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Kurukshetra seeks to carry the message of Rural Development to all people. It serves as a forum for free, frank and serious discussion on the problems of Rural Development with special focus on Rural Uplift. The views expressed by the authors in the articles are their own. They do not necessarily reflect the views of the government or the organizations they work for. The readers are requested to verify the claims in the advertisements regarding career guidance books/institutions. Kurukshetra does not own responsibility.
The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution (1992) is a landmark in the evolution of Panchayats in India which carved out the third tier of the Indian political system. While Panchayats have been the backbone of Indian villages for ages they had mainly performed the role of imparting justice.

The Panchayats as they exist today have been made by law and the Panchayati Raj System is an institution of administration which seeks to involve the people at the grass-root level in planning and administration. Peoples participation at the local level in both planning and implementation is essential for the success of decentralization and democracy.

The intention of the Government is to empower the local bodies at the grass-root level to promote micro-level planning, initiate need based development programmes and ensure transparency.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have brought significant change in the Indian system of governance. The most important development has been that the democratic base of the Indian polity has become very wide.

The basic objective of Panchayati Raj is to evolve a system of democratic decentralization and devolution with a view to ensuring rapid socio-economic progress and speedier and inexpensive justice.

The PRIs constitute the core of decentralized development of planning and its implementations and are involved in all major poverty alleviation schemes of the government.

The goal of inclusive growth, as envisaged by the government cannot be achieved without the active participation of PRIs and these institutions should be considered as integral to the governance of the country.

We discuss in this issue the effectiveness of the modern PRIs in achieving inclusive growth.

Though the present system of Panchayats draws heavily from the ancient system, its canvass of responsibility has enlarged since the 90s. We also discuss the evolution of the PRIs from the ancient Panchayat system.
The 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution (1992) has made Panchayats the third tier of the Indian political system. Earlier we had only two tiers—the union government and the state governments. Now we have the third tier—the Panchayats at the village, block and district levels. This write up is a modest attempt to trace the evolution of Panchayats from Traditional Panchayats to the Statutory Panchayats and from the Statutory Panchayats to the Constitutionalised Panchayats.

The Traditional Panchayats

The Traditional Panchayats had been formed in various parts of India after the pastoral society was converted into an agrarian one following the emergence of agriculture as the major mode of production and the consequent settlement of the villages. Every village community formed a council for the system maintenance and conflict resolution. In Haryana, they were known as Bhaichara (Brotherhood) Panchayats. These
consisted of the heads of various extended families known as Tholedars or Lanedars. They were collectively known as the Panchayats as their strength used to be Panch (five).

The main function of this Panchayat was the distribution of justice and they were known for the spirit for fair play. That is why they began to be called as the Panch Parmeshver (the Five possessing the quality of God). But this is idealistic conception of the Traditional Panchayat might or might not be corresponding to empirical reality as the landowning castes had hegemony in these.

Be that as it may, these Bhaichara Panchayats, which had come into existence in the ancient period, survived the Afghan and Mughal era during the medieval period. They were very much present when the British occupied this territory in 1804. This has been recognized by Charles Metcalfe, the Provincial Governor General of India (1835-1836). He described them as a ‘Little Republics’. And, these kept on surviving even in the British rule despite the creation of the institutions of Numberdars, (Headmen) and Zaildars (head of the group of villages) for the collection of the land revenue and the introduction of modern police and judicial systems by them. These continue to exist in the post independence period despite the creation of the Statutory Panchayats and Constitutionalized Panchayats. Even the processes of modernization, politicization and economic development in the 20th century and the processes of liberalizations, privatizations and globalizations in the 21st Century could not wipe them out because of the feelings of bhaichara among the residents of the villages. So much so that even the breakdown of jajmani system (Patron client relationship) after the Green Revolution could not make much impact on them. However, they no longer perform the local government functions and instead persist as informal justice bodies in the villages. The local government functions were taken over by the Statutory Panchayats which became Constitutionalised Panchayats after independence.

The Statutory Panchayats

While the Bhaichara Panchayats were based on the tradition, the Statutory Panchayats were created by law. These owe their origin to the Report of the Royal Commission on Decentralization (1907). The Commission had recommended the creation of village Panchayats for reducing the financial burden of the provincial governments and for extending the concept of local self government to the village level. While the Mayo’s Resolution (1870) had created the municipalities in the urban areas and the Ripon Resolution (1882) the district board at the district level and the rural board at the taluka /tehsil levels, as the local self government institution, the Royal Commission not only advocated their strengthening but also suggested creations of these at the village level as the Panchayats.

Consequently, the government of various provinces enacted Village Panchayat Acts in the second decade of 20th century. In Punjab, which included Haryana, the Punjab Village Panchayats Act was made in 1912 for the creation of the Statutory Panchayats. However, the enactment of this Act failed to have the desired results. This happened because the Panchayats setup under
this Act had neither a real representative character nor any element of autonomy. Secondly, those who were responsible for executing it too could not be spared from their due to share of blame. The failure may partly be attributed to the lack of sincerity on their part. Thirdly, the blame may also be squarely placed on people who exhibited much apathy for this institution.

However, it would be unfair to deny the significance of the Act in the development of Panchayats in this province. It was the first attempt by the provincial government to provide legal basis to this traditional institution. It marked the beginning of the era of Statutory Panchayats. It initiated the process which culminated in the incorporation of the idea of Panchayats in the Indian Constitution.

After the introduction of Dyarchy in provinces as a result of the implementation of the Government of India Act (1919), the local self government was made a transferred subject. Thereafter, the Indian ministers got new Village Panchayat Acts enacted for strengthening the Village Panchayats. In Punjab, Fazl-i-Husain, the founder of the Unionist Party, got made Punjab Village Panchayats Act (1921). The objective of this Act was to strengthen the Panchayats both as units of Local Self Government and as judicial bodies. It too, however, failed to achieve its objectives because it was implemented at a time when the political atmosphere of the province was surcharged due to the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Civil Disobedience Movement. Be that as it may it was certainly an improvement on the Punjab Village Panchayat Act, (1912).

Fresh efforts were made to further strengthen the Village Panchayats after the establishment of the Provincial Autonomy in 1937 by the Government of Indian Act (1935). For illustrations, the legendary Jat leader and the then Minister of Local Self Government on the province, Sir Chhotu Ram got enacted the Punjab Village Panchayats Act (1939) which extended the right to franchise to the scheduled castes. But it did not grant it to women. It conferred wide judicial powers – civil and criminal – on the Village Panchayats. Efforts were also made to improve their financial resources through the provision of government grants equal to the Judicial Fees and Fines credited by the Panchayats to the government treasury. The Panchayats were also allowed to levy taxes in their respective areas with the previous sanction of the Government.

The Punjab Village Panchayat (1939) Act would have gone a long way in putting the Statutory Panchayats on firm foundation but failed to do so as the outbreak of Second World War in 1939 diverted the attention of the government to the war efforts.

The Constitutionnalised Panchayats

The institution of Panchayat was given space in the Indian Constitution after the Independence. Article 40 of the Directive Principles of the State Policy laid down that the state shall create Village Panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as enable them to function as institutions of self governments. This mandate of the constitutions led to the enactment to the Gram Panchayat Acts in various states. For example, the Punjab Gram Panchayats Act (1952) was made in Punjab. It introduced universal adult franchise for the election of the Panchayats and the women too were given voting rights. The Gram Panchayats were given regulatory, civic and the judicial functions.

The implementation of Balvantray Mehta Study Team Report (1957) for the democratic decentralisation of development administrations, created a three-tier structure of Panchayats which was given the name of Panchayati Raj. It included the Gram Sabha, and Gram Panchayat at the village level, the Panchayat Samiti at the
The Panchayati Raj was inaugurated by the then Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, at Nagaur in Rajasthan on October 2, 1959. In Punjab it was created through an amendment in Punjab Gram Panchayat Act 1952 in 1960 and through the enactment of Punjab Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act 1961 in 1962. By 1964, the Panchayati Raj had been set up in all the States. However, it was weakened due to several well-known reasons.

Therefore, the then Prime Ministers of India, Mr. Rajiv Gandhi moved the 64th Amendment Bill in 1989 for creating strengthened, inclusive and uniform system of Panchayati Raj. The Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha but could not get the requisite to two-third majority in Rajya Sabha as it was misunderstood as an attempt to erode the autonomy of states.

But P.V Narshima Rao, who became Prime Minister of India in 1991, was able to build a consensus in its favour. As a result, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) was enacted. The conformity legislations were made by all the state of India in 1994. And now we have a new system of Panchayati Raj having the following features:

1. Uniform three tier structure of Panchayats at the village, block and district level in all the states except those having a population of less then 20 lakhs.

2. One-third reservation of women

3. Reservation for the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes in proportion to their share the population

4. Five year tenure and fresh election with in six months in case of their dissolution

5. State Election Commission for fair election


7. The Eleventh Schedule having 29 items which may be devolved by the state legislation on Panchayats for making and implementing plans of economic development and social justice so that these could become institutions of self government.

However, the genuine devolution of functions, functionaries and funds has not been made in most of the states. This has happened because of the lack of political will and hostility of bureaucracy & technocracy. The failure of the elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions to pressurize the state governments for this purpose by organizing themselves has also been responsible for it.

Concluding Observations

The above discussion leads us to the conclusion that the evolution of the Panchayats has to be traced from the Traditional Panchayats in the pre-colonial period, Statutory Panchayats in the colonial period and the Constitutionalized Panchayats in the post-colonial period. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) has to be recognized as a great landmark in the evolution of Panchayats in India. But much more needs to be done for realizing Mahatma Gandhi’s ideal of Gram Swaraj and the vision of Sh. Rajiv Gandhi for the empowerment of the people. This requires consistent, concerted and systematic efforts on the part of civil society.

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The year 2009-10 has been declared as the year of Gram Sabha being the 50th anniversary of launching of Panchayati Raj in our country.

What did Mahatma actually mean by Gram Swaraj? He wrote, “Power resides in the people, they can use it at any time.” He further narrated, Independence begins at the bottom...A society must be built in which every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs... It will be trained and prepared to perish in the attempt to defend itself against any onslaught from without...

Needless to mention, our country took a little over four decades since independence to conceptualize this context. Despite Mahatma’s strong advocacy in bringing down the state closer to the people since the days of freedom movement under the auspices of what he called ‘Gram Swaraj’, there was prolonged debate in the Constituent Assembly over the issue.

Although several states have undertaken the activity mapping, PRIs still exist in the marginal position in most of the cases. Many parallel Committees, agencies and missions created either by the Central or the State level Departments for the purpose of implementing the specific schemes encroach the domain of the PRIs. Thus the bodies like District Rural Development Agency, Sarba Siksha Abhijan, National Rural Health Mission etc. are entrusted with the tasks for which the PRIs are also accountable.
Constitutionalising rural Governance

Constitutional provisions, however, relating to the establishment, powers, functions and responsibilities of the Panchayats have been introduced through the 73rd Amendment in 1993 for the country as a whole following the recommendations of L.M. Singhvi Committee. These provisions not only compelled the State Governments to constitute Panchayats after every five years through the general elections but also prescribed for reservation of seats for weaker sections in respect of both of its ordinary members and office bearers. Besides, the panchayats have been made accountable to its electorate through the forum of Gram Sabha in respect of its every action. The responsibility of local level planning with an objective of ensuring economic development and social opportunity have also been bestowed upon the Panchayats. The State Governments, on the other hand, are expected to devolve panchayats with all powers and authority as listed in Schedule XI in respect of its fund, function and functionaries.

A close observation of the provisions of the Constitution, thus, reveals a mixed idea that to be an effective institution, the responsibilities are mutual as well as reciprocal. On the one hand while it depends upon the effective leadership at the local level on the other it is the state who is equally responsible to share its powers and functions with the institutions for grassroot’s governance. We should take first the initiatives at the level of the Government to make the constitutional amendments effective since the issue of democratic decentralization was an agenda of the state particularly during the mid 1980s.

In the global agenda there has been renewed interest during this period that the transfer of powers to the local level governments would make the public institutions more effective and would also make the local governments and civil society more competent in managing their own affairs.

Post amendment initiatives

The first decade after the 73rd amendment, however, did not witness remarkable initiatives in the way the central and the state departments dealt with the panchayats. Most of the line departments continued to function more or less in the same manner as they were prior to the 73rd amendment. Panchayats were mostly viewed as the extension counters of the Block Development Offices. Line departments continued to collect monthly performance reports, returns and utilization certificates from the Panchayats in respect of the state or centrally sponsored schemes and programmes as is generally done by the central departments in respect of their counterparts at the state level.

While addressing a conference of the Chief Ministers on 29 June, 2004, the Prime Minister stated, “many studies of effective decentralization reveal an interesting paradox—that it needs a visionary leadership above to ensure decentralization”. In the same year, the Government of India created the Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), with an objective of primarily overseeing the implementation of Part IX of the Constitution. The conference of the Chief Ministers discussed the scope of the Ministry’s work.

In accordance with the decision adopted in the conference on 29th and 30th June, 2004 the Ministry of Panchayati Raj organized seven Round Table discussions throughout the country and resolved the matters relating to the scope and future of the Panchayati Raj.

Besides issuing several guidelines to the State Governments on the Model of devolution, the Ministry of the Panchayati Raj has by this time has also framed a model Panchayat Act keeping in mind several preconditions of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act.
From a close examination of the subject matter of the round table conferences it can be expected that a time bound plan of action would be devised towards implementation of the plan of devolution of powers and responsibilities on the PR institutions covering all 29 subjects as are detailed in the eleventh schedule of the Constitution. A plan of action is also expected regarding close coordination between the central, state and the PR institutions in respect of implementation of the Centrally sponsored schemes and programmes. We, therefore, need an examination of the status of empowerment of the PRIs of the country.

**Role Clarity**

The first and foremost precondition for planning and implementation of any organization is its autonomy in decision making as well as its role clarity. It is more relevant for the PRIs particularly because multilevel tiers alongwith the different line departments are involved in the process. For example, if we examine the legal provisions of the different state panchayat Acts, it is the District, Block and Gram Panchayats who are equally assigned with the task of social development delivery like health or education and still there are concerned line departments of the state Governments with similar responsibilities. Thus a question of demarcation of the jurisdiction arises.

By this time almost all the states have enacted Panchayati Raj laws devolving some matters mentioned in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. But again in most of the cases the devolved matters end with some sort of concurrent responsibilities which does not ensure the specific and measurable accountability of a particular tier of the PRI. Here comes the question of activity mapping assigning appropriate responsibility to the appropriate level keeping in view the principle of subsidiarity.

Although several states have undertaken the activity mapping, PRIs still exist in the marginal position in most of the cases. Many parallel Committees, Agencies and Missions created either by the Central or the State level Departments for the purpose of implementing the specific schemes encroach the domain of the PRIs. Thus the bodies like District Rural Development Agency, Sarba Siksha Abhijan, National Rural Health Mission etc. are entrusted with the tasks for which the PRIs are also accountable. These bodies should either to be abolished or be brought under the control of the PRIs. Similarly functions of the line departments should be clearly defined and the surplus functionaries to be transferred to the PRIs in a rational way so that there may not be any overlapping area.

**Planning**

Article 243G of the constitution empowers the PRIs to prepare its own plan with an objective of ensuring economic development and social justice. Again a District Planning Committee (DPC) has been constituted by the 74th amendment of the Constitution. This means the plans prepared by the PRIs and those by the municipal bodies
are to be compiled in a single District Plan by the DPC. These plans should be the integral part of the state plan and again the central plan should be the combination of the state plans. Thus there is ample scope of reflection of the aspirations of village people in the National Plan in a realistic way.

But in reality the local level planning with the active participation of the local people and taking into consideration the local resources with the immediate local need cannot be the option for the PRIs as they are always busy with the schematic fund. Moreover poor supply of untied fund coupled with meager own source revenue becomes a serious hurdle to the decentralized planning. The National planning commission and the state planning Boards should come up with a specific plan of action so that a specific calendar with time limits are prescribed in the state legislation. At the same time line departments should declare its allocation well ahead to the PRIs. Similarly necessary knowledge and skill inputs for multilevel planning should also be assured to the PRIs. There should be a clear district vision while the DPC is incorporating the PRI plans into the District Plan. Finally, the recommendations of the expert group headed by V. Ramchandran, which was constituted by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj in 2005, should be implemented.

Implementation of Programmes

For ensuring economic development and social justice ,PRIs are entrusted with different state and centrally sponsored programmes. These include National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGA), Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY), Indira Awas Yojana (IAY), Integrated Waste Development Programmes (IWDP), Drought Prone Area Programme (DPAP), Desert Development Programme (DDP), Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), MP/MLA’s local area Development Scheme etc. In the social sector there are programmes like Mid day Meal (MDM), Sarva Siksha Abhijan (SSA), Reproductive and Child Health Programme (RCH) and several Pension schemes like Indira Gandhi National Old age, Widow and Disability Pension Schemes together with other social security schemes of the state social welfare departments.

