CHAPTER ONE

Introduction
A. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Since independence greater emphasis has been laid on the socio-economic planning policy of our country for creating an appropriate rural infra-structure and promoting an overall development. In view of this, community development programme was launched on 02 October, 1952 with a view to evoke popular enthusiasm and co-operation in the process of socio-economic advancement of the country. However, the well thought out community development programme failed to enthuse people and enlist their participation in its working.
The development of panchayati raj can be said to be the logical outcome of the community development programme (CDP). With the rise of panchayati raj (PR) a new phase of local government was ushered in by democratic decentralisation to make the lower units of administration more popularly elected, more socially broad based and more engaged in the wider range of activities than hitherto. Panchayati raj has passed through four distinct phases within its short span of life - the phase of ascendency (1959-1964), the phase of stagnation (1964-1969), the phase of decline (1969-1983) and the phase of revival (1983 onwards).

The phase of ascendency witnessed an important landmark in the history of PR. The basic pillars of the PR structure were erected in a constructive and future oriented style during this period. This period started with the implementation of Balwantrai Mehta committee. It recommended a three tiered system of rural local government. After the phase of ascendency the PRIs passed through the phase of stagnation. Unfortunately no serious attempts or efforts were made neither to revamp nor to revitalise the PR structure. Since mid sixties, the PR had been in a low profile. As a form of local government, it has fallen out of favour everywhere except in Gujarat, and Maharashtra where it had been relatively more successful. The stagnation is the result of some basic reasons, which will be discussed in
detail in the second chapter. The third phase in the history of the PR is the period of decline (1969-83). No serious efforts were made to revamp PRI s in early seventies during congress rule at centre. The appointment of Ashoka Mehta committee in 1977 by Janata Government at centre to revitalise the PR structure was the only major step taken in this direction, during this period. The Ashoka Mehta committee, submitted its report in 1978, but due to the political change, the report was not implemented. After the submission of Ashoka Mehta report, the phase of decline witnessed a few more significant developments - ie, the chief minister's conference 1979 and the appointment of Hanumantha Rao committee in 1983. Panchayati Raj in India, entered into its last but latest phase of revival from 1983 onwards. Non congress governments in states like Karnataka (1985) and Andhra Pradesh (1986) made appreciable efforts to rejuvenate the PR structure in their respective areas. Under the prime ministership of Rajiv Gandhi, congress as an all India party could not ignore this new trend taking place at the grass roots level of Indian democracy. In view of the general elections in 1989, serious attempts were made by the central government, to involve PRIs in the mainstream of Indian politics. This process led to the formation of a series of steps on the part of the central government in connection with PR institutions, which include, the appoint-

In the midst of these heartening developments at the centre and some of her neighbouring states including Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh, the Left Democratic Front (LDF) government in Kerala appointed a committee under the Chairmanship of V. Ramachandran, former chief secretary of Kerala, in April 1988. It was expected to advise the government on the measures to be taken for democratic decentralisation at the district and lower levels.

B. THEME OF THE STUDY

All these happenings - both at the national and state levels - were good enough to stir the present researcher to think in the direction of having an overall study of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Kerala. They possess certain unique features such as - high population with high level of rural literacy, political consciousness and comparatively low level rural-urban dichotomy, which distinguish it from
the rest of India. While in other states, the population of a panchayat normally ranges between 1,000 and 5,000 but in Kerala it is between 10,000 to 25,000. This has helped the Kerala panchayats to become viable units of local self government both financially and administratively. It has also helped in the formation of a sound basic unit of planning and administration in the villages. There are administrative provisions in the Kerala Panchayat Act enabling the elected representatives to have some supervisory powers over the executive officer. The president and vice president have been directed not to accept any remuneration for the various services rendered by them, except for the prescribed sitting allowance approved by the Government.

Because of the formidable, empirical and theoretical variety of writings on panchayati raj, Seshadri says, "literature on panchayati raj can fill a whole godown of the Indian warehousing corporation". He is right in the sense that in states like Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Rajasthan, reputed scholars of Panchayati Raj have done wide academic enquiries in this field. But in certain states like Kerala only limited enquiries have been made. Except a few research papers, and reports of some government committees, only two major descriptive studies concentrating on Kerala were done so far. It shows that PR in Kerala, has not attracted the researchers for the reasons
unknown. However, this is an attempt on the part of this researcher to present before the scholars as well as those who are interested in PR, a thorough picture of PR in Kerala. The researcher intends to fill up the gap in literature about Kerala PR and therefore attempts to make a macro level study of Panchayati Raj.

C. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The idea behind this work is obviously to stimulate in the researcher and general reader a deeper interest and insight in the problems of grass root democracy in general and panchayat administration in particular. It is taken up at a time when Kerala panchayat system has entered a new era of revival with the recent decision of Kerala Government to implement District Administration Act*. As referred earlier, though a few studies were done decades back on Kerala Panchayati Raj, it mainly concentrated only on some historical and financial aspects of the village panchayat system, but no effort was made so far to cover up the overall picture of PRIs in Kerala. Hence, the present study hopes to fill this existing lacuna. This excavation will be useful for academic, administrative and practical purposes.

*For details see Appendix No.III, which reflects on the revolutionary step taken by the Govt. of Kerala (1991) to transform the one tier system of PR into two tiers.
Historically village panchayat which is the basic unit under any form of local institutions, has been functioning in Kerala, as in other parts of India since time immemorial. A knowledge of this basic link in the governmental hierarchy should therefore be regarded as an indispensable prerequisite for an efficient and effective administrative system in a democratic polity like ours. It is at the village level that 80% of the people come into direct contact and close relations with the administrative machinery.

In this study a modest attempt is made not only to survey historically the growth and decay of ancient village panchayats but also to discuss analytically the present structure, functions, powers, personnel, problems, financial management and people's participation. The researcher has also paid attention to discuss the role of panchayati raj institutions in connection with pollution problem and weaker sections, both are new areas of concern now a days. Therefore, it may give a new dimension to the hitherto traditional studies of PR in Indian literature. After reviewing the overall picture of PR and its working since its inception to the present day the researcher has also tried to throw light on its short comings and possible remedies in final conclusions.
D. MODE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Since this work is a macro level one for an overall study of PRIs in the state, data were collected from the concerned departments of the state government especially panchayat administration, rural development, and local administration. Moreover, census reports, notes placed before the state legislature by the panchayat department, basic statistics on panchayat development, annual administration reports were also used. Besides the sources of materials outlined above, various Acts, reports of several commissions and committees, relevant books and journal articles were also taken into account. To get a realistic picture of the PRIs, the researcher has paid special attention to establish personal contacts with almost all the officers, who are connected with panchayati raj institutions (A detailed list is given in acknowledgement).

The main objectives of the present study are:

1. to present the overall picture of PR in Kerala;
2. to assess authorities, powers and functions enjoyed by the PR bodies in the state;
3. to examine the relationship of bureaucracy with PR bodies;
4. to analyse the financial position and problems of the PR bodies;
5. to measure the extent of public participation and cooperation with these bodies with special reference to elections;
6. to find out whether PRIs have served as instruments of rural development in general and uplifting of weaker sections in particular.

E. OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

The study is divided into ten chapters. The first is an introductory one.

The second chapter depicts the historical growth of panchayat institutions in India right from Vedas to VP Singh as briefly as possible.

The third chapter intends to focus attention to the position of PR in Kerala. This chapter is divided into two parts - first half is devoted to analyse the growth of panchayat raj in Kerala during the pre-integration period and the second half is for post integration period (1956-1990).

The fourth chapter is devoted to analyse the structure, powers, functions and authorities of the PR bodies in Kerala.

The focus of attention of the fifth chapter is on Bureaucracy and its relation to Panchayati raj.
Financial organization of the PR system both of the revenue and expenditure is given in the sixth chapter.

The seventh chapter is devoted to analyse the role of people and their participation in the panchayat raj institutions of Kerala.

After putting before the reader the overall picture of PR in Kerala from second to seventh chapters, the researcher has given a special treatment to analyse the two most important problems - the role of PRIs in checking pollution in chapter eight and significance of rural development and weaker sections in PRIs in chapter nine.

The last concluding chapter presents briefly the major findings of the study relevant to different chapters. In view of these findings it also throws light on the present problems of PR in Kerala with suggestions to solve them. The concluding remarks takes care of the prospects of PR in Kerala.

F. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Government Publications:

In Kerala, the government so far appointed four major committees on panchayati raj and related affairs viz. administrative reforms committee (1958), administrative reorga-
nisation and economy committee (1967), panchayat finance commission (1985) and the committee for the democratic decentralisation at the district and lower levels (1988)*.

The administrative reforms committee\(^2\) reached the conclusion that, the mandatory functions or compulsory duties of the panchayats should be those which can be performed by them from out of their own resources and with their own staff. This will make the panchayats responsible fully both for their formulation and execution. It follows that there will be full devolution of powers to the panchayats in the area of mandatory functions. They should not include any of the agency functions or functions which are to be vested in a higher body. In the exercise of these functions, the panchayats should have sufficient administrative powers. In the fields of social service programmes and development work panchayats should function with executive responsibility as agents of government. It will be the responsibility of the panchayats to formulate the programmes of development in these matters and in other items of development work like agricultural production, animal husbandry and village industries etc.

