
UNIT 14 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF RURAL LOCAL BODIES

Structure

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14.0 LEARNING OUTCOME

After studying this unit you should be able to:

- discuss the structure of rural local bodies;
- highlight the importance of democratic decentralisation; and
- understand the structure of Panchayati Raj System at the national, state, district, block and village level.

14.1 INTRODUCTION

Panchayati Raj implies the creation of local government institutions at the village, block and district levels. These bodies play a vital role in rural administration in the present age when more and more governments are carrying the banner of welfare state. In fact the powers entrusted to these bodies really make a State democratic or undemocratic. The units of local self government in rural areas are village Panchayat, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. The village Panchayats have been linked to the Panchayat Samitis at the block level and to the Zilla Parishad at the district level. No doubt the scheme of Panchayati Raj emerged after the acceptance of the recommendations on Democratic Decentralisation of the Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team. A new system of local –self Government has been introduced which seeks to tackle the problems at the grassroots level, building up democracy and mobilize the entire potential manpower resources of the country for the purposes of economic and social progress. Panchayati Raj makes democracy a reality—PR aims at making democracy real by bringing the millions into the functioning of democracy. It is really grassroots democracy wherein the individual family in the remotest village is linked up with the democratic process. The introduction of PR is the most appropriate step for building up democratic traditions in the country. India is committed to the democratic form of Government democracy not only a form of government but a way of life. Democracy cannot be built up either from Delhi or from a State Capital. It can be built up only when all people are directly or indirectly involved in it. It stands for local government, local leadership, local competency, local initiative and participation of local people in all the activities (**Moorthy**). In this unit we will be discussing about the organisational structural of rural local bodies and understand the structure of Panchayati Raj System at the national, state, district, block and village level.

14.2 HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In India, the system of village Panchayat is very old. In ancient India the village formed the basic unit of social and economic life in India. During the foreign rule the inhabitants of our country were denied all the benefits of a civilized life. This tendency has been in its naked form since the onset of Industrial Revolution in

England. The 18th century Revolution in England brought far-reaching changes in Great Britain in different fields viz., agriculture, transport and Industry. These changes in Britain subsequently affected the economy of the country. The village suffered the most. The village organization as a self-sufficient unit which was the characteristic feature of the old Indian economy disappeared. Our handicrafts and manufactured were ruined with a view to providing a push to British Industries. In due course of time, agriculture became more and more an uneconomic population. (**Darling**).

Britishers made all efforts to ruin our culture, arts and crafts and foreign trade. The villagers became conservative and shrewd. In this way, the condition of the rural masses from physical economic, social, educational and cultural points of view became gradually very unsatisfactory and beyond the limit of tolerance. There were the victims of mental lethargy. Thus, in the course of a few decades a developed and advanced country—due to the imposition of certain checks, hindrance and obstacles on the smooth path of developing process in our country, we lagged far behind many other countries – was put in the category of under-developed countries. The several cause led to the village Panchayats during the British rule in our country. It is stressed and claimed that India had a self-governing system at the base level during ancient time in the form of village Panchayats. The village organization then functioned as a centre of Community life independent of the state. It is, therefore, argued that the British rule dismantled our self-governing system. “Planning in a welfare State is a social process in which every citizen has to participate” says Planning Commission. India is a land of villages and we have lacs of villages in the country. Gandhiji used to say that India consists of villages and ultimately our progress will be really regulated by the advancement that the village people can show.

Gandhiji drew the picture of free India’s political structure in the words, “Indian Independence must begin at the bottom. Every village should be a republic or a Panchayat having full powers—the greater the power of Panchayats, the better for the people. (**Harijan, 1946**.) Swaraj signified to him the vesting of the ultimate authority in the peasant and the labourer. True democracy cannot be worked out by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village. (**Harijan, 18th Jan, 1948**).

The Report on the organization of Local –self Institutions (Rural and Urban) in relation to Planned social and economic development in India emphasized in 1951, “ *A democratic Government at the centre can never function satisfactorily unless it is supported by democratic organisatuion of local administration.*” Democratic government will never be secure unless it is so supported. Our leaders were careful, cautious and watchful and they realized that we may also be in danger of losing our democratic government unless we take steps to afford security to our system of Parliamentary Democracy by establishing a properly organized scheme of local-self government.

The First Five Year Plan pointed out that, “ The Constitution has provided for democratic Institutions at the centre and in the states, but so long as local self-governing institutions are not conceived as parts of the same organic institutional and administrative framework the structure of democratic government will remain incomplete. Local –self governing bodies have to play a vital role in the fields of development. It may also be necessary to work out suitable arrangements for linking local-self governing bodies at different levels with one another. For instance village Panchayats with district or sub- division local boards.”(**First Five Year Plan**). In this way, the First Plan emphasized that the administration of the country has to provide for establishment and development at the village level and above of appropriate agencies which derive their authority from the people. This point was re-emphasized in the Second Five Year Plan. (**Second Five Year Plan**)

The Second Five Year Plan recommended that village Panvhayts should be organically linked with popular organization at a higher level an that, by states determined in advance, democratic bodies should take over the entire general administration and development of the district or the sub-division perhaps other than such functions as law and order, administration of justice and certain function pertaining to revenue administration. The NDC in the 8th Meeting decided that a special investigation into such a re-organisation of the District Administration should be carried out by the Study Team for Community Development and National Extension Service.

The Study Team came to the conclusion, the block offers an area large enough for functions which the village Panchayat cannot perform and yet small enough to attract the interest and services of the residents. Thus, the Team pointed out that the existing local bodies cannot take over and perform function which the Planning Commission has proposed for the local bodies to perform. The Team found that without organizing units of continuous local administration, with truly democratic in spirit reflects the wishes and aspirations of the rural people and work for their fulfillment, the Community Development movement would not become a people's movement. Democracy has to function through certain executive machinery but the democratic government operational over large areas through its executive machinery can not applicable local needs and circumstances.

It is realized that there should be devolution of powers and a decentralization of machinery and those powers be exercised and such machinery controlled and directed by popular representatives of the local areas. The Team suggested that the Government should develop sufficient powers to locally elected representatives so that they may assess their own priorities of need in the sphere of development activities within certain limits prescribed by the Government. What the Team suggested in actual details was the creation of a three-tier system of decentralization, namely, the village Panchayats, the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads and recommended that the entire development administration should be handed over to these bodies. The Team gave the details organization, functions, resources and relations of one with the other.