As most of the centrally sponsored programmes have a top down and supply driven approach and moreover they are governed by certain rigid guidelines, the PRIs are neither in a

| Table 1 | Revenue mobilization and expenditure pattern of PRIs (All tiers & All India) |
|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| **Revenue (Rs. crore)** |          |      |        |        |        |
| Own tax         | 629.89   | 677.49 | 753.7  | 810.81 | 928.71 |
| Own Non tax     | 531.08   | 657.02 | 664.54 | 621.95 | 714.8  |
| Total own revenue | 1160.97 | 1334.51 | 1418.24 | 1432.77 | 1643.51 |
| Assigned and devolution | 5222.71 | 6508.53 | 6531.17 | 6169.43 | 6648.23 |
| Grants in aid   | 9744.19  | 13118.53 | 13426.2 | 13224.07 | 14154.48 |
| Others          | 1167.81  | 1302.45 | 1868.75 | 1643.81 | 1564.29 |
| Total other     | 16134.71 | 20929.62 | 21826.12 | 21037.07 | 22367.01 |
| Total revenue   | 17295.68 | 22264.13 | 23244.36 | 22470.07 | 24010.52 |
| % of own revenue to total revenue | 6.71% | 5.99% | 6.10% | 6.38% | 6.84% |
| **Expenditure (Rs. crore)** |          |      |        |        |        |
| Revenue         | 13031.47 | 15889.15 | 18131.61 | 18177.17 | 17739.97 |
| Capital         | 5275.41  | 5803.67 | 5928.53 | 5764.02 | 6546.32 |
| Total Expenditure | 18306.89 | 21693.12 | 24060.14 | 23941.19 | 24286.29 |

Source: Tenth Finance Commission
position to intergrate these programmes in the local level planning nor have any authority to spend the fund as per their own choice. Thus the PRIs have become the mere development delivery agents of the Government.

**Mobilizing own revenue**

One of the preconditions for the success of the institutions of self Government is their self reliance and self sufficiency. Besides poor untied fund supplied by the central and state Governments on the basis of recommendations of the central and state Finance Commissions, mobilization of own revenue by the PRIs are very poor. As per study conducted on behalf of the Eleventh Finance Commission, own revenue of the PRIs constitute only 4.17 percent of their total revenue. From different other studies it is further seen that due to ensured delivery of different schematic fund coupled with other local factors they are reluctant to collect local taxes and fees or to modify the poor rates. They are not even interested to venture into the new scopes and areas. There is, however, variation, across the tiers and the Gram Panchayats are comparatively in better position than other two tiers. Table 3 depicts picture of revenue mobilization vis-à-vis expenditure by the PRIs.

**Inadequate Capacity**

From different studies it is experienced that the elected PRI representatives are lacking adequate capacity to shoulder the responsibilities bestowed upon them. On the one hand, some members gathering experiences in a full five year term have no certainty to be reelected. On the other, the newly elected members with limited educational background in most of the cases despite trained in the institutionally arranged programmes are not in a position to cope with the complex institutional mechanism coupled with ever changing guidelines of different rural development programmes. As a consequence they are gradually going to be more dependent on the paid employees in respect of decision making and development delivery. Thus, in stead of one time training arrangement in a five year’s term, capacity building should be a continuous process coupled with hand holding support as was recommended by the 7th round table conference.

**Peoples Participation**

Peoples participation in the local level planning and implementation is the pillar of the success of decentralization. What Mahatma actually dreamt of is the owning of a certain portion of the state by the villagers themselves. The constitution has provided for Gram Sabha, a body consisting of electors of a Panchayat to which a gram panchayat is accountable for its every action and inaction. This body besides being the forum of village level planning are also the venue of social audit. But in practice, these bodies are gradually losing its relevance in most of the cases. Due to lack of adequate knowledge about the functioning of the Gram Panchayats and also about the limitations of different Rural Development programmes these bodies are gradually going to be the mere venue of raising the demands and blaming each other for every unattended aspects of development. The Gram Panchayats on the other hand as a pressure of spending of different time bound schematic fund gradually going to be reluctant to convene such meetings. The Gram Sabha should be well capacitated to make the level of participation efficient and effect. Special Gram Sabha need to be convened to capacitate them by the Block level officials. At the same time the Political Parties should take keen interest in mobilizing and educating them in the same initiative as is shown during general elections. The NGOs and CBOs working in the locality should also facilitate such initiatives.

**Towards inclusive Governance**

The vision document of the 11th plan of the country has clearly defined that reducing poverty
and bridging the various divides that continue to fragment our society can only be achieved if there is a significant improvement in the quality of the governance. The ultimate objective of the 11th plan to reach this goal is inclusive growth. This goal cannot be reached unless the governance itself is inclusive. Therefore, PRIs should be considered as integral part of the governance of the country. They need to be adequately empowered with fund, function and functionaries and should be capacitated to function as the third stratum of the Government. They also need to be trained to accommodate local need and local resources in truest sense instead of implementing some state or centrally sponsored schemes and programmes designed from above. At the same time, women and weaker sections of the society should brought to the forefront of planning and implementation to achieve the targets. Civil Society organizations should be well connected with the PRIs for better capacity building of the PRIs in utilising the local knowledge and skill as well as bridging the public-private partnership. We may conclude with the confession of our Hon’ble Prime Minister, ‘We have too many schemes, which are fragmented in concept, are rigidly designed and impose national parameters on highly differentiated local realities in terms of resource endowments or felt needs’ and ‘Panchayati Raj is the medium to transform rural India into 700 million opportunities.’

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Panchayats have been the backbone of the Indian villages since the beginning of recorded history. Gandhiji, the father of the nation, in 1946 had aptly remarked that the Indian Independence must begin at the bottom and every village ought to be a Republic or Panchayat having powers. Effective and meaningful functioning of these bodies would depend on active involvement, contribution and participation of its citizens. Gandhiji’s dream has been translated into reality with the introduction of the three-tier Panchayati Raj system to ensure people’s participation in rural reconstruction. Close to 70% of India still resides in rural and semi urban areas. It is in rural India that a vast potential of talent and untapped creative and intellectual energy lies. If this group of people is not empowered, the nation as a whole cannot flourish and develop. Development strategy that seeks to make growth progress more inclusive has been rural development. Development of rural areas has been at the core of planning process in the country. Rural Development is a broad, inclusive
term which takes in its ambit socio-economic and political development of the rural areas. It includes measures to strengthen the democratic fabric of society through the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as provide the vast rural multitude ‘voice and choice’ apart from measures to improve the rural infrastructure, improve income of rural households and delivery systems pertaining to education, health and safety net mechanisms. Poverty alleviation is a key component of rural development. The present paper examines the status of rural poverty alleviation and the role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in providing the services to accomplish inclusive growth as per the eleventh plan agenda.

The Village Poverty Reduction Program & Panchayat

The basic foundation of the village poverty reduction program is a proper identification of the poor on a Panchayat wise basis. The identification of the poor has to be treated as a continuing process that periodically tracks the situation of the poor, without the overriding concern of dividing people into clear poor and non-poor categories. These surveys ought to be carried out by the Panchayat, with the total involvement of the people in Gram and Ward Sabhas, including SHGs and other Community based organizations. Such surveys could be updated on a half yearly basis and thus provide a continuous flow of information on needs and situation of each family. When these are consolidated, a clear picture of the public services required for the poor will emerge, which will go into the service provision side of the Panchayat plan. On the livelihood side, an equally clear picture will emerge as to the likely demand for providing wage employment, as well as self-employment, thus helping for better planning for the same. The following points may be specifically considered in the further process of convergence between wage employment and livelihood programs:

- There is need to prepare family wise livelihood plans, based on the surveys, to identify the basket of needs of each family.
- There is a need to ensure an up gradation of skills to improve earning capacity. This can be done in two ways, either by providing skills and tools to wage earners to improve productivity, or provide them skills to move out of wage employment into small livelihoods.
- 40 percent of NREGA funding is available for procurement of material. This can be linked to SGSY, so that wherever possible, such procurement is also undertaken from SGSY groups,
- There is a need for greater coordination and convergence between NREG and SGSY on the one hand, with programs for poverty reduction undertaken in States through State plans or externally aided efforts.
- Monitoring systems of NREGA and SGSY will have to be closely related, particularly at the outcome assessment level, so as to get a total picture of their combined effect on poverty.
- There is a need to integrate the NREG shelf of works into the Panchayat plan. However, the fact that wage employment has become demand driven under the Act would have a big impact on village level planning, which will now need to adapt itself quickly to fluctuations in demand for labor.

PRIs & Centrally Sponsored Schemes for poverty alleviation

- Drinking Water and Sanitation Programs

The main programs of the Central Government relating to drinking water supply are the Accelerated Rural Water Supply Program (ARWSP) and Swajaldbhara. ARWSP is aimed at ensuring a minimum
availability of 40 Litres of water per capita per day (LPCD) to all rural people. Swajaldhara is a demand driven approach to augmenting water supply, with a high degree of local participation. Citizens are to provide 10 percent of the capital cost and ensure that they meet 100 percent of the maintenance cost in implementing the program. ARWSP is now part of the Bharat Nirman approach, with a time bound strategy of tackling all habitations that are deficient in water supply. In both schemes, there is a clear thrust on putting Panchayats in the forefront of implementation of drinking water schemes. The Department of Drinking Water Supply has adopted an MOU based approach, by which States are persuaded to assign Panchayats the entire gamut of drinking water and sanitation interventions in rural areas. There is also a built in disincentive as State governments that do not sign the MOU before commencement of the Eleventh Plan, could be ineligible for receiving any fund under ARWSP in the that plan period. This Group felt that the approach in respect of drinking water supply is on desirable lines and did not require any major change.

- **Total Sanitation Campaign**

  The Total Sanitation Campaign aims at providing subsidized individual and community latrines, so as to completely eliminate open-air defecation. The program has now added solid waste management as another component of the program. Along with water supply, TSC is a program that is clearly part of the core responsibility of every Panchayat, particularly the Gram Panchayat. The guidelines of the TSC give leeway to the States to decide on the extent of involvement of Panchayats in the program. This creates a wide variation in the modalities of implementation of the scheme in different States, even in those where the subject of water supply has been devolved upon Panchayats. In many States, the implementation of the scheme is still kept outside the Panchayats, with the primary role given to the PHE department and NGOs/SHGs.

  This happens in spite of the fact that in most State Panchayati Raj Acts, the function of maintaining cleanliness in villages is the primary responsibility of the Gram Panchayat. While the achievement can be impressive in terms of latrines constructed, unless there is public mobilization, awareness and a fairly deterrent social sanction against open-air defecation, the program objectives could still remain unfulfilled and there is likely to be slipping back. A high involvement of Panchayats in the program is therefore essential.

- **Public Health**

  The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM - 2005-2012) has been launched to improve availability of and access to quality health care and public health services, including women’s health, child health, water, sanitation & hygiene, immunization, and nutrition by rural people, through making necessary changes in the mechanism of health delivery. The goals of the mission are to reduce Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) and Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) and prevent and control communicable and non-communicable diseases.

- **Women and Child Welfare**

  ICDS promotes integrated child development through converging basic services for improved child care, early stimulation and learning, improved enrolment and retention, health and nutrition, and water and environmental sanitation. The Scheme aims to improve the nutritional and health status of pre-school children, pregnant women and nursing mothers through providing a package of services including supplementary nutrition, preschool education, immunization, health check-up, referral services and nutrition & health education, with particular focus on the vulnerable and poor. In addition, the Scheme envisages effective convergence of inter-sectoral services in the anganwadi centers. From a coverage of 33 blocks in 1975-76, the program has been expanded to cover
4200 Operational ICDS Projects in the Country. Budgets have also correspondingly increased.

- **Housing**

The Indira Awas Yojana (IAY) is the sole program that deals with housing for the poor from the Government of India. This program gives a 100 percent subsidy, capped at Rs. 25,000 per unit for providing houses to families below the poverty line. Beneficiaries are to construct the house and payments are made directly to the beneficiary, on the completion of certain milestones in construction. The guidelines of IAY in its present form are both Panchayat-friendly and beneficiary friendly. However, it must be ensured that the selection of the beneficiaries and the coordination with them is with the Panchayats and not with the DRDAs. States have a variety of programs for housing, each with its own ceilings and subsidies. This often results in duplication and misuse of funds. Panchayats need to be empowered to pool the resources for housing and adopt a single scheme with a narrow band of parameters.

- **Rural Roads**

The Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana primarily aims to provide all weather access to unconnected habitations of up to 500 population (with relaxations for hill, desert and tribal areas) by 2007. The Scheme mandates the development of master plans and a core network at the block and district level, approved by the Intermediate and District Panchayat respectively. The District Panchayat is also to prepare the annual proposals in consultation with Intermediate Panchayats and Gram Panchayats, in accordance with the district’s fund allocation under the Scheme. Road alignments are to be undertaken in consultation with the Gram Panchayat. Executing Agencies are to be designated to implement the program. It is open for States to designate the District Panchayat as the implementing agency. Executing Agencies are to create Project Implementation Units (PIUs) for each district or group of districts to implement the program. Regarding maintenance, the guidelines stipulate that all PMGSY roads are under five-year defect liability of the contractor and maintained by him under a contract for the above said period. Funds for the maintenance contract are provided from the state budget. In case of rural through routes, a further five years’ Zonal Contract is to be entered into at the end of the initial five-year period.

**Electricity programs and Panchayats**

The Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) is the major rural electrification scheme of the Ministry of Power, which aims at providing electricity in all villages and habitations in four years and provides access to electricity to all rural households. This program is one of the major components of Bharat Nirman. The approach is to strengthen the electricity distribution infrastructure by establishing Rural Electricity Distribution Backbone (REDB) with at least a 33/11kV sub-station, Village Electrification Infrastructure (VEI) with at least a Distribution Transformer in each village or hamlet, and stand-alone grids with generation where grid supply is not feasible. In remote villages the objectives of the RGGVY are proposed to be met through renewable energy and the program is managed at the central level by the Ministry of Non-conventional Energy Sources (MNES).

**Steps to be taken to ensure Panchayats become effective in service delivery**

- Ensuring that clearly demarcated roles are assigned to Panchayats, through activity mapping,
- Confining centrally sponsored and state schemes to a small number of important programs to achieve declared national and state goals,
Undertaking a well structured process of fiscal devolution that matches the fund availability at each level of Panchayat with the functions assigned to it,

Providing capacity to the Panchayats, in the widest sense of the term to perform their responsibilities effectively,

Ensuring benchmarking of services so that Panchayats can be clearly judged in terms of outcomes and

Putting in place systems of accountability so that citizens, the ultimate recipient of services from Panchayats, are enabled to hold them account for any inadequacies in service delivery.

Suggestions

- Strengthening the delivery system for services and development initiatives through Panchayati Raj Institutions,
- Formulation of District and Sub-District plans at all levels of Panchayats to deliver basic minimum needs to the citizens at the grassroots level,
- Strengthening the Planning Machinery at the district and sub-district levels for pursuing Such formulation, including guidelines for the DPC to consolidate such plans,
- Reviewing guidelines of Centrally Sponsored Schemes and Central Sector Programs to ensure the centrality of participation by Panchayati Raj institutions from the drawing board to implementation of schemes including poverty alleviation, elementary education, rural health coverage etc.,
- Development of model guidelines for conferring original jurisdiction on Gram Sabhas as envisaged in PESA.

It is important that independent evaluation of the impact of economic development and social justice programs implemented by Panchayats are undertaken at regular intervals.

CONCLUSION

The Eleventh Five-year Plan, which has identified Inclusive Growth as the overarching objective, seeks to ‘substantially empower and use PRIs as the primary means of delivery of essential services that are critical to inclusive growth. For the success of any democracy-decentralized governance is a must and for that the Panchayati Raj (PRIs) is the best example. Panchayati Raj System as a process of democratic decentralization aims at providing a broad base to affording the much needed training ground for future leadership; creating an awareness and initiative in the rural people about community development programs, proper utilization of the available manpower and other rural resources which have mostly remained under-exploited and unutilized manpower and other rural resources of participate in the management of rural affairs, bringing rural consciousness among the officials and impressing upon the utility of coordinated and inter-related approach to various development programs, and planning an overall balanced development of rural areas and thus, raising the standard of living of the rural people by alleviating poverty and to ensure Inclusive growth.

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After the Community Development Programme was launched in 1952, it was realized that there should be an institution at the village level which could represent the entire community, assume responsibility and provide the necessary leadership for implementing development programmes. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was appointed in 1957 to study the Community Development and National Extension Service programmes, especially from the point of view of assessing the extent of popular participation, and to recommend the creation of institutions through which such participation could be achieved. The Committee recommended the constitution of statutory elected local bodies with the necessary resources, power and authority devolved to them and a decentralized administrative system working under their control. Recognizing the importance of such

Rajasthan was the first State to set up panchayats. The first one was formed in Nagaur in 1959. By mid-1960s, the system was operative in all the states. Now the Panchayati Raj system has got a stronger-base with the elected representatives of 233251 village panchayats, 6105 taluq panchayats and 539 zilla panchayats. No country in the world has such a wide democratic base of elected representatives. It, in fact, is the true foundation of Indian democracy.
democratic institutions at the grass-roots level, the Indian Constitution laid down in Article 40 of Part IV of the Directive Principles of State Policy that the state would take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as might be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.

Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered as a means to good governance and 73rd Constitutional Amendment was effected with the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantage section of the society like schedule caste, schedule tribes and women. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 conferred Constitutional status on the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It envisages the establishment of a democratic decentralized development process through people’s participation in decision-making, implementation and delivery. In order to achieve this objective, the Constitution provides for devolution of powers and responsibilities upon panchayats at appropriate levels. 29 Subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution have been identified for devolution to the PanchayatiRaj Institutions.

