CHAPTER III

DECENTRALISATION,
PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS
IN INDIA AND KARNATAKA
Political decentralisation is a process, which transfers policies and legislative powers and roles to democratically elected local bodies. Village panchayats in ancient India acted as the 'basic units' to the local bodies. They saw to it that the development programmes were effectively implemented at the village level. According to Tinker (1959), the Panchayats provided 'a kind of prelude to democracy'.

'Grassroots Democracy', 'Involving People's Participation', 'Democratic Decentralisation', 'Local Self Government & Community Development' are the concepts that look like being different in their context and meaning, but have arisen from a single common philosophical basis related to the PRIs. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1951-52) recommended for Community Development and National Extension Service Programmes and it was Prime Minister Nehru who suggested the term Panchayat Raj instead of the term democratic decentralisation (Asundi and Chandrappa 1989).

It was in 1952 that the programmes were launched to realise the strong belief and dream of Mahatma Gandhi about his Gram Swaraj concept. A provision was made in Part IV, Art. 40, in the Directive Principles of State Policy, about introducing Panchayat Raj Institutions.

During the Second Five-Year Plan period, it became a common objective, although it varied from state to state.
Articles 243, 243 A and 243 B explicitly declared such institutions to be "institutions of self-government", a status or nomenclature denied even to the Union government (Part II) and state governments (Part III).

The process resulted in the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which broke new ground in several aspects. Adequate representation for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and women was provided in the elected bodies, at all levels, with an enabling provision for a similar reservation for other backward classes. A fixed tenure of five years, regular elections and mechanism to ensure appropriate financial allocations were the other measures designed to strengthen these bodies.

In this chapter, we focus on the historical background of decentralisation and NGOs' involvement in India and Karnataka.

Will Durant, the famous historian, once remarked that India is the 'mother of democracy' through its village institutions. The concept of decentralisation is nothing new and it has been in existence since prehistoric times. Even ancient literature brings out that decentralisation is not a foreign system, and it had originated in India. During the Vedic period, decentralisation referred to 'village panchayat' in which Sabhas were found. According to manuscripts, Jathakas and in Maharbharatha's Shanti Parva, the element of Gram Sabha was discussed. Similarly, in Kautilya's Arthashastra, one can find reference to decentralisation whose main function was mainly focused on administration and social issues. Apart from this, archaeological evidence and many inscriptions tell the existence of LSGs in ancient times. Even the oldest civilisation, like Harappa and Mohenjodaro,
reveals that an advanced urban civilisation and elected council of bodies were functioning in those times. According to Havell (1918), a detailed profile of city administration has been given in the Imperial Gazetteer of India. To sum up, our Indian culture can be traced back to our hoary past.

There is evidence about the existence of LSG in other countries also. In the Middle Ages, the LSGs had discharged their duties well. Gradually, after the 16th century, the city administration became centered to Kotwal's premises. It was like Nagara Rakshaka.

After the fall of the Moghal Empire in the 17th century, and with British colonization, India's social framework of such local institutions started breaking down.

The above said review brings out that decentralisation of administration was prevalent not in the present form. It is a known fact that at the local self-government, that is, at the village level, it was the lowest level working for the upliftment and reforming of rural life (Mudgal 1998). Documents also show the functional aspects of gram sabha, and specific qualification prescribed to become a member of the gram sabha and to contest for election.

While the British discouraged LSGs during the initial years, they, however, recognised, later on the importance of ancient LSG. Subsequently, the local institutions were given a chance in LSGs in the setting up of elected or periodically elected representatives. The British rulers in Madras initiated this kind of model in 1687, within the Municipal Corporation limit. In 1793, the Charter Act was implemented...

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in three Presidency Town Municipal Administration limits, viz., Madras\(^2\), Calcutta and Bombay\(^3\). The failure of Bengal’s People Act in 1842 had resulted in Lord Mayo’s Policy Resolution, (1862-70) and decentralisation in provincial government, where they were made responsible for their own affairs. In confirmation of this concept, many acts were passed. However, people of India were not fully satisfied.

