CHAPTER II

EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN
ANDHRA PRADESH
India will make progress only when the people living in the villages become politically conscious. The progress of our country is bound up with the progress in our villages. If our villages make progress, India will become a strong nation and nobody will be able to stop its onward march. Gandhiji strongly felt that the village panchayats should play an integral part in Indian Government. Ideologically, organisationally and functionally the Panchayati Raj system constitutes the most significant socio-economic and politico-administrative phenomena. It is an excellent epitome of decentralization at the grass-root levels for development.

The advent of Panchayati Raj system constitutes one of the most outstanding developments in India in the post-independence era. It would be a grave error to identify the present day Panchayati Raj system with the institution of Gram Panchayat that flourished in India in the bygone days. The nomenclature of Panchayati Raj Institutions refers to the politico-administrative device which was necessitated in the wake of the introduction of democracy and development for the nation-building programmes and activities.
The local bodies provide an opportunity to the local people to participate in the administration of the country. The unnecessary growth of executive bureaucracy in administration can be easily avoided through active participation of the people in the process of policy formulation in Local Government Institutions in India. Panchayati Raj or Panchayat Raj, literary 'Panchayat rule' may be paraphrased as Rural Local Self-Government in India. While Local Self-Government in the modern sense is essentially a British creation. The Indian component, as it relates to some institutional legalies the historical image of 'Panchayats' perceived broadly in a nationalist idiom and relatively recent ideologies of decentralization and democracy conditioned by such an image of panchayats.

Local Self-Government Institutions are not new to India. These Institutions have flourished in India, since times immemorial, the Panchayats or Village Governments as they were called ancient institutions and were themselves as small republics. In a system of Local Self-Government mere existence of a local body is not enough. It should be a body that represents the local inhabitants possessing a fairly large amount of autonomy raising at least a part of its revenue through local taxation and spending its revenue on services which are regarded as local.
The village bore the collective responsibility for the realisation of land revenue and other state duties during the Mauryan period. The village council always protected the rights and interests of the people and protested against any undue demand on the part of the State during the Gupta period. And as a protest, it would refuse to collect land-revenue and give it to the State.

So far as the finance is concerned, besides the receipt of the small percentage of the revenue collected, and the fines from the courts, popular faith in the necessity of doing good deeds or acts of piety considerably helped those institutions to meet the very common necessities of their daily life.

The village assemblies mentioned in the ancient classics like the Sangam literature which dealt with common matters of village. A plethora of literary and epigraphical evidence is available to bear witness to the existence and working of the rural institutions of those days in south India.

Although Local Government Institutions existed in India since ancient times, these acquired representative character only during the British regime. During the British rule in India the villages established closer contacts with
the outside world. As customs and traditions broke down under the impact of these changes, individualism began to crush the elements of corporate life in the villages. British rule established a closer and more direct connection between the central and provincial Governments on one side and the individual inhabitants of the village on the other.

A new phase of evolution of Local Government began with the coming into force of the Government of India Act 1935 in the provinces which established provincial autonomy. The administration of Local Government was then fully in the hands of Ministers. Naturally efforts were made to democratise local bodies and improve their structure and working. Finances were also improved later as a glorious change took place with the dawn of Indian Independence in the year 1947.

In 1948 a conference of Local Government Ministers from all over India met at Delhi under the Chairmanship of the Central Ministers of Health to exchange ideas with regard to various problems facing local authorities. Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru in his speech he reiterated that "Local Self-Government must be the basis of any true system of democracy. We have got rather into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top may not be a success unless you build on this foundation from below".
The landmark in the history of Local Self-Government in India was the year 1950 when the Constitution of India came into operation. It made the Local Government as state subject. Article 40 of the Constitution directs the states to establish village panchayats.

EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ IN INDIA AFTER 1950

The changes in the structure of rural Local Government and in the functions made over to rural local bodies were based on the recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta. This was a departure from what prevailed in the later stages of British rule. After the inauguration of the community development projects in 1952 and the National Extension Service Programme in 1953 and their consequent ineffective functioning made the planning commission to appoint a study team under the Chairmanship of Balwantrai Mehta on January 7, 1957 to study and to report on community development projects and the National Extension Service Programmes and to probe into their functioning so as to suggest ways and means to ensure economy and efficiency.

Second Five Year Plan had further emphasised the need for a well organised democratic structure of
administration at the district level through which the 
village must be organically linked with the popular organisa­
tion at the higher level. In persuasion of this emphasis the 
Balwantrai Mehta Committee made an exhaustive enquiry and the 
team submitted its report on November 24, 1957. The team 
made many important recommendations.

