Chapter - VI

Development of Local Self Government
CHAPTER VI
DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

Local institutions constitute the strength of free nations. It is the basis of any true system of democracy. This chapter discusses the growth of local self Government in the Madras presidency.

Between 1900 and 1920 quite a number of local self government institutions sprang up in the Madras Presidency.

TABLE 6.1
LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS IN THE MADRAS PRESIDENCY 1900-1920

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No-of District Boards</th>
<th>No-of Taluk Boards</th>
<th>No-of Union Boards</th>
<th>No-of Municipalities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>379</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>390</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Report on the working of Local Boards in the Madras presidency (annual for the years 1900 - 1920).

From the middle years of the nineteenth century, the Madras government occasionally employed committees of non-officials to assist with certain aspects of local administration. It was only during the viceroyalty of Lord Ripon, with the passing of local self government acts in the 1880s, that the policy acquired momentum. The primary aims of the new local self-government boards were to associate local notable with the system of raising extra revenues, and to draw on their knowledge and assistance to help in the
provision of better local services and amenities at the least possible administrative cost to the exchequer.²

In 1900 Local administration was governed by the Madras Local Boards Act of 1884.³ The year 1884, is significant in the history of local self-government.⁴ It witnessed the passage in The Municipal Act of 1884 in pursuance of the magnificent scheme of local self-government promulgated by Viceroy Ripon in 1882.⁵

Ripon’s famous resolution of 18th May 1882 on Local Self-Government was born out of his earnest desire to train educated Indians in the art of self-rule.⁶ It envisaged a largely increased elective element and a degree of freedom from official control. Madras paid homage to the great good done by Ripon by christening the majestic Corporation building as “Ripon Building”. The installation of the statue in its premises in 1914 added to the stateliness of the building.⁷

The Madras Local Boards Act V of 1884 introduced many changes, the chief of which were:⁸

1. The control over local boards exercised by the Board of Revenue under powers delegated to it by the Government under section 71 of Act IV of 1871 was assumed by Government.⁹

2. The administration of local affairs was vested in a single district board constituted for each revenue district, consisting of a president and not less than 24 members who might all be appointed by the Governor in Council or might be partly so appointed and partly elected by the members of the taluk boards of the district from among their own members, or, in any part of the district where there was no taluk board, by the union boards and by the tax-payers and inhabitants of such parts of the district. All Revenue Divisional Officers were ex officio members.¹⁰
3. The Proportion of official members was reduced from one-half to one-fourth of the total strength.\textsuperscript{11}

4. Under the old Act the Board had no powers to levy taxes on their own authority but could only administer the funds raised on their account by Government. Under Act V of 1884 the local boards were empowered to levy with the approval of Government any of the taxes authorized by the Act. The president might be elected from among the members of the board if the Governor in Council so directed.\textsuperscript{12}

5. Taluk boards were constituted for divisions of districts and union boards for the larger villages.\textsuperscript{13}

Between 1900 and 1920 quite a number of self government institutions sprang up throughout the Madras presidency.

\textbf{TABLE NO 6.2}

\textbf{STATEMENT SHOWING NUMBER OF THE DISTRICT BOARDS THEIR STRENGTH ETC - 1900 - 1920}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>No. of Boards</th>
<th>Total Ex-Officio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>696</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>757</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
Years & No. of Boards & Total Ex-Officio & Nominated & Elected & officials & Non officials \\
\hline
1900 & 21 & 638 & 80 & 250 & 308 & 261 & 377 \\
1910 & 23 & 696 & 117 & 265 & 314 & 268 & 428 \\
1920 & 24 & 757 & 121 & 151 & 485 & 146 & 611 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

Source : Report on the working of Local Boards in the Madras presidency (annual for the years 1900 - 1920).

A District board was constituted for every revenue district. Every District board consisted of the collector of the district as ex-officio president, not less than twenty four members, and the revenue divisional officers being ex-officio members. Once-half of the members of each district board were
elected by the Taluk boards in all districts except the Niligiris where there were no Taluk boards.  

The District and Taluk Boards of the Madras Presidency were richer and more influential than their counterparts in other provinces. They were powerful and a force to reckon with. They were run by government officers as part of their regular work. With the exception of dispensaries, schools and Taluk Board roads, almost the whole of the outdoor work was managed by the Revenue Divisional Agency. The three subjects that did not come under the jurisdiction of the Revenue divisional officers namely, dispensaries, schools and Taluk Board roads were managed by the Medical, Education and Public Works Departments.

There were 21 district boards, on 31st March 1900 one in each district. Of the 638 member of the district boards, 308 were elected by the Taluk boards; the other members were either ex-officio members or were appointed by the government.

