Chapter - 1

Introduction

The Panchayati Raj is an ancient concept which has a long history in India. The elements of Panchayats did exist in the ancient period. In this way, these are the oldest administrative institutions in the country. “The tradition of having Panchayats has been one of the fundamental concepts of Indian Culture”. If we go into the historical context of PR system, we will find that the system has been existing in India since the ancient Vedic periods. In Vedic age, the village was looked after by a person who was known as Gramini. Likewise, in the periods of Mauryan and Guptas’ references are found of a village and a district respectively. The Mauryan and Gupta administration provided a systematic base to the PR system. During the Mughal administration, Panchayats used to perform works relating to administrative, social and economic development.¹ Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of the recorded history.² It is a real local self government, providing an opportunity to local people, adequate and sufficient powers and resource to equip them solve the local problems. During Vedic era powers vested in the hands of people and the organization was known as ‘Panchayat System’³

Description of Panchayats is available in famous books such as Jatakas, Ramayana and Kautilya’s Arthashastra.⁴ One can find reference of local

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4. Ibid. P. 33
administration in the early Vedic times when the villagers themselves managed the simple affairs of the village. As it can be found in the work of Kautilya, it seemed that the villages were completely self-governing originally and were practically free from central control. As time passed by, they were brought under control of the king after which the village assembly lost much of its power and prestige. Some local matters, however, continued to be decided by this assembly. It was a popular body consisting of elders of the village. The head man was the president of the village assembly. Presumably, he was the leader of the village of both civil and military purposes. Also, it was the connecting link between the village and central administration. There is no mention of the Municipal Board or its Committees by Kautilya.

However, the village governments established by tradition were not exactly democratic in character. The institution of local self-governments received considerable attention during the British rule but the focus was essentially on the urban local bodies. It is only after independence that the debates over Mahatma Gandhi’s vision of Gram Swaraj led to a consensus and a provision was made in the Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 40, which reads, “The state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self governments.”

In the beginning, there was no mention of Panchayati Raj in the Draft Constitution. However, this happened in the final draft, the persons imbued

with Gandhian Philosophy were able to include Pachayati Raj as Article 40 of the Indian Constitution. Also, the state legislatures have been empowered under Article- 246 to enact any law regarding any aspect of local self-government and now it has become a compulsion that the state governments must ensure the proper functioning for the rural bodies.

As a result, Jawaharlal Nehru while inaugurating the conference of the ministers on local self-governments in the provinces in 1948, said, local self governments is and must be the basis of any true system of democracy. We have got rather into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top may not be a success unless you build on this foundation from below\(^6\). The leaders of the Indian struggle for freedom were, from quite an early stage, acutely conscious of the strangulating control and supervision exercised over local bodies by the state governments and the demand for enhanced local autonomy had been incorporated in their political agenda. G.K. Gokhale, an eminent liberal Congress leader, had made out an appeal for decentralization of greater powers to the rural local bodies even in 1908 when he testified before the Hobbourne Commission. Later, Dr. Annie Besant, in her presidential speech at the Cultural Congress in 1917, had made scathing criticism of the Royal Commission’s recommendation that the Village Panchayats should be completely under the “age and hand” of the district authorities. At the same session, another veteran leader, Surender Nath Bannerjee also strongly attacked the British policy with regard to development of local self government institutions in India and observed:

\(^6\) S. L. Goel and Shalinin Rajneesh (2003), *Op cit.* P. 14
The government has emasculated the institution of local self-government by imposing upon them restrictions and disabilities (cries of shame).\(^7\) This demand for greater autonomy for rural local governing units gained support and strength later from Mahatma Gandhi which he emphasized for on the lines of ancient India's Panchayat System.