The Balwantrai Mehta Committee envisaged a three-
tier system of rural Local Government namely Panchayati Raj 
consisting of village panchayat at the village level, the 
Panchayati samithi at the block level, and the zilla parishad 
at the district level.

The Mehta team felt that the community development 
and National Extension Service failed to mobilise popular 
initiative and that this was due to the absence of statutori­
ly elected democratic institutions at the local level.

It felt that for development work to be made 
effective a new local body with territorial jurisdiction 
larger than a village and smaller than a district should 
created. The development block was preferred to the taluk or 
even a sub-division within a district as a viable unit. The 
block had been functioning in a similar way since 1952. 
The team called this new unit as the 'Panchayat Samithi'. 
Hierarchically the Village Panchayat was to be below the
Panchayat Samithi and Zilla Parishad above it. The Zilla Parishads jurisdiction being coterminus with the district.

The Mehta Committee made number of recommendations about the Constitution, organisation, staffing, functions and finances of these local bodies. The village panchayats should be constituted primarily on an elective basis, the adults in the village voting directly. Women members are to be coopted together with a member from the Scheduled Castes and one from the Scheduled Tribes. The Panchayat Samithi should be constituted through indirect election by village panchayats within the block area. Legislators were not provided any berth in the panchayat samithis by the Mehta Committee.

The Committee felt that the village panchayats and panchayat samithis were to be the bodies entrusted with developmental activities and if found no necessity for assigning any executive duties to the Zilla Parishad. Among the compulsory duties assigned to the village panchayats by the Mehta Team are the supply of drinking water, sanitation, maintenance of public streets, drains, tanks, lighting of streets, land management, maintenance of roads, bridges, supervision of schools, welfare of backward classes and similar works.
The village panchayats acts as agents of panchayat samithis in executing special schemes. The team did not record that panchayats should be entrusted with developmental functions except to a limited extent.

The Balwantrai Mehta Team envisages the panchayat samithis as the main responsible body for developmental activities in Panchayati Raj system. These activities include the development of agriculture, improvement of cattle, sheep, poultry etc., promotion of local industries, supply of drinking water, maintenance of public health and sanitation, relief of distress due to natural calamities, construction of roads, management of schools and host of such works.

The Balwantrai Mehta Team felt that one of the important causes for the failure of the Panchayati Raj system in the past had been the inadequacy of finances. The financial resources at the disposal of the Panchayati Raj bodies were limited. Hence, the team recommended more resources to the Panchayati Raj bodies in the form of prescribed shares of land revenue and some other taxes levied by the State Governments, liberal grants from the State Governments and income from taxes levied by the Panchayati Raj bodies themselves like taxes on professions, entertainment, and pilgrim tax.
On the basis of the recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta Study Team, Panchayati Raj was introduced in various States and it was launched on October 2, 1959 by Jawaharlal Nehru who pertinently remarked. Some people thought that if the responsibility was handed over to the people, they would probably not be able to shoulder it, but it is only by providing opportunity to the people, they can be trained to handle responsibility.

PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN ANDHRA PRADESH

Andhra Pradesh is one of the premier states of the Indian Union. It ranks as the fifth largest State in terms of territory and population and is the largest State in South India. It was formed on November 1, 1956 by merging the nine Telugu speaking districts of the old Hyderabad State with the eleven districts of the Andhra State which was separated from the State of Madras in 1953. This is the first linguistic State in the Indian Republic with the city of Hyderabad as its capital.

Andhra Pradesh lies in the eastern sea board of the Indian peninsula occupying 2,76,814 sq.kms comprising 8.4 per cent of the total area including a largest Coastal line
of 960 Kms. Bounded by the States of Madhya Pradesh, and Orissa in the North, the Bay of Bengal in the East, the states of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka in the South and the State of Maharashtra in the West, it formed the major link between the South and North India.

Local Self Government in Andhra Pradesh flourished right from the days of Satavahanas to the days of Vijayanagara empire. The village government system of the old paved way to centralised administration under the British and the new situation "strengthened the habit among the people to look into 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 certain amount of local self-Government in the Madras province. The first legislative enactment pertaining to rural Local Self Government was the 'Education Cess Act of 1863' passed by the Madras Legislature. A host of similar Acts were passed consequently. The Local Boards Act of 1884 introduced a three-tier system of village unions, taluk boards and district boards wherein all the three together formed the local administrative system. This three-tier system was endorsed by the Royal Decentralisation Commission of 1919 also. The Commission however emphasised 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 by the Madras Legislature widening the functions of Local Government bodies. Under this Act, every village with a population of 500 people and above had a panchayat.

