A few days before death Gandhiji wrote in Young India “True democracy can not be worked out by twenty persons at the centre. It shall be worked out only by the villagers.” Again in Harijan he wrote : "Independence must begin at the bottom when Panchayati Raj established public opinion will do what violence can never do” [Harijan, 26.07.46 and 01.07.47].

Our Constitution in Article-40 directs to form village Panchayat as the unit of self governance. In 1958 to make Community Development Programme a reality Balwant Ray Committee recommended to introduce 3-tier Panchayati Raj in the entire country with the objective of removing illiteracy, poverty and diseases. It was however amended in 1962, 1965 and 1968. The 1965 amendment provided direct election of the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayat by the people. The 1968 amendment substituted the District Advisory Council in the place of Zilla Parishad.

The Panchayati Raj system during 1950’s and early 1960s was under the control of different departments like Board of Revenue, Dept. of Agriculture and Community Development and Political services Department before it was placed under the Department of Planning and Coordination with a secretary to head the Department. In July 1962, a new Department of Community Development and Panchayati Raj was created. The Panchayat Samities and Zilla Parishads and former District Boards came under its purview.

In 1978 Ashok Mehta Committee offered some important suggestions on the basis of which some states introduced Panchayati Raj. The recommendations could not be implemented in all states due to the short-life of Janata Government. Rajiv Gandhi Government in 1989 had offered a proposal to introduce uni-pattern Panchayati Raj in all states. Strong opposition of some states and the sudden demise of Rajiv Gandhi brought an end to this effort. In early 1990, Biju Pattnaik in his second spell as CM of Odisha was more determined and exhibited sheer self confidence and unremitting zeal to streamline Panchayati Raj. For him, "Let them chalk out plans, schemes for the improvement of their respective areas and let them execute their plans." According to Biju Babu the goals of the Panchayati Raj can not be fructified unless there is proper devolution of financial power to Panchayats. His Government made concerted effort for appointment to a special Finance Commission to look after the domain of devolution of financial powers. Moreover, Biju Patnaik introduced in Odisha a progressive Panchayati
Raj providing 30 per cent reservation for women to applause of the people of the state.

Recognizing the importance of the Panchayati Raj, Article 40 (Directive Principle of state policy of our Constitution states, “The state shall take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of Local-self Government.”

April 24, 1993 is a Red Letter day in the history of Panchayati Raj in India as on this day the Constitution 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions.

The Salient Feature of the Act:

(i) To provide 3-tier system of Panchayati Raj for all states.

(ii) To hold Panchayat elections regularly every five years.

(iii) To provide reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women (not less than 33%).

(iv) To appoint State Finance Commission to make recommendations as regards the financial powers of the Panchayats.

(v) To constitute District Planning Committee to prepare Draft Development Plan for the district as a whole.

Powers and Responsibilities:

According to the Constitution, Panchayats shall be given powers and authority to function as institutions of self-Government. The following powers and responsibilities are to be delegated to Panchayats at the appropriate level:

(i) Plan for economic development and social justice.

(ii) Implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice in relation to 29 subjects given in Eleventh schedule of the Constitution.

(iii) To levy, collect appropriate taxes, duties, tolls and fees.

The history of Panchayati Raj has been one of success and failure in different states. A phase of success during 1959-64, a phase of stagnation during 1965-69, and phase of failure during 1969-77. In state of Maharashtra and Gujarat, Panchayati Raj has shown a good scene of success and took planning and development sincerely.

This Act gives constitutional status to the Gram Sabha. According to Article 234 B of the Constitution, Gram Sabha means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls of a village within the area of the Gram Panchayat. As per Article 243 A, a Gram Sabha may exercise such powers and perform such functions at the village as the legislature of a state, by law, provide. Accordingly all villagers over 18 years of age, have an inherent right to determine their own destiny. This is the forum where even a poor villager can make his presence felt. Moreover, Gram Sabha plays a very important role in functioning of the Gram Panchayats in ensuring transparency in the working and equitable distribution to benefits in creation of community assets bringing about social involvement in the developmental process.

On December 24, 1996, the Panchayat network has been extended to the tribal areas of the country. The provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Schedule Areas) Act 1996, extends Panchayats to the tribal areas of Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan. A conference of Ministers
of Panchayati Raj of the state was held on July 11, 2001 in New Delhi, to discuss and analyse the progress in respect to devolution of power upon Panchayats and to find out the steps needed to make the Panchayats emerge as real “Institutions of Self-Government”. The necessity of time bound and regular election to Panchayats, completion of devolution of powers with regard to the 29 subjects listed in the eleventh schedule and the constitution of the District planning committee was felt.

