.C. Sarcar, N. Srenivasan, Ganesh Prasad Surha and R.C. Raychaudhary. R.S. Sharma’s work on Indian feudalism gives an insight into the political, economic and social conditions of India in the rural areas, Michael Edwards also has appraised the historical background of Village Panchayats and the Gandhian thrust upon the traditional Panchayat system.1

b. British Policy towards the rural local bodies

A few documents which include legislative enactments, statements, statutory reports etc., mentioned below describe the policy of the British Government towards the rural local bodies in India.2

In the year 1861, the British Government in India launched some measures to revive the traditional village government with a view to collect the revenue dues from the villagers. The details of the measures taken by the Government are available in the report on Indian constitutional reforms. An Annual edited by Rush Brook Williams gives a pen picture of rural India in the 1920’s. Another work prepared by J. Coatman presents a vivid picture of the progress of self-government in the 1930’s. He also advocates the need for expanding the electoral capacity of the poorest and the humblest of Indian people. The Report of the Statutory Commission (1928), reveals the steps taken by the British Government towards creating responsible self-government and also explains the contrast between the local self-government in England and that in India.


c. Decline of the Indigenous System

There are also some books on Modern Indian History that give an account of the impact of British colonial policy that led to the decline of local government in India. For example, the works of Percival Spear, A.M & S.G. Zaid, and Hugh Tinker reveal the depressing impact of British measures on rural local bodies.

d. Features of the British System

A few books by British writers on the English local government system were also consulted in order to understand the features of the British system. This helped to make a comparative study of the concepts of British pyramidal tier system and the concept of ‘oceanic circles’ in a sort of grid, which Mahatma Gandhi envisaged for India. These include the works of R.M. Jackson, J.A.R. Marriott, M.D. Chalmers, Rt. Hon.C.F.G. Masterman, G.M.Trevelyan, Murphy James and G.D.H. Cole. In fact, G.D.H. Cole raises doubts about the role of rural local bodies as the guarantor of individuals’ freedom of the people of England.²

1.3.3. Literature relating to Gandhi’s views on Gram Swaraj, Panchayat system, Decentralization etc.

Broadly classified, Gandhian literature falls into two groups. (a) Works by Gandhi and (b) Works on Gandhi. The writings of Gandhi mainly include three books—the Hind Swaraj or Indian Home Rule, An Autobiography or The Story of My Experiments with Truth, Sathyagraha in South Africa. However, Gandhi’s views evolved and developed in the course of six long decades have been conveyed through innumerable articles, speeches, letters and reports of interviews most of which have been published through the columns of journals and periodicals like the Indian Opinion, Young India,


Navajivan and the Harijan, which were edited by Gandhi himself. Most of his speeches and writings have been compiled as the *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* in 95 volumes by the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, which form a veritable treasure house of knowledge on Gandhian ideas. These primary sources on Gandhian works have been consulted for preparing this dissertation.

Studies on Gandhi far exceed the quantum of works by the Mahatma. These include volumes, numbering thousands by Indian and foreign authors, admirers, and critics. The present study being confined to Gandhi’s views on *Gram Swaraj*, *Panchayat* system, and decentralization, the use of literature on Gandhi has been selective.

Gandhian concepts of Democratic Decentralization and *Gram Swaraj* (the keynote of which is that power must belong to the people) and the *Panchayat* system, its administrative model, have been presented in detail by eminent Gandhians like Vinoba Bhave, Jayaprakash Narayan, J.B. Kripalani, D.G. Tendulkar, Pyarelal, J.C. Kumarappa, and J.D. Sethi, B.R. Nanda.¹


Articles on Gandhi’s writings have been compiled by well-known scholars like S. Radhakrishnan, G. Ramachandran and T.K. Mahadevan. Most of the writers have focussed on Gandhi’s opposition to the pyramidal organizations of society and polity and his option for concentric circles. His vision of Gram Swaraj and Panchayat system has also been examined.

Gandhi’s views on appropriate technology and small scale production has found a powerful exponent in the German thinker (economist), Schumacher who fully subscribes to the view that the poor


of the world be helped not by mass production, but by production by the masses. 1 The Gandhian views, no doubt, have their critics as well. 2 While the imperialist writers have tried to belittle his contributions, the Marxist school has been reluctant till recent times to assign to Gandhian ideas a place of importance or relevance.

A review of these studies has helped in making a proper appraisal of Gandhi’s views on decentralization.