In 1953, Andhra was separated from the Madras Province and the new State of Andhra was formed. Andhra Pradesh came into existence on November 1, 1956 consisting of the two regions of Andhra and Telangana. The Village Panchayats Act of 1950 provided class I panchayats with a population of not less than 5,000 and annual income of not less than Rs.10,000 and rest were categorised as class-II panchayats. The number for 1955-56 was 193 and 3,687 respectively.

ORGANISATION OF VILLAGE PANCHAYAT

The village is an autonomous republic and its affairs are governed by panchayat. Every Gram Sabha soon after its formation elects from its members an executive committee called the 'Gram Panchayat' the number of members of Gram Panchayat may be between 5 to 9. The head of the village panchayat is known as 'Sarpanch' and until 1981 he was indirectly elected by its members. Since 1981 the Sarpanch has been directly elected by the people of the panchayat area. The term of the office of the members and the
The functions of Gram Panchayats are Legislative, Executive and Judicial. They pass bye-laws, for the good government of the village and if any matter assigned to them. The panchayat at prescribed a number of obligatory and discretionary functions.

Obligatory Functions

(1) Construction, repairs and maintenance of public streets, (2) Medical Relief, (3) Sanitation and taking preventive measures to remove and stop the spread of an epidemic diseases, (4) Registrations of births, deaths and marriages,

Discretionary Functions

(1) Planning and maintaining the trees on both sides of public streets, (2) Assisting and advising agriculturists in obtaining and distribution among them. Government land and in the liquidation of old debts, (3) Establishing improved seeds and relief against famine, floods and other natural calamities.

AMENDMENTS TO THE ACT

In 1961 the Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishad Act of 1959 was amended and the number of standing committees was increased from 5 to 7. One of the committees was to deal with exclusively with the welfare of women and children and a majority of its members were to be women. Another dealt with social welfare, the majority of its members belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The President of panchayat samithis was given more power or discipline over the staff of his samithi.
In 1963, the Andhra Pradesh Government appointed a High Power Committee to examine the question of territorial reorganisation of blocks. The Government decided to amend the Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads Act to enable it to delimit the blocks. There was opposition to give unlimited power to the Government to delimit the blocks. Finally, the Government secured the full approval of the assembly to re-delimit the blocks. In December 1963, a new Gram Panchayats Act was passed (known as Gram Panchayat Act of 1964). The Act was intended to integrate the structure and functioning of village panchayats in Telangana and Andhra areas and try to bring into effective operation the three-tier system introduced on the basis of Balwantrai Mehta Committee's recommendations. However, the Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishad Act of 1959 as usual created two or three-tiers.

Unfortunately the fruits of Democratic Decentralisation resulted in its wake a new kind of conflict in rural political scene. The role of the District Collector was cut into short and the hands of the rural elites were strengthened. In 1967, the District Collectors Conference appointed a committee with majority of civil servants and two politicians under the chairmanship of M.T.Raju. The committee provided for the creation of new institution, the District Development Board to formulate and implement developmental
programmes in the district. In fact, the District Development Board increased the role of the bureaucracy vis-a-vis political leadership contributions centralisation at the district level.

JALAGAM VENGAL RAO COMMITTEE

The creation of the new institution of district development board and the enhanced role of bureaucracy was bitterly criticised and represented by the politicians. It was alleged that the functions of the above board was counter to the recommendation of Balwantrai Mehta and further never synchronised under these circumstances a committee of the Congress Legislature Party under the headship of J. Vengala Rao consisting of 13 members of Legislative Assembly was set up in 1968 to consider all aspects relating to the panchayati Raj and to suggest improvements and amendments to the concerned Acts. Other major recommendations of the Committee were: (1) Reforms to rationalize the mode and pattern of elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions, (2) reduction of the importance of the village Sarpanch in the Panchayati Raj set up, (3) giving up the provision for co-option of village panchayats, panchayat samithis or zilla parishads, (4) giving representation to Scheduled Castes, Scheduled
Tribes and women in the Standing Committee by means of co-option, (5) making rule by standing committees, mandatory. Sarpanch the samithi President or the zilla parishad Chairman will have no independent power but would act strictly accordingly to Standing Committee decision.