Firstly, we should have village Panchayat purely on an elective basis, with a provision for the co-option of two women members and one member each from the scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. To this body, maximum powers should be delegated for the implementation of the Community Development Programme falling within the territorial jurisdiction of the village. The main source of income of the Panchayat will be property or house tax, tax on market and vehicles, terminal tax, water tax, lighting rate, grant from registration of animal sold.

Secondly, Panchayat Samiti should be formed for an area included in a block at present to be constituted by indirect election from the villages. Panchayats within

the block area can be grouped together in convenient units and the Panches of all the Panchaytas in each of these units shall elect from amongst themselves person or persons to be members of Panchayat Samiti.

Thirdly, it was proposed by the Team that there should be Zilla Parishad at the district level, mainly with a view to achieving the necessary co-ordination between the Panchayat Samitis within the district. The ZP was to consist of the President of Panchayat Samitis, members of Parliament and the state legislatures and District level officers of the development departments. The Parishad was to be an advisory-cum-supervisory body.

14.2.1 Democratic Decentralisation - Panchayati Raj

The recommendations of the study Team in favour of a system of democratic decentralization were considered by the NDC in Jan 1958. The Council emphasized that the foundation of any democratic structure had to be democracy in the village, and endorsed the recommendations of the Team. It was, however, left to each state to work out the structure, best suited to its conditions. This point was affirmed by the central Council of local self- government when it suggested that the devolution of this genuine transfer of power to the people may be left to the State Governments. Accordingly, the state governments are evolving their own patterns of democratic decentralization. Subsequently, the term of 'democratic decentralization' was given up and the term ' Panchaytai Raj' was adopted.

In this way, Panchayati Raj is a three-tier system of rural local government in India viz, Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level with adequate powers and resources and responsible for Planning and devolution in their respective jurisdiction. No doubt, the scheme of PR emerged as an alternative to district and block advisory/ development Committees, which failed to evoke popular initiative and response for the implementation of Community development programme. In condition of our country, self-government is possible only when there is development. But it has brought about a revolutionary change in the structure of administration within the district and in the pattern of rural development. The development

administration was married to local self-governing bodies. It can be said that Panchayati Raj is an agency of the state government. Panchayati raj institutions form part of decentralization state. They can be entrusted with any work by the state government and they are supposed to execute the same. In this way, the Panchayati Raj is (1) a unit of local government (2) an extension of the Community development programme and (3) an agency of the state government. "We are clear in our minds that Panchayati Raj embraces in its scope all three sets of functions.

PR is the only route by which the people of India may gain the knowledge, the feeling, the practice and the experience they must have to make freedom a living reality.

PR provides a valuable Training ground for further leadership

It has enables a majority of citizens to associate themselves in public affairs. Local bodies have been rightly regarded as the 'Nursery of Democracy'. These local bodies form a valuable training ground for the elected persons to move to higher levels of representative institutions. The experience on these bodies is valuable elementary training for budding Statesmen and Politicians. (Corry)

PR is a means of Political Education of Citizens

Local Government not only forms a valuable training ground for the elected leaders at higher levels of representative institutions, but also becomes a source of political education, of citizens in general. Political education means that citizens knowledge and experience the political machinery operating at local levels and understand their role in it. Local Government is a door-to –door government. Its composition and functioning are open to the citizens of a local unit. They learn how to exercise the vote and how to decide issues of public importance. Local electors can be decided only once. They learn from their mistakes in choosing incompetent or corrupt representatives and realize that dissatisfaction can only be expressed at the stated times. Since political parties have come into the areas of local bodies, they play their own role during the election campaigns. Citizens become aware of different types of problems. Understanding problems of local

magnitude broadens their mental horizon and makes them capable of understanding national problems. Citizens also become aware of their needs and demands. The world of politics and public affairs becomes intelligible and familiar to them.

Role of PRIs in the achievement of our Plan Targets

PR has given the rural people an opportunity, which they never had before. Now people have powers to solve their own problems and to do things by themselves. Farmers through Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis assess their own requirements, initiate, formulate and execute the plans for their own betterment with the aid of such resources as are made available to them by the state or which they are able to raise on their own. This development of PR bringing with it the transfer of authority, responsibility and resources to village Panchayats is bringing about a major changes and revolutionary the outlook of our rural masses. There is an increasing realization among them that it is through their own initiative, handwork and cooperation with the resources under their control and command that they can achieve rapid progress in various developmental activities, particularly in agricultural, animal husbandry, education, health and sanitation, communications, co-operations, village industries, housing and welfare work among valuable sections o the society.

The PR provides a promising means for the democratization of Planning. The idea is growing that planning can succeed only if it becomes a shared activity, the different organized groups is the Community must have a part in it. Progress would be slow but the results would be more lasting. Ever since the introduction of Planning in our country, it has been felt by some people that planning from the grassroots level, i.e, the village and local level, has not been given due attention. Planning from the village level is very essential and important at the same time. It educates the people and develops their abilities to do things by themselves. It helps in drawing up of local plans of action keeping in view local needs and priorities. It helps in fixing local targets. It helps in exploring and mobilizing local resources. It ensures people's participation in development work. But Planning from the National level cannot be ignored. Therefore, priorities have to be fixed

up and emphasis has to be placed on certain aspects to reach the National objectives and goals as quickly as possible.

Panchayats discharged their responsibilities in connection with the Five Year Plan very efficiently. Instructions were issued to Gram Panchayats to prepare draft Plan on the basis of their needs and resources. The 2nd Five Year Plan is thus a Combination of village level plans after the necessary scrutiny at block district and state levels. The contribution of the Panchayat towards the Five Year Plan has created a new awakening in the rural areas. (**Local self- government, 1955-56**).

These above comments explain one thing that Panchayats and local self-government institutions have a role to play in the achievement of plan targets and they have not played their due role in this connection so far.

This is only possible through Panchayati Raj. In the process of PR, the citizens tend to mature; they are no longer content merely to complain. They contribute to the Planning process and thus are responsible for the achievement of Plan targets. PR engenders plan consciousness among the rural people. They are required to prepare village Plan, block Plan and so on. In this way, it helps in proper utilization of the available resources in man and material which have remained unexploited and unutilized so far.

A new outlook of life has opened and new vitality is pulsating in the areas where Panchayati Raj has been established. The things are taking such shape that the powers, prestige and importance of Central and State legislatures are in melting pot and are being transplanted to the Pradhans, Sarpanchas and Panchas. It is really very encouraging to see that Kisans and other rural people, who had suffered for long for lack of opportunities, have responded magnificently to the new form of life and their achievements are creditable and praiseworthy. The process has brought about new faces and new blood. So, PR, in India must succeed. If it fails, the confidence of all developing countries in the development through democratic way would be shaken and million would plunge into utter despair, frustration and despondency.