1.3.4. Literature on Panchayati Raj

The rich literature on Panchayat system in the post-British period includes national and regional studies, case studies, reports, research projects at micro and macro levels etc. Some of them are of a general nature while the others are of topical relevance.

The general studies on Panchayati Raj provide a textual treatment of the subject. These studies cover almost all aspects of Panchayati Raj Institutions and examine some of the ‘consequences’ of Panchayati Raj in the social, political and administrative spheres of rural India. They also examine the case for democratic decentralization, the process of local government administration and the problems of grass-root level planning as well as the pattern of emerging leadership. They analyse some of the significant questions concerning the conceptual frame-work and the institutional set up.

The various literatures on Panchayati Raj under the category deal with the local institution at the macro level. They refer to matters like the democratic politics in India, the tendency on the part of the central and the state governments to retain maximum possible control over the local institution through the bureaucrats and the leaders belonging to ruling parties.

Carl H. Taylor has stated that in the post-independence period the Panchayat system stands eclipsed by the multiple programmes under the ‘Community Development Programme’ causing a

deviation from the Gandhian emphasis on 'Gram Swaraj.' This view has been shared by many writers. They include G.S. Halappa, Rajeshwar Dayal, G. Ram Reddy, M. Shiviah et al., T.N. Chaturvedi, Douglas Esminger and Iqbal Narain. The series of documents on Panchayati Raj published by the National Institute of Rural Development (Hyderabad) give a glimpse into the functioning of Panchayati Raj at the national level, various committees set up at the national/regional levels, major reports etc.\(^3\)

The case studies conducted by reputed scholars like B.S. Bhargava in Rajasthan, Mario D. Zamora in Uttar Pradesh, Ralph H. Retzalff, V.G. Nandekar and N.R. Inamdar in Maharashtra, S.P. Jain in Assam, B.N. Sahay in Nagaland, present faithful chronicles of cross currents at the grass-root level which nourished the top roots of the decentralized democratic institution in India.\(^4\)

Decentralized planning at the Panchayat level has become a major area of specialization recently. Many writers have brought out the importance of decentralized planning for the healthy growth of Panchayat system in India which can assure, citizen's participation. They observe that

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   a) *Summaries of Major Reports* (P.R. DOC 001)
   b) *Salient Features of Panchayati Raj Acts* (P.R. DOC 002)
   c) *Structural Patterns* (P.R. DOC 003).
   d) *Decentralization and Development Administration* (P.R. DOC 021)
   e) *Panchayati Raj and Programme Implementation* (P.R. DOC 023)
   f) *Woman and Panchayati Raj* (P.R. DOC 024).
   g) *Direct Vs. Indirect Election to PR Bodies* (P.R. DOC 025)
   h) *The Idea of Mandal Panchayat* (P.R. DOC 026)
   i) *Panchayat Raj Leadership* (P.R. DOC 27)
   j) *Interface between Officials and Non-Officials* (P.R. DOC 28)
   k) *Panchayati Raj and Political parties* (P.R. DOC 29)


decentralized planning is the means of promoting people's participation and co-operation. To them there exists a close nexus between democracy and district planning, between development and district planning, and between decentralization and district planning. They also view that mass participation is the channel through which people ensure their effective influence on the decision-making process at all levels of social activity and social institution. Participation is more broadbased than going to polls. Here the writers come closer to Gandhian thought on decentralization and village uplift.

B.P.S. Bhadouria has edited a book which contains a series of essays on decentralized planning and the Panchayat system in India. C. Harichandran examines the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions as the units of planning in rural sector in Tamil Nadu. C.K. Renukaya, Vasant Desai, Ms. Snehalatha Pandia and others have brought out the need for decentralized planning at the Panchayat level on the Gandhian model. Henry Maddick clearly brings out the difference between the Nehruvian approach in planning and the Gandhian vision of Gram Swaraj. He views that, by a meaningful decentralized planning at the village level, the rural local bodies can play a vital role in promoting social change, economic development and intelligent administration. S.K. Dey, too, portrays an evolving pattern of Indian democracy from the Gram Sabha to the Lok Sabha. To him democracy, which has no roots in the people, is at best short lived, if not totally illusory. He is deeply committed to the Gandhian concept of democratic decentralization in its decentralized perspective.

Pondy Papers in Social Sciences, published from the Institute Francais de Pondicherry, on decentralization deals with the multi-level planning in South India.

