CHAPTER-III

PANCHAYAT RAJ IN ANDHRA PRADESH
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3.1. INTRODUCTION

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 is the result of that mandate of the Constitution Amendment. Inspite of lapses and deficiencies, it aims for strengthening of Panchayat Raj system and to make people participate in the political process of democratic governance.

3.2. HISTORY OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Local self-government in Andhra Pradesh flourished right from the day’s Satavahans to the days of Vijayanagara Empire. The village government system of the old paved way to centralized administration under the British and the new situation strengthened the habit among the people to look to institutions away from the villages for the betterment of their condition. However, in the later part of the 19th Century and the early years of 20th Century attempts were made to re-establish a certain amount of local self-government in the Madaras province. The Local Board Act of 1884 introduced a three-tier system of Village Unions, Taluk Boards and District Boards, where in all the three together formed the local administration system. This three-tier system was endorsed by the Royal Decentralization Commission of 1919. The Commission however emphasized the need to resuscitate the village community and establish Panchayats in villages. In pursuance of the above recommendation the Village Panchayats Act was passed in 1920. Some other changes were brought in later.

At the time of launching Panchayat Raj, there was only a two-tier system of rural local government in the state, viz. District boards at the district level, and Gram Panchyats at the village level. Though the State of Andhra Pradesh was reorganized in 1956, the District Boards and gram Panchayats in the Andhra and Telangana area were governed by different statutes. For instance, in the Telangana area of the State, Gram Panchayats and District Boards were governed by the Andhra Pradesh (Telangana Area) gram Panchayats Act 1956, and the Andhra Pradesh (Telangana Area) District Boards Act 1955 respectively. Their counterparts in Andhra area of the state were governed by the Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) Village Panchayat Act,
1950. And the Andhra Pradesh (Andhra Area) District Boards Act, 1920. Thus the village Panchyat and the District Board, which were functioning in the state, were replaced by three-tier system of Panchayat Raj statutorily.

The growth of Panchayat Raj in the State can be broadly divided into five phases:

- **PHASE I**: (1959-1963)
- **PHASE II**: (1963-1972)
- **PHASE III**: (1973-1982)
- **PHASE IV**: (1981-1992)
- **PHASE V** (1993): Post 73rd Constitution Amendment

3.2.1. **PHASE I** (1959-1963)

The Panchayat Raj system came into being in Andhra Pradesh, on the basis of the recommendations of the Study Team for Community Projects and National Extension Service (1957) headed by Balwantray G. Mehta. In brief, the Team had recommended:

- There should be a three-tier structure of local-self government bodies from village to the district,
- There should be organic linkage between the different tiers,
- Adequate resources should be transferred to these institutions to enable them to discharge their duties,
- There should be genuine transfer of powers and duties; and
- All development programmes at these levels should be implemented through these bodies, and
- The system should ultimately be able to facilitate further devolution of powers.

The State Government, keeping in view these recommendations, issued a White Paper on reorganization of rural local administration, indicating inter alia the general policy for introducing Democratic Decentralization in the State. The system
was introduced first, on an experimental basis, in 20 ad hoc Panchayat Samitis in selected Community Development Blocks; one in each of the 20 districts of the State with effect from 1st July, 1958. On the basis of experience so gained, Panchayat Raj system was introduced all over the State under the Andhra Pradesh Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act (1959) in August, 1959.

In the light of the past experience in the administration of the Blocks, the government of Andhra Pradesh appointed a Committee under the Chairmanship of M.P. Pai in October 1963 to examine the question of territorial reorganization of Blocks, allocation of existing revenue between the new units which would emerge after the reorganization, and the future pattern of Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads at the Block and District levels respectively. The Committee opined that the net area of a Block, after excluding the forests, should not generally exceed 300 sq. miles in densely-populated areas, and 500 miles in sparsely populated areas, while its population may vary between one and one-and-half lakhs. Further the Block, as the unit for planning and development, should not cut across the Taluka boundary or independent sub taluka boundary. The Committee suggested principles for delimiting the reorganized Blocks and proposed reduction of the total number of Blocks from 448 to 290. In order to devote special attention to the less-developed areas, the Committee recommended reorganization of Blocks into four broad categories, viz., ‘advanced’, ‘ordinary’, ‘backward’, and ‘tribal’. The recommendations of the Committee were accepted and the number of Blocks was reduced from 448 to 321 with effect from July 1, 1964.