14.2.2 Structure of Panchayati Raj System

Balawant Rai Mehta Committee in its Report suggested a three tier system of Panchyati Raj—Gram Panchayat in village level , Panchayt Samiti at Block level and Zilla Prishad at district level.

Gram Panchayat

The Panchayat is the executive committee of Gram Sabha. It is known by a variety of names. The membership of the Panchayat varies from five to thirty one. Members of the Panchayat are called Panches and are elected by the Gram Sabha by secret ballot. The President is directly elected by the people in Orissa; by the Gram Sabha in Assam, Bihar, Punjab, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal, and by the Panches in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka. The President can be removed from the office by a majority of two-thirds of votes of the members of the panchayts present and voting. Several states provide for reservations of a specified number of seats for women as well as members of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The tenure of the Panchayat in various states varies from three to five years.

The Panchayat is looked up in as an instrument for execution of the Community Development Programme. Functions of Panchayat are obligatory and discretionary. The Panchayat may also be entrusted with any other functions given by the state government. To perform these functions the panchayt has been given certain sources of revenue. It has been seen that the Panchayats do not function as an effective institution. Agenda of meetings was not issued, meetings held without proper quorum, sometimes with proper delay. They suffer from lack of resources, secretarial assistance, adequate powers, and cooperation from revenue and police agencies, guidance and supervision, apathy on the part of Panches. Apart from all these they have group rival which hinder smooth functioning. There exists the complexity of rules and procedures, lack of timely action against defaulters, proximity of the Panchayat Samitis . So, to reduce all these loopholes some remedial suggestions by the Balwant Rai Committee are as follows: Finances of the Panchayts should be augmented; Powers and functions should be more clearly enunciated; Efficient and regular secretarial assistance

should be there; roles and procedures should be simple; cooperation from revenue and police agencies must be ensured; Cooperation of government departments is needed; gram sabha should be active; Education among the people need to be stepped up. There is a state control over Panchayat. It includes the power to delimit and alter its jurisdiction, appointment of staff, records management, financial administration, election. The state government may call for necessary reports and records. It may suspend or remove a panch or a sarpanch under certain conditions.

Panchayat Samiti

The Panchayat Samiti is the intermediate tier in the PRIs of rural local government in India. The term varies from three to five years. There is no uniformity in constituting a Panchayat Samiti in different states. It consists of ex-officio, associate and co-opted members. The Sarpanches of the Panchayats are the ex-officio member. Members of State Legislatures and of Parliament are also members. Women members and members from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled tribes in Panchayats are also members. President of Panchayat Samiti can be removed from his office by a no-confidence vote of the Panchayat Samiti passed with a special majority. President exercises control over the Block Development Officer for implementing resolutions of the samiti or its standing committee. He has all access to all records of the Panchayat Samiti. He is empowered to demote, suspend or dismiss any member of the staff whose jurisdiction is less than the whole Block.

The Panchayat Samiti is the pivot of the Panchayati Raj system of rural local government. It is the principle executive body in all the states except Gujarat and Maharashtra charged with the responsibility of implementing Community Development Programmes. Besides, it also acts as an agent of the state government in the performance of tasks which may be assigned to it. It also exercises supervision and control over Panchayats within the jurisdiction and provides necessary technical and financial assistance to them. It scrutinizes budgets of the Panchayats of the area under its control and makes suggestions to them. Functions may be classified in two broad areas: (1) provision of civic amenities and (ii) fulfillment of development functions.

A Panchayat Samiti appoints a number of Committees to assist it in performance of its functions. A Panchayat Samiti appoints a number of Committees to assist it in performance of its functions. Members of the Standing Committee are elected by the members of the PS. President of the PS shall be the ex-officio member or the chairman of the standing committee. Taxation is not a major source of revenue of the Samiti. The Samiti gets a certain share of land revenue collected in the state. The Samiti is equipped with the administrative machinery called the Block Development Officer. As, all the executive authority in the three-tier local government structure has been vested in the Panchayat Samiti, the body at the district level being given only a supervisory and coordinating role.

Zilla Parishads

The Zilla Parishads constitute the apex in the Panchayati Raj System of rural local government in India. It is a corporate body. Membership of Zilla Parishads has been designed in such a way as to link it, with the intermediate tier of PR, i.e., PS. ZP is an official rather than a popular body because of its ex-officio and co-opted membership. The Zilla Parishad's membership varies between forty to sixty. Urban local governments in the districts must be represented in the ZP to enable it to view and function in a comprehensive, intelligent and meaningful manner. The term varies from three to five years. The members of the ZP elect amongst themselves a president called chairman. He exercises administrative supervision over the chief executive officer for implementing resolutions and orders of the ZP, and sends a confidential report on the work of the CEO to the Divisional Commissioner. The provision is made in all statutes to remove the president by a vote of no-confidence. The ZP functions through a network of standing committees.

In most of the states the ZP has been assigned with the executive authority, particularly in those of planning and development and designed to be the strongest tier of PRIs. Except in Gujarat and Maharashtra, ZP functions as a supervisory and coordinating body. It coordinates development plans prepared by the Panchayat Samitis, advises the state government on all matters relating to developmental activities in the district, informs the district collector and Divisional Commissioner about irregularities, it collects statistics relating to the

activities of local authorities in the district, it advises the state government on allocation of work to be done among Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis. Normally sources of income available to ZP are taxes, non-tax revenue, grants from State Government etc.

There are many problems which hindered the success of PRIs (i) the illiteracy and conservatism of the village people;(ii) rural local self- government have become riddled with casteism, communalism, factionalism;(iii) benefits not reached to the common man;(iv) dishonesty and corruption in the local bodies;(v) urbanization is another problem;(vi) excessive government control is also responsible for the slow progress;(vii) shortage of funds;(viii) irregular elections to these bodies.

14.2.3 73rd Amendment Act and Powers and Functions

Before 73rd Amendment to the Constitution also, the panchayats were assigned some traditional functions such as maintenance rather than developmental responsibilities. The 73rd Amendment has made PRIs responsible for maintenance as well as developmental activities. The Article 243G of the 73rd Amendment enlists the power, authority and responsibilities of panchayats as under. Though, the amendment had provided with a list of functions under the provisions of 11th Schedule, it has not mentioned clearly about the level of PRIs which would perform the particular type of functions. In conformity to the 73rd Amendment Act, all the states have amended their respective Panchayat Acts and enlisted the functions assigned to the different levels of PRIs in the respective states. Here, in this juncture, it is essential to discuss the functions at different levels of PRIs across the states. The functions enlisted in the different 13 states Panchyats Acts are classified into three categories: (i) General Administrative Functions (ii) Developmental and social and (iii) Maintenance.

