Chapter- I

Introduction

The system of Panchayati Raj, based on the principles of democratic decentralization, peoples’ initiative and participation, was introduced in India early in the sixties. More than 72% Indians live in rural areas and the participation of people in Panchayati Raj Institutions in the rural areas could be regarded as an important indicator to asses the participation of the Indian citizen in the political process.

The village panchayats of India have had a long history and it is a unique feature of Indian political system. These village panchayats are basic units of administration at village in the third stratum of local government. Soon after independence the framers of the Indian Constitution decided to give them importance and directed the states to organize village panchayats as units of local self-government. Mahatma Gandhi believed in panchayats’ immense potential for democratic decentralization and for devolving power to the people. He had a vision to make all the villages as village republics, with this idea wanted to create village swaraj in the country side. B.R. Ambedkar argued against panchayats and he was apprehensive about the continuation of caste Hindus hegemony. Further he opined that villages in India were caste-ridden and had little prospects of success as institutions of self-government. George Mathew puts it aptly ‘his (B.R.Ambedkar) stand should not be interpreted as the one against democratic decentralization or the concept of giving power to the people’. He was only speaking from his experience of what a caste-ridden village society in India had meant to him and to millions like him. Undoubtedly, his perception was as realistic as that of others. The remedy lay in creating an egalitarian and truly democratic panchayat raj system in the country. He also fought for providing reservation in panchayats to involve all depressed classes in the rural governance.

Andhra Pradesh, one of the first to accept the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957) decided to establish one Panchayat Samithi in each district on an adhoc basis, learnt from its working and then brought legislation thereafter to create a three-tier system. With the success of the experiment with adhoc Samithies, the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithies and Zilla Parishads Act, 1959 was enacted. According to this Act, a representative of Scheduled Castes and another representative of Scheduled Tribes (ST) if their population was not less than five per cent in the Block or another
representative the SCs (if there were no STs) at Panchayat Samithi level. M.T.Raju Committee (1967) Vengal Rao Committee (1968) did not focus on representation of SCs or STs in its recommendations. The Narasimham Committee (1971) had recommended for limited reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and Women. Two to four seats were reserved for women depending upon the total number of seats in the Gram Panchayat. Three functional committees- agriculture, public health and sanitation, communications- were to be constituted with a minimum of three members, the Sarpanch being the chairman and at least one member from the Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes being co-opted into each committee. The Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayat Act of 1964 was a remarkable step taken by State Government to provide reservations for weaker sections of the society.

The original Panchayat Raj Act of 1964 had provided for reservation of one seat in each panchayat to either Scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes. This Act did not provide substantial or proportional representation in respect of office of Sarpanch or Members to Scheduled Caste and Tribes. The inclusion of this provision in the amended Act of 1978 reflected a new socio-political perspective, considering the importance of the office. The salient features of the new system were as follows:

Fourteen per cent of the total number of offices of Sarpanch in each block in non-scheduled areas have to be reserved. Further step towards include these groups in local governance, in Mandal Praja Parishad & Zilla Parishad Act 1986 had provided for reservation at Mandal & Zilla Parishad level. 9 per cent for women, 15 per cent for Scheduled Caste, 6 per cent for Scheduled Tribes and 20 per cent for Backward classes. But, Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Act, 1994 in conformity with 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments have provided clear cut proportional reservation to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and 1/3rd for women.

The system of representation of Dalits in Panchayati Raj Institutions is discussed in detail in chapter-II. There have been concerted efforts since late’ 80 to revitalize the system and to facilitate participation of all sections of the society. The result was the passing the 73rd Constitution Amendment with high hopes and expectations.

B.R.Ambedkar emphasized the need to have the representation of Dalits in decision-making processes and administrative machinery to implement and monitor the policies, measures and programmes. “Representing the interests of Dalits is not just enough”, he said, “He believed the interests could be meaningfully ensured by their own representation and participation in decision-making processes at all levels”. He
recommended participation of Dalits in democratic polity at all levels from legislature to execution of policies. In the central scheme of Ambedkar, representation and participation are central. He favoured a fair policy of inclusion of Dalits in democratic polity, economy and society and cultural life of society. Thus his approach is holistic. It is interesting to note that the Article 15 (4), the Constitution of India, empowers the state to make any special provision for the advancement of socially and educationally backward classes of citizens, women and children. It is the obligation of the state to consider and their claims in the making of appointments to public services and reservation in case of inadequate representation. Again Article 16(4 A) states that nothing prevents the state from making any provision for reservation to promote any class or classes in all sectors including the services under the state in favour of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, and according to 77th Amendment Act, 1995 in the opinion of the state the Dalits are not adequately represented in the services under state. Article 17 of the Indian Constitution abolishes the practice of untouchability. It further says that the enforcement of any disability arising out of untouchability is an offence punishable in accordance with law. Articles 23, 24 and 46 provide economic safeguards to the disadvantaged sections of the society though specific mention of the term Scheduled Castes is not made. Article 23 prohibits bonded labour. Article 24 prevents the use of children below the age of 14 to work in factories, mines and in other hazardous employment. Article 25 (2 b) deals with the throwing open of Hindu religious institutions of a public character to all classes and sections of Hindus.

