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## **Evolution of Panchayati Raj in India with Special Reference to Arunachal Pradesh Gandhi Siga**

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### **Abstract**

*In Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat bodies have been the first modern political institutions. Democratic political process was started in the erstwhile NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) in 1969 with the inauguration of Panchayati Raj. Significantly, the modern Panchayati Raj was introduced in NEFA (Present Arunachal Pradesh) on the backdrop of existing traditional tribal councils. In substance, the indigenous isolated tribal communities were exposed to grassroots political process. A new framework of participatory development and village management was introduced which mobilized the tribes to a great extent. Thus, the panchayat institutions engineered the modern political process in Arunachal Pradesh. The introduction of modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh became the key instruments for the development of village life. The people got the opportunity to exercise their franchise for the first time in the panchayat elections. This very processes an eye opener for the village communities so far as the grassroots democratic political process is concerned. As a result, the people got themselves involved with the developmental process of the rural area. Panchayati Raj Institution has brought a many socio-political changes in the rural Arunachal Pradesh. Therefore, importance and effectiveness of working of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh is an interesting subject of study to whether these institutions are an effective mechanism for the modern grassroots democratic political participation. With this objectives, the present study is intending to shed light on the working of Panchayati raj Institution in the Upper Subansiri district of Arunachal Pradesh and to examine the various socio-economic changed brought in the area and people's perception on PRIs*

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**Introduction:** Democracy is considered as one of the best form of government because it ensure liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship, equality of status and opportunity, fraternity as well as the right to participate in political decision making<sup>1</sup>. Participation and control of governance by the people of the country is the essence of democracy.

Panchayati Raj Institutions are such an important political innovations of India, for the establishment of grass-roots democracy and to ensure the greater people's participations in political system of the country. Panchayati Raj Institutions, the grass-root units of local self-government have been considered as an instrument of socio-economic transformation in rural India. Involvement of people at the grass-roots level is the most important means of bringing about socio-economic development. Panchayati Raj is identified as such an instrumental expression of democratic decentralization in India. Decentralization of power to the Panchayat is seen as a means of empowering people and involving them in decision-making process. Local governments being closer to the people can be more responsive to local needs and can make better use of resources. The democratic system in a country can be ensured only if there is mass participation in the governance. Therefore, the system of democratic decentralization popularly known as *Panchayati Raj* in India which is considered as an instrument to ensure democracy and socio- economic transformation in society. Panchayati Raj system is an age-old indigenous Indian politico-administrative institution. It owes its origin to the different traditional patterns of governance, in the phase of history in many parts of India. The term '*panchayati Raj*' is relatively new, having originated during the British administration. '*Raj*' literary means 'governance' or government'.

Thus, panchayati Raj is a system of local rural government in India. Conceptually, panchayat can be described as an assembly of the village people or their representatives and the term "*panchayat*" is

a Hindi word, which literally means assembly (*ayat*) of five (*panch*) wise and respected elders chosen and accepted by the local community.

Mahatma Gandhi equated panchayati with 'village republic'. He explained his concept of village panchayat thus, "...the government of the village will be conducted by the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males and females, possessing maximum prescribed qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdiction required: since there will be the legislature, judiciary and executive combined without much interference even from the present government whose sole effective connection with the village is the execution of the village revenue ....., here there is perfect democracy based on individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government. Thus, Gandhi had envisaged the vision of self-sustained and self-sufficient village republic capable of managing own affairs, as the foundation of India's political system. The term for such a vision was "Gram Swaraj" (village self-government). Philosophically, panchayati Raj is a multidimensional idea. It has its pluralistic definitions and wider connotations in the writings of different thinkers. Emphasizing the ideology of panchayati raj Gandhi viewed; "India lives in her village. Independence must begin at the bottom, thus making every village a republic or panchayat, enjoying full powers. He remarked that, "twenty men sitting at the centre could not work true democracy. It has to be worked from below by the people of every village."

Jaya prakash Narayan the advocate of total revolution had a different view of panchayati Raj. He was of the view that, "A proper balance must be struck between a state government on the one hand and organs of local-self-government, or panchayati raj institutions on the other. For this purpose, it may be necessary to provide for these Panchayati Raj Institutions in the Constitution itself and clearly short list their powers, so that they may exercise legitimate powers and remain answerable to their constituents."<sup>7</sup>

However, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, who is often considered as the father of the Indian Constitution, completely ignored about the village panchayat in the Draft Constitution. Rather he considered the village panchayat as "a sink of localism and den of ignorance is and narrow mindedness and communalism." To him the village republic's spelled ruination for the country and played no part in the affairs and destiny of the country.

Our first Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru favoured the idea of village republic. He said, "India will progress only, when the people living in villages become politically conscious. The progress of our country is bound up with the progress in our village. If our villages make progress, India will become a strong nation and nobody will be able to stop its onward march, if you flinch from your determination and get involved in mutual quarrels and petty factions, you will not be able to succeed in your mission."

Thus, the philosophy of Panchayati Raj is based on the conviction that the paramount need of the rural people is real power devolution, when the elected representatives of the people, not the bureaucrats, administer at the grassroots level, i.e. the district level and below. The way to develop them is through Panchayati Raj by realizing their potential powers for personal, economic, social and civic growth and ensures social justice. Towards this end, the responsibility of administration, including law and order, should be entrusted to the members of panchayats, who are the real elected representatives. It is of the utmost importance to actually bring all the subjects, including revenue and resources, under the district, block and village level governments, with a view to bringing about a real change in rural India.

In the present scenario, the concept of Panchayati Raj has come to be accepted as an extension cord of democracy upto the village, and has found favour amongst politicians. The present Panchayati Raj Institution was come into existence as per the recommendation suggested by *Balwant Rai Mehta committee Report* (1957). The committee came out with the suggestion of a three-tier system of rural local government which would be given statutory status and upon which the various developmental functions performed by blocks were to be devolved. "Democratic decentralization" was the name given to this process. Subsequently, the same began to be called as "Panchayati Raj" in popular speeches and literature a name which is also synonymous with the term-"Rural Local Self-Government in India" The Constitution of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, 1992 marks a new era in the federal democratic set up of the country and provides constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj Institutions in its part-(IV) under the Directive Principle of State Policy. Article 40 herein says,

“The state should take steps to organize village panchayat and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.”<sup>10</sup>

Gandhi’s dream for “Gram Swaraj” has been translated into reality with the introduction of three-tier Panchayati Raj System to insure people participation in the great task of rural reconstruction and democratic decentralization at grass-root level. Thus, the Panchayati Raj Institution is Indian system of political institution at grass-root level, which gives power to rural people to manage themselves. Therefore, the relevance of Panchayati Raj is greater for rural development. In a way, these institutions are often refers to as extension cords of democracy to the villages.

In Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat bodies have been the first modern political institutions. Democratic political process was started in the erstwhile NEFA (*North East Frontier Agency*) in 1969 with the inauguration of Panchayati Raj. Significantly, the modern Panchayati Raj was introduced in NEFA (Present Arunachal Pradesh) on the backdrop of existing traditional tribal councils. In substance, the indigenous isolated tribal communities were exposed to grassroots political process. A new framework of participatory development and village management was introduced which mobilized the tribes to a great extent. Thus, the panchayat institutions engineered the modern political process in Arunachal Pradesh. The introduction of modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh became the key instruments for the development of village life. The people got the opportunity to exercise their franchise for the first time in the panchayat elections. This very processes an eye opener for the village communities so far as the grassroots democratic political process is concerned. As a result, the people got themselves involved with the developmental process of the rural area. Panchayati Raj Institution has brought a many socio-political changes in the rural Arunachal Pradesh.

**Evolution Of Panchayati Raj In India:** Historical roots of the local self-government in India can be traced from the ancient past. In fact, India has been the cradle of rural local government, which continued to flourish from the time of Vedic civilization to the advent of British rule. The village in India has been considered as the basic unit of the local self-administration since the *Vedic times*<sup>1</sup>. The term for the village was the “*Gram*” which is an immemorial unit. There was little interference by the state in their activities. It indicates that there was some method of self-government in those periods. In the *Rig-Veda*, there is a mention of *Sabha*, “*Samiti and ‘Vidath’* as local self-units. The concept of ‘*Panch - Parweshwar’* or *Panch* - the god existed in the ancient age. There was a description of *Sabha* and *Samiti*, which were the democratic bodies at the local level. The king used to get the approval of the *Sabha* or *Samiti* regarding certain functions and decision.<sup>2</sup> So, the village communities were enjoyed with self-sufficient, self-reliant and independent autonomy. The autonomous village describe by Sir Charles Metcalf:

The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves. Dynasty after dynasty tumbles down; revolution succeeds revolution, but the village community remains the same. This union of village communities, each one forming a separate little state in itself, has contributed more than any other to the cause of the preservation of the people of India and the enjoyment of freedom and independence.<sup>3</sup>

References to such a highly organized system of local government can be found in the *Vedas*, in the epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, *Manu Smriti*, in the Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*.<sup>4</sup> The epics of the *Ramayana* indicates that administration was divided into two parts – ‘*Pur*’ and ‘*Janpad*’ and the village people were called the ‘*Janpada*’<sup>5</sup>. It has mentioned the importance of the decentralization of the functions of the state<sup>6</sup>. During the reigned of Chandragupta Maurya’s dynasty the policy of decentralization of powers was adopted. The village was considered as the smallest unit of governance body. A person elected by the people of the village was the ‘*Gramik*’ (Head of village) entrusted with wide power and functions.<sup>7</sup> In the medieval period, the Sultans of Delhi knew that it would be impracticable to govern a vast country like India from the centre directly. Hence, they divided their kingdom into provinces called ‘*Vilayat*’ ‘*Amir*’ or *vali* was the head of a province. They were given an ample power and functions like management of finance, collection of taxes and selection of judicial officials. For governance of the village, there were three important officials – *Mukadam* for administration, *Patwari* for – collection of revenues and *Choudrie* for decision on disputes with the help of the *Panch*.<sup>8</sup>

During the Mughal periods, village bodies were the pivot of administration. In this period, particularly in the regime of Sher Shah, the villages were governed by their own panchayat. Each

*panchayat* comprised of village elders who looked after the interest of the people, administered justice, and imposed punishment on defaulters. The headman of village, semi government officials, acted as a coordinator between the village *panchayat* and the higher administrative hierarchy. In this period, each village had its own *panchayat* of elders. It was autonomous in its own sphere and exercised powers of local taxation, administrative control, justice and punishment.<sup>9</sup> The Mughal introduced elaborate administrative machinery with a hierarchy of officials, particularly in the field of revenue. It was with the collapsed of the Mughal strong hold, the British established their hegemony in India. In the words of Dr. Altekar: "From most ancient times villages in India have been the axle of administration."<sup>10</sup>

The British came to India as traders. The primary focus of the British Raj was much to do with trade and little to do with governance and development. In fact, until the advent of the British rule in India, the rural republic had flourished and thrived. With the emergence of the British *Raj* in India *panchayat* ceased to play a role that it once played. But, local self-government as a representative's institution was the creation of the British. The first local authority created by the British in India was the municipal corporation of Madras in 1887<sup>11</sup>. This body was empowered to collect taxes in local areas. It was Lord Mayo, the then Viceroy of India (1869 to 1872), who felt the need to bring about administrative efficiency. The year 1870 was landmark when Lord Mayo passed a resolution suggesting the decentralization of powers and the necessity of associating Indians in administration. He introduced the concept of elected representation in the urban municipalities and making them more powerful<sup>12</sup>. In 1880, Lord Ripon came as the Viceroy of India and he made a remarkable contribution to the development of local government. In 1882, he introduced an important Act Self – Government Resolution. It provided for local boards consisting of a large majority of elected non-official members and presided over by a non-official chairperson. This is considered to be the "Magna-Carta" of local democracy in India.<sup>13</sup>

Ripon's resolutions followed a series of committees, commissions and acts, which stresses on the development of rural local self – government. The Royal Commission on decentralization in 1909 elaborated further the principles of Ripon resolution. The Commission recommended, "It is most desirable alike in the interest of decentralization and in order to associate people with the local tasks of administration that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village *panchayat* for the administration of local village affairs."<sup>14</sup>

In 1909 itself, the 24<sup>th</sup> Congress Session at Lahore adopted a resolution urging the government to take easy steps "to make all local bodies from village *panchayats* upwards elected with elected non-official chairman" and support them with adequate financial aid. In 1919, Montague-Chelmsford Reforms Act, were passed. This Reform transferred the subject of local government to the domain of provinces. The Reform also recommended that as far as possible, there should be a complete popular control in local bodies and largest possible independence for them, of outside control<sup>15</sup>. However, this Reform could not get much result as far as democratization of *Panchayat* was concerned. In the year, 1935 British Government passed a historic Act of the Government of India Act, 1935 which gave a separate power to the Provincial Government. Popular elected provincial government in the provinces got provincial autonomy and they were duty bound to enact legislation for further democratization of the local Self-Government institution including the village *Panchayat*.

