CHAPTER II

HISTORIC EVOLUTION OF
DECENTRALIZED DEMOCRATIC AUTHORITIES
IN INDIA

2.1 Early era

During the time of the Rig-Veda (1700 BC), evidences suggest that self-governing village bodies called 'sabhas' existed. With the passage of time, these bodies became panchayats (council of five persons). Panchayats were functional institutions of grassroots governance in almost every village. The Village Panchayat or elected council had large powers, both executive and judicial. Land was distributed by this panchayat which also collected taxes out of the produce and paid the government's share on behalf of the village. Above a number of these village councils there was a larger panchayat or council to supervise and interfere if necessary. Casteism and feudalistic system of governance under Mughal rule in the medieval period slowly eroded the self-government in villages. A new class of feudal chiefs and revenue collectors (zamindars) emerged between the ruler and the people. And, so began the stagnation and decline of self-government in villages.

During the British rule, the autonomy of panchayats gradually declined with the establishment of local civil and criminal courts, revenue and police organizations, the increase in communications, the growth of individualism and the operation of the individual Ryotwari (landholder-wise) system as against the Mahalwari or village tenure system.

The panchayat had never been the priority of the British rulers. The rulers were interested in the creation of 'controlled' local bodies, which could help them in their trading interests by collecting taxes for them. When the colonial administration came under severe financial pressure after the 1857 uprising, the remedy sought was decentralization in terms of transferring responsibility for road and public works to local
bodies. However, the thrust of this 'compelled' decentralization was with respect to municipal administration.

From 1870 that Viceroy Lord Mayo's Resolution (for decentralization of power to bring about administrative efficiency in meeting people's demand and to add to the finances of colonial regime) gave the needed impetus to the development of local institutions. It was a landmark in the evolution of colonial policy towards local government. The real benchmarking of the government policy on decentralization can, however, be attributed to Lord Ripon who, in his famous resolution on local self-government on May 18, 1882, recognized the twin considerations of local government: (i) administrative efficiency and (ii) political education. The Ripon Resolution, which focused on towns, provided for local bodies consisting of a large majority of elected non-official members and presided over by a non-official chairperson. This resolution met with resistance from colonial administrators. The progress of local self-government was tardy with only half-hearted steps taken in setting up municipal bodies. Rural decentralization remained a neglected area of administrative reform.

**Indian village autonomy – a historical summary**

A historic context of village autonomy as it has emerged through the ages will provide a better perspective to Indian planners concerned with rural reforms. Vedic and post-vedic sources\(^{85}\) show Indian village as a self-sufficient and autonomous miniature republic. The autonomous village is best described by Sir Charles Metcalfe in his famous minute of 1830 in which he wrote:

The village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves. They seem to last where nothing else lasts. 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 cause

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\(^{85}\) Altekar describes the lack of original sources for a better understanding of polity during the vedic period as compared to the mauryan age and the succeeding periods of Indian history. See A, S, Altekar, *State and Government in Ancient India*, (Motilal Banarasidass, Banaras, 1955)
to the preservation of the peoples of India, and the enjoyment of freedom and independence86.

The *vedic* age

The village during the *vedic* age was administered by a respected official who in turn was advised by a council of elders. The Ramayana cites a village leader of great prestige called *Gramani*, He was held in high esteem so much so that when Rama killed Ravana, the happy gods, in singing praises to him, compared him to a general and a *Gramani*87:" That the *Gramani* enjoyed high status in the village can be noted furthermore in that "at the royal consecration, the king's entourage consisted of a *Gramani*, a *Suta* (charioteer), and a *Bhagdunga* (collector of taxes)." As one Indian historian has written:

*Gramani* was probably at the head of the village administration. The post carried considerable prestige and is described to be the object of the highest ambition of a *Vaisya*, The king exercised his powers over the village through the *Gramani*.

A *Gram Vridhas* (council of village elders) and the whole village cooperated with him in collecting dues for the state.

The *mauryan* age

The *mauryan* age village administration during this period (324 B.C.-236 B.C.), was closely linked with agriculture. The village size ranged from 100 to 500 families. Boundaries were demarcated by river, hill, forest, ditches, tanks, bunds, and trees situated at one or two *krosha* (1 *krosha* equals 2 miles) presumably for mutual protection with neighboring villages88. The following officials composed the village administrative staff: (1) the headman (*Adhyaksha*), (2) the accountant (*Samkhayaka*), (3) village officials of different grades (*Sthanikas*), (4) the village couriers (*Jamgha karika*), and (5) the veterinary doctor (*Anikastha*). In addition, the *Chikitsaka* (in charge of sanitation) and the *Ashwa-damak* (horse trainer) were also village officials. All these

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87 H.D. Malaviya, *Village Panchayats in India*, Economic and Political Research Department, All India Congress Committee, New Delhi, 1956, p. 45 (Ramayana Yuddha-kanda, Shloka 17, Sarga 116.)
88 Ibid., pp. 71-72, Altekar, op. cit., p. 319
functionaries were given land free of rent and taxes but they were not allowed to sell or mortgage the land.89

Vidyalankar cites the degree of governmental control over the village. Every village had its own sabha (assembly) which debated all matters relating to the village; rules helpful to the entire community were framed, and the offenders were punished through regular trials and judgments. The sabha was the centre of the multifarious activities of the village. It discussed religious and social matters. It arranged numerous types of entertainments. The sabha met under a shady tree. Representatives of village families, the elders, and other experienced folk gathered there. The Indian people lived independently in these self-governing village republics90.

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The village administration was in charge of a headman designated as a Grameyaka or as a Gramadhyaksha. He had a clerk to work under him to keep the records. The headman was assisted in his work by a non-official council. The village councils were known as Janapadas in the Gupta administration.

The main responsibilities of the village council were defence, settlement of communal disputes, collection of revenues, organization of public works, and acting as a trustee for minors92. Justice was administered by royal officials with the help of the,

89 Malaviya, op. cit.87, p. 72
90 Satyaketu Vidyalankur, Maurya Samrajya Ka Itihas (It is in Hindi, English translation of the title reads- History of the Mauryan Empire) Indian Press, Allahabad, 1928, pp. 210-211 as quoted by Malaviya, op. cit.87, p.74.
91 Altekar says: "The Grama or village continued to be the smallest administrative unit; headman was known as Griirnarii, Gramika or Gramanayaka or Gramabhojaka. He was assisted in the administration by a council of elders, Grama-mahattaras, as in the earlier period." Altekar, op. cit., p. 331
92 Ibid at p. 342
village councilor assembly. In certain cases the assembly alone sat in judgment and passed sentence\(^93\).

