

**CHAPTER – 2**  
**PANCHAYATI RAJ IN WEST BENGAL :**  
**AN OVERVIEW**

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### PANCHAYATI RAJ IN WEST BENGAL : AN OVERVIEW

#### 1. Panchayat and Democracy:

Democracy is considered as one of the best forms of government because it ensures liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision-making. Participation and control of governance by the people of the country is the essence of democracy. Such participation is possible only when the powers of the state are decentralized to the district, block and village levels where all the sections of the people can sit together, discuss their problems and suggest solutions and plan execute as well as monitor the implementation of the programmes. It is called the crux of democratic decentralization.

Abraham Lincoln defined democracy as “the government of the people, by the people and for the people”. But, in the present context, people can participate in the government at the top level only indirectly by electing their representatives to run the administration, but at the lower levels, they can participate directly by identifying their needs and prepare micro-level plans as well as execute such plans.

In India, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Jai Prakash Narayan described democracy as the government that gives ‘power to the people’. Gandhi said: “True democracy could not be worked by some persons sitting at the top. It had to be worked from below by the people of every village.” (Joshi & Narwani, 2011) Nehru also advocated democracy at the lower levels when he opined: “Local self-government was and must be the basis of any true system of democracy. People had

got into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top could not be success unless it was built on this foundation below.” (Ibid.) Jai Prakash Narayan also favoured power to the people of the village along with the government at the centre when he remarked: “To me the Gram Sabha signifies village democracy. Let us not have only representative government from the village up to Delhi, one place, at least let there be direct government, direct democracy. The relationship between the Panchayat and the Gram Sabha should be that of Cabinet and the Assembly.” (Ibid.)

Mahatma Gandhi’s vision was that democracy through people’s participation could be ensured only by way of ‘Gram Swarajya’. He wanted Gram Swarajya in villages where there will be a village republic and the management of the village would be done by the people themselves. They would elect their president and common decisions would be taken unanimously by the Gram Sabha of the village. According to Gandhiji’s Gram Swarajya, “every village should be a democracy in which they will not depend even on neighbour for major needs. They should be self sufficient. For other needs, where cooperation of others would be essential, it would be done through mutual cooperation. It will be swarajya of the poor. No one should be without food and clothing. Everybody should get sufficient work to meet one’s necessities. This ideal can be asset only when the means of production to meet to the primary needs of life are under the control of the people. True swarajya cannot be achieved by power to a few people. People should have the capacity to prevent misuse of power. People have the capacity to get hold of power and regulate it.” (*Gram Swarajya*, October, 2000)

The late Prime Minister of India, Lal Bahadur Shastri, was also opined that only the panchayats know the needs of villages and hence development of villages should be done only by the panchayats.

Prosperous people in villages should ensure that powers given to the panchayats are used in the interest of the poor. The panchayats are the foundation of democracy and if the foundation is based on correct leadership and social justice, there can be no danger to democracy in this country.

After independence, many functions were included in the State List, consequent to the objective of a welfare state as enunciated in Article 38 of Constitution of India. Besides law and order and public administration, many welfare functions like education, health and family welfare, transport, social security, agriculture extension, animal husbandry, irrigation and power, urban development, rural development, poverty alleviation and employment generation, population control, pollution control and environment regulation, etc., became the concern of the states. Consequently, many new departments were created, resulting in a huge expansion of the service cadre and bureaucracy. Therefore, it became essential to decentralize the powers, especially relating to the social services sectors and welfare functions. Moreover, it was also necessary to consult people for whom such schemes were being implemented.

It was also laid down in Article 40 of the Constitution that “the state shall endow such powers and responsibilities to the Panchayats so as to make them institutions of self-government.” (Joshi & Narwani, 2011) In pursuance the Directive Principles also, it was conceived to decentralize powers and functions to the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs).

When five-year plans were launched, community development in rural areas was being done through bureaucrats who were not conversant with the local needs of the people. People’s participation was missing. The Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team recommended the association of the people’s elected representatives for effective rural

development, which led to the establishment of Panchayat Raj in 1959. S. K. Dey, the then minister for Community Development, announced that "Panchayati Raj as we now visualize will, therefore, mean progressive increase in competence from the ground upwards and corresponding transfer of responsibilities from the centre to the ground. Our centre must be relieved of responsibilities which should be discharged by the State Government, the State Government should be relieved likewise, of responsibilities such as can be discharged by the Panchayati Raj Institutions along the line - the Zila Parishad, Block Panchayat Samiti, Panchayat, associate voluntary institutions and the individual families. Panchayat Raj will, thus, grow to be a way of life and a new approach to government as against a unit of government. It will bring about a complete link up of our people from the Gram Sabha to the Lok Sabha." (Joshi, R.P. 1999)

In a democracy, the decision-makers should use their powers, as far as possible, with the consent and understanding of all concerned. By way of Panchayati Raj, people participate more and more in politics and administration. The Key to the success of democracy lies where more and more strength is given to people's elected bodies at the district, block and village levels. At the village level, even the poor people, including the SCs, STs, women and other marginalized section of the community get a chance to participate in the administration of the village. Thus, Panchayati Raj is a system which ensures people's participation at the lowest levels.

## **2. Guiding Principles for Panchayati Raj** (R.P. Joshi, Jaipur, 1999)

The credo of Panchayati Raj is :

- \* Give power to the people.
- \* Power is about people's participation.
- \* Build democracy bottom up.

- \* A waken the collective consciousness of the masses.
- \* Start with the Gram Sabha.
- \* Through elected representatives, not bureaucrats.
- \* Give the feeling of participation.
- \* Bring about transformation through real devolution of power.
- \* Teach by showing, learn by doing.
- \* Plan with people's consensus.
- \* Work with the people in cooperation.
- \* Motivate people to strive for their own good.
- \* Approach with humility and measure of faith.
- \* Lead the people to achieve their goals.
- \* Not a show – case but a pattern.
- \* Not coercion but consensus.
- \* Not order but participation.
- \* Not rule but representation.
- \* Not relief but realizing their potential power.
- \* Not to conform but to transform.
- \* Not a piecemeal but integrated approach.

These principles have universal value and the effort to put them into concrete reality, however have met with little success. Panchayati Raj has been no exception in this regions a sustained attempt to relay the goals of democracy at the grass roots level has yielded a vocabulary of suggestions which, if implemented faithfully, can go a long way in realizing the goals a swarajya. These are, of course, and outcome of researches on experiments with Panchyati Raj during the last four

decades and are being outlined here to focus on the basic issues concern across the different states in India since these continue to be the core of the debate on the new Panchyati Raj.

### 3. History of Panchayati Raj in India

The history of Panchayati Raj in India can be divided into the following periods from the analytical point of view:

1. Vedic era
2. Epic era
3. Ancient period
4. Medieval period
5. British period
6. Post-independence period

Historically, every village in the country had a panchayat which was responsible for finding the solutions to the local problems within the village itself. Panchayats or the village councils are as old as India's history and have been a part of her tradition. In *Discovery of India*, Pandit Nehru has provided a fairly exhaustive India about the working of the Village Panchayats in ancient India. Panchayats had vast powers, both executive and judicial. Its members were treated with great respect by the king's countries and the public. Land was allotted by the panchayats.

#### Vedic Age

'Panch-Ayat' means a group of five persons selected by the villagers. In the old Sanskrit scriptures, there is a word 'Panchayatan', which means a group of five persons, including some spiritual man. But, gradually, the concept of the inclusion of a spiritual man in such

groups vanished. In the Rigveda, there is a mention of 'Sabha', 'Samiti' and 'Vidath' as local self-units (Rigveda-X,71,10). Subsequently, the panchayat became a group of any five selected persons of the village at decide village disputes. The concept of 'Panchayat Permeshwar' or 'Panch' – the God' existed in the ancient age. 'Yagna' or sacrifice, to be successful, must be done by five devoted persons as per the Vedic saying. It indicates the pious conscience of Panchas. There is a description of 'Sabha' and 'Samiti', which were the democratic bodies at the local level. The king used to get the approval of the 'Sabha' or 'Samiti' regarding certain functions and decisions.

### **Epic Era**

The study of the Ramayana indicates that administration was divided into two parts- 'Pur' and 'Janpad' or city and village. Villages were 'janpad' and the village people were called the 'Janpada'. 'Gram', and 'Ghosh' (village, big village and group of village) are mentioned in the Ramayana. Even in the Ramcharit- Manas by Tulsidas, the welfare of the people has been described as the main object of the ruler. The system of governance was divided into the rule of the king (Raj- Tantra), the rule of the people (Praj-Tantra) and the rule of the wise men (Vidvat-Tantra) or educated and knowledgeable persons.

Self-government of a village finds ample expression in 'Shanti Parva' of Mahabharata and Manu Smriti as well as in Kautilya's Arthashastra. 'Sabha' and 'Samiti' played a part in controlling the decisions of the king. As per the Mahabharata, over and above the village, there were units of 10, 20, 100 and 1,000 village groups. 'Gramik' was the chief official of the village. 'Dashap' was the chief of ten villages. 'Vinshya Adhipati', 'Shat Gram Adhyaksha' and 'Sahasra Gram Pati' were the chiefs of 20, 100 and 1,000 villages respectively. There were small and big towns. There was also 'guptachar' (CID) system in towns to search for the offenders. The village heads also

protected people against the cruelty of the king. 'Sabha Parva' of the Mahabharata mentions the Gram Panchayats it is not clear whether the Panchas were elected by the people or nominated by the kings.

*Manu Smriti* stresses on organized system of local self-government. Manu has mentioned 'village' as a smallest unit of governance. Units of 10, 20, 100, 1,000 village groups were also groups were also a part of the system of self-government. 'Rakshak' (saviour) was responsible for the village. His function was to maintain law and order. Lower Rakshak owed responsibility to the higher Rakshak.

### **Ancient Period:**

*Kautilya*, in his *Arthashastra* advised the king to constitute units of villages having 100-500 families. There would be centres of 10 villages, 200 villages, 400 villages and 800 villages. These centres would be respectively known as 'Sangrahan', 'Karvatik', 'Drpna Mukh' and 'Sthaneeya'. Town was termed as 'Pur'. Its chief was 'Nagrik'. Local bodies were free from any interference from the king's side. The village headman was designated as Gramik and appointed by the king. He continued to be the most influential adviser to the king who constantly by and large consulted him about rural affairs. Initiative and administrative responsibility in particular was vested exclusively with him. Kautilya sated their rural administration was mainly so designed as to meet revenue administration needs. The Somaharta was the head of Janapada, primarily responsible for revenue assessment assisted by Sthanik and Gopa who was local leaders, carried out detailed census periodically for revenue administration. Besides revenue assessment and collection, this official enforce law and order showing the revenue, police and magisterial functions were vested together in one hand. (Ram Sharan Sharma, 1959).

In Chandragupta Maurya's regime, the policy of decentralization of powers was adopted (Marcindie, Ancient India). The village was the smallest unit of governance. A person elected by the people of the village was the 'Gramik' (head of village). Megasthenese has described how Patliputra town was administered by six committees consisting of five members each.

In the Gupta period also, the 'Gramik' was the village head and a village was the smallest unit of governance. The records of the Gupta period mentioned 'Gram Sabha', 'Gram Janpad' and 'Panch Mandli'.

Neeti Shastra of Shukracharya also mentions village governance during this period In South India (Dr. S.B. Samant, 1959), The 'Satvahan, kingdom existed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century B. C. There were local bodies for governance in the cities as well as the villages. The 'Chola' rulers also developed self-governance in the villages 'Nadu Parishads' were representative bodies which were solely responsible for the maintenance of the villages.

In northeastern India, there were small republics which were quite independent in internal matters. The Village Panchayats were vested with sufficient administrative powers and the king interfered the least. Now it will be pertinent to focus on some details of Deccan local government. The Gramunda (headman) held charge of the village administration at the apex. Despite minor changes in ancient Indian rural local government, the basic system remained largely unchanged. Inscriptions of the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. clearly show that the village assembly was the supreme authority and it was highly developed as an organization in some places comprising young and old, i.e. all adults of the village, whereas in others, it was a selected body consisting of the learned and distinguished and was also the proprietor of the village land, revenue of the government received by the people. (R.C. Majumder, Calcutta; S.N. Sen, 1969).

### Medieval Period

During the early medieval period despite the civil strife and unsettlement under the Mohamuddan rulers, the fabric of the Indian economic, social and political life remained largely the same as the Sultan of Delhi did not find it profitable and practicable to interfere with it, leaving it to its own devices – the village communities, thus continued as autonomous unit throughout this period. The most marked Hindu officials, sometimes with their ancient designations, continued to function with little changes in their duties. The administration of the smaller areas and revenue was left entirely hands of the Hindus. (Chach Nanh, WL Kiran, Hasan Kureshi, 1971).

During the Sultanate period at the top of hierarchy was the province, divided into districts, further sub-divided into smaller units. The basic unit of the administration was the village self sufficient in functioning. There was a village assembly like the Panchayat of North India in every village it carried on the village administration through its hereditary officers such as the village account, village weight-man, village watch man and the village officer in charge of forced labour. These officers were paid by grants of land or by a portion of agricultural produce. The central administration maintained contact to the village through an officer called Mahanayakcharya who had a kind of supervisory authority over the administration of the village. (A.L. Srivastava, S.L. Agarwal, 1972). The Sultans of Delhi also knew that it would be impracticable to govern a vast country like India from the centre directly. Hence, they divided their kingdom into provinces called 'Vilayat'. 'Amir' or 'Vali' was the head of a province. Management of finance, collection of taxes and selection of judicial officers were under their charge. For governance of a village, there were three important officials. Mukkadam for administration, Patwari for collection of

revenues and Choudhrie for decision on disputes with the help of the Panch. A village was the smallest unit where the management was looked after by Lambardar, Patwari and Chowkidar.

Marathas also constituted local self-government institutions in rural and urban areas during the rule of the Peshwas in the Maharashtra area.

### **British Period :**

Self-governance was not the objective of the British government their main objective was the protection of imperial interests. It was only with such and objects that the powers were given at the local level more attention was paid to urban administration rather than rural areas.

According to S.R. Maheshwari, the beginning of local government can be presumed from 1687, when the Madras City Corporation was established. The subsequent history can be detailed as follows :

- a) 1687-1881: Local government established to share the burden of resources of the central and provincial governments
- b) 1882-1919: Local government was seen as local self- government.
- c) 1920-1937: Local government was established in the provinces and people's representatives were controlling the provincial administration also.
- d) 1938-1947: Local Government was in the state of rejuvenation and reconstruction.

### **1687-1881**

In 1687, the Madras Corporation was made responsible for the public services. Besides collection of taxes, civil and criminal matters were also dealt with by it. In 1726, Bombay and Calcutta municipal

bodies were established. In 1773, under the Regulating Act, Justice of Peace was appointed in presidency towns. They supervised health and sanitation in these cities. Sir Charles Metcalfe, the Governor General of India (1835-36) called the Indian communities the "little republics". In 1863, the Calcutta City Corporation was formed. The year 1870 was a landmark when Lord Mayo passed a resolution suggesting the decentralization of powers and the necessity of associating Indians in administration.

### 1882-1919

Lord Ripon came as the Viceroy in 1880. The Local Self-government resolution, 1882 was the most important act of his tenure. It is regarded as the 'Magna Carta'. Since political education of people starts at the local level, Ripon wanted to develop municipal bodies. Local boards were established in rural areas districts and tehsils were formed. During 1883-85, the local self-government acts were passed in many provinces. Local boards could be superseded in case of abuse of powers. The British bureaucracy did not think of Indians as mature and experienced enough for local self-government. Hence, Lord Curzon subsequently opposed such liberalism and increased government control over such local bodies.

The Royal commission (1909) reported on decentralization that paucity of funds and caste and religious disputes were the main obstacles in effective functioning of the local bodies.

Many suggestions were given to make the village Panchayats, the sub-district boards and the municipalities more powerful. But, this remained on paper.

In 1918, the Montague-Chelmsford report suggested that the local boards be made representative bodies, state intervention should be minimum. They should learn from their mistakes. The suggestion of

the Royal Commission was incorporated in 1918 with the proposed scheme of diarchy. The municipalities were vested with more powers to impose taxes. The village Panchayat Act. was also passed and panchayats became a legal body.

**1920-1937**

Notwithstanding the Montague-Chelmsford scheme, PRIs did not become truly democratic and vibrant instruments of local self-government at the level of village, due to constraints- organizational and fiscal. In 1930, evaluation of the implementation of self-government was done by the Simon Commission. It reported that except Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Madras, they did not find any progress in the rural areas. The condition of the local bodies deteriorated between 1919 and 1930. During the period between 1920 and 1937, the local boards were elected bodies, chairman were non-official persons and more administrative and financial powers had been given to local bodies. Bengal Self-government Act (1920), Central Provinces and Behar Panchayat Act (1920), Uttar Pradesh Village Panchayat Act (1920), Punjab Panchayat Act (1922) and Assam Self-government Act (1925-26) were passed by the native states.