**Gokhale on Village Panchayats**

The Government of India turned deaf ears not only to the resolutions passed by the Indian National Congress but to all the pious recommendations made by the Decentralization Commission appointed by it. The recommendations remained only on paper though one more member was added in 1911 to the Viceroy's council holding the portfolio of education and local self-government. Eminent leaders like Gokhale and Pherozeshah Mehta vigorously adopted a policy of political progress based on local self-government. While speaking in the Imperial Legislative Council on 13\(^{th}\) March, 1912, Gokhale complained that the district administration continued to be where it was carried by Ripon about 30 years ago.\(^8\) He further said, "I agree entirely with the recommendations made by the Decentralization Commission that steps should now be taken to create Village Panchayats in selected villages throughout India. I also agree that steps should be taken to establish what they call 'sub-district' Boards in those provinces where they do not at

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present exist”. One essential condition of the success of local self government is that those who take part in it possess a personal knowledge of the area under their management or at any rate should be able to acquire that knowledge without much difficulty. This condition cannot be fulfilled in regard to District Boards as our districts are so large. Therefore, first think our real local self-government should start with the village and stop with sub-districts. The District Boards may exercise only general supervisory and coordinating functions and then if the government chooses, the other functions of an advisory character might gradually be transferred to them.  

The reorganization of local self-government system in rural areas has been long overdue. The municipal authorities were first set up in urban areas. The Government of India Resolution of 1882, for the first time, directed local governments to set up rural boards similar to Municipal Boards. It further directed that unit of administration should be small—the sub division, tehsil or taluka. Next, came the Report of the Decentralization Commission which had been appointed in 1907 to enquire into the financial and administrative relations of the Government of India and the provincial governments and of ‘authorities subordinate to them’ and to report ‘whether by measure of decentralization or otherwise’ the system government could be simplified and improved. It submitted its report in 1909. The Commission for the first time emphasized the importance of village organization and insisted on universal establishment of Taluka and Tehsil Boards as the principal agencies of local government.

Villages continued to neglect and District Boards were retained as principal local self-governing institutions in rural sector.¹⁰

Later Gram Panchayats were set up. The two main focus (i) Provisionalisation of several functions of District Boards and (ii) Growth and development of Gram Panchayats brought about a situation in which District Boards could not be continued for long. Mahatama Gandhi emphasized that the last man should be the first to benefit, i.e., the philosophy of Antyodaya. This thinking comes very much near to the target group approach, in which a specific group is taken for in-depth studies and plan priorities are accordingly modified, as end is the same though means differ. Here, development of an area is not measured by its gross product on the per capita but by the rate at which the weaker sections of the population of a region grow. The development system produces a client oriented design and the ultimate goal is to transfer all the responsibility of planning and development to the clientele themselves.¹¹

After independence, for community, development through community participation was envisaged. Two programmes–Community Development and National Extension Services were launched in 1952 and 1953 respectively but they failed to achieve their development objectives.

However, proposals of the Planning Commission for the Second Five Year Plan stressed the need for creating within the district a well organized democratic structure of administration in which village Panchayats would be organically linked with popular organizations at higher levels. The proposal was subsequently taken up by the study team appointed by the committee on planned projects and was presided over by Balwant Rai Mehta Committee which submitted an elaborate report in 1957.\textsuperscript{12}

The Mehta Study Team realizing the importance of popular participation recommended creation of institutions which were to be statutory, elective, comprehensive in duties and functions and enough autonomy and freedom. The creation of Panchayati Raj in 1959 with the object of interesting the authority and responsibility for rural development to rural people was held not only as an innovation but also as a revolution. Indian leaders took vigorous steps to fulfil the aim of the Constitution through planning and community development.

With the help of Ford Foundation, 15 pilot projects started functioning in India in early 1952 to improve the pathetic conditions of rural masses. In the meantime an Indo–U.S. Technical Cooperation Agreement was signed in January, 1952, which started the first scientific and systematic programme of Community Development in India.\textsuperscript{13}

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The Community Development Programme (CDP) under the Indo-US Operational Agreement was started on October 2nd, 1952 with 55 community development projects. Each of the 55 projects was to cover about three development blocks or 300 villages and a population of about three lakhs. On the suggestion of the enquiry committee set up to look into the causes of the failure of the 'Grow More Food' campaign, Government of India introduced another programme called the National Extension Service on October 2nd, 1953.