In southern-most region of India the "lowest administrative units were the Kurram (union of villages) and grama (village) each under its own headman who was assisted by assemblies (Ur, Mahasabha)\(^94\). In summary, the village headman and the accountant, both prominent officials in the Vedic and Mauryan periods, continued to play an important part in village administration during the Gupta period, although the village council took various forms but it retained most of its earlier functions.

**The Mughal Period**

The traditional officers, headman, accountant, and watchman, were active and the village, continued to be the basic unit of administration and it was little altered by the vicissitudes of Mughal, Mahratta rule. Each village had a number of hereditary native officials. The most important was the headman, usually referred to as the patel, who collected the revenue and in Madras was a petty magistrate and civil judge; the patwin, or accountant, in charge of the village accounts, registers of holdings, and records connected with the land revenues; and the chowkidar, or watchman, the rural policeman\(^95\).

This feeling is shared by Majumdar and his associates\(^96\). Samant's view on the judicial aspect of the panchayats is that the village councils under Muslim rule had the support of the state because "when muhammadan interests were involved, the decision of a panchayat was enforced by the ruling monarch which is a sufficient proof to show that the power of the State was always behind the village councils\(^97\). It can thus be inferred that the administrative structure as well as the spirit of the panchayats remained basically intact from Vedic period through mauryan and gupta periods up to the end of mughal rule in India.

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\(^{94}\) Ibid at p. 195

\(^{95}\) Cecil Cross, *The Development of Self-Government in India 1858-1914*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1922, p. 27. Although it lasted up to 1858 when the English finally took over after the mutiny, but effective Mughal rule in India was from 1526 Baber's invasion to 1707 in the year of Emperor Aurangzib's death.

\(^{96}\) Majumdar op. cit. pp. 381 and 560

2.2 The British Rule

As seen and described by the British colonial officials, the typical Indian village has its central residential site, with an open space for a pond and cattle stand. Stretching around this nucleus lie the village lands, consisting of cultivated area and (very often) grounds for grazing and woodcutting. The arable lands have their several boundary marks, and their little sub-divisions of earth ridges made for retaining rain or irrigation water. The inhabitants of such a village pass their life in the midst of these simple surroundings, welded together in a little community with its own organization and government, which differ in character in the various types of villages, its body of detailed customary rules, and its little staff of functionaries, artisans, and traders98.

The most characteristic feature of the government of a village was the village councilor panchayat (literally, council of five), In Matthai's view, the village council might designate either a general meeting of the inhabitants or a select committee chosen from among them99.

The headman in non-landlord villages "has always been part of the original Constitution, holding all important position in every sphere of village life," while in the landlord type, the headman is comparatively, a government creation and the original purpose of his appointment was simply to act as an intermediary in revenue matters between the proprietary body and the government100.

With this distinction between the two systems of land-holding, the changes can be seen more clearly. Under the centralized British regime, all activities were initiated and directed from the center. The village autonomy had no important place in the scheme. Because the British rulers deemed it wise and profitable to have direct dealing with the tenants, the existing village machinery was, therefore, relegated to the background101. The land revenue allotment and collection which till then was vested in the village councils was allowed to lapse in favor of direct dealing with the tenant102. The traditional village headman and accountant became paid government servants.

99 Matthai, ibid. at pp. 15-16
100 Ibid at p. 10
101 Samant, op. cit. p. 23
102 Ibid. at p. 23
Thus, the villagers were not only deprived of their land revenue share but their leaders were also reduced to salaried government employees.

In judicial matters, the regular courts established, by law, influenced even distant villages. The British administrators would not enforce local panchayat courts decisions. Statute law, therefore, in many ways replaced the social and religious traditions. The panchayat, an effective institution of social control before the advent of British rule, was gradually made ineffective with the introduction of a more formalistic, legalistic, and impersonal system of justice.

The introduction of this British system of justice by regular courts and fixed laws, naturally, tended to suppress the indigenous agencies, whether caste assemblies or guilds, by which the customary usages regulating the conduct and rights of the members of the communities were constantly though unconsciously modified to suit the changing conditions.

With the introduction of centralized colonial administration under the British, the traditionally self-sufficient and self-governing character of the village was almost completely eroded. However, the British government later, realizing the efficacy of traditional village system of self-government, tried to extend some semblance of local autonomy to the Indian village. The success or failure in British attempts at panchayat reform can be made clear by describing in the succeeding discussion the role of the Indian nationalist movement.

2.3 Panchayat and the nationalist movement

The Secretary of State for India at that time realizing the lag, appointed a Royal Commission on Decentralization which investigated in 1907-1908 the crucial issue of local self-government. The Indian National Congress took for the first time a stand on the problem of restoration of village panchayat in 1909 and in its 24th Session held in Lahore in December passed the following resolution:

This Congress expresses its satisfaction that the Secretary of State has recognized that the Local Self-Government scheme of 1882 has not had a fair trial and has pressed on the Government of India the necessity of an in-effectual advance in the direction of making local, urban and rural bodies really self-
governing and it expresses the earnest hope that the Government will be pleased to take early steps to make all local bodies from village panchayats upwards elective with elected non-official chairman and to support them with adequate financial aid\textsuperscript{103}.

The recommendations of the Decentralization Commission like the local self-government scheme of 1882 remained unfulfilled. The Congress, in its Karachi session held in December, 1913, regretted the non-implementation of the measures of the Commission and passed a resolution urging anew increased powers and resources for local units\textsuperscript{104}.

