CHAPTER 2: EVOLUTION OF URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN INDIA.
CHAPTER – II

EVOLUTION OF URBAN LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

2.1: Historical Background

Throughout the primeval period in India, we have substantiation that the Indus Valley Civilization was a highly sophisticated and a well-structured urban culture. Fairservis (1971: 300) writes on the city of Mohenjodaro, “The centralisation represented is of formidable kind, and if our population estimate of some 40,000 souls living together at Mohenjodaro has any validity, an administration of authority and strength must have been established to keep matters in hand.” Considering the patterns of laying down of infrastructure and their maintenance one can safely assume that for this city, there must have been a sufficiently efficient municipal management. In the previous chapter while dealing with the evolution of local government in India we have seen how the local institutions evolved in the country through the passage of time and reached the present stage.

2.1.1 The Mughal period:

During the Mughal era responsibility of administering a city was entrusted on the “Kotowal”. Abul Fazal in his Ain-I-Akbari serialised as many as eight functions of a Kotowal. These are i) to detect thieves, ii) to regulate prices and check weights and measures, iii) to keep watch at night and patrol the city, iv) to keep up registers of houses and watch the
movement of strangers etc, v) to employ spies from among the vagabonds, vi) to prepare and inventory of and take charge of the property of deceased or missing persons who left no heirs, vii) to prevent the slaughter of oxen, buffaloes, horses or camels and viii) to prevent burning of women against their will and circumcision below the age of twelve. (Fazal, cf Jarett 1949: 43-44). Majumdar et al (2004: 551) observes that Kotowal's main business was to preserve peace and public security in the urban areas. However, no definite record is available to have an idea as to how the Kotowal managed these affairs, the pattern of office he was allowed to maintain, and the assistance he received. In fact the type of urban administration that ran under the Mughal had neither any public backing nor any legal status. It was an administration imposed from above and not in the true sense of the term a local administration run by local representatives. During the later part of Mughal rule the urban administration had collapsed. In the words of Majumdar et al, “During the turmoil that followed in the wake of dissolution of the Mughal Empire, these self governing organisations almost entirely disappeared from towns and greatly decayed in villages.”(Ibid: 850).

2.1.2: Between 1688 and 1882:

To begin with the British were never interested in revitalising the urban administration in India. However, in the year 1688, they for the first time introduced a municipal corporation in the city of Madras by a Charter granted in 1687. While modelling this institution, the practice prevailing in Great Britain at that time was followed. (Maheshwari, 2000: 15). The dominant rationale for constituting the municipality was to collect taxes and also to accommodate the political aspirations of the increasing group of well-informed and well-read Indians. “The Municipal Corporation was
set up because the East India Company believed that the people would willingly pay five shillings for public good, being taxed by themselves, than six pence raised by our despotic power” (ibid). The other reasons were to shift civil and sanitation functions to the local level institutions (municipalities) to prevent epidemic and to ascertain supply of essential services like water supply, drainage etc and fiscal compulsions (Verma, 1998: 143). Local government institutions were nonetheless, not given genuine power, resources and authority. The municipalities were given very few functions. Financial resources were thoroughly inadequate. There was too much official monitoring exercised by the district collector.

In 1726, the Municipal Corporation was converted to a Mayor’s Court empowering it with the judicial powers and thus it became a judicial body than and administrative entity. It was only in 1793 that the municipal administration in India was given the statutory rank when the Charter Act 1793 was passed. Under this Act three municipal bodies were established in the Presidency towns of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay with extensive taxation powers (Venkatarangaiya & Pattabhiram, 1969: 14). At first Indians were fascinated by the municipal governments, but with the subsequent escalation of the national struggle for self-determination, public glare weaned away from local government. Progressively the Indian leaders boycotted the local governing institutions and attention was effusively focussed on the nation’s freedom movement. Nonetheless municipal government owes its origin to the colonial government’s advantage in setting up municipal institutions in towns and cities.

Hence the actual commencement of the urban local bodies owes their derivation to the British rule. The initiation was with Samuel Laing,
member of the Viceroy’s Council in the Budget Speech (1861-62) advocating that local services should be supported on local resources. Lord Mayo’s Resolution of 1870 pioneered the concept of elected representatives in the municipalities. The resolution expected that its full operation would lead to the thriving of municipal government in the India. But an assessment of the Taxation Enquiry Commission (1953-54) reveals “The resolution of Lord Mayo on financial decentralisation also visualised the development of local self-government institutions; but this was subordinate to the need for tapping local sources of revenue and of effecting economy by decentralised administration.” (Report, c.f Maheshwari: 17). This was factual for both rural and urban local governments. Mayo’s resolution was not given effect in all the towns equally and as a result there was no standardized definite principles of administering and managing the towns. In cases of particular municipalities, the authority of taxation for tackling local requirements was based on legislative enactments while in other cases it was dependent on local usages and customs. In certain other cases Government had absolute control over the administration (Majumder et al, op cit).

2.1.