

PREFACE

The Panchayati Raj or democratic decentralised pattern of Government and administration is a development of far-reaching significance and consequence for engineering an adequate and rich programme of universal primary education for children in the age-group 6-14. The goal of universal primary education of 7 or 8 years has so far continued to elude the educational planners, educational administrators and legislators. There is wide disparity between the education of boys and girls. There is wider disparity of educational development between the advanced classes and the backward ones - the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. On the grounds of social justice as well as for the furtherance of democracy, to use the Kothari Commission's words, it is essential to make special efforts to equalise educational opportunities between these groups. It is true that like all ideals in life, perfect equality of educational opportunity to all members of its population is a sacred duty from which there is no escape for a democratic, socialist Government.

The present research is an attempt to study Gujarat's untiring efforts spread over a decade and a half to reach the goal of universal primary education for all the children till they complete their 14th birthday.

The Panchayati Raj was introduced in Gujarat in 1963 under the assumption that it would speed up, and give a greater focus and dynamism, to the machinery of community development in all the spheres of national life including education. But the assumption is not realised. The expectations are belied. A feeling is gathering intensity to the effect that the experiment of Panchayati Raj - democratic decentralised pattern of administration has failed. The present thesis has tried to find out to what extent the feeling about the failure of Panchayati Raj in the sector of primary education is valid. The findings of the study are not flattering for the champions of the experiment on democratic decentralised administration. The impact of the Panchayati Raj on expansion and enrichment of primary education in Gujarat is little - the success is to the extent of about 30 percent. The achievements in this field are more due to determined policy of State Government and large financial allocation for primary education through Five-Year Plans. The contri-

bution of the Panchayati Raj appears to be marginal. However, the Panchayat machinery has contributed to creating an improved climate for universal primary education and the programmes of expansion and improvement of primary education have received greater focus and reception at the hands of rural communities. This is on the credit side of the Panchayati Raj.

The Thesis is the result of long and sustained labour extending over five years.

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V.T. Chokshi College of
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H.R. Joshi