The State Government thus established a three-tier system consisting of Panchayat at village level, Samiti at the Block level, and Zilla Parishad at the district level. The Gram Sabha was to function as the General Assembly of the people at the lowest level. The Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) gave a good account of themselves during the first five years of their establishment because of the enthusiasm of the rural masses and support of the State Government.

3.2.2. PHASE - II : (1963 - 1972)

During the initial period of this phase, an Amendment in the Panchayat Raj Act in 1963 prohibiting the legislators from simultaneously holding the posts of
Chairmen of Zilla Parishads or Presidents of Panchayat Samitis, signalled the decline of Panchayat Raj and adversely affected the momentum which had been initially generated.

3.2.2.1. Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Raj Act 1964

The Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Raj Act, 1964 superseded the two gram Parishyat Acts of Andhra and Telangana. It is clear by now that the three-tier structure of Panchayat Raj in Andhra was not the result of a single legislation. Thus a three-tier structure with the village Panchayat at the bottom, the Zilla Parishad at the district level and the Panchyat Samithi representing the middle tier was established. There was also a provision for the Gram Sabha consisting all the persons, included in the electoral roll of the Gram Panchayat.

Andhra Pradesh has established a three-tier structure of Panchayat Raj with the block as a unit of development and planning. The decentralization of democratic power has been made to this unit. The function of Panchyat Samithi covers almost every service for the social, economic and cultural development of the rural areas. Zilla Parishads were established mainly as advisory, coordinating and supervisory bodies with limited executive functions. Village Panchayat, the primary unit, is mostly responsible for civic and certain developmental activities. In the scheme of Panchayat Raj, Gram Panchayat is the basic unit and only for this unit there was direct elections. The other units at block and district levels were constituted through indirect elections so as to establish an organic relationship between the institutions at different levels. Both at the Samithi and Parishad levels members of the state legislature and parliament are not only associated but also given right to vote along with elected members. There was also provision for cooption of two members each from women, scheduled castes and tribes and persons having experience in rural development. The term was for three years. There were five standing committees each in the Samithi and Zilla Parishad. There was no bar on the Assembly Members and Members of Parliament becoming the presidents or Chairman of the Samithi of Zilla Parishad respectively. The Secretary of the Zilla Parishad was made its Chief Executive Officer and district heads of departments were expected to cooperate with the Zilla Parishad in all developmental activities. At the Samithi level Block
Development Officer is its executive head assisted by several technical officials designated as Extension Officer to plan and execute development plans. The Village Panchayat was given powers of taxation and two higher tiers were given grants to undertake both obligatory and discretionary and civic and developmental functions.

The 1964 Act had provided for functional committees for agriculture, public health, sanitation and communication, and also one or two other committees, if necessary. The development programmes undertaken by the Gram Panchayat were many. Every conceivable work relating to agriculture, irrigation, drainage, cooperatives, animal husbandry, civic amenities, education, public health, and rural arts and crafts was entrusted to it. Although under the statute the gram panchayat was assigned an important function and role in development programmes, the success of these programmes depended upon the availability of panchayats financial resources. Adequate financial resources were a real problem for the panchayats. The act also made provision for Nyaya panchayats in chapter VII. The Nyaya panchayats will be constituted for a single or group of three to five villages, for the administration of civic and criminal justice in rural areas. Their term of office was three years.

In order to strengthen the Panchayat Raj system, the Government appointed a High Power Committee headed by M.T. Raju (1967)\(^3\). Having examined the working of PRIs, the Committee recommended changes in its administrative pattern. The most significant recommendation was to establish District Development Boards (DDB) under the Chairmanship of District Collector\(^4\).