The success of democratic institution at the village level in Karnataka, West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir has been highlighted by George Mathew. His views, with the focus on the devolution of authority on Panchayati Raj Institutions, assume special significance against the background of the

recent efforts by several state governments to radicalize the working of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, while frequently invoking the Gandhian concept of decentralization.

This study has also utilised the following journals, in analysing the concepts of decentralization, and the Gandhian views on development and planning at the lower levels.

* Development and Change,
* Yojana,
* Economic and Political Weekly,
* Alternatives,
* Breakthrough,
* Main Stream,
* Journal of Rural Development,
* Quarterly journal of the All India Institute of Local Self - Government,
* Gandhi Marg,
* Man & Development,
* Kuru. khetra,
* Indian Journal of Public Administration,
* International Social Science Journal,
* The Indian Historical Review.

1.3.5. Literature on the Village System in Kerala, (Travancore, Cochin and Malabar).

The available literature on the subject can be classified into Primary (official records) and the Secondary Sources (other materials). The study depends more on official records that include Archival records, Acts, Rules, Proclamations, Assembly Proceedings, Statistics, Year Books, Census Report, Administration Reports, Study Team Reports, series of Gazetteers (Kerala State) and the Manuals. A large number of secondary sources like History text books, both on Kerala and South India, doctoral dissertations, articles, journals and newspapers, also were consulted.

Historical writings on Kerala and South India are valuable sources of information to this study, which immensely helped the researcher to prepare an account of the historical background of local
bodies in the erstwhile Travancore, Cochin and Malabar regions of Kerala. The Books on South India were consulted because, Kerala, during this period, formed part of the larger unit of 'Thanizhakam' (Tamil Land).

During the Sangom Age, the people of a village who could not be in any sense effectively governed by the King all the time, governed themselves through the rich experienced, influential and sufficiently wise men of the locality. According to scholars, these are the rudiments of village autonomy and rural local self-government in Tamizhakam. One gets a detailed account of the lower level body — Mahasabha, which had functioned at Utteramellur in Cingalepet District (Tamil Nadu), and also a vivid picture of the self-governing institutions under the Pallava rulers. The main works include that of N. Subramaniyan, Rao Bahadur S.Krishna Swamy Ai yangar, R. Gopalan and Krishna Swamy Ai yangar, C. Minakshi, T.V. Mahalingam and T.K. Ravindran, et al.¹

Some of the literary works in the later period like those of Nobouru Karashima and his associates, Y. Subbarayalu, S. Saraswathy and others have reinforced the view that the South Indian Villages were little republics where social reproduction was maintained by the combination of agriculture and manufacture². However, their mutual dependence on one another induces one to think that villages were not primary units where social reproduction of the people was maintained and to which villager's social activities were confined. The Administration Report of Madras Presidency, related to local government, provides useful information on the functioning of Village Panchayats in Malabar.

The literary sources which deal with the history, features and the functioning of local bodies in early Kerala are plenty. Burton Stein and George Woodcock state that early rural

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settlements in Kerala were only residential clusters formed around large rice fields, and were not similar to the North Indian cluster of houses, assembled or accumulated in one particular area. The sources also give details of Brahmin settlers from the north, split up into 64 Grammams (villages) and how the semi-tribal society under them was gradually developed into the typical Hindu mould with innumerable castes and sub-castes existing in a complex village economy. They also give details of grass-root level institutions like Taras, Cheris, Ur or Sabhai, Paratai and other community gatherings, which have functioned as units of social life. While some scholars like L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer, Kesavan Veluthat, view that the early form of the 'Panchayat bodies' were in the nature of caste councils and temple centered village bodies, others, including earlier scholars like Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai and T.V. Mahalingom, William Logan, M/s. Ward and Conners, T.M. Satchit, K.M. Panikkar, P. Sangoony Menon, S. Ramanathan Iyyer, K.P. Padmanabha Menon, K.V. Krishna Iyyer and the later scholars like A. Sreedhara Menon, and the editors of Kerala Gazetters, Adoor Ramachandran Nair and C.K. Kareem, have represented these councils to be democratic (popular) and secular assemblies.

With the launching of statutory census system residential village known as Kara or Muri was adopted as the territorial unit in rural area and the Panchayats were relegated. Rao Sahib. N. Kunjan Pillai, who was the census commissioner of Travancore looks upon villages, as revenue divisions rather

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than as units of democratic bodies. He says that there is no village in Travancore in the strict sense of the term, 'village' i.e., a cluster of houses.