**Gandhi on Panchayats**

The Congress party's preoccupation with *swaraj* (self-rule) movement and the non-enforcement of Decentralization Commission's recommendations retarded the re-emergence of panchayat for some time. Although no immediate prospect of progress was within sight, the public interest was kept alive by two classical treaties on local government.\textsuperscript{105}

### 2.4 British Attempts to revive the Panchayats

The British rulers made many unsuccessful attempts to reform local government in the country\textsuperscript{106}. The Royal Commission on Decentralization of 1907 will be treated because it reveals the general pattern of British attempts at reform and the causes of their failure. The Commission appointed by Edward VII considered the whole subject of local self-government. The Commission agreed that "throughout the greater part of India, the village constitute; the primary territorial unit of Government organization, and from the villages are built up larger administrative entities."\textsuperscript{107} These villages, according to this report, "formerly possessed a large degree of autonomy," but this autonomy the Commission continued:

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{103} Malavya, op. cit. pp. 215-216
\item \textsuperscript{104} Ibid. at p. 216
\item \textsuperscript{105} John Matthai, *Village Government in British India*, Op cit. 98 and Radhakumud Mukerji, *Local Government in Ancient India*, op. cit. 86
\item \textsuperscript{106} For the many other attempts to revive local government by the British, administrators in India, see Matthai, op. cit. 98 pp. 162-198.
\end{itemize}
“... has now disappeared owing to the establishment of local civil and criminal courts, the present revenue and police organization, the increase of communication, the growth of individualism, and the operation of the individual raiyatwari system which is extending even in the north of India. Nevertheless, the village remains the first unit of administration, the principal village functionaries—the headman, the accountant and the village watchman—are largely utilized and paid by the Government, and there is still a certain amount of common village feeling and interests.”

The Commission recommended the individual village as the ordinary unit of panchayat administration, and the membership of five as “as good average,” though local variations were allowed. The report also urged that the village headman "should be ex-officio chairman of the Panchayat, as being ex-hypothesi the most influential person in the village." the recommendations of the Commission were laudable. But the provision that panchayats would be under the control of the district authorities virtually negated the reformative intent of the report. The nationalists felt that village officials' dependence upon government superiors defeated the spirit and intent of decentralization.

2.5 Panchayats since Independence

In the first drafts of the constitution, no mention was made of the village panchayats. Gandhi deplored this omission and called for "immediate attention if our independence is to reflect the people's voice. The greater the power of the Panchayats, the better for the people" 108.

Panchayats in Second Five Year Plan

The development of the village along cooperative lines and 'ultimately the economic prosperity of the country would depend on the effective functioning of panchayats. The reconstruction of the village along cooperative lines implies, firstly, that a more or less homogeneous social structure in which different sections of the community have equal opportunities is brought into existence, and secondly, that the economic basis of village life is greatly expanded. Measures relating to land reform, development of village industries, establishment of village panchayats have to be

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108 Harijan, 21st December 1947, as quoted in Malaviya, op. cit. 87, p. 256.
considered in relation to these two basic objectives the agency which provides direction and leadership in the village is the panchayat. The development of panchayats has to be a fundamental item in the programme of national extension and community projects\textsuperscript{109}.

**Panchayats in the Third Five Year Plan**

Major responsibility for the implementation of development work at the block level is placed on the block Panchayat samiti.\textsuperscript{110} This body works closely with the village panchayat and the zilla parishad, the unit at the district level. Four criteria have been set for successful projects through democratic decentralization at the district and block levels\textsuperscript{110}:

1. The way each panchavat samiti and panchayat mobilizes local manpower and other resources and elicits the people's cooperation.
2. District administration's responsibility at all levels for making supplies and services available at the right time according to the accepted programs and for preventing loss due to waste or misapplication of funds.
3. Panchayat samitis and panchayats should stress increased agricultural production.
4. Panchayat samitis and panchayats should emphasize measures to raise the level of living of the less privileged sections to the level of other groups in the area.

In order to fulfill the objectives of the third plan and meet the target set, many states have evolved their own pattern of decentralization suitable to local conditions. This is being enforced in different states: namely, Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Madras, Mysore, Orissa, Punjab, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh etc.

**2.6 Administrative Mechanism in Malabar, Kochi and Travancore**

Apart from other east coast territories, for administrative purposes, Malabar was not divided into villages. In Malabar, Parishes functioned as local units. For revenue administration each *taluk* was divided into *amsams*. The ten *taluks* of Malabar district were divided into 426 *amsams*. But owing to the lack of scientific geographical survey

\textsuperscript{109} Draft Outline of the Second Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, 1956, pp. 66-70

\textsuperscript{110} See Third Five Year Plan, Planning Commission, Government of India, New Delhi, (1961) op, cit.
the territorial area of *amsam* was not so clear and specific during that period. Acceptability of census data also was doubtful\(^{111}\).

As per the analysis of the British administrators in Malabar, there was no village units in the traditional Hindu format of grama. Instead, the country was under military administration of traditional indigenous rulers from *naduvazhi* to *deshavazhi* at different levels with inherited or vested powers of the rulers\(^{112}\).

Later certain changes may be seen in this context, by which it was stated that as any other province of India, in Malabar also the revenue administration was divided into districts and villages from earlier period of history. The jurisdictional limits of such villages exist even today without much change. Heads of such villages and districts held their status and power through traditional inheritance pattern and the villages were known as *desams* in the history\(^{113}\). The local rulers considered *thara* as their lowest basic unit. But it is not logical or reasonable to provide much relevance to village administration and to consider this as much influential in highly autocratic governance system of those countries. Whereas the local villages, *thara* had much resemblance with similar type of village republics in other parts of the nation due to their survival as little republics under a *karanavar* or *kartha* or senior citizen as the local authority.

*Kozhikode Nadu* was divided into 125 *desams*, at the same time 72 *thara* were also functional there simultaneously. *Nadu* was governed under a representative platform known as *nattukootam*. The *nattukootam* was usually vested with powers to consider and dispose of allegations against even ministers and officials of the state\(^{114}\).

The local governance unit, *thara*, continued during the period of Mysore rulers. And they were converted into subdivisions of the district known as *hobali* during British period, with little but expansion in their area and population. But *hobali* was not fruitful in the government administration in satisfactory manner and hence they had to be reconstituted so as to serve those responsibilities as mentioned by Sir Thomas Munro\(^{115}\). Actually the *hobali* was not real village administration mechanism in its legal sense. In

\(^{112}\) Warden, *Revenue Board Report* (1815 September) p.12, para 63-64  
\(^{113}\) See Sir Thomas Munro, *Revenue Report* (1817 July 4)  
\(^{114}\) Supra n.1 at 111  
\(^{115}\) Supra n. 3 at 113
actual practice they were caused to extent the chain of administration instead of linking and assisting the district collector in the governance process.