Thus, the spirit of democratic decentralization at the village level was existent right since the Ancient period. Even though the British Government did not have interest in the village autonomy, they were forced to do so, in order to continue their rule in India and to meet financial necessities. However, the Indian rural local self-government become more and more organized and took proper shaped by the time India became independent on 15 august, 1947.

The task of strengthening *Panchayati Raj* institutions (PRIs) fell on the Indian Government after independence. It was clear that India a country of villages had to strengthen village *panchayat* to strengthen democracy. Mahatma Gandhi, who strongly believed in 'Grama-Swaraj, pleaded for the transferred of power to the rural masses. According to him, India lives in village and Indians should govern themselves through elected *panchayat* to become self-sufficient. However, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, who was primarily responsible for the Draft Constitution did not want to give any place to the *Panchayati Raj* institutions. He spoke clearly and unequivocally condemning the village *panchayat* and said, "What is the village but a sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism?"<sup>16</sup>. Mahatma Gandhi severely criticized this and called for immediate

attention. It is thus that *Panchayat* finds a place in the Directive Principles of the State Policy under Article- 40, which envisages that “The states shall take steps to organize village *panchayat* and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as unit of self-governments”<sup>17</sup>. But this provision under Directive Principle of State Policy was not legally binding on the governments.

The first organized effort to tackle the problem of rural India was made through Community Development Programmed (CDP) in 1952 and National Extension Service in 1953. Community Development Programmed was first launched on October 2, 1952. The programmed aimed at improving the standard of life of the rural people in all spheres by providing an integrated package of services.<sup>18</sup> The objectives were to promote self-help and self-reliance among the rural people, to generate a process of integrated Social, Economic and Cultural change with the aim of transforming social and political life of the villagers. First President, Rajendra Prasad hailed this programmed as “The small seed which will grow into a huge and mighty tree”.

Jawaharlal Nehru while launching this programmed said, “Real, solid constructive work which would bring about a great revolution in a peaceful manner and not by breaking heads and yelling.”<sup>19</sup>

However, CDP did not yield the expected results because there was no institutional mechanism for the local people to participate in the development work. S.N Mishra has rightly remarks that “What was originally conceived as a people’s programmed became a government programmed and failed to achieve its objective.”<sup>20</sup> The basic thrust of the CDPs was to ensure community participation in all activities, which was not ensured at all. And that was the reason that Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru appointed a committee on decentralization popularly known as the *Balwant Rai Mehta Committee*.

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was the first committee set up in 1957 to look into the problems of democratic decentralization in independent India. The Committee was set up by Central Government in January 1957 to examine the working of the Community Development Programmed and the National Extension Service and to inquire into the question of economy and efficiency and suggest other measures for the reorganization of Community Development Programmed. The committee came out with the suggestion of a three-tier system of rural local government popularly known as democratic decentralization scheme. Subsequently, the same began to be called as “*Panchayati Raj Institutions*” in popular speeches and literature.

The recommendation of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee came into effect on 1 April 1958.<sup>21</sup> The first states to go for full stream with the scheme of democratic decentralization were Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. Then the Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru inaugurated the *Panchayati Raj* measures in Rajasthan on October 2 1959 in an impressive ceremony at Nagaur district<sup>22</sup>. The Nehru in his inaugural address called *Panchayati Raj* as a revolutionary and a historical step towards the democratic decentralization in India.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, the year 1959 marked as revolutionary step in the development of the institution of rural local self-government in the country. According to the George Mathew, the period between 1959 and 1964 can be described as the golden period of the first generation of *Panchayati Raj* institutions. He further elaborates this period in following lines:

I considered panchayati Raj of the Nehruvian era as the first generation because in this period the panchayati raj institutions were conceived as local bodies meant to ensure peoples participation in development. This phase started on 2 October 1959 and the decline began with Nehru’s disappearance from the scene in 1964. For about thirteen years after that, from 1964 to 1977, panchayati raj remained the whipping boy of all those who wanted to discredit the decentralization of power.<sup>24</sup>

The Committee with Ashok Mehta as Chairman was appointed by the then Janata Government in 1977 and was entrusted with the task of enquiring into the cause’s responsible for the poor performance of *Panchayati Raj* institutions and suggesting measures to strengthen *Panchayati Raj* institutions. The committee submitted its report in August 1978 and the committee suggested “*Two-Tier Model*” of Panchayati Raj consisting of *Zilla Parishad* at the district level and *Mandal Panchayat* at the grass root level as against three-tier system suggested by Balwanrai Mehta Committee. The Committee recommended for constitutional protection to the *Panchayati Raj* institutions and further decentralization of power at all levels<sup>25</sup>. Due to the fall of the Janata Government in Centre, the Ashok Mehta Committee recommendations were not implemented.

After publication of Ashok Mehta Committee report and its experimentation, hectic activities at the Central level started towards the strengthening grass-roots democratic decentralization. In 1985, a

Twelve-Member Committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Dr. G. K Rao for reviving the administrative arrangements for rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. This committee recommended that the district should be the basic unit for policy planning and programme implementation, it also recommended for regular elections to the *Panchayati Raj* institutions.<sup>26</sup>

Once again, in 1986, another Committee headed by Dr. L.M Singhvi was appointed by then Prime Minister late Rajiv Gandhi to suggest approaches as to how *Panchayati Raj* institutions could be given constitutional status. This Committee recommended the reorganization of villages to make village panchayat more viable. It also suggested that more financial resources should be made available to these institutions. The net result of the recommendations of these committees was that a proper environment was created in favour of giving new thrust to the concept of democratic decentralization.