For the last few decades, the village panchayats have served as a system of democratic governance and as an institutional framework for the empowerment of the people by giving them not only the voice, but also the power of choice as well, in order to shape the development they feel is appropriate to their situation. It implies maximum decentralisation of powers to the elected bodies to function as autonomous units with adequate authority, resources and power to discharge the basic responsibility of bringing about economic development and social justice. Decentralisation of development planning and implementation has been central to the PanchayatiRaj Institution and in the past two decades, the panchayat system has brought much change in the Indian system of governance. The most important development has been that the democratic base of the Indian polity has become very wide. Rajasthan was the
first State to set up panchayats. The first one was formed in Nagaur in 1959. By mid-1960s, the system was operative in all the states. Now the PanchayatiRaj system has got a stronger-base with the elected representatives of 233251 village panchayats, 6105 taluq panchayats and 539 zilla panchayats. No country in the world has such a wide democratic base of elected representatives. It, in fact, is the true foundation of Indian democracy.

Rural decentralization through PanchayatiRaj system has provided a strong platform for political participation and mobilization and no doubt, this has aroused the political awareness of the people of all sections including the the marginalized and the socially excluded groups. This has also considerably contributed for strengthening their political organizations and capacity for effective bargaining for better delivery of goods and services. It is assumed that in future, decentralization and democratization would strengthen the capacity of every section of the society, specially the weaker sections to make the political system at all levels accountable and responsive to the needs of the people and to respond better to their demands. This will in turn make the public services more efficient and democratic. In developing countries in particular, decentralisation has been a palliative for a large number of governance problems. Rural decentralization is expected to achieve higher economic efficiency, better accountability, better resource mobilization, lower cost of service provision and higher satisfaction of local preferences. The panchayati raj system has brought in another far-reaching development in political process and decision-making. About one million women representatives from village, block and district panchayats are now members of these institutions. Most of these women are 

**West Bengal Panchayati Raj System:**
A Role Model for Rural Decentralisation

In India, the panchayat system in West Bengal has been acclaimed as a pioneering model of participatory governance with maximum stability and prolonged existence. It is one of the earliest states to make a serious effort to implement Panchayati Raj. Through progressive amendments to the Panchayat Act and supportive executive orders, the government has constantly tried to strengthen and empower the Panchayat system. West Bengal is the first and the only state to hold timely Panchayat elections regularly after every five years, since 1978. West Bengal is the first state to bifurcate the participatory platform of Gram Sabha and another popular forum of villagers at each and every ward or constituency of Gram Panchayat, known as gram sansad has been ordained. Gram sansad and Gram sabha in West Bengal are to consist of all registered electorate within their respective geographical areas. Gram Panchayat is supposed to hold at least two gram sansad meetings in every year; an annual meeting in May and a half-yearly meeting in the month of November.

The July 2003 Amendment of West Bengal Panchayat Act has further institutionalized participation via the creation of another institutional layer of planning, namely, the Village Development Council or Gram Unnayan Samiti. Now, Gram Panchayat shall not omit or refuse to act upon any recommendation of Gram Sansad. Gram Sansad has apparently been provided with its executive arm Gram Unnnayan Samiti. It has become the planning unit in the sense that development plan of GP will be a compilation of Gram Sansad plans.
young in the age group of 25 – 45 and about 80% of them do not have political background. This large number of rural women has been empowered with political powers that they never expected and heard before.

With the 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution, the role of the Gram Panchayat is predominant in implementing almost all the development programmes launched by the Government. The intention of the Government is to empower the local bodies at the grassroot level to promote micro-level planning, initiate need based development programmes and ensure transparency. The Gram Panchayats are expected to develop their plans through a participatory approach and discuss such plans in the Gram Sabha. The Gram Sabha is expected to act as the watch dog and monitor the programmes implemented by the Gram Panchayat and other organisations. This concept is ideal for the upliftment of rural areas and to ensure transparency in all public dealings. The realisation of this concept is totally dependent on a change in the attitude of the local people, who are the members of the Gram Sabha.

Active involvement of the Gram Sabha in various development programmes is a noble objective. However, the difficulty lies in motivating the villagers to attend the Gram Sabha meetings. In most of the backward villages, in the absence of a common public, the vested interests are likely to influence the proceedings which may not be in the interest of the community. Therefore, the office bearers of various villages level organisations such as schools, colleges, cooperative societies, banks, mahila mandals, youth groups, farmers associations and voluntary agencies should take part in the meetings as these institutions are expected to safeguard the interests of the community. Some of these institutions can also assume the role of facilitators of the Gram Sabha and form a link between the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha. With good team work at the village level in the form of Gram Sabha, the community will be able to monitor the services provided by the Government.

The ethos of democracy can find real nourishment, only when power reaches the grass-root levels. For the ordinary citizen, it is local democracy which can have real meaning and significance. In a vast country where large masses are still unlettered, village panchayats and participative democracy can do wonders. If the aim is to establish a democratic society, where change is brought about by voluntary consent and willing cooperation and not by the force of arms, there may be no alternative to PanchayatiRaj Institutions.

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Acknowledging the importance of peoples’ active participation in planning, decision-making, implementation and delivery system to accelerate rural development process Government legislated the 73rd Amendment Act, 1992, which became the Panchayat Raj law on April 24, 1993. From that date it became mandatory to involve local people & Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) to implement Government schemes and make them responsible to achieve the underlying objectives. The Law stipulated reservation for women & disadvantaged sections of the community, which created a space for them to be assertive and demand their rightful share in the decision-making at the local level.

NREG Scheme: For the first time in the history of post-independence India, and beyond all expectations, PRIs are directly involved in planning, implementing and social audit of the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme [NREGS]. Gram Panchayats (GPs) and Gram Sabhas (GSs) identify, approve, allocate, supervise, monitor, and are accountable for all works under NREGS. Their active participation can engender millions of sustainable livelihood following initial rounds of wage employment and asset creation. A large increase in fund flow will help PRIs [GSs and GPs] build participatory democracy and plan for people’s development. They must disseminate legal aspects and guidelines on NREG Act among rural households.
to help them register, demand work and receive
minimum statutory wage for 100 days in a year and
plan and implement works effectively.

nreg act was passed out of a political response
to a people's movement and the articulated needs
of rural workers. law acknowledges People's right
to seek work and stipulates that a citizen can
initiate to demand work on 15 days; payment of
wages in 15 days and redress of grievances within
seven days. in case of failure, workers can demand
unemployment allowance, compensation up to
Rs.3000 and imposition of penalties. the works
under nreg should create productive assets by
providing wage employment in a transparent and
accountable manner. The scheme is a revolutionary
and social empowerment is through the economic
program and operationally NREGS is an asset creation
program that generates employment rather than
an employment program that incidentally creates
assets. the assets created should benefit the poorest
and most marginalized communities first. All plans
and programs should be suggested and endorsed
by the people. the effort in building social capital
and land diversification of agriculture and faster rural
industrialization. it should mitigate the suffering of
vulnerable population inflicted by chronic drought
and flash floods.

Implementation:
The NREGS has been under
implementation since February 2006 and now
covers all of rural India. Implementation, however,
has suffered from leakages, delays in payments,
non-payment of statutory minimum wages, fudged
muster rolls, creating few durable assets and even
fewer sustainable livelihoods.

Independent survey reveals that the PRIs
functionaries as implementing agencies are not
aware of the scheme's essential features and they do not employ poor for 100
days.

A study on implementation by Institute of
Management, Delhi in States of Andhra
Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Orissa,
Madhy Pradesh and Gujrat points out urgent
need for significant improvements in respect of
creating awareness among beneficiaries about
management of muster rolls and job cards,
public awareness on essential elements of nreg and
specifically beneficiaries' entitlements; issuing
job-cards to family members to seek 100 days
employment; streamlining payment system including
statutory minimum payment; conducting social audit
systematically and learning lessons from its
outcomes. The degree of inter-states and inter-
districts variations at the level of household, job cards
and job cards to family members to seek 100 days
employment, bottleneck in the flow
of funds, improper record-keeping. non-
maintenance of muster rolls and job cards,
and report of prolonged delays in wage payments
for months together have been incurring from
agreed worker's compensation entitlement
up to Rs.3000. Delays occur because of delays
in work measurement, bottleneck in the flow
of funds, improper record-keeping, non-
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maintenance of muster rolls and job cards,
functionaries and institution building of PRIs as the implementation apparatus was “inadequate and ill-capacitated”.

The CAG reports that guidelines on transparency safeguards are routinely violated making the program vulnerable to leakages. The report concludes “The MoRD needs to ensure that State Governments take swift and immediate action to remedy these deficiencies and improve their administrative and technical infrastructure so that the forthcoming expansion of NREGS to cover all districts in the country can be successfully implemented.”

**Capacity Building:** Implementation of NREG Scheme, since its inception from February 2006, has revealed serious lacunae. Since the scheme has entered into phase-II from August 2009 and the scope of works included in the scheme has been considerably expanded significant improvements are needed in its implementation process. Capabilities of PRIs should be augmented by providing them requisite technically qualified and experienced staff to formulate and implement plans genuinely bottom-up, replacing top-down legacy of an ignominious past 60 years dependent on the munificence of the State. This will convert NREGS into a truly demand-driven program, where works are undertaken in response to the needs and aspirations of a fully aware citizenry to create assets. Knowledge of PRIs, comprising GPs and GSs, about the legal provisions of the NREG Act and guidelines for implementing NREG Scheme and their skills [technical, administrative, financial, communication and interpersonal in particular] need to be substantially improved to implement it successfully with the focused objective to achieve its mission. Under the NREG scheme efforts for capacity building of PRIs should, among others, address following.

- Create awareness among the members of PRIs, and elected representatives on the legal aspects of NREG Act [worker’s rights and accountability of GPs] and guidelines on the implementation of NREG Scheme. This should address concern, commitment and accountability towards preventing leakages, delays in payments, non-payment of statutory minimum wages, fudged muster rolls in particular.
- Identify types of works included in NREGS that can be undertaken for providing employment for 100 days, such as watershed management, water conservation, drought proofing, flood protection, land development, minor irrigation and rural connectivity, which are important to strengthen the natural resource base and ecological foundation of sustainable agriculture.
- Understand various issues involved in measuring the executed works and expenditure in the NREGS in order to make timely payment by drawing funds of required amount.
- Learn how to implement NREGS and measure its performance
- Understand various stages in the social audit process to prevent malpractices, fraud, financial irregularities and quickly respond to redress workers and public grievances
- Seek active participation of all rural households, particularly women and other marginalized groups in PRIs meetings and their involvement in discussion leading to decision making process
- Eliminate caste, class, and gender divide while planning and implementing the scheme
- Evolve result oriented plan of works, strategic execution and monitoring system to match objectives of NREGS
- Develop better understanding of local self-governance and democratic values while taking decision
Ensure total transparency in implementation including use of funds and resources, and accountability of planners and implementers to GSs.

Millions of small and marginal farmers are forced to work under NREGS because the productivity of their own farms is too low to make ends meet. NREGS should, therefore, become a powerful means to rebuild this decimated productivity of small farms and create enabling environment for them to return to full-time farming, thereby reducing the load on NREGS.

In July 2009, the Schedule I of the NREG Act was amended to allow the” provision of irrigation facility, horticulture plantation, and land development facilities to land owned by households belonging to SC and ST or below poverty line families or to beneficiaries of land reforms or to Indira Avas Yojana, or that of small or marginal farmers as defined in the agricultural debt waiver and relief Scheme 2008”. The “Social Audit” should suitably address the perceived apprehension that rich farmers cannot misuse this provision.

Access to Information Technology can strengthen social audit, reduce incidences of leakages and frauds. Monitoring system can immediately identify and help correct the delays in payments at any stage as the network system secures all levels from the village up to the State headquarters and data are transparently and immediately available on the website. Free availability of this information on the website can facilitate public scrutiny, greater transparency and better social audit.

Training: For the emergence of Gram Sabha as a body to whom the Gram Panchayat are accountable, there is critical need to spell out the powers and functions of GS in great detail–articulating its role as planner, decision-maker and auditor. Further, GS & GP should understand their responsibility in planning, implementation, managing financial resources, accounting, audit, and accountability of any NREG initiative.

The NREGS calls for active participation of local people, GSs, and GPs right from the stage of planning. It is essential to impart comprehensive structured training for transferring various skills to members of GPs. While some efforts have already been made but unsatisfactory implementation demands designing training syllabus and modules on aspects of planning, implementation, managing financial resources, accounting, social audit, monitoring-cum-concurrent evaluation, and post project assessment and imparting intensive training. Involvement of private institutes in training will greatly improve delivery of desired skills.

It is necessary to organize one day workshop on Implementation of NREGS at block level for the benefit of GPs & selected members of GS. Experiences on successes and failures should be shared based on case studies for mutual benefits among participants.

Conclusion: The participatory approach accompanied by empowerment and capacity building of Gram Panchayats and Gram Sabhas under NREGS will create productive assets, generate massive employment among poor and disadvantaged groups, improve productivity of small farms and contribute to inclusive growth in rural India. NREGS combined with right to food and education should help erase India’s image as the land of poor, hungry and illiterate.

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Sir Charles Trevellyn puts it that the Village Republics flourished during the Hindu, Muslim and Peshwa governments. The system collapsed with the advent of the East India Company. According to Sir Charles Metcalfe, the village communities were little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations.

The Panchayat System was very popular during Vedic period. This is referred to as ‘Traditional Village Panchayats’ by present day writers to distinguish it from the present form of Panchayati Raj System. Though the present system draws heavily from the ancient system, its canvass of responsibility has enlarged since the 90s. An attempt is made here to reflect on the features of the Ancient Panchayat System and contrast it with the present system.

In Retrospection

Panchayat System of local governance has a long history traced back to Vedic period. This system was functioning not just as a local dispute settlement mechanism but engaged in rural development tasks too. From the Uttaramerur inscription and other documents one can infer that the system was participatory in nature, its representatives were drawn from all shades of society and had evolved Committee System to implement and monitor Village Development works (such as water supply for irrigation and drinking purposes, create and maintain village basic amenities, take care of law & order tasks etc) for ensuring social harmony and economic wellbeing of all communities.

The Village Panchayats were called ‘village republics’ by a few writers which portray
democratic visions of people living in Vedic period. This system was prevalent, with minor differences, throughout the length and breadth of India (regions lying contiguously along Ganga, Yamuna, Godavari, Saraswati, Narmada, Sindhu and Cauvery rivers).

Sir Charles Trevellyn puts it that the Village Republics flourished during the Hindu, Muslim and Peshwa governments. The system collapsed with the advent of the East India Company. According to Sir Charles Metcalfe, the village communities were little republics having nearly everything they want within themselves, and almost independent of any foreign relations. He further states that the inordinate and unscrupulous greed of the East India Company caused gradual disintegration of these gram panchayats. The centralisation of all executive and judicial powers in the hands of the British bureaucrats also deprived the village functionaries of their age-old powers and influence.

Dr Annie Besant observed that old panchayats were elected by the householders of the village and were responsible to them. Unfortunately, we continued with the same system after independence, which was put in place by the British.

**Uttaramerur Inscription**

This inscription is on the walls of Sundaravarada Temple in Uttaramerur, in Kanchipuram district of Tamil Nadu. This inscription that dates back to 1000 AD and portrays complete description about the Village Panchayats that existed. It had prescribed qualifications for contesting elections, circumstances under which aspiring candidates and their close relatives are disqualified for life from contesting elections, transparent mode of election, the tenure of elected, right to recall the elected when failed to discharge their duties. The Village Assembly had both administrative and judicial functions and had power to impose and collect fines from both criminals and erring village administrators. The elected members were effectively policed by a larger assembly which comprised of resident villagers and the serving elected representatives.

The tasks of these Panchayats covered wide canvass and the ward and committee systems were in place. Tasks of Tank Committee, Garden Committee, Pancavara Committee, Gold Committee and Annual Committee were overseeing higher learning, village tank maintenance, village development, law and order maintenance and various other aspects. From among those with impeccable honesty and acumen was appointed as Accountant. Villagers were having final say in all these matters. Members of Committee if found guilty of any offence or found to have indulged in unfair practices and adultery or any other misconduct were removed and made ineligible for re-election in their life time including their close relatives from contesting elections.

Democratic principles were followed in conducting elections to these committees in a highly professional way where each contestant needed to meet strict eligibility criteria. The contestants needed to be well educated. They should have never been convicted or found guilty of any offence. The candidates should be between the ages of 35 and 70. One could contest an office only three times in their life time and an elected candidate could contest the office again only after two tenures by someone else.

Village Assemblies were very popular in Ancient India (Rig Vedic, Ramayana and Mahabharatha periods). Major decisions such as war, onslaught of major diseases, community developmental programmes were discussed and decisions taken collectively. Gautam Buddha was known to have mediated major river disputes through this method. During princely regimes such practice was in vogue.

**Post-Independence Developments**

India’s Constitution adopted in 1950 neither accorded rightful status to the Panchayats nor provided adequate teeth to it to function as a
system of local government and development machinery. However, in the 80s, some state governments spearheaded the process of rejuvenation of Panchayati Raj System (in Andhra Pradesh during N T Rama Rao’s regime, in Karnataka under Ramakrishna Hegde’s regime and in West Bengal under the leadership of Jyoti Basu). The PRIs wave was becoming a vote-capture mechanism. These developments could have propelled Congress-I Government at the Centre to get the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment passed in the Lok Sabha. This was successfully spearheaded by Rajiv Gandhi in the late 80s and early 90s.