During 1822-23, the *hobali* system was abolished and replaced by *amsam* through the reforms introduced by the then special commissioner H. S. Grame. Around 2000 *amsams* constituted during that period were reduced into 425 in number afterwards due to their reconstitution by different *amsam adhikaris*. Mr. Grame failed to differentiate *thara* and *amsam*. Hence due to the reforms introduced during that period, the village administration jointly performed by several elder citizens in the *Grama thara* became autocratic administration of *adhikaris* appointed by the rulers. Former *deshavazhis*, who were not appointed as *adhikaris*, were entrusted with their traditional status and powers by the rulers. Hence transformation from previous village government, i.e, *thara* to real local self-government known as *amsam* absolutely failed. Thereafter, the governmental administration of each *parish* (*amsam*) was performed by *adhikaris* and in addition to these a headman, a *menon* (Accountant) and two or three *kolkar* (policemen) were appointed by the then government\(^{116}\). This system of public governance was continual up to the period of the elected district boards in Malabar region.

**Village administration in Cochin**

The nature of the early village organization of Cochin as of West Coast has been generally the same. Its substantial account was given by Sir Thomas Munro in 1817\(^{117}\). The State was divided into districts (*nadu*) and subdivided into villages (*desams*) under the Headman (*deshavazhi – janmi*) which enjoyed different powers and rights such as:

- The *ambalapathi* – ceremonious head of temples in the village
- The *urayma* – management of temples, lands and servants.
- The *karayma* – controller of marriages and other public ceremonies of village
- The *deshapathi* – general superintendence of law and order including offences within the village

The powers and rights were severable and separable as well as the status of *deshavazhi* or *janmi* were decided accordingly. There were usually few *pramanis* for a

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116 Ibid at p.84  
117 *The Cochin State Manual*, p.412
desam or village, but they were not regularly appointed or hereditarily entrusted. Instead they were only designated from time to time within the neighbourhood.

The village system remained substantially till 1762 when the naduvazhis and deshavazhis were deprived of their powers of governance. There after the State was divided into kovilakathumvatils or taluks, under karyakar and sub-divided into thirty pravritis, the units of village administration under pravriti karyakar or parvatyakaran. They were assisted by one or more accountants (menons), a cash-keeper (chandrakaran), pramanakars (registrars), tannadar, chowkidars (policemen), vicharippukars (foresters) etc. as government servants. In 1762 there were 12 taluks in Cochin, which was reduced to 10 by 1860 and once again reconstituted into 6 taluks in 1907, by merger and realignment. By 1813 a chief accounts officer was also appointed to assist karyakar known as tirumukham. In 1818, the karyakar was re-designated as taksildar and tirumukham into samprathi. Taksildar was vested with police and magisterial powers initially. But in 1907 those powers were separated118.

By 1762 there were two major administrative divisions in Cochin known as thekkemukham and vadakkemugham under each sarvadhikaryakars. During 1813 these officers were abolished and karyakars were placed under the district order of the Diwan. In 1822 diwan peshkar was appointed to assist the diwan. In 1878 a deputy peshkar was also appointed and continued till 1895 without much difference in designation and powers119. There was no participatory or democratic system of governance in the Cochin princely state during this period of time.

Local Government system in Travancore

Local government system of Travancore was chiefly conducted through the agencies called as municipalities under the regulation promulgated by the Maharaja120. These bodies were presided over by non-official known as elected Chairman. Whereas in Trivandrum, the whole time salaried official nominated by the government was the president of the municipality.

Construction of streets and their maintenance, lighting the streets, maintenance and preservation of public health, vaccination, registration of birth and deaths, basic

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118 Ibid at p.416
119 Ibid at p.417
120 The Travancore Municipal Regulation, 1920
education, public convenience etc. were the main duties vested with such municipalities. Trained women were engaged in midwifery functions\(^{121}\). The system of the removal of sewerage by means of motor lorries was introduced in Trivandrum Municipality by 1927. Establishment of markets, *pounds* and vehicle stands were undertaken by municipalities by that time. Municipal toll gates were instituted to collect rates for animals and vehicles. To compensate the municipalities in their losses of revenue, grants were sanctioned and suitably increased\(^{122}\).

During the sessions of Sri Mulam Popular Assembly, the demands for creation of local government boards to foster and develop local self-government in rural areas, villages and panchayats were considered. It was stated as, the domain of urban and rural self-government was the great training ground from which political progress and a sense of responsibility have taken their start and it was felt that the time has come to quicken the advance, to accelerate the rate of progress, and this to stimulate the sense of responsibility in the average citizen and to enlarge his experience\(^{123}\).

In accordance with this proclamation, a specific regulation for constitution of village panchayat was pronounced\(^{124}\), and in several places such village panchayats were established there under. They were also entrusted to attend village roads, street lighting, improvement of water tanks and wells etc. Out of total 36 members of the village board, 25 were elected by the people themselves and rest were nominated by the government\(^{125}\).

### 2.7 Democratic Decentralization: Kerala Experiment and Experience

Democratic decentralization is the process of devolution of powers, functions and resources of the State to the elected representatives and institutions of lower levels of governance so as to facilitate greater direct participation of the citizens in administrative process. A major drawback of Indian democracy has been that participation of citizens in government was more or less limited to the periodic exercise of the franchise to elect representatives to the Central and the state governments. The

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121 *Travancore State Manual*, Chapter XXXV, pp.241-43  
122 Ibid at p.243  
123 The Regulation and Proclamation of Travancore, Vol V, p.1105  
124 The Travancore Village Panchayat Regulation, 1925  
125 *Travancore State Manual*, Chapter XXXV, p.244
parliamentary system existed only at the central state level, whereas at the district and the lower levels the powers were concentrated at departmental bureaucracies, who were accountable only to hierarchical superiors. Previous local government institutions existed in the country was either caste-wise, religious or executive instrumentality or mere administrative apparatus of higher level government mechanism. An important aspect of democratic decentralization is to bring bureaucratic State machinery at the lower levels under the control of elected local self-governments. The concept of democratic decentralization developed here requires that not only appropriate institutions and opportunities but also necessary capabilities would have to be created at the lower levels for ordinary citizens to participate in the decision-making, planning, implementation, enforcement, monitoring, auditing, benefit sharing and other related activities.

Democratization and development

The above process of democratization may contribute to acceleration of economic growth and greater economic welfare of citizens in many ways. Most of the traditional arguments in economic theory favour decentralization related to advantages of local decision-making process. As Oates has argued, “the tastes and preferences of the people are spatially differentiated and welfare can be maximized only by providing services consistent with these differences.” Such specific local choices can be made only locally. Bringing the point of decision-making to the point of action can significantly reduce the cost of information, it is almost a truism of public finance that local bodies are more efficient with respect to allocation of function, while stabilization and redistribution functions are better served by central government.