In May 1989, the constitution 64<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill was moved by then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, with the intention of transferring “power to the people” which was passed by the *Lok Sabha*. However, the Bill could not be enacted, as the *Rajya Sabha* did not approve it. Immediately, after assumption of office by the next government, Prime Minister, P.V. Narasimha Rao, decided to draw up a fresh constitutional status to the Panchayat Raj bodies as well as to strengthen them. The *Lok-sabha* put the seal of its approval on the bill on 22 December 1992 and the *Rajya Sabha* passed it on the next day and came into force on 24 April 1993.<sup>27</sup> This Act is popularly known as 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act, 1992.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 is, in fact a watershed in the history of decentralized governance, planning and development in India. As a landmark achievement, it has made the *Panchayat Raj* institutions as the third tier of Government with providing reasonable substance and content of power and authority as well as creating adequate space for the empowerment of women and marginalized groups or communities in the Indian federal system. The Act provided for the Constitutional Status to *Panchayati Raj* institutions under part-IX with the heading “*Panchayati*” was added to the Constitution. Article 243, a new Scheduled -XI, containing 29 subjects to be transferred to panchayats was added.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendments to the Indian Constitution are the indicators of real revolution of grass root democratic decentralization or rural local self-government in India. After 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution list 29 items or functions that State Legislatures could devolve to the local governments. In reality, most of the states have made such devolution as for mere ostentation. Some states have not yet fully transferred the power and functions conferred to the local self-governing bodies under the 73<sup>rd</sup> Act. Arunachal Pradesh has not devolved any functions to the *Panchayati Raj* institutions. This, in turn, has adversely affected the efficiency and effectiveness of the *Panchayat*.

**Historical Backgrounds of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh:** The roots of the *Panchayati Raj* in Arunachal Pradesh lay in the centuries old indigenous village councils of different tribal communities, which enable the tribes to manage the affairs of the village and to develop a smooth corporate life therein. The villages in Arunachal Pradesh are well-defined units and are mostly nucleated villages<sup>29</sup>. Politically every village was independent unit and knew no extraneous authority<sup>30</sup>. The tribes had no idea of State and Government. Their activities resolve round their villages and village councils. Their councils adjudicate the disputes and often distribute the village resources on the basis of customary laws and methods. The tribes of Arunachal Pradesh, with their primitive socio-political institutions, were exposed to the modern life through a process of administrative development and officials’ interference during the British period.

Political and Administrative history of Arunachal Pradesh begins with the inception of British rule in Assam after the *Treaty of Yandaboo* concluded on 24 February 1826<sup>31</sup>. After annexation of the Assam, the British administration followed the Ahom policy of conciliation to make friendship with the hill tribes of the Frontier<sup>32</sup>. In the subsequent years the British Government in India introduced administrative regulations for the hill tribes, the first being the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873 by which an “Inner Line” was prescribed for the Frontier Tribal areas<sup>33</sup>. *The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation*, 1873, thus, came into existence that laid down such lines in the districts of Kamrup, Goalpara, Darrang, Lakhimpur and Sibsagar. The Inner Line for the first time separated some tracts inhabited by tribal people from the districts of Assam and British authority. The area was

kept outside the purview of regular laws of the country and administered in different way by passing regulations and framing procedures from time to time.

The creation of the Dibrugar Frontier Tract in 1882 was for filling up the gap between the administered areas and the Inner Line through the extension of 'Political Control'<sup>34</sup>. In 1912, the Western Section of the North East Frontier Tract was created under the control of the Deputy Commissioner of Darang<sup>35</sup>. In 1914 the Dibrugarh Frontier Tract was called the Central and Eastern Section of the North East Frontier Tract and a new tract- the Lakhimpur Frontier Tract was created on its south. In 1919 the Western Section was renamed the Balipara Frontier Tract, and the Central and Eastern Section the Sadiya Frontier Tract.<sup>36</sup> In 1937, the Sadiya frontier tract, Balipara Frontier Tract and Lakhimpur Frontier came to be known collectively as *Excluded Areas* of the province of Assam under the provisions of the Government of India Act, 1935. In 1946, the Balipara Frontier Tract was divided into two administrative units, Sela Sub-Agency and Subansiri Area.<sup>37</sup>

In order to bring the tracts under British Administration, the British Government introduced the *Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945*.<sup>38</sup> This Regulation was meant to consolidate and amend the laws governing the administration of justice in the Frontier Tracts. The Regulation of 1945 put the Tribal village councils within its general framework and recognized their importance and authority. The councils were given considerable powers in judicial matters, especially to settle the village disputes. It also envisaged the appointment of village *Gam* or village head empowering them with civil and criminal administration. Thus, the British Administration was extended into the Tribal areas with little interference in the internal affairs of Tribal society, except for maintaining law and order. However, throughout Arunachal Pradesh, the tribal councils had to work within the framework of this Regulation of 1945. Thus, during the closing years of British administration in India, the aged-old tribal village councils were officially recognized as the indigenous authorities for the administration of justice in the North East Frontier Tracts.

Immediately after the Independence, Indian Independence Act, 1947, placed the administration of the Frontier Tracts at the disposal of the Government of Assam. Under the North East Frontier Tracts (Internal Administration) Regulation 1948, the remaining portion of Sadiya Frontier Tract was bifurcated into two charges of Abor Hills and Mishmi Hills District<sup>39</sup>. The Constituent Assembly of India viewed the problem of Tribal development carefully and appointed a Committee to investigate and report for a rational administration of the tribals of Assam<sup>40</sup>. The Sub-Committee was headed by Gopinath Bordoloi of Assam to recommend the future pattern of administration of the hills of Assam and the Frontier Tracts. The Bordoloi Committee had recommended a system of administration in which the tribal people were to be given to administer their tribal issues applying their tribal customs and conventions, leaving the overall planning, development and administration to the Government of Assam<sup>41</sup>. The recommendations of the Bordoloi Committee took the shape of Sixth Schedule (Part- B) of the Indian Constitution<sup>42</sup>. The Constitution placed the administration of the tribal tracts of the Frontier under the Governor of Assam acting as an Agent of the President of India not Government of Assam, as under the British<sup>43</sup>. The idea was to pace up the development of the Frontier Tracts, which they thought would be best done by the Union Government with its plentiful funds, than the meager resources of the Assam Government<sup>44</sup>.

In 1950, the plains of Balipara Frontier Tract, Tirap Frontier Tract, Abor Hill District and Mishmi Hill District were transferred to the administrative jurisdiction of the Government of Assam. In 1951, the units of the tracts were reconstituted again and Tuensang Frontier Divisions was created which later merged with Nagaland. The remaining portion of the tracts after the introduction of the North-East Frontier (Administration) Regulation, 1954 was designated as the North East Frontier Agency; the NEFA<sup>45</sup>. The Balipara Frontier Tract was split into two divisions- Kameng and Subansiri. Thus, six divisions came into being- Kameng, Subansiri (on its east), Siang (formerly the Abor hills district, further east), Lohit (formerly the Mishmi hills district), Tirap and Tuensang (formerly the Naga Tribal Area, south of Tirap).<sup>46</sup> These Frontier Divisions were administered by the Governor of Assam acting as Agent to the President of India and placed under the charge of Ministry of External Affairs.