Functional Responsibilities of Gram Panchayat(GP)

At this level, administrative functions include: (i) Preparation of annual plans for the development of the village Panchayat; (ii) preparation of annual budget;(iii) mobilizing relief in natural calamities;(iv) removal of encroachment on public

properties;(v) organizing voluntary labour and contribution or community works ;(v) maintenance of statistics of village;(vi) any other functions entrusted by the Panchayat Samiti, Zilla Panchayats or state or central government on an agency basis, is most commonly found across the states. Apart from this, village defence, information and publicity and the constitution of Nyaya Panchayt were found in Andhra, West Bengal and Maharashtra. In case of developmental and social activities, are agriculture, social forestry, animal husbandry, rural housing, education etc. Next is a maintenance function which includes rural electrifications, rural sanitation and conservation.

Block Level (Panchayt Samiti- PS) functions

In this level, general administrative functions include –providing relief in natural calamities and other works entrusted by the Zilla Panchayt. Some of the functions like trusts, social education and village defence corps (Gujarat alone). Publicity and information (Gujarat and Maharashtra) and statistics (Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Rajasthan) were very common. Regarding developmental social activities concerned are agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, social farm and forestry. Among the maintenance functions, the market and fair maintenance, health, family welfare, sanitation and medical and cultural activities and sports were common responsibilities of PS in many states.

Zilla Parishad (Zilla Panchayat (ZP) level functions

At this level, the major responsibility of general administrative function is of overall supervision, coordination; consolidation, integration and implementation of development schemes at block and district levels. Preparation of plans for economic development and social justice of the entire district and securing the execution of plans, projects, schemes or other PS works were commonly found in almost all the states. Amongst the developmental variety the agriculture including extension and horticulture, animal husbandry, dairying and poultry, social forestry, fuel and fodder education were quite common among all the states. Health, and hygiene and family welfare, medical and sanitation were only responsibility of maintenance variety performed commonly performed by two or

three levels of PRIs in most of the states. In case of maintenance variety of functions the situation is slightly better as compared to the development and social. Most of these functions are performed by the GP only. In sum, with respect to development and social variety of functions the demarcation of the areas of responsibilities in the state Acts are not defined clearly.

14.3 ADMINISTRATIVE FRAMEWORK

The present administrative system of India is inherited from the colonial rulers, and it is this structure which has primarily been entrusted with the functions and responsibilities of rural development. Some modifications have been grafted on to it from time to time. The revenue and general administrative organization and structure have been mobilized for rural development functions. Changes have been made since the inception of the Community Development Programme in 1952 which for the first time attempted in a big way to set up development administration right unto the field level and this included induction of technical expertise and training of manpower to undertake various schemes under the Community Development Programme.

It was the Grow More Food Enquiry Committee which in its Report submitted in 1952 stressed, for the first time, the need for an integrated organizational structure for rural development. It also laid down the blueprint for the set up at various levels—National, State, District, Block and village. It recommended the establishment of the taluq as a development block covering 100-120 villages under the charge of a development Officer for the Block who would be the Revenue Divisional Officer assisted by four Technical Officers for agriculture, animal husbandry cooperation and engineering; and village level workers, one for 5 to 10 villages. The Report also recommended that development activities at the District should be unified under the Collector assisted by specialized officers and the State level there should be a Cabinet Committee presided over by the Chief Minister and a non-official Board for coordinating policies and finalizing joint action.

The blueprint was given shape with the launching of the Community Development Programme (CDP) in 1952 followed by the National Extension Services (1953) which covered the whole country. Under the CDP Programme, the development block was created as the basic unit of planning and integrated rural development comprising agriculture, animal husbandry, village industry, education, health, social welfare with special emphasis on self-help and public participation. The most striking administrative innovations made by Community Development Programme were identification of block as the unit of administration, appointment of extension officers who were subject specialists, appointment of the village level worker(VLW) for a group of villages as multi-purpose development functionary through whom programmes of different departments were administered, role of Development Commissioners as the coordinating functionary at the State level, coordination and integration of development programmes of different departments at the Block level, and mobilization of people's participation in development.

The Organizational set up conceived at the time of the implementation of the Community Development Programme has broadly continued till now with some changes introduced at the District level during the Fourth and Fifth Plan periods, with the shift in the strategy of the rural development programmes and the launching of special programmes. The strategy of rural development has gradually begun focusing on area based and clientele specific development.

Administrative Set-Up

Initially, the implementation of CDP was entrusted to the Planning Commission. A special organization, viz., Community Project Administration headed by the administrator was created for this purpose. He was to be assisted by a central committee comprising members of the Planning Commission and some central ministers with the Prime Ministers as its Chairman. This Committee was entrusted with the task of laying down broad policies relating to the programme and supervising its progress. Considering the growing magnitude and importance of the work, a separate Ministry of Community Development was set up in 1956 to deal with subjects like allocation of blocks, financial assistance, supply of equipment to states, training, research, overall direction, and monitoring and

implementation of the programme. The nomenclature and status of the Ministry has been changing from time to time with the shift in emphasis in rural development programmes. In 1958, the subject of village Panchayats was transferred to the Ministry of Community Development from the Ministry of Health, and Cooperation from the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, and the Ministry was renamed as the Ministry of Community Development and cooperation. The Ministry was organized into two departments—the department of community development and department of cooperation. With the introduction of Panchayati Raj in 1959, as suggested by Balwantrai Mehta Committee, the Ministry was redesigned as Ministry of Community Development, Panchayati Raj and Cooperation but after a short period it was again redesignated as the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation.

During the early 1960s the emphasis of rural development programmes shifted towards increase in agricultural production. As a result, the Intensive Agricultural Area Programme (IAAP) in 1964. In order to implement IAAP, in 1966 the Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation. For the effective supervision of the Programme special machinery was created at the Centre. Emphasizing the need for coordination at the central level to implement the programme effectively, the Estimates Committee of Parliament pointed out : “ It was recognized that effective coordination must be maintained at all levels among the agencies concerned with the implementation of an integrated programme of rural development, especially agricultural production. As a result, at the Centre, the Departments of Community Development and Agriculture have not only been placed under one Minister but at the official level under one Secretary also.”