The arguments favouring local level decision-making process is further strengthened if, in addition to the traditional civic duties, economic development is also regarded as local body function. Local level planning then becomes necessary not only to take note of the preferences of the people, but also natural endowments if they are catered by each local body. Planning has to be a multilevel process. Each level of administration has functions that are most optimally taken up at the level. Land and

126 See Oates E.W, *Fiscal Federalism*, Newyork (1972)
water management, small-scale production, particularly, agriculture and cottage industry – and locally specific services are best planned at the local level.\textsuperscript{129} Centralization inevitably leads to narrow departmentalization, fragmentation and duplication and lack of complementarities between programmes at the ground level. Only through decentralization and by making department officials accountable to elected representatives at local level can horizontal linkages and integrated programmes be ensured.

Democratic decentralization may also contribute to significant improvements in the efficiency of implementation, particularly if the development process is made participatory as well as transparent. This helps to prevent misuses and leakage of resources and allows better monitoring of programmes. Participation may also help to tap dormant local resources in the form of monetary donations, material contributions and voluntary labour. In a labour surplus situation characterized by high degree of disguised unemployment, community participation may make significant contribution of resources of creation of social and physical infrastructure.

Asset management and utilization may be taken over by the community, ensuring equitable distribution of resources. Public vigilance and social ombudsman as watch dog on governance may ensure responsive service delivery, corruption free administration and public accountability in governance process.

Apart from the above material resources potential, democratic decentralization may help what some theorists call social capital. There exist a vast arena of interpersonal relations or small group and community networks where order is maintained without recourse to State legislation on the basis of trust and norms – governed behaviours.\textsuperscript{130} Such informal norms, mutual trust and interpersonal networks may significantly reduce transaction costs of collective action and economic exchange and when appropriately linked to State interventions generate significant synergies.\textsuperscript{131} In this respect as much as with physical capital, social capital becomes an important asset in development. One may not want to join the currently popular tendency of converting capital into a historical category independent of social relations. Not all

\textsuperscript{129} See Planning Committee Guideline for Formulation of District Plans, Planning Commission of India, Government of India, New Delhi (1969)

\textsuperscript{130} See Ellickson Robert, Order Without law, How Neighbours Settle Disputes, Cambridge (1991)

forms of trust or social networking are conducive to promoting developmental objectives. Democratic decentralization, however has the potential of state – civil society synergy is a powerful argument for decentralization.

**Retarded decentralization**

The question still remains, why despite powerful arguments in favour of democratic decentralization, democratically elected governments in the third world continue to be highly centralized in structure. Besides colonial legacy there are three possible factors that contribute to the above situation. First, the social and economic crises in these countries have been powerful stimulus for centralization. It is well known how in independent India the green revolution strategy and Centrally planned vertical programmes that emerged as a response to the crisis of the mid-sixties coincided with dismantling of the first generation of local bodies. Secondly, they are powerful political and bureaucratic vested interest who has consciously thwarted all attempts to decentralize. Thirdly, successful decentralization involves certain preconditions such as existing appropriate legal and administrative framework, local information based capacity building programs and civic culture. No doubt that these preconditions are most important for democratic decentralization to take root. But to make fulfillment of these preconditions a requirement to introduction of democratic decentralization is only a ploy to postpone substantial devolution of power to lower levels. The federal policy, social plurality, economic equity, administrative transparency etc. may be ensured only through restructuring of the State government systems and mechanisms.

By the enforcement of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments, elected representative bodies at district, taluk/block and village level in the rural areas and the towns and cities with uniform five year terms have become an inherent part of the state structure. They also have introduced an element of social justice through substantial reservation of dalit communities and women in the above bodies and to the posts of important offices. Most importantly grama sabhas (assembly of voters in different villages or parts thereof) have been given constitutional status. Similarly ward committees in municipal areas are constitutional entities. Yet, the Constitution remains far removed from the ideal decentralized structure. It still remains quasi-federal in nature with heavy concentration of power in the Centre. There has been no restructuring of the Centre-State relations. State Government continues to enjoy
considerable discretion in allocating functions and powers to local bodies. Further, segregation of rural and urban areas in the Constitution has foreclosed the possibility of a government at the district level that would have full control over district administrative machinery.

Though the Constitution speaks self-governing unit at the local level it does not envisage substantial devolution of regulatory functions. Even with respect to development functions the devolution of powers, finances and functional autonomy of the local self-government institutions are not clearly mandated. A major weakness is that the Constitution does not mandate a minimum list of functions to be devolved to such institutions. The Constitution can be given credit at the most for creating only an enabling framework. The extent or limit of transfer of powers, functions and responsibilities from the Centre to the State and to the lower tiers were left to the whims and fancies of the bureaucracy and was decided by regional or sub-regional politics. It was left to the State Government to determine the extent and scope of actual devolution. The actual powers and functions devolved to these new institutions vary widely among the States with many providing no enhancement of local powers over the past. The unwillingness of the Central Government to devolve any of its own powers to States is the basic factor responsible for this. One is tempted to recall the observation of EMS Namboothiripad, the chief architect of people’s planning, that in such a situation it was surprising that neither the bureaucrat nor politician at the State level was prepared to decentralize whatever power had been conferred to the State under the Constitution.132

State Finance Commissions have been appointed and reports have been submitted. Analysis of the reports shows that the resources devolved to the local self-government would not increase substantially even if their recommendations are implemented. More than the increase in resources, a major positive impact of the state finance commissions would be the reduction of arbitrariness by the State Governments in devolution of funds. Devolution of funds and distribution of programmes and schemes still depend on the Central and State governments and their policies from time to time. Executive guidelines, directives, prescriptions, mandatory allocations etc. again reduce the ambit of autonomy of local self-government institutions. The District Planning Commissions (DPCs) are yet to function effectively and involvement of local

bodies in planning has not undergone any qualitative change. It is in the context of such fairly adverse environment that the on-going experiment for decentralized planning in Kerala assumes particular significance.

What are the salient features of Kerala’s decentralization programmes that make it special? There are four important points of departure for Kerala model when compared to decentralization programmes of other states or to the best of knowledge, in other parts of the world.