These amendments made it compulsory on the part of the States to bring into being local government system called the Panchayati Raj Institutions (either two or three tier system). There were initial hick-ups and halting progress in making all the States and Union Territories to comply with this requirement. However, by late 90s all the states have fallen in line and adopted the PR System.

The reservation of seats and chair positions to women (not less than 33%) and SC/STs and Minorities has provided access/opportunities to seats of power to the excluded sections of society in a big way. The ‘exclusivity’ has been replaced with ‘inclusiveness’ in all the states and thus new aspirants are able to occupy space in Panchayat Raj Institutions.

Government of India has been making efforts to provide direct funding to the PRIs and entrusted several developmental tasks to these. PRIs are involved in local planning too. They get substantial quantum of grants for peoples as well as infrastructural development. The elected members are also paid salary/honorarium in many states. The State Governments too have been supplementing these efforts for making PRIs more effective, accountable and transparent in their functioning. More and more powers are being devolved to Panchayats.

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Though change, contexts alter so does perspectives and viewpoints. Indian panchayat system perhaps is an apposite example. Several make-overs of these units of rural ‘local self government’ dot the post independence era. Yet despite its long and entrenched legacy, any serious scholar tracing its development is compelled to arrive at a rather strange feeling that its growth and acceptance have been stymied on several occasions.

Gandhiji was fascinated with panchayats! Apart from ensuring ‘sweetness of ancient way of life’ he construed this as the bedrock of ‘village swaraj based on perfect democracy and individual freedom’. This fascination however was a premeditated one. In his effort to come up with an alternative to the existing British concept of Indian local governance he backed the panchayats, a concept with which Indians have cohabited for long. Prior to the advent of British, a system of local governance existed in the villages of India, catering to its needs and thereby making it more or less self sufficient. Foreign rulers in their effort to consolidate ascendancy over India re-created and packed these units of local self-governments.
with neighbourhood influential persons. Apart from ensuring an all pervasive Indian market, the units also kept vigil on the nascent movement of independence (Bengal Village Chowkidari Act 1870) and took efforts to whip up a local fund through local taxation to foot the ever increasing administrative liabilities.

So as a departure Gandhiji propounded his Gram-Swaraj through *panchayats*, a complete *Republic* based on perfect democracy and individual freedom. These units, as Gandhiji construed, had immense potential of developing rural sector as well would act as the cornerstone of Indian democracy through decentralisation of power.

The passion and zeal of ‘Father of Nation’ over *panchayats* went for a toss in the Constituent Assembly. The concept of Panchayats was *briller par son absence* in the first draft. An amendment moved by K. Santhanam was accepted which later on got incorporated in the Constitution of India through Article-40 of the Directive Principles of State Policy Part IV of the Constitution, ‘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’. Simultaneously in another curious development, *panchayats* were excluded from the definition of local self government as mentioned in ‘Schedule Seven, List II (State list) item 5’; ‘Local governments, that is to say, the constitutions and powers of municipal corporations, improvement trusts, district boards, mining settlement authorities and other local authorities for the purpose of local self government or village administration’. A side by side reading of the provisions only exposes too obvious a proposition! A proposition to bypass the *panchayats*!

The dominant ‘Think tank’ in early fifties identified bureaucracy as the vanguard of Indian development. Despite sincere efforts, Community Development Programme (2/10/1952) destined to be executed by block administration banking upon a Block Development Officer and his band of Extension Officers formed through National Extension Service (2/10/1953) fell face down. They probably erred on one basic point. They failed to carry the popular participation with them.

This Achilles’ heel hastened the failure of CD programme. The study team headed by Balvantray Meheta Committee (1957), therefore advocated the formation of a ‘statutory representative body’ to harness popular participation. The formation of *panchayati raj* bodies, in the states thus got a boost and the term got inducted into common parlance as a process of governance.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister of India inaugurated independent India’s first Panchayati Raj at Nagpur (Rajasthan) on 2/10/1959 and the second one at Shadnagar (Andhra Pradesh) just nine days later. Quoting Nehru *Delhi* edition of Hindustan Times (3/10/1959) found *panchayats* ‘... the most revolutionary and historical step in the context of new India’ A study team in 1962 indicated that the devolution of power at local level has improved the ‘service delivery’ at grass roots. Yet the initial euphoria waned quickly. There were neither election to forge organic solidarity (elections were suspended in 11 states) nor was adequate operating fund available! (CAARD Report 1985). Naturally over time these institutions were reduced to ‘living caricature of local government’.

The institutions however were predestined to fail. The effectiveness of *panchayats* was scuttled through the creation of specialized schemes for target groups and pumping money therein. Government launched an Intensive Agriculture District Programme(IADP) in 1960 and despite staunch opposition followed it up with Small farmers Development Agency(SFDA)Draught Prone Areas Programme(DPAP) or the Intensive
Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) quickly. Jaiprakash Narayan Committee (1961) denounced government on this trend of ‘doublespeak’ yet the practice went on. This profound dichotomy spurred George Mathews (Panchayati Raj in India-An Overview) to conclude that a fear of panchayat’s ascendancy drove local bureaucracy and regional vested interests to work in tandem through their representatives in the Legislatures to cripple panchayati raj. Rajni Kothari was more caustic “We have ended up creating an impregnable alliance of urban officialdom and the rural rich and have excluded the rural poor from it’. The legacy, may be, is still continuing.

The constitution of the Asoka Mehta Committee (1977) to enquire into the health and functioning of the panchayats marked the end of ‘First generation of panchayats’ so integrally connected with the Nehruvian era. A simultaneous development occurred in West Bengal with the change of guards in 1977. To sew in a broad consensus for implementing the ‘land reforms’, a commitment of the new government in Bengal, it revamped the panchayats and made it an integral part of the socio-political process basically in line with the recommendations of the Asoka Mehta Committee. Karnataka Andhra Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir followed suit. These panchayats, essentially political institutions with all ramifications, marked a necessary departure from the erstwhile typically development oriented first generation panchayats.

1980s saw India’s basic federalist arrangement under severe stress. Claims of erstwhile excluded actors for a space in the decision making process begot disturbing trends of rampant strife and fissures. So also was the case of institutions of local self governments. Utter lack of constitutional sanction and uniform legislation, made them play-things in the hands of the state governments.

This sharpening of the social identities of erstwhile excluded actors was simultaneously a challenge and a peril. It was a peril to the existing centralized approach of Indian polity. At the same time it was an opportunity to broad base the Indian democracy. The dominant political leadership took the challenge and enacted the 73rd and 74th Constitutional amendment. The amendment ensured the constitutional status of the self-governing units and assured the representation of the excluded actors. Gram Sabhas were constituted for harnessing the ‘voice from below’ and elected planning committees ensured formalization of decentralized planning process. Existent irritants involving non-conducting of elections, incessant fund crunch and non-segregating of areas of operation with paucity of operational staffs were also addressed. An all-round effort to translate these organizations from abstraction to solid and opaque identity was thus initiated.

Nonetheless disquieting features emerged in both political and social field. Some of the major developments were-

a) Parallel Structures - Ministries at the Centre and the Departments in the states, concerned with various rural development schemes and other programmes such as health, social welfare, education are comfortable in operating through simultaneous structures at the state and district level rather than through the panchayati

Rajni Kothari was more caustic “We have ended up creating an impregnable alliance of urban officialdom and the rural rich and have excluded the rural poor from it’. The legacy, may be, is still continuing.
raj structures. Watershed Development Programme, Sarba Sikshya Abhijyan, Rogi Kalyan Samity are some of these structures which either simply bypass panchayats or at the best allocate fund to the panchayats as ‘tied funds’.

b) MP and MLA Local Area Development scheme- MPLAD scheme was launched in December 1993 with an aim to provide a mechanism for members of Parliament “to recommend works of developmental nature for creation of durable community assets and for provisions of basic amenities including community infrastructure based on locally felt needs”. MLALAD for the members of state Legislature (for West Bengal it is Bidhayak Elaka Unnayan Prokolpo initiated in 2000-01) also had identical objective. Since the list of works permissible under these schemes is sheer duplication of Schedule 11 which again is the exclusive domain of panchayats this is a clear contravention of Article 243G. These schemes flout Article 243 ZD also which constitutes the District Planning Committee.

c) Certain other Programmes - Janmabhoomi Programme of Andhra Pradesh in 1997 District Government Programme of Madhya Pradesh in 1999 and such other programmes also eroded the powers of panchayats.

d) Caste Religion and Gender-It is quite disturbing when the crass and inane dictates of the self styled caste or religious authorities issued in regard to demeanour and behaviour of people finds favour with the panchayat leadership. Panchayats issuing sanctions against exogamous marriages or siding for ‘witch hunting’ in different parts of the country are real dampers. Gender discrimination in nomination in election to panchayat bodies also is a worrying feature. The prophecy of B.R. Ambedkar perhaps is coming true in the 21st century.

The 73rd and the 74th Constitutional amendment fundamentally scores on two counts. Along with widening of the democratic base of the country, it has also introduced the idea of ‘multilevel federation’ with elected local bodies at the district and sub-district strata. At the operative level steps are on to make these institutions more efficient, adept and responsive. Robert Putnam, the famous social scientist have argued that democratic performance of any structure is dependent on a network of trusts and civic engagements among citizens as it makes them participate in the process in coordinated, responsible and collective way. This is the strength of the self-governing units. Forces which have acted as spoilsport vis-à-vis the panchayats need to understand this else deluge is just in the making!

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EMPOWERMENT OF GRAM SABHA THROUGH LEGAL LITERACY

Awanish Somkuwar

Benefits of legal rights and entitlements therefore do not reach out to the needy sections as quickly as administrative machinery expects. Many development programmes do not yield expected results for want of legal literacy among the target groups. As the largest democracy, India needs a sustained and intensive legal literacy campaign at village level to make participatory democracy at grassroots level highly responsive.

India is celebrating 50th anniversary of Panchayat Raj and has declared the year 2009-10 as the year of Gram Sabha. The declaration assumes significance at the time when Indian needs a strong network of grassroots level institutions to quicken the process of democratic decentralization for faster development.

The judicial activism leading to enactment of some epoch – making legislations in recent past has attracted global attention. Acts like Right to Information, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act and Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Dwellers Rights) Act have already shown their impact on the rural India in a little span of time. The Gram Nyayalaya Act is now in force. The proposed Nation Food Security Act will again be a catalyst of change in the series of radical legislations.

India is known for ethics and values. The concept of Nyaya or justice is deeply rooted in this land of ethics and practically guides the governance systems. India’s judicial prudence
is unquestionable. The problem is that nothing significant has so far been done to raise legal awareness of the masses. Advancing Indian democracy needs some prerequisites like legal literacy. Despite radical legal provisions a sizeable illiterate population specially in rural India remains ignorant. Benefits of legal rights and entitlements therefore do not reach out to the needy sections as quickly as administrative machinery expects. Many development programmes do not yield expected results for want of legal literacy among the target groups. As the largest democracy, India needs a sustained and intensive legal literacy campaign at village level to make participatory democracy at grassroots level highly responsive.

**Gram Sabha and Legal Literacy**

The Gram Sabha has a crucial role to play in spreading legal literacy among the rural masses. It is the most suitable institution as the Gram Sabha is constitutionally mandated and a permanent body. The Gram Sabha needs to be strengthened to take up such a challenging responsibility. There are enough logics why Gram Sabha can effectively spread out legal literacy. It is –

1. A constitutionally mandated body.
2. A cornerstone of grassroots level democracy.
3. Instrumental in planning, implementation and monitoring of development programmes.
4. An institution enjoying extensive administrative and financial powers.
5. Responsible for raising awareness and ensuring sustainability of knowledge about issues of public interest.

Some States have already capacity building of Gram Sabha on legal issues. The Gram Sabhas are the key implementing bodies for many development programmes as their constitutional status remains unchallenged and supreme. If Gram Sabha becomes alive to the legal issues and develop legal understanding with a constant legal literacy campaign, the participatory democracy will attain maturity with greater sustainability of development initiatives.

Recently, Madhya Pradesh launched a novel method of spreading legal knowledge on the Scheduled Tribes (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act 2006 which empowers Gram Sabha in scheduled areas to approve and ascertain dwelling rights. A small booklet of key provisions was published in tribal dialects like Korku, Bhili and Gondi. These provisions scripted in local dialects were read out in the Gram Sabha meetings. Result was encouraging. Innovative audio materials on the provisions of the Act were built by DFID-aided Madhya Pradesh Rural Livelihoods Project for 3000 tribal villages. These audio plays are played in village level meetings. Regular legal literacy classes and camps are added features. If major Acts are translated into local dialects they would prove a good source of knowledge for the local community.

**Gram Sabha and Radical Acts**

Right To Information Act, National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, Tribal Rights Act, Gram Nyayalaya Act and proposed National Food Security Act are the milestones in the post-independent history of India. They intend to address social justice issues and arrest rural poverty. Access to information and its constructive application are two different things. The RTI Act originally aims at discouraging corrupt practices and promotes greater accountability to people in the government machinery if used as tool of empowerment. The RTI Act is a step towards creating transparent systems of governance. The Gram Sabha can use it so constructively with its raised legal understanding.

The Rural Employment Guarantee Act can be best implemented only when prospective are
aware of their legal rights. The Tribal Rights Act acknowledges the role of the Gram Sabha. The provisions Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act 1996 enable the tribal society to exercise their traditional rights over natural resources. Effective implementation needs legal awareness. The Gram Nyayalayas Act has come into effect from October 2, 2009 but the concerning government and non-government organizations need to spread approach Gram Sabha for spreading information on prominent features of the Act.

Concern for Legal Ignorance

Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has expressed concern over poor legal literacy in the country. A lot of measures have been designed for improving judicial infrastructure for prompt justice delivery system. The Centre has approved a Rs. 450 crore scheme for computerization of around 15,000 district and subordinate courts across the country. Such steps are greatly appreciable but the legal literacy issues still remain out of focus.

The National Legal Literacy Mission is however up-scaling its awareness generation activities. The biggest question is that whether those who administer the governance systems voluntary subscribe to the idea of legal literacy. Secondly, it is going to be a joint strategy involving a pro-active support from concerning ministries, legal authorities, courts, States’ Human Rights Commission, NGOs and legal educational institutes. Organizing free Legal Literacy Classes for the villagers specially for the representatives of Panchayat raj institutions with the support of voluntary organizations, representative bodies of Bar Associations could be another effective tool. National Legal Literacy Mission can assume a leading role in organizing theme-based awareness raising workshops to meet specific information needs of different groups and stakeholders.

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In the rural areas of Jharkhand, literacy level of women is low. Traditionally they remain confined to their homes and fields, heir world circumspect within these defined parameters. The desire to seek new avenues, of information not of unrelated things but even aspects related to their daily lives and local developments has been dim. Understandably so given the fact that very little emerged from within their environment to require a change. Not until Mobile Libraries burst upon the scene an initiative of the (Poorest Areas Civil Society) PACS project which seeks to address issues of poverty in 120 districts across India by improving access to rights and entitlements by those who remain socially excluded of whom women form a large chunk.

Young enthusiastic boys ride bicycles across 30 villages in Maheshpur block in Pakur district loaded with not only books, newspapers but forms for old-age pension, information on MNREGA and Forest Rights for sharing with the local communities. Still the women held back, perhaps because of an obvious lack of literacy but unsure of how all this material could at all relate to them. This bastion too was broken once these young ‘library activists’ started to speak to them, giving them information about
the material they had and how it could benefit them.

Women gradually came out to listen with keen interest about Annapurna Yojana, about facilities available to a BPL cardholder under various government schemes. It now seems clear that the spark had been there, the desire to gain new knowledge and insights, about how to better their lives. The Mobile Library had only triggered it off. Stanecila Hambrum from Birkitta village, says that the women now understand the importance of this mobile library. “We are making them aware of their rights, laws related to women including those on ‘violence against women’ the Panchayat Raj system and their participation in it.”

To the urban conditioned mind. A library in a village is not easily conceivable. Yet it is in these very rural areas in Jharkhand, still struggling with basic issues like health, education, food and housing that information needs to flow. How else can rural communities, poor and backward sections, the adivasis link with the mainstream, to access the fruits of development and join in the march to progress?

Through such libraries, what is happening is a gradual spreading of this storehouse of information in the villages. Rather than remaining an institution which people access, it has taken on a pro-active role of taking the institution to the people, breaking down its tomes of information in such a way, that is understood, assimilated by even those who are out of the literacy net. Thus going beyond the conventional sense of a library.

In doing so, these Mobile Libraries have upheld a lofty principle, the core of any enlightened or egalitarian society. That knowledge is free and the access to it should be unhindered, beyond any societal divisions of class, region, caste, language or gender. It actually boils down to the enthusiasm of its members to bring about positive change on the ground. Michael Hambrum, says, “I want to do something for the society. As a member of mobile library, I am working as a carrier of news, information and knowledge. Today, rural people are more awakened. This is an effective tool to fight the backwardness of the society.”

The good news is that in spite of the backwardness and low development; the impetus for change has begun amongst rural communities. University, Dumka district in the ‘Santhal paragana’ says, “The flow of information is vital, it changes the thinking of common people. In a fast changing world like ours, it is important to understand so many things. But unfortunately, information revolution has not benefited the rural areas.”