In its Draft Plan (1978-83), the Planning Commission reviewed the approach to rural development specially with reference to the poor. It visualized an integrated plan of development at the Block level within which a beneficiary –oriented plan for the poor was to be appropriately accommodated. Consequently, the IRDP was launched in 1978-79 in 2,300 development blocks all over the country. The Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDAs) were also merged with IRDP in 1980, when IRDP was extended to all blocks in the country For employment generation, the National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) was launched in 1980 as a modification of the earlier ‘ Food for work’ programme which had been launched

in 1977. However, doubts were raised with regard to achieving the objectives of IRDP and NREP through the existing administrative arrangements of multiple agencies looking after various special programmes in the districts. The Government of India, issued instructions in 1980 for the integration of administrative arrangements both at the State and District levels. State level Coordination Committee and District Rural Development Agencies were set up. The Ministry of Rural Reconstruction was constituted in 1979 and continued till 1982. In Jan, 1985, it became the Department of Rural Development in the Ministry of Agriculture with a separate Department of Rural Development as one of its constituents.

Now, we will describe the organizational structure operating in 1989-90. The Department of Rural Development is now one of the four Departments of the Ministry of Agriculture and is headed by a Secretary to the Government of India; he is assisted by an Additional Secretary, six Joint Secretaries and other supporting staff, administrative as well as technical. The department is divided into six wings each headed by a Joint Secretary. The six wings are:

- i) Administrative Wing
- ii) Rural Employment Wing
- iii) Integrated Rural Development Wing
- iv) Land Reforms Wing
- v) Finance Wing
- vi) Monitoring Wing

Besides these six wings, a Technology Mission on Drinking Water in villages and Related Water Management was set up in the Department in 1986 under the charge of a Mission Director-cum-Joint Secretary to provide safe and adequate drinking water. The Department of Rural Development is responsible for Policy, Planning, Direction, Coordination and monitoring of the programmes.

The Department of Rural Development has the following institutions under its administrative control:

- Directorate of Marketing and Inspection (DMI) which is an attached office;

- National Institute of Rural Development which is an autonomous body;
- Council for Advancement of People's Action and Rural Technology (CAPART) which is a registered society.

A National Fund for Rural Development (NFRD) was set up in 1984 for the purpose of attracting donations for rural development projects. It provides incentives to the donors by offering tax concession to the donor. It is also true that the Department of Rural Development is not the only Department which implements programmes in rural areas. Rural Development is as much the concern of several other Ministries/ Departments which too have programmes in rural areas. The Department of Agriculture and cooperation has a large number of programmes as also the Ministry of Environment and Forests. The Department of Women and Child Development has programmes for welfare of children and women. The Ministry of Welfare has programmes for the welfare of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and the physically and socially and socially handicapped in rural areas; the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare for health and family planning programmes, the Ministry of Industry for village industry, the Department of Education for educational development and the Ministry of Water Resources for development of water resources.

The Present Set-Up at the National Level

A New Ministry of Panchayati Raj has been created w.e.f. 27th May 2004. As per the amended allocation of Business Rules, "all matters relating of Panchayati Raj and Panchayati Raj Institutions" will be looked after by the newly created Ministry.

Ministry of Panchayati Raj will be responsible for the work of advocacy for and monitoring of the implementation of Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 and the Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996, hereinafter refer to as said Acts to ensure that the State Panchayati Raj Acts adhere to the provisions of the above mentioned two Acts and are implemented in letter and spirit.

States/UT Administrations at present are at varying degrees of the implementation of said Acts. The Ministry, inter-alia, would ensure that they hold timely elections, set up State Finance Commissions and implement their recommendations, constitute District Planning Committees and empower them suitably to ensure grass-root level planning to feed into State and Central level Planning effectively. One major task of the Ministry will be to ensure that the State Governments/UT Administrations devolve funds, functions and functionaries on the Panchayati Raj Institutions in the spirit of the Constitutional provisions. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj will also be responsible for formulation and implementation of an Action Plan for seeing PRIs to emerge as "Institutions of Local-Self Government" securing economic development and social justice in their respective areas.

Empowerment of Gram Sabhas by holding regular Meetings and social audit through Gram Sabhas so as to enable them to emerge as foundation of Panchayati Raj will be pursued vigorously with States/UT Administrations. Depending upon the local situation, States/UT Administrations will be encouraged to institute Ward Sabhas and Mahila Sabhas and make them functional.

The Ministry attaches great importance to the capacity building of elected representatives and officials of PRIs as well as functionaries involved in the Rural Development Programmes. It is estimated that about 3 million elected Members and the Staff assigned to the Elected Bodies needs training to enable them to discharge their functions effectively. The Ministry will also be funding research studies, workshops and seminars for development of Panchayats. The Ministry will implement the scheme of "National Awards for Best Panchayats" to encourage PR Institutions in discharging their role of "Institutions of Self-government" to be able to enforce economic development and social justice at the local level.

Administrative Set-Up at the State Level

The State government has direct responsibility for the administration of rural development programmes. Almost all states now have a separate Department of Rural Development headed by a Secretary. Above him is the Development Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development. In several states the Chief

Secretary himself is the Development Commissioner- cum- Secretary. During the late 1960's State level coordination and Review Committees were set up in all the states to bring about coordination among different departments. These committees consisted of Secretaries of all the departments concerned and a representative from the Central Government. A study conducted during 1979 to 1981 by the Programme Evaluation Organisation (PEO) of the Planning Commission on the Antodaya Programme for Small farmers, Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Laborers (1983), pointed out that Coordination and the Review Committees at the state level have not been active in most of the states and have failed to provide guidance or support to the agencies. State level cells which were expected to exercise general supervision and ensure coordination of activities of various departments have also generally not been able to achieve their objectives.

The Union Ministry of Rural Development had prescribed that programmes like Integrated Rural Development Programme, National Rural Employment Programme (NREP), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP), Drought Prone Area Programme, (DPAP) Desert Development Programme (DDP) at the state level should be looked after by a single department having an overall control over the development administration right up to the Block and field levels so that inter-sect oral coordination with other departments are adequately taken care of. The Ministry had recommended the creation of a separate post at the level of a Commissioner for dealing with all the special programmes, to be assisted by middle level officers of the rank of joint/Deputy Secretary for monitoring, formulation and implementation of these programmes in the districts.

Consequently, at the State level, initially there was the office of the Development Commissioner who was in charge of all the development work under the supervision of the Development Committee usually chaired by the Chief Minister. Now in most of the cases, either the Department of Planning or the Department of Rural Development is responsible for policy, planning, and implementation. The Coordination Committee chaired by the chief Secretary / Agricultural production Commissioner/ Principal Secretary reviews, sanctions, coordinates. Monitors and evaluates the schemes. Some states like Rajasthan created an unique organizational set-up called the Special Schemes Organisation SSO) in 1971 to

formulate agricultural development projects. Gradually, special programmes like DPAP, DDP, IRDP, NREP were also entrusted to the SSO.