The Committee observed that the CDP and NES programmes had failed to evoke popular initiative that local bodies at the level higher than the Panchayat had not come into the field of CD in any significant way. The team came to the conclusion, so long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply the local interest, supervision & care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms to the needs and wishes of the locality, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite local imitative in the field of development.

The basic principles emphasized by the Committee were

1. There should be a three tier structure of local self governing bodies from the village to the district, with organic linkage among them well defined and practical.

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2. Adequate administrative powers may be entrusted to these bodies to avoid excessive state control.

3. There should be real transfer of power and responsibilities to them so that they can discharge their responsibilities.

4. Adequate resources should be transferred to the new bodies to enable them to discharge their responsibilities.

5. All development programmes should be executed through these bodies.

6. The system evolved should aim at further devolution and disposal of responsibilities in the future in the real sense.

7. State Govt. should not duplicate their functioning.\textsuperscript{17}

The study team also recommended that such a body, if created, has to be statutory, elective and equipped with the necessary executive machinery and in possession of adequate resources. It must not be cramped by too much control by the government or by government agencies. It also stated that this body can develop programmes which are of exclusive interest for the areas. In such matters, the state government will cease to operate within the area and in special circumstances when it has to do through the agency of this local body.\textsuperscript{18}

The Balwantrai Mehta Study Team visualized at the Panchayati Raj, bodies should be made responsible for planning and development within their jurisdiction and emphasized that these bodies will be able to function effectively only if there is "devolution of power and decentralization of machinery and there

\textsuperscript{17} S. L. Goel and Shalini Rajneesh (2003), \textit{Op. cit.}, PP. 15-16.
by sought to inject an element of autonomy" in their working. It also said that
the backward community has to develop on so many different lines and its felt
needs are so numerous and so fast growing that with limitations of available
resources, it has to prescribe for itself certain properties. In a large country,
with its planning for its overall development, the development of the community
has to be integrated with the development of the country as a whole and added
that "such integration will need that the overall priorities should be prescribed
by the government and the details worked out by the village community".19

So, these Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) became mainly executive
agencies for the national and state plans. The idea of decentralization was
again reiterated in the Third Five Year Plan and it was proposed that the states
should formulate their annual plans at least in the following activities on the
basis of district and block level plans.20 Agriculture, development of
cooperatives village industries, elementary education, rural water supply,
conclusion of approach roads. Undoubtedly, the Balwantrai Mehta Committee
was confronted with the problem of how to lay down some uniform lines of PR
in view of the vast size and varying social, political and economic conditions
prevailing in various parts of the country. It was thus properly visualized by the
Mehta Committee and wisely endorsed by the National Development Council to
take into view broad patterns of the scheme with out sticking the idea of a rigid
uniformity that would have made their job not only tedious but impossible as

well. As a result, the Government of India did not insist that every state should follow the same pattern.  

In 1957, Madras started on an experimental basis a pilot block of democratic decentralization in its own way, while Andhra Pradesh introduced it in twenty selected blocks, one in each district, but Rajasthan was the first to give practical shape to this scheme throughout the state. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated it in Rajasthan on Mahatama Gandhi's birthday on October 2nd, 1961. As on March 31, 1984, there were 217319 Gram Panchayats covering 561135 villages and about 95 percent of the rural population 4526 Panchayat Samitis and 297 Zila Parishads.

The development of P.R., therefore, can be said to be the logical outcome of the CDP. P. R. as described by Harison as the most important potential invention of independent India is a complex system of rural local self-government. With the rise of P. R. (Panchayati Raj), a new phase of local government was ushered in the democratic decentralization 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.