In 1965, the Indian Parliament passed the North- East Frontier (Administration) Regulation with a view to bringing changes in the existing administration pattern of the NEFA. The regulation first brought changes in the names of the administrative divisions. Accordingly, the hitherto known as divisions of the NEFA were termed as districts, namely, Kameng Frontier Division to Kameng District, Subansiri Frontier Division to Subansiri District, Siang Frontier Division to Siang District,

Lohit Frontier Division to Lohit District and Tirap Frontier Division to Tirap District. NEFA, which was administered under the Ministry of External Affairs, was brought under the supervision and control of the Ministry of Home Affairs in first August 1965. Under the provision of NEFA (Administration) Regulation of 1965, the Political Officers, Assistant Political Officers were also re-designated as the Deputy Commissioners. A district was divided into Sub-Divisions and was placed under Additional Deputy Commissioner and EAC. A Sub-division was divided into Circles and placed under the Circle Officers who formed the lowest level of Administration.

NEFA was a part of Assam until 21 January 1972 and was administered by the President of India through the Governor of Assam as his agent under the provision of Part-B of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitutions. By the North East States Reorganization Act 1971, NEFA was re-constituted as a Union Territory with the new name of Arunachal Pradesh.

**Introduction of Statutory Panchayati Raj Institutions in Arunachal Pradesh:** Arunachal Pradesh remained out of national political currents till the late sixties. The first Prime Minister of India Pandit Nehru's Government followed Verrier Elwin's idea of retaining the identity of the tribes and also the British policy of isolation until 1962 when China attacked this part of India<sup>47</sup>. Elwin's view as expressed in *A Philosophy for NEFA* was based on the assumption that the British Government inclined, on the whole to leave the tribes men alone... "but detribalization leads to make the tribesman ashamed of his own culture and religion as so creates that inferiority complex which is a political as well as social danger. Yet isolation was neither possible nor desirable. He too agreed on the principle- "let the tribes grow in their own way on their own heritage, according to their own genius and tradition"<sup>48</sup>. Pt. Nehru also favoured the Elwin principles of tribal development and he wrote in his forward to V. Elwin's *Philosophy for NEFA* "I had a feeling that we should help them to grow in their own way"<sup>49</sup>.

The policy adopted by Pt. Nehru, often referred as Nehru-Elwin 'Go Slow Policy'. As enunciated by V.Elwin in his five principles of tribal development, it held: (i) People should develop along the lines of own genius and government should avoid imposing anything on them. (ii) Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected. (iii) Government should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside will be doubt be needed, especially at the beginning. But attempt should be made to avoid introducing too many outsiders into territory. (iv) Nor should there any attempt to over administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes; rather development should be through, not in suppression of, their own social and cultural institutions. (v) Government should measure the results of the progress not by statistic or the amount of money spent but by the reality of human character, that is evolved<sup>50</sup>. But, New Delhi had remained practically unconcerned and took little interest in the affairs of the Frontier and the administration of the Frontier was left to the Governor of Assam and his Adviser as before. Though North-East Frontier was an integral part of the territory of the Republic of India, the people of the area hitherto did not enjoy the democratic rights and privileges of a citizen of the Indian Republic. The North-East Frontier people did not elect their representative in the parliament, the representative from this area being nominated by the President of India<sup>51</sup>. There was almost in every locality or village a local headman either elected by the people themselves or hereditary who performed much useful work, but the people did not enjoy any right of participation in the working of this local-Government of statutory provisions.

After the Sino-Indian war of 1962, the Government of India was compelled to change its policies towards NEFA and undertook a number of measures for its speedy politico-economic developments to bring the indigenous tribes into national mainstream. Subsequently, the Government of India changed its earlier policy of 'minimum interference to tribal people' with a certain reconsiderations: (i) The policy envisaged by Pt. Nehru, often called as Nehru- Elwin 'Go Slow' policy, was given a second look after 1962 aggression of China on India. The Sino- India war of 1962 marked a sudden change in the administrative policy of government of India towards North East Frontier agency. (ii) Perhaps, considering that India's shameful defeat in the war was due to lack of road communication and other facilities in the region<sup>52</sup>. After occupying certain strategic parts of NEFA, it was feared that the Chinese troops would descend on Assam valley. The people of Assam were irate over this possibility and strongly criticized the tribal policy followed in the Administration of NEFA. The NEFA people had to abandon their native homes and become refugees in Assam. They too joined the

agitation against the “Go Slow” policy in NEFA. Pt. Nehru seemed to have appreciated that the so-called *A Philosophy for NEFA* authored by Verrier Elwin required a second look.<sup>53</sup>

Thereafter, political and geo-strategic significance of the territory was recognized and special attention was paid towards its development. It was during this period that the NEFA Administration designed its administrative machinery to achieve twin objectives of bringing the areas to the national mainstream; and to organize the people to take lively interest in developmental activities<sup>54</sup>. Modern governmental institutions were sought to be introduced so that the territory could come closer to the mainstream of political life in the country. Thus, Chinese attack became a turning point in the process of political development of NEFA. A committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of *Dying Ering* for the purpose and specially to recommend regarding the democratic decentralization<sup>55</sup>.