*See Appendix Nos.I to V for the recommendations made by the different committees.
The administrative reorganisation and economy committee made an indepth study of the reduction in administrative expenditure and suggested steps for achieving maximum economy compatible with security, efficiency and the paramount needs of the planned development of the state. The committee suggested a series of recommendations.

The panchayat finance commission 1985 has made detailed enquiry in the whole affairs relating to panchayat finance, which includes - assessment of the existing panchayat services and amenities and their cost, assessment of the gap between existing resources and cost of services and amenities at satisfactory standards, examination of the present panchayat taxation structure and suggestions for augmenting the resources of panchayats etc. The committee suggested several recommendations. Important among them are (a) government may consider the request for availing institutional finances from those panchayats whose annual establishment cost have not exceeded their self raised income for the preceding three years (b) the elected bodies should be vested with adequate financial powers to carry out smoothly the obligatory and discretionary functions (c) government should make available the 'specific purpose grant' to the eligible panchayats every year as per the approved norms and the grant should not be allowed to lapse.
V. Ramachandran committee⁵ was constituted in April, 1988 to advise government on the measures to be taken for democratic decentralisation at the district and lower levels. The committee reached the conclusion that, there are basic conceptual and practical difficulties in declaring the president of the panchayat as the Executive Authority of the Panchayat. But the position of the president as the Executive head of the panchayat under whose general supervision and control, the officers and staff will work, may be recognised and specific provision made in the Act. The committee further recommended, the rules framed under the Kerala Panchayat Act that have severely hedged in the panchayat between the executive officer on the one hand and the departmental officers on the other. A committee may be appointed to suggest comprehensive revision of the rules in order to enhance the functional freedom of panchayats.

Individual Studies

There is another study by N.R. Visalakshi⁶ on the administration of village panchayats in Kerala. In this work Visalakshi tried to present a lucid and comprehensive account of the growth of rural local government of the state in a historical perspective. After analysing it, the author came to the conclusion that, "ours is no longer a police state nor a stagnant society; we are committed to the 'welfare state', though the goal is yet to be realised. We are living in a developing society which is in the throes of a multiphased,
constructive revolution in all spheres of human life. Many ancient institutions, the most conspicuous of which being the village panchayat, has, of late, been in the process of revival and reorientation to keep pace with the challenging needs of the changing society.7

An attempt has been made by G. Karunakaran Pillai8 to analyse the major economic issues relating to the needs, resources and utilisation of funds of the panchayats in the country with particular reference to Kerala including the problems involved in the present system of state local fiscal relations. The study attempts to present the analysis in a comparative setting; comparisons are attempted between the performance in Kerala and that in the country in general. After the comparative analysis of both national and state scenario, the author concludes that, "Panchayats in Kerala, like their counterparts elsewhere in the country, have been assigned a variety of functions and numerous sources of revenue. However, most functions are not obligatory and several sources of revenue are under utilised. While many functions go unattended, the panchayats have failed to spend even the limited amounts they receive by way of revenue from own sources and from the state government in full. There exist inter-panchayat differences in the levels of income, revenue and expenditure. The working of the panchayats for the last quarter of a century has instead of reducing such
differences, only aggravated them. The existing system of grants-in-aid is based neither on the principle of 'need' nor of the effort of the panchayats. Therefore it has not helped in reducing inter panchayat inequalities in revenue and expenditure.9

Selected studies relating to other states

After finishing the survey of literature in Kerala the researcher has to take into account the relevant studies and their findings about panchayati raj in different states of India.

Since its inception there has been an enormous growth of literature pertaining to the institution of panchayats, throwing light on various aspects such as the administrative, financial, political and functional. Out of it the researcher has tried to present a few samples of serious studies about PR keeping in view to give attention on the developments in the representative states like Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu etc. The review of the studies are made according to their chronology of publications to draw the attention that how the shifts in the interest and emphasis of the scholars have occurred from time to time about the working of PR in India.
The available literature on the subject can well be classified into empirical and non empirical works. The major issues discussed in non empirical studies are: the concept of decentralisation, devolution and delegation of powers to these bodies and other theoretical issues relating to the functions and roles of these bodies. The empirical studies cover aspects like resources utilisation, problems of resource mobilisation, institutional relationship and development, the response to development by bureaucrats, elected representatives and rural population.