On an average Panchayat covers two to three villages and a population of approximate 2400. There are 4526 Panchayat Samities at Block / Tehsil Level. There are 330 Zilla Parishads covering about 76% of the district in the Country and Zilla Parishad on an average 13-14 Panchayat Samities and about 660 Gram Panchayats. If all the units became active and sincerely plan for the real development of the villages, there is no reason that the villages do not make rapid progress. The institution of Panchayati Raj, enshrines the villages as model units for the development. It is the foundation on which lies the fortress of democracy. Success of Panchayati Raj depends much upon the enlightenment of the rural people, real support and involvement of the general mass.

Odisha Panchayat Laws were amended in consistent with the provision of the Act and Provision of Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Area Act, 1996 (PESA). Odisha is the first state to conduct PRI election in 2002 according to PESA Act, thereby ensuring social justice to scheduled tribe communities. Government of Odisha is committed to strengthen PRI as institutions of self-Government. In the year 2003, 21 subjects of 11 departments were transferred to Panchayati Raj Institutions, District Level Officers, Block Level Officers, and village level functionaries of 11 departments have been made accountable to Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat respectively for the implementation of subjects / schemes transferred to PRIs. They will place plans and schemes for discussion and approval in the meeting of the respective level of PRIs for economic development and social justice of the people. Government has signed an MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India for effective devolution of functions, funds and functionaries as per the mandate of 73rd Amendment of the Constitution.

**Working of PR in Odisha :**

The structure of PRIs varies from state to state from 3-tier structure in village, Block and District level to a 2 tier structure at the village and Block level. A few states had only a single tier panchayat at village level. The experiment was started in Rajasthan with 3 statutory institution of Village Panchayats, Panchayat Samities and Zilla Parishads. This 3 tier model structure was adopted by the state of Odisha and has continued to operate over a period of three decades up to the historic amendment of 1992. Out of 3 tiers of Panchayati Raj, the intermediate - tier, the Panchayat Samiti is made the implementing agency for all programmes.

Funds for community Development given as Grant-in-Aid to Panchayat Samities, Zilla Parishads were abolished in the year 1968. The Panchayat Samiti emerged as an important institution for implementing developmental programmes, poverty alleviation programmes and social security schemes. However, even before the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, Odisha had taken the lead in providing reservation in favour of SCs, STs and women in 3-tier PRIs. A distinguishing feature of the Panchayati Raj System in Odisha is that either the Chairperson or the Vice-Chairman of all the 3-tier PRIs is a
woman. Despite these important roles, PSs and GPs could not emerge an institution of self-Government. Those wishing to take a deeper look into the malady would find factionalism, casteism, communalism and groupism and the nasty game of politics that has been carried to the doorsteps of innocent villagers. In fact, the PR began to totter and in some states even crumble, under the heavy weight of political factionalism, scramble for control over patronage among politicians and bureaucrats, scarcity of economic resources and not the least of all the general apathy of the people.

**Activities and Achievement of PR Dept. : Odisha Scenario**

The Panchayati Raj Department has been entrusted with implementation of various Poverty Alleviation programmes in the state. The Poverty Alleviation programmes mainly cater to the needs of rural families living Below the Poverty Line. These programmes can be grouped under the following four broad categories:

1. **Self Employment Programme**:
   - **National Rural Livelihood Mission**:
     During the financial year 2014-15, up to January 2015, an amount of Rs.3709.28 Lakh has been utilised out of the total available funds of Rs. 9756.13 Lakh and out of 57237 number of targeted SHGs 5132 numbers of SHGs have been validated 4088 SHG and 1044 SHGs have been graded as Grade-1 and Grade - II respectively out of total functional SHGs.

2. **Wage Employment Programme**:
   - **Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS)**:
     The basic object of this scheme is to enhance livelihood security of the rural poor in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of guaranteed wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work. This work guarantee can also serve other objectives like generating productive assets, protecting the environment, empowering rural women, reducing rural - urban migration and fostering social equity among others.