After the implementation of Balwantrai Mehta Committee's recommendations, P.R. in India, in a short span, has passed through four district phases. The first phase (1959-1964) of ascendancy witnessed an

22. B. Maheshwari (1963), Studies in Panchayati Raj, Metropolitan, New Delhi, P. 11.
important landmark in the history of P.R. The basic pillars of P.R. were erected in a conclusive and future oriented style during this period. On January 12th, 1958, the National Development Council endorsed the recommendations of the Mehta Committee. Thereupon, the central council of the local self–government at its fifth meeting held at Hyderabad in 1959, took stock of the action taken by the states to implement the decision of the NDC. At this stage it recommended, "while the broad pattern and fundamental may be uniform there should not be any rigidity in the pattern. In fact the country is so large and P. R. is so complex a subject with far reaching consequences that there is the fullest scope of trying out various pattern and alternatives. What is most important is genuine transfer of power to the people. If this is ensured, form and pattern may necessarily vary according to conditions prevailing in different states."

After the phase of ascendancy (1959-64), the P.R.I.'s witnessed the phase of stagnation from 1965 to 1969. Unfortunately no serious attempts or efforts were made neither to revamp nor to revitalise the P. R. structure. Since mid-sixties, the P. R. has been in a low profit. As a form of local government, it has fallen out of favour every where, except in Maharashtra and Gujarat, where it has been relatively more successful. The stagnation is the result of four major factors. The new national and state level leadership which emerged around 1966 had much thinner links with the ideals of Mahatama Gandhi and thus much weaker ideological commitment to P.R. Secondly, the mounting food shortage of this period and the crop failures of 1966-67 led to a reshuffling of

priorities in the community development programme itself, resulting in an over­
riding emphasis an agricultural production. In the process, a comprehensive
concept of internal development got of a major project for agricultural
production. Thirdly, the trend of Indian political system has been markedly
centralized since the mid-sixties but the pace towards centralization of power
got considerably, accelerated since 60’s. During that period political leadership
and the state governments were being made subsequent to the central
government. This exactly is not the climate under which Panchayati Raj can
grow and flourish. Fourthly, the technology discovered at this time served only
to reinforce the already powerful centralized pressures, in the process,
relegating Panchayati Raj to a lower, even unimportant status.  

The third phase in the history of the P. R. is the period between 1969 to
1983. This was a period of decline. No sincere or serious effort was made
neither at the center nor at the state level like the period of stagnation as
mentioned earlier. In the political side, this phase witnessed the change of the
congress ministry at the centre and it culminated in the appointment of Ashok
Mehta Committee in 1977 to revamp the PR structure. As far as the states
were concerned, Karanataka, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh made appreciable
efforts to regenerate the PR structure in their areas.  

The Ashok Mehta Committee submitted its report in August 1978 and
made 132 recommendations. Some of the important recommendations are:27

25. Report of the Central Council of Local Self Govt., Fifth meeting held at Hyderabad in 1959 as
26. Ibid P. 27.
27. Ibid, PP. 27-28
1. There should be a two tier set up in the P.R. structure, i.e. a district level Zila Parishad and a Mandal Panchayat covering a population of 15,000 to 20,000.

2. The Committee suggested abolition of blocks as a development unit and emphasized that all development activities relating to district being performed by the state government should be placed under Zila Parishad.

3. The term of PRI's should be four years and direct elections to these institutions should be held simultaneously.

4. Political parties can participate in the P.R. elections.

5. Nyaya Panchayat should be kept separate from the development Panchayat and the former should be headed by a qualified judge.

6. P.R. bodies should normally not be superseded but if suppression becomes necessary elections should be held within 6 months.

7. Representation of the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in all Panchayat bodies should be on the basis of their population.

8. There should be complete transfer of land revenue collections to PRI's over a period of five years.

9. A permanent annual grant of not less than Rs. 2.50 per capita should be made to the Mandal Panchayats.

10. The Committee agreed to the need for some provisions in the Constitution in order to provide the PRI's the requisite status as well as assurance of continuous functioning and wanted that this aspect should be considered.

11. All development functions relating to a district which are now performed by the state government should be placed under Zila Parishad.
Shri E.M.S. Nambodripad, who was a member of the committee, appended a note to the report in which he has expressed his views. Some of the important points are:

1. I am opposed to the suggestion of including the nominee of district level cooperative federation and other categories of members of Zila Parishad and other PRI’s. I am for purely elected bodies at all levels of PR bodies.