The good news is that in spite of the backwardness and low development; the impetus for change has begun amongst rural communities.
a holistic and sustained development, one that emerges from within society and not merely from without or ‘top-down’. Government welfare schemes, programs for development will remain limited in the absence of an aware community, which reaches out and derives benefit from it. There necessarily needs to be participation from the ground for any benefit to be effective and deep-rooted. The Library as a hub could work very well in fostering this participation, building a dynamic partnership between the government and the governed.

The scope of such initiatives in a rural scenario is manifold and extends to new dimension from merely academic interest or a collection of reading material to become a dynamic vehicle for social change. It points to a direction, which should be taken up by agencies, those promoting public-private partnership to rise to the occasion and build on what the PACS initiative has opened up.

Today we are witnessing the passing of a long awaited, salutary piece of legislation, the Right to Education which brings to every child, the fundamental right to learn and break out of the darkness of ignorance. Libraries, mobile or otherwise across rural India could play a stellar role in enhancing this learning, aiding the new generation of literates with nuggets of information and knowledge not only about their course matter but the wider world. Somewhere at the beginning of the previous this century, eminent poet and litterateur Rabindranath Tagore visualised an ideal for our society “Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action. Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.” Now near the beginning of this century, perhaps the time is right when this ideal can be realized.

Charkha Features
The Panchayat Empowerment & Accountability Incentive Scheme (PEAIS) is a Central Sector Plan Scheme which is being implemented by the Ministry of Panchayati Raj since 2005-06. The scheme had an allocation of Rs.5.00 crore for 2005-06, which was raised to Rs.10.00 crore for the subsequent years. Funds released to the State Governments/UTs on 100% grant basis, after assessing their devolution of the 3Fs (Funds, Functions and Functionaries). The Scheme has continued in the 11th Five Year Plan period with annual allocation of Rs.10.00 crore.

From 2006-07 onwards the criteria for eligibility were derived on the basis of devolution of 3Fs, which was developed by the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), New Delhi. During 2007-08, the index was revised to include a fourth dimension of “Framework”, which specifically tests if the State has met the four mandatory Constitutional requirements viz. establishing the State Election Commission, holding PRI Election every five years, establishing State Finance Commission and setting up of District Planning Committees.

For 2008-09 NCAER, New Delhi was engaged by the Ministry for compiling the information on the parameters constituting the DI and processes the same. NCAER submitted the final Report titled ‘An Index of Devolution for Assessing Environment for PRIs in the States-Empirical Assessment-2008. An Evaluation of the States under the PEAIS for
2008-09 was based on a two stage assessment. The first stage was called the Framework Criteria, which was based on the following 4 fundamental Constitutional requirements:

- Establishment of State Election Commission;
- Holding of elections to the PRIs;
- Setting up State Finance Commission and Constitution of the District Planning Committees (DPCs).

For the year 2008-09, the Ministry awarded 10 prizes in all, which went to Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu & Kerala as First Prize of Rs.1.50 crore each, Karnataka, Sikkim, Himachal Pradesh and Haryana as Second Prize of Rs.75 lakh each and to Chhattisgarh and Assam as Third Prize of Rs.50 lakh each.

For 2009-10, the Indian Institute of Public Administration (IIPA) was commissioned to undertake the study of the Devolution Index and rank States accordingly.

As in 2008-09, evaluation of States under PEAs for 2009-10 was based on a two-stage assessment. The first stage, called the Framework Criteria, was based on the following 4 fundamental Constitutional requirements as in 2008-09. States that fulfilled each of these 4 fundamental requirements, qualified for evaluation in terms of various indicators of the DI.

The indicators for the DI aim at assessing the state of devolution in respect of the 3Fs, namely, funds, functions, and functionaries by the respective States to the PRIs. The 2009-10 study has attempted some important conceptual and methodological improvements. Firstly, States have been assessed on how well they have implemented the framework criteria. For example, as against only assessing if State Finance Commission (SFCs) have been set up as a qualifying criterion, delays in constitution of SFCs, submission of reports etc. have also been studied. Secondly, weighted scores, that reflect in the importance of particular criteria have been used. Thirdly, scoring has been more differentiated by grading various responses. Finally, the accountability parameters have been built in systematically. The indicators for the DI study this year are as follows:

**Indicators for the Devolution Index Study 2009-10:**

**Framework**

- State Election Commission-Holding regular Panchayats elections, Gap and dissolution
- District Planning Committees and their working - Regular Meeting, Regular submission of plans, Consolidation of plans and its integration with State plan.

**Functions**

- Functions Assigned to Panchayats - Legislative devolution, Activity mapping, Executive orders issued, The role of Panchayats in planning, implementation, spending funds and monitoring.
- Role of Panchayats in Important Central and State Schemes
- Role of Gram Sabha - Number and of meetings held and whether minutes are maintained; Role of Gram Sabha in approval of plans, budget, UCs and beneficiary lists
- Transparency in Panchayats - Mechanism to deal with RTI and corruption, Whether there is an Ombudsman

**Finances**

- Empowerment of Panchayats to impose and collect revenue- Taxes, fees, duties, cess etc. collected by Panchayats, Share of own revenue of Panchayat in State own revenue
- Fund availability with Panchayats
- Panchayat Nidhi/Fund: (Receipt & Expenditure)
Timely release of Twelfth Finance Commission grants to the Panchayats
Set of criteria, weight to allocate fund to the Panchayats
System of fiscal management, monitoring and evaluation

**Functionaries**
- Accountability of functionaries to Panchayats
- Panchayats’ own officials
- Panchayats super cession
- Role of Panchayats in parallel bodies/institutions
- Capacity building of functionaries
- Infrastructure for efficient & effective management of Panchayats

Indicators related to functional devolution include legislative devolution, activity mapping, issuing of executive orders, the actual activities performed by Panchayats, the role of the Gram Sabhas etc. The indicators regarding devolution of finances include the fiscal domain of Panchayats, i.e. taxes, fees etc. levied by them, grants from State Government and the system of fiscal management. The indicators regarding the devolution of functionaries include control of Panchayats over officials, capacity building, role of Panchayats in parallel bodies etc.

**Performance of the States and the UTs**

24 States and Union Territories (UTs) participated in the evaluation exercise. Jharkhand did not qualify, as elections to Panchayats have

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>States</th>
<th>D1 Framework</th>
<th>D2 Function</th>
<th>D3 Finance</th>
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<td>5.46</td>
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not been held in the State. Evaluation of the performance of the 23 States / UT that qualified on the DI is as follows:

For the year 2009-10, the Ministry has decided to award 6 prizes in all, as follows:

First Prize : Kerala & Karnataka -Rs.2.50 crore each; Second Prize : Tamil Nadu & West Bengal- Rs.1.50 crore each; Third Prize: Maharashtra Rs.1.00 crore. Sikkim being the Best performing North East State: Sikkim Rs. 1.00 crore.

The States were facilitated on the occasion of the `National Panchayat Diwas” on 24.4.2010.

The ranking of States that were adjudged for the award as per DIs for the (2005-06, 2006-07, 2007-08, 2008-09 and 2009-10) is given below:

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*(PIB Feature)*
n India, where about 72 Percent of the population lives in rural areas, the development and progress of the country lies in the development of its villages. Any progress of growth and development that does not fulfill the needs of rural area and its people, especially the poor cannot be claimed as development in India. Hence, the Community Development Programme (CDP) initiated in 1952 and the setting up of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) were the significant measures undertaken with the objective of coordinated rural development by the Government of India. The main objective is to take development to villages, to generate employment opportunities, to bring the villagers in the mainstream.

With the launching of the CDP “Block” was created as the chief local area of administration. The idea of the creation of the blocks was to develop and make the administration closer to the people and for more convenient and concentrated manner of administration in comparatively smaller areas.
Hence, a new type of rural bureaucracy—the “block level functionaries” were also introduced for the administration of the blocks to motivate and assist the rural people headed by Block Development Officer who was to be assisted by number of Assistant Development Officers—specialized and trained in various branches of CDP for rural development.

With the introduction of PRIs in almost all the states of India, rural development programme is undertaken and implemented by PRIs as well as with the coordination of the block level functionaries. In case of Mizoram, the programme has been implemented by the block administration, as Mizoram has not introduced PRIs as local self-government. The State of Mizoram has been exempted from the 73rd Constitutional Amendment due to the existence of traditional local self-government bodies—the Village Councils, created under The Lushai Hills District Council, (Village Councils) Act 1953. However, the Village Councils in Mizoram cannot be compared to the PRIs in other states of India especially after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The Village Councils are not as intense as the PRIs. The main deficiency of this local self-government body is its financial handicap with no permanent source of income. Satpathy observed that the autonomy of the Village Councils as the local self-government in Mizoram is highly restricted by the governmental interference and without financial power; the Village Councils seems to be irrelevant local self institutions. Hence, the role of block administration is crucial in rural development of this state. The success and failure of rural development programme depends largely on the commitment, dedication and efficiency of the block level functionaries.

In Mizoram, the Directorate of Rural Development heads the administration at the state level. At the district level, the Deputy Commissioners are the controlling officers of the rural development. The programme drawn up by the Directorate is implemented at block level by the respective Block Development Officers under the supervision of the controlling officers. The Block Development Officer implements both state and centrally sponsored rural development schemes in Mizoram.

**Problems of Rural Development in Mizoram:**

Mizoram is situated on the North East of India located between 22. 19’N and 24. 19’ N Latitude 92. 16’ and 93. 26’ East Longitude covering a geographical area of 21,087 sq. km. It is covered by international borders from three sides, Myanmar in the East and South (404), and Bangladesh in the West (306). Mizoram is highly mountainous and has rugged topography with high ranges trending north south direction. Barring few patches of flat land along the valleys and the area bordering the plains of Cachar and Bangladesh, the topography of Mizoram is composed of steep hills and deep gorges. Jhum cultivation (Shifting cultivation) has been widely practiced in the state as it is practiced in the tribal areas all over the northeast.

Mizoram has a unique personality derived from its landforms, climate, land use, accessibility constraints, and pattern of social organizational and cultural characteristics. The land is fertile and favoured by monsoon. Its forests are lush green. But in spite of its natural resources, Mizoram remained socio-economically backward. The local agricultural products could substantiate only about 30 Percent of the states requirements despite about as much as 64 Percent of the workers engagement in agricultural activities. The region is at an infantile stage in the field of industry. Whatever industry, it may be called; at present is only small-scale industry, fed by indigenous agricultural produce covering only a small market zones. The situation in respect of allied sector is in no way better. The potential in animal husbandry, a common subsidiary activity, is grossly under utilized and meat, eggs, fish come from outside the state. The topographical isolation, bad communication network, limited cultivable land, remoteness and over two decades
of insurgency severely slowed down the process of rural development in Mizoram.

In this background, the block administration is required to perform wide-ranging activities covering all aspects of development. In all the poverty alleviation programmes leading to income generation, infrastructure development, monitoring activities related to various projects needs the coordination of the block administration with the local self-government institutions and with different development departments.

Assessment of Block Administration:
As heavy reliance has been placed on block administration, the people’s expectations on it are also very high. An assessment has been made on the block functionaries in all the four Rural Development Blocks viz, Lunglei, Hnahthial, Bungmun and Lungsen in Lunglei district of Mizoram through questionnaire and interview schedule. Total of 20 sample villages—10 nearby and 10 remote villages were selected for the assessment, out of 179 villages in the district. A simple tabulation method in terms of percentage was made to analyze the data collected for the study.

The message from Table 1-5 reflects the availability of the block functionaries in the service of the village people in assisting, helping and motivating them for which the block administration was conceived.

Table 1 shows the responses on the question whether the block functionaries especially Village Level Workers (VLWs), Extension Officers (EOs) and Block Development Officers (BDO) were visiting the villages regularly.

The message from this table reflects the non-availability of the block functionaries in the villages and many remote villages were not visited by the personnel 75% of the villagers responded ‘no’ in response to whether the block personnel’s visit them regularly or not.

The following table shows the purposes for which the block functionaries visit the villages occasionally.

Table: 1
Showing Responses on Whether Block Functionaries visits the Villages

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<tr>
<th>Block Functionaries</th>
<th>Number of Respondents—240</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Category</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BDO</td>
<td>Responding—Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eos</td>
<td>Responding—No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VLWs</td>
<td>Do not Know</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Questionnaire and Interview Schedule

Table: 2
Showing Responses on the Purposes of Visit No of Respondents—240

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>No. Responding</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<td>Awareness of RD</td>
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<td>10.41</td>
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<td>Programmes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivating the Farmers</td>
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<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impart agriculture Education</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision of Work only</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>85.41</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Source: Questionnaire and Interview Schedule
From the above, it is evident that the block administration mainly visited the villages to supervise the works entrusted to the Village Councils or other else only. The purpose for which the block personnel’s were conceived like to aware on development programmes, motivating the farmers, imparting agriculture education etc. has not been done and 85.41% of the respondents responds that they visit their villages only to supervise the work entrusted to Village Councils.

From the above analysis, is evident that the block administration is not upto the expectations of the rural people. Though the Village Councils are being involved in the process of rural development process, it is not as synchronized as it is under the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It was also observed that the expertise of the existing technical personnel’s of the blocks was not being properly utilized for which they have trained and posted. Moreover, it was found that there has been an acute shortage of block functionaries in all the blocks especially Lungsen and Bungmun blocks.

**Suggestion:**

1. Panchayati Raj system as per the 73rd Constitutional Amendment of the Constitution be introduced in Mizoram which will bound to ensure proper coordination of the local self government bodies and the block administration in planning and implementing rural development programmes.

2. The existing local self government in Mizoram was introduced by the Lushai Hills District Council, (Village Councils) Act 1953 which needs to be reviewed as 50 years has passed since then, if Panchayati Raj Institutions are not be introduced. The existing term of 3 years, the decision making power, and financial powers of the Village Councils needs to be increased.

3. The block level body may be introduce in Mizoram, as the villages are scattered due to geographical location, for effective planning and smooth implementation of rural development programmes.

4. The experience of the block technical staff, their expertise on agriculture, agronomy, plant protection, soil science etc. should be fully utilized with increase of salary and rewards for working in difficult geographical location, which will bring motivation, enthusiasm and job satisfaction.

5. Mizoram, a hill state where the villagers are scattered and remote, development of all sectors especially road transport for market link is required. It requires extra efforts and zeal from block administration, effective planning and a powerful local self government. The policy makers at the national and state level need to make policies which are realistic and achievable within a particular area and in a specific period of time.

**Conclusion:** Full-fledged staffing in all the blocks and involving them effectively in all-sectors of development—agriculture, small-scale industry, veterinary, horticulture, fishery etc. and increasing the powers of the Village Councils is needed. But at the moment, the importance must be given in motivating the rural bureaucracy to work hard in assisting the village people in a difficult working condition for which the head of the block administration, as the chief implementing agency of the rural development programmes, is responsible.

(The author is a Reader in Political Science, Govt. J. Buana College, Lunglei, Mizoram, e-mail: dr.j.zorema@gmail.com)
Peren is the 11th and newest district of Nagaland, bounded by the States of Manipur and Assam in the south and west and districts of Dimapur and Kohima in the north and east. It became a separate district in the year 2003. The district, covering an area of 164700 hectare, is home to the Zelang and Kuki tribes. The population of Peren is tribal and economically very poor, with most people depending on jhum (shifting cultivation) for their livelihood. In the area where the project was implemented, the average jhum cycle was of six years. This practice led to environmental degradation due to top soil losses which were estimated at 40 MT/Ha/annum, severe erosion, loss of vegetation and ecological imbalance and siltation in lowlands. The resultant low productivity of the land, lack of resources and economic opportunities led to high migration to towns.

This case study focuses on Mhainamtsi, one of the 16 village micro-watersheds covered by the Integrated Water Development Programme (IWDP) Peren-I project. Mhainamtsi, comprising approximately 236 households, mostly of the Zelang Naga tribe, covers 500 Ha. and is located at a distance of 30 km from the district headquarters. The average literacy rate in the area was about 33%.

About the Project

The IWDP Peren-I project was sanctioned during 2005-06 to cover 16 village micro watersheds with a total project area of 8000 Ha. The IWDP intervention was targeted at the jhumming system for productive utilization of the land and was well accepted by the local people as the activities were tailored to suit local conditions through economically beneficial tree plantation, soil and moisture conservation measures such as contour bunds, check dams, water harvesting ponds, etc. and the formation of Self Help Groups (SHGs). The project benefitted 172 households in the Mhainamtsi village micro watershed.

Some Indicators of the Success of this Project are:

- The 78 households engaged in pineapple plantation now have an average annual income of Rs. 38,000. From this activity as opposed to the earlier annual average income of Rs. 6,000 per annum from Jhum.
- All 78 households have abandoned jhum practice and are extending their cultivation every year in view of the high profit from pineapple.
- The 21 households engaged in plantation of 6000 rubber trees expect to get Rs. 17 lakh per annum on maturity (after seven years).
- The seven SHGs have generated Rs. 9.70 lakh from the seed money of Rs. 10,000 provided per SHG.

(Courtesy: Grameen Bharat)
EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL WOMEN THROUGH PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS

Dr. P Malyadri

“Every village ought to be a republic or panchayat with the authority and resources to realize the potential for economic and social development of the village”.