The Congress party passed a resolution for self- government in the Nagpur Convention in 1931. Gandhiji also wrote an article in the newspaper.

**1937-1947**

The Government of India act, 1935 gave powers to the provincial governments. Popular elected governments in the provinces got provincial autonomy and they were duty bound to enact legislation for further democratization of the local self-government institutions, including the Village Panchayats. In almost all the provinces, local bodies were given more functions. Powers to impose taxes were

reduced. Thus, the local bodies were organized properly during the British period, though during the Second World War in 1939, the popular government vacated the office. But, the position of the local self-government institutions remained unchanged till August 1947, when the country attained independence.

Thus, the spirit of democratic decentralization at the village level was existent right since the ancient period. It became more and more organized and took proper shape by the time India became independent in 1947.

The Village Panchayats were a part of the ideology of Indian National Movement. Gandhiji had given the idea of 'Gram Swarajya': "The Government of the village will be conducted by the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males and females, possessing minimum prescribed qualifications." Gandhiji considered Gram Swaraj to have self-sufficiency in villages where people would be self dependent and have an autonomous self-government. Acharya Vinoba Bhave organized the 'Gram Daan' movement. Many villages were donated. People became masters. There was perfect swarajya. The Gram Sabha exercised all the powers in the village.

It is a sad commentary on India's commitment to democratic decentralization that despite the nationalist movement's commitment to panchayat and Mahatma Gandhi's propagation of the ideal, the first draft of India's constitution did not include a provision for panchayats. Dr. Ambedkar opined that villages in India were caste-ridden and had little prospects of success as institutions of self-government. Arguments of those who pleaded for inclusion of Village Panchayat in the Constitution, however, finally prevailed and found place in Article 40 of the Indian Constitution which reads as under:

*“The state should take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.”* (P.M. Bakshi, 1998)

### **1947-1957**

During this era, Mahatma Gandhi's conception regarding the Village Panchayat as the primary grass roots level democratic unit prevailed. People's participation came to be considered as necessary so that India's perception as a welfare state could be fulfilled. According to Gandhiji, “greater the power of the panchayat, the better for the people as true democracy.”

Community Development Program (CDP) was started in 1952 under the major influence of the Etawah Project undertaken by the American expert, Albert Mayaer. Community development sought to motivate the rural people to take community-based approach for the improvement of the economic and social condition of their life. The government was expected to provide general guidance and technical-cum-financial assistance in some blocks in a phased manner. National Extension Service (NES) was also introduced in 1953, as a prelude to community development in various blocks. (NES 1957)

Panchayats at the village level took interest in development schemes. The programmes were more or less bureaucratic and excessively politicized. SDO-cum-BDO fulfilled the local demand like road, drinking water wells, panchayat ghar, school building, etc. All schemes were treated as government schemes rather than people's programmes.

### **1957-1961:**

Complaints of wastage of funds, corruption, malpractices and favoritisms began to mar the public image of the development process.

A study team under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta was appointed in 1956 to critically review the CDP and NES and suggest measures for effecting economy and improving efficiency in implementation of schemes. At the same time, the planning commission had already been advocating that village panchayats should be strengthened and given the responsibility for taking over development administration.

### **Balwant Rai Mehata Study Team Report (1957)**

The team felt that "there should be a single representative and vigorous democratic institution to take charge of all aspects of development work in the rural areas....it must not be cramped by too much control by the Govt. or Govt. agencies...it must receive guidance which will help it to avoid mistakes. In the ultimate analysis, it must be an instrument of expression of the local people's will in regard to local development". It suggested that the concept of democratic decentralization should form the basis for the planning and implementation of the community development and national extension service programmes. Both the programmes should be merged. The main recommendations of the study team were as under :

1. Suitable administrative decentralization for effective implementation of development programmes.
2. Place decentralized administrative system under the effective control of elected representatives of people.
3. Development block covering about 100 villages and having a population of a hundred thousand should coincide with taluka/tehsil/sub-district unit.
4. There should be three tiers-Zila Parishad at the district level to replace the District Board, Panchayat Samiti at the block level

and the Gram Panchayat Samiti, which would include their representatives.

5. Panchayats should work under the overall supervision of the Panchayat Samiti, which would include their representatives.
6. The 3-tier Panchayati Raj system would be vested with powers and functions. Resource will be largely devolved upon the Panchayat Samiti will play a primary role in rural development process.
7. Looking at the diversity of the socio-economic conditions, some states might modify the proposed system. They may prefer devolution of powers to the district level body.
8. Composition of the Panchayati Raj bodies should be representative of all sections of people, by and large.
9. Dynamic attitude should be adopted towards the functioning of the proposed new set-up. Further devolution of powers, functions and resources from the state govt. should be done in future, looking to the success of the scheme.
10. Effective training of people's representatives at the three tiers of the local bodies was also stressed.
11. People's representatives would plan the community development and allied programmes as well direct and supervise their implementation by bureaucracy. Hence, they should develop the knowledge and attitude essential for it. Seminars, workshops and conferences and training courses should be arranged adequately.

The National Development Council agreed to most of the recommendations in 1958. The govt. of India also convinced the states to switch over to institutionalized participative approach to

rural development at all levels with some variation in the structure. Almost all the states adopted the system.

### 1959-1965

Rajasthan was the first state where Panchayati Raj was established on 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 1959. Pandit Nehru kindled the Lamp at Nagar to inaugurate Panchayati Raj. Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu followed it in 1959, Assam, Karnataka, Orissa, Punjab, and Uttar Pradesh in 1960-61, Maharashtra, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Kashmir Decided not have multi-lever Panchayati Raj and gave more powers to the Village Panchayats.

In several states like Rajasthan, Bihar, Madras, Mysore, and Orissa, powers were largely devolved on the middle-level tier, e.g., Panchayat Samiti, for undertaking a substantial number of development functions and the Zila Parishad was mainly responsible for advising, guiding, supporting, and supervising the Panchayat Samitis and also to consolidate the plan proposal at the district level. It would also be a watch dog of the state in and financial matters relating to Panchayati Raj in action.

In Maharashtra, powers were largely developed on the Zila Parishad for planning and implementation of rural development programmes as per the Naik committees recommendations.

In some states like Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Utter Pradesh and West Bengal, the Zila Parishad was also under-take directly some specialized development functions along with guidance, monitoring and general supervision. Jammu & Kashmir and Haryana adopted a 2-tier system at the village level and the block level. Among the union Territories, only Himachal Pradesh adopted a 3-tier system. Pondicherry had French-type community at the local level. Others did not take any action to set up a 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj.

**Rise and fall of Panchayati Raj (1965-78):**

Different states followed different systems of Panchayati Raj – while Jammu & Kashmir followed a 1-tier, Harayana chose a 2-tier and Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh adopted a 3-tier system. Panchayat Samiti was more powerful in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh whereas Zila Parishad was more powerful in southern states. In the beginning, there was enthusiasm but it dwindled after the second panchayati elections in 1965 onwards.

**Committees in Various States:**

In view of the increasing importance of Panchayati Raj, the following committees were appointed in different states to recommend on organizational pattern resources of PRIs, administrative powers, personnel-System and other problems.

During this period, Panchayat Raj gained momentum. It became a process of governance, linking people from the Gram Sabha to the Lok Sabha and thereby proving that democracy at the top would not be a success unless it was built from below. S.K Dey had rightly pointed that the panchayat was a local body limited to a geographical area whereas Panchayati Raj was distinct from panchayat. Panchayati Raj had, thus, become a Philosophy envisaging linking of the Gram Sabha with the Lok Sabha.

The report of the Ministry of community Development stated in 1966 that younger and better leadership was emerging through PRIs and there was a fairly high degree of satisfaction among the people regarding their working. Many chairmen of the Zila Parishads and Panchayat Samitis became chief Ministers or cabinet and State Ministers by 1965-70. It created feelings of enmity between the PRI leaders and the state politicians. Hence, political will at the state level was missing after 1965. Lip service was being paid to Panchayati Raj

but in the heart of their hearts, the state leaders tried to discourage Panchayati Raj in most of the states. Bureaucracy also tried to snatch the powers of agriculture extension and animal husbandry on the pretext of the World Bank and other foreign assistance in Rajasthan and other states. The Industries Department closed its handloom production Centres and withdrew its staff in Rajasthan.

In 1968-69, the Venkatapiah committee was appointed by the Reserve Bank of India for all India rural debt and credit survey. It was after this report that the Small Farmer Development Agencies (SFDA) were created in 1977 to spend the central funds for agriculture and animal husbandry. They were converted into District Rural Development Agencies (DRDAs) in all the districts in 1978. All central funds for rural employment and poverty alleviation were routed through these agencies.

#### **Ashok Mehata committee (1977)**

The Govt. of India appointed the Ashok Mehata committee in 1977 to study the role and powers of the PRIs in Rural development and give suitable suggestions. This committee classified the period of 1962-64 as the establishment era for PRIs, 1964-69 as the period of dormancy and 1969-74 as the period decline.

The committee was the view that though the PRIs faced ups and downs, yet these institutions never failed. It suggested measures to strengthen the PRIs so that the system of democratic decentralization became effective for Planning and development.

Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka implemented these suggestions by creating Mandal Panchayats. Many powers were given by Chief Minister Hegde in Karnataka to the PRIs in 1984-85. It set an example for the whole of country. Madhya Pradesh also adopted changes in the Panchayati Raj system in 1990.

The West Bengal govt. also took initiative in 1978 to give new life to the panchayats on the lines of the Ashok Mehta committee's recommendations. (N. Delhi 1978) Jammu & Kashmir also revised the existing Panchayat Acts and passed new Acts. These states adopted the recommendations to suit their conditions and learn from each other's experience.

Though the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta committee were not accepted by the Union Govt. due to a change in the ruling party, it did exercise some influence upon the working of Panchayati Raj in a few states.

### **C.H.Hanumanth Rao Team(1982)**

The planning commission wanted effective people's participation through the PRIs in rural development so that plans are more responsive to people's needs and aspirations and there is coordinated as well as accelerated progress. The planning commission experts, under the leadership of Dr.C.H. Hanumanth Rao, were deputed to study as to how to prepare plans at the district level. He suggested that decentralization of planning should take place. Development plans have remained centralized hence, participation of local people has been lacking. People should be associated right from the plan formulation stage.

In 1984, the prime Minister wrote to all the states chief Minister to take action without further delay to hold overdue elections to the PRIs.

**G.V.K.Rao Committee(1986)**

In 1985 the union Govt. also appointed G.V.K. Rao committee to advise on poverty alleviation programmes and Organization of the PRIs. The committee advised for regular elections to the PRIs and formulation of plans at the district level.

**Laxmi Mal singhvi committee(1986)**

This committee was formed by the Govt. of India to suggest steps for revival of Panchayati Raj. It advocated that Panchayati Raj should primary be viewed as the local self-Govt. system and should be strengthened accordingly It is the foundation stone for the country's democratic political system. Management of rural development was its secondary role. The existing constitutional provision in Article 40 is too general and discretionary. It cannot give a firm basis for Panchayati Raj, which has been weakened due to neglect and unscrupulous politicking in various states. The committee advocated constitutional recognition to strengthen Panchayati Raj, which became the basis for the 64<sup>th</sup> constitutional Amendment Bill.

**WORKSHOPS OF COLLECTORS (1978-88) AND CONFERENCES OF PANCHAYATI RAJ LEADERS :**

The Department of personnel and Administrative Reforms Govt. of India, organized quite a number of workshops at Bhopal, Hyderabad, Imphal, Jaipur, and Coimbatore where the collectors of many districts discussed the subjects to be entrusted to Panchayati Raj at the district level. The importance of the PRIs was recognized for expediting development programmes in rural areas and in the interest of responsive administration.

Conferences of Panchayati Raj leaders, including women were also organized to know their views about the Reorganization and strengthening of Panchayati Raj. The demands for de-bureaucratization of the control of Panchayati Raj as well as for devolution of more powers and resources were the focal issues in these conferences.

**P.K. Thungan Committee (1989)**

This committee recommended regular election and according constitutional status to the PRIs and making the Zila Parishad the agency of planning and development.

**Harlal Singh Kharra Committee (1990)**

In Rajasthan a committee was constituted under the chairmanship of the Panchayat Minister to study Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, etc., and suggest measures for strengthening Panchayati Raj in the state. The main recommendations of the committee were:

1. Per capita grant-in-aid to the panchayats be increased from Rs.4 to Rs. 20.

2. The power of the panchayat to impose penalty should be increased from Rs.50 to Rs.200 and the rate of the fees also should be revised.
3. Services such as education, ayurved, health, hand pumps, etc., which cater to the needs of rural people, should be brought under the administrative control of the PRIs.
4. The District Rural Development Agency and the Zila Parishad should be amalgamated into one agency.

The Rajasthan Govt. also appointed a cabinet sub-committee in 1992 to study the Panchayati Raj system operating successfully in Karnataka and Andhara Pradesh. The group visited these states and gave its recommendations. The state Govt. did not think it proper to bring about any structural changes like reorganization of panchayats into Mandal Panchayats, as recommended by this group. The decision was, of course, taken to reorganize all the panchayats, increasing their number from 7358 to 9184 after the reorganization process was completed.

As a result of the recommendations of various such committees and the tempo generated the central Govt. decided to give a constitutional status to the PRIs and passed the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitution Amendment Act in 1993 to provide uniformity to the Panchayati Raj system throughout India. Reservation to scheduled Castes, scheduled Tribes and women was also guaranteed by the Indian Constitution.

Though most the state Govt. amended their Panchayati Raj Acts during 1993 and 1994, yet things have mostly remained on paper. Political will is still lacking. Powers, staff and resources to the PRIs have hardly been transferred. The PRIs still remain more an agency of development rather than institutions of self-government.

#### **4. The Panchayat Government**

The seventy third amendment of the Constitution envisages Panchayat as a Government – self-Government at the local level. In other words, it is a democratic institution nearest to the people with the powers of a Government. We are all aware of the Central or the State Government. But we are not used to think that there may or should exist a Government even below the state level. Therefore, the question why the panchayat should be called a Government may naturally raised.

##### **Government and the people**

The Government rules and the people are ruled. Is the relationship between the Government and the people that of the ruler and the ruled? This is the case where the Government of the country is autocratic with the ruling class being considerably distanced from the ruled. In an autocracy it is the ruling class which decides how the Government will run. Ordinary people have no role. Neither is any good causes to them. The Government is run in the interest of the individual and groups, not in the interest of the majority people.

People cannot accept such a situation. The power to rule a country is derived from the people themselves. This facilitates their orderly social life, brings common good and enhances their happiness. So, it the people have the exclusive right to decide who will run the Government and how.

Democracy is a guarantee for such a dispensation. It admits that it is the people who are the source of state power. A democratic Government is created by the people. It is not possible for such a Government to isolate itself from the people. The support of and the active participation by the people nourish such a Government. Isolation of the Government from the people marks the death of

democracy. People have to struggle to restore democracy. Nearer the Government to the people more lively to democracy.

### **5. Role of people in a democratic Government:**

We all know that a democratic state has an elected Government. Election is a mechanism through which the people's power of governance devolves on their representatives who, in their estimate, are honest and capable and are committed to look to their interest. Again, people reserve the right to remove in the next election, any groups of rulers who, after coming into power, indulge into activities detrimental to their interest. Elections also clearly show that those who come into state power are merely the representatives of the people. The power of the people is bestowed upon the representatives through election to secure public welfare. So the elected representatives have the moral right to run the Government only as long as they apply the state power for public welfare.

But only election is not enough for democracy. Will people have to wait for the next election if their representatives betray the trust put in them by their electors and indulge in activities detrimental to the interest of the people? Will people remain inactive during the period intervening two election? If people have nothing to do except exercising their voting powers every five years, a people-friendly Government will continue to remain a distant hope.

The people have to prove that the powers of a democratic Government emanate from the people themselves. This is achieved not only through exercise of franchise, but also through show of interest in the government functions. For this purpose people have to understand if the policy and activities of the Government shall do good to them, or if those will beget evil. If the Governmental actions are likely to result in evil consequences, protests shall have to be

raised. If however, the actions have the potential of people's good and welfare, all possible help and co-operation should be extended to the Government. Where there is an opportunity, Government has to be suitably advised. Democracy loses its health and vigour if people remain inactivate. Also, such a situation facilitates the emergence of autocracy. Only vibrant and alert people can make democracy a success.

When Panchayati Raj was launched in India, the basic idea was that people's participation would be forthcoming and village people would be associated at the level of formulation through the Gram Sabha, plan execution through the village panchayats, monitoring by Block Panchayats and review or guidance by the District Panchayats.

In a democracy, decentralization of political and economic power is essential, because a few centres of power cannot realize or fulfill the needs of the vast multitudes of people. If India is to develop, the power and responsibilities must be shared by all. (N.K. Bose)

The Panchayati Raj system, in almost all the states, was introduced with enthusiasm and interest. By providing power to the people control. The process of socio-economic development would be accelerated. The PRIs would fulfill the long-felt need of providing rural infrastructure for rural development of the backward areas. But, Panchayati Raj faced many ups and downs, even having been through legislation, because of the lack of political will, quality of political leadership, government control exercised over these bodies and the way the government looked at these institutions. There was duality of character in the mind of the bosses. Hence, real support to the PRIs remained a dream only.