It was agreed that the DDBs was merely intended to coordinate planning at the district level and to strengthen the position of the Collector in the development process of the district which was getting eroded as a result of the presence of an elected chief in the Zilla Parishad\(^5\). The Government accepted this recommendation and established DDBs in the State. Creation of the DDBs was a major setback to the growth of PRIs as these legitimized supremacy of civil services over the popularly elected, bodies\(^6\). It generated widespread dissatisfaction among the rank and file of the elected representatives. In order to counteract the growing dissatisfaction, a Committee of the Congress Legislature Party was appointed in March 1968, under the Chairmanship of J. Vengala Rao to consider all aspects relating to Panchayat Raj and to suggest improvements and amendments in the concerned Acts\(^7\).
The Committee, while admitting widespread public dissatisfaction over the functioning of the PRIs, stated that: "the record of the Panchayat Raj Institutions in respect of clean administration cannot be said to be worse when compared to what is alleged to be happening at the higher levels of administration". While the Committee identified some of the undemocratic practices of the political elite that grew out of the system of democratic decentralization, it was equally critical of the role of the officials. It also agreed with the criticism that the DDB was a "super body created with the sole purpose of strengthening the hands of bureaucracy at the expense of the popular institutions, and to a, lesser extent, giving a face-lift to the revenue setup which is right from the beginning nursing a grievance against the PRIs". The Committee recommended immediate abolition of DDBs as it is opposed to the democratic way of life we have chosen. The Committee favoured placing the District Collector under the control of the elected representatives of the Zilla Parishad. However, the Report of the Committee had little effect on the attitude of the State Government to bring about any change in the setup of Boards.

3.2.2.2. Narasimham Committee (1971)

Another important committee, which went into various aspects of Panchayat Raj in Andhra Pradesh, was the high power committee set up in 1971 headed by C. Narsimham. This committee was asked to review the function of Panchayat Raj in the light of the experience gained during the twelve years of its existence. It submitted its report in 1972, with the following the following recommendations.

- The Sarpanch of village panchayat should be directly elected by all the voters in the villages, and the up-Sarpanch should continue to be elected by the Sarpanch as well as the members of the Village Panchyats.

- A Panchayat Samithi should be composed only of directly elected members and sarpanches, elected by an electoral college made up of the sarpanches and members of gram panchayats. The strength of its members must be fixed at twelve times the number of members it elected to the Zilla Parishad.

- The President and vice-President of the samithi should be elected by all the members of the samithi from among themselves.
The Zilla Parishad should consist of all the members directly elected from the single member constituencies (subject to a limit of four per block) into which the blocks were to be divided with the presidents of the samithies as its ex-officio members.

The practice of associating the District collector as ex-officio member and chairperson of the standing committee of the Parishad should be discontinued.

The motion of no confidence against the Sarpanch of the village Panchayat should be disallowed as he was elected directly, but the provision may stay as regards the upa-Sarpanch.

For the Gram Panchayats, one to three seats are reserved for women depending on the strength of the Panchayat. The committee had felt that there was no need for reservation of seats for women in the Samithi and Zilla Parishads. However, political parties could choose as many women as possible and give them proper representation.

Reservation should be made of one seat either for the SCs or STs in the village panchayat if there were at least ten voters among them in a given panchayat, and in the Zilla Parishad according to the percentage of their population in the district.

Legislator need not be made ex-officio members either of the Samithi or of the Parishad.

The existing standing committees of the Panchayat Samithi should be re-designated as subject committees, limited to four in number. Planning, agriculture and industry, education, social welfare and women’s welfare.

Political parties should be recognized for the purpose of elections to Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samithis. A district development fund should be constituted and administered by the zilla Parishad. Instead of different departments giving grants-in-aid to Panchayat Raj bodies on various items, a block grant of twenty-five crore rupees every year may be given.

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The committee had strongly recommended the appointment of all Local Authority Finance Commission every five years on the lines of the Central Finance Commission. The authority to remove a Sarpanch, up-Sarpanch or a member of the gram panchayat was to be vested in the commissioner of Panchayat Raj. The power or removal of the member, the Vice-President and President of a Samithi could be vested with the government.

According to the provisions of Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act (1994), two commissions had been constituted viz., the State Election Commission to supervise the elections/polls etc. to PRIs and the State Finance Commission, to look after the matters relating to the strengthening of the financial resources of PRIs for better administration.