**Reversal of sequence of the decentralization process**

Democratization involves a number of processes related to changes in administrative structure, allocation of functions and powers, and control of resources. All three are interrelated and to an extent have to be introduced simultaneously. But the concept of decentralization reforms cautions that the changes be effected gradually. Typically it may be argued that preconditions for successful decentralization, and this according to a sequence and with a clear demarcation of function between various levels, have to be met. Administrative support structures have to be created by establishing horizontal linkage effecting institutional changes, redeploying staff, generating an information base and training personal.

Awareness creation is also important. The devolution of financial resources is to be limited by absorption capacity of the nascent institutions. It is almost a case of cutting a coat to suit the size of the cloth. For various reasons preconditions would be seldom met and financial devolution would continue to be namesake. The model of decentralization presumes a linearity of implementations informed by a social technocratic vision in which blueprint may be deployed in a frictionless environment.

In Kerala the above sequence of decentralization has been reversed. One of the first decisions taken by the newly elected government in 1996 was to earmark 35 to 40% of the outlay of the Ninth Five Year Plan towards projects and promises to be drawn by local authorities. During 1997-98 the total resources devolved worked out to be Rs. 1025 crores, and in 1998-99 Rs. 1178 crores, not counting funds from Centrally sponsored schemes and institutional loans that could be availed of by local bodies with government guarantee. This indeed was a substantial hike in plan funds earmarked to local authorities. Before 1996-97 the share in the annual plan was limited to a paltry
amount of untied funds that averaged around Rs. 20 crores. As a result, it has been estimated that share of panchayats in the total government expenditure, which historically averaged around 3%, has increased nearly threefold.133

There was no doubt that the administrative capacity and experience of the newly elected members did not warrant such a large-scale devolution. Instead of waiting for gradual administrative capacity-building through reforms, the Government opted to take the plunge and devolve funds. Given the sequences of decentralization, it was inevitable that there would be serious problems during the stage of implementation of plans. The necessity would then compel the Government to carry out essential complementary reforms and create conditions for successful financial devolution. Given the inherent limitations of a coalition government and inevitable minimum time required for the immense task of building new complex of rules and procedure, the administrative reforms such as redeployment of staff and even legislative process have been slow. One can imagine what would have been the fate of decentralization if the normal sequence of reforms process has been adhered to.

As equally important as the size of the plan funds devolved was the nature of devolution. In 1997-98, 75% of the devolution, i.e, Rs. 749 crores was in terms of grant-in-aid and the rest in the form of schemes sponsored by State Government. The latter component was to be further reduced over time. The share of grant-in-aid component was confined to relatively small amount to so called untied fund. In contrast the nature of financial devolution in Kerala is such as to permit maximum autonomy to the local authorities.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that financial devolution is being used as an instrument to bring about a functional division of labour between State Government and local authorities. The formal functional distribution of power between the State Government and local bodies under the Panchayat Raj Act and Municipal Acts was subject-wise rather than in terms of definite activities. This resulted in considerable overlap and duplication. Negotiation of schematic activity-wise demarcation of functions would have been very difficult and time consuming owing to resistance from departments. Instead of going through the above routine, the Local Self-Government

Institutions (LSGIs) were given autonomy to formulate any project that could be taken up within their capabilities.

A calculation shows that during the previous decade under Kerala scheme, i.e. scheme, whose location and benefits may be identified within the boundaries of a district, had been around 30% of the annual plan outlay to the local bodies, predominantly in the form of grant-in-aid implied that sooner or later the State Government would have to confine itself to State level schemes alone. During 1996-97 the first year of the decentralized planning most of the departments insisted on continuing all their traditional schemes and there was considerable duplication between the department programmes and those of the LSGIs. But the situation also created considerable strain on the overstretched financial resources for the departments and in subsequent years most of the departments on their own, gave up schemes and programmes that the LSGIs had chosen. Thus village roads and minor irrigation have virtually disappeared from State Government’s plan. Even though by law all piped water supply schemes are monopoly of the Kerala Water Authority (KWA), it no longer takes up small scale projects.

Planning as an instrument of social mobilization

The second distinctive feature of decentralization under Kerala model is the Central role allotted to the planning function of LSGIs. A comprehensive area plan is to be prepared by each local body before they can claim the grant-in-aid. In Kerala itself during the five year of the new local bodies in 1996-97 a total of ₹212 crores of rupees had been provided to them and untied fund “to initiate the preparation and implementation of local level need based plan programmes for development”. But no local body had prepared any plan. The most common method adopted was merely to provide funds equally between ward members for various works (mostly roads), selected by them. The attempt was to break this tradition by insisting on comprehensive area plans. Sectoral planning process and considerable allocation for primary sector has rejuvenated the agriculture based social initiative in Kerala.

Apart from the comprehensive nature of the local plans and the maximum autonomy given to the LSGIs in plan formulation, the micro level planning methodology adopted in Kerala is singular from similar experiments in other States by the insistences on mass participation and transparency. The district is no more the basic
planning unit. The planning process starts from grass roots with maximum involvement of the masses. It is a genuine bottom up planning process. Mass participation is not limited to elected representatives or voluntary agencies but includes ordinary people assembling in grama sabhas and no official experts and volunteers participate in the preparation of reports formulating projects and drafting the plan. The officials are to work alongside non-officials. The people’s planning campaign was launched to empower around the elected local bodies by rallying official experts, volunteers and mass of people around them, so that the impediments to the local level planning may be overcome.

In order to ensure transparency and participation without compromising the technical objectivity of the planning process, a sequence of phases, each with its distinctive objectives, nodal activities and training programme, was drawn up. In the subsequent years also similar sequence of activities with necessary modification were undertaken in the preparation of the plan.

An important component of the people’s campaign was fairly elaborate capacity-building for training programmes. The campaign was the largest non-formal education campaign, the country had ever witnessed. At the local level more than a lakh persons received at least five days of training. All the elected representatives were expected to participate in the training programme at one level or other. Each round of training focused on definite planning activities that had to be undertaken. Separate handbooks were prepared for each round. Planning is a technical process that involves an assessment of the needs and resources, the fixing of the priorities, the preparation of the projects and formulation of the plan. But in the case of Kerala model the process of planning has been much more than a technical exercise. It occupied centre stage because it was being used as an instrument for social mobilization in support of decentralization.