The present study relies also on Census Reports of the years 1891-1991, the details from which have been cited in the appropriate context.

The Acts, Regulations and Proclamations by the sovereigns, the Proceedings of the Diwans of Cochin and Travancore States and the Legislative Proceedings from the Cochin and Travancore were consulted in order to reconstruct the historical continuity of Kerala Panchayats in the pre-independence period.† 'Memorandum on the Revision of Village Establishments with the Diwan’s Orders of 1909" gives a detailed account of villages.

As given above, a wide body of literature on post-independent Kerala Panchayats have been used for this study. Among them, there are only a very few macro or micro level or analytical studies on Kerala Panchayat system by academicians, activists, researchers or specialists. The present study therefore, relies much on official literatures, like the Annual Administration Reports of the Panchayat Department, ‘Panchayat Manuals’, Administrative Reforms Committee Reports 1957, 1965 and 1988 and various literatures published from the Public Relations Department, Government of Kerala, Sastra Sahitya Parishad, the State Planning Board, Thiruvananthapuram, and a few working papers available at the Centre for Development studies, Thiruvananthapuram.\(^2\) The Kerala Legislative Council

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1. Among many Regulations issued by the Sovereigns of Cochin and Travancore, those of 1914 and 1925 deserve special mention because they were the very base of subsequent regulations. The Cochin Village Panchayat Act was the first Act ever enacted in the Princely State of India. The Act of 1925 (Travacore) was also a pioneering venture in Travancore State.


Proceedings, available in many volumes at the Kerala Legislature Library, Thiruvananthapuram, also deal with the process of decentralization till date which form a major part of the source materials for its study.

1.3.6. Studies on Rural Local Bodies in Kerala.

Among the special studies on Kerala Panchayat administration, Ms. Visalakshy’s post-doctoral thesis\(^1\) can well be called a pioneering work. K. Thulaseedharan’s study on Kerala gives insight into rural society and the role of Panchayats. K. Sukumaran Nair’s elaborate work on rural politics is very informative. He concludes that the Panchayat President in Kerala is more like a quasi-chief executive in England. Ms. Radha’s doctoral thesis gives an account of the evolution of Local Government in Travancore. N.K. Bhaskaran, in his doctoral dissertation, has also analysed the democratic movement in Travancore.\(^2\)

G. Karunakaran Pillai took up a study on financial standing of Kerala Panchayats, their sources of income, and other matters. Recently Ms. Padma Ramachandran and M.A. Oommen jointly edited a book on issues of development administration, V. Ramachandran, in one of the articles, says that people’s participation is essential for successful administration.

Neelamperoor Ramakrishnan Nair has edited a book on Kerala Panchayat which is mainly a historical narration\(^3\). It deals with the early history of local bodies like sabhas and variyams which he calls as the very beginning of the modern Panchayat system. He says that fundamental principles in the administration of a Panchayat are democratization and devolution. C.K. Varghese also describes

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the Kerala Panchayat system in its historical setting.¹

The book edited by N. Jose Chander is a collection of six articles. The work seeks to bring out the major dynamic forces at play in the politics of Kerala State.² The rural structure in Kerala is unique, having no nucleated village. This settlement pattern according to him, is peculiar because of the property relations in Kerala.

The present study also relies on a selection of journals, published by the Public Relations Department and the Panchayat Department of the Government of Kerala³ and all the ‘Background Papers’ presented at the ‘Seminar on Panchayati Raj/Nagar Palika Bill and its Implications for Local Self-Government and Decentralized Developments in Kerala’ held on October 2 & 3, 1993 at the Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram.⁴

Inspite of the fact that there is an array of literature on Kerala state, there are also sufficient reasons to believe that the study on rural local bodies has not become popular in Kerala. The general survey on literature pertaining to Kerala Panchayats brings to light the following points:

1) Very few historical or statistical or other studies have been made on Kerala Panchayats;

2) The available literature, specially some studies on Panchayat’s structure and functioning are not systematically arranged or updated;

3) The literature directly related to the process of decentralization are very few, and even the few literature that refer to democratic decentralization at the state level do not say much about the Gandhian concept;

4) Among the academicians in Kerala, the theme has not become very popular, though in other states a vast number of researchers are engaged in Panchayat studies. Therefore the state is lacking in areas like Case Studies, Team Reports, Evaluation Reports, etc.