Within a couple of years of the introduction of Panchayat Raj in the State, failure on the political front became only too evident. Firstly, the political leadership could not arouse popular enthusiasm about PRIs and efficient management of development activities. Secondly, harmonious working relationship among different tiers of political hierarchy on the one hand, and between the officials and elected representatives, on the other hand, could not be established. Thirdly, the reluctance on the part of state-level leadership to provide the PRIs a fair trial was too evident from the very beginning. Lastly, the attitude of the people themselves was far from encouraging. In general, the people treated these bodies merely as an extension of government “system” at local level.

3.2.3. PHASE -III: (1973 - 1982)

In the ongoing effort to improve the working of PRIs in the State, two Legislative Bills, one each, for amending the Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads Act and the Gram Panchayats Act, were introduced in 1975. The former Bill provided for direct election of the President of the Panchayat Samiti, inclusion of four nominated members with limited voting rights and appointment of an independent Chief Executive Officer for each Zilla Parishad. In the other Bill, directly elected Sarpanch was made a member of the Gram Panchayat. The two Bills retained all powers of control of the Government over the PRIs. However, only the amendments to the Panchayat Act came into being due to swift political developments. The term of the Panchayat Raj bodies constituted in 1970 was
extended by one year on the expiry of their tenure. It was expected that elections will be held in 1976. However, instead of holding elections on due date, the Samitis and Parishads were superseded and special officers were appointed to look after the administration with the help of nominated advisory bodies. After the 1979 General Elections, the ruling party introduced some minor amendments to the Panchayat Act and initiated the process of elections to 23000 Panchayats, 326 Samitis and 22 Parishads in 1979. Again, the elections were postponed on account of Writ Petitions filed in the High Court.

In the meanwhile, the Asoka Mehta Committee (1978), suggested strengthening of the Panchayat Raj system so that the elected bodies may play a larger role in planning and implementation of rural development programmes. In order to initiate follow up action taken on the recommendations of the Committee, the Government of Andhra Pradesh appointed a Committee headed by Narsimham in 1979 to suggest measures to reorganize Panchayat Raj system for playing a more effective role in development, planning and management. The State Government had already brought about a series of important changes in the Acts by the time the Committee on PRIs submitted its report.

Elections to Panchayat Raj bodies were held after a gap of one decade in 1981 and the newly elected bodies started functioning with some negative factors. Firstly, local bureaucracy continued to be indifferent to PRO. Secondly, the rural elite, which largely came from the landed class, continued to enjoy most of the benefits, including those which were meant for the poor. Thirdly, factionalism among local leadership tended to inhibit effective functioning of the elected bodies. Fourthly, development process was constrained due to inadequate finances and insufficient staff. Finally, excessive supervision and control over these bodies tended to cripple the initiative of leadership in taking locally relevant decisions.

3.2.4. PHASE - IV: (1981 - 1992)

In order to strengthen the system of Panchayat Raj, the State Government adopted the Andhra Pradesh Mandal Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Abhivrudhi Sameeksha Mandals Act (1986), replacing the Panchayat Samitis and Parishads Act, 1959. The Act was mainly intended to bring the lower tiers nearer to the people besides enhancing financial and administrative viability. The
reorganization which was in conformity with the recommendations of the Asoka Mehta Committee, however, did not alter the place of Gram Panchayats which continued to be governed by the 1964 Act. The reorganized Panchayat Raj set up was characterized by the following features:

- Firstly, the Mandal Praja Parishads which replaced the Panchayat Samitis are much smaller in area and size of population thereby bringing the unit of planning and development nearer to the people.

- Secondly, besides the Sarpanch, the Presidents of the Mandal Praja Parishads and the Chairmen of Zilla Praja Parishads were directly to curb corrupt practices which are generally found in indirect elections.

- Thirdly, linkages between the three-tiers were maintained not only by making the office-bearers such as the Sarpanchas and the Presidents of Mandals as ex-officio members of the next higher tier, but also associating the state and national level legislators as ex-officio members of the Mandal and Zilla Praja Parishads.