During the two decades the changes made in the constitution of the District boards were that in 1905, a separate District board koraput was created for a portion of the large district of vizagapatnam and in 1910 a new district of Ramnad was formed out of the district of Madura and Tinnevelly. Hence in the year 1910-1911 there were 23 district as seen in the table no 6.2. The number of district boards rose to 24 in the year 1920 - 1921, as a result of an addition of one district board due to the creation of a new district of chittor on 1st April 1911.

During the second decade there was an extension of local self government and the electoral principle which is proved from the figures shown in the above table, i.e. there was an increase of 171 in the number of members elected in the year 1920 - 1921 where as the increase was only 6 in 1910 - 1911.
Their administration extended to all the areas not covered by municipalities. Their chief responsibilities were the construction, maintenance and management of roads and sometimes railways, the administration of schools and hospitals, the supervision of markets and fairs, and the control of charitable endowments.\(^{21}\)

The Madras District Boards were permitted even to raise loans on the open market to finance the building of railway branch lines. The power was wielded only by officials and not by non-officials.\(^{22}\)

### TABLE 6.3

**THE NUMBER OF TALUK BOARDS, UNION BOARDS, THEIR STRENGTH ETC - 1900 - 1920.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TALUK BOARDS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>No. of Boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 - 1901</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910 - 1911</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920 - 1921</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>UNION BOARDS</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years</td>
<td>No. of Boards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900 - 1901</td>
<td>379</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910 - 1911</td>
<td>390</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920 - 1921</td>
<td>588</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Report on the working of Local Boards in the Madras Presidency for the years from 1900-1920.*

Taluk boards were constituted for divisions of districts and union boards for the larger villagers. Under each of the district boards were ranged five or six taluk boards, and beneath these there were panchayats and union boards in some of the villages and small towns.\(^{23}\)
Every taluk board was composed of Revenue Divisional officers being ex-officio president and not less than twelve members who were appointed by government. In all the districts except south Canara and Malabar, the taluk boards had union panchayats working as their agents.

Each panchayat consisted of not less than five members, the headmen of the revenue villages included in the unions being ex-officio members and others being appointed by the presidents of district boards in exercises of the powers delegated to them by the Governor in council. The powers of removing these members, of re-appointing members of Taluk boards originally appointed by government, and of accepting the resignation of members of district and taluk boards continued with the presidents of district boards.

Beneath the taluk boards there were panchayats and union boards in some of the villages and small towns. The union panchayats attended to village sanitary arrangements, to the construction, repair and lighting of roads, and in some cases to the control of choultries and markets entrusted to them by taluk boards.

In the year 1900 - 1901, the total number of members in the taluk boards were one thousand and hundred. Among them three hundred and seven were officials, seven hundred and ninety three were non-officials and there were no elected officials.

The development that took place in the administration of local boards was that the system of appointing by election was introduced in 1909 to 1910 and hence as is shown in the table no 6.3 in the year 1910 - 1911, out of the 1,404 members of total strength 318 were elected members, where as in 1900 all the 1100 members were nominated. The other members as well as those of panchayats were either ex-officio members or appointed by the government. Further there was an increase in the number of Taluk boards which rose from 83 in the year 1910 - 1911 to 119 in 1920 – 1921 and this rise was due to the
division of certain taluk boards into smaller units coincident with their component taluks.\textsuperscript{30}

The resources of district and taluk boards were derived from a tax not exceeding two annas in the rupee on the annual rent-value of all occupied lands in the districts of Malabar, South Canara and the Nilgiris and not exceeding one anna in the rupee elsewhere.\textsuperscript{31} In Tanjore, one-fourth of the receipts under land cess was set apart for railway construction.\textsuperscript{32}

Tolls upon carriages, carts and animals were levied in all the districts. The other source of income was from house tax which was levied in all unions. The primary item of expenditure was on construction of new roads and repair of old ones. Each district board employed an engineer called the Local Fund Engineer to supervise this work.\textsuperscript{33} Hospital maintenance, vaccine operations, sanitations etc. were also attended by this board.\textsuperscript{34}

**DISTRICT MUNICIPALITIES**

Following Ripon’s Act, the Madras Government formed municipalities in all the major towns of the presidency. The commissioners who were either appointed or elected were to conduct the affairs of the town while the collector of the district was the ex-officio president. In fact however, all commissioners were appointed by Government until 1878 - 1879 when the franchise was given to the important towns.\textsuperscript{35}

In 1900, the municipal administration was governed by the Madras Municipal Act of 1884.\textsuperscript{36} Under this act, the Collector ceased to be the president but was vested with the powers of supervision as he could not realistically deal with the rapidly growing business of the municipalities as well as his many other responsibilities. The number of councillors was to be not less than twelve and two thirds of the members were to be elected by the tax payers, the others being the ex-officio councilors and nominated
councillors. Chairmanship was handed over first to nominated and then to elected non-officials.\textsuperscript{37}

By Act V of 1920, the minimum number of councillors was raised to sixteen: a proportion not less than three-fourth of the total number should be elected and the remaining members were to be appointed by Government. Official control was relaxed.\textsuperscript{38} With these changes, the municipal councils grew in stature and importance in local affairs.