2. With regard to the election to all PRI’s proportional representation with the list system should be adopted.

3. I oppose the recommendation in favour of a qualified judge to preside over an elected Nyaya Panchayat being associated with him. The report itself admits that there is no enthusiasm for Nyaya Panchayat being associated with him. The Report itself admits that there is no enthusiasm for Nyaya Panchayat, the reasons being that people do not expect elected punches to be objective and do justice to the poor. Any proposal for bringing the judiciary closer to the people, can therefore, be considered only as a matter of reforming the judicial system and not as a part of democratic decentralization of administration. The government may consider the various reports, referred to in our report separately and not as part of strengthening PRI’s.

Ashok Mehta Report has made an attempt to revitalize the PR system as established according to the reconsiderations of Balwantrai Mehta Report. The second Mehta has built his concept upon the first one, though in a certain way, he has given much of his own in the form of according constitutional
status to PRI's. Thus, the two Mehtas constitute two landmarks in the history of local self government in our country, though each has its distinctive conceptual framework of analysis and examination.

After the submission of Ashok Mehta Report—the phase of decline witnessed three more developments, that is,

**The Chief Minister’s Conference 1979**

It considered important recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee but it did not accept the concept of Mandal Panchayats and favoured continuance of existing three tier system.

**Dantwala Committee 1977**

Working Groups on Block and District Planning—in the beginning of 80’s a number of anti-poverty programmes were introduced for the implementation of which district rural development agencies and other related organizations of lower levels were created various aspects of decentralized planning were examined by two expert groups namely the working group on block level planning headed by M.L. Dantwala (1977) and the working group on district planning headed by C.H. Hanumantha Rao (1983). Both groups recommended that the basic decentralized planning function has to be done at the district level.
The Phase of Revival (1983) onwards

After 1983, Panchayati Raj Institutions entered in an era of progress and prosperity. After Rajiv Gandhi came to power, he made sincere and whole hearted efforts to implement the P.R. in letter and spirit. The scheme of PR as unfolded by the then Prime Minister, was the most comprehensive and radical blue print of participatory democracy officially published so far. Mr. Gandhi showed the necessary stamina.

L.M. Singhvi Committee

In 1986, appeared the L. M. Singhvi Committee Report submitted at the instance of the Ministry of Rural Development. After tracing the growth and development of democratic decentralization, the Singhvi Committee resurrected the nearly forgotten Gram Sabha, comprising all the inhabitants of a village and called it as the embodiment of direct democracy.

Sarkaria Commission

The Sarkaria Commission on centre–state relations (1988) did not favour the idea of L.M. Singhvi Committee to confer constitutional status to the PRI's. The Commission advocated that the power of enacting any law on the Panchayats vests under entry 5 list 11 exclusively with states. Uniformity in

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these aspects of the law throughout the territory of India is essential. The uniformity can be secured by adopting in the following order of preference any of the alternatives given below:

(i) By law with respect to this matter made by all the state legislatures in accordance with a model bill prepared on the basis of consensus at the forum of the Inter-state council, recommended by us to be established under Article 263.

(ii) By a law on this subject made by Parliament under Article 252 (i) with the consent of the legislatures of all the states.

(iii) By a parliamentary law uniformly applicable throughout India containing provisions analogous to Article 172 and 174 of the constitution.

**Constitutional Status**

After independence, efforts were made by the states to introduce Panchayati Raj System. To give a boost to the system and to ensure its effective functioning, it became necessary to amend the Constitution. The Constitution (73rd Amendment Act, 1992) that came into form with effect from 24th April, 1993 conferred constitutional status to Panchayats and government from the village upwards. It was considered by the experts that there is an imperative need to enshrine in the Constitution certain basic and essential features of PRI to impart certainty, continuity and strength.