NARASIMHAM COMMITTEE

In 1971, the Andhra Pradesh Government appointed a High Power Committee under the Chairmanship of C. Narasimham, a retired I.A.S. Officer to examine the working of the Panchayati Raj and made proposals for reorganising it. The committee submitted its report in 1972. Some of the important recommendations made by the committee are: the member of Legislative Assembly and members of Parliament should be completely kept out of Panchayati Raj system, the Panchayati Raj system be modified on the Maharashtra pattern, the District Collector should be kept out of the Panchayati Raj and instead another I.A.S. Officer should be appointed at the chief executive officer of the Zilla Parishad. The Sarpanch of the Village Panchayat will be elected directly by the people, the members of Panchayat Samithis will be elected directly by the people, the members of Zilla Parishads should also be directly elected by the people.
In 1974, the Government of Andhra Pradesh organised five regional Sammelans on Panchayati Raj and after ascertaining the view of all concerned introduced in the year 1975 two bills in the Andhra Pradesh Legislature, one to amend the Gram Panchayat Act and the other to amend the Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads Act.

ASHOK MEHTA COMMITTEE 1978

This being the position of the Panchayati Raj system in Andhra Pradesh the effect of the Ashok Mehta Committee recommendations on Panchayati Raj set up in India has to be seen though the Chief Minister's conference on Panchayati Raj held in the month of May 1979 which endorsed many of the committee recommendations as good.

The Ashok Mehta Committee has been appointed by the Janata Government in December 1977, the terms of reference being broad enough to cover the entire gamut of the panchayati raj system. The committee submitted its report in the month of August 1978. It recognised that there has been structural weaknesses in the Panchayati Raj system. No doubt, it was dominated by economically and socially privileged sections of the society and functionalism had spread disharmony. But still the committee felt that Panchayati Raj
was not a failure. It felt that the contribution of the Panchayati Raj system was politically and socio-culturally very significant. The committee was of the view that "Panchayati Raj, like democracy at national and state levels, is both an end and a means". The Committee emphasised the need for decentralisation and also felt that it should be regarded as a functional necessity and not as an 'act of political charity'.

The Committee viewed that the district as the first unit of decentralisation below the State. It considered the village panchayat and the panchayat samithi are not viable units of administration and recommended the creation of 'Mandal Panchayats' placed next to the district covering a population of about 15 to 20 thousands. The committee was in favour of two-tier system of Panchayati Raj.

The Mehta Committee also recommended that more finances should be provided by the State Governments to the Panchayati Raj bodies and that the Panchayati Raj institutions should also mobilise enough resources of their own.

EMERGENCE OF MANDAL SYSTEM IN ANDHRA PRADESH

The Ashok Mehta Committee as discussed above observed that "the activities of Panchayati Raj Institutions were meagre, their resource base weak and the overall
attention given to them niggardly. Hence the committee recommended for some important changes in the existing Panchayati Raj system. It favoured for the replacement of the existing three-tier system by a two-tier system with Mandal Panchayats at the base and the Zilla Parishads at the top with a population from 15,000 to 20,000. Its term is to be four years. The zilla parishads should consist of six types of members elected from the demarcated electoral wards and the presidents of the panchayat samithis. Open participation of political parties in panchayat elections and constitutional protection to the Panchayati Raj Institutions and further decentralization of power at all levels was also suggested by the committee.

These recommendations have influenced in the creation of Mandal System in Andhra Pradesh. On 29th July, 1986 the Telugu Desam Government passed a legislation known as Andhra Pradesh Mandala Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishads and Zilla Pranalika Abhivrudhi Mandals Bill, 1086, with an object to reorganise the existing Panchayati Raj Institutions. It also seeking to repeal the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads Act of 1959, provides for the constitution of 1104 mandals in place of 330 panchayat samithis, constitution of zilla praja parishads and zilla pranalika abhivrudhi mandali (District Planning and
The decision to bring out a legislation constituting mandal praja parishads and zilla praja parishads was taken on the basis of the recommendations of a cabinet sub-committee which considered the suggestions of the Ashok Mehta Committee, the later recommended mandal set up in order to bring the panchayati raj administration closer to the people. For both the Mehta (Balwantrai and Ashok) have stressed this dimension of local government in their reports. A point may be noted here that the relative success of these bodies in Maharashtra and Gujarat is due to "more confidence seems to have been reposed by the respective state Governments in these institutions than by the other State Governments".