**Dying Ering Committee, 1965:** In the zeal for introducing Panchayati Raj in NEFA, the Governor of Assam constituted a four-member committee known as *Ering Committee* on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1964.<sup>56</sup> Lt. Dying Ering, Member of Parliament, and the then Parliamentary Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs as the Chairman headed the Committee. This Committee, popularly known as *D. Ering Committee*, started exploring the feasibility of democratic decentralization in NEFA<sup>57</sup>. In making its recommendations, the Committee was to take into consideration the scope and pattern of authority and function exercise by indigenous tribal institutions at the level of village and above. It was also to examine how far the existing indigenous system was adequate and how best it could be modified or enlarged to introduce democratic working in the field of judiciary, local development and administration. The Committee was to give due consideration to the stage of advancement in respect of each tribes and the committee was request to propose regarding:

- (1) The type of democratic bodies suitable at the village level and above.
- (2) The extent and nature of jurisdiction of these bodies.
- (3) The phases in which the recommendations of the committee might be put into force having regard to the varying stages of development of the different tribal groups.<sup>58</sup>

After extensive tours into different parts of NEFA and coming across the various shades of different levels, the Committee prepared its report, making certain landmarked recommendations, and submitted the same in January 1965. The *Ering Committee* recommended for the establishment of a four-tier and organically linked representatives bodies in NEFA.<sup>59</sup> As a whole democratic decentralization was strongly recommended. Formation of following bodies, these were to be at village, Circle, District and the Agency or territory levels were suggested. These bodies at the first three levels were in line with the all India pattern of Panchayati Raj based on the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee. Though the Ering Committee did not mention the term “Panchayati Raj”, it clearly recommended this system to be the first modern political institutions in NEFA (Present Arunachal Pradesh). More or less, the proposed political structures were given all India names such as the *Gram Panchayat*, the *Anchal Samiti* and the *Zilla Parishad*.

In its scheme of democratic decentralization, the Ering committee recommended -

- (1) There should be a village council at the village level. The existing tribal councils should be unrecognized as “*Gram Panchayat*”. They should functions as per the tribal customary laws and exercise judicial, developmental and general functions.
- (2) At the circle level, there should be *Anchal Samiti* in which then sub-divisional officer should be the ex-officio Chairman. The Anchal Samiti would mainly undertake development functions.
- (3) At the district level there should be *Zilla Parishad* with a membership between” 24 to 30. The Deputy Commissioner of the concern district was to be the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad.
- (4) At the apex, there should be Agency council consisting of” 20 members, 4 members from each district. The agency council was to advise the governor in the administration and the development of NEFA.
- (5) Other recommendations of the committee include introduction of district system, a separate service cadre for NEFA officers, mode of election of the Member of Parliament from NEFA, creation of NEFA police force and most importantly transfer of NEFA from the Ministry of External Affairs to the Ministry of Home.<sup>60</sup>

Significantly, the NEFA was given a territorial identity through the Agency Council- a territory level people’s forum for the first time. As Ering Committee invented ways for democratic decentralization as well as providing a political set up for the whole of NEFA. Their proposal for

political change was democratic decentralization of power on national pattern, while integrating all indigenous tribal councils into a uniform system. The Ering Committee report ushered an Era of all round development of NEFA. The report was a firsthand social survey of the then NEFA people and their polity. Because of these landmark recommendations, Dying Ering can be considered as the father of *Panchayati Raj* as well as modern politico-administrative institutions in Arunachal Pradesh. The Government of India accepted the recommendations of *Ering Committee* and incorporated the same in North-East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 with few modifications.

**North-East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967:** The Government of India accepted the recommendations of Ering Committee. The President of India, in exercise of powers conferred by Article-240 of the Constitution of read with sub-paragraph (2) of the paragraph 18 of the Constitution of India, promulgated the *North-East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulation (Regulation 3 of 1967)* with effect from 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1968, incorporating the scheme of Ering Committee with minor modification. However, the Regulation was not to be implemented in Seppa Sub-Division, the Eastern part of the Kameng district and Miao-Vijayanagar areas of Tirap district because of its remoteness and backwardness.<sup>61</sup>

Under the Regulation, the NEFA village councils were accorded the status of *Gram Panchayats*. The Regulation also provided constitution of *Anchal Samiti*, *Zilla Parishad* and *Agency Council*. Regulation 3 of 1967 aims at establishing the *panchayat* system of local self-government and investing the various bodies constituted under the provisions of the Regulation with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.<sup>62</sup> It offers opportunity to the people to take effective part in developmental administration of NEFA. The Panchayat Raj Regulation 3 of 1967 envisaged a four-tier system. The Governor of the Assam formally inaugurated the *Panchayati Raj* in NEFA at Shillong on December 3, 1969<sup>63</sup>.

**Gram Panchayat:** The regulation of 1967 accorded the status of *Gram Panchayat* to the village authorities constituted under the Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation, 1945.<sup>64</sup> As such, no separate *Gram Panchayat* was provided. The existing traditional village councils were accepted as the *Gram Panchayats* serve only the Electoral College for the purpose of *Anchal Samiti*. The regulation did not assign any specific function to the *Gram Panchayat* except helping the executive in developmental activities and mobilizing the people for such purpose. The Panchayat Regulation 1967 guarantee to constitute a *Gram Panchayat* for a village or group of villages having a population of not less than 300.<sup>65</sup>

The village authority appointed under the *Assam Frontier (Administration of Justice) Regulation of 1945* consists of village elders who are selected or nominated by the Deputy Commissioner under the aforesaid Regulation.<sup>66</sup> The village authority were empowered to take up petty cases of criminal nature and fine upto Rs. 50/- and in regard to civil suits they enjoyed wider powers. But under the provision of Panchayat Raj Regulation 1967, *Gram Panchayat* Members are selected in a democratic way and are never appointed by the Deputy Commissioner. This is the basic difference between village authorities and *Gram Panchayat* under Regulation 1 of 1945 and Panchayat Raj Regulation 1967. *Gram Panchayats* and indigenous self-government institutions of different tribes are two separate institutions guided and governed by two separate regulations. Practically in all the districts, each group of tribals have their own indigenous form of village authority. These village authorities used to decide all petty cases both civil and criminal, according to their customary laws. After introducing of Panchayat Raj in the area, the village authorities had declined its importance.

**Anchal samiti:** An *Anchal Samiti* is constituted by notification of the Governor vide section 4 of the regulation 3 of 1967 declaring contiguous areas in a district as he deems fit to be a block for the purpose of this regulation and may specify the *Gram Panchayats* in the block<sup>67</sup>. This is the only elected body having funds, powers and right of execution of the schemes analogous to Community Development Blocks, ( as the area under *Anchal Samiti* is coterminous with that of a community block) in respect of its territory, village and population.