-------- Mahatma Gandhi

Rural Women’s participation in the decision making process was either nil or negligible. The development of Indian women will be the biggest source of enrichment for our country’s development. Empowering of women pre-supposes a dynamic and democratic change in the perception and expectation from women in our society. To help women, to attain economic independence is the first priority for such a change. In this regard, the emergence of self-help group to seek economic independence for every woman is a welcome change and given the assistance and guidance these self-help group is bound to make not only a sea change in empowering women but also tap the hither to unutilized powers of women for development of the society as a whole. The objective of the present paper is to throw a light on the empowerment of rural women, their stand in decision making while implementing schemes through Panchayat Raj Institutions and also give some of the policy implications for further improvement of empowerment in order to bring the rural women into the main stream.
Introduction

In the context of rural development, decentralization should not be seen as an objective on its own, but a means to improve the living conditions of the rural women by contributing more appropriate and effective, better coordinated services, based on participatory decisions, transparency and accountability. Women participation in self-Government encompasses structural changes in the rural socio-economic situation in order to achieve the prosperity and welfare, which is the ultimate goal of all development. Panchayati Raj is the best system for empowering women and it is the lowest unit of local government and its efficient working, clean image and activism can be the basis for good governance. Unless the decentralization process goes along with democratization and control from below with the participation of women, the risks may even outweigh the expected benefits. Decentralization support is to be put into the context of a wider process of institutional reforms and poverty-oriented service systems.

Empowerment of Rural Women & Power structure

It is necessary to find out whether the two processes of empowerment has managed to alter the existing value systems on which power structures are based. It is a trap to believe that if women come to power through PRIs or SHGs, it will necessarily lead to empowerment, a reduction of gender discrimination and a better life for them or other women. It seems as if advocates of both processes have fallen into this trap since targets and numbers of women in SHGs and in PRIs are bandied around as indicators of empowerment. It is only when women come to power and control with a new understanding of power different from the existing patriarchal understanding, that empowerment will take place in the true sense. Otherwise instead of male oppressors one will see female oppressors who are as patriarchal as are men. The empowerment for women is fundamentally about changing social institutions and practices, about changing rules, norms and rights, and about changing the balance between women’s obligations and responsibilities and their command over the resources needed to discharge these obligations and responsibilities. The empowerment is the process of challenging existing power relations and of gaining greater control over the sources of power. It is manifested as a redistribution of power. The goals of women’s empowerment are to challenge patriarchal ideology, to transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuate gender discrimination and social inequality and to enable poor women to gain access to and control of both material and informational resources.

Panchayats and rural ICT-SHGs

Elected Panchayats are the most appropriate vehicles for spearheading the Rural Knowledge Revolution. Bridging the urban-rural digital divide is a must for implementing the provisions of the Right to Information Act. Also, bridging the digital divide is an effective method of bridging the gender divide in villages. Panchayats and rural ICT-SHGs should become mutually supportive. They can thus help to mobilize “people power” to make knowledge connectivity a reality. The one million women and two million men elected members of Panchayats can then become torchbearers of both the Rural Knowledge Revolution and the Bharat Nirman Movement. They will thereby help to convert Gandhi ji’s concept of Gram Swaraj into reality. India has seen two major initiatives towards women’s empowerment, in the guise of PRIs and micro finance, the time has now come for research to delve into unraveling the areas
of overlap between the two processes. There are issues, which affect women’s lives intimately which are seen in both initiatives. A common conceptualization of empowerment should be used to gauge the extent of empowerment that has been unleashed by women’s participation in PRIs and in SHGs. It is not to suggest that necessarily there are similarities or that similarities have to found under any circumstance.

**Recommendations**

- Training of PRI personnel especially rural women is important considering that a large number of them are illiterate or semi-illiterate without any administrative or managerial experience. It is in this context that corporate, NGOs and other social groups have a major role to fulfill the lacking.

- Grievances from the SHGs should be received/registered panchayats through all modes of communication like, ‘Integrated Voice Response System’, verbal, applications forms, SMS, phone and website. There should be an effective grievance tracking system to ensure redresses in a time-bound manner from the rural women.

- Better communication systems viz. satellites, video conferences etc. should be available at district level to take care of situations like disaster management with the help of SHGs.

- Corporate organizations should consider prescribing a per cent of their budget for developing rural women entrepreneurs and PRI personnel by imparting training in administration, management and IT areas.

- Regular feedback on the impact of schemes should be arranged through rural women representatives of Panchayats, surveys, NGOs, SHGs and also from rural women beneficiaries.

- Most of the funds given to PRIs are tied to various projects and programs. As such PRIs do not play any role in planning activity and their role has been limited to an executive agency. Planning skills at the district and lower levels need to be considerably augmented and rural women participation in such levels should be made mandatory.

**Conclusion**

For the success of democracy-decentralized governance is must and for that the Panchayat Raj institutions (PRIs) are the best example. Panchayat Raj System as a process of democratic decentralization aims at providing a broad base to affording the much needed training ground for future leadership; creating an awareness and initiative in the rural women about community development programs, proper utilization of the available manpower and other rural resources which have mostly remained under-exploited and unutilized; manpower and other rural resources of participate in the management of rural affairs; bringing rural consciousness among the officials and impressing upon the utility of coordinated and inter-related approach to various development programs by taking women in participation for ensuring quicker acceptance of new ideals in the countryside and planning an overall balanced development of rural areas and thus, raising the standard of living of the rural people particularly rural women.

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ROLE OF SHGS IN STRENGTHENING GRASSROOTS DEMOCRACY- EXPERIENCES OF HARYANA

Manju Panwar

This paper highlights the pivotal role played by the members of SHGs in strengthening grassroots democracy.

The main aim of Panchayati Raj Institutions is to provide good governance to people by bringing government at their doorsteps through the establishment of participatory democracy in the form of Gram Sabha. The structure of the Panchayati Raj is based on Gram Sabha. Panchayati Raj Institutions, whether it is the Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad cannot be made strong if the foundation i.e Gram Sabha is weak.

It may be recalled that the institution of Gram Sabha has evolved through a historical process. It was first mooted by the Congress Village Panchayat Committee in its recommendations for strengthening the Panchayati System in India. This Committee stated that all the adults of a village should constitute Gram Sabha and further suggested that at least two meetings should be convened by the Gram Panchayat every year.
It was hoped that the Gram Sabha would play an effective role in strengthening Gram Panchayat to perform its role of making and implementing plans for economic development and social justice by exercising the above-mentioned powers.

**Experience on Ground**

This article is based on the field experiences. The author took ten Gram Panchayats of Nilokheri block of Karnal district of Haryana where the author has formed three SHGs in each gram Panchayat. In this way, office bearers and members of 30 SHGs of ten Gram Panchayats of Nilokheri block was taken with whom focused group discussion and participatory discussions were conducted to ascertain the impact of the intervention of Self Help Groups in order to strengthen Gram Sabha.

This paper highlights the pivotal role played by the members of SHGs in strengthening grassroots democracy. It was observed after visiting ten Gram Panchayats of Nilokhehi block by the author that if proper direction is given to the members of SHGs, then they not only attend meeting but also raise development issues in Gram Sabha meeting.

Impact of initiative of SHGs on strengthening Gram Sabha Members of SHGs played a vital role in strengthening grassroots democracy and with their initiative led to the following positive developments:

**Increased Attendance in Gram Sabha meetings**

Prior to the above-mentioned initiative, the Gram Sabha meetings had thin attendance. The Sarpanches and the Gram Sachivs did try to fulfill the legal requirements of one-tenth quorum. But, after the quorum had been abolished through an amendment in Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, no such attempt was made. But the mobilization of the people by the SHGs made a quantitative difference. They were able to do so by personally contacting the people, by pasting the posters on the walls and by distributing these in Schools, Primary Health Centres, Panchayat Ghar and other public places. They also distributed pamphlets in different wards. Moreover, in some cases the meetings were not actually held and bogus proceedings were recorded by the Gram Sachivs. This had to be done by them to meet the statutory requirement of holding at least two general meetings of the Gram Sabha every year. And, the extra-ordinary meetings were very rare. The office bearers of the SHGs, therefore, approached the officials to ensure that the meetings of the Gram Sabha are held as per the provisions of the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. They also tried to convince the Sarpanches that the holding of these meetings would strengthen their position and enhance their popular support. This strategy was successful to a great extent and the Sarpanches began to hold regular meetings as per legal provisions. However, the office bearers of the SHGs could not ensure the holding of an extra-ordinary meeting because of the disinterestedness of the people.

The author also found that women rarely attended the Gram Sabha meetings. The women from the high castes and the dominant peasant castes did not attend because of the Parda System.
Ensuring Presence of the Members of Marginalised Sections

It was found that the members of marginalised sections, belonging to the backward classes and the scheduled castes, were generally conspicuous by their absence from the meetings of the Gram Sabha because of several reasons including lack of awareness in them about its powers, their preoccupation with their work for livelihood, their hesitation to speak in the presence of the Sarpanches from the dominant caste, etc. Therefore, the stakeholders in the SHGs resolved to ensure their presence by impressing upon them that they can derive the benefits of various rural development schemes of the Government of India and social welfare schemes of the Government of Haryana only through their participation in the meetings of the Gram Sabha. This made some difference and a few of them began to attend the meetings of Gram Sabha.

Ensuring the Attendance of Women

The author also found that women rarely attended the Gram Sabha meetings. The women from the high castes and the dominant peasant castes did not attend these because of the Parda System. The women from the backward classes and scheduled castes did not report owing to the same constraints which prevented the male members of their families from participating in the Gram Sabha meetings. Therefore, the SHGs were used for undertaking the challenging task of ensuring women participation in these. Their office bearers approached the women in general and those from the backward classes and scheduled castes in particular to participate in the meetings of Gram Sabha for ensuring that they are able to take advantage of the programmes and schemes for their empowerment. They particularly ensured the presence of the women members of the SHGs and other women from their families. This did make some difference.

Agenda of Gram Sabha Meetings

Before the intervention of the SHGs in Gram Sabha meetings, the Sarpanches and Sachivs discussed only the agenda on infrastructure such as construction of streets and drains, building of retaining walls and chaupals etc. They seldom discussed issues of social development such as opening of new schools or upgrading of existing schools, programmes of adult education, opening of sewing centres for women, ensuring attendance of the doctors in Primary Health Centres and of the teachers in the Primary/Middle/High Schools. They also never took-up the agenda of social evils and the problems of increased alcoholism and other retrograde trends in the rural society such as female foeticide. But the initiative of the SHGs brought about a difference and the focus shifted, to a small extent, from discussion on construction work to social development issues.

In the above context it would be interesting to discuss the issues raised by the members of the SHGs in Gram Sabha meetings:

The above discussion leads us to the conclusion that the interface between the Gram Sabha and Self Help Groups resulted in ensuring the holding of Gram Sabha meetings in a proper manner. It lead to an increase in attendance and ensured the presence of the members of marginalised sections and women. It also changed the agenda of Gram Sabha meetings. These were certainly limited but significant achievements. Therefore, the interface between the PRLs and SHGs needs to be activated for ensuring good governance through the Gram Sabha.

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A cross-country study reports that 10 per cent improvement in the country's infrastructure index is associated with 5 per cent reduction in child mortality, 3.5 per cent reduction in infant mortality and 7.8 per cent reduction in maternal mortality, controlling of incomes and availability of health services.

Infrastructure is critical for rural India because of its strong linkage with economic growth and poverty alleviation, on the one hand, and failure of conventional networks due to high cost and inefficiency, on the other. Considering its priority, the UPA government launched Bharat Nirman (BN) as a four-year (2005-2009) business plan for strengthening six areas of rural infrastructure: electrification, roads, water supply, telephony, irrigation and housing. In the first four sectors, universal coverage was envisaged. The Centre and States, external aid, market borrowing, and a separate window under Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF) are meeting the funding for the programme. In view of achieving fast GDP growth, besides inclusive development, Bharat Nirman 2005-2009 was later considered as Phase 1 (BN-1), and it was decided to continue the programme for the rest of the Eleventh Five Year Plan period, as BN Phase 11 (2009-12). Out of the total projected investment of Rs 14,36,559 crore in the Eleventh Five Year Plan, Rs 4,35,349 crore (30.3%) would be spent exclusively towards improvement in rural infrastructure (GoI, Planning
Commission 2008,1:259). Conceived in the above background, the paper attempts to throw light on the macro outcome of Phase I and generate action-points for Phase II.

**Status of Rural Infrastructure**

Infrastructure investments broaden opportunities for people and communities by integrating them into regional and national systems of production and commerce, and by improving their access to public services (World Bank 2005). A cross-country study reports that 10 per cent improvement in a country’s infrastructure index is associated with 5 per cent reduction in child mortality, 3.5 per cent reduction in infant mortality and 7.8 per cent reduction in maternal mortality, controlling of incomes and availability of health services. The prevalence and duration of diarrhoea among children under five in India are found to be significantly lower for families with piped water (Jalan and Ravallion 2003). Investments in basic water and energy infrastructure can improve gender equity; electricity in the home can reduce the need to burn polluting fuels for light and cooking (Malmberg 1994). Countries having higher tele-density (given their income levels) experienced higher growth than the countries with lower tele-density (World Bank 2002). Similarly, improvement in rural transport infrastructure can reduce transaction costs, expand access to markets, and enhance rural incomes. Barnes and Binswanger (1986) found that the impact of rural electrification on agricultural productivity, through private investment in electric pumps, was highly significant. Fan et al (1999) showed a

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Infrastructure</th>
<th>Status</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Electricity*</td>
<td>1,2 5,000 villages remained uncovered</td>
<td>According to the new definition of village electrification (effective from 2004-05), there were 1,25,000 un-electrified villages</td>
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<td>Road **</td>
<td>26.5 lakh km (80.3%) of total road network; 80% un-surfaced; 3.42 lakh (39%) of 8.88 lakh habitations lacked all-weather connectivity in 2000</td>
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<td>Drinking *** Water</td>
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<tr>
<td>Villages not covered:</td>
<td>55067</td>
<td>Estimate at the beginning of Xth FYP Survey undertaken in 2000 As on 01/04/2005</td>
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<td>Slipped-back villages/habitations (lakh):</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Water quality problems (habitations):</td>
<td>216968</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Habitations not covered:</td>
<td>4588</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Partly covered:</td>
<td>50479</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total number of uncovered villages:</td>
<td>66822</td>
<td>Created irrigation potential: 99.36 Gap (created minus utilized): 14.00</td>
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<td>VPTs to be provided on satellite technology:</td>
<td>14183</td>
<td></td>
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<td>other technology:</td>
<td>52639</td>
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<tr>
<td>VPTs provided up to 30-09-2005:</td>
<td>13078</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Irrigation (MH)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ultimate irrigation potential:</td>
<td>139.88</td>
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<td>Of which potential through major &amp; medium irrigation schemes:</td>
<td>58.46</td>
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<td>Through surface water, based on minor irrigation schemes:</td>
<td>17.42</td>
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<td>Through ground water schemes:</td>
<td>64.00</td>
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<td>Houses (lakhs) @</td>
<td>Rural housing shortage:</td>
<td>149</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *Census of India 2001; M/o Power; ** Grameen Bharat; ***D/o Drinking Water Supply, M/o Rural Development; **** D/o Telecommunications, M/o Communications & IT; @ Census of India 2001.
strong linkage between improved infrastructure and decline in rural poverty. Singh (2004) found that availability of infrastructure facilities in rural areas helps in reducing poverty levels via their favourable impact on agricultural productivity, wages and non-farm activities. She also observed that, in the post-reforms period of India, the role of rural infrastructure in reducing rural poverty has become stronger through diversification of the rural economy. Decline in public investment in rural infrastructure has been identified as one of the causes of deceleration in agricultural growth during the nineties. Thus, economic opportunities are strongly shaped by access to infrastructure. Table 1 presents the status of rural infrastructure in India when BN was launched.

**Bharat Nirman: The Tasks**

- Every village to be provided electricity: remaining 1,25,000 villages to be covered by 2009 as well as connect 2.3 crore households
- Every habitation over 1000 population and above (500 in hilly and tribal areas) to be provided an all-weather road: remaining 66,802 habitations to be covered by 2009 through 1,46,185 km of roads
- Every habitation to have a safe source of drinking water: 55,067 uncovered habitations to be covered by 2009. In addition, all habitations which have slipped-back from full coverage to partial coverage, due to failure of source and habitations, and facing water quality problems to be addressed
- Every village to be connected by telephone: remaining 66,822 villages to be covered by November 2007
- 10 million hectares (100 lakhs) of additional irrigation capacity to be created by 2009
- 60 lakh houses to be constructed for the rural poor by 2009
- Investment to be made: Rs.1,76,205 crore

**Achievements**

**Electrification**

Rajiv Gandhi Gramin Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY) (2005) has been brought under Bharat Nirman. The rate of achievement in covering villages (47.91%) and in free connections (43.16%) indicates a steady upward trend compared to the performance in the first two years, particularly in free connections. Given the above trend, we may expect fast universal coverage, at least in the second leg (Phase II) of the programme delivery.

- Achievement in the first two years: Village electrification, 34% & free connections, 6% (Goi, 2008, 111:132)
- Achievement (as on 31 March 2009): 59,882 villages (47.91%)
- Achievement in free connections (as on 31 March 2010): 1.01 crore (43.16%)

**Road Connectivity**

There is an inverse relationship between connectivity and poverty level (Yadav 2009). Prime Minister’s Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) was identified as the programme instrument for the roads component of BN. Achievement was moderate (65.75%) in new connections, commendable (87.04%) in the task of the upgradation programme (inclusive of renewal), but least satisfactory (52.05%) in the case of habitations proposed to be covered (M/o RD, GoI). However, the evaluation study by the Planning Commission (2010) found 66.4 per cent achievement in the coverage of habitations for the first half of BN-1 (Table 11).