Then, the Governor General Charles MetCalfe (1832) stated that the villages in local self-governments were really “small republics\(^4\).” Lord Rippon passed a resolution in 1882, to remove the omissions of the Bengal’s People Act. This included non-government members, including the chairman to be involved in the Local Self Government Committees. These had to function or serve in the subdivision and not in a big district. In this new set up, local self-committee’s members were aware of their existing problems. However, due to adverse situation, the resolution could not be implemented in letter or spirit in all the provinces.

Another effort to recommend improved measures in local bodies’ administrative functions was made by the Royal Commission.

Keeping in view all these above said features of Lord Harding’s resolutions (in 1915) on local bodies’ structure and functions were broadly redefined. In 1918, passing an Act brought about complete control of local bodies. In 1921-37, the local system had diarchy component functioning. Their success and failure were neutral.

\(^2\) Renamed as Chennai
\(^3\) Renamed as Mumbai
During 1937-47, there was no progress in these local self-governments, because of freedom struggle in the whole of India. However, even in the Princely States, enough interest was shown towards the LSG.

After independence, the concept of reviewing the LSG took a significant turn at Simla, where a detailed discussion on strengthening and restructuring of LSG was held. This resulted in the formation of committees such as Local Finance Committee in 1949, the Taxation Enquiry Commission on Municipalities in 1953, Taxation of Rural Urban relation Commission in 1963. Appropriate structure and functioning of urban bodies, and their significant relationship in PRI's central committee, augmentation on financial resources in urban local bodies was indeed recommended by the Balwanta Rai Mehta Committee.

The phases of PRIs in India are prime instruments for decentralisation at the grass-root level. The operative part of PRIs, since their establishment, faced numerous interpretations from protagonists and antagonists. Greater emphasis was laid on maximum local autonomy and supervision or minimisation or control of higher authorities (State Government). Some considered it to be rejuvenation for the country.

Another controversy regarding the role of political parties in PRIs, in the light of this development, was the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which provided a new dimension to the PRIs.

The father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi, was greatly interested in 'Gram Swaraj' and strongly advocated the doctrine of national development through the arm of autonomous rural organisations which he proposed to be modern, on the lines of the PRI system, as it existed in ancient India. He endorsed the finer system of Village Panchayats, Taluk
Panchayats, Zilla Panchayats, Provincial Panchayats and All India Panchayats.

The administrative system advocated by him was similarly like a pyramid, whose broad base consisted of many villages of the country. The higher panchayat had a role to give sound advices, guidance, reformation, completion, co-ordination of the activities of village panchayat, so that administrative efficiency would be more responsive for more public service, but it would also be a basic unit that would help decentralise. In fact, when the whole system is examined upside down, it is understood that village will be a real moving unit for state administration.

However, the man who drafted our constitution, Dr. Ambedkar, never gave a place for it in the constitution. He clearly condemned village panchayat as a sink of localism, den of ignorance, narrow mind and communalism. He also opined that republics of villages resulted in the ruination of the integrity of the country, and had no role in local affairs. What followed was a middle path between Gandhian concept of village panchayat, and total condemnation on unequal tones by Ambedkar, whereas acceptance of an idea of local autonomy existed. But, in local self-institutions, there was a strong barrier to allow itself for any radical change, concerning the balance of power structure re-organisation etc. This development resulted in involving the Village Panchayat in the Directive Principles of State Policy and Article 40 of the Indian Constitution (Aziz 1986).

Lok Nayak Jaya Prakash Nararayan had understood that PRIs had no space allotted for political parties. He strongly campaigned that political
parties must refrain from involving in it and stop trying to modify it as a springboard to reach power (Khilberg 1976).