The six studies presented in readings on panchayati raj published in 1967, by George Jacob throw light on the structure, functions and finances of PR bodies in different states. It is revealed that Gram panchayats and Panchayat Samities are heavily dependent on grants-in-aid from the state and the centre. These are exclusive areas of taxation to which these bodies are entitled but unfortunately the elected leaders all over India have shown great reluctance to levy such taxes. The studies have further pointed out that PR bodies are generally playing more attention to social service and public works and less attention to development of agriculture, animal husbandry and other economic programmes. The finances of panchayats have been found to be uniformly poor. The study concludes that the reluctance to impose and collect taxes is almost universal among panchayats.
An elaborate study was ventured by N.R. Inamdar (1970)\textsuperscript{11}, who surveyed the functioning of Dehu, Dhamni, Khadakwasla and Rahatwade Panchayats of Maharashtra state. It is revealed that the barriers of cultural backwardness, the rigid bonds of caste and kinship, the serious economic difficulties and socio cultural and political transformation were the factors posed tremendous problems to the panchayats. The transfer of development functions to them increased the burden of responsibility. The author was of the view that though the functioning of the panchayats evoked popular cooperation and participation in implementing their programmes, yet the developmental activities would require immense effort on the part of the administration and political leadership to bring about a rapid change and development.

Mats Kihlberg (1970)\textsuperscript{12} has presented an interesting study of the PR of India. The study presents an authoritative picture of the PR, as debated by the Indian writers - from Rajani Kothari to Inamdar. It is an attempt to reflect the ideas on ways of thinking in India and to provide some kind of balance and counterbalance to the western descriptions and analyses. He further pointed out that, it is also essential to understand the ideological differences that run through the whole Indian debate and which partly stem from Gandhi's ideas. PR provides an example of how modern and traditional elements are merged in nation building, how the new institutions are marked by Indian culture and traditions.
There is one in-depth study by B.C. Muthayya (1972)\textsuperscript{13} on panchayat taxes with particular reference to a few panchayats in Andhra Pradesh. It reveals the truth that, for funds these bodies depend heavily on grants from the government and the samities. But taxation is also conceived of as one of the sources of revenue for these bodies and this understanding, he concludes, may be one of the influencing factors in their tax payment.

An in-depth study was made by V.G. Nandedkar (1979)\textsuperscript{14} who analysed the role of zilla parishad as local government and development body. It was a case study of the Nasik zilla parishad in Maharashtra. The various functions, civic, social and economic have been analysed in the light of the necessary and suitable methodological tools. He has reached the conclusion that zilla parishads as units of development and administration should be provided with more resources. He has pointed out that operational success of these institutions is organically linked with their financial resources and strength.

In an interesting study Chokshi (1971)\textsuperscript{15} found neither the panchayats were functioning satisfactorily nor that the resources were adequate for these bodies. It was a case study on village panchayat in Baroda district of Gujarat. He pointed out that each and every panchayat should follow the broad
principles of programme budgetting and accordingly should have a properly worked out demand schedule of different types of resources. So also the government should have a properly planned supply schedule of resources. The study pointed out that unless the resource position of these bodies improved, panchayats could not justify their existence as developmental units. He reached the conclusion that there was popular reluctance towards local taxation.

A.Y. Darshankar (1979) has presented an authentic study on leadership in panchayati raj. It was a case study of Beed district in Maharashtra. The study covers 22 zilla parishad members, 38 panchayat samiti members and 120 sarpanchas and panchas of the gram panchayat. The study reached the conclusion that, "the success of panchayati raj largely depends on the leaders and they have to be deeply committed to the ideals of PR. PR has not brought all the expected benefits to the common man but the PRIs have brought new changes in various fields. The credit for such development rightly goes to the leaders who have selflessly worked in these institutions. There is reasonable hope that with the emergence of young and enlightened and committed leadership, PRIs will function for the betterment of the rural community as a whole and realise the ideals of self government, efficiency and welfare."
B.S. Bhargava (1979) has presented an empirical study on the role of political parties in panchayati raj. After his indepth analysis, he came to the conclusion that, political linkages have developed between key leaders of PRIs and higher level leaders... It is no longer true that PR leaders just serve as 'vote bankers' for higher level leaders. It is clear that their political relationship is increasingly based on the principle of mutuality. He also observes further that leadership that has emerged in PR is more interested in politics than in the fulfilment of development obligations.  