     It is a centrally sponsored programme with the following funding pattern between the centre and the state. While the central Government will bear the entire cost of wages of unskilled manual workers and 75% of material cost and wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers, the state Government will bear 25% of material cost and wages of skilled and semi-skilled workers. In case of failure to provide employment within the stipulated period, i.e. within 15 days from the date of application, unemployment allowance has to be paid to the concerned job seekers and the same is to be borne by the State Government.

     Up to the end of 2007-08, 24 districts were covered under this scheme. During the financial year i.e. 2008-09, six more districts have been added with effect from 01.04.08 and the SGRY scheme which was being implemented in these districts, namely Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Kendrapara, Khurda, Nayagarh and Puri have been merged with MGNREGS. At present all the 30 districts are being covered under MGNREGS.

     Up to January 2015 in the financial year 2014-15, an amount of Rs.105658.47 Lakh has been utilised against the total available fund of Rs.106980.26 Lakh. The utilisation of fund is 99%. 405.60 Lakh person days have been generated against the total target of 633.13 persondays.
3. Rural Housing Programme:

(i) Indira Awas Yojana:

The scheme provides coverage of at least 60% SC/ST BPL rural households and 40% from other categories. Priority is given to freed bonded labourers, fire victims, families of defence personnel and paramilitary force killed in action and physically handicapped persons. The beneficiaries are selected by Gram Sabha/Pali Sabha from among rural families living Below Poverty Line. Grant-in-Aid is provided to the beneficiaries under the scheme and houses are constructed by themselves. It is a centrally sponsored scheme with funding pattern of 75:25 between centre and state.

Up to January, 2015 in financial year 2014-15, an amount of Rs.41926.72 Lakh has been utilised out of available funds of Rs.172577.54 Lakh. The utilisation of funds is 24%. 13528 number of houses have been completed against the total target of 152966 houses.

(ii) Indira Awas Yojana (FRA):

Government of India sanctioned 99,986 number of additional houses under IAY in 18 IAP districts with an amount of Rs.75000/- per unit and 10 Non IAP districts (except Jagatsinghpur and Puri districts) Rs.70000/- per unit for the beneficiaries of Scheduled Tribe and other Traditional Forest dwellers (Recognition of Forest Rights) Act, 2006 during 2011-12. During 2013-14, an amount of Rs.141.30 crore has been released against the target of 36238 number of houses. It is centrally sponsored scheme with funding pattern of 75:25 between centre and state.

Up to January 2015 in the financial year 2014-15, 6484 number of projects have been completed with expenditure of Rs.19783.64 lakh out of the total available fund of Rs.3103.07 lakh. The utilization of fund is 64%.

(iii) Biju Pucca Ghar (BPG):

The 'Mo Kudia' scheme is termed as “Biju Pucca Ghar” (BPG) Scheme. The unit cost for new construction of dwelling house for the year 2014-15 is Rs.70,000/- for non IAP districts and Rs.75,000/- for IAP districts. The entire fund is provided by the state Government. Up to January 2015, in the financial year 2014-15, an amount of Rs.10779.26 Lakh has been utilised out of available funds of Rs.76863.26 Lakh. The utilisation of fund is 14%. 1108 number of houses have been completed against the total target of 42829 houses.

4. Infrastructure Development:

(i) Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF):

The Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF) is designed to redress regional imbalances in development. The fund will provide financial resources for supplementing and converging existing developmental inflows in to 20 identified districts. It is a central plan scheme being implemented from 2006-07. The entire fund is borne by Govt of India.

Up to January 2015 in the financial year 2014-15, 6484 number of projects have been completed with expenditure of Rs.19783.64 lakh out of the total available fund of Rs.3103.07 lakh. The utilization of fund is 64%.

(ii) Gopabandhu Gramin Yojana (GGY):

It provides additional developmental assistance to targeted 11 districts the state which are not covered under Backward Regions Grant Fund (BRGF). The principal objective is to provide rural infrastructure primarily Bijli, Sadak and Pani to every revenue village in the identified districts.
It is a state plan scheme launched in 2006-07 and the entire fund is provided by the State Government. Expenditure to the tune of Rs.6876.03 lakh has been incurred up to January, 2015 in the financial year 2014-15 against the available funds of Rs.24877.69 lakh which constitutes 28%. 3027 number of works have been completed out of 6221 number of works taken up.

(iii) Cement Concrete Road (CC Road):

The State Government have decided to give thrust to the scheme of construction of cement concrete roads in the villages in every nook and corner of the state with special focus on SC/ST/PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group) habitations. It is a state plan scheme launched in 2010-11 and the entire fund is provided by the State Government.