## 6. Panchayati Raj in Various States Prior to 1993

Prior to 1993, PRIs existed in India almost at all the three levels, i.e. village, block and the district. As a result of the Balwant Rai Mehta Report (1957), almost all the state had adopted a 3-tier system but depending on the size and population of the state, some state had deviated and adopted a 2-tier or even a single-tier structure. Similarly, duration of the PRIs was decided as per their wish and convenience, varying from three to five years. Regarding the procedure of election also, it was not uniform. Direct election system obtained generally at panchayat level only. At higher levels, there were indirect elections, except in Karnataka which started direct election of members at the block and district level also. Due to the concept of 'Panch parmeshwar' in India, the judicial function was also made a part of the village panchayats in the beginning.

S.S. Singh and Suresh Mishra, in their book 'Legislative Framework of Panchayat Raj in India,' described Panchayat Raj at a glance, including their system, mode of election, term of office and judicial powers. (Sing, S.S. & Mishra, Suresh)

In a large country like India, it is really difficult to have a uniform system of Panchayat Raj. Local circumstances differ from state to state. Even then, certain, duration of a PRIs, judicial functions and functionaries were mostly uniform with little variations looking to the size of the state or the nature of people residing therein, having different culture traditions as found in tribal areas or hill districts.

After the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment, it became mandatory for all states, except those having a population of 20 lakhs, to adopt a 3-tier structure, reserve one-third seats of members and chairpersons at all levels for women, SC and STs in proportion to the State Election

Commission and amend all states Acts in according with the 1993 amendment within one year's latest by 23 December 1994.

### **Three-tier Structure**

Prior to 1993 also, generally, it was a 3-tier structure, except Assam, Haryana, Manipur, Orissa, Sikkim where there were only two tiers. Assam, Haryana and Orissa did not have a provision for the District Panchayat at all. They had Panchayati Raj only at the village and block levels.

If we look at the Panchayati Raj Acts of small like Goa, Kerala, Tripura and Jammu & Kashmir, they had Panchayats only at the village level. Block and district levels did not have any PRI.

Sikkim was an exception to this. There was a Panchayat at the village level as well as the district level but they did not think it necessary to have any PRI at the block or intermediate level.

To a very large extent, the geographical size and the administrative need of the state had been instrumental in deciding the structure of Panchayati Raj. Smaller states had a single tier, whereas larger states had a 3-tier system, keeping in view their requirements.

### **Term of Office:**

Now, there is a uniform term of five years. However, it was three years in Arunachal Pradesh and Punjab, and four years in Assam, Goa, Jammu & Kashmir, Maharashtra and West Bengal.

### **Judicial Bodies:**

Provision of judicial powers existed in almost all states, except Goa, Manipur and Tamil Nadu. The judicial body was called the 'Nyaya Panchayat' in Andhra Pradesh, Gujrat, Karnataka, Maharashtra,

Rajasthan, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. It was called 'Panchayat Adalat' in Assam, Haryana, Jammu & Kashmir and Punjab, 'Gram Kutchery' in Bihar and 'Conciliation Board' in Madhya Pradesh. Sikkim was the exception where one elected member of the panchayat was to act as the secretary and was empowered to settle the disputes. Judicial functions were withdrawn in some states later on where the working was not up to the mark or when Judicial Munsif courts were sanctioned at the block level, as done in Rajasthan. At present, it is a defunct institution in all the states, though it existed in the earlier Acts.

After the 1993 constitutional amendment various states have delegated powers out of the 29 functions listed in schedule XI of the constitution of India. The Rajasthan government has appointed an Administrative Reforms Commission under the chairmanship of the ex-chief Minister, Shiv Charan Mathur. The commission examined the position regarding the powers and functions in the states of Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Karnataka and Gujrat and submitted its report in the year 2001. The position was also reviewed in the Panchayati Raj Ministers conference held in New Delhi on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2001. The position was found as under regarding transfer of funds, functions and functionaries as on 11<sup>th</sup> July 2001, as per the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India :

Table No.2.1

**Transfer of funds, functions, functionaries as on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2001  
under the Ministry of Rural Development, Government of India.**

<u>State</u>	<u>Funds</u>	<u>Functions</u>	<u>Functionaries</u>
Andhra Pradesh	5	13	2
Arunachal Pradesh	-	-	-
Assam	-	-	-
Bihar	-	-	-
Chhatisgarh	10	23	9
Goa	-	-	-
Gujrat	-	-	-
Haryana	-	16	-
Himachal Pradesh	15	15	15
Jharkhand	-	-	-
Karnataka	29	29	29
Kerala	15	29	15
Madhya Pradesh	10	23	9
Maharashtra	18	18	18
Manipur	-	22	4
Orissa	5	25	3
Punjab	-	7	-
Rajasthan	-	16	-
Sikkim	29	29	29
Tamil Nadu	-	29	-
Tripura	-	12	-
Uttranchal	12	13	9
Uttar Pradesh	12	13	9
<u>West Bengal</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>12</u>

Source : Ministry of Rural Development, Govt. of India, 2008

Thus, it is evident that though the functions have been transferred by many states, but funds have been transferred in

Karnataka, Sikkim, Maharashtra, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh only, whereas functionaries are transferred in Karnataka, Sikkim, Maharashtra, Kerala, Himachal Pradesh and West Bengal only. Karnataka and Sikkim top the list.

In Andhra Pradesh, funds and staff in respect of agriculture, animal husbandry, women welfare and child development sectors have been transferred. Regarding the remaining sectors, out of 29 subjects, planning, execution and review have been entrusted to the Zilla Panchayats. Fourteen subjects have been entrusted to the Mandal Panchayats. Twelve obligatory and 27 optional functions apart from civic functions like drainage street lights, etc., have been given to the village panchayats alongwith the required paraphernalia of staff and tax-levying powers and share in the state revenue. Out of the three tiers of the panchayats, panchayats at the district level only are string and the other two District Panchayats and thus they are not independent.

In Maharashtra, a very strong and powerful system of PRIs was established from the very beginning and district was accepted as a unit of devolution of powers and Panchayat Samitis as the executive arms of Zila Parishad functioning through a strong system of as many as 10 standing committees involving almost all the members of Zila Parishad. An IAS officer has also been appointed as the chief Executive and a very large paraphernalia of staff and almost all district-level officers of rural development sectors have been placed under them. As many as 129 activities, including development activities of 113 subjects of almost all the Rural Development Departments, were assigned to the Zila Parishad even before the passing of the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment. Panchayat Samitis were also assigned with 75 subject / activities of 12 sectors. They have kept the MLAs, MPs, and District Collectors out of the entire set up of the PRIs. Out of 29 subjects, three

subjects have been transferred fully and 11 subjects partly to the panchayats. The District Panchayat, being the apex body, performs functions of coordination, control and supervision and serves as link between the state and PRIs. The Gram Panchayat can approve work only from own resources and Jawahar Gram Samridhi Yojna (JGSY)

In West Bengal, the position is reverse to that of Maharashtra. The Gram Panchayats have been given more powers in corporation with powers given to the Block/District Panchayats. They have 14 obligatory and 21 assigned functions, apart from a large number of discretionary functions. The Gram Panchayats have full powers to approve works. The Panchayat Samitis also perform a large variety of functions related to 18 sectors. The Zila Parishads have a wide range of administrative and financial powers. They are delegated with all the functions of 29 departmental schemes for implementation. The PRIs in West Bengal are very strong bodies which functions as real institutions of self-governance. However, there is need for strengthening the administrative structure to cope with the increase in powers and functions of the Gram Panchayats.

In Karnataka, the DRDA works has been merged into the Zila Parishad. An IAS officer, senior to the collector, has been appointed as the Chief Secretary (now CEO) of the Zila Parishad, assisted by a large paraphernalia of senior officer and all the district level officers of as many as 28 departments functions under him, as the entire rural development administration is with the Zila Parishad. The Zila Panchayat sector is very strong, covering as many as 257 important activities of 20 departments. Under the new Act, there has been further enhancement. Seventy activities of 31 sectors have been assigned to the panchayats, 56 activities of 28 sectors to the Tehsil Panchayats and 60 activities of 29 sectors have been given to the Zilla Parishad under the mandatory provisions of law. The village panchayats have a few

schemes, mainly JGSY, and work under the control of the Block Panchayats.

In Kerala, the State Government has transferred all the subject alongwith the staff to the PRIs. The Gram Panchayats are very strong and can approve schemes of any amount, subject to the availability of funds.

Tripura has transferred 12 departments to the PRIs and has given powers, authority and responsibilities to the PRIs to enable them to function as institutions of self-government and to implement schemes for economic development and social justice. However, the Gram Panchayat has no control over the village-level functionaries.

In Gujarat, the PRIs were strong from the very beginning, having all the functions, staff and resources relating to rural development. Fifteen, out of 29 subjects of schedule XI, are with the PRIs. A large number of statutory functions in respect of land revenue, Loan Act, cooperative Act, etc. are delegated to them. All the powers of the District Registrar of the cooperative societies are also delegated to the Zila Parishad. Presently, 150 plan schemes are with the Zila Parishad. The District Panchayat enjoys wide executive powers and a high degree of autonomy in planning.

In Rajasthan, 16 functions out of 29 have been transferred but actual working is yet to take shape after awareness, training and reconciliation of respective departmental staff with the new set-up, especially in education, health soil conservation, agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry, irrigation, fisheries, etc.

Assam could not hold elections for a long time and now the Government has decided to hold them by the end of the year in December 2001. Devolution of powers will be possible only after new panchayats are constituted.

Bihar is yet to develop functional and financial powers to the PRIs. In Haryana, the panchayats are not empowered because the administrative and financial control is still vested in the respective department and only planning, monitoring and supervisory powers have been given to the PRIs. Himachal Pradesh has, of course, devolved powers, functions and responsibilities relating to 23 departments to the PRIs. The Gram Panchayats have been given powers to check attendance and prepare reports of misconduct of the village-level employees of schools, dispensaries, etc.

In Madhya Pradesh, though the functions of 23 departments are transferred, staff and budget continue to be with line departments. In Orissa, the position is confusing. Rules for devolution have been framed but they are yet to be implemented. In Punjab, powers vest in the bureaucracy. The District and Block Panchayats have limited functions. The Gram Panchayat can supervise the work of the village level functionaries and reports to the concerned department. Sikkim has devolved powers, but orders are yet to be issued. In Tamilnadu, 26 out of 29 subjects are to be transferred but orders are in the process of being issued. So far, orders have been issued in respect of some subjects. In Uttar Pradesh, though 13 line departments are transferred, the administrative control rests with the respective departments. The panchayats have functional control without any administrative authority.

The conference of the Ministers of Panchayati Raj in the state Governments held on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2001 decided:

- 1) The states will devolve functions upon the PRIs in respect of the subject listed in the XI schedule and issue detailed executive instructions devolving specific and substantial executive powers upon each tier of the panchayats by 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2002, i.e., the

10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the Constitutional (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act, 1992.

- 2) A task force comprising senior officers of the Ministry of Rural Development and state Governments will be set up at the earliest to operationalize administrative decentralization of funds, functions and functionaries with regard to the subjects specified in the constitution, so that functional and financial devolution is completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March, 2002.
- 3) Incentives should be extended to the panchayats by the State Govts. by way of grants-in-aid for their better performance as regards raising their own resources.
- 4) Panchayats may be given untied funds to enable to select development work according to their needs.

Rural employment-generation and poverty-alleviation programmes are being carried out by PRIs in almost all the states. Provision of basic services and amenities, building rural infrastructure, primary education, hand pump maintenance, rural sanitation, etc., are being entrusted to the PRIs. They coordinate rural development activities and function basically as an agency of the government for implementation of development programmes.

### **7. Evaluation of Working of Panchayats :** (Evaluation of PRIs 1994-1999)

Sixty percent of the elected representatives were in the age group 21-40. This is a healthy trend as it ensures the participation of the young in the local governance system.

**Level of education:**

Literacy rates were very low, particularly among the women representatives. Twenty-five percent males and 74 percent females were illiterate.

**Support during elections:**

Forty-eight percent representatives had received support from their family members. Thirty-two percent received support from the local groups during the elections. Fifteen percent received support from political parties. Some received support from NGOs.

**Previous experience in governance:**

Nearly 88 percent of the elected representatives were first-timers. Among females, 97 percent were elected for the first time and only 3 percent had previous experience. Among males also, 82 percent were first timers and 18 percent had some experience of governance.

**Level of awareness :**

Women and men alike were largely unaware about the new Panchayat Act, functions and powers, role of members in the panchayat and the Gram Sabha and panchayat finances. Ignorance of rules and regulations was used as a weapon against the women sarpanchas.

**Hurdles to women :**

A women sarpanch in the reserved category had to face other opposition from other communities who had held powers for long. They faced on confidence motions also from the Up-Sarpanchas of other castes.

**Women Leadership:**

One-third reservations of seats for women is a silent revolution. They will assume leadership in due course, though their husbands or sons were more powerful during this period. Impact not identifiable in the short term but experience has made them bold to undertake public works. Participation of women in governance is still not acceptable to the community.

**Gram Sabha :**

1. Low attendance: Very often, the required quorum is not complete. It suited the Sarpanch also because no quorum was needed in adjourned meeting. That is why such a provision has been deleted since January 2000.
2. Long distance: The Gram Sabha is held at the panchayat headquarters. Villages are situated at long distances, hence people do not come. Since January 2000, an amendment has been made to hold sabha in each ward. It may resolve the problem.
3. Low participation of women: Attendance of women was hardly 1/11 to 1/20 of the total attendance. They were five to seven in absolute number. Those present, hardly spoke and remained only passive observers.

**Panchayat Meetings :**

Almost every Gram Panchayat faced the problem of incomplete quorum. There were incidents where the Gram Panchayat meeting were being held and decisions taken without the quorum. The participation of the female Panchas was higher when the panchayats were headed by strong women Sarpanchas.

The phenomenon of the husbands handling the decision-making and financial matters was common when the woman was illiterate.

### **Planning Process :**

The nature of participation in preparation of annual action plan was passive, accepting what was offered to them rather than proposing the plan. It was mostly list of the demands of the panchayat. Planning from below was practically guided by a top-down philosophy. The process of bureaucratization was found, which needs to be reversed. Gram Sevak at the panchayat level and BDO at the Panchayat Samiti level generally dominates the meetings.

### **Vigilance Committees :**

Vigilance Committees are only on paper. They never became functional. Hence, they were abolished since January 2000 at the panchayat level.

### **Perception among Opining Makers**

1. A majority of the government officials considered the PRIs as implementing agencies. PRIs do not have the full freedom to take decisions to carry out any activity in their areas.
2. Reservation for the SCs/STs and women after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment has increased awareness amongst and participation of people in the development process. The weaker sections of the society have come in the mainstream.
3. The government is more inclined to make declarations rather than act. Decentralization cannot be effective unless the panchayats are given both financial resources and the power to take decisions.

4. Regarding a separate Act for the tribals, panchayat representatives felt that a common Act cannot help in addressing the needs of the mainstream, even after India attained independence. Hence, attempts should be made to include them in the mainstream by making special provisions for them in a separate Act.
5. There was a high degree of hope on the enactment of the amendment, followed by an equally high degree of enthusiasm in the rural circles.

### 8. A Critique :

The Karnatak Governor, Khurshid Alam Khan, in his address to the joint session of Karnataka Legislative Assembly, remarked on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1999: "Democracy has to be re-informed by devolving powers, resources and responsibilities to decentralized bodies. We do not want people to travel long distances and come to the Vidhan Sabha for solving their problems, which can be done at the local level institutions. The PRIs at the village, taluk and district levels should be empowered to take decision on matter that directly affect people's lives. Thus, our aim is to strengthen the local administration and governance by the people for their own benefit. Local decentralized governance will have the advantage of involving citizens of every creed and class in this common venture and will promote greater harmony among different communities." (Khursid Alam Khan, 1999)

The Union Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, also stressed recently the need to increase decentralization by maximizing the functions of the PRIs. He said "*There is no alternative to devolving powers and functions and finance to the panchayats if we are serious about the development of India.*" (Yashwant Sinha, 2000)

## 9. Women in Panchayati Raj: A Historical Perspective

The franchise committee set up by the British Government that discussed the constitution of statutory village panchayats, did not consider the question of women's representation in panchayats, on the contention that then women did not even have the right to franchise. However, such official initiatives did raise the issue of panchayats being linked up with the issue of local culture and sensitivity. This was endorsed by the joint select committees of the British Parliament in its first report on the Bill for the Government of India Act, 1919. Thus, in the first set of Acts of the 1920s of the provinces and the princely states, women did not appear as representatives of even as voters. This is in line with the ideologies prevalent at the point of time. For instance, the deputy commissioner of one of the areas who was to make an enquiry regarding desirability of establishing a panchayat, had received an application from the district council written by not less than 20 adult male residents of villages that the elected panchas should be from among the male owners of the houses.