**Drinking Water**

During Phase–I, about 55,067 uncovered and 3.31 lakh slipped-back habitations were targeted for provision of drinking water facilities, and 2.17 lakh quality-affected habitations were
to be addressed for water quality problem. According to a report, during the first two and half years, there was impressive achievement (63%) in slipped-back habitations; coverage of not-covered habitations was average (48%); and there was little achievement (5%) in covering the water-quality-affected habitations (Gol, Planning Commission, 2008, 111:132). However, all these indicators have registered cent per cent, if not higher, achievement over the programme period (habitations-uncovered 98.86 %; slipped-back 108.07%; and quality-affected 142.85%), taking the overall achievement to 119.74 per cent (M/o RD, Gol).

**Telecommunication**

The distribution of telephones within the country is highly inequitable, with rural tele-density in 2004 below 1.5 per cent as against 20.7 per cent for urban areas. Bharat Nirman targeted achievement of at least 40 per cent tele-density by 2014, broadband coverage of 2,50,000 village Panchayats and Village Public Telephone (VPT) facility in 66,822 revenue villages. The VPT installations for the first two years of BN (48,704) have posted 72.89 per cent achievement of the target fixed up to 2007 (66,822). However, the actual achievement of rural tele-density (15.11%) as on 31 March 2009, compared to the target (40%), indicates a low level of achievement (37.78%) of the target. But, with the early achievement of VPT target, and the trend in tele-density (24.97% as on 30 April 2010), hopefully, we may be able to hit the tele-density target (40%) by 2014, as envisaged.

**Irrigation**

Under the irrigation component of Bharat Nirman, the target of creation of additional irrigation potential of 10 MH in 4 years was planned to be met largely through expeditious completion of identified ongoing major and medium irrigation projects. Irrigation potential of 42 lakh hectare was planned to be created by expeditiously completing ongoing major and

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<th>Table 11: Evaluation Study on Rural Roads Component of Bharat Nirman: A Summary</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reference period</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Coverage</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Findings</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Suggestions</strong></td>
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* For the period 2005-06 to 2006-07.
medium projects. Creation of additional irrigation potential of 4.30 MH was targeted in the first two years of BN against which the achievement reported up to March 2007 was 2.587 MH which is about 60 per cent of the target. The performance of BN under the irrigation component indicates an achievement rate of 73.15 per cent; this is significantly higher compared to the rate achieved in the first two years.

- Achievement (as on 31 March 2009): 7.315 MH
- Achievement (2009-10): 1.601 MH
- Cumulative achievement: 8.917 MH

**Housing**

Census 2001 places the rural housing shortage at 148.6 lakhs; it was placed at 159.5 lakh houses by the Eleventh Five Year Plan document. The housing component of BN has been assigned to Indira Aawas Yojana (IAY). Against the target of constructing 60 lakh new houses for BPL families in BN-1, 71.76 lakh houses were constructed (M/o Rural Development, 2010), indicating an achievement rate of 119.60 per cent. The government had anticipated a shortfall of 101 lakh houses even after the completion of BN-1 and the need for constructing 30 lakh houses annually in the last three years of the Eleventh Five Year Plan (Jha 2006:48). Target for BN-11 has been fixed at 120 lakh houses, in view of the vast gap persisting in rural housing.

**Concluding Remarks**

It is reported that three key areas—electrification, roads and irrigation—had made bleak progress. Out of 61,335 habitations targeted to be covered by the end of August 2008 by constructing 1.30 lakh km new roads and 1.78 lakh km up-gradation of existing roads, only 22,519 habitations were provided connectivity through 67,500 km new connection and 96,080 km up-gradation of existing roads (Yadav 2009:7).

According to another preliminary evaluation, the programme was found to slip in to the usual implementation lags (Sankaran 2006). Similarly, it is observed that the States found it difficult to raise the required funds on their part for the completion of the projects (Alagiri 2009:14). The potential of bridging the digital divide effectively through broadband connections was also not considered seriously in Bharat Nirman (Gulati 2006).

Though information on the durability/sustainability of the infrastructure created is limited, some general conclusions emerge. Average sector-wise achievements in percentage (estimated from percentage achievement/s in respect of the various targets fixed in the six components) are as follows: electrification 45.54; road connectivity 68.28; water supply 119.73; telephony 55.34; irrigation 73.16; and housing 119.60. From these sector-specific figures, the average achievement of BN Phase 1 targets is found to be 80 per cent, which is an encouraging outcome, given the technological, administrative and institutional constraints in the system. The PEO study has reported deeper involvement of PRIs, use of standard materials, improvement in rural wellbeing (income, access to health care, education, banking and postal services) etc that enhanced the success rate of the roads component of BN. In Phase 11, all the Gram Panchayats would be having a Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendra BNRSK) for providing information/feedback on the implementation of NREGS. The MoU signed in 2007-08 with Government of India commits the States to meet the Bharat Nirman targets, provide sufficient funds for it and give due emphasis to GoI principles. However, we may have to look up to Phase 11 of Bharat Nirman for achievements closer to the targets in the development of rural infrastructure.

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The vision enshrined in the concept of providing a roof to every rural poor, especially those living below the poverty line dates back to 1985 i.e. during the Ninth Five Year Plan, under the ‘Special Action Plan for Social Infrastructure’ when Housing was identified as one of the priority areas which aimed at removing shelterlessness in the rural areas. Considered as one of the components considered to be vital for human survival and, therefore, essential for socio-economic development, the Government has chosen the path of fulfilling the housing requirement of Economically Weaker Sections and Low Income Groups through Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) which is now an essential part of the ambitious Bharat Nirman projects since 2005-06.

According to salient features of Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) the funding of IAY is shared between the Centre and States in the ratio of 75:25. In case of North-East States, the funding ratio between the centre and the States is 90:10 respectively. For Union Territories (UTs), entire funds of IAY are provided by the Centre.

A rural Below Poverty Line (BPL) family is given grant of Rs. 45000/- in plain areas and Rs.48,500/- in hilly/difficult areas for construction of a house. The IAY houses have also been included under the differential rate of interest (DRI) scheme for lending by Nationalized Banks upto Rs.20,000/- per unit at an interest rate of 4% in addition to financial assistance provided under IAY.
The criteria for allocation funds to the States & UTs involves assigning 75% weightage to housing shortage and 25% to poverty ratio. The allocation amongst districts is based on 75% weightage to housing shortage and 25% weightage to SC/ST component. Further, 60% of the IAY allocation is meant for benefiting SC/ST families, 3% for physically handicapped and 15% for minorities.

The dwelling units are invariably allotted in the name of a female member of the beneficiary household. Alternatively, it can be allotted in the name of both husband and wife. In case there is no eligible female member in the family, a house can be allotted to a male member of the family.

Five per cent of the total allocated funds under IAY are kept apart to meet the exigencies arising out of natural calamities and other emergent situations like riot, arson, fire, rehabilitation under exceptional circumstances etc. The State Government have to make necessary recommendation for additional funds in this regard which are to be shared by the Centre and State on 75:25 basis. The upper limit for such assistance is 10% of district’s annual allocation or Rs.70.00 lakh per district whichever is higher in a year.

In order to introduce transparency in selection of beneficiaries permanent IAY waitlists have to be prepared gram panchayat wise by the States/UTs. These lists contain the name of deserving BPL families who need IAY houses in order of their poverty status based on the BPL list 2002.

Sanitary latrine and smokeless chullah are required to be constructed alongwith each IAY house. For construction of sanitary latrine, the beneficiary can avail of the existing assistance from the Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), in addition to the financial assistance provided under Indira Awaas Yojana.

Since inception of the scheme, 238.25 lakh houses have been constructed under Indira Awaas Yojana with an expenditure of Rs.59053.22 crore.

**New Initiatives**

*Enhancement in financial assistance for IAY houses*

The unit assistance provided to the rural BPL households for construction of a dwelling unit under Indira Awaas Yojana has been revised from 1.4.2010 from Rs.35,000/- to Rs.45,000/- for plain areas and from Rs.38,500/- to Rs.48,500/- for hilly/difficult areas. In addition, the Department of Financial Services have advised the Reserve Bank of India to include the IAY houses under the different rate of interest (DRI) scheme for lending upto Rs.20,000 per housing unit at interest rate of 4%. For upgradation of an existing kutcha house into a pucca/ semi-pacca house, the financial assistance is Rs. 15,000/- across the country.

*Change In Funding Pattern*

Indira Awaas Yojana is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme funded on cost-sharing basis between the Government and the State Governments in the ratio of 75:25. However, in the case of North-Eastern States and Sikkim, cost sharing has been revised in the ratio of 90:10. In the case of Union Territories, the entire funds under this Scheme are provided by the Central Government.

*Change In Guidelines For Assistance For Natural Calamities*

The maximum limit for providing financial assistance out of 5% IAY funds meant for natural calamity has been enhanced from existing 10% of the district’s annual allocation or Rs. 50.00 lakh to 10% of the district’s annual allocation or Rs. 70.00 lakh per district (including State’s share) whichever is higher in a year.
**Earmarking of funds for BPL Minorities**

From the year 2006-07, IAY funds and physical targets are being earmarked for construction of houses of rural BPL minorities.

**Allotment of Homestead Plot**

As per estimates made by the Ministry on the basis of NSSO report 58th and 59th round, there are 7.7 million rural BPL household who do not have a house site in the country. For the poorest of the poor who are landless and do not have house sites, provision of homestead site is essential to enable them to fulfill their need for shelter and avail benefit under various government housing schemes. Accordingly, as part of Indira Awaas Yojana scheme to provide homestead sites to the rural BPL households was launched in August, 2009. Under this scheme, a homestead site of 100-250 sq.mt. will be provided to those rural BPL households who have neither land nor a housesite. For this purpose, Rs. 10,000/- per beneficiary will be provided to the DRDAs which will be shared by the Centre and the States in the ratio of 50:50. Under this scheme, funds have since been released to Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, Rajasthan and Sikkim.

**Bharat Nirman Program**

Rural Housing is one of the six components of Bharat Nirman Programme. Under Bharat Nirman Program Phase-I, 60 lakh houses were envisaged to be constructed through Indira Awaas Yojana all over the country during the four years i.e. from 2005-06 to 2008-2009. Against this target, 71.76 lakh houses were constructed with an expenditure of Rs.21720.39 crore. It has now been proposed to double this target and to construct 120 lakh houses during the next five years period starting from the current year 2009-10.

**Convergence of various Centrally Sponsored Schemes with IAY**

For convergence of various Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) with IAY necessary instructions have been issued to all the DRDAs. IAY beneficiaries can get the benefits available under Rajiv Gandhi Grameen Vidyutikaran Yojana (RGGVY), Total Sanitation Campaign (TSC), Janshree and Aam Aadmi Bima Yojana and Differential Rate of Interest (DRI) Scheme etc.

Under RGGVY each IAY beneficiary can get a free electricity connection to his house, under TSC, an IAY beneficiary who will construct a sanitary latrine will get an amount of Rs.2200/- from TSC funds in addition to the unit assistance under IAY, all willing IAY beneficiaries can get the benefits available under Janshree Bima and Aam Aadmi Bima policies, under DRI, an IAY beneficiary can borrow up to Rs.20,000/- from any Nationalized Bank at 4% interest per annum to top up the unit assistance under IAY.

The provision of shelter and hence the roof to every rural poor has been and will continue to be a major component of the poverty alleviation measures of the Government in times to come.
REACHING OUT TO THE RURAL POOR MAHATMA GANDHI NREGS SHOWS THE WAY

With the objective to enhance the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing 100 days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act has made deep inroads into the lives of millions of rural poor. It has generated livelihood opportunities, raised productivity, increased the purchasing power, reduced distress migration and helped in creation of durable assets in rural India.

The Act provides for certain categories of work to be taken up for providing employment to the job seeking rural. These include water conservation, drought proofing, irrigation, land development, rejuvenation of traditional water bodies, flood control and drainage work, rural connectivity and work on the land of SC/ST/BPL/IAY beneficiaries/ land reform beneficiaries/ individual small and marginal farmers.

The highlights of the Scheme are Allocation of funds for 2010-11 raised to Rs. 40,100 crores; Employment provided to 5.25 crore households; Real wages raised to Rs. 100 per day; Average wage rate per day has increased from Rs. 65 in 2006-07 to Rs.91 in 2009-10; 776.8 crore person days generated since 2006 , of which women comprise 50%, SCs 21% and STs 20% ; 69.5 lakh households(13.24%) have completed 100 days of work; Over 9.19 crore accounts (in banks &/ post offices) opened to give wages transparently; Rs. 21,625.18 crore (84% of wages) disbursed as wages through bank &post office accounts; Over 46.95 lakh works taken up in
619 districts and Social Audits conducted in 76% Panchayats.

New Initiatives

Entitlement of Rs. 100 as real wage under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA: The Government has revised the wage rate under Section 6(1) of NREGA act subject to a ceiling of Rs. 100. In respect of States with higher wages, amount exceeding Rs. 100 would be paid by the State Governments from their own resources.

Wage disbursement to Mahatma Gandhi NREGA workers through Banks/Post Office accounts has been made mandatory to ensure proper disbursement of wages to NREGA workers. Emphasis on works on individual land of small and marginal farmers particularly those belonging to SCs/STs and BPL.

District Level Ombudsman

Guidelines have been issued to states for Ombudsman at the district level. Ombudsmen will be well-known persons from civil society who have experience in the field of public administration, law, academics, social work or management. It will receive complaints from Mahatma Gandhi NREGA workers and others on any matters, consider such complaints and facilitate their disposal in accordance with law.

Social Audits

Gram Panchayats have been asked to organize Social Audits once in every six months. Social audits conducted so far in 2.43 lakh Gram Panchayats.

National Level Monitors (NLMs)

37 National level Monitor were deputed in 37 districts in 15 states for special monitoring of the Social audit campaign.

On line Monitoring

The monitoring of Social Audit is online through the website which places all critical parameters such as job cards, muster rolls, wage payments, number of days of employment provided and works under execution online for monitoring and easy public access for information.

Eminent Citizen Monitors

61 out of 100 Eminent Citizens have been identified so far as per the Guidelines of the Scheme for independent monitoring to Report on the progress of the scheme.

Vigilance and Monitoring committees at State and District Level

Vigilance & Monitoring Committees (V&MCs) have been re constituted in all States/UTs at State as well as District level for effective monitoring of the implementation of the programs including Mahatma Gandhi NREGA.

National Helpline For Receipt Of Complaints

A Toll free number 1800110707 set up to enable the workers and other persons to submit complaints and queries to the Government Helplines have also been set up in states like Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Goa.

Unique Identification Development Authority of India (UIDA)

To eliminate duplicate job cards, ghost beneficiaries while facilitating easy bank account opening, tracking the mobility of beneficiaries and ensuring a better monitoring of the system, use of ICT devices especially biometrics and integration with Unique Identification Development Authority of India has been introduced.

Construction of Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendra

Gram Panchayat Bhawans would be constructed in each Gram Panchayat and block. This will act as a centre for dissemination of knowledge.
and delivery of public services to rural households.

6% of the funds earmarked under the administrative head of the Scheme to be used to provide latest ICT facilities in Gram Panchayats within the permissible norms.

**Enlarging The Scope Of Works Permitted**

Schedule I, paragraph 1, sub para (iv) of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005, was amended on 22nd July, 2009, to include: “provision of irrigation facility, horticulture plantation and land development facilities to land owned by households belonging to the Schedule Castes and Schedule Tribes or below poverty line families or to beneficiaries of land reforms or to the beneficiaries under the Indira Awas Yojana of Government of India or that of the small farmers or marginal farmers as defined in the Agriculture Debt Waiver and Debt Relief Scheme, 2008.”

Gram Panchayats while approving work plans have been asked under the Act, to ensure that works on lands of SC / ST and BPL receive first priority. Small and Marginal Farmers account for 80% of all land holdings and operate about 40% of all cultivated land. Permitting private works on lands of small & marginal farmers implies coverage of 40% of all cultivated area. Of the 142 million hectares of land under cultivation about 57 million hectares will come under ambit of Mahatma Gandhi NREGA works.

Under the Schedule I, paragraph 1(g) of National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 the scope of work under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA has been expanded to include the construction of Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendra (BNRGSK) at the Gram Panchayat and Block level.

**Work Under MGNREGA In Naxal Affected States**

The Government has issued instructions to all naxal affected States (Andhra Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh) for implementation of MGNREGA to intensify awareness generation campaign among rural households, issuance of job cards, implementing sufficient number of works and timely payment of wages.

**Convergence**

Guidelines have been developed for convergence of the Mahatma Gandhi NREGS with different Schemes. 115 convergence pilot projects have been instituted in 23 states under the monitoring of National Institute of Rural Development.

**Business Correspondent Model**

To ensure timely payment of wages to the workers ABCM was adopted in Rajasthan with the help of Central Bank of India.