3.2.5 PHASE - V (1993) : Post 73rd Constitution Amendment

The State Government amended the existing laws governing the PRIs in the light of the 73rd Constitution Amendment. Accordingly, a new Act called The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1994 came into effect in May, 1994, replacing the earlier Acts. In accordance with the provisions of the Act, a three tier structure consisting of Zilla Parishad at the district level, Mandal Praja Parishad at intermediate level and Gram Panchayats at village level were constituted in the State.

3.3 ANDHRA PRADESH PANCHAYAT RAJ ACT, 1994

3.3.1 Salient Features of A.P. Panchayati Raj Act

- Provision of organic linkage between the three tiers which enables the Sarpanches of the Gram Panchayats to attend the General Body meeting of the Mandal Parishad concerned. Similarly, the Presidents of the Mandal Parishad are entitled to attend the General Body meetings of the Zilla Parishad concerned without right to vote.
Provision of two child norm, whereby a candidate with more than two children will be disqualified from contesting the elections or from continuing as a member in any of the Panchayat Raj bodies.

A member who is absent for three meetings consecutively is deemed to be disqualified thereby ensuring regularity of the members in the functioning of Panchayats.

3.3.2. State Election Commission

The Act provided for the constitution of State Election Commission for the Superintendence, direction and control of the true preparation of electoral rolls for, and the conduct of elections to all Panchayat Raj institutions governed by the Act. The Election Commission shall consist of a State Election Commissioner. The Governor, on the recommendation of the government shall appoint a person who is holding or who has held on office not less than that of a Principal Secretary to Government in rank as the State Election Commissioner.

3.3.3. The Organisation

The three-tier system of Panchayat Raj introduced under the new Act consists of Gram Panchayat, Mandal Parishad and Zilla Parishad at the village, intermediate and district levels respectively. The Act also provides for the constitution of Gram Sabha at the village level having all the registered voters under its jurisdiction as members. The Gram Sabha which is to function as the General Body of the Gram Panchayat has been, among others, responsible for supervision and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes, selection of local schemes, identification of beneficiaries etc.

The Act provides for direct election of members to the PRIs at all the three levels on the basis of wards for the Gram Panchayat and territorial constituencies in the case of Mandal Parishad and Zilla Parishad with reservations for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, backward classes, and women. Besides reservation of seats for the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their population, one-third of the total number of seats for direct election in each of these bodies are to be reserved for backward classes and another one-third of them of women.
The Sarpanchs of the Gram Panchayat are to be elected directly by the electorate in the village whereas the President of the Mandal Parishad and the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad are be elected from among the directly elected members in respect of these bodies. The term of PRIs and their heads is five years.

The Collector is a permanent invitee for the meetings of the Mandal Parishad and the Zilla Parishad Standing Committees. He/she is entitled to participate in the discussions, but without right to vote. Besides, the Mandal Parishad and the Zilla Parishad also have one or two members co-opted from minority communities.

3.3.4. Functions

Under the new Act, PRIs are expected to perform all development functions as suggested in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution 73rd Amendment. These include a wide range of maintenance, regulatory and development functions. From the point of view of agrarian reforms, the Panchayats are responsible for implementing action of land reform measures including consolidation of holdings and cooperative management of community lands. The PRIs are also expected to take up programmes under agriculture, animal husbandry, cottage industries, preprimary and primary education, health and sanitation, and welfare programmes for women, children destitute and crippled.

3.4. SUBJECTS TRANSFERRED TO PANCHAYATS

The following subjects have been transferred to Panchayats: Agriculture; animal husbandry; rural water supply; minor irrigation tanks; social and farm forestry; small scale industries and food processing; khadi and village industries; fuel and fodder; roads; culverts, bridges ferries, and water ways; non-conventional energy; technical training and vocational education; adult and non-formal education; libraries; cultural activities; market fairs and shandies (except market yard); and maintenance of community assets.

The Mandal Parishad is responsible for the implementation of rural development programmes in the Mandal area in association with the Panchayats, cooperatives, voluntary organizations and other development institutions. In addition, a number of functions for stepping up agricultural production through
propagation of improved methods of cultivation; for improving livestock and establishing minor veterinary dispensaries under animal husbandry; and for expanding and maintaining medical and health services under rural health and sanitation have also been specified.