\textbf{TABLE 6.4}

\textbf{THE GROWTH OF THE REPRESENTATIVE PRINCIPLE IN TWO DECADES}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>No. of Municipalities</th>
<th>Total Strength of the council</th>
<th>Ex-Officio councillor</th>
<th>Elected Councillor</th>
<th>Nominated Councillors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1900 – 1901</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>883</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>412</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910 – 1911</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>940</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>466</td>
<td>403</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920 – 1921</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>1204</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>753</td>
<td>407</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


By 1920 there were eighty municipalities with seven hundred and fifty-three elected members and four hundred fifty-one other members, whereas in 1900 there were only sixty municipalities.\textsuperscript{39} Thus there was extension of local self-government.

The duty of these councils was to look after the safety, health, convenience and education of the inhabitants.\textsuperscript{40} In practice this meant that they maintained roads, ran schools, provided water, organized sanitation, managed hospitals and dispensaries, controlled markets, fairs, slaughterhouses and burial grounds, licensed industrial enterprises, managed public property and supervised chatrams and charitable trusts.\textsuperscript{31}
To perform these duties they raised taxes, employed retinue and distributed contracts. Their chief receipt was rates on property. Besides this they taxed animals, vehicles, professions and trades and levied fees on water supply, schools, markets, slaughter houses and cart stands. Their retinue ranged from secretaries, office managers and revenue collectors to lighting attendants and scavengers. Their contracts covered removal of rubbish, repair of roads, and construction of new public buildings and provision of water pipes. The municipalities' powers and their patronage attracted the attention of several of the townsmen.

For more than 25 years, there was no change in the constitution of the municipalities set up in 1884. Between the years 1906 and 1908, the Royal Commission on Decentralization reviewed the position of the Presidency Corporation as part of its enquiry and recommended changes that would definitely make it more democratic.

The Commission urged the revision of the municipal constitution in order to make it truly representative of the citizens. The recommendations of the Commission on the reforms to be carried out in the Presidency municipalities were forwarded by the local government in 1910 to the corporation of Madras for an expression of the latter's view. A sub-committee was appointed by the corporation to make a report on the matter.

There were of course recommendations to modify the constitution, and the chief ones were those contained in the Report of the Royal Commission on Decentralisation of 1908. Some of its liberal recommendations were: substantial elective majority in the Councils; nominated Chairman who was to be a non-official; preclusion of government officials from election; and constitution of committees consisting of councillors and outsiders for administrative supervision.

The Act of 1920 made the municipalities wholly elective except for a few seats reserved for backward communities and minority interests; they
lowered the franchise qualifications based on ownership of property and payment of taxes so that 5.4 per cent of the municipal population was included in the electorate; they deprived the Collector and other officials of ex-officio membership of the councils and diminished the Collector’s supervisory powers; they increased the council’s duties and their taxes - the rates or property were raised, and new taxes on entertainments, pilgrims, lighting, education, conservancy and scavenging were introduced.48 By 1925 all but four of the eighty municipal councils had elected chairmen; there were 1,284 elected members, over double the number in 1918 in which years the elected members were 668.49

CORPORATION OF MADRAS

The law relating to the constitution and functions of the corporation of Madras was completely revised and consolidated in 1904. Drastic changes were made in the corporation council of Madras by the Municipal Act III of 1904.50

Under the Municipal Act III of 1904 the total number of commissioners was raised from 32 to 36. Only 20 among them were to be elected by the rate-payers. Of the remaining 16, 8 were to be nominated by the Government and 8 by institutional bodies connected with trade and industries like the Chamber of Commerce, the Trades Association, the Port Trust and the Railways which had until then been inadequately represented on the Council. The representation to institutional bodies was a welcome measure but reducing the proportion of the popularly elected divisional members was not justifiable.51

The Act of 1904 increased the strength of the Standing Committee and made it more representative than before.52 In 1907 a provision was inserted empowering the Local Government with the concurrence of the Corporation to appoint an engineer, without limit as to salary, for the purpose of executing
or supervising engineering schemes of a special character; the necessity for this measure arose in connection with the water-works and drainage project.