In a detailed study M. Shivaih et al (1976) made a comprehensive and objective analysis of the nature and working of PRIs. It is, as the sub title indicates, an analytical survey, and not a comprehensive study. The first part is devoted to the nature of PR, second part for the structure and functioning of these bodies and the third part is for the working of the PRIs. After the detailed discussion authors came to the conclusion that, Panchayat Raj is a multi dimensional phenomenon. Its contribution to the modernisation of rural India cannot be quantified. However, in the context of the gap between a modern political super structure and a traditional social base, it is a vitally important contribution. Greater dynamism in rural areas will increase the effectiveness of PR, as an instrument of modernisation including, of course, economic development.
C. Harichandran (1983)\textsuperscript{21} has made an attempt to assess the role of PRIs in rural development with special reference to Tamil Nadu. This has been done by making a detailed study of a sample of two panchayat unions and four panchayats. The study has analysed the various functions and responsibilities that are generally delegated to panchayat bodies by the state governments. It has also brought out the serious mismatch between resources and functions at the local level resulting in the neglect of both maintenance and development activities. The study also highlights the fact that local institutions, contrary to popular beliefs, are very much economy minded and given the necessary support and incentives are quite capable of mobilising effectively the resources that have been earmarked for them whether they be tax or non tax revenues. The study also highlights the fact that developmental activities such as education, health, water supply and general welfare can be handled effectively by the panchayat institutions. The study is a pointer to the fact that, there is no use of having institutions without a meaningful delegation of functional as well as financial responsibilities.

J.N. Pandya (1984)\textsuperscript{22} in his study analyses the role of leadership and development in panchayati raj, with special reference to the Kheda district of Gujarat. An attempt is made in this study to find out the correlation between the two important aspects of rural development namely leadership
in panchayati raj and agricultural development. The interaction between the two has direct bearing on rural development which ultimately affects the process of national development. In his study he has pointed out that PR leadership at the village level has shown mixed and sometimes contradictory results in relation with agricultural development. He has reached the conclusion that, "since the village panchayats are the only democratically organized bodies, they must be accepted as a centripetal force in the working of the entire developmental set up for agricultural development at village level. No scheme of coordination of various agencies will provide an answer to our problems unless it has village leadership in the centre. Because the village panchayat leadership which ensures public participation and involvement in rural development which is the main objective of our national development".

An elaborate study was ventured recently by B.C. Shah and J.N. Pandya (1989) to find out the recent developments of PR. Authors pointed out that, the working of PR in India has revealed its weakness, strength, constrains and potentialities. Authors are of the opinion that, 'the state becomes the centre when problems of sharing the resources come before it'. The study reached in the conclusion that, "there should be positive approach in the revival, renewal and reforming of the PR. Movement from the people should
emerge to force the state to provide maximum authority and resources to the PR system and pressures for redistribution in favour of the poor be built up at the grass roots. What is lacking however, is the political will at the level of ruling elite at the state level. Popular pressures should be built up to force the ruling elite to demonstrate such a political will^25.

Comments

1. The overview of the entire literature available on PR in India prompts the researcher to make an observation that there is a lack of sound tradition of study in this new emerging area of political science. A student interested in this field soon finds that there is a lack of data regarding the working of PR in most of the states in India. Therefore, there is a lack of all India level study of PR at present. However some reports of the commissions appointed by the central government are there, but they do not tell the full story of PR. Some writers like, G. Ram Reddy have tried to present the developments in different states which of India. But that also lacks continuity.

2. The selected studies which are presented here reflects that academicians interested in this area have dealt with the different aspects of PR at micro level
viz. ideology of PR, structural study of different levels, functions, finance, its leadership, elites, political parties, people's participation etc. On the basis of the findings of these micro studies it is difficult to generalise about PR either at the state level or all India level.

3. A comparative study of these institutions either in the same state or inter-states has been hardly dealt with by scholars interested in this area. When PR is passing through the present phase of revival it is a challenge before the academicians to fill up the lacuna in the literature of PR.

4. If we compare literature of Kerala panchayati raj with the literature of panchayati raj in other states of India as discussed above, proves without doubt that so many areas are still remain untouched in connection with Kerala panchayati raj. The literature available in the form of government publications throws light on the actual working of PR in Kerala pertaining to some selected aspects. Moreover, only two individual studies are available on Kerala PR. Out of them, one takes care of the historical aspect and second one deals with panchayat finance.
To highlight the different untouched aspects of Kerala PR this study may prove as the stepping stone in this direction.
REFERENCES


7. Ibid., p. 208.


17. Ibid., p. 194.

19. Ibid., p. 403.


23. Ibid., p. 237.