It is well known that there are many bonded labourers, child labourers among the Scheduled Castes even today. Articles 330 and 334 provide for reservation to Backward Sections in the House of the People and in the Legislative Assemblies of State respectively. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment provides for reservation of seats and chair positions to Scheduled Castes in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Articles 243(D) of the Indian Constitution provides that seats and offices are to be reserved for Scheduled Castes (Dalits) and Scheduled Tribes (Adivasis) in proportion to the size of their population within the panchayat, subjected to one-third seats are to be reserved for women belonging to these categories. There is also an enabling clause for states to

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provide reservations, on similar pattern for the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). The allocation of reserved positions for various categories is to be by rotation in such manner as may be determined by the states. It is of interest to note that “before the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, former Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi visited extensively the village belt. He tried to get first hand information about the hardships, as well as needs of the villagers. Rajiv Gandhi realized that decentralization of power could, to a great extent, solve their problems. The need for devolution of power was fully realized “Power to People” was assumed to ensure democracy at the grass roots level. Rajiv Gandhi on the floor of Lok Sabha opined that, unless there are adequate representatives of the Scheduled castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, there is the likelihood that the emerging leadership from among the Dalits and Scheduled Tribes may not be able to bestow proper attention to problems of these groups”.

The amendment under reference had taken special care to provide reservation to the weaker sections which include Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women. Till the passing of the amendment, presence of the weaker sections inadequate numbers in Panchayat Raj was not ensured. The amendment expected to usher in a new era in realizing the goals of Panchayat Raj and in enhancing the role of weaker sections in the processes of development. The weaker sections, in some form or the other were to a large extent, prevented from exercising their power. The traditional power structures, economically strong and social hierarchy came in the way. In the post 73rd constitutional amendment period several changes have been reported, and resultantly there has been a set back to the forces of exploitation. The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes representatives began to have a greater say in the affairs of local governance. A young and educated grass roots leadership among Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes has emerged. The conventional barriers of caste are breaking. Power shift is visible. However the obstacles have not totally waned where there was a greater need to make the panchayat more inclusive. In the above background an attempt is made in the present study to examine the role of Scheduled Castes’ representatives in gram panchayats through a micro level study.

1.1 Statement of Problem

After nearly two decades of the 73rd Constitution Amendment came into operation, which is intended, as stated earlier, to strengthen democratic decentralization, people’s participation, participation of the weaker sections including women, the situation is hoped better than before. Both in the areas of administrative, political and fiscal decentralization, several issues and concerns emerged and the domination of economically and socially higher sections of society challenged. Any objective analyst would agree that politics should be the realm of all people and that it is important to examine the outcome of the participation of Dalits and women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is also essential to examine their new roles in local governance in relation to family, community and state as enabling or inhibiting factors in the performance of these marginalized groups. Available literature suggests that change is evident in the attitudes and behavioural pattern of the dominant as well as deprived sections in the arena of Panchayat Raj. Joshi and Narwani “examined the emerging trends across Indian states in relation to Panchayati Raj. They point out that despite their social, educational and economic backwardness, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes representatives have now a greater say in rural local governance. These communities have also noticed improvements in their lives. A new grass roots leadership of the weaker sections among Scheduled Castes/Scheduled Tribes is emerging and conventional barriers of the caste system are breaking. The pressure of dispossessed people in the local bodies is felt, though with prejudice by higher castes and land lords who have been relatively disempowered. Power shift is visible. However, conflict is inevitable. It could be due to caste, economic, religious and other factors. Available research suggests that the demand for the exercise of rights is seen in some cases. The peoples’ representatives in panchayats, especially assertion of identity by the Dalits/SCs is evident”.4 In the above background it is proposed to study the role of Scheduled Castes’ Members and Sarpanches.