Administrative Set-Up at the District Level

The District in India has been the basic unit of administration and the head of the district administration is the District Collector. At the District level, the revenue and development functions have been combined in office. When the CDP was launched, the District Collector was made the head of the community development administration in the district. The Collector coordinated district plans and presided over the District Planning Committee. The Committee consisted of official and non-official members assisted by a District Planning office.

Significant changes were introduced at the District level during the Fourth Plan (1969-74) when the Small Farmers Development Agencies (SFDA) and Marginal Farmers and Agricultural Labourers development Agencies(MFALs.) were set up on the recommendation of the All-India Rural Credit Review Committee appointed by the Reserve Bank of India in 1969 to provide credit support and technical guidance to the small framers. To coordinate the activities of all departments, a coordination committee was created in each district under the chairmanship of the District Collector.

An autonomous agency registered under the Registration of Societies Act 1860 was established at the District level to implement the SFDA/MFAL programmes. Each agency consisted of a governing body with a small executive staff and was to receive support from a State Level Coordination and Review Committee. The Governing Body consisted of a Chairman who was normally the Collector of the district, and representatives of the State Departments of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Cooperation or any other department concerned with the programme, a representative of the Lead Bank, Chairman of the Central Cooperative Bank concerned, a representative of Zilla Parishad, and a few non-officials. Each agency was allowed only a nucleus staff comprising a Project Officer and three Assistant Project Officers drawn from the Departments of Agriculture, Animal husbandry and Cooperation. The SFDA had no field of its own and the agency

was supposed to work through the staff of other development departments concerned and institutions such as cooperatives and commercial banks.

Besides SFDA, other special programmes were also introduced in the country during the Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans. Among these, the Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP) and Desert Development Programme (DDP) were taken up in the 1970s. Special project agencies have been set up by the state or central government at the District level. Collectors are normally associated with them..

The Ministry of Rural Development had recommended that at the District level, the planning and implementation agency should be the District Rural Development Agency (DRDA) headed by a Chairman who is the collector or Deputy Commissioner or District Magistrate. Hence, DRDAs were set up as autonomous agencies at the beginning of the Sixth Plan when the IRDP and NREP were launched in all the blocks in the country.

The DRDAs are in overall charge of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the programmes in the district. The functions of DRDAs are:

- To provide information regarding the parameters, dimensions and requirements of the programmes to District and Block level agencies and to apprise them of their tasks in this regard;
- To coordinate and oversee the survey and preparation of perspective plan and Annual Plans of the Block and finally prepare a District Plan;
- To ensure the effectiveness of the programme by regular evaluation and monitoring;
- To secure inter-sectoral and inter-departmental coordination and cooperation;
- To publicize the achievements made under the programmes, disseminate knowledge and build up awareness about the programme; and
- To send periodic returns to the State Governments in prescribed formats.

The Governing Body of the DRDA includes, apart from the Chairman (usually District Collector) the following:

- (i) All MPs and MLAs of the District
- (ii) Head of the Central Cooperative Bank
- (iii) Chairman of the Regional Rural Bank
- (iv) Chairman of the Zilla Parishad
- (v) An Officer of the Lead Bank
- (vi) District Employment Officer
- (vii) One representative of rural women, preferably a beneficiary.

The President of the DRDA is empowered to form an Executive Committee to assist the DRDA. The Committee has as its members District level officers. The Governing Body of DRDA is required to meet every quarter and the Executive Committee every month. The Project Officer of the DRDA is assisted by 2 to 3 Assistant Project Officers (APOs) who are subject matter specialist. An APO for women looks after the women's component of IRDP and the Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas Programme (DWCRA). There is also an APO (Monitoring).

The Ministry of Rural Development had also suggested the setting up of a District Development Committee under the chairmanship of the District Collector. Its meetings are attended by the District level heads of the development departments, BDOs, representatives of the banks and non-official bodies. Its main function is to coordinate between all the district level departments and other agencies like Khadi and Village Industries Board, District Industries Centre, banks etc. It also reviews the working of various programmes in operation in the district and attends to the day-to day problems of implementation and administration of the programme.

Since the inception of the CDP (1952), some thinking had been going on regarding District level decentralization. The Planning Commission's Working Group on District Planning (1985) had reiterated the fact that District Planning

should be viewed as a holistic operation with different sectoral programmes integrated into a unified planning activity.

The Report of the Committee to Review the Existing Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes (1985) had stated that the district should be “the basic unit for policy planning and programme implementation”. It is also observed that the formulation of a proper district plan is a pre-requisite for having a process of development which will ensure that the poor are properly taken care of, and a key senior officer of the rank of Chief Secretary should be designated as Development Commissioner to be in charge of development administration at the State level.

Administrative Set-Up at Block Level

Under CDP, the Development Block was created as the basic unit of planning and integrated rural development comprising agriculture and allied activities, education, health, social welfare, with special emphasis on self-help and public participation. The Block administration consisted of the Block level officer, namely, Block Development Officer (BDO) who was assisted by about eight extension personnel representing agriculture, animal husbandry, cooperation, social welfare irrigation etc. Village Level Workers (VLWs) also called Gram Sevaks and Gram Sevikas and auxiliary staff. Provision was made for the constitution of block advisory committees to enlist popular support for the programme. But after some time it was realized that the block advisory committees were not functioning properly because they were purely advisory bodies without any direct responsibility in the development work. The Balwant Rai Mehta Study Team appointed by the Government of India to review Community Development Projects and National Extension Service in 1957 suggested decentralization of power to the basic unit viz., block, in a three-tier

organically linked structure including the District level above and the village level below.

Even with the introduction of new programmes, staff in the mid-sixties like SFDA, MFAL the structural mechanism at the Block level not altered much. All programmes and schemes of the DRDA are being implemented through the Development Blocks headed by the Block Development Officer (BDO). Besides the BDO, the other block staff involved directly in the implementation of the IRDO are extension officers for Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Social Welfare, Irrigation, Industries and Khadi Supervisor from Khadi and village industries Corporation (KVIC). In states which have adopted the Training and Visit (T&V) system of agricultural extension, agricultural extension is being directly handled by the staff of the Department of agriculture. Hence, the Agricultural Extension Officer and 70 to 80 per cent of the VLWs have been taken away from the Block establishment, and they have only a small nuclear staff. Consequently, the block administration had got considerably weakened.