Again, in 1911 minor changes were carried out legalizing, (i) the fanning out of the collection of license fees for the slaughter of animals (ii) an increase in the scale of taxation of motor vehicles, (iii) the exemption from assessment of bicycles belonging to volunteers serving in cyclists sections. and (iv) the prescription of educational qualifications as a condition of service under the corporation.  

Another redeeming feature of this Act was that it so amended the franchise law as to increase the number of voters to about 11,000 or 2.5 per cent of the population at the time of the First World War.

The largest source of the revenue of Districtboards and Taluk boards was from the cess on land and the primary item of expenditure was on construction of roads and building. Each District Board employed an engineer called the Local Fund Engineer to supervise this work.

The Local Fund Board handled an annual budget of Rs. 5 Lakh by 1893-94 and Rs. 7 Lakh by 1909-10. Their administrative powers also increased, empowering them to supervise institutions of higher education, markets, wells and buildings and the implementation of major constructive programmes like railways and jungle clearance.

As for water supply, the old system of an open channel conveying the water from the Red Hills to the city which was exposed to the danger of contamination as well as loss of water owing to evaporation and percolation was replaced by the new system of improved water supply which provided for the distribution of pure filtered water. It was formally inaugurated by Governor Pentland in 1914. The roads of Madras, which were lit with oil lamps until 1910 were gradually replaced by electric lights.

The Commission noted that when compared with other provinces, the Madras Presidency had a higher average of population in its municipalities.
Out of the total 60 municipalities in 1906-1907, nearly 57 had a population of over 10,000. 54 of the 60 Municipalities in the Presidency rendered a good account with some like Dindigul, Mangalore, Cocanada, Kodikanal and Madura having attained excellence. Only six municipalities namely Kurnool, Mayavaram, Tanjore, Trichinopoly, Masulipatnam and Conjeevaram did poorly.

Each Municipality was treated as a department of the government and the Municipal and Rural Secretariats were as busy as the Revenue or the Public works Department of the Provincial Secretariat. The Provincial government controlled the whole machinery of the municipal administration down to the appointment of Tottis - Scavengers.

Establishment of local self-government on fairly democratic principles had a double advantage. Besides satisfying the Indian desire for a share in the administration of local affairs, it relieved the government of an oppressive mass of work. But Ripon’s resolution was only recommendatory and not mandatory in character. The Provincial governments were therefore at liberty to implement it to the extent it suited them.

Section IV of the Act IV of 1919, entrusted the administration to the three authorities:- The Council, Standing committees of the Council and the Commissioner who was to be appointed by the Governor in Council not being a member of the council.

The Council consisted of 50 councillors as follows:

a) Thirty elected divisional councillors.

b) Three elected by the Madras Chamber of commerce, three by the Madras Trades Association and two by the south Indian Chamber of Commerce.

c) Three elected or appointed by other associations or bodies as directed by the Government. The Government directed that the Madras port
Trust, the University and Anglo-Indian Association would each elect one councillor.

d) Nine appointed by the Government with special regard to the representation of Muhammadans and other minorities. President of the Corporation was elected annually by the council.

The commissioner held the appointment for a renewable period of three years. He could be removed by the Government and be so removed if, at a special meeting of the Council called for the purpose, 33 councillors voted for his removal. He had the right to attend meetings of the council or of a standing committee and to take part in the discussions but not to vote. The executive power vested in the Commissioner; he prescribed the duties of the establishment and exercised supervision and control over their acts and proceedings.

The executive of the Corporation was organized in departments:
1. The Revenue Department under the Revenue officer
2. The works Department under the Engineer.
3. The Health Department under the Health Officer.

Thus in the Corporation Council of Madras, drastic changes were made by the Act IV of 1919. It inaugurated an era of new interest and activity in the field on local government. This period witnessed a series of amending Acts on local government in every province. The practice of having a civil servant as the president disappeared from all municipal bodies of district or local boards; the franchise was further democratized; the local bodies were freed from many restrictions in respect of preparation of budget; and, finally, the executive direction passed into the hands of the elected members of the public. Men like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Purshottam Das Tandon entered the municipal councils and gained insight into the functioning of democratic institutions. The local government was thus set to move in the direction of democracy.
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20. Table no 6.2.
23. Ibid.
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27. Table no 6.3.
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39. Table no 6.4.
41. Ibid.
44. Saroja Sundararajan, op.cit., p.472.
45. Ibid., p.477.

83


50. Saroja Sundara Rajan, op. cit., p. 475.

51. K.K. Pillai, op. cit., p. 50.

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57. Saroja Sundararajan, op. cit., p. 473.


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64. Ibid

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