In 1923, from the first time names of women appeared in the electoral rolls and in 1926, the first woman members were nominated to the Indian Legislature. In 1931 women voiced for universal adult franchise but are said to have opposed reservation, nomination or co-option for women. In the Independent India, the Constitution guaranteed women equality in all spheres and left the issue of representation to the state legislatures. The central council of Local Self Government at its third meeting in 1957 decided that the elected representatives in each block panchayat, 'will co-opt two women who are interested in work among women and children'. This was similar to the recommendation made during the same time by the Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team (1957) which recommended co-option of two women in panchayat bodies for the purpose of 'participation'.

The fourth meeting of the Central Council of Local Self Government in 1958 recommended that approximately half of the total members in panchayats be women if the panchayats were to be real representative body of the people. The council further suggested that till that stage is reached at least two seats should be reserved for the women. It was felt by the council that having two women was preferable compared to a solitary woman [Buch, 2001].

The Committee on the Status of Women in India (CSWI) set up in 1971 to look into the various aspects of the women's status, including their political participation, released its report in 1974. The committee noted the ineffectiveness of the women's representation in panchayats and it recommended a statutory separate 'all women's panchayats' at the village level to ensure greater participation of women in the political process and with adequate resources for management of their welfare and development programmes especially for rural women. They would be directly elected by the women of the village and would also have strong links with the existing PRS as their representatives would be sent to PS and ZP. The recommendation was not implemented by any state as the provision was not considered appropriate for it would further segregate women instead of integrating them into the society [Buch,2001]. The committee also recommended system of reservation for women at the legislative bodies which was opposed by some members of the committee, representatives of the political parties and women's organizations as a retrograde step from the equality conferred by the Constitution. [Sharma, 1998, 27]

The Ashok Mehta Committee reviewed the PRS in 1978 and recommended that two women who get the highest number of votes in the elections be made members of ZP and Mandal Panchayats respectively. In case no women came for contesting elections, two women should be co-opted at these levels. Karnataka, AP, and Bengal

were the first states to introduce the policy of reservation for women on recommendation of the Ashok Mehta Committee. They provided for 25 per cent reservation for women at the ZP and Mandal Panchayat levels. Their experience shows that with women's presence in panchayats, the women's issues have successfully been incorporated into the agenda of panchayats. A decade later, the National Perspective Plan in 1988, discussed the issue of under-representation of women at all levels of the PRS. Quoting the experience of successful states, it recommended 30 per cent reservation for women at local bodies. The recommendations and efforts of the committees and commissions finally materialized when the Union government headed by Rajiv Gandhi initiated the reservation process by recommending 30 percent reservations of seats for women in panchayats at all the three levels, through the 64<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Bill in 1989. The issue was taken up by the V.P. Singh government too who introduced the 72<sup>nd</sup> Amendment Bill in parliament. Unfortunately, the Bill did not come up for discussion as his government had to resign sometimes later. The Congress took up the issue again when it came back to power in 1991. The Bill was finally introduced as the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in 1992 and was ratified by all the states in April, 1993. The amendment reserved 33 per cent seats for women to come through open elections at all the three levels.

To conclude, the history of PRIs shows that these institutions have existed since the ancient times, but ancient literature makes no mention of women attending the village councils. Ever since the Independence and the adoption of a democratic system of governance, the Government of India's efforts have been to get people's participation in the development process through distribution of power at the local level. There is a reference to women's political participation in panchayats in all major reports – the B.R. Mehta Committee report, CSWI report, Ashok Mehta Committee report, and the National perspective plan. Since the reports of these panels were not mandatory,

their suggestions were not uniformly implemented by all the states. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment is an effort towards bringing in structural adjustments to the system by introducing 33 per cent reservation for women at all the three tiers of the PRS – reservation at the level of both members and heads/chairpersons.

## **10. History of Panchayat Raj in West Bengal**

Panchayati Raj Institutions, which aims at democratic decentralization of power, is facing a challenge over the last few years in the state of West Bengal. The earlier enthusiasm among the rural population of Bengal about panchayats and their activities has subsided. It is a well known fact that panchayats in West Bengal have endured long. Specially since 1978 the panchayats have worked as the locomotives for change in rural Bengal. They earned a very good reputation not only because of the rural elections but also due to the way in which the whole panchayat apparatus functions. Implementation of various rural development schemes and land reform programmes also received great appreciation. Compared to many other states in India where panchayats have remained more or less non functional and insignificant, West Bengal model is considered by many as the ideal one in this sphere. Even before the passage of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment to the constitution of India when deliberations and discussions were going on all over the country in order to bring about an all India model of Panchayati Raj and the practices and experiences of some of the states in this sphere were being considered West Bengal stood as an example. This indicates that West Bengal emerged as a successful model even before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment.

### **The Panchayat Government**

The seventy third amendment of the constitution envisages Panchayat as a Government- a self – Government at the local level. In

other words, it is democratic institution to the people with the powers of a Government. We are all aware of the central or the State Government. But we are not used to think that there may or should exist a Government even below the state level. Therefore the question why the panchayat should be called a Government may naturally be raised.

### **Government and the people**

The Government rules and the people are ruled. Is the relationship between the Government and the people that of the rural and ruled? This is the case where the Government of the country is autocratic with the ruling class being considerably distanced from the ruled. In an autocracy it is the ruling class which decides how the Government will run. Ordinary people have no role. Neither is any good caused to them. The Government is run in the interest of the individual and groups, not in the interest of the majority people.

People cannot accept such a situation. The power to rule a country is derived from the people themselves. This facilitates their orderly social life, bring common good and enhances their happiness. So, it the people who have the exclusive right to decide who will run the Government and how.

Democracy is a guarantee for such a dispensation. It admits that it is the people who are the source of state power. A democratic Government is created by the people. It is not possible for such a Government to isolate itself from the people. The support of and active participation by, the people nourish such a Government. Isolation of the Government from the People marks the death of democracy. People have to struggle to restore democracy. Nearer the Government to the people more lively is democracy.

### **Role of People in a democratic Government**

We all know that a democratic state has an elected Government. Election is a mechanism through which the people's power of governance develops on their representatives who, in their estimate, are honest and capable and are committed to look to their interest. Again, people reserve the right to remove in the next election, any group of rulers who after coming into power indulge into activities detrimental to their interest. Elections also clearly show that those who come into state power are merely the representatives of the people. The power of the people is bestowed upon the representatives of the people. The power of the people is bestowed upon the representatives through election to secure public welfare. So the elected representatives have moral right to run the Government only as they apply the state power for public welfare.

But only election is not enough for democracy. Will people have to wait for the next election if their representatives betray the trust put in them by their electors and indulge in activities determination to the interest of the people? Will people remain inactive during the period intervening two elections? If people have nothing to do expect exercising their voting powers every five years, a people – friendly Government will continue to remain a distant hope.

The people have to power that the powers of a democratic Government emanate from people themselves. This is achieved not only through exercise of franchise, but also through show of interest in the governmental functions. For this purpose people have to understand if the policy and activities of the Government shall do good to them, or if those will beget evil. If the Governmental actions are likely to result in evil consequences, protest shall have to be raised. If however the actions have the potential of people's is an opportunity, Government has to be suitably advised. Democracy loses its health and vigour if

people remain inactive. Also, such a situation facilitates the emergence of autocracy. Only vibrant and alert people can make democracy a success.

### **11. Self-Government in Pre-Independence West Bengal :**

An idea of the nature of Self-Government in undivided Bengal will help an adequate appreciation of the evolution of this institution of this institution in West Bengal. Our acquaintance with this system, though in a limited way, is through the village Chowkidary Act of 1870. This Act provided for levy of local taxes for maintenance of peace and order through the village police. The Local Self-Govt. Act of 1885 introduced a three-tier representative type of Self-Govt. for the first time.

The tiers were – the District Board at the district level, Local Board with one or more Sub-divisions and union committee with one or more villages. The institutions were partly representative with a very limited domain of activities. In 1919 the Bengal village Self Govt. Act was introduced and the Union Board created after amalgamating the chowkidary panchayat and the union committee. The area of activities of these three tier institutions was also enlarged. The functions of these institutions were primarily sanitation, supervision of the work of chowkidars and Dafadars, maintenance of the accounts of birth and death supply of drinking water and construction and maintenance of roads etc. As these institutions were not of fully representative character, people had very limited scope for and opportunity of, participating in local affairs.

### **12. Post-Independence Panchayat System**

A democratic system of governance was introduced in our country through the constitution which was enacted after Independence. It provided for elected Governments at the state and

center. But there was no obligatory provision for establishing any elected government at the village or town level or to secure any qualitative improvement in the existing institutions. The Directive Principles of the constitution only laid down that the states would take necessary steps to set up panchayats in the rural areas. It further provided that the states would make appropriate laws endowing the panchayats with necessary powers to act as units of Self Government. But the Directive principles not being obligatory, it was left to the states to decide if panchayats should at all be set up and if so, the extent of powers those should be endowed with. The result was that the constitutional right of the local people to exercise their democratic rights through panchayats went unrecognized.

If the early part of the fifties the community Development programmes and the National Extension Service were introduced in 1957 the National Development council constituted a committee under the chairmanship of Balwantray Mehta to evaluate the impact of these two programmes in the rural society.

The committee after evaluation made several recommendations one of the momentous being re-juvenation of the existing panchayats. The panchayat system introduced in the different states of India on the basis of this recommendation are the first generation panchayats. A four-tier panchayat system was set up in West Bengal through the West Bengal panchayat Act, 1957 and the West Bengal Zilla parishads act, 1963. Later in 1973 the West Bengal panchayat Act, 1973 was enacted after amalgamating these two Acts and incorporating several new provisions.

The then Government of India constituted under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta, a committee to evaluate the working of the panchayat institutions of the country. This committee expressed itself in favour of participation of the political parties in the panchayat

system. West Bengal accepted the recommendations of the committee in 1978 elections were held in West Bengal on the basis of the 1973 Act and several amendments to it. Thus the second generation panchayats came into being in this state.

The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 was enacted which led to the abolition of Union Boards and its replacement by a two-tier system of rural local governments comprising Gram Panchayats at village level and Anchal Panchayats at union level. In 1963 the West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act was passed. It replaced the district boards by creating Zilla Parishads at district level and Anchalik Parishad between Anchal Panchayats and Zilla Parishads. Thus a four-tier structure was formed in West Bengal—Gram Panchayat, Anchal Panchayat, Anchalik Parishad and Zilla Parishad—although many of the states adopted the three-tier model. The entire state was covered by PRIs except the ten community Development Blocks in Asansol sub-division of Bardhaman and Tea Estates of Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri which were excluded in view of their industrial-commercial nature. (Das, Parthasarathi, 1991, p.94) West Bengal gave effect to 15 Zilla Parishads, 325 Anchalik Parishad, 2,926 Anchal Panchayats and 19,662 Gram Panchayats in 1964. (Ibid. p.95)

At the lowest level was the Gram Sabha covering on an average a population of 800-1000. It met twice in a year to consider the working of Gram Panchayats and direct it for future activity.

In the Forth Five-Year plan, 1969 it was stated, "In 1952 community Development Programme was started. Next step was to bring together Panchayati Raj and community development... there was to be a link between administrative apparatus and elected representatives." (The Fourth Five Year Plan, 1969, p.228, Section 9:39) It further recommended, "Panchayati Raj has been accepted as the pattern for local development administration, fuller and more active

involvement of the institution is necessary in the process of economic development and social advance. The viability of these institutions would depend upon the extent to which they can undertake obligations for mobilizing local resources.”

Another five year plan that gave major emphasis on panchayats was the Eighth Plan, 1992. It states, “The Eighth Plan recognizes the essential need to involve people in the process of development.” (Govt. of India, 1992) The attitude of passive observance and total dependence on government for developmental activities has become all pervasive. It has to be altered into a pro-active attitude of people taking initiatives themselves. In the process of development people must operate and government must cooperate. The Planning Commission has worked out institutional strategies which will mean creating or strengthening various people’s institutions at the district, block and village level in order to synthesize the purpose of investment, envisaged in the central plan with optimization of benefits at the grassroots level by relating these programmes to the needs of people. Panchayats and Nagarpalikas, elected by the people, will have to play larger role in formulating and implementing the developmental projects in their areas.” The Ninth Plan (1997-2002) has been finalized. It has focused upon the promotion and development of PRIs further. “It is expected that in the Ninth Plan the PRIs would become the principal agencies for delivery of development programmes at grassroots.” (Govt. of India, 1998)

In West Bengal a fresh effort was made at rejuvenating panchayats and in this effort the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 was passed. The Act was, however, not implemented till 1978. When the Janata Party came to power in the centre, it brought forward a new scope to PRIs. Two studies were sponsored : The Dantwala Working Group and the Asoke Meheta Committee. (Datta, Prabhat)

### **13. Amendment of the Constitution and the place of panchayats in the present polity:**

An impression gradually gained ground that the benefits of different 5 year plans were not percolating down the grass roots level. The failure of the people who are lagging behind and for whom development is meant to participate in the development process was identified as one of the causes of this situation. The necessity of a panchayat system which could integrate the popular initiative and their participation in the development process was being increasingly felt. This found recognition in a constitutional amendment. The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment provides for panchayats in the rural areas and the 74<sup>th</sup>, Municipal institutions in the urban areas. Provisions have been made in the amended constitution for three tier (district, intermediate and village level) panchayats in large states and two tier (district and village) panchayats where the population does not exceed twenty lakhs. Setting up of panchayats is obligatory under the constitution. The important aspects of the amendment are elections at an interval of every five years, reservation of at least one third of the seats for women reservation of seats for the members of scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes on the basis of population, identification of economic development and social justice as the main task of the panchayats. The amendment also provides for division of funds between the state government and the panchayats. Further the amendment envisages constitution of state Election commission to conduct panchayat elections. An important provision of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment is the constitution of Gram Sabha at the village level. In effect it is through this provision that democratic de-centralisation has been taken to the grass root level. This amendment guarantees an uninterrupted existence of the panchayat institutions, beyond the whim of the State Governments.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment imposes a compulsion upon every states to set up Panchayats or to bring the existing Panchayats in conformity with the constitutional provisions by amendment of the related states Acts. It may be mentioned that quite a number of provision incorporated through the amendment already featured in the West Bengal Panchayat Act. Through several amendments the Act was later on brought into conformity with the constitutional amendment. The post-amendment panchayat in our state is the third generation panchayat.

### **What are the functions of panchayats**

The constitution requires every states law to specify the functions and powers of the panchayats. But the constitution itself gives a clear outline of the functions that will be assigned to the panchayat by the states law. The outline is as under:

- a) The panchayats shall make plans for economic development and social justice.
- b) The panchayat shall execute different schemes according to the plan.

It is therefore seen that the function of the panchayat is to make plans for economic development of the people execution of schemes and to secure social justice. Schedule 11 of the constitution indicates twenty nine areas to which these schemes will related.

All the areas where development activities will ultimately result in economic development of and social justice in the rural society are included in this schedule in this schedule. The State Government will make laws and assign the development functions in all these areas to the panchayats. These functions are not new to the West Bengal panchayat. Because most of these functions had been already assigned

to them. The areas of responsibility were however enlarged. What is significant is that the policy of de-centralisation of states power got the recognition of the constitution which would go a long way in strengthening the panchayats. They will not have to depend on the political will of the Governments at the higher strata.

### **Social Justice - Responsibility of the Panchayats:**

Social justice has been declared as one of the aims of the development programme of the panchayats. In fact this is also the objective of the Indian States. It has been mentioned in the preamble to the constitution that one of the objectives of the Indian state is to secure social justice for every citizen.

### **Gram Panchayat Mambbers**

The directly elected members of the Gram Panchayat will be elected from among themselves a pradhan and a upa-pradhan for the Gram Panchayat. The members of the panchayat samiti shall not, however, have any right to vote in such election.

### **Term**

The term of office of the members will be five years from the date of the first meeting of Gram Panchayat after its constitution. Under no circumstances membership shall extend five years.

### **Meeting of Gram Panchayat**

The business of the Gram Panchayat shall be conducted after discussion in a meeting and the basis of unanimity of opinion of the members or the opinion of the majority members. The meeting of the Gram Panchayat shall always be held in the office of the Gram Panchayat.

One meeting shall be compulsorily held every month. All the members shall be called to the meeting but under the circumstances a meeting can be held unless atleast one-third of members is present. The minimum number of members whose presence is necessary to hold a meeting is called quorum.

If there is no quorum the meeting shall be adjourned. No quorum is necessary for an adjourned meeting. In an adjourned meeting decision may be taken only on the agenda previously fixed.

Ordinarily the pradhan shall preside over the Gram Panchayat meeting. In his absence the upa-pradhan will preside. If both of them are absence the members present will elect from among themselves one of the members to preside over the meeting.