**Panchayat raj legislation in Kerala**

The first major Communist Party involvement with the local bodies was in 1952 when it won elections to the Malabar District Board. The District Board played an important role in spreading education and health facilities in Malabar. A serious debate within the Party about the role of local bodies in the administrative structure took place after formation of the State of Kerala. EMS Namboothiripad, the Chief Minister,
chaired and the Administrative Reforms Committee (1958) addressed the administrative reform of the newly formed State of Kerala. An important cornerstone of the vision of future administrative edifice of the State was local self-government.

The report argued for a two-tier setup, panchayats and municipalities at the grass root level and a district council at the District level. Besides the normal civic functions and development duties, the function and powers of panchayats included significant responsibilities in revenue administration and a number of other regulatory functions. In this respect it went much beyond what was recommended by even Belvantrai Mehta Committee which had by and large looked at the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) as merely popular developmental agencies.

With respect to district council, the Administrative Reforms Committee (1958) was divided into two opposite views both of which were presented in the text. One position was that the council need only have advisory powers and therefore need only be constituted through indirect elections and exofficio membership. The opposite view was that elected District Councils, should function as institutions and take charge of all aspects of development work. The District Council Bill introduced in the Assembly in 1958 visualized a comprehensive district council that would coordinate the functions of both the panchayat and municipalities in the District and also take over the entire development administration in a phased manner.

The Bills could not be passed as the Government was dismissed and the assembly was dissolved. Subsequent legislation passed in 1960 and 1961 were watered down version of the draft Bill drawn up by the previous ministry and in terms of implementation, a far cry from the declared legislative intentions. The role of panchayats in Kerala was limited to what are known as civic duties and the district council was put in the cold storage.

In 1967 E.M.S Namboothiripad ministry again introduced Kerala Panchayati Raj Bill (1967) with a two-tier system – panchayat at the lower level and zilla parishad at the District Level. At the Select Committee stage, the Bill underwent significant modifications to which the Chief Minister made significant contributions. The zilla parishad, which was visualized to be a unit of planning and development, was renamed district council and its functions redefined as “the administration of a district in respect
of matters enumerated in the first schedule shall be vested in the district council”. This Bill was lapsed since the ministry was brought down.

A Kerala District Administration Bill was introduced in 1971, reintroduced once again in 1978 and finally passed in 1979 while A. K. Antony was the Chief Minister. The Act was not implemented during the next decade. The attempt of the left coalition government in 1981 to implement the law was scuttled by the major coalition partner, a breakaway faction of the Congress. Finally, it was during the left democratic ministry of 1987-91 that measures were taken for implementation of the Act. A commission was set up to study the 1978 Act to make recommendation for rectifying many of its defects, certain essential changes were made and election conducted in February 1990. The District Council was constituted in March 1990. A number of notifications were issued transferring district offices in agriculture, soil conservation, animal husbandry and others. It may be noted that comprehensive changes required in the existing legislation had not been carried out and there was a fear that the Government was adopting adhoc approach to the whole process.

It was in the above context that E.M.S Namboothiripad took initiative in starting a public debate on measures to be urgently undertaken to make decentralization effective. He set forth a number of proposals in an opening article and invited public debate. Some of his proposals were startling. He called for disbanding of the Local Administration Department, as the District Council was the coordinating agency of municipalities and grama panchayats. Arrangements were to be made for a State Development Council with representation of all ministers and certain other key officials and presidents of District Councils. He sought abolition of unnecessary and avoidable duplication of work between the Government departments and the directorates outside Secretariat through substantial dismantling of departments in the Secretariat and combining the directorship and secretaryship in person. Instead of IAS officers, technical and professional persons were to be the heads of the combined department-directorate set up. A major portion of the departmental staff was to be redeployed to District Councils. He argued for greater devolution of powers to the District Councils so that they are transformed into genuine district governments.

The publication of the above proposals was followed by a discussion in which important leaders of political parties including administrators, academicians and leaders
of opposition parties participated. From a re-reading of the articles today, it is very evident that many could not imbibe the spirit of radical reforms then proposed.

The new Government set out to undo whatever that had been achieved in the decentralization front. The very first decision taken by it was to amend the District Administration Act and restrict the powers of District Councils. The District Collector was removed from the ex-officio secretaryship of the council and junior official was appointed as the secretary to the Council. The amendment also empowered the Government to alter the powers and functions through notification without reference to the legislature. Thereafter the officers and institutions transferred were taken back through a series of notifications and most of the powers were nullified so that the District Councils were left with only a few functions and even fewer resources. They were left with no technical staff and little administrative support. What remained was only a ghost of the grand design for decentralization. The then State Government advocated their stand on the foundation of new panchayat raj and nagarapalika legislation.

As seen in the introductory section the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments were major landmarks in the history of local bodies in India, but for Kerala these Constitutional Amendments were a step back from the progressive features of the District Administration Act in existence there. The amendments compartmentalized the rural and urban areas, making comprehensive district government impossible. They imposed a three tier structure which nobody in Kerala wanted. By April 1993, the Government of Kerala like the other State governments had to pass conformity legislation. For several months no action was taken by the Congress government in Kerala, and finally in March 1994 after all-round criticism from intellectuals, opposition parties and public in general, the Government in a hurry introduced Kerala Panchayat Raj Bill whose provisions were highly restrictive.

As a result of public pressure, certain changes in some of the draconian provisions were made at the select committee stage and it is the legislation that was in force in Kerala when the campaign was launched. Many of the anti-democratic provisions remained and complementary legislative amendments in the related statues had not yet been made. It is primarily to make recommendations regarding legal and administrative changes that the next government set up, as we have already noted, the
committee headed by late Sathya Bratha Sen. It demanded another round of constitutional changes to facilitate States like Kerala to remove constraints in self-governance at the district level and below.

**Barriers to decentralization**

The conception of PRIs as part of a larger political process also meant that these institutions cannot be imposed from above by legislative processes alone, but have to establish through popular movements through mass mobilization. The left movement in Kerala had succeeded to a considerable decree in bringing basic reforms in agricultural sector, collective bargaining in labour sector, public distribution of essential commodities system, social provisioning of education, health and other services to the social agenda through mass mobilization in favour of these issues and PRIs could not be an exception of this.134

The issue of Kerala’s backwardness in decentralization cannot be settled satisfactorily for the time being. But viewing PRIs as part of a larger political process should provide some clue to this. Thus one of the reasons for this is the relative political instability in Kerala and the lack of commitment of ruling party to the decentralization process. The brief survey of the history of decentralization in Kerala reveals how the State government that came to power frustrated the efforts made by the left governments in 1957, 1967 and 1987. As in the rest of India, the lack of commitment to decentralization, despite the generous lip service to the ideal, was the most singular factor that prevented effective decentralization in the State. In Karnataka also the subsequent State government reversed the decentralization programme of the 1983 Government.