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3. Janapatham(Malayalam), Kerala Public Relations Department, Trivandrum; Kerala Calling,(Malayalam) Public Relations Department, Trivandrum; Panchayati Raj (Malayalam) Kerala Panchayat Department, Trivandrum.
1.4.0. **Research Problem and Hypothesis:**

The problem analysed in this study is related to the nature and functioning of rural local bodies in India, in general and the state of Kerala, in particular. The inquiry converges on the predicament engendered by confused and conflicting views on administrative decentralization, with the focus on conditions distinctive to the state of Kerala.

The concept of decentralization which was developed under British rule in India envisioned the local bodies as agents of the central government. Hence, reforms relating to local self-government did not conceive of autonomy at the grass-root level, notwithstanding the legacy of self-governing ancient Indian Village Panchayats. Despite the forceful advocacy of a model of decentralization in tune with the traditions of India, ensuring self rule and freedom in the real sense, by Mahatma Gandhi, the fortunes of local bodies in India did not change even after the attainment of independence. The preference for a model of material progress and development involving greater assistance for science and technology and heavy industrialization, necessitating a highly centralized administrative system, and conceptions of villages as dens of ignorance and backwardness unfit for self-government, created setbacks to the concept of decentralization advanced by Mahatma Gandhi, which visualized a commonwealth of self-reliant and autonomous village republics in free India. The Gandhian ideals embodied in the concept of Gram Swaraj envisioned Village Panchayats primarily as bulwarks against inroads into the freedom of the ordinary citizens. With the rejection of the Gandhian view in toto, Swaraj or self-government in its true sense, remains an unrealized ideal. Of late, however, there has been a rethinking on the relative merits of the model of development which has held sway over the Indian national scene, as in most other developed countries. The adverse effects of the unbridled use of the avenues opened by science and technology, unfolding vistas of material progress, have provoked campaigns for restraint. Happily, the ideals of Mahatma Gandhi have been invoked time and again in this process of rethinking, which has assumed a universal character. The drift away from concepts favouring heavy industries, large scale technology and administrative centralization should facilitate a rethinking on concepts of decentralization and individual freedom. The problem analysed in this study claims relevance in the context of a general rethinking on subjects, relating to the area which has begun to gain acceptance among large sections of intellectuals the world over.
Although steps in administrative decentralization in Kerala during the post-independence period, as noted earlier, were generally in line with the trends set at the national level, popular views in the state have been conspicuous by the recognition of the relevance of the Gandhian model of rural administration. Small wonder that, the statutory committee constituted by the Government of Kerala in 1957 to propose measures and methods for decentralization in the state set for itself the objective of realising the Gandhian dream of Gram Swaraj in the state of Kerala. The Proceedings of the state Legislature following the introduction of the Panchayat Bill in 1960 reflected the general enthusiasm for the model of decentralization as envisioned by the Mahatma.

Even though the administrators have been hesitant to translate the ideal into reality and to take earnest efforts to strengthen the agencies of local government, the Gandhian ideal has remained unchallenged at the conceptual level and remains to be invoked by intellectuals and politicians even to this day. In this context, special mention may be made of the recent announcement of the Government of Kerala of a scheme of securing Swashraya Gramas or self-reliant and self-sufficient villages in the state providing for the planning and implementation of all developmental schemes at the village level itself.

The main argument against Gandhian vision was that the Indian villages were backward and the villagers illiterate. However, Kerala state is an exception to this general estimation of Indian villages. There is a congenial environment for the introduction and promotion of the concept of decentralization in Kerala in its true sense as envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi because of the following factors:

* The state presents a highly literate and politically conscious and responsive population inhabiting the numerous villages;

* The state has the advantage of having large village Panchayats in terms of territory and population, different from the isolated clusters of houses representing villages in most other parts of the country;

* The rural-urban continuum of Kerala, highlighted in most of the Census Reports, presents a situation of advanced infrastructural facilities in most of the rural areas of the state.

* In Kerala, the scope of the Village Panchayats has been increasing year after year with the
advent of more and more schemes. They have taken up very ambitious projects like the One Lakh Housing Scheme and also have won many laurels in the yesteryears.