The Zilla Parishads have been given, inter-alia, the powers of supervision and control of the Mandal Parishads including collection of data, consolidation of plans of the Mandal Parishads, distribution of funds allotted to the district further down to the Mandal Parishads, examining and approving the budgets of Mandals. The Act, however, neither specifies the powers devolved on these bodies nor the administrative set-up to perform the functions identified at each level. The functions to be performed by each of these bodies are only indicative of the powers that would be given to them.

On the whole, it is seen that of the 29 subjects which are supposed to be transferred to the PRIs only 17 subjects have been transferred. However, ground reality is that the exercise is only on paper.

3.5. DEVOLUTION PROCESS

The State Government took a decision to transfer the following powers to Panchayats, which include:

a) Empowering them to draw cheques;

b) Issuance of identity cards to the Sarpanches; and

c) Vesting more administrative powers to Gram Panchayats. Furthermore, 10 out of 29 subjects in XI schedule would be transferred to Gram Panchayats. These subjects include: minor irrigation, water management, watershed development, drinking water, roads, culverts and bridges.

In order to strengthen the administrative support to the Panchayats, the State Government has taken several steps recently. For example, a Secretary to each Gram Panchayat combining revenue and Panchayat functions is being provided. He/she will be under the administrative control of the Gram Panchayat but would also be simultaneously responsible to Revenue Department for revenue functions.
3.6. RESOURCES OF PANCHAYATS

3.6.1. Gram Panchayats

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Act, 1994 provides power to levy taxes only to the Gram Panchayats. Accordingly, a Gram Panchayat has the power to levy house tax, Kolagaram tax or Katarusum tax on the produce sold in the villages. The Act has also introduced compulsory new taxes like tax on advertisement, water tax, drainage tax and lighting tax. The profession tax which was compulsory until 1987 has been taken away from the Panchayats against a compensation package for the loss.

3.6.2. Mandal Parishad

The main sources of income of Mandal Parishad consist of the funds relating to institutions and schemes transferred by the government or heads of departments, funds relating to different development programmes; funds or aid received from central, state and other all India bodies like Khadi, Silk, Coir, handicrafts; donations and contributions from the Gram Panchayat or from public or from Zilla Parishad; share of the land revenue; surcharge fee, income from remunerative enterprises and annual grant at the rate of five rupees per person residing in the Mandal. The own resources of a Mandal Parishad accounts for only 5 per cent of the total income. Remaining 95 per cent income is derived as assigned revenues and grants.

3.6.3. Zilla Parishad

The resources of Zilla Parishad includes 5 per cent own resources obtained from rents on buildings and commercial complexes, fee from markets, factories and other miscellaneous sources. Per capita grant paid to Zilla Parishad accounts to Rs.2. An important grant paid to Zilla Parishad is the grant for salaries of the staff of Zilla Parishad, teachers of primary school, upper primary school and secondary schools which comes to 50 per cent of the receipts.

3.7. STATE FINANCE COMMISSION

The State Finance Commission made 84 recommendations, both financial and non-financial. The Government has accepted 54 recommendations. While 11 recommendations were accepted with some modifications, 19 were not accepted at all.
The non-financial recommendations accepted by Government relate to the formula for release of grants to Gram Panchayats on 'Backwardness Index', penalties on Minor Minerals Tax, computerisation in local bodies, training to the Panchayat Raj Officials, regular inspection of offices, transfer of functions to the local bodies and introduction of Social Audit etc.

The State Government, accordingly, initiated several measures to implement the recommendations of the SFC. In case of default of payment of taxes, the Divisional Panchayat Officers have been empowered to collect such taxes as arrears of land revenue through the Village Administrative Officers. Orders have also been issued to identify government land, enter the details thereof in the register of immovable properties and explore possibilities of utilizing them in order to augment the resources of the Gram Panchayats. Local bodies have been asked to introduce 'Social Audit' and ensure efficient delivery of services to the tax payers. The government has made it compulsory for any person applying for a loan from the government or from a Corporation or a Bank to submit a 'no tax due' certificate from his Panchayat. The same rule also applies to applications for telephone, electricity and water connections and registration as a small-scale industry.