Even the first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharalal Nehru, contributed in defining PRIs, into two types, viz., those allocated with more powers, and those decided by a majority of votes. However, the concept of PRIs as a supporter of parliamentary democracy, and the correlation between parliamentary democracy, based on a well-defined political party system, and direct elections, and well established means and ways of democratic government on the principle of unanimity led to totalitarianism.

The Constitution of India, in its Sixty-Fourth Amendment (1989), envisaged a constitutional status to the elected bodies at the lower levels of administration. This marked the beginning of a new initiative for strengthening the system of Panchayat Raj. However, due to its very controversial nature the Act had to face opposition in the Rajya Sabha (Shah 1990; Singh and Misra 1993).

After the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the PRIs were given a new and fresh lease of life (to the concept of PRIs), by providing adequate opportunity to political parties for holding direct elections and play a significant role.

In today’s context, the concept of PRIs, has been an extended arm of extensive democracy, which has found favour among people’s representatives. Merely giving power to exercise the right to elect representatives for the state and central legislature is not enough for the common citizen. In other words, the participation of people should be made as a commitment to ideology, and, therefore, what were needed were the legislative and structural changes to grant legitimacy to the participation of people.
The PRIs in our country have undergone a long struggle to acquire the constitutional status. From mere mentioning of constitutional status (Art 40), “It states that the state shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government”. This article remained as a dead letter for many years before finding an appropriate place or some importance in the form of Balwanta Rai Mehta Committee Study Report 1959. The report strongly recommended elected panchayats for directing elected village panchayats or group of villages or panchayat samiti (executive) for a block with a direct election and co-opted members and an advisory body. The ZP at the district level was constitutionally binding to have an ex-officio member from the lower level, elected indirectly. The collector was its chairman. The intricacies existing in the PRIs prompted the then government to set up another Committee in 1978 headed by Sri Asoka Mehta as the chairperson, along with 13 members, for specific suggestions, regarding the ways and means to strengthen the PRI institutions. This committee later on suggested the total abolition of blocks as units of administration, and recommended a two-tier set up at district and mandal levels, based on population. The Asoka Mehta Committee was considered by the Chief Ministers' Conference (1979), which favored the three-tier system. The conference in 1985 made a suggestion to frame a model Bill, which should be adopted and enacted in all the states, with necessary changes to meet the local needs.

A twelve-member committee, under the chairmanship of Dr. G V K Rao, was appointed for reviewing the administrative arrangements for rural development and poverty alleviation programmes. While recommending that the district should be the basic unit for policy planning and programme implementation, this committee emphasised the need for
regular elections to the PRIs (Mishra and Kumar 1996). Also, this committee recommended a bold scheme of democratic decentralisation in which the district level body was to be of pivotal importance (Singh and Misra 1993). It also emphasised upon periodical elections. The Seventh Five-Year Plan document admitted that these PRIs required radical changes in the conventional methods of planning village and block level activities and greater financial autonomy. Again, in 1987, L M Singhavi was appointed by the government of India to review the functional aspects of PRIs. It recommended that the villages should be reorganised more viably with more financial resources.

The Sarkaria Commission (1988) also pointed out the absence of periodic election in these LSG. Due to this, they were not functioning properly. These bodies were being superseded on silly reasons. He felt that the need for a uniform law in states to hold periodic elections and superseding of PRIs had to be demanded. A Sub Committee of the Parliamentary Consultative Committee attached to the Ministry of Public Grievance was set up under the chairmanship of Dr. Tungan, to consider the type of political and administrative structure, needed in the district for district planning. The committee recommended the constitutional status of the PRIs to conduct regular elections once in five years. It also advocated separation of powers. The ZP should be only a planning and development body in the district.