The review of development programmes and schemes including IRDP is conducted at the Block level on a fortnightly basis in a meeting of VLWs and other block staff under the chairmanship of the BDO. The review of all activities of the block is also made in the quarterly general body meeting of Panchayat Samiti under the chairmanship of its Pradhan with the BDO as the member-secretary. This meeting is attended by all the members of the Panchayat Samiti, Sub-divisional Magistrate of the area, District level officers of concerned Development departments, representatives of DRDA, sub-divisional Agricultural Officer, Tehsildar of the area, Block Level Officers of other Development departments and the block For the review of credit supply and coordination there is a Block Level Coordination Committee (BLCC) which meets once a month in a fixed date. The Pradhan of the Panchayat Samiti is the chairman. All the branch managers of banks in the Block and the BDO are its members. All extension officers in the Block and the Tehsildar of the area also attend the meetings of this committee.

14.4 DEVOLUTION OF POWERS AND FUNCTIONS – ACTUAL POSITION

The type of functions assigned to and the level of PRIs perform the functions is unfortunately led to ambiguity. Same function is performed by the two or three different levels of PRIs. The level of PRIs and the sub-component of the function is not clear. There was also overlapping of functions between different levels and different official agencies. With the exceptions of Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura, the remaining states had not assigned the functions and allocated the powers on any clear principles.

Other issues regarding this, are to be concerned (a) appropriateness of functions/ areas of responsibilities at different levels; (b) coordination between different levels of Panchayats on the one hand and between Panchayats and official agencies on the others ;(c) incentive compatibility of panchayats and line agencies; (d) accountability of Panchayats not just to the higher authorities but also to the community. But unfortunately, these are not taken up by any other states Acts. **(Gaiha)**

It has also been felt in regarding the assigning of the responsibilities no selection criteria were used. There is no overburdening of function at gram Panchayats level. Here, a smaller group of functions can be identified and could be assigned to the particular level of PRIs in the basis of economic consideration. Overlapping, rigid and elaborate procedures and weak monitoring and evaluation systems impede coordination between the Panchayats at different levels as well as between the Panchayats and official agencies which result in delays in the implementation of schemes. Besides, even the formal participation of the people were there but as there were delays in elections and in implementing the quotas. All together the experiences so far as has not been very encouraging. (**Bohra, 2000**).

Other issues of 73rd amendment are, there shall be a gram sabha in each village exercise in such powers and performing such functions at the village level as the legislature of a state may provide by law. While the elections in respect of all the members to Panchayats at all levels will be direct, the elections in respect of the post of chairman at the intermediate and district level will be indirect. The mode of elections of chairman to the village level has been left to the governments to decide. (**Krishnamurti, 1993**).

Reservations of seats for SC/STs have been provided in proportion to their population at each level. Not less than one –third of total membership has been reserved for women and these seats may be allotted by rotation of different constituencies in a Panchayat. Similar reservations have been made in respect of the office of the chairman also.

A uniform term of five years has been provided for the PRIs and in the event of suppression, elections to constitute the body should be completed before the expiry of six months from the date of dissolution. (**Jain, 1991**). The state legislatures have been given the power to authorize the Panchayat to levy, and appropriate suitable local; taxes and also provide for making grants in aid to the Panchayats from the consolidated fund of the concerned state.

Panchayat shall be constituted in every state at the village, intermediate and the district levels, thus bringing about the uniformity in the Panchayati Raj structure. However, the states having a population not exceeding 20 lakh have been given the option of not having any Panchayat at intermediate level. A Finance Commission has to be constituted once in every 5 years to review the financial position of the Panchayats and to make suitable recommendations on the distribution of the funds between the state and local bodies.

With a view to ensuring continuity it has been provided in the Act that all the Panchayats existing immediately before the commencement of these Amendment Act and will continue till the expiry of their duration unless dissolved by a resolution to that effect passed by the state legislature concerned. The state legislature should bring the necessary Amendment to their Panchayat Act within the maximum period of 1 year from the commencement of these Amendment Act so as to conform to the provision contained in the constitution. (**Mishra, Kumar, Pal, 1994**)

So far as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 has only provided the general guidelines for the effective and efficient PRIs in India. It granted the PRIs a constitutional status, some sort of uniformity by making three tier systems, a permanent feature, a regularity by making elections and imperative after the termination of the PRIs after every 5 years and the state election commission to conduct and supervise the elections, more financial autonomy with the constitution of the State Finance Commission etc. But the major question still remains: how the various states are responding and at what speed they are implementing the Panchayati Raj envisaged by the recent Constitutional Amendment. The amendment is designed to revitalize the Panchayats to promote growth in rural economy. This Amendment is an important landmark, because it has given legal recognition to the tier of governance, ie, PRIs,. It provides for a uniform three tier structure of Panchayats especially at the district, block and village levels and specification of areas of responsibility of the Panchayats at the three levels. Most of the states modified their Acts and went for Panchayat elections. However, the devolution of power has been far from smooth. (**Bohra, Ibid**).

14.4.1 Devolution of Powers and Functions: Trends in the Local – Government Gram Sabha

Article 243 (G) – defines a village as one specified by the Governor by public notification to be a village for the purpose of the Act and includes a group of

villagers so specified. Article 243(B) of the constitution refers to Gram Sabha as “a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised with the area of Panchayat at the village level”. Regarding the powers of Gram Sabha, article 243(A) of the Constitution states that, “A Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village level as the legislature of a state, may, by law, provide”. In essence, a clause, which has ensured that states have not devolved any significant powers and functions to the Gram Sabha. Instead, they have confined the role of the Gram Sabhas to overseeing and monitoring the functioning of Panchayats, approving schemes and identifying beneficiaries. While there are states like Madhya Pradesh and Kerala that have made the recommendations of the Gram Sabha binding on the panchayats, many States have given short shift to Gram Sabhas where the calling of meetings is concerned On 5th (**Chandra Parul, 2001**). They meet twice a year. The centre is pushing the states to hold it four times a year. Union Finance Minister, Sinha declared 1999-2000 as the year of the “ Gram Sabha” to affirm our resolve to set the process of decentralized democracy in motion, with human development as the core objective of planning” (**Panchayati Raj Update1998**)

On 5th, 2000 Union Ministry of Rural Development met in Hyderabad to discuss ways of strengthening the Gram Sabha as envisaged by the 73rd amendment (**The Hindu, , 2000**)