Expenditure to the tune of Rs.25495.75 lakh has been incurred up to January 2015 in the financial year 2014-15 against the available funds of Rs.54440.54 lakh which constitutes 47%. 9168 number of CC Roads (991.92 kms) have been completed out of 15964 number of CC Roads taken up.

Problems:

Diverse and huge problems in the functioning and working of the Panchayati Raj system which are facing in the day to day activities can be broadly described as mentioned below:

Initially there was domination of the bureaucracy over PRIs. The agent of implementation of all major programmes (CDP or IRDP) has always been the state administration, various parallel bodies that have grossly undermined the importance of PRIs.

Secondly, inadequate financial resources to carry out the administration is a serious problem. The grant-in-aid is the major component of the PRI revenue. The Government should realise the difficulty and try to solve it permanently.

Besides, other major problems are also affecting the structure. These are:

(a) Incompatible relations among 3-tiers;
(b) Undemocratic composition of various PR institutions;
(c) Political bias, and
(d) Uncordial relations between officials and public.

A very peculiar thing is being observed that despite of lot of powers given at grassroot level, the actual development work is not being carried out. Corruption and groupism at village level, casteism, nepotism, in creating community assets is gradually becoming rampant. A lot in the fields of education, health, family planning, land improvement, minor irrigation, sanitation, animal husbandry etc are to be done, but instead of concentrating on development activities the elected representatives are found busy in fulfilling their personal interest, and benefiting to their caste men or other fellows which directly or indirectly serve their vested interests. If the evil of corruption, casteism groupism be allowed to penetrate to grass root level, the whole system of Panchayati Raj will be collapsed one day and it shall be most disastrous to the democratic values envisaged in adopting the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Suggestions:

The Government should take steps to spread education rapidly. The government should also change its former attitude towards the local bodies. The local bodies need better personnel as well as better office organisation and methods. The local bodies should have adequate finance at the disposal to take up manifold developmental activities. Local bodies should be away as far as possible, from the arena of nasty party politics.
Last but not the least, the Panchayati Raj and other local self governing institutions, public life should be free from corruption. People and the leaders should possess a high moral standard. They should be honest, truth-binding, vigilant and well-informed. The establishment of the Panchayati Raj has led to the quest of new leadership. The new leadership should be “development oriented” and not “Power-motivated”. The success of Panchayati Raj much depends on this pattern of emerging leadership. If it is successful, it will bring to a new era of prosperity. We may quote De Jocquevillia, “Local institution constitute the strength of free nations. A nation may establish a system of free government, but without local institutions, it can not have the spirit of liberty.”

**Conclusion:**

The whole exercise of decentralisation of powers is equivalent to the transfer of power from British to the Indians. The Panchayati Raj set up is still in experimental stage. Every experiment has its problems and promises. The Panchayati Raj may have weakness today, but it will be a vital force of tomorrow in shaping and developing the richer and prosperous life of people of India. It requires a movement of the masses. For mobilising the masses for a new task, the leaders are to be trained. It is needless to say that the Panchayati Raj system acts like the grassroot of democracy and a time may come when Jay Prakash Narayan’s dream of “Gram Sabha to Lok Sabha” may be materialised through it. Besides, democratic decentralisation took its shape for better administration and developmental perspectives for quick rural development and cooperation of local people. State Government does not possess adequate wisdom of local affairs and problems. It constitutes a significant contribution to the theory and practice of nation-building activities in the developing areas.

In the words of Professor Dr. Anup Dash, “Given the history and culture of the functioning of Government institutions, especially in rural communities- poor sense of accountability, no learning culture, no culture of interacting with citizens around common goals and objectives, the Result - Based Panchayat Governance is a Paradigm shift and involves cultural change among public officials at the grass root level. But as the process will move, it will generate a lot of hope, excitement, positivism and confidence as also ownership among the different governance partners. Odisha should lead this new initiative and provide a model for others.

**References:**

2. Das, H. Introduction to Panchayati Raj and Community Development in India. New Delhi, Kalyani, 1996.
4. Ghai, K.K. Indian Polity (Democratic Government and Politics in India), New Delhi, P.218.

Rabindra Kumar Behuria, Retired Lecturer, Chandbali College, Chandbali, Bhadrak, Odisha-756133.