The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 has ushered in a new era in the history of Indian women. The recent P.R. Act has given them a chance
to wield a greater power for, the Act which came into effect on April 24, 1993 has a provision for not less than one-third of the elected members being women not less than one-third chairpersons at the different tiers of Panchayat (that is village, block and Zila) being women. This meant that about 20 lakh women would be contesting elections out of which about 8 lakh women would be elected as members and out of which 80,000 would be chairpersons.

The Present Status

Throughout the world, women by virtue of gender, experience discrimination in terms of denial of equal access to power structure that controls societies and determines development issues and peace initiative. Further, the United Nations Report on women has pointed out that women perform two-thirds of world's work, receive only 10 percent of the world's income and own only one percent of the means of production.

Bringing in Power Equation:

Power equation can be brought about only by change in societal conditions and an attitudinal change in women and men. This undoubtedly can become a reality in the P.R. system. The 29 subjects to be assigned under the eleventh schedule to the PRI's are as follows:

1. Agriculture including agriculture extension.
2. Land improvements, land reforms, soil conservation

3. Minor irrigation and watershed development.
4. Animal husbandry, dairying and poultry.
5. Fisheries
6. Social forest and farm forestry
7. Minor forest produce
8. Small scale industries including food processing industries.
10. Rural housing
11. Drinking water.
14. Rural electrification including distribution of electricity.
15. Non-conventional energy sources.
16. Poverty alleviation programmes IRDP, JRY.
17. Education including primary and secondary schools.
18. Technical training and vocational education.
19. Adult and non-formal education.
21. Cultural activities.
22. Markets and fairs
23. Health and sanitation including primary health centers and dispensaries.
24. Family welfare.
25. Women and child development.
26. Social welfare including welfare of handicapped and mentally retarded.
27. Welfare of weaker sections and in particular SCs and STs.
28. Public distribution system.
29. Maintenance of community assets.

Reservation of seats in the local body institutions for the women in all positions as per the provisions of 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India, no doubt, is going to create a metamorphosis in the activities of women in polity, economy and society in the years to come. The initial apprehension and doubts over the readiness of women folk to come into power centers and to take up responsibilities of administering development on their own have been dispelled by their participation in the electoral process of the local body institutions in the month of October, 1996.

The elected leaders of the local bodies in Tamil Nadu have started functioning in their respective domain. While discharging their duties they found problems like lack of training which was given by the state. The effective functioning of the leaders fully relies on the leadership qualities of elected representatives. The elected women representatives who have stepped into the portals of power essentially need leadership training. Hence, a programme was conceived to offer leadership training to elected women of urban local bodies. The training programme's content was a detailed discussion on the background of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act and the role of women in administering development in their areas. Studies, carried out by the Institute of Social Science between 1987 and 1990 in Karnataka and another in 1991 in

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Kerala have shown that women did take part in large measures in PRI's. In Kerala, they have fought non-reserved constituencies for women.  

**PRI Status in Himachal Pradesh**

**Background**

P.R. system in H.P. was established in a statutory form under the provisions of the H.P.P.R. Act, 1952 in the year 1954. Only 280 Gram Panchayats existed prior to the enactment of the H.P.P.R. Act, 1952. However, after the enactment of the said Act, 466 Gram Panchayats were established in the year 1954 and the number of Gram Panchayats was increased to 638 during the year 1954 and the number of Gram Panchayats rose to 1695. In the merged area, a three tier P.R. system was in existence under the provisions of Punjab, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act, whereas two tier system was prevalent in the state. With a view to bring uniformity in the P.R. system of the old and the newly merged areas, the H.P.P.R. Act, 1968 was enacted on 15th November, 1970 State. Besides this, the Nyaya Panchayats were also in existence in this state for discharging judicial functions but during the year 1977 the Nyaya Panchayats were abolished and the judicial functions were transferred to the Gram Panchayats. After the enactment of the said Act in the year 1970 the existing Gram Sabhas were reorganized/ bifurcated from time to time and new Gram Sabhas/Gram Panchayats were established. At present there are 3087 Gram Sabhas, 75 Panchayat Samitis and 12 Zila Parishads.