In 1990, another constitutional amendment was introduced by the Lok Sabha (LS) but could not be considered as the LS were dissolved. The bill mainly emphasised on the Gram Samiti in each village panchayat at the village level, direct election for all seats in the panchayats in the village level and not less than 52 per cent of seats in the other levels.
The Constitutional 72\textsuperscript{nd} Amendment Act was passed unanimously on December 22\textsuperscript{nd} 1992, in the Parliament. After having been ratified by 12 state assemblies, subsequently, the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment Act, 1993, came into existence on 24\textsuperscript{th} April 1993. Thus, this Amendment Act became a combination of various concrete proposals made by earlier subcommittees on PR bodies. A new vitality initiating the PRIs began as the important features of the Act, which are follows:

1) Gram Sabha at the village (as the legislature of the State may provide, by law)

2) Direct elections at all levels for all the members in the PRIs. In the direct election of the chairman at ZP and intermediate levels, the state government decided as to from which category the chairman at the village level should be selected. 1/3 of the seats were reserved for women, on rotation basis, in different constituencies in a Panchayat. Reservation of seats for SCs/STs was also provided in proportion to their population. Similarly, the system of reservation was also made with respect to the selection of the chairman of the panchayat.

3) Five-Year Terms of PRIs was also recommended.

4) In the event of elections, the constitution of the body should be completed before six months. State legislatures were authorised to impose and collect tax and for making grant-in-aid to the panchayats.

5) Uniformity in PRIs' structure, that is, every state should have panchayats at village, intermediate and the district levels. However, the Finance Commission has to be constituted once in five years to review the financial position and make suitable
recommendations to the state regarding allocation of funds between states and local bodies.

With a view to ensuring continuity, the amendment bill was adopted by state legislatures concerned. A resolution to that effect, to be effective within one year, from the commencement of this Amendment Act concerning the provision contained in the constitution was passed. Thus, the 73rd amendment highlighted the general guidance for efficient and effective PRIs in India.

After a thorough study or evaluation of PRIs, it can be said that India is in the forefront of a historic transformation of political power, delegated to grassroots levels. Similarly, states swung into action to pass fresh legislation in 72 hours after the passing of the Act. Some states completed this process in early hours of 23rd April 1994, to beat the stipulated deadline, fixed for introducing the Act.

3.1 Historical Evolution of PRIs in Karnataka

Karnataka State has been in the forefront of development-oriented reforms in accordance with the required socio-economic changes that are needed in a society. The state has always been able to protect the harmony in its local self-government institutions. In olden days, the tradition of village bodies was very strong. Even in the centralised monarchy system, local self-governing bodies were very much prevalent and village assemblies functioned and dealt with local problems. The local bodies were called Uru (town), Okkalu (residents), Praje (subjects), Praje Samudaya (congregation of subjects), Ura Hadinentu Jaati (18 communities of the village), the assembly of mahajans (heads of scholarly Brahmin families) in an agrahara village served as village councils. In fact, it is argued that the present day Mandal or taluk Panchayat is the
same as the 10th century 'Nadu' that emerged to the status of modern units of local administration. They comprised of the heads of constituent villages as the representatives of villages, towns, merchant guilds, officials etc. It can be compared to modern ZP and it was the highest local assembly. All these assemblies were entrusted with the task of undertaking socio-economic, religious and cultural activities for the promotion of local development. They had their own financial resources and also acted as their own trustees of public properties and endowments. All these local bodies were the creation of the local interest groups and the government remained there only in an advisory capacity (Kamath 1982).

In tune with the social, economic and political changes in the society, the state is always in the forefront in maintaining harmony with the local self governing bodies.

In the Province of Mysore State, modernisation in rural development was introduced through the enactment of the Village Sanitation Act in the year 1863. Not only was this, in 1862, Municipal Committees also introduced on an experimental basis. Both Diwan Sri Rangacharalu and Diwan Seshadri Iyer knew the need for having peoples' representative in local self-government (Kamat 1982). Even Sir M Vishweswaraya, in his period, had taken many steps to develop local self-government. However, most of the Mysore diwans gave preference to local government not only for peoples' representative but also encouraged women to have representation (Stephanie 2005).

