

PART - I

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1.1. Local self Government was central to the ideological framework of India's national movement. It was in this context Gandhiji had said, "True democracy cannot function by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked from below, by the people of every village".

1.1.2. Freedom was won but soon lost to centralization of power and authority. Huge investments made through capital intensive projects did not percolate down to the masses. It was not difficult to diagnose the malady, not at least for Nehru, who said, "To uplift lakhs of villages is not an ordinary task. This can be done only if people take up the responsibility. They are not merely to be consulted, the effective power has to be entrusted to the people".

A visionary like Perarignar Anna, former Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, felt the same way, "Village Panchayats constituted the bed-rock of democracy and unless we strengthen them, our democracy cannot be strong and vibrant".

1.1.3. Converting the vision into reality was a daunting task. Particularly so, because India is a vast country with a surging population of multi-ethnic characteristics. Political and economic management of such a big nation from one particular location is difficult, inefficient and unprofessional. It was under this realization that the late Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi launched the Panchayat Raj Act, "It is a revolution that will bring democracy to the door steps of crores of Indians; it is a revolution that will open the doors of opportunity to millions of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and at least to half of the population of our country, the women of India".

1.1.4. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments came into effect on April 24, 1993. This was a land mark of transition of political power to the grass root. This was also a big leap to achieve Gandhiji's 'Village Swaraj'. Conformity legislations were soon passed in the States. It not only provided a constitutional status to the local bodies

but also laid down, without ambiguity, that legislature could, by law, endow them with such powers and authority that may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self - Government. Hopes were aroused. All over the country, there was excitement about strengthening the local self Government. It was expected to provide greater participation by the people in the affairs of local bodies, in planning and implementation of development programmes. The local bodies were, in turn, expected to provide more responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the citizens.