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constituted in the state. Detailed information about the number of the 3 tiers is given later in the Chapter.

Elections to establish three tier Panchayati Raj system under the provision of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 were held during December, 1995 except for the Panchayats of sub-division of Lahaul of District Lahaul Spiti, sub-division Pangi of District Chamba and four Gram Panchayats of District Kullu. The first meeting of the Panchayats at all the three levels was held on 23rd January, 1996 and as such the five years term of the elected representatives of Panchayats started with effect from 23rd January, 1996 which expired on 22nd January, 2001. Under the provisions of the Constitution and Panchayati Raj Act, it was mandatory to hold general elections to constitute new Panchayats before the expiry of the term of the representatives of PRI's elected during December, 1995 and thus the general elections to the PRI's were again held during December, 2000. As the term of the elected representatives of PRI's in sub-division of Lahaul of district Lahaul Spiti, sub-division Pangi of district Chamba and four Gram Panchayats of District Kullu was to expire in June, 2001, therefore the elections in these areas were held on 5th and 7th June, 2001. The term of the present elected representatives has also started with effect from 23rd January, 2001 and in the case of sub-division of Lahaul of district Lahaul and Spiti, sub division Pangi of district Chamba the term of office of representatives of PRI's has started with effect from 24th June, 2001.  

With a view to restructure, rejuvenate and to give constitutional status to the PRI’s the constitution (seventy third) Amendment Act, 1992 was enacted on 24th April, 1993. Essentially, the Amendment Act lays down certain ground rules which will constitute the basic structure or core features of the local authorities. This consists of a well defined duration, safeguards against external interference in the form of prolonged suppression, provision for regular elections of P.R. bodies, proper and meaningful representation of weaker sections and women and devolution of powers, authority and adequate finances to the Panchayats. The rest of the field has been left to the state government.

Himachal Pradesh is one of the states which has enacted the new legislation, that is, within one year from the date of the constitutional amendment. Simultaneously, the State Election Commission and the State Finance Commission was constituted by the government. The two tiers in the P.R. system, namely Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti, which were already constituted in the state, gave way to the establishment of three-tier P.R. system.

With a view to bring the state law relating to Panchayats in conformity with the provisions of the Panchayats (extension to the scheduled areas) Act, 1996, the state government has brought amendments in the Himachal Pradesh P. R. Act, 1994 vide the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 1997.
Survey of Literature

The studies pertaining to Panchayati Raj, since its very inception has been the focus of attention of the policy makers, political leaders, administrators and researchers. A review of existing literature shows that various issues and problems, relating to Panchayati Raj have been discussed. Here, an attempt has been made to mention certain pioneering studies which have helped the researcher to understand the concepts, issues, problems and to develop acumen for the present study. The important studies are mentioned as under:

M.V. Mathur, et. al. (1966), Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan:
A Case Study in Jaipur District, Impex India, New Delhi.


Shanti Chakraborty (1985), Rural Women’s Claim to Priority, Selected Documents from International and Indian Archives, 1975-85, Centre for Women’s Development Studies, New Delhi.

Centre for Women’s Development Studies (1986), the Seeds of Change: Role of Grass-root Rural Women’s Organisations in Development, New Delhi.

Sunit Pandhe (October 1st, 1988), "Women’s Studies and Women’s Movement" in Economic and Political Weekly, Bombay.

Centre for Women’s Development Studies (1989), Partners in Grassroot Democracy, New Delhi.


Kumud Sharma (1998), Power Vs Representation, Centre for Women’s Development Studies, New Delhi.


It is evident from the above discussion that, a good number of studies have been carried out, dealing with different aspects of Panchayati Raj in India and women empowerment. In the present study, an attempt has been made to study the empowerment of women after 73rd Amendment on which nothing substantial has been studied. The present study is confined to the state of Himachal Pradesh where very little work has been carried out. Hence, the present study makes it different from the above mentioned studies and is justified in the context of empowerment of women.