In 1902-03, District Boards and Taluk Boards were introduced to enable rural development. In 1914, the then Mysore government, to rectify the loopholes of previous ordinance (1902) for efficiency of local self
government institutions, its framework, execution of powers, had constituted two committees: one under Kantha Raj Urs and another under Diwan Bahadur C Srinivas lyengar. This committee recommended, in 1915, that municipal committee members' strength should be rectified. It also gave call for the declaration of complete municipalities. Apart from that, the committee felt the need for the recommendation of village organisation, to be called as gram Panchayat. Based on these recommendations, in 1916, the orders were followed. Later on, in 1917, a new legislation regarding this was introduced in the Mysore Legislative Council. Again, in 1918, a reference to local self-government reconsidered the establishment of a strong gram panchayat.

In 1923, at a conference on local self-governance, the landmark decision on the establishment of local self-government was taken. Establishment of Mysore Gram Panchayat and Mysore Zilla Mandal act was implemented in 1927. According to the above-mentioned act, the taluk board was abolished, gram panchayat system and two-tier local self-government were established which included nominated and elected members. President and vice president of local self-government were elected. This is how, the rulers of the princely state tried to enrich the panchayat system in their administration. This system made provision for meeting the very basic needs in the rural society in a moderate way. Thus, in 1919, Village Panchayats became active in Princely Mysore.

In the same way, in Bombay Karnataka area, the East India Company created local bodies in the year 1850. These bodies came into existence first in Belgaum, in 1851, in Nippani in 1854, in Hubli in 1855 and in Dharwar in 1856. These areas came under the Bombay District Municipalities Act of 1925, with more powers.
In the Madras Presidency, in 1865, Municipalities and Local Boards came into existence. Town Improvement Act, Local Fund Act, Panchayat Boards were first recommended for single or groups of villages, under the 1884 Act.

In Hyderabad Karnataka area, levying of local Cess, in 1887-88, marked the beginning of local self-governments in the state.

In Kodagu area, municipal committees were established in 1870.

3.1.1 The 1947-56 Era

In 1949, under the Chairmanship of Venkatappa, a committee (Krishna 1992) was exclusively formed in Karnataka (the then Mysore state) to examine the two-fold system of integration and coordination of local bodies. The Committee also examined the main financial sources (revenue). In 1950, the committee gave its recommendations, which have been listed here as follows:

1) Local bodies have to be recognised and reorganised thoroughly and preference should be given to district level, and village level for a two-tier system. The committee preferred the administration through a cluster of villages (Narain and Mathur 1994).

2) Keeping in view the rural society, the committee suggested setting up of Group Panchayats, on a priority basis, so that village panchayat should be the nucleus administrative unit.

3) For purposes of regional planning and development, preference has to be given for setting up district councils. Those who contest for the council should have completed 25 years of age.
4) One of the most important recommendations of the committees is that associated with the appointment of the Commissioner to strengthen the PRIs and also to universalise the form of functions with the other states.

In summary, it can be stated that in order to strengthen the local bodies, in 1952, Mysore Village Panchayats and District Board Act was given effect to. Then, under the prevailing circumstances, instead of village panchayats, they preferred group panchayats. Due to this reason, the Act did not function for a long period.

In 1953, under the chairmanship of Mr. Chandrashekaraiyah, the Local Boards Enquiry Committee was appointed. The recommendations of this Committee were as follows:

1) Taluk Boards and District Boards were asked to be continued so that it can give the strategic linkage. The National Development Council has recognised the developments as the phase of democratic decentralisation.

After the implementation of the Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Board Act, simultaneously, the Kondajji Basappa Committee was constituted exclusively to look into the functioning of PRIs, comparing them with Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, and also to suggest modifications in the 1959 Act. In 1963, the committee submitted its report with the following highlights:

1) It strongly endorsed the policy of decentralisation through PRIs. The committee also recommended joint responsibility of the government and the non-official representatives of these institutions to strive for effective and smooth functioning of the PRIs.
2) The Committee recommended a Three-tier system of PRIs based on the 1959 Act. To deliver justice at the grassroots level, Nyaya Panchayats were to be set up.