The secretary shall prepare the Agenda on the advice of the pradhan or in his absence, the upa-pradhan. The pradhan or in his absence the upa-pradhan will countersign the Agenda Book.

**Except for an emergency meeting.**

Written notice of all meeting shall be served on all the members at least seven days before the date fixed for the meeting. The emergency meeting may be convened on three days' notice. In an emergency meeting only an agenda previously fixed can be discussed. The time date venue and the agenda of meeting shall be clearly written in the notice. One copy of the notice shall be hung up in the office of the Gram Panchayat. Before the start of the meeting the chairman of the meeting shall check if all the members have received written notice of the meeting. If it is found that the notice has not been served on any members in appropriate time and in the appropriate manner no meeting can be held. A meeting may however be held if any member who has not received any written notice comes to the meeting on receipt of information from other sources. The secretary of the Gram

Panchayat will send notice of the meeting to the members through messenger. He will also keep written proof as a token of receipt of the notice by the members.

The members shall sign the Attendance Register as a token of their presence at the place of the meeting.

The subject as mentioned in the Agenda Book shall be discussed at seriatim and the secretary shall record the decision thereon in the Meeting Book. After all the subject have been discussed the secretary shall read out the decisions as incorporated into the meeting book. The chairman of the meeting shall thereafter sign the book. Signing of the Meeting Book by the chairman of the meeting is obligatory and the members should also satisfy them-selves that this requirement has been completed with. If there is a difference of opinion, the majority opinion shall be accepted and if necessary, it should be ascertained through votes. If there is an equality of votes the chairman shall cast the second vote for a final decision. This vote by the chairman of the meeting cast for the second time is called a casting vote. The date and time for the next meeting shall be decided in the Gram Panchayat meeting itself. Every member of the Gram Panchayat shall be entitled to a monthly Travelling Allowance of Rs.20/- for attending the Gram Panchayat Meeting.

If one third of the total number of members (atleast three) request the pradhan to convene any meeting he will fix the time and hour of such meeting and convene it with due intimation to the local Block Development Office within 15 days from the receipt of the notice from the members. Such a meeting is called a Requisition Meeting.

If the pradhan does not convene a Requisition Meeting within 15days from the date of notice from the members, they may themselves convene the meeting giving due notice to the panchayat and all

members of the Gram Panchayat and with due intimation to the Block Development office within 35 days from the date of receipt of their notice by the pradhan. The meeting will be held in the office of the Gram Panchayat on the date and hour fixed. The Block Development officer may appoint an observer for the meeting. He will submit a report on the proceeding of the meeting to the BDO within 7 days from the date of the meeting. On receipt of the report the Block Development officer will examine if the meeting has been lawfully held or if the decision taken are according to law he will there after take such step as he thinks appropriate. It may be mentioned that according to section 12 of the panchayat Act atleast one third of the members directly elected (atleast three) may issue a notice to the pradhan to deliberate on a proposal for the removal of the pradhan or the upa-pradhan.

### **Functions of Gram Panchayat**

The functions of the Gram Panchayat have been mentioned in the Act. The list of functions is rather long it contains details of many functions. An analysis of the functions will show that may be divided primary into three groups. First there are certain functions which aim at the well being of the villages. Secondary some functions relate to improvement of their economic. Third some functions aim act measures which would ensure social justice for the villages.

### **Functions relating to common well being (SIPRD, Govt. of W.B., 1998)**

1. Sanitation, conservancy.
2. Preventive measures in respect of Malaria, small pox, cholera or any other epidemic,
3. Supply of drinking water and prevention of pollution,
4. Construction and maintenance of roads,

5. Removal of encroachment of public streets,
6. Maintenance of tanks with easement right, grazing ground, Burning Ghats, public graveyard,
7. Lighting of public street,
8. Maintenance of documents relating to census,
9. Planting of trees on the side of public streets or in public places,
10. Sinking of well, tanks, beels etc,
11. Protection of common properties, and
12. Imposition assessment and collection of taxes, rates and fees leviable under the Panchayat Act and administration of Gram Panchayat fund.

**Functions relating to development and social justice**

13. Co-operative farming, industries and other work,
14. Construction of markets, holding of fairs and exhibition,
15. Measures for development of different industries like Khadi, Food preservation and other cottage and small scale industries,
16. Preparation and execution of schemes for Dairy, Animal Husbandry and Fisheries. Measures for improvement of breeding of cattle, improvement of medical treatment of cattle and prevention of cattle disease,
17. Establishment and maintenance of Libraries,
18. Cultural activities including sports and games,
19. Public distribution system,
20. Social welfare including welfare of the handicapped, the destitute and the old and infirm,
21. Welfare of scheduled castes and scheduled Tribes, rehabilitation of the displaced,

22. Primary, social, technical, vocational education, adult and non-formal education,
23. Establishment and maintenance of public dispensary, health center and central for women and child care,
24. Maintenance of ferry services if authorized by govt. under the ferries Act.,
25. Irrigation,
26. Agriculture extension, fuel and fodder,
27. Reclamation of waste land, preservation of soil and land development,
28. Social forestry and development of forest,
29. Poverty Alleviation programmes,
30. Land reformer,
31. Co-operative management of land and other resources of the village,
32. Rural Housing,
33. Rural Electrification and supply of electricity,
34. Non-conventional energy, and
35. Women and child Development.

The list is quite exhaustive with all the subjects mentioned in the Act being included it. In a word the duty of the Gram Panchayat is to take measures for take well being of the villagers to secure social justice and to bring about rural development.

#### 14. The Left Front Phase

The Left Front government in 1978 brought into force the West Bengal Act, 1973. The Act proposed change in structure, composition, and functions of the PRI bodies. Accordingly a three-tier system was introduced-Gram Panchayat, Samiti, Panchayat and Zilla Parishad. The 1973 ACT in its original form provided for a Gram Panchayat consisting of a few village with maximum population of 15.000(5000 in hill areas). The total elected members would vary between 7 and 25 depending on the number of voter in the area. The state govt. might nominate two person from SC or ST and two women if these section were otherwise unrepresented. Members held office for four years. They elected a pradhan and upa-pradhan from among themselves. The pradhan exercised all administrative powers. There would be a secretary to look after the Gram Panchayat Office, a semiskilled person called job Assistant, a tax collector, village chowkidars and a Gram Seveka who happened to be a village level Extension officer of the Rural Development Department at the disposal of the Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayat meet at least once in a month if one-fifth of its members were present.

The next higher tier was Panchayat Samiti established at block level by abolishing the earlier Anchalik Parishads. It consisted of a maximum of three members elected from each village on the basis of adult franchise, two persons belonging to SC/ST and two women to be nominated by state govt., pradhans of Gram Panchayat within the block area and members of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha within the block area. They all held office for four years and elected from among themselves a Sabhapati and a Sahakari Sabhapati. It met at least once in a month provided one-fifth of its members were present. The 1973 Act provided for seven standing committees at both Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad level to deal with particular functions. These were

Finance and planning, Education, Public Health, Construction Work, Relief and Welfare. The BDO was the ex-officio Executive Officer of Panchayat Samiti.

At the highest level was the Zilla Parishad headed by a Sabhadhipati and, in his absence, a Sahakari Sabhadhipati. Its members included – two persons elected on the basis of adult franchise from each constituency within the territorial limits of each Zilla Parishad. Sabhapatis of Panchayat Samitis within its area and members of Lok Sabha and Vidhan Sabha from the district were its ex-office members, also Rajya Sabha members whose residence is in the district were its ex-officio members. Two persons from SC/ST and two women members were to be nominated by State Govt. The District Magistrate (DM) was the Executive officer of Zilla Parishad and Additional District Magistrate (ADM) was its Additional Executive officer.

Thus PRIs were working in close cooperation with bureaucracy. It was not possible to abolish bureaucracy altogether, so they were brought under close popular supervision (of elected bodies at different tiers). With more power and authority, PRIs became responsible for huge amount of money. Even planning was decentralized with the establishment of District Planning Committees (DPC) and Block Planning Committees (BPC) after 1985. The DPC was headed by Zilla Parishad Chairman with the DM as its Member Secretary. The heads of Panchayat Samitis and municipalities and standing committees within the territorial jurisdiction of the district were all members of the DPC. It acted as the executive arm of District Planning and coordination committee(DPCC) which was a bigger body comprising all DPC members, MPs, MLAs, and Ministers. The BPC was set up on similar basis. These provisions held good till 1992 where the Panchayat ACT was amended.

The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 was amended a number of times till 1994. These amendments changed the character of West Bengal PRIs further. In 1982, amendment was made in which the term of PRIs was increased from four to five years. In 1992 amendment, it was provided that not less than one-third of the seats in each tier of panchayats shall be reserved for women. The reserved seats shall be rotated in every election. The number of standing committees were increased to ten. In 1994 amendment it was said that not only for ordinary members, reservation will be effective also for the seats of chairpersons. Reservation of seats for SC/ST according to their proportion to total population was also provided. Secondly, two popular bodies namely Gram Sabha (all electors of a Gram Panchayat) and Gram Sansad (all electors within a constituency of a Gram Panchayat delimited for the purpose of last preceding general elections to panchayats) were set in operation with changed connotation. Thirdly, it was said that only directly elected members of a tier will have say in choosing and removing office-bearers. Fourthly, panchayats at all tiers were empowered to approve their own budget and bye-laws and also borrow from any financial institution for implementation of a scheme without prior approval of any higher tier. Fifthly, an independent state Election Commission was recommended to be constituted for conducting all the panchayats within the state.

Thus the West Bengal panchayat Act was brought in line with the letter and spirit of seventy Third Amendment of Indian Constitution, 1992. The panchayat in West Bengal are now being run according to all these amended provisions. In doing so, how far panchayats have been able to bring about democratic decentralization will be examined in the following chapters.

## 15. An Introduction to Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad

The Gram Panchayat is one of the tiers of the three tier Panchayat System in West Bengal. The two upper tiers are the Panchayat Samiti and the Zilla Parishad. A brief outline of the composition and functions of these two tiers and the inter-tier structural and functional relationship is given in the following paragraphs.

The Panchayat Samiti is the intermediate tier in the Panchayat System. In every Panchayat Samiti not more than three members are elected from each constituent Gram Panchayat. Seats for scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are reserved in each Panchayat Samiti on the basis of population. Of these reserved seats, at least one third seats are reserved for women. Altogether, one third of the total seats of a Panchayat Samiti are reserved for women.

The Pradhan of each constituent Gram Panchayat of a Panchayat Samiti and the Zilla Parishad members elected from the Panchayat Samiti area are ex-officio members of the Panchayat Samiti.

The different functions of the Panchayat Samiti are carried out through ten Sthayee Samitis (standing committees). Each standing committee is constituted with not more than five elected members and one or more Government Officials. One of the elected members is elected as the Chairperson of the Panchayat Samiti. All functions of the Panchayat Samiti are conducted under his leadership. Besides, the standing committees, there is a Samanway Samiti (co-ordination committee). The Sabhapati of the Panchayat Samiti is the Chairperson of the Samanway Samiti and its main function is to co-ordinate the activities of the various Sthayee Samitis.

The Sabhapati is in charge of the general and financial administration of the Panchayat Samiti. He discharges his functions

and responsibilities with the help of an Executive Officer. In addition to its duties relating to economic development and social justice, the Panchayat Samiti may, in certain cases, supervise the work of the Gram Panchayat.

The Zilla Parishad is the highest tier in three-tier Panchayat System. Not more than three members are elected in the Zilla Parishad from each constituent Panchayat Samiti. Because, the Sabhapatis of all the constituent Panchayat Samitis are ex-officio members of the Zilla Parishad. The principle for reservation of seats for women and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in a Panchayat Samiti applies equally to a Zilla Parishad.

As in the case of a Panchayat Samiti, the functions of a Zilla Parishad are carried out through ten Sthayee Samitis. The Sabhadipati is primarily responsible for the general and financial administration the Zilla Parishad.

In certain cases the Zilla Parishad may supervise the work of Panchayat Samitis and Gram Panchayats.

An attempt has been made to secure uniformity in the functional pattern of the three tiers from the district to the grass roots level through structural and functional relationship among the three tiers.

### **16. Structural & Organizational Pattern of West Bengal in grass root level (Sthayee Samiti & Upasamiti)**

In a democracy, decentralization of political and economic power is essential because a few centres of power cannot realize or fulfill the needs of the vast multitude of people. If India is to develop, the power and responsibilities must be shared by all. So far programmes were designed by a few people at the top and were implemented by official's without the involvement of people at the grass root level.

After the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment of our constitution, it became mandatory for all states, except those having a population of 20 lacs to adopt a 3 tier structure, reserve one-third seats of members and chairpersons at all levels for women, SCs, STs in proportion to the population of the area, hold election every five years through the State Election Commission and amend all state Acts in accordance with the 1993 amendment within one year latest by 23<sup>rd</sup> December 1994.

In West Bengal for decentralization of PRI powers of three-tier system implemented up a samiti in Gram Panchayat level under 324 articles in West Bengal Panchayat Act. Sthayee Samiti are implemented in Panchayat Samiti, Zillaparisad and Mahakumaparisad level under 124,171 and 185 B article in West Bengal Panchayat Act.

In 1964 administrative rule of Zillaparisad and 2008 administrative rule of Panchayat Samiti this was given some instruction regarding functions of the Sthayee Samitis. Sthayee Samitis of Panchayat Samitis, Zillaparisad and Siliguri Mahakuma Parisad are as given below:

<b>Panchayat Samiti &amp; Zilla parisad</b>	<b>Siliguri Mahakumaparisad</b>
1.Artha, Sanstha, Unnyan o parikalpana Sthayee Samiti	1.Artha, Sanstha, Unnyan o Parikalpana Sthayee Samiti
2.Janasansthya o Paribesh Sthayee Samiti	2. Janaswasthya Paribesh, Sthayee Samiti
3.Purta karya O Sthayee Samiti	3. Krishi, Sech o Samabay, Khudra Silpo, Bidyut o Achiracharit Shakti of Sthayee Samiti
4.Krishi, Sech o Samabay Sthayee Samiti	4. Ban o Bhumi Sanraksha Sbang Matsya o Pranisampad Bikash Sthayee Samiti
5. Siksha, Sanskriti, Tathya o Krira Sthayee Samiti.	5. Khadya o Sarbarah Ebang Janakalyan o Tran Sthayee Samiti.
6. Sishu o Nari Unnayan , Janakalyan o Tran.	
7.Bon o Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti.	

8. Matsya o Parisampad Bikash Sthayee Samiti.	
9. Khudra Shilpa, Bidyut o Achiracharit Sakti Sthayee Samiti.	
10. Khadya o Sarbaraha Sthayee Samiti.	

Such other Sthayee Samiti or Samities as the Panchayat Samiti or Zillaparisad may be formed, Subject to the approval of the State Govt.

**Procedure of formation:**

As per total members of Sthayee Samiti of Panchayat Samiti or Zillaparisad maximum five or minimum three members will be elected in the Sthayee Samities other than Artha Sanstha Unnayan Parikalpana Samiti.

Karmadhyakshas of other Sthayee Samitis will be ex-officio member of Artha Sanstha Unnayan o Parikalpana Sthayee Samiti. No other members will be elected separately for this Sthayee Samiti.

	<b>Total Members</b>	<b>Member of Sthayee Samiti</b>
Zilla Parisad	a) Upto- 30 members	3 only
	b) 31-60 members	4 only
	c) 61 and above	5 only
Panchyat Samiti	a) Upto 15 members	3 only
	b) 15-30 members	4 only
	c) 31 and above	5 only

In case of Panchayat Samiti Sabhapati and Sahakari Sabhapati will be ex-office member of other Sthayee Samiti, in Panchyat Samiti and also in case of Zilla Parisad Sabhapati and Sahakari Sabhapati will be ex office member of other Sthayee Samiti in Zilla Parisad.