As per the regulation, the *Anchal Samiti* consists of elected, nominated and ex-officio members. In an *Anchal Samiti* there should be (i) not more than 25 members elected by the *Gram Panchayats*; (ii) one representative elected by the Chairman of the co-operative societies situated within the block; (iii) not more than 5 members nominated by the Deputy Commissioner from among the tribes who have

not secured any representation; (iv) the Sub-Divisional Officer of the area within which the *Anchal Samiti* falls as the ex-officio President of the Samiti; (v) such officers as ex-officio members, as may be deemed necessary, appointed by the Deputy Commissioner provided that these members shall not be entitled to vote. The *Anchal Samiti* elects a Vice President from among its elected members.<sup>6</sup>

**Zilla Parishad:** The Regulation envisages the *Zilla Parishad* as a district level Panchayat body with supervisory and advisory roles over the *Gram Panchayats* and *Anchal Samitis* located within the district.<sup>69</sup> Further, it is the supreme body in finalizing the plans and programmes of the district. The *Zilla Parishad* consists of (i) the Vice Presidents of all the *Anchal Samitis* in the district, as ex-officio members; (ii) one representatives each elected by the *Anchal Samitis* in the district, as ex-officio members; (iii) not more than six members nominated by the Governor from the tribes not represented in the parishad; (iv) the Deputy Commissioner of the district, as ex-officio president of the Parishad. The members of *Zilla Parishad* elect from among themselves a Vice President. Besides, the district heads of the development departments may be included in the parishad.

**Agency Council:** The Regulation of 1967 provides for an Agency Council, at the territory level, for the entire area of NEFA.<sup>70</sup> The council is to be constituted by the Governor through notification. It consists of- (i) The Governor; (ii) the Members of Parliament representing NEFA; (iii) the Vice President of all the *Zilla Parishads*; (iv) three representatives from each of the *Zilla Parishads* to be elected by its members from among themselves in the prescribed manner; (v) the Adviser to the Governor, as ex-officio member<sup>71</sup>. The Governor presides over the meetings of the council and consult it in regard to the matters of administration of NEFA, the five year plan and annual plan proposals for development of NEFA, the estimated receipts and expenditures pertaining to NEFA, proposals for legislations with respect to any of the matters enumerate in the state list in the seventh schedule to the constitution etc. precisely, the Agency Council was to be developed in the line of a legislature of state.<sup>72</sup>

The North-East Frontier Agency Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 was promulgated with effect from 2 October 1968.<sup>73</sup> As the existing village councils were accorded the status of *Gram Panchayat*, no separate *Gram Panchayat* was constituted. By the middle of September 1969, *Anchal Samitis* were constituted and in October the election for *Zilla Parishad* were completed. The Governor of Assam formally inaugurated the *Panchayati Raj* institutions in NEFA on 3 December 1969. However, the introduction of *Panchayati Raj* in NEFA evoked mixed responses. The political elites in the Assam became critical about this development as it led to the virtual separation of NEFA from Assam. Dr. varrier Elwin, the architect of the tribal policy in NEFA, considered the introduction of statutory panchayats as threat to traditional councils and advocated for the retention of tribal ways of life.<sup>74</sup> On the other hand, the NEFA administration defended the statutory *Panchayati Raj* by explaining the objective of the NEFA Panchayati Raj Regulation, 1967 in the following words:

For the all-round progress of the villages a people's movement has to be organized and should be strengthened and vitalized by providing a truly democratic institutional base. The Panchayati Raj alone can provide such a base and can help in creating real life and dynamic movement, which would transform the countryside in NEFA. It is essential that a process has to start by which efforts of the common people are united with those of the government agencies for improvement of the economic, social and cultural conditions of the communities living in different corners of NEFA and also to integrate those communities into the larger nation life.<sup>75</sup>

Significantly, the introduction of *Panchayati Raj* was prior to the universal adult franchise in NEFA. Although the first General Election in India was held in 1952, the franchise rights were not extended to the people of Arunachal for long. The voting rights was not extended till 1977 by the special provision of the Representation of People Act, 1951 by the constitution (Removal of Difficulties) orders VII and VIII withheld from NEFA the right of representation of Assam and central Legislatures. This is, probably, due to the fact that "Administrative policies of Arunachal Pradesh was long been determined by the anthropological view that election are alien to tribal culture."<sup>76</sup> The Bordoloi Sub- committee also did not favor extending franchise right to the people of NEFA as the committee found that the level of consciousness among the tribal was very low. Basically, the introduction of the statutory *Panchayati Raj* in Arunachal Pradesh (NEFA) was meant to bring uniformity and integration insolated political practices of the area and thereby linking it with

the national mainstream. In January 1972, the NEFA was changed into Union Territory, with the new name of Arunachal Pradesh. The Agency Council was converted into Pradesh Council, which was developed as the Provisional Legislative Assembly on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1975.<sup>77</sup> Then the Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh remained confined to a three-tier pattern, with *Gram Panchayat* at the village level, *Anchal Samiti* at the block level and *Zilla Parishad* at the district level. With this delinking of *Panchayati Raj System* from the provincial territorial legislative institutions, the PRIs became grassroots democratic bodies within the framework of all Indian patterns.

Since the introduction of the *Panchayati Raj* in Arunachal Pradesh, seven elections to panchayat bodies were held from 1969 to 1992.<sup>78</sup> Elections were held through secret ballot except in the case of *Gram Panchayat*, the members of which were elected according to the prevailing tribal customs. The people of the state experienced the modern democratic culture. The roots of local self-government were strengthened and the level of political consciousness was raised at the village level. Precisely, the *Panchayati Raj* institutions have caused a significant development in the traditional political process of Arunachal Pradesh. A set of new young leadership emerged with the shifting of authority from traditional to an elected one. The political parties made entry to the village level. The *Panchayat* leaders dominated the village affairs, replacing the numerically learner clans. The political outlook of the people became broad and the narrow ethnic interests were minimized. Thus, the *Panchayati Raj* system added a new dimension to the traditional ethnic political process of Arunachal Pradesh through a method of gradual modernization.

However, the panchayat bodies constituted in 1992 continued upto the later part of 1997, with a normal tenure of 3 years, which was extended for another 2 years by the Governor.