In order to accelerate the emergence of Gram Sabhas as bodies to whom the PRIs are accountable, the powers and functions of Gram Sabhas should be spelt out in detail articulating their role as planners, decision-makers and auditors. The Gram Sabha meeting should be held at least four times a year. Instead of holding the Gram Sabha meetings in predetermined days they should be held with in a span of 30 days from the predetermined dates, so that concerned officers are present to respond to questions and concerns. The meeting resolved to implement the four point strategy—awareness, participation, transparency and social audit—for strengthening of the Gram Sabha and carious rural development schemes in letter and spirit.(**Panchayati Raj Up Date, 2001**)It has been felt that meetings are held rarely. If the Gram Sabha has to be meaningful, the gathering can not be large. The Gram Sabha should meet periodically and the subjects placed before it is such that they attract public attention. Only then, the electorate will have any

interest to attend the gram sabha. Unfortunately, the Act does not appear to provide for both of these requirements explicitly. (**Sundaram, 1997**)

Constitutional Provision does not make constitution of Gram Sabha at village level mandatory. Legislature of the State has the discretion to assign powers and functions of Gram Sabha in relation with Gram Panchayats. It is impossible to continue a single Gram Sabha in large Gram Panchayats as in Kerala and West Bengal. Multi Gram Sabha system has been introduced in these states. There is need to amend the existing article governing Gram Sabha as general assembly. But at the same time Gram Sabha should not undermine panchayats (**Subrahmanyam, 2000**. The Union Ministry of Rural Development has indicated that broad guidelines would be framed by the centre on the functioning of Gram Sabhas, their accountability, strengthening and social audit. (**The Hindu, 2000**). Another dimension is ‘elected Sarpanch totally lacked understanding about their roles and responsibilities and had no skills in conducting the meetings of Gram Sabha, with the result that they were never held. Even when held, Gram Sabha meetings were poorly attended. What was more disgusting was that without any meaningful discussions really taking place, the minutes of their proceedings were written and signatures obtained by the village secretary, going from door to door. The lack of attendance of women in such meetings and lack of participation by the poor and the SCs were particularly striking’ (**Sundaram, 2000**).

In a study of 185 Gram Panchayats in Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh the following were observed in relation to Gram Sabha. (**Panchayati Raj Up Date 1997**).

- In many instances Gram Sabha meetings were convened as a matter of formality;
- In most of the meetings the minimum required quorum was rarely fulfilled;
- In nearly 1/3rd cases of study, the records of Gram Sabha meetings were completed even when meetings were not held or there was no quorum;
- The important reason for ineffective functioning of Gram Sabha is due to absence of understanding about its role in the minds of both its members and Gram Panchayat leaders
- Absence of prior information about the Gram Sabha meeting is the most important reason for poor attendance.

- When ever Sarpanch and Panchayt members have consulted members of Gram Sabha in advance, participation of members has been substantial and active;
- Confusion about the role of Gram Sabha is mainly due to members perception that it is a programme of a political party or an occasion to identify beneficiaries;
- Except in Kerala and Madhya Pradesh the advice and suggestions of Gram Sabha are not binding on Gram Panchayat.
- Most Sarpanches lack skills in conducting meetings.

Above findings indicate that special interventions and awareness –building measures for their proper functioning is required. Unless the Institution of Gram Sabha put to use fully, the PRIs in general, and grassroots democracy in particular will not be able to flourish to the desired extent. The Gram Sabha has been recommended to serve as an assembly of the village and act as a watch dog on the working of Gram Panchayts besides facilitating people’s participation in the decision making process at the grass roots level (**Jain, 1997**).The sub-group of the task force on Panchayati Raj constituted by the Union Ministry of Rural Development has suggested the following recommendations in relation to Gram Sabha (**Panchayati Raj, Up Date,. 1999**)

1. Appointment of specified officers of intermediate level or District level PRIs as observers of Gram Sabha;
2. Gram Sabha Abhiyan meetings through out the state for two weeks for awareness building;
3. The agenda of the Gram Sabha should be of interest to majority of members and must cover a range of subjects that vitally affect their day-to day-life;
4. They should not act merely as a recommendatory body or debating forum;
5. If the decisions are not capable of being implemented, the Gram Panchyats should report the reasons for non-compliances to Gram Sabhas.

A recent Amendment of Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Act has given a range of functions to the Gram Sabha. Kerala had involved the Gram Sabha in its people’s plan campaign. The Gram Sabha of Orissa and Rajasthan have been given power to approve the Gram Panchayt’s Plan and budget. Since the practical situation differs from state to state, it is not possible to make constitutional provisions on the specific functions and powers that should be given to the Gram Sabha, but the

constitution may explicitly indicate its intention to allow the Gram Sabha too play a substantive role in the functioning of Gram Panchayat (**Ghosh, 2001**)

14.5 CONCLUSION

The fruit of democracy could not immediately travel to level below that of the state as the transfer of power from the British to Indian hands on the mid-night of the 14th August, 1947 was, in effect the handing over the keys of the administration to the people's representatives at the centre and the state levels. It was expected that by this pattern state legislature will travel from the state head quarters down through the districts and the block to the village Panchayats. In this way, there will be a complete link-up of the millions in this country from the Gram Sabha to the Lok Sabha. The people of India will govern themselves through their representatives in institutions from the Panchayat to the Parliament and then democracy will travel from Lok Sabha to Gram Sabha. " Panchayati Raj thus reflects the new concept of inter-connected democracy from the Gram-Sabha to the Lok Sabha. (**Dey**)

It can be said that India is on the threshold of a historic transition of political power to the grassroots with all the states completing the process of enacting fresh legislation on strengthening the PRIs on 23rd April 1994. As many as 11 states pushed through fresh legislation in 72 hours, some of them even in the early hours of 23rd April, 1994 to beat the stipulated the deadline of 23rd April 1994, the day Panchayats became part of the Indian Constitution. However, the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act is not applicable to Jammu and Kashmir, Mizoram, Nagaland and certain scheduled areas of the country. But mere legislative enactments do not ensure effectiveness and viability of the PRIs in the states. What is more important is their operationalisation. So, we will take up the state wise assessment of the New Panchayati Raj in Action to have clear picture on the ground realities.

14.6 KEY CONCEPTS

Empowerment: Giving a person or organisation the formal authority to do something.

Federalism: A system of governance in which a national, overarching government shares powers with sub-national or state governments.

Executive Branch: In a government with separation of powers, that part that is responsible for applying or administering the law. Thus a president, governor, or mayor and their respective supporting bureaucracies are the executive branches of their respective jurisdictions.

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14.8 ACTIVITIES

- 1) Explain the structure of Rural Local Bodies.
- 2) Discuss the structure of Panchayati Raj System at the national, state, district, block and village level.