**Fixed responsibility of Sthayee Samiti of Zillaparisads and Panchayat Samitis** (Janasasthya O Paribesh Sthayee Samiti, 2009)

Name of Sthayee Samities	Responsibilities	
	Zillaparisad	Panchayat Samiti
1. Artha Sanstha Unnayan o Parikalpana	i) Financial subjects ii) Audit iii) Budget iv) Inspection (Niriksha) v) Administrative and organizational subjects of Zillaparisad/ Mahakumaparisad vi) Co-ordination of different running schemes of various departments vii) Small savings viii) Plan making ix) Tax collection and actions (sampad sangraha & babasthapanana) x) Self employment schemes xi) pheri, bridge etc. xii) Co-ordination of various samities	i) Financial Subject ii) Audit iii) Budget iv) Inspection (Niriksha) v) Fees, Toll etc. vi) Resource or Sampad collection vii) Co-ordination of various samities viii) Administration or organization ix) Plan making & implementation x) Self employment schemes xi) Small savings xii) To form an information centre (bhander) for planning of Panchayat Samiti xiii) Hat, Market, Pheri drive (parichalana) xiv) Arranged training of members of G.P xv) Responsibility not tendered to sthayee samiti.
2. Janaswasthya o Paribesh	i) Public health related matters ii) Hospital system iii) Health System iv) Drinking water supply v) Nutritional arrangement vi) Dispensary, primary health centers and clinic.	i) Public health ii) Hygiene iii) Rural drinking water iv) Block wise health system. v) Block wise agenda for controlling AIDS and other infection disease. vi) Block wise resistancy

	<p>Vii)Family welfare</p> <p>viii)Resist Environmental pollution</p> <p>ix)Economical Toilet</p>	<p>against disease of the borrower.</p> <p>vii) Rural health centre, clinic and Dispensary.</p> <p>viii) Family welfare.</p> <p>ix) Nutritional system.</p> <p>x) Protect environment &amp; Preservation of recreational evolution.</p> <p>xi) Population Control.</p>
3.Purtakarja o paribahan	<p>i)road, Bridge , Culvert and drain making</p> <p>ii)House build of Panchayt Samiti and Public</p> <p>iii)transport development, SERY, IX-th Finance Commission IAY etc.</p>	<p>i)For whole year communication drain, bridge , culvert etc.</p> <p>ii)House making for public interest.</p> <p>iii) Rural house building.</p> <p>iv) Various types of building &amp; preservation.</p> <p>v) Road, water, path communication for public interest.</p> <p>vi)Lavatory system.</p>
4.Krishi, Sech o Samobay	<p>i)Agri-related matters</p> <p>ii)Agri-Industry related</p> <p>iii)Irrigation and small irrigation</p> <p>iv)Land preservation</p> <p>v)Garden of flowers and fruit</p> <p>vi)Selling and bringing arrangement for agri-commodities</p> <p>vii)Co-operative</p> <p>viii)Water tanks.</p> <p>ix Development of river side (Ababahika unnoyan)</p> <p>x) Agri-loan</p> <p>xi)Division of water development planning and implementation</p> <p>xii)Agri-pension</p> <p>xiii)Provident fund of landless labors(PROFLAL)</p>	<p>i)Agri New plant &amp; variety of crops.</p> <p>ii)Agri-industry related.</p> <p>iii)(Garden of fruits)Horticulture</p> <p>iv)Garden of Flowers.</p> <p>v)Kecho Sar.(earthworm Fertilizer)</p> <p>vi)Agri-commodities marketing.</p> <p>vii)Irrigation &amp; small Irrigation.</p> <p>viii)Mart preservation</p> <p>ix)Water shed development.</p> <p>x)Co-operative.</p> <p>xi)Projects of landless agri-labour.</p>

<p>5. Siksha, Sanskriti, Tathya o Krira</p>	<p>i)Primary &amp; secondary education. ii)Adult &amp; non-customary education. iii)welfare of students. iv)Sports v)Youth welfare vi)Agenda guided by Information and broadcasting Dept. vii)Keep accounts in socio economic development and broadcast. viii)Agenda of children education. ix)School buildings and lavatory x)D.P.E.P XI)Mass education mission xii)Library</p>	<p>i)Primary &amp; secondary education. ii)Adult &amp; non-customary education. iii)welfare of students. iv)Sports v)Youth welfare vi)Agenda guided by Information and broadcasting Dept. vii)Keep accounts in socio economic development and broadcast. viii)Agenda of children education. ix)School buildings and lavatory x)D.P.E.P XI)Mass education mission xii)Library</p>
<p>6.Nari, sishu unnayan, janakalyan o tran</p>	<p>i)women and child development ii)Prevention of child labour iii)Social welfare iv)Scheduled caste- tribe welfare v)Other backward cast welfare vi)Agenda of social security. vii)natural calamities, relief. viii)Allowances given by Social welfare dept.</p>	<p>i)women and child development ii)Prevention of child labour iii)Social welfare iv)Scheduled caste-tribe welfare v)Other backward cast welfare vi)Agenda of social security. vii)natural calamities, relief. viii)Allowances given by Social welfare dept.</p>

7. Ban o Bhumi Sanskar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Governmental land distribution</li> <li>ii) Land reform agenda</li> <li>iii) Forestry</li> <li>iv) Agri-Forestry</li> <li>v) Development of fires &amp; animal food</li> <li>vi) Protection of forest wealth.</li> <li>vii) Protect the balance of environment</li> <li>viii) Supervision of land reform related cases.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Governmental land distribution</li> <li>ii) Land reform agenda</li> <li>iii) Forestry</li> <li>iv) Agri-Forestry</li> <li>v) Development of fires &amp; animal food</li> <li>vi) Protection of forest wealth.</li> <li>vii) Protect the balance of environment</li> <li>viii) Supervision of land reform related cases.</li> </ul>
8. Matsya o pranisampad vikash	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) fishery</li> <li>ii) Animal resources development</li> <li>iii) Projects for the development of fish farmers pension and home building.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) fishery</li> <li>ii) Animal resources development</li> <li>iii) Projects for the development of fish farmers pension and home building.</li> </ul>
9. Khadya o Sarbaraho	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Rationing system</li> <li>ii) Supply of essential commodities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Rationing system</li> <li>ii) Supply of essential commodities</li> </ul>
10. Khudra silpa, Bidyut o Achiracharit Shakti	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) Sthayee Samiti of small Industry &amp; cottage</li> <li>ii) Handloom</li> <li>iii) Rural eternal Industry</li> <li>iv) Khadi &amp; sericulture</li> <li>v) Rural electrification , source of power and line</li> <li>vi) Self employment &amp; Training for mechanical skill.</li> <li>vii) Electric supply</li> <li>viii) Source of renew able energy</li> <li>ix ) Electric bill &amp; meter</li> <li>x) Illegal electric connection related matter</li> <li>xi) Electric connection to the irrigation project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i) small Industry &amp; cottage</li> <li>ii) Handloom</li> <li>iii) Rural chirantani industry</li> <li>iv) Khadi &amp; sericulture</li> <li>v) Self employment scheme &amp; training for mechanical skill</li> <li>vi) Rural electrification, source of power and use</li> <li>vii) Electric supply</li> <li>viii) source of renewable energy &amp; use.</li> <li>ix ) Electric bill &amp; meter</li> <li>x) Illegal electric connection related matter</li> <li>xi) Electric connection to the irrigation project.</li> </ul>

Responsibilities of Sthayee Samiti more elaborate and fixed through Rural and Panchayat Dept. by activating Map.

Composition powers, responsibility and duty of upasamity there will be five types of Upasamitis These are :

- i) Artha o Parikalpana
- ii) Krishi o Pranisampad Bikash
- iii) Shiksha o Janaswastha
- iv) Nari, Sishu Unnayan o Janakalyan
- v) Shilpo o Parikatham

### **Composition of Upasamity:**

Upasamity will be formed within three month after the first meeting of Panchayat (Governmentally call) Members of the Upasamiti will be –

- i) Pradhan & Upaprodhan (ex-officer) and
- ii) Direct elected member of Panchayat and ex-officer (Panchayat Samiti) maximum three members. These three members will be elected governmentally in a meeting which is called.

One member will be as ex-officio member of Artha o Parikalpana from the opposition which party will be obtained more seats among opposition. If two parties obtained same seats then as per order of Election Commission of India among National and Resional political party, the former will be given priority. If there is no member from any political party then senior member of independence will be as ex-officio member of Artha o Parikalpana.

In case of Nari, Sishu Unnayan O Samajkalyan Upasamiti half member will be women.

Member of Upasamiti in Numbers:

Number of Panchayat Member	Member of Upasamiti
a)10 & less than	01
b)11 to 20	02
c)21 & above	03

No member holds more than two posts in Upasamiti except Pradhan & Upapradhan.

Responsibility of the Upasamity in the following subjects-

Upasamity	Subjects
1. Artha o Parikalpana	Finance , Budget, Audit & Accounts cell, Tax, Resource collection , Plan, Estimate making of G.P. making and supervision of various rural Development agenda, Resource and information cell system of G.P. for public distribution disaster rescue, marketing hawking land pond leading co-ordination of other upasamiti and other work that did not give other upasamiti.
2. Krishi o Praniisampad vikash	Agree, Horticulture, Irrigation Animal resources development, Fish water shed development, co-operative Provident fund of land less labors, Fishery, Forestry, Prevention of land erosion, water resource development.
3. Siksha O janaswasthya	Literacy campaign and spreading, child education agenda, primary education, secondary education agenda, environment public education, Rural library, public health, Hygienic Rural water supply, rural dispensary & clinic & family welfare agenda

1. Nari Shisu unnayan o Samaj kalyan	Self-help groups, swarna jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana, Integrated child Development scheme, National Social Assistance projects, Women & Child Development related other projects, Social Welfare old and Handicapped Development.
2. Shilpa O Parikathamo	Small & cottage Industry, Rural artistry

### APPOINTMENT OF OFFICIALS IN DIFFERENT COMMITTEES

(Annual Administrative Report, 2008-09):

On 18.08.08 orders were issued by this Deptt vide No. 3340/PN/o/I/2A-1/04 and 3341/PN/O/I/2A-1/04 for appointment of the persons being officials government or of a statutory body or corporation, as members of different Sthayee Samitis of Zila Parishad and a panchayat samiti. A further order was issued vide No. 4304/PN/o/I/2A-1/04 dated 23.10.2008 to appoint the secretary, Zilla Parishad as member of the Artha Sanstha Unnayan O Praikalpana Sthayee Samiti of the Zilla Parishad concerned. Order No.4052/PN/O/I/2A-1/2003 (pt-1) was issued on 24.09.08 in respect of Gram Panchayat for appointment of the officials of the concerned Gram Panchayat, state Govt or of a statutory body or corporation , as members of different Upa-Samitis of Gram Panchayat. The designations of officials appointed in different Sthayee Samitis of Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samitis as well as in different Upa-Samitis of Gram Panchayat are given below.

**Sthayee Samitis of the Zilla Parishad****A) Artha Sanstha Unnayan O Parikalpana Sthayee Samiti :**

1. District Magistrate and Executive officer, Zilla Parishad.
2. Additional Executive Officer, Zilla Parishad.
3. Secretary, Zilla Parishad.
4. District Panchayat and Rural Development officer.
5. District Planning Officer.
6. Parishad Accounts & Audit officer.
7. District Engineer, Zilla Parishad/Executive Engineer of Zilla Parishad.
8. Financial Controller & Chief Accounts Officer of Zilla Parishad.

**B) Janaswastha O Paribesh Sthayee Samiti :**

1. Chief Medical officer of Health.
2. Executive Engineer, P.H.E.
3. Deputy Chief Medical officer of Health-III.
4. District public Health Nursing officer.

**C) Purta Karya O Paridhan Sthayee Samiti :**

1. Additional Executive officer, Zilla Parishad.
2. Executive Engineer, PWD.
3. Executive Engineer, PWD (Roads).
4. Executive Engineer (Rural development) or where there is no such officer, Assistant Engineer (Rural Development).
5. Regional transport officer.

6. District Engineer of Zilla Parishad/ Executive Engineer of Zilla Parishad.

**D) Krishi Sech O Samabaya Sthayee Samiti**

1. Principal Agricultural officer or where there is no such officer, District.
2. Agricultural officer.
3. Executive Engineer (Irrigation & waterways).
4. Executive Engineer, Agri-Irrigation/Agri- Mechanical.
5. Assistant Registrar, co-operative societies.
6. Superintendent, Agri-Marketing/Assistant Director, Agri-Marketing.

**E) Siksha, Sanskrit, Tatha O Krira Sthayee Samiti**

1. District Inspector of Schools (primary).
2. District Inspector of school (secondary).
3. District Mass Education officer.
4. District Information and cultural Affairs officer.
5. District Youth Officer.
6. District Library Officer.
7. Assistant Coordinator, Education.
8. District Project Officer, Paschim Banga Sarbo Siksha Mission.

**F) Sishu O Nari Unnayan, Janakalyan O Tran Sthayee Samiti**

1. Project Director, D.R.D.C.
2. District Relief officer.
3. District social welfare officer.

4. Project officer cum District welfare officer of Backward Classes Welfare.
5. Programme Officer, ICDS.
6. Deputy Project Director, DRDC (Women Development).

**G) Bon O Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti**

1. Additional District Magistrate (land reforms) / District Land and Land Reforms officer.
2. Divisional Forest officer.
3. Additional/Assistant Divisional Forest officer.
4. Assistant Director, Tourism/tourism officer/Assistant Tourism officer.

**H) Matsya O Prani Sampad Bikash Sthayee Samiti :**

1. Assistant Director, Fisheries.
2. Chief Executive officer, F.F.D.A.
3. Chief Executive officer, Brackish water Fish Farmers Development Agency.
4. Deputy Director of Animal Resources Development.

**I) Khadya O Sarbaraha Sthayee Samiti**

1. District Magistrate or Additional District Magistrate-in-charge of food and supplies.
2. Superintendent of Police (D.E.B)
3. District Controller of Food & Supplies.
4. District Manager, F.C.I.
5. Assistant Director, Consumer Affairs / Assistant Controller, Weights & Measures.

**J) Khudra Shilpa, Bidyut O Achiracharit Shakti Sthayee Samiti**

1. General Manager, District Industries centre.
2. District officer, West Bengal Khadi & Village Industries Board.
3. Zonal Manager, West Bengal state Electricity Distribution company Limited having jurisdiction in any part of the district.
4. Superintending Engineer (O&M) west Bengal state Electricity Distribution Company limited having jurisdiction in any part of the district.
5. Divisional Engineer (R&E) West Bengal state Electricity Distribution Company limited having jurisdiction.
6. Divisional Engineer (EHT) (O&M) West Bengal state Electricity Distribution Company limited having jurisdiction.
7. Divisional Engineer (O&M) West Bengal state Electricity Distribution Company limited having jurisdiction.
8. Secretary Department of science & technology.
9. Director West Bengal Renewable Energy Development Agency.
10. Executive Director (Distribution) Calcutta Electric supply corporation Ltd. (for Sthayee Samitis of south 24-parganas, North 24-parganas, Howrah and Hooghly Zilla Parishad).

**Sthayee Samitis of the Panchayat Samiti****A) Artha , Sanstha , Unnayan O Parikalpana Sthayee Samiti**

1. Block Development officer and ex-officer Executive officer, Panchayat Samiti.
2. Joint Block development officer and ex-officio joint Executive officer, Panchayat Samiti.
3. Panchayat Development officer and ex-officio secretary, Panchayat Samiti.
4. Block Livelihood Development officer/Asstt. Programme officer.
5. Sub-Assistant Engineer (R.W.P)
6. Panchayat Accounts and Audit officer.

**B) Janaswastha O Paribesh Sthayee Samiti**

1. Block Medical officer of Health.
2. Joint B.D.O. and ex-officio joint Executive officer, Panchayat Samiti.
3. Sub-Assistant Engineer (P.H.E.)
4. Block Public Health Nurse.

**C) Purta Karya O Pardahan Sthayee Samiti**

1. B.D.O. and ex-officio Executive officer, Panchayat Samiti.
2. Joint B.D.O. and ex-officio joint Executive officer , Panchayat Samiti
3. Sub-Assistant Engineer, Agri-Irrigation / Agri-Mechanical.
4. Sub-Assistant Engineer (R.W.P.)
5. Block Livelihood Development officer/Assistant programme officer.

**D) Krishi Sech O Samabaya Sthayee Samiti**

1. Agricultural Development officer.
2. Assistant Agricultural Extension officer.
3. Co-operative Inspector.
4. Chief Executive officer, Large Sized Multipurpose co-operative society.
5. Chairman, Large Sized Multipurpose Co-operative Society.
6. Inspector, Agricultural Minimum Wages.
7. Assistant Engineer, Irrigation and Water Ways.
8. Assistant Engineer, Agri-Irrigation/ Agri-Mechanical.
9. Agri-Marketing officer.

**E) Siksha, Sanskrit, Tathya O Krira Sthayee Samiti**

1. Sub-Inspector of Schools (primary).
2. Extension officer (Mass Education).
3. Lady Extension officer (Mass Education).
4. Block Youth officer.
5. Samiti Education officer.
6. Sub-Divisional Information & Cultural Affairs officer.

**F) Sishu O Nari Unnayan, Janakalyan O Tran Sthayee Samiti**

1. Block Relief officer.
2. Block Welfare officer.
3. Inspector, Backward classes welfare.
4. Sub-Assistant Engineer (Relief).
5. Child Development project officer posted at Block.
6. Chairman, Large sized multipurpose co-operative society.

7. Chief Executive officer, Large Sized Multipurpose Co-operative society.
8. Women Development officer / Gram Shebika of Block.

**G) Bon O Bhumi Sanskar Sthayee Samiti**

1. Block Development officer and ex-officio Executive officer, Panchayat Samiti.
2. Block Land and Land Reforms officer.
3. Range officer / Beat officer of Forest Department having Office located within the jurisdiction of the block.
4. Sub Assistant Engineer (RWP) of the Block.
5. Assistant Agricultural Extension officer of the Block.

**H) Matsya O Prani Sampad Bikash Sthayee Samiti**

1. Joint B.D.O. and ex-officio joint Executive officer, Panchayat Samiti.
2. Extension officer (Fisheries).
3. Block Live-stock Development officer.
4. Veterinary officer posted at the Block.