3) The Committee also recommended the establishment of training centres at the district level to understand the regional and sub-regional issues centering on members to be more literate, informative and educative.

4) It also suggested setting up a state council for PR exclusively to watch the progress of community development.

Apart from the Kondaji Basappa Committee, certain Acts like the 1983 Karnataka PR Act, worked for the development or growth of the PRIs. Thus, the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, in the year 1985, established panchayats at the Zilla (district) and Mandal levels (below taluk) and Nyaya panchayats at the gross-root level. Gram Sabha meetings came to be conducted at least once in a year, through this Act. But enforcement of Nyaya Panchayats did not take place.

3.1.2 Post-1956 Era

During the course of the five decades, 1952-2002, radical changes have taken place in the concept, structure, constitution and modus operandi of PRIs in Karnataka, by enacting progressive legislation by successive governments in power, in order to translate the concept of decentralisation and gram swarajya into a reality.

After the state’s reorganisation in 1956, the Panchayat Raj Act was unified. In Karnataka, the Karnataka Local Boards and Village Panchayats Act, 1959 came into effect in 1960. This Act led to the formation of Village Panchayats at the village level, Taluk Development Boards (TDBs) at the block level and District Development Councils at
the district level in every district. In this three-tier system of administration, only the Village Panchayats and TDBs had elected representatives. This system of administration continued till 1983 and the TDBs gave a new twist to rural development.

In 1983, the Karnataka Zilla Panchayats, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayat Act was passed replacing the Act of 1959. However, the Nyaya Panchayats did not come into force despite being included in the above Act. In the same year, the new Panchayat Raj system came into existence, and the Taluk Panchayat Samitis were linked to the Mandal Panchayats. The former (TPs) functioned only as co-ordinating institutions. The ZPs and MPs had elected representatives. The ZPs had more power and 80 per cent of development expenditure was earmarked to them. This system continued till about 1992, when 2500 MPs functioned by providing opportunity of reservation to a number of people from weaker sections.

In 1983 Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, reservation was provided for the weaker sections of rural areas to have representation in the PRIs. Women were given 25 per cent of seats; SCs and STs up to 18 per cent or in proportion to their population and also for other backward classes (Khanna 1994). This was a revolutionary step in improving the panchayat raj institutions and more than anything else, it facilitated women to become leaders in these institutions.

According to this act, every mandal panchayat should have convened Gram Sahbas (GS) in its jurisdiction. These would meet at least twice a year. Periodically, the entire people in a village got an opportunity to interact with all people regarding common issues in their jurisdiction (Krishnan 1992).
The 1983 Act also came in for amendment in 1985 with an official Government Order issued. It grouped one or sometimes more than one taluk as a mandal panchayat. These mandal panchayats consisted of a population ranging from 8,000 to 12,000, with the election of one member for every 400 citizens. Under exceptional circumstances, even units with 4,000-5,000 population, were established as mandal panchayats even when they were established within 8 kms from another panchayat.

3.2 Functions of the various tiers of Panchayats

a) Mandal Panchayat

The MPs were responsible for maintaining sanitation of gram panchayats, for safeguarding the health of every gram Panchayat citizen and prevention of diseases. They concentrated on the development of village roads, construction of drainage and repairs, establishment of market centres, providing street lights, tax collection, licenses to establish and control hotels, etc.