Excessive departmentalism and bureaucratic vested interest are the other impediments to decentralization. This was the recurrent theme and important source of concern. There is no doubt that the opponents of decentralization viz. the bureaucrats, who have been enjoying the sweet benefits of centralization in the government secretariat would employ every tactic as to retard transfer of power to the councils.

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It is indeed difficult to generate the necessary political will to create preconditions for a successful programme for decentralization. It is in this context that the importance of mass mobilization in support of decentralization reforms becomes important. Only through mobilizing the masses for creating public opinion in favour of decentralization can the hurdles be overcome. Here also there is an interesting contrast between West Bengal and Kerala.

The introduction and strengthening of PRIs was originally linked to the rising tide of peasant movement for land reforms in West Bengal. The panchayat played a crucial role in ‘Operation Barga’. A large proportion of panchayat members were drawn from the ranks of leadership of peasant movement. The role that the panchayat played in the flood relief operation of 1978 and later in the agricultural extension work during the post ‘Operation Barga’ phase stabilized the relationship. Decentralization became a part of the agrarian reform that was being carried out in West Bengal.135

The coalition politics in Kerala was too enmeshed in repressive and manipulative tactics to stem the tide of mass movement to think of any measures for comprehensive decentralization quite apart from the fact that the political parties always ideologically been lukewarm to decentralization.

The fears expressed about the absence of powerful mass mobilization in support of the 1991 reform of district council became a reality when the Congress government wantonly set about dismantling the entire edifice without fear of any serious resistance. The significance for people’s campaign for Ninth Plan is that for the first time in Kerala the masses of people mobilized in support of PRIs.

The discussion so far should leave no doubt that the left took a consistent stand in favour of decentralization. The support for decentralization is no newly found fervour. What is new in the people’s campaign is the attempt to link local democracy with local development. This is the major feature of the current Kerala experiment. In a sense, the link between decentralization and development is part of mainstream thinking. It has been the rationale for advocacy of PRIs in the five year plan and other government documents. It was in pursuance of this that Balwant Rai Mehta Committee

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and later Ashok Mehta Committees took “Panchayat Raj as a vehicle of development” as ideal.

From the point of view of the radical movement, the participatory nature of the decentralization process assumes special significance. Decentralisation facilitates the people and their organization to directly intervene in the planning and implementation of development. In a centralized system their participation in planning may be only indirect at the central or state level, in an era where people’s participation by governmental and international agencies has come to be synonymous with voluntary organizations.

It is unfortunate that the Report does not take into consideration the fact that there were voluntary organizations which had sizeable membership and are active in rural areas, such as Kisan Sabha, Agricultural Labour Organization, students and youth and women’s organizations etc. which are not and would refuse to be non-political. Many of them are very active and enjoy the confidence of people. Wherever such organizations exist they should be given an important role in the scheme of human resource development. This aspect is ignored by a few critics because of their prejudice against political parties and organization oriented towards them.

With respect to the people’s participation in the decentralized planning the official guidelines of the Planning Commission do not go beyond the involvement of the volunteers of the so called “non-governmental organisations (NGOs). People are a vast reservoir of life experience and local wisdom, and the potential must be tapped for the success of local level planning. But the official documents on this topic, at best take ordinary people into consideration for identification of the felt needs. Thereafter, their role reappears only at the implementation stage after the experts have drawn up the local plan. E.M.S Namboothiripad, as we shall see, thought that this is an extremely narrow minded elitist approach, a hangover from the tradition a bureaucratic planning.

**New development culture**

The people are much alienated from planned development process in our country. Here the attempt is to unravel the problem by correlating politics of development.
The basic factor responsible is the very class framework of development and class bias of development policies. The path of capitalist development without land reforms and compromising with imperialism impoverishes the vast majority of people and condemns them to a life without even bare basic necessities. Any attempt to improve their lot is considered a drag on development, a drain from the pool of investable funds, not to tell the struggles that are viewed as disruptive of planned development. This is a shortsighted view.

In the ultimate analysis, all investment surpluses are created by the people and determined by their willingness to sacrifice themselves in money, materials or labour.

One has to approach decentralization as a process of extension and deepening the system of political democracy. The extension of parliamentary democracy from the Central and State levels to district and lower levels would open up possibilities of more direct participation of the masses in day-to-day governance. Such grass root level democracy is favourable to mobilization and defense of the interest of the exploited and weaker sections. This will only improve development and the lot of the poor. One has to agree that the process initiated in Kerala in the last two years is by far the most radical in terms of the scope and nature of devolution. The attempt is being made to make a major break with the past and in order to facilitate the transition a unique mass movement has been launched in support of decentralization. A major contribution of decentralization campaign is indeed creation of mass movement for democratic decentralization. From a mere government-led administrative reform, the process of decentralization has to become an objective for popular action and a part of popular politics.

In the specific setting of Kerala, democratic decentralization is an important strategic initiative to resolve development crisis in the State at least partially and to make a break with narrow political compartmentalization that tends to divide people. Such strategic initiative cannot stem from any single movement, but could be the result of fairly long debate and introspection. The discussion has been more focused on unfolding the logic of democratic decentralization from the political perspective.

The above approach does not in any way underestimate the significance of an autonomous civil society and the synergies that State-civil society interface may generate. In Kerala a variety of local level development initiatives were evolved even
within the limited opportunities or spaces available in the traditional centralized State structure of development policies. The developmental experiments are testimony to the vitality of a civil society in Kerala and also prepare the ground for the people’s planning campaign. The lesson learned from each of these micro-experiment and debates have been widely diffused through different modes and have been successfully incorporated into the campaign. However, the process through which they were scaled up and consolidated remains to be documented. Dearth of space does not point to the nature of interaction of mass movements and other civil society organizations with political parties or the interface between social and political process. Nevertheless, one has to emphasize that if the above experiments, theoretical discourses or even partial movements for further democratization efforts are to become universal and sustainable, they would have to become part of a larger political strategy for democratic decentralization.