* The Panchayats in Kerala are known for their efficient collection of taxes and proper accounting of the same;

* The state is perhaps the earliest one to enact land reforms and to eliminate the blemish of landlordism; absence of such enactments are usually said to be the reason for imbalances in the society;

The existence of Commercial Banks, Primary Credit Societies, Housing societies, Transportation facilities and the availability of highly trained agricultural and medical personnel even in the rural areas of Kerala is unparalleled in the other rural parts of India.

Kerala has followed a path of development different from the rest of the country. The state has the highest general rate of literacy and education in India. The social consumption of people of all levels of income is high. The physical quality of life of the people is the highest in Kerala compared to that in other states in the country. The state is highly placed in several respects. This congenial environment, for an overture and elevation of the concept of decentralization in its true sense as a model of development, envisaged by Mahatma Gandhi, has been selected for a special study with a view to analysing the viability of autonomous functioning of Village Panchayats.

1.5.0. Objectives

The objectives may be listed as follows:

(a) An examination of the extent to which the Panchayat administration in India is influenced in its policies and decisions by Mahatma Gandhi’s concept of Gram Swaraj and also the mandate of the Article 40 of the Indian Constitution. (b) The extent to which the Government of India is responsive to the vision of Mahatma Gandhi on decentralization of power at the Panchayat level and the consequent need to convert the local bodies, as the effective mechanisms guaranteeing peoples’ participation rather than as units of administration. (c) The process of decentralization of power at the Panchayat level in Kerala vis-a-vis the Gandhian concept. (d) How far the state of Kerala presents a picture, favourable to imbibe Gandhian philosophy. (e) The extent to which the aims and objectives of grass-roots democracy are fulfilled in practice, the
that gaps still exist and how these can be bridged.

The question of decentralization of power at the sub-state levels has been a live issue since 1957. This has become recently a very live issue among the political parties, both ruling and opposition, and also among the administrators, but surprisingly not among the academicians in the state. So it is appropriate to analyse the very concept as visualized by the Father of the Nation and examine what the state actually follows in the matter of rural local administration.

1.6.0. Importance of the Study

In the context of Kerala State, the field has so far remained somewhat unexplored in the sense that no one seems to have worked on the process of decentralization of power at the Panchayat level, vis-a-vis the Gandhian vision of Gram Swaraj. Also, it seems that most of the concepts which were set afloat by Mahatma Gandhi like decentralization, grass-root level democracy, Gram Swaraj, people’s participation in decision-making and the like have not been properly comprehended by the decision-makers at the upper levels or the villagers at the lower levels. As such, a good deal of confusion prevails at all levels regarding their exact meaning or connotations. As mentioned above, it seems that barring some legislators, few have worked on the viability of Gandhian vision of Gram Swaraj in the peculiar politico-economic and social background of Kerala state. The lofty vision of Gandhi has not found a proper place in the latest report (1988) on measures to be taken for decentralization in Kerala state at the Panchayat level. The concepts of Mahatma Gandhi in the context of the process of decentralization efforts in Kerala state need clarification. Very recently, the Government of Kerala, after invoking the vision of Mahatma Gandhi, also announced a scheme of self reliant, self-sufficient villages in Kerala where all developmental schemes including planning would be done at the village level itself. These situations necessitated this study and herein lies its importance.

1.7.0. Study Area

It is impossible to ignore the past and take up a theoretical analysis on the present day functioning of any institution. One has to delve deep into history to understand the details on development in yester years. The study is being conducted in the wider context of the perspective of a historical analysis of
the functioning of rural local bodies at the national and state levels which is followed by the study on Kerala State. It includes a study on the three main streams of thought in India --- the colonial, the Gandhian and the trans-1947 period in relation to the concept of decentralization of power, which has percolated down to the state level.

This study does not attempt a dialectical treatment of the conceptual parameters of decentralization, different approaches, issues or compulsions. On the other hand it deals with the concept and idea in its generic forms and specific connotations in the context of decentralized functionality of local bodies in India in general, and in the state of Kerala in particular. It is restricted to Gandhian ideology pertaining to Gram Swaraj, Panchayat system, decentralization and democratic decentralization and the concept of power vis-a-vis functioning of rural local bodies. The study is intended to analyse and assess the gap between the lofty vision of Mahatma Gandhi and the actuality, with particular reference to Kerala. It is required to extend the study at the national level, in order to analyse the policy perspectives on decentralization and their impact on Kerala state. As such the study is extended to local self-government in India and the process of decentralization effected during the pre-British, British and post-independence periods.