The studies conducted so far indicate that the participation of Dalits in Panchayat Raj Institutions is evidenced, to some extent, as a result of 73rd Constitution Amendment to the Constitution of India. The Indian society specially in rural sector is still dominated by upper castes, economically powerful sections including muscle men. It may be stated,

here that these sections of the society may not give up easily and shut the dominance over
the weaker sections of the society. It may be simple and easy to talk about the
constitutional amendments, legislative acts, rules and regulations which would bring the
change, but in reality the said forces may not easily give up their power and create
several hurdles and barricades in the process of implementation of the provisions of 73rd
Amendment. Though some change could be witnessed with regard to discrimination
against disadvantaged sections of the society, yet there is a lot of evidence to show that
there exist the discrimination, domination and exclusion of the downtrodden sections, and
Dalits are not an exception to this phenomenon in rural areas and more especially in the
Panchayat Raj administration. Most of the studies discussed this aspect as highlighted in
chapter III- Review of Literature.

For the study proper two districts i.e Krishna, Ranga Reddy are chosen from the
two regions-Andhra and Telangana respectively. Krishna comparatively is more
advanced than Ranga Reddy district. Ranga Reddy is backward though it is nearer to
capital city. The present study covers two villages in the districts of Krishna and Ranga
Reddy in Andhra Pradesh. The representation of Kamma community in Krishna District
is higher than other community. A large percentage of Kamma community is involved in
lucrative agriculture business and industry. They are spread over mostly in a greater
number, in rural as well as urban areas. They are most advanced politically,
economically, socially and culturally. The lobby of this community is greater at the
union and state level governments. There were several incidents and instances to show
the arrogance of Kammas towards the disadvantaged sections of the society the famous
case of Karamchedu⁵ is in point as an example.

It is beyond once imagination to see that their power is passed on to Dalits in
these areas by Kamma community. Strongly enough socio-economic, political power,
not in toto but in some extent passed onto, gradually, to Kapus a forward community and
Goudas one of the backward communities. The change occurred on account of the
awareness created by various political parties in the rural scenario as regards to
Panchayat Raj. Ranga Reddy district, as stated earlier is nearer to twin cities of
Secunderabad and Hyderabad. Yet the district is quiet backward socially, economically,
culturally for various historical backgrounds. One of the chief reasons for its
backwardness is the step motherly attitude of the respective successive state government.

⁵ Karamchedu massacre was took place on 17th July 1985 in Prakasm District of Andhra Pradesh in which Dalits were attacked by the Kammas.
It is very strange to note that though Ranga Reddy district closer to twin cities their impact over the district is hardly seen in some pockets. There are two communities for the purpose of the study, Reddys and Goudas are dominant in all the sectors of life. The influence of these communities is greatly seen in all walks of life. The large percentage of people living in poverty gave scope for these two communities to become influential and dominant in all the sectors more especially in the arena of Panchayati Raj. There is representation of Dalits in various politico-administrative bodies of Panchayat Raj but in actual operation there is lot of socio-political exclusion whereby Dalits can not exercise under circumstance explained supra the real power in the administration of Panchayat Raj. The narration given above compels one to think that the real power has not reached though laws have given the opportunity. It appears that there is a great vacuum between perceptions and practices. The situation might improve when several instruments of state, NGOs and caste based organizations create more awareness and an element of agitation among the Dalits to seize the opportunity. The study therefore examines the entire scenario and comes forth with theory to help improve the prevailing situation.

1.2 Objectives
The objectives of the present research are

1. to study the socio-economic, political background of respondents;
2. to study their perceptions in relation to community at large and the Scheduled Castes in particular and to examine the factors leading to the assumption of leadership positions;
3. to asses the nature of performance;
4. to analyse the influence of caste politics, sub-caste dimension, economic status groups and political leaders;
5. to examine the position of leaders in village politics in pre and post 73rd Constitutional Amendment era and to identify the changes if any; and
6. to suggest measures for improving the quality of and for empowering Dalit/SC leaders.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is generally held that the 73rd Constitution Amendment has facilitated increased scope to Dalits to participate in decision-making and implementation process. It is also felt that the Dalits of rural India are gradually, strengthening their place in leadership
roles and transfer of power is also taking place, facilitating their empowerment. The present study proposes to examine the validity of stated assumptions with the help of research in a micro setting.