**Post 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992:** Arunachal Pradesh was required to enact a comprehensive law revising the provisions relating to its three-tier Panchayati Raj system in conformity with the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, 1992.<sup>79</sup> The Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 provided for a uniform system of Panchayats throughout the country. Pursuant to the said Act, the Government of Arunachal Pradesh promulgated an *Ordinance* in conformity with the provisions of the Constitution Amendment Act and later replaced it by *The Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Bill, 1994* which was passed by the Legislative Assembly on September 9, 1994<sup>80</sup>. The Bill, though passed by the state Assembly was, however, reserved by the Governor for the assent of the president on the ground that the provisions relating to reservation for scheduled castes had not been kept in the Bill. The Bill was however, received back with the President's Message dated September 2, 1996 that necessary provisions relating to:

- (i) constitution of *Gram Sabha* as per Article 243 (c) of the Constitution;
- (ii) reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste as per Article 243 (d) of the Constitution; and
- (iii) direct elections to *Panchayat* as per the Article 243 (c) of the Constitution.<sup>81</sup>

The matter was thereafter discussed and consider at great length by public and *panchayat* leaders in an *All Party Convention* held at Itanagar, on February 18 and 19, 1997 and it was resolved that the State Government should approach the Government of India for relaxation of the provisions relating to reservation of seats for scheduled castes in view that the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act provides for the general application of provision to all states where there exist scheduled tribes and scheduled castes in minority groups and not like Arunachal Pradesh which is exclusively a tribal State<sup>82</sup>. The Bill was accordingly reintroduced on March 6, 1997 as "*The Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat Raj Bill, 1997*" in the State Legislative Assembly without making any provision for reservation of seats for scheduled castes and the same was passed by the State Assembly on 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1997. However, the Governor again reserved the Bill reiterating earlier view for assent of the President on 7<sup>th</sup> April, 1997.

To amicably resolve this Constitutional deadlock, a high level meeting was convened at the instance of the Hon'ble Prime Minister on the request of Hon'ble Chief Minister in New Delhi on August 21, 1997. The meeting appreciated the vie-points of the State Government and recommended for "direction to change the constitution (Scheduled Castes) order, 1950 by deleting part XXI of the schedule to the order without linking the exclusion of the general issues regarding modalities for exclusion."<sup>83</sup>

Meanwhile, the Arunachal Pradesh Governor twice extended the life of the *Panchayats* elected in 1992 under the NEFA *Panchayati Raj Regulation* 1967. It was extended in 1995 and 1996 for a year

each. On 14<sup>th</sup> September 1997, the Panchayat was finally dissolved. As a result of this, the Panchayati Raj Institutions in Arunachal Pradesh came to a moribund stage<sup>84</sup>. And from 1995 to 2003 and in between this period there was no panchayat bodies were constituted in State. This clearly reflects the conflict between the ethnic tradition and revitalized national grassroots democracy in its Constitutional form.

Ultimately, the 83<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 2000, passed by the Parliament of India, which came with retrospective effect from the April 24, 1993, contained that nothing in Article 243D relating to reservation of seats for scheduled caste shall apply to the State of Arunachal Pradesh<sup>85</sup>. Subsequently, the Arunachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Bill, 1997 duly passed by the Arunachal Pradesh State Legislative Assembly received the assent of the President of India on 13 April 2001 (Act no.5 of 2001).<sup>86</sup> This Act is known as the Arunachal Panchayati Raj Act, 1997. This is an Act to replace the NEFA Panchayati Raj Regulation 1967 by a comprehensive law in line with 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. The Act of 1997 extends to the whole of Arunachal Pradesh. This act provides for three-tier Panchayat system with wider representation as well as expanded developmental functions. Precisely, the act restructured the following bodies at different levels:-

1. Gram Sabha for each village.
2. Gram Panchayat for one village or group of villages.
3. Anchal Samiti at the block level.
4. Zilla Parishad at the district level.

**Gram Sabha:** It is a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village, which is located within the area of *Gram panchayat*. The Chairman of the concerned *Gram Panchayat* presides over the meeting of *Gram Sabha*. The quorum for a meeting of the Gram sabha shall be 1/10<sup>th</sup> of its total membership. There should not be a gap of six months or more between the two meetings of *Gram Sabha*. Primarily, the agenda for discussion in the *Gram Sabha* is approved by the *Gram Panchayat*.<sup>87</sup>

**Gram Panchayat :** The Act has given power to the Deputy Commissioner of the district to declare any area comprising of a village or group of villages having a population not less than 300 to be or as panchayat area.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly, a *Gram Panchayat* is established in every panchayat area declared as such. However, the Deputy Commissioner can declare any area as panchayat area having even less than 300 populations as a special case. Further, in compliance with the provisions of this Act and at the request of the concerned *Gram Panchayat*, the Deputy Commissioner may- increase, decrease, alter or change the name of any Gram Panchayat and declared any particular area ceases to be a panchayat area.

**Anchal Samiti:** An *Anchal Samiti* is constituted by the notification of the government as deems fit, to be an Anchal Block and may specify the *Gram Panchayats* in the *Anchal*. No area of a municipality, town committee or cantonment constituted under new law shall be included in an Anchal Block.<sup>89</sup> The government may include, exclude any village or part of a village within the limits of an *Anchal Block* or amalgamate two or more Anchal blocks into a single block, after consultation with an *Anchal Samiti* or *Samitis*. Every *Anchal Samiti* shall be a body corporate having power to acquire, hold and dispose of property and to enter into contracts and shall by its corporate name sue and be sued.

**Zilla Parishad:** The territorial jurisdiction of panchayat at district level (hereafter referred to as Zilla Parishad) will be the district. The *Zilla Parishad* is the highest for each district is to be constituted by the notification of the government. The *Zilla Parishad* is the supreme body in finalizing the plans and programmes of the district.<sup>90</sup>

In fact, the new Act has become a landmark step so far as modernizing the Arunachal Panchayati Raj institutions in line with all India pattern. With this development *the panchayat* bodies have been revitalized to provide more representation to the socially disadvantage groups particularly tribal women in the state. Further, the new Panchayati Raj Act has entrusted a sizeable developmental functions for bringing rapid socio-economic development in village of Arunachal Pradesh. On the whole, the *Panchayati Raj* institutions have played a great role in shaping the modern political process of Arunachal Pradesh. On the basis of the new Panchayati Raj Act of 1997, in line with the

73rd Acts, Arunachal Pradesh conducted its first election in April 2003 except in Tirap district. Subsequently, second election was held in April 2008.

There, however, are still some concerns as per as meaningful working of Panchayati Raj system is concerned. Proper devolution of power has not taken place; women representation is restricted to 33 per cent as per the reservation provisions in the Act; it is yet to overcome bureaucratic hurdle; financial powers are controlled by political leaders of high order (Member of Legislative Assembly); and election to the panchayat bodies are fought on party lines, which often resulted into political rivalries at the clan and community level.<sup>91</sup>

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89. Swain, op cit., p.198.
90. Dubey, op cit., pp.10.1
91. Bath, op.cit.