**Strengthening Monitoring Mechanisms**

A Professional Institutional Network (PIN) has been constituted, including IITs, IIMs, ASCI, IIPA, IIIFM agriculture universities and other professional institutions, for lending support to Mahatma Gandhi NREGA to conduct impact assessment and concurrent monitoring and appraisal. Some of the findings include increase in Agriculture Minimum Wages, wages earned per day, annual income, reduction in distress migration, effective targeting of marginalized groups SC/ST/BPL and use of MGNREGA as a supplementary income source during non-agricultural seasons. The productivity and multiplier effects of MGNREGA include improvement in ground water, improved agricultural productivity & cropping intensity, livelihood diversification in rural areas. It is hoped that the new initiatives under Mahatma Gandhi NREGA will go a long way in ensuring transparency and accountability while reaching out to the last mile in the process making it an effective instrument of poverty alleviation on the road to sustainable development.
## PERFORMANCE OF THE MAHATMA GANDHI NREGA (National Overview)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FEATURES</th>
<th>(FY 2006-07) 200 Districts</th>
<th>(FY 2007-08) 330 Districts</th>
<th>(FY 2008-09) 615 Districts</th>
<th>(FY 2009-10) 619 Districts</th>
<th>(FY 2010-11) 619 Districts Up to May-June, 2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment provided to households:</td>
<td>2.10 Crore</td>
<td>3.39 Crore</td>
<td>4.51 Crore</td>
<td>5.25 Crore</td>
<td>1.79 crore</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persondays [in crores]:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>90.5</td>
<td>143.59</td>
<td>216.32</td>
<td>282.57</td>
<td>43.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCs:</td>
<td>22.95 [25%]</td>
<td>39.36 [27%]</td>
<td>63.36 [29%]</td>
<td>86.30 [29%]</td>
<td>9.41 [20%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STs:</td>
<td>32.98 [36%]</td>
<td>42.07 [29%]</td>
<td>55.02 [25%]</td>
<td>58.74 [22%]</td>
<td>8.74 [21%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women:</td>
<td>36.40 [40%]</td>
<td>61.15 [43%]</td>
<td>103.57 [48%]</td>
<td>137.40 [50%]</td>
<td>21.77 [50%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others:</td>
<td>34.56 [38%]</td>
<td>62.16 [43%]</td>
<td>97.95 [45%]</td>
<td>137.69 [49%]</td>
<td>25.77 [59%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persondays per HH</td>
<td>43 days</td>
<td>42 days</td>
<td>48 days</td>
<td>47 days</td>
<td>24 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget Outlay: (In Rs Crore)</td>
<td>11300</td>
<td>12000</td>
<td>30000</td>
<td>39,100</td>
<td>40,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure (In Rs. Crore.) [percentage against available funds]</td>
<td>8823.35 [73%]</td>
<td>15856.89 [82%]</td>
<td>27250.10 [73%]</td>
<td>37397.06 [68%]</td>
<td>5627.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditure on Wages (In Rs. Crore.)</td>
<td>5842.37 [66%]</td>
<td>10738.47 [68%]</td>
<td>18200.03 [67%]</td>
<td>25633.67 [69%]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4437.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Wage paid per Persondays</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total works taken up (In Lakhs):</td>
<td>8.35</td>
<td>17.88</td>
<td>27.75</td>
<td>46.01</td>
<td>52.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works completed: (In Lakhs):</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>8.22</td>
<td>12.14</td>
<td>20.94</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works break up: (In Lakhs)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water conservation:</td>
<td>4.51 [54%]</td>
<td>8.73 [49%]</td>
<td>12.79 [46%]</td>
<td>18.23 [51%]</td>
<td>26.09 [52%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provision of Irrigation facility to land owned by SC/ST/ BPL and IAY beneficiaries:</td>
<td>0.81 [10%]</td>
<td>2.63 [15%]</td>
<td>5.67 [20%]</td>
<td>5.78 [17%]</td>
<td>4.77 [10%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural Connectivity:</td>
<td>1.80 [21%]</td>
<td>3.08 [17%]</td>
<td>5.03 [18%]</td>
<td>5.77 [16%]</td>
<td>10.63 [21%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land Development:</td>
<td>0.89 [11%]</td>
<td>2.88 [16%]</td>
<td>3.98 [15%]</td>
<td>4.99 [14%]</td>
<td>6.61 [13%]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other activity:</td>
<td>0.34 [4%]</td>
<td>0.56 [3%]</td>
<td>0.28 [1%]</td>
<td>0.81 [2%]</td>
<td>2.00 [4%]</td>
</tr>
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*Director(M & C), Press Information Bureau, New Delhi.

RTS/VN

(Courtesy : PIB)
In India, as the population increased, the land parcels became small and valuable, and different agencies like Panchayats, Consolidation Department, Survey Department, Revenue and Registration Department, etc. came into existence. The manual system of land records maintenance was not able to cope and the demand for easy accessibility to up-to-date and accurate land records strengthened. The advent of computers in the country in the ‘80 provided a solution to this problem. As a follow up of the decision in the Conference of the State Revenue Ministers in 1985, the Government of India initiated two Centrally-sponsored schemes – Strengthening of Revenue Administration & Updating of Land Records (SRA & ULR) and Computerization of Land Records (CLR).

**Strengthening of Revenue Administration (SRA) & Updating of Land Records (ULR)**

The scheme of SRA & ULR was launched in 1987-88 to help the States and Union Territories (UTs) in updating and maintaining the land records, setting up and strengthening of the survey and settlement of organizations and the survey training infrastructure, modernization of the survey and settlement operations, and strengthening of the revenue machinery. The Scheme was approved by the Cabinet in 1987-88 for the States of Bihar and Orissa and subsequently extended to cover the rest of the country. The funding pattern was 50 : 50 between the Centre and the States and 100% for UTs. A total of Rs.475.36 crore has been released towards Central share until now. The progress achieved under the scheme is as follows:

- Construction of 1078 land record rooms completed in 16 States/UTs.
- Construction of 4216 office-cum-residence of Patwaris/Talathis/RIs completed in 15 States/UTs.
- Strengthening of 56 revenue/survey training institutions by construction, renovation, upgradation, providing modern equipments etc. done by 17 States.
- Survey/resurvey projects taken up by the States/UTs of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, Goa, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Mizoram, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal.

Land as an asset plays an important role both in rural and urban areas. Therefore, it is important that a landholder should have an authentic and tamper proof record of the land. The Government has evolved systems for ensuring the clear and irrefutable title of land to the owner. Charanjit Singh Mann, Deputy Adviser LA&RR, Department of Land Resources gives us an overview of how the National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP) has evolved.
Computerization of Land Records (CLR)

Centrally sponsored scheme of Computerization of Land Records (CLR) was started in 1988-89 with 100% Central assistance as a pilot project in eight districts: Rangareddy in Andhra Pradesh, Sonitpur in Assam, Singhbhum in Bihar, Gandhinagar in Gujarat, Morena in Madhya Pradesh, Wardha in Maharashtra, Mayurbhanj in Orissa, and Dungarpur in Rajasthan. This was subsequently extended to cover the rest of the country. The main objectives of the scheme were:

- Computerization of ownership and plot-wise details for issue of timely and accurate copy of the Record of Rights (RoR) to the land owners.
- To store the records with the latest digital technology for a long time.
- To provide fast and efficient retrieval of information both graphical and textual.
- To provide a database for agricultural census.

A total of Rs. 586.60 crore has been released towards Central share until now.

The progress achieved under the scheme is as follows:

(A) States which have Stopped Manual Issue of RoRs (12):

- Gujarat, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, Chandigarh and Puducherry.

(B) States/UTs which have Accorded Legal Sanctity to the Computerized Copies of RORs (21):

- Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Puducherry.

National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP)

These two schemes have been merged and replaced with a modified Centrally-sponsored scheme of the National Land Records Modernization Programme (NLRMP) in the year 2008-2009. District has been taken as a unit of implementation in this scheme and all the activities are supposed to converge in the district. Funds have been released to 26 States to cover 142 districts under the programme until now.

(C) States/UTs which have Placed RoR Data on Websites (14):

- Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, Haryana, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Puducherry.

(D) States/UTs which have Effected Mutations using Computers (16):

- Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Sikkim, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, West Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry.

(E) States/UTs which have taken up Digitization of Cadastral Maps (23):

- Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Bihar, Gujarat, Goa, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Tripura, Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Daman and Diu, Lakshadweep and Puducherry.

(F) Computer Centers set up in 4434 Tehsils/Taluks, 1045 Sub-Divisions, 392 Districts and Monitoring Cells in 17 State Headquarters.
Beware of "Phishing" E-mails!

A little extra care makes your online transactions more secure.

One has to be aware of "Phishing" An online method used by fraudsters to steal customers' personal details like Users IDs, Passwords, Date of Birth, CVV, IPIN, Credit/Debit Card No., Card Expiry Date and so on.

UNDERSTAND "PHISHING" PREVENT IT.

- Fraudsters can get personal information from bank’s customers through emails or phones. These are very cleverly camouflaged and appear to be originating from the bank itself.
- Information could also get siphoned off while you are logged on to your bank’s website. This happens through pop-ups, which appear alongside your bank’s webpage asking unsuspecting users to disclose confidential information.
- Other requests might draw you to be part of a survey or inform you that your online session has expired and that you online session has expired and that you need to validate/update/reveal your account to revive it.
- This could also happen when you download software of files from an unknown source or through threats that your online session will be shut down if reconfirmation of account details is not carried out.

Consumers can call:
National Consumer Helpline No.
(1800-11-4000 Toll Free)
(From BSNL/MTNL lines)
011-27662955, 56, 57, 58 (Normal Call Charges Apply)
(9.30 am to 5.30 pm - Monday to Saturday)

HABITS THAT SAVE YOU FROM "PHISHING"

- Always type the address of your bank URL in the browser bar only.
- Avoid opening of multiple windows during a session.
- Never give your user IDs, Passwords, Date of Birth, CVV, IPIN, Credit/Debit Card No., Card Expiry date on pop-ups.
- Always log off systematically and reconfirm your status.
- Use proper, updated anti-virus and anti-spyware tools to keep your computer healthy.
- Employ dual security passwords for added protection.
- Update yourself on "Phishing" at regular intervals from authentic sources.

Issued in Public Interest by:
Indian Banks' Association

Government of India
Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food and Public Distribution
Department of Consumer Affairs,
Krishi Bhawan, New Delhi-110001
website: www.fcamin.nic.in
with the growing awareness of the hazardous side effects of the synthetic drugs, traditional herbal medicines are attracting more and more attention from professional healers. One of the prominent among these is fenugreek, which has a long history of use as a spice as well as in Ayurvedic medicine.

Known as “Methi” in a number of Indian languages and *Trigonella foenum graecum* in science vocabulary, it has a light bitter taste with a romantic flavour and is believed to be the antidote of a long list of diseases and disorders, such as, diabetes, colic, flatulence, dysentery, diarrhoea, dyspepsia, tuberculosis, digestive disorders, gastric inflammation, painful menstruation, insufficient lactation, labour pain, libido in men, hernia, premature ejaculation, weight loss, anorexia, poor appetite, back pain, bronchial complaints, gout, arthritis, ulcers, boils, eczema, various types of fever including malaria, sore throat, different kinds of skin diseases and many more. It can also reduce serum cholesterol and triglycerides and increase haemoglobin content of blood.

Nutritional constituents:

Fenugreek seeds and leaves are very nutritive, which are rich in protein and contain less of fat (Table-1). Besides, those also contain high quantities of iron and therefore, can be useful in treating anaemia.

Table-1 : Nutritional constituents of fenugreek (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constituent</th>
<th>Seeds</th>
<th>Leaves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protein</td>
<td>26.20</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fat</td>
<td>5.80</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbohydrates</td>
<td>44.00</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fibres</td>
<td>7.20</td>
<td>5.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ash</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential oil</td>
<td>1.50</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moisture</td>
<td>6 to 8</td>
<td>85 to 86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vitamins</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>A, C, K</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(*on dry weight basis it is 18.6 to 40.9% at different stages of growth)

Therapeutic Properties:

It’s biological as well as pharmacological actions are attributed to the varieties of its chemical constituents, including various steroids, N-compounds, polyphenolic substances, alkaloids, proteins, aminoacids, lipids and volatile constituents. It is particularly rich in the steroidal sapogenin...
called diosgenin, which along with its epimers are the precursors of a number of steroids like some sex hormones and oral contraceptives. The content can be as high as 65 mg percent to 75 mg percent depending upon the varieties and ecological factors.

A number of sterols are present in all parts of the fenugreek plant, both in combined as well as in free state. Those include B-Sitosterol (in leaf) and small amounts of cholesterol. Recently, six triterpenoids such as, lupeol, 31-norocycloartanol, betulin, betulinic acid, soyasaponin I and soyasaponin I methyl ester have been isolated and identified from the ethanolic extract of the seeds. Those are also rich in flavonoids like quercetin along with luteolin, quercetin, vitexin, vitexin-7-O-glucoside, arabinoside of orientin (or iso-vitexin), iso-orientin and vicenin-1 in substantial quantities. All these and some more have been extracted and identified in the alcoholic extracts of the stems as well as the seeds. The anti-bacterial activities of fenugreek are said to be due to these flavanoids. Those are also considered to have healthy effects on heart and have anti-cancer properties.

Different varieties of fenugreek accumulate different phytoalexins in different quantities. Those include pterocarpan (medicarpin and maackiain) and isoflavan (vestitol and sativan) derivatives. Besides, hydroxylated pterocarpan and traces of three pterocarpan precursors, namely, isoflavone, formononetin, flvanone liquiritigenin and chalcone isoliquritigenin are also found alongwith those in a few varieties. All of those have active biological properties that cure several diseases and disorders and boost resistance against those.

The phenolic compounds present in fenugreek are scopoletin, chlorogenic , caffeic and p-coumaric acids in its root, shoot and pod, while its leaf and stem contain scopletin and lignan γ schisandrin. Similarly, hymecromone (4-methyl-7-acetoxycoumarin) has been isolated from a whole plant extract and the stems are found to have, besides hymecromone, phenolic compounds like (E)-3-(4-hydroxyphenyl)-2-propenoic acid or p-coumaric acid and trigoforin (3,4,7-trimethyl-coumarin). Not only those ensure healthy heart and boost immunity against several infective diseases, but also, have strong anti-tumour and anti-rheumatic properties.

More than 50 volatile components have been detected in fenugreek, out of which 40 have been identified. Those include some n-alkanes, sesquiterpenes and other oxygenated compounds like n-hexanol , 2-heptanone, n-heptanone, aniline, phenol, heptanoic acid, undecane, camphor, dodecane, decanoic acid, thymol, 2-hexylfuran, tridecane etc. All these have various medicinal properties and serve as raw materials for the synthesis of several medicines.

The aroma of fenugreek seed is due to compounds like Υ nonalactone and 5-methyl – δ – caprolactone, which are present in it in small quantities, but have strong olfactory properties. Besides, some other compounds belonging to n-lactane family also contribute to its aroma, but to a very small extent.

A number of free aminoacids are present in fenugreek seed, but, hydroxyl isoleucine constitutes 80% of those. One of its isomers, 4-hydroxy isoleucin (2-amino-4-hydroxy-3-methyl pentanoic acid) is an insulin stimulant. Therefore, fenugreek has been
found to be useful for diabetic patients. Besides, its anti-diabetic and hypo cholesterol activities have also been linked to the saponin and high fibre content of it, which selectively reduce the LDL (low density lipids) and VLDL (very low density lipids) fractions of total cholesterol and increase the HDL (high density lipid) fraction in type-II diabetic individuals.

In a recently conducted experiment, oral administration of fenugreek seed powder (5% of the diet) has been found to have marked effects on glycolytic, gluconeogenic and NADP – linked lipogenic enzymes in alloxan induced Wistar rats. In diabetics, the activities of the glycolytic enzymes are significantly lower in the liver and higher in the kidney, while on the other hand, the activities of gluconeogenic and lipogenic enzymes are higher and lower respectively in those organs. However, treatment with fenugreek seed powder reportedly can bring the activities of all these enzymes back to normal and can control blood sugar level in 21 days. Thus, it has established the therapeutic role of fenugreek in type I diabetes, by normalizing the activities of glucose and lipid metabolizing enzymes.

**Cautions about side effects:**

Generally it is believed that long term consumption of fenugreek does not have any harmful side effects. Therefore, it is beneficial to consume its leaves and seeds regularly as a measure for management, control and prevention of many kinds of diseases and health related disorders. However, recent researchers view it with caution. According to them, the scientific studies conducted to establish the health promoting effectiveness of the herb are still inadequate. On the other hand, its chemical composition suggests that it may have a number of potential side effects such as, diarrhea, gas, bloating, indigestion, heart burn and allergy, if taken in larger quantity. Besides, it contains compounds that make blood “thin”, which may enhance proneness to internal bleeding as do some drugs like aspirin or warfarin. Similarly, it may also increase the risk of hypoglycemia, when taken in combination with diabetes medicines. Besides, there is also the possibility that it may interact with certain drugs, an aspect which has not been studied properly. Again, since fenugreek is traditionally used to stimulate labour, it should induce uterine contraction causing preterm labour and miscarriages, if taken earlier in pregnancy. Therefore, pregnant ladies must be cautious while taking it as an antidote for any diseases. These researchers also point out that the medicinal dose and longterm effects of fenugreek are yet to be established to satisfy the norms to clear it for use in modern medicine. Therefore, they suggest more scientific research on the medicinal uses of the herb should be conducted and caution people to use it only in consultation with medical practitioners.

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Fig 4. Fresh Methi Leaves.