**I) Khadya O Sarbaraha Sthayee Samiti**

1. B.D.O. and ex-officio Executive officer, Panchayat Samiti.
2. Inspector or Sub-Inspector of Food and Supplies.
3. Consumer Welfare officer/Inspector, Weights and Measures.

**J) Khudra Shilpa , Bidyut O Achiracharit Shakti Sthayee Samiti**

1. Industrial Development officer.
2. Extension officer of Sericulture (In-charge of Technical Service Centre).

3. Assistant Engineer, Distribution (O&M) Sub- Division, West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited having jurisdiction in the concerned Block.
4. Assistant Engineer, RE Construction Sub-Division, West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited having jurisdiction in the Concerned Block.
5. Assistant Engineer of Group Electric Supply Station, West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Limited having jurisdiction in the Block Concerned Where Such Group Electric Supply in actually headed by an Assistant Engineer.
6. Director, West Bengal Renewable Energy Development Agency.
7. Manager (North) of C.E.S.C. for Panchayat Samitis in North 24-Parganas.
8. Manager (South) of C.E.S.C. for Panchayat Samitis in 24-parganas.
9. Manager (West) of C.E.S.C. for Panchayat Samiti in Howrah and Hooghly districts.

**Upa-Samitis of Gram Panchayat :****A) Artha O Parikalpana Upa-Samiti**

1. Executive Assistant.
2. Secretary.
3. Nirman Sahayak or Assistant or both.
4. Revenue Inspector.
5. Member of Core Committee of Self-Help Group.

**B) Krishi O Prini Sampad Bikash Upa-Samiti**

1. Sahayak (Where two Sahayak are Posted, one Sahayak in Charge of activities of Krishi and Prani Sampad).
2. Veterinary Assistant.
3. Krishi Prajukti Sahayak.
4. Fishery Extension officer (invited member).
5. Member of Core Committee of Self-Help Group.

**C) Siksha O Janasasthya Upa-Samiti**

1. Executive Assistant.
2. Supervisor of Health & Family Welfare.
3. Supervisor of ICDS.
4. Chairperson of Village Education Committee (invited member).
5. Sahayika of SSK.
6. A.N.M. of Hqtr, Sub-Center of Health.
7. A.N.M. of Sub-Center of Health.
8. Member of Core Committee of Self-Help Group.

**D) Nari Sishu Unnayan O Samajkalyan Upa-Samiti**

1. Secretary.
2. Supervisor of Health & Family Welfare.
3. Supervisor of ICDS.
4. Chairperson of Village Education Committee (invited member).
5. Sahayika of SSK.
6. Member of Core Committee of Self-Help Group.

**E) Shilpa O Parikathamo Upa-Samiti**

1. Job Assistant or Nirmal Sahayak or both.
2. Revenue Inspector.
3. Member of core Committee of Self-Help Group.

The modus operandi for inclusion of member of core committee of SHG in each of the Upa Samitis has been explained in this Department's order No. 4053/PN/O/I/2A-1/03 (pt.1) dated 24.09.08. A representative of core committee of SHG cannot be a member of more than one Upa-Samiti. The core committee will decide as to its representative in each Upa-Samiti and there shall be no other qualification for selection. The Gram Panchayat shall not have any authority in this selection process. No member or official of a Gram Panchayat can be a representative of core committee of SHG.

The functional transfer of subjects as mentioned in the Eleventh Schedule has been clarified through a detailed Activity Mapping exercise, which has been complied for 28 subjects as per orders No. 6102/PN/O/dated 7.11.05. No. 3969/PN/O/dated 25.07.2006 and No. 4769/PN/O/dated 29.10.2007. Activity mapping for only one subject, i.e. technical and vocational education is yet to be published. So far eleven departments of this Government namely, (i) Forest, (ii) Health &

Family Welfare, (iii) Women & Child Development & Social Welfare, (iv) Water Investigation & Development, (v) Micro & Small Scale Enterprises & Textiles , (vi) Animal Resources Development, (vii) Mass Education Extension and Library Services, (viii) Fishery, (ix) Power , (x) Food Processing Industries and Horticulture, and (xi) Panchayat & Rural Development Department have issued matching orders from their end for the purpose of devolution. In addition to those the Land & Land Reforms Department assigned responsibilities to the PRIs from the very beginning of the Panchayat system. The duties and responsibilities of Panchayat functionaries in respect of activities of Land & Land Reforms Department have laid down in West Bengal Land & Land Reforms Act, 1955, West Bengal Estate Acquisition Act, 1953 and West Bengal Land Reforms Manual, 1991.

### **17. The Role of the Panchayati Raj Institutions of West Bengal**

After independence in the idea of Block Development was conceived. According to this total responsibility of the development of a block representing a cluster of villages lay with the Block Development officer working under the control of the District Collector and the local people had, in reality no say, in the planning and implementation of rural development. The system was a form of top down bureaucratic response to the needs of the people where local people even the elected members were undesirable elements in the system. It was the common fate of any planning which was imposed from by the executive upon the beneficiaries intended that the interests of the people were ignored, resources wasted and development under minded. Naturally the system automatically called for some basic changes to make the system 'by the people of the people and for the people.' Hence the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was appointed in January 1957 to study and report on the community Development projects and National Extension service, the team called for the development of participatory democracy

through a three tier system of Panchayats in order to bring about significant improvement in the life of India's villages.

In 1973 the then Government of West Bengal ruled by the Indian National Congress, enacted the West Bengal Panchayat Act- 1973. This Act called for three tier system of Panchayati Raj and direct election of every stage after 4 years. But unfortunately no such election was even held until 1978. The Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI's) based on direct election since 1978 represent what Dr. Probhat Dutta called 'Second Generation Panchayat.'

The Left Front Government introduced the Panchayat Raj in West Bengal for harnessing rural development and bringing about some positive changes in the sphere of land reform, literacy and health care the major areas wherein is hidden the key to development.

In 1979-80 the Indian Planning Commission made a survey on the number of people living below poverty line and it was found that 50.82% of the rural people and 38.19% urban people lived below poverty line. According to the price index of 1978-80, the per capita income in villages was Rs. 76/- while it was 88 in urban

Literacy is a basic tool of self-defence in a society. Prof. Amartya Sen says that basic education is a catalyst of social change. Education helps the overcome traditional inequalities of caste, class and gender. Moreover, education influences a person in at least five distinct ways. (i) Intrinsic importance; (ii) Instrumental personal roles; (iii) instrumental social roles; (iv) instrumental process roles and (v) empowerment & distributive roles. (Sen Amartya and Omnibus Dreje Jean, 1999).

Health is one of the most important social vulnerable, has a great strategic importance in the process of economic development and it is very important in the case of rural development in India. Prof. Amartya

Sen observes 'Illness is, obviously enough one of the most widespread causes of human deprivation and economic insecurity in India. It affects not only the actual patients and those who depend on them for their substance. A well developed system of public health is an essential contribution to the fulfillment of social security objectives (Dr. Dutta, Gouri Pada, 1991).

Every human being male or female wants to act freely and decide on the course of his or her action. This sense of freedom is as true in the case of a person as it is in the case of a little community and a nation in the wider sense. Through such free and self determined activities as a man as well as a community or a nation realizes his dreams and aspirations. Only autonomy can guarantee such pre-conditions. Members of a local community can co-operate and take decisions on them own for its welfare. If local communities can responsibly work for their own benefit a democratic system to which they belong well ultimately be benefited. And a democracy can only flourish if it takes care of the needs of the little communities and their local efforts. Local governments thus acts as an ante dote to centralization of power. If power is centralized, individuals feel no interest to take initiative and decide their course of action. Sometimes centralized power goes against individual liberty, centralization goes against the spirit of local Govt. Local leaders taking part in the government can supervise and control local officials. It also means various official paraphernalia which delays service to the local people. Central interference is also not expected for the solution of problems which are purely local clearing and lighting the streets, removing garbage, constructing roads and wells are better managed by local people directed by local Govts. than by any form of centralized power. A local government manage its services and functions under the guidance of locally elected councils following certain rules and regulations with adequate financial allocation from the state. And these local bodies

should enjoy enough financial and other Independence in making policies and implementing them, so through such activities local governments take part in the main stream of national life.

In this respect decentralization of power is the only means. Through decentralization popular participation in the decentralized institution for development is ensured. Citizens can take effective steps in the decision making process of democratic administration. Through decentralization of authority be it legislative a judicial or administrative power and resources are transferred from higher levels of government to lower ones, people become directly related with the process of administration, by doing so they become instrumental in guiding administration for their social and economic development. The idea of decentralization involves the idea of local self government, self government is not possible unless local, units are made to exercise powers in their own right and independently execute their own decisions. These local bodies constitute the basic structure of a democratic government and provide best agencies for welfare, they are very near the people, know the needs of the people and can manage their affairs with the help of local people, who are quite familiar with local situation. So far healthy system of local government is very relevant in a country like India consisting mainly of villages. As Gandhiji says, 'Go to village that is India, there in lives the soul of India,' with this philosophy of development in mind different study teams recommended the scheme of democratic decentralization or Panchayat Raj. Though the study teams were set up a different points of time and comprised different dignitaries having different philosophies of development, they were unanimously agreed that Panchayat Raj is the only means of rural development in India.

Panchayati Raj on alternative paradigm for rural development was introduced to involve the entire people in the process of

development by democratic decentralization of power in favour of the poor and working people in villages. The CPI(M) aimed that its Panchayati Raj programme was central to achieving this development aims. 'by instituting a system of democratic local Govt. the party hoped these would be mass participation in one Panchayats and increased class consequences as a result (Rogaly Ben, White, Ben Bara, Harish, Sugata, Somen, 1999).

The perspective of socio economic development was largely a result of the short comings of the development policies adhered to in the 1950s and 1960s which believed in the 'trickle down' mechanism by which the process of growth automatically tackles the problems of distributive justice among the lower echelons off the population in any given nation. That euphoria burst its bubbles in the 1970s, when it was realized that poverty, malnutrition hunger, lack of education and health facilities and starvation and disease continue to plague a sizable majority.' (Ghosh & Chatterjee, 2001).

To do away with the adequacies of the previous development policies and to do distributive justice along the 'expansion of social infrastructure like education health nutrition, gender, parity, access to sanitation drinking water and scoop and political empowerment in the turn of grass root democracy spread to the weaker sections of the population, people's participation on civic, local bodies, legislature or the parliament are now viewed as important constituents of development as conditions of material well being or progress thereof connote'. (Ibid)

That is why, 'the Government of West Bengal since, 1977, has been propagating the use of an alternative model of development based on institutional reforms ensuring people's participation in the Panchayats and local bodies, and introducing decentralized planning to effectively monitor and implements measures aimed at poverty

alleviation, construction of social overheads, land reforms and empowering the people who had been historically deprived, like the backward castes and tribes, and the women, while there is some merit in such a claim to usher in institutional change related to the land credit markets in the rural society of the state, and thus much of the progress in agricultural growth in the state in recent years have been attributed to such institutional change ensuring development from below.'

In the Panchayati Raj autonomy plays a vital role in the local governance, the development of a gram panchayat, are sole contributes to the development of a block. A Gram Panchayat,' is responsible for drawing up annual development plan for its own area and distributions state and national funds to realize their goals. In fulfilling this role at the village level individual numbers of the Panchayat are intended to be in close consultation with villagers to ensure that 'grass roots' opinions from the fundamental basis of all development work.' (Ben Rogally, Bose Harish, 1999)

### **The Background of the Panchayat Raj:**

As a traditional village units of government the Panchayat existed for many centuries in India. The Panchayats in the lowery past rarely represented the interest of all the classes of a village community. The superior classes, that is Brahmins, the Kshatriyas regarded as semi-Gods in the social hierarchy had the total dominance over the Panchayats. The Sudras, that is the menials and landless had no status, social or political. These panchayats worked within a very limited area and never bothered about National development.

In 1982, this traditional concept of Panchayat acquired a new, connotation with the introduction of the Ripon Resolution proposing the establishment of local Rural Boards. The resolutions proposed two

thirds of the board's membership would be composed of non-official representatives elected where possible. In Bengal, the Bengal Local Self Government Act of 1885 incorporated these ideas – District Boards, local Boards or the sub-divisional level and union committees for group of villages came into being. An awfully limited electorate, selected on criteria of age, place of residence, taxation and education elected 9 or 10 members to the District Board entrusted with the tasks to look after primary education, water supply and a number of public services through standing committee.

The local Boards having no fixed roles became redundant because of their total reliance upon very limited grants and subsidies.

The Union Committees had even fewer responsibilities and powers and had little role outside the context of village politics. As a whole the total Panchayat system was but an appendage to the colonial administrative framework.

Later the Bengal village self Government Act of 1919 amended the then provisions and set up union Boards, covering an average of 8 to 10 villages. With a population of 10,000 to function under District Boards, these system should have sought to create a means to elevate the condition of the rural poor. But this system helped the rural middle class to grow mobilizing the political support of the rural folk for their own nationalist aspirations. The union Boards offered little to the majority of villages. The Union Boards continued to exist even after independence.

After independence the framing and adopting the constitution of India in 1950 on 26<sup>th</sup> January Article 40 of the Indian constitution should that 'the state should take steps to organize village panchayats, and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self Government.' In 1952 and 1953

community Development Programme and National extension services were launched for rural Development. The concept of block development was envisaged in these programmes. For the purpose of effective rural development a district was deviated into a number of rural development blocks, comprising about a hundred or so villages. The post of a BDO was mooted to give proper administrative shape to each development block. But these two programmes failed to achieve any success mainly due to lack of public participation and minimum allocation of money for rural development.

In 1957, Balwantrai Mehta study team pinpointed public participation and recommended the creation of statutory Institutions, elective comprehensive executive machinery with adequate resources and with enough autonomy and freedom. The team offered two broad directional thrusts. First it argued that these should be administrative decentralization for the effective implementation of the development programme. Secondly, the decentralized administrative system should be under the control of elected bodies. Mr. Mehta recommended the three tier system of Panchayat – (i) Panchayate in village lever; (ii) Panchayat Samity in Block level; and (ii) The Zilla Parishad at the district level. This marked a turning point in the planning and implementation of socio-economic programme on the basis of the three tier Panchayat Raj system recommended the Mehta team. The Panchayat Raj was created in 1959 in some states but not in West Bengal.

Zilla Parishad	District Planning
Panchayat Samity	Block Planning
Gram Panchayat	Village Planning

In West Bengal the Panchayat system was started in the year 1957 and in that year West Bengal Panchayat Act was passed. This was out of four tier West Bengal Panchayat system came into force. The four stages were as follows:

1. Gram Sabha/Gram Panchayat;
2. Anchal Panchayat
3. Anchalik Parishad;
4. Zilla Parishad.

Hence in the post independence period in West Bengal Panchayat system has two phases (i) 1957 – 78 and (ii) 1978 – till this day.

According to the act of 1957 the smallest unit of the Panchayat system was Gram Sabha/Gram Panchayat. The members of Gram Sabha variety from 9 – 15 elected directly by the people. The term of Gram Panchayat was 4 years. At the first meeting of the Gram Panchayat the members elected one, 'Adhyakshya' and the 'Upadhyakshya' from amongst them. The duty of Gram Sabha was to supervise the development work of village. In West Bengal 19662 Gram Panchayat were constituted.

The second unit was Anchal Panchayat, the union board was replaced by an Anchal Panchayat. An Anchal Panchayat consisted of 8 – 10 Gram Panchayat with 10000 populations. In the west Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 a member of an Anchal Panchayat was elected by 250 members of Gram Panchayat. The act was revised in 1965. The revised act envisaged that the members of an Anchal Panchayat should come from two categories; (i) all adhyakshya of Gram Panchayat were the members of Anchal Panchayat and (ii) a member of an Anchal elected by 500 members of a Gram Panchayat. So it envisages that each of the constituent of the Gram Panchayat elected 2- 3 members to

the Anchal Panchayat. In the first meeting of the Anchal Panchayat the members elected one prodhan and one upa-pradhan from amongst themselves. The term of Anchal Panchayat was 4 years. There was a stipendiary secretary for attending to the day to day work of organization. Each Anchal Panchayat administered a fund to which contribution made by the state Government as also tax, toll fee or rate levied and collected by it under the act. In west Bengal 2926 Anchal Panchayat was constituted.