The study on Kerala includes a sub-section on the historicity of the local bodies in Kerala, decentralization of power at the Panchayat level in two phases, 1950-1971, and 1971-1992. The study then narrows down to the Karumalloor Panchayat level (Ernakulam District). The last part of the study deals with a review of the Gandhian vision of Gram Swaraj vis-a-vis the Kerala Panchayats and the various Committees, Reports etc.

1.3.0. Methodology and Style of Format

The study is largely historical. A case study is also employed to support the main conclusion reached in the thesis. The style is mainly descriptive with occasional comments where the ideas have to be placed in a theoretical perspective. It relies very much on primary data and wherever necessary, secondary data has been used to supplement the former. Abundant primary sources are available on Gandhian thought. These include writings by Gandhi and writings on Gandhi. The Acts and proclamations issued by the Maharajas of Travancore and Cochin are available in the Kerala state
Archives, and the Regional Archives, Thiruvananthapuram and Cochin. Malabar became a district directly under the British in 1792 (treaty of Srirangapatanam with Tippu Sultan). Some of the acts enacted by the British Government are available in the Regional Archives, Kozhikkode. The reports of the various commissions, committees and study teams conducted by the Union and State Governments were of help in obtaining first hand information about the structural and functional aspects of the Panchayat Institutions. The census data, and survey reports have been used to understand the general characteristics of the Village Panchayats, population, rural-urban ratio etc.

A case study, which analyses the functioning of a Panchayat is one of the most satisfactory methods of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the Panchayat Institutions in a state. Studies based on this method would provide an opportunity to a researcher to understand an institution at close quarters, and help the investigator to get an insight into the actual working of the system. In the present study the Case Study Method has been used in one Panchayat for an assessment of democratic functioning at the micro level. This has helped to highlight the problems affecting the Panchayats, under the present mode of decentralized administration. The Karumalloor Panchayat in Ernakulam revenue district has been selected as the area for a case study because of the researcher's familiarity with the Panchayat and the district.

Interviews were conducted with the administrators, officials, non-officials, scholars, social scientists and Gandhian activists. They were contacted several times to discuss the relevant problems. Administrators include the Minister of Local Administration, Kerala and the West Bengal States, civil servants, both retired and in service. The Director of Panchayats, Kerala state was consulted to discuss certain problems. Some renowned historians were interviewed to clarify some problems related to the historicity of village assemblies. Discussions with the specialists who had their research studies on Panchayat functioning in different states, helped the researcher to obtain information on the structural and functional aspects of the Panchayati Raj in the states like Maharashtra, Karnataka and Rajasthan. Discussions with the Gandhian activists helped the researcher to clarify some ideas. Newspaper reports and view-points expressed by different writers and political leaders have been used in drawing suggestions and conclusions.

The secondary data used for the present study have been collected mainly from the libraries.
They include the National Institute of Rural Development (NIRD) Library at Hyderabad; the Centre for Development Studies, the Kerala University Library, the Kerala Legislature Library, the Public Library at Thiruvananthapuram; Mahatma Gandhi University Library at Kottayam; the Kerala History Association Library, the Public Library at Ernakulam; the Union Christian College Library at Alwaye; the Kerala Institute of Local Administration Library (KILA) at Trichur; the Postak Bhandar (Gandhi Library) at Wardha, Nagpur.

The format of the thesis is mainly based on the widely used ‘MLA documentation style’ and the mechanics of writing recommended by the Modern Language Association of America for the writing of Research Papers. The chapters are divided into numbered sections and sub-sections for easy readability. Foot notes are given on the relevant pages for ready reference.

Conclusion:

This study is focussed mainly on the process of decentralization of power in the state of Kerala since its formation in 1956. However, a proper study or analysis of the advancement achieved in decentralization and the hesitancy in accelerating the process of democratization of the rural local bodies compel its presentation in the wider context of a national vision of administrative decentralization. The preference to treat local bodies as agents of a centralized administrative system, as opposed to the Gandhian vision of parallel layers of autonomous and self-reliant Village Panchayats, has been traced to its roots with a view to unfold the confusion and contradiction which characterize the views of policymakers on decentralization. An area where a process of serious rethinking can be initiated is the state of Kerala where, despite apparent hesitation, a congenial situation presents itself. This work represents an attempt to bring to focus the issues of conflict on administrative decentralization and to present the state of Kerala as a field for their possible resolution.

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