1.4 Universe of Study and Rationale for the Selection of Villages

For the present study two villages have been selected after carrying out a pilot study in Andhra Pradesh. They are Pedda Thummidi village in Bantumilli Mandal of Krishna District of Coastal region and Pedda Amrberpet village in Hayatnagar Mandal of Rangareddy District from Telangana region. Pedda Amrberpet is an exterior village and is very close to Hyderabad, the state capital and the latter i.e, Pedda Thummidi is an interior village and is 35 kilometres from Machilipatnam, the head quarters of Krishna District and 450 Kms from Hyderabad. During 2001-2006, the position of Sarpanch in Pedda Thummdti village panchayat was reserved for SCs. But in the consecutive term i.e., 2006-2011 the position of Sarpanch was reserved for BC woman. During 2001-2006, the position of Sarpanch in Pedda Amrberpet was reserved for SCs. During the period of 2006-2011 the seat of Sarpanch in Pedda Amrberpet village was reserved for B C woman candidate. It is proposed to select a village where the panchayat was formed during the pre-independence period and another in the post-independence times. Caste politics, sub-caste dynamics, economic status of the Dalits, geographical location and history of the villages have also been considered in selecting the villages.

1.5 Methodology

A sample of 262 respondents which consists of 58 peoples’ representatives (Dalits and non-Dalits), 200 primary respondents (Dalits and non-Dalits) and 4 panchayat officials are covered for the study. The methods chosen for the study are essentially comparative and empirical. Both spatial and diachronic comparisons pertaining to the period of 2001-2006 and 2006-2011 respectively are made. A detailed schedule consisting of closed and open ended questions is prepared and administered in person to the Dalit representatives as well as non-Dalit representatives. Informal discussions (ID), focussed group disscussions (FGD) with village elders, officials, group members both Scheduled Castes and non-SCs and youth associations have been held. A field dairy is maintained to note personal observations. The data are analysed with the help of

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6 But according to official records it is called “Peda Thummidi”
7 Focussed Groups Discussions.
Statistical Package for Social Science Research (SPSS). Available research forms the secondary source material. Data are also drawn from government reports, periodicals and news papers.

The purpose of interviewing the non-Dalit representatives also is to identify the differences in socio-economic and political background, perceptions and performance. But the focus is essentially on Scheduled Castes’ representatives. Each interview lasted for 2 to 3 hours. A number of visits have been undertaken to the research area to get detailed information. The respondents include the elected representatives, contestants, officials, villagers. Each category has been represented in collecting their opinions separately.

1.6 Problems during Field Investigation and Limitations

Field investigation, especially in villages is a difficult task. The researcher made three visits to each of the villages under study to establish rapport. There was high amount of suspicion about the purpose of the work. Some members of panchayats especially the Sarpanches doubted the credentials of the researcher, suspecting that there is an indirect effort to elicit information by the income tax department, party leaders of political parties and CID\(^8\). The husband of a Sarpanch began to seriously question the purpose of the present research. However, the researcher could gain the confidence of the person in question and elicit the required information.

Another problem encountered was getting correct information. Based on face to face interviews and cross checking, every effort is made to arrive at objective assessment. It is learnt that some of the respondents were involved in criminal cases and with a great difficulty and persuasion they cooperated to furnish the information. Further it came to the light of the study that the force of circumstances led a Sarpanch to commit suicide in one of the two villages. Another problem is relating to obtaining records. The panchayat records have not been appropriately maintained and perturbing factor was that the minutes of meetings were neither properly recorded nor recorded at all. Therefore the researcher had to depend heavily on the interviews to assess the nature and extent of participation. The village secretaries were found scared to give the information required. After prolonged persuasion, some information was obtained.

\(^8\) Criminal Investigation Department.
1.7 Scheme of the Thesis

This thesis consists of seven chapters including the introduction and conclusion. The first chapter deals with introduction. The second chapter gives details of the concepts of democratic decentralization, Panchayati Raj System and empowerment of Dalits. The third chapter is devoted to a survey of contemporary literature relating the role of Scheduled Castes/Dalits in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The fourth chapter gives detailed account of the background, participation and perceptions of the members of Peda Thummidi village panchayat. In order to assess the role of Scheduled Castes representatives the non-Scheduled Castes representatives’ background, participation and perceptions have also been detailed. An analysis of the perceptions of a cross sections of the villages would also form part of this chapter. Chapter fifth is designed in a manner similar to chapter four. In this chapter the background, perceptions and participation of Scheduled Castes and non-Scheduled Castes representatives of Pedda Amberpet village are analysed. The perceptions of a cross sections of villagers are also included in this chapter. The sixth chapter makes a comparative assessment of the respondents’ background, perceptions and performance in the villages selected for study. The concluding chapter (chapter-seventh) presents a summary of findings and it also contains suggestions for a better and effective performance of Scheduled Castes representatives in particular and for more effective implementation of 73rd Constitution Amendment Act in general. In all stages, care is taken to identify and to assess the position before and after the 73rd Constitution Amendment in respect of the role of Scheduled Castes in the process of empowerment.