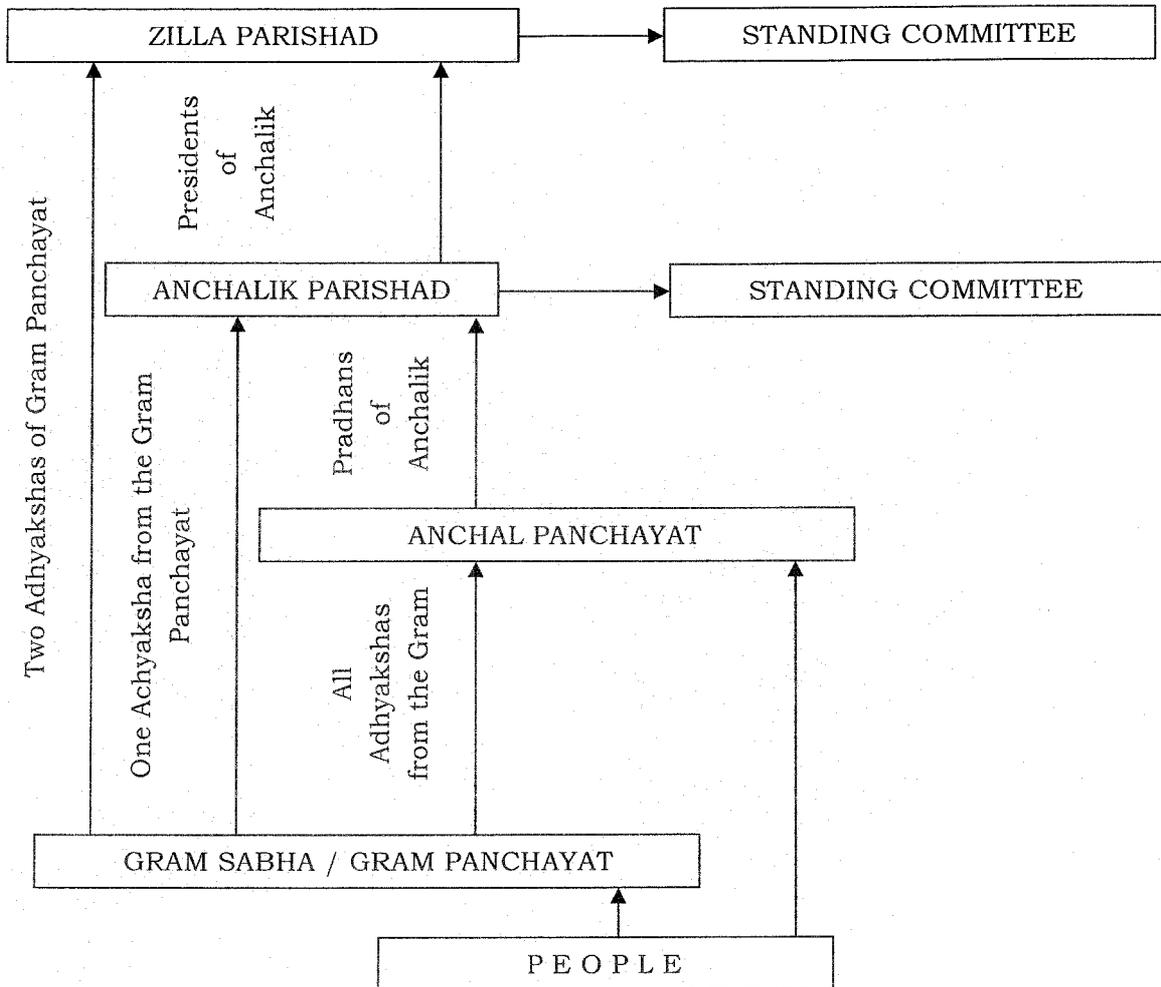
The third unit was Anchalik Parishad which is equivalent of the Panchayat Samity of the present day. Anchalik Parishad was set up under the west Bengal Zilla Parishad act 1963 it was composed of the following members; (i) all prodhan of the Anchal Panchayat; (ii) one adhyakshya from each Anchal Panchayat elected by the adhyakshyas of the anchal. (iii) All M.P.s/M.L.As of the block except ministers of the block (iv) two women and two members from the backward communities nominated by the state government. (v) two co-opted members having the knowledge or experience of social work of rural development.

The term of the parishad was 4 years. Each Anchalik Parishad had a president and vice-president elected by the members amongst themselves. Block development officer was chief executive officer each Anchalik Parishad had 7 standing committees. The parishad would be responsible for the following development works - land, animal husbandry, primary and adult education, village industry, supply of drinking water, public health, communication establishment of cooperative society etc. The grant of parishad came from central government, state government, Zilla Parishad and from tax tolls levied by it. No member was elected directly by the people of it. In west Bengal 3254 Anchalik Parishad were constituted.

The apex unit of 4 tiers was Zilla Parishad. Under the provision of Zilla Parishad the Parishad was composed of the following members; (i) all president of Anchalik Parishad (ii) two adhyakshyas of Gram Panchayat from each sub division of the district elected by the other adhyakshyas (ii) all MPs /MLAs of the district (except minister) (4) one chairman was the municipality in the district nominated by the state government (5) a president of the school board in the district. (6) two women members nominated by the state government (7) all Sub-Divisional Officers (SDO) and District Panchayat Officers and (DPO) as associate members.

A chairman and a vice-chairman (Sabhapati and Sahakari Sabhapati) were to be elected by the members of the parishad. The term of the parishad was 4 years. In west Bengal 15 Zilla Parishad were constituted. A deputy magistrate designated look after day to day administration and the district panchayat officer another deputy magistrate acted as the Ex-officio secretary. Both sub divisional and district panchayat officer were associate members of the parishad which had certain standing committees on finance and establishment, public works, public health, agriculture and irrigation, industry and social welfare etc. the parishad administered a fund to which were credited contribution, grants, loans etc. from the central or state government the proceed of road taxes levied in the district all receipts on account of tolls rates and fees levied by the parishad etc.

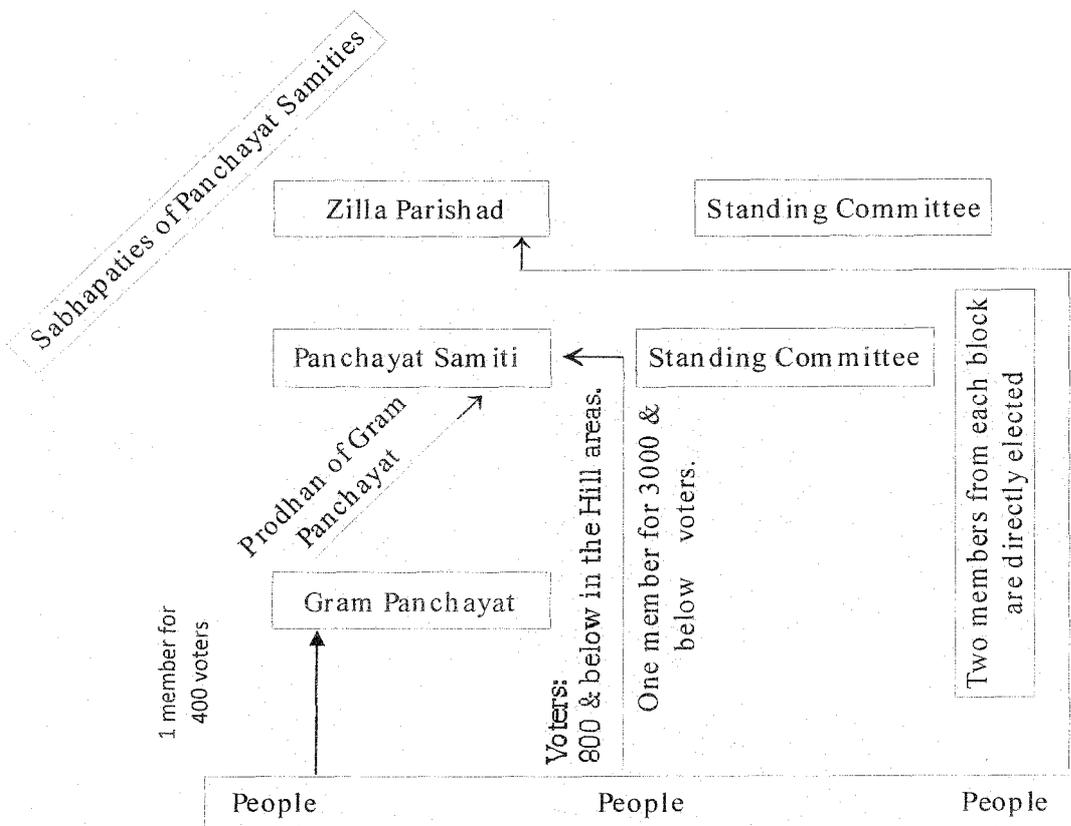
**Table 2.2**  
**The structure of four tier Panchayati Raj in West Bengal.**  
**(Old system – Acts of 1957 and 1963)**



Source : Srikumar Bandhyopadhyay 'Panchayati Raj in West Bengal' in R. Chatterjee (Ed.) Politics in West Bengal, The World Press, Kolkata, 1985, p.216-17

Table - 2.3

**The structure of three tier Panchayati Raj in West Bengal under  
the Act of 1973**



Source : Srikumar Bandhyopadhyay 'Panchayati Raj in West Bengal' in R. Chatterjee (Ed.) Politics in West Bengal, The World Press, Kolkata, 1987, p.216-17

The old system of Panchayati Raj failed as there was no system of direct election in the 4 tier system except in Gram Panchayat and Anchal Panchayat. The Diwakar committee Report released in 1963 about the failure of Gram Sabha noted:

- i) "The ordinary villagers find to distinguish between the Gram Sabha and the Panchayat and one aware of their rights and responsibilities as Gram Sabha members.

- ii) The nature of village policies are such that once a village leader is elected the villagers think that they have nothing to do after that and the leaders will do everything. On the other hand, once an opposition is defeated he and his followers cease to take interest in the Gram Sabha meetings.
- iii) The ruling group often does not want to make proper announcement of the Gram Sabha meeting for fear of faces the opposition. Also in some cases the members of the opposition group deliberately stay away from the meeting.
- iv) Very few people get the information about the forth coming Gram Sabha meetings. The usual method of communities is by the beating of drums by the village chowkidars, which is seldom done properly.
- v) When the Gram Sabha contains a number of villagers, there is generally the well of common venue, which is easily accessible to the people of all the constituent villages.
- vi) The timings of the Gram Sabha meeting have much to do with popular participation.
- vii) The doubtful utility of the /Gram Sabha makes the village a pathetic forwards it.”

The overall structures build for some reason:-

- a) There was no provision for election except in Gram Sabha & Anchal Panchayat.
- b) There was too much government control.
- c) The planning policy maker from top level of the government sides.

- d) Villages politics was in the hands of the village zamindars and other notable to representing the upper can be landed gentry.
- e) Rural poverty was one of the reasons for the failure.

Due to the above reasons the chief objective of the panchayati system was obstructed. In 1967 the United Front Government came to power in West Bengal. But president's rule was imposed on the state of West Bengal in 1968, however, the United Front Government having was in the midterm election for the second time in 1969 took special drive for reconstruction of the panchayat system. No successful implementation was possible because the government was fall. The Congress party came to power in 1972 and subsequently a full-fledged Panchayat Act was passed in 1973. In this new Act three tier Panchayat system faced lien of four tiers. In 1974, the new panchayat system got the approval of the president. The interesting factor is that although the panchayat Act was mooted by the Congress, no arrangement was made for holding Panchayat Election on party basis with political symbols and 4 tier of Panchayat was operative till 4<sup>th</sup> July 1978. In 1977 the left parties declared major pledge for holding panchayat elections and delegacies power to the elected panchayats along with the 38 point programmes in their election manifesto. In 1978 the left front parties won in the election and the left front Government made arrangement for holding 3 tier panchayat elections before the recommendation of the Ashok Mehta Committee August, 1978. The three tier are: - (i) Gram Panchayat; (ii) Panchayat Samity and (iii) Zilla Parishad.

In three tier system the lowest units is Gram Panchayat which was formerly known as Anchal Panchayat at the village level. A Gram Panchayat is constituted of 8 to 10 villages with a population of around 12000, but not exceeding 15000 in plain and 5000 in hill areas.

According to the West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 Sec 4 (2) and 1974 Election rule every 400 voters elect a member of Gram Panchayat in Plan and 125 in Hill areas. The total numbers of Gram Panchayats vary from 7 to 25 as per voters. But the members of the scheduled caste, scheduled tribe and women are not elected. The state Government has power to nominate the two representatives from scheduled caste and tribe groups and two (2) from women members.

The middle tier is Panchayat Samity which was formerly known as Anchalik Parishad of the block level. The Samiti is constituted with the members directly elected by the people from Gram Panchayat constituency that varies from 1 - 3 depending on its size and population that is 3000 and below voters elect one (1) member in Panchayat Samiti in plain area and 800 below voters elect one (1) member in P.S. in hill area.

The apex level is the Zilla Parishad which was formerly known by the same title at the district level. The parishad is constituted with two members from each block, directly elected by the people.

Each Gram Panchayat is headed by a prodhan and an Upo-Prodhan who are elected by the members of the Gram Panchayat to hold the office for 5 years. All executive powers are vested in the hands of prodhan and upo-prodhan. A Secretary and a Job assistant help the prodhan to run the administration and implementation of the different rural developmental schemes. According to the Bengal village Chowkidari Act 1870, village police namely village chowkidar and Dafadar hold office in the Gram Panchayat. After election the BDO convenes the first meeting of the Gram Panchayat. According to the Act, 1984, (Amendment) the quorum has been made only 3 which is one third of the members.

The duties of Gram Panchayats are three categories. There are obligatory, delegated and discretionary. All the duties are related to the development works in the rural area such as public health, water supply, education mainly primary education sanitation etc.

The income of the Gram Panchayat comes from the professional tax, rent from building; tax from land, social forestry etc. and also a lump grant is incentives from Government.

A Panchayat Samity is headed by a Sabhapati and a Saha-Sabhapati. During the absence of the former the latter holds office. The Panchayat Samity is composed of the members directly elected by the people. All prodhans of Gram Panchayat the MLAs, the MPs and also the member of Rajya Sabha (not ministers) who reside in the area, are ex-officio members of the Panchayat Samity.

BDO is the executive officer and the Extension office of panchayat is the ex-officio secretary to run the office and implement the rural development schemes.

The Panchayat Samity works with the six standing committees. Each committee is headed by an elected Karmadhhyaksha and has a government official as its secretary, the Panchayat Samity functions for the whole block and also supervises the works done by Gram Panchayats under its jurisdiction 13 - 14. The West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 as modified upto 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1988, that Act specifically keeps provision that, "Such other Sthayee Samity or Samity's as the Panchayat Samity may, subject to the approval of the state Govt. constitute. To bridge the gap of the West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 as modified upto 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1988, that Act successfully keeps provision that 'such other Sthayee Samity or Samitis as the Panchayat Samity may, subject to the approval of the state Govt. constitute. To bridge the gap of the West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 as modified upto the 31<sup>st</sup>

January 2004 recommended constituting 10 Sthayee Samitis, of course leaving the Panchayat Samitis with the option to constitute 'such other Sthayee Samiti or Samitis subjects to the approval of the state Government.

Zilla Parishad the apex body of the system is headed by the Sabhapati and the Sahakari-Sabhadhipati elected by the members of the Zilla Parishad to hold office for 5 years. The district magistrate is the ex-officio Executive officer. A secretary is appointed from WBCS officers. Recently an additional district magistrate is the additional ex-officio executive officer.

A Zilla Parishad is composed of the members directly elected by the people, Sabhapati of Panchayat Samitis, all MLAs, all MPs member of the Rajya Sabha (not minister) of the constituency, if in the election the members of scheduled caste and tribes group and also women are not elected the state government has the power to nominate the two members from the scheduled caste and tribes and also two women.

The West Bengal panchayat act was amended in 1992 following the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitution amendment Acts providing for reservation of not less than 1/3 (one third) of the total seats of all times for women. It further said that seats shall be reserved for scheduled and tribes in proportionate to their population in every area out of which one third (1/3) seats shall be constituted by women of those communities. Naturally the number of women members increased at all.

The Zilla Parishad works with six standing committees. Each committee is headed by a Karmadhyakshya elected from Zilla Parishad members and has three government officials namely – the executive officer (District Magistrate) Additional Executive Officer (Additional District Magistrate) and the secretary (WBCS Officer). The Zilla

Parishad work as the co-coordinator and the source of income of Parishad comes from cess trants, land revenue grants, income from the fixed assets, lump grant from government.

As per provision of West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973 as modified upto 1<sup>st</sup> January 1988 the Zilla Parishad could subjects to the approval of the state government constitute other Sthayee Samities.

However the West Bengal panchayat Act 1973, as modified upto 31<sup>st</sup> January 2004 recommended constituting ten Sthayee Samitis by the Zilla Parishad subject to approval of the state government.

We find from this brief historical account of the evolution of rural local self-government in West Bengal following Indian Independence that the concept of block development through decentralized administration. The block remarked the core agency linking the village with the district head quarters. The subsequent introduction of a three tier panchayat system with Gram Panchayats at the bottom (Gram Sansad since 1994 facilitating further consideration) and the Zilla Parishad at the apex would hinge on the linkage mechanism of the block level Panchayat Samiti with the BDO playing a key role. In a strategy of rural development standing half way between the 'top down' and the 'bottom up' approaches the concept of block development provides the key to an understanding of the dynamic of rural development through Panchayat Raj Institutions.