3.8. STATE SUPERVISION AND CONTROL

The Act gives ample scope for the state government to exercise its control over the PRIs. The power to exercise control over Mandal Parishads and Zilla Parishads is vested with the Commissioner of Panchayat Raj while the District Collector has the authority to:

a) Suspend or cancel any resolution passed by these bodies;

b) Initiate action in the event of default;

c) Give directions to PRIs to take a specific action

d) Suspend the Chairman (Zilla Parishad), the President (Mandal Parishad) and the Sarpanch (Gram Panchayat) and
e) Dissolve the Zilla Parishad/Mandal Parishad/ Gram Panchayat and any of the Standing Committees. The government reserved powers for itself to review or revise the decisions arrived at by the PRIs. One positive aspect, however, is that opportunity for an appeal to a higher authority against any arbitrary decision taken by the officials concerned has been provided for in the Act.

Thus, the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act provides for direct control by the state government over the PRIs at all the three levels. The Government, without consulting the Zilla Parishad, can dissolve any of its Standing Committees. The Gram Panchayat needs to submit its Annual Report to the District Panchayat Officer (DPO), but not to the Mandal Parishad, whereas the Mandal Parishad is required to submit its Annual Report to the Zilla Parishad, which, in its turn, submits the Report to the government for ratification. Hence, it can be inferred that such an incursion into the autonomy of PRIs would have a debilitating effect on the functional linkages among and between the three tiers since the state government exercises its direct control over these bodies.

3.9. SUMMING-UP

The structure of Panchayat Raj in Andhra Pradesh has undergone several changes during the last four decades of its existence. Though the system was originally conceived as a institutional framework for planning and implementation of development programmes and also as an administrative set up for delivery of services at lower levels, the entire growth process was inhibited by too much party politics and favouritism coupled with bureaucratic apathy. The process of Panchayat Raj reforms, therefore, exhibits shadows of political exigencies and short-term gains. While some of the intended changes in the structure of the system were sought to be justified on some count or the other, these could hardly contribute in strengthening the system. The initial enthusiasm got exhausted within the first five years of their establishment due to slackening of political will, decline in the quality of leadership, lack of sustained interest of the State and inadequacy of resources. The bureaucracy also made occasional interventions which were not conducive to the growth of these institutions. Instead of initiating long-term strategy for the growth of democratically
elected bodies, the leadership was more often contented with ad hoc remedial measures and provision of routine functions and activities covered under the centrally sponsored rural development programmes.

The high expectations of the people from the system have not been realized. For instance, each mandal was to have a Primary Health Centre, a High School, a Veterinary Hospital, Cooperative Banks, a Police Station, Market Place, a Sub-Treasury, a Bus Station and an Agro-service Centre. Even now, about two-thirds of the Mandal offices are located in rented accommodation. Similarly, expansion and upgrading of the health sub-centres into primary health centres, and of the veterinary clinics into veterinary hospitals have hardly taken place in many places. As a matter of fact, the Mandals have neither been provided with requisite infrastructure nor qualified staff. Even if a sincere step is taken, it would probably take almost a decade for equipping the institutions with infrastructure and services all over the State.

The State of Andhra Pradesh essentially represents a case wherever the Panchayat Raj bodies, after having an initial successful beginning, could hardly regain the status they had enjoyed due to political processes. Though there appears to be total conformity with the provisions of the Constitution 73rd Amendment, at least in legal terms, the situation in the field does not confirm Governments' commitment to the process of decentralization. At the same time, the potential which the elected bodies has for accelerating the pace of development cannot be denied. These bodies have functioned reasonably well in the initial phase of decentralisation. There is no reason why they cannot repeat the performance. What is needed is to free them as much as possible from political considerations and treat them as an equal partners in the development process. The problems emerging out of the growth of parallel organisations can also be tackled through appropriate inter-organisational integration.

It can be concluded that the system of Panchayat Raj in the State has the necessary potential to transform the rural areas but it requires a political will which, if used, can go a long way in fruitful utilisation of decentralisation process for development of all sections of society.
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5. Government of Andhra Pradesh, Block Reorganization Committee (Chairman: M.P. Pai), Hyderabad, 1964.

6. Ibid.


9. Ibid.


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