The Government of Andhra Pradesh established Mandala Praja Parishad Institutions on 15th January, 1987 in the State. The Mandala Praja Parishads offices started functioning from 15th of January, 1987. The Andhra Pradesh Government has intended that the democratic decentralisation should reach the door levels of the people so that the distinction between the government and the people must be reduced. Accordingly the revenue mandals were established on 25th May, 1985. The Andhra Pradesh Government has issued a notification to form the Mandala Praja Parishads on 15th January 1987. With that the villages under the jurisdiction of revenue mandal with confermances came under the
jurisdiction of Mandala Praja Parishad that is the villages under revenue mandal will be come under the same mandal praja parishad jurisdiction. But the municipalities and corporations which are under revenue mandal are excluded from the mandal praja parishad.

The work has been started for the formation of the Mandala Praja Parishad offices and staff. The present mandala praja parishad offices are located in the Panchayat Samithi offices. Where there is no panchayat samithis there the new mandal praja parishad offices are located in the Government building offices. The Block Development Officers of the erstwhile 330 panchayat samithis are redesignated as Mandal Development Officers in their original places. And the Agricultural Extension Officers who are gazetted, in rank are also appointed as Mandal Development Officers for the remaining Mandal Praja Parishad offices. The Government had also decided that the 330 managers of panchayat samithis may be appointed as Mandal Development Officers by conducting interviews after the election of mandal praja parishad upto then they have to work under their respective mandal development officers.

The aim of the proposed mandal set up is to ensure that the benefits of Government welfare schemes should reach the people for whom these are intended. Below the Mandal
Praja Parishad, there are Gram Panchayats. The position, constitution and powers and functions of Gram Panchayats in the new Mandal system is same as that of Gram Panchayats Act of 1964.

The second and intermediary tier constitute the Mandal Parishad which replaced the older Panchayat Samithi. The new Mandal Parishads are formed on the old Gram Panchayats as its constituent components.

Constitution of Mandal Praja Parishad

The Government by notification from time to time as may be specified therein constitute as mandal praja parishad and Gram Panchayats. At the apex of the structure, there are 22 Zilla Parishads with about 50 Mandalas each and an average population of 22 lakhs.

The Government further explained the objectives of the mandal system thus:

1) To involve people at all levels in the developmental programmes to increase their participation in the making of public policies.
2) To provide adequate financial powers to these programmes.

3) To implement welfare schemes for the benefit of the poor sections.

To achieve these objectives the mandals would work dedicatedly for the integrated and allround development of the state, the welfare of the six crore people of the state providing such day-to-day necessities of life as medical-education and agricultural services.

As a result of the introduction of revenue mandal system the Government has visualised some of the favourable optimistic developments in the rural local Self-Government Institution and rural development. In this new system there will be an opportunity for the people to involve effectively in the political process at the grass root level of the system. It seeks to provide the basic educational facilities to the illiterates to develop their political awareness, leading to a better standard of life. It can reduce the social tensions and economic indebtedness among the rural masses. It gives encouragement to the concept of self-reliance among the rural people. It can generate employment through the self employment scheme and developmental
programmes given by the industrial centres to the unemployed rural people.

CONCLUSION

The diagnosis of various weaknesses of the Panchayati Raj system implemented as per the recommendations of Balwantrai Mehta Committee report paved the way for the constitution of Ashok Mehta Committee which in turn strengthened the idea of Balwantrai Mehta in respect of Democratic Decentralisation. The implementation of Mandal system in Andhra Pradesh by the NTR's Telugu Desam Government is more or less based on the report of Ashok Mehta Committee and instead of two-tier structure. Andhra Pradesh has struck on to the three-tier structure with greater emphasis and importance to the middle-tier i.e., Mandala Parishad. No doubt, these reforms and innovations are meant for the convenience of the Government to some extent but for the welfare of the rural masses to a greater extent still it is the right time for such a change. The Mandal system has come to stay with us. But to what extent it rectifies the earlier lapses and strengthens the Local Self-Government system is a point to be studied. However, it is too short a time to evaluate its performance. But there is no structural change
in the powers and functions of Gram Panchayats after the enactment of Mandal system in Andhra Pradesh.

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 has incorporated all the requirements of the 73rd Amendment Act to the Constitution. It is a comprehensive legislation covering all the three-tiers of Panchayati Raj in the State. The nomenclature of the district and the intermediate level bodies stands changed to Zilla Parishad and Mandal Parishad respectively.

In the bottom of the three-tier structure, there are 20,560 Gram Panchayats with a population of ranging from 300 to 25,000 and an average population of 2,500 covering 29,273 revenue villages. At the intermediate level, there are 1,104 mandal parishads each with a population ranging from 35,000 to 55,000 and each mandal parishad covers about 18 Gram Panchayats. At the apex of the structure, there are 22 Zilla Parishads with about 50 Mandals each and an average population of 22 lakhs.
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