b) Taluk Panchayat Samitis

The 1983 Act specified the structure and functions of taluk panchayath samiti. Every taluk must have a taluk Panchayat samiti. These should be in middle path to all mandal panchayats, which comes in their jurisdiction. In these Panchayat samitis, mandal Panchayat presidents, ZP members, members of co-operative societies, Agricultural Produce Marketing Committee's presidents, SC, ST, OBC, nominated members and finally, Member of Legislative Assembly and Member of Legislative Council were composite members. They came to be responsible for advisory functions and for reviewing the developmental works in their
jurisdiction; besides solving the problems of mandal panchayat in a peaceful manner and implementing the work, which was assigned by the state government and ZP.

c) Zilla Parishads

Every district came to have a one Zilla Parishad. It consisted of elected members where each member represented a population of 28,000. Here MLAs, MLCs and Member of Parliament we the ex-officio members but they are devoid of voting and could not contest for the posts of the president or vice-president.

3.2.1 The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993

According to the 73rd amendment of the Constitution, all uniform PRIs system was established. The Karnataka state also endorsed the new changes in Karnataka Legislative Assembly and Council in the form of a bill which was approved by the Governor in 1993. This legislation was called Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act. All the amendments brought in this Act have resulted in receiving a constitutional status by both the centre and the state. In our state, we have adopted the three-tier system of Gram Panchayat, Taluk Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat.

Gram Panchayat Structure and Functions

A village, which consists of population ranging from 5,000 to 7,000 villages, will be decided as a gram panchayat. In a few cases, there are gram panchayaths with below 2,500 population. The Act provides one elected member for every 400 citizens. The main functions of GP are collection of statistical data of the villages, maintenance of the community properties, electrification of the villages and preparation of annual plan etc.
3.2.2 Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1997

According to this Act, every member of the gram panchayat should already have, or construct sanitation facilities in the form of latrines, within 6 months of their assuming the office of a GP member. Otherwise, he/she will lose one's membership status. During the time of elections to the GP, if a contestant follows any malpractice, he/she is bound to face two years' of rigorous imprisonment. If a government employee works in favour of political parties he will be imprisoned for three years or he/she may be dismissed from the government service. An expert committee formed under the chairmanship of Mr. D M Chandrashekaraih, particularly looked into suitable changes required in the 1993 Panchayat Raj Act. The changes recommended by this committee have been mentioned below:

Based on Madhya Pradesh Panchayat Act 1993, gram sabhas, with all duties and power, were established in Karnataka Panchayats also. Approval of gram sabha for all planning is essential. It was made mandatory for SC, ST and women to participate in gram sabha meetings and it was considered as a forum.

Gram sabhas have to be empowered to protect community resources and safeguard them and also develop them in a meaningful manner. Here, the establishment of Nyaya Panchayat is a special feature and approval of gram sabha is essential for implementing the development programmes (Panchayat Raj Vartha Pathra 2001).

3.2.3 Panchayat Raj Act, 2002

This Act insists that every gram panchayat electoral constituency should form one ward committee, which meets once in six months. Similarly, the
whole gram panchayat must consist of one gram sabha. If members of
GP, TP and ZP fail to submit election expenditure, then, they are banned
from contesting election for three years. Powers have to be delegated to
gram panchayat to seek requisition for technical services from the state
for undertaking civil works for a definite purpose.

3.2.4 Belur Declaration, 2004

In order to cover the regional imbalances between Panchayat Raj and city
corporations, and to use the planning resources in strengthening the
gram sabha at the gram panchayat level revenue staff has been brought
under its jurisdiction through what is called as the 'Belur Declaration'.
This declaration also emphasised that it an ombudsman should be
established at each district headquarters under the control of Lokayukta.
It also placed importance upon bringing efficiency and accountability for
local self-government.

Akshara Dasoha primary schools, village literacy adult education
centres, anganwadi centres, ANM centres and public distribution
services, which come under the jurisdiction of gram panchayat. It
necessitates that the administration should be transparent in local self-
government.

Although the above resolution of the declaration aimed at complete
decentralisation of local self-government, the state cabinet has not fully
endorsed these declarations, because of a centralised mind-set
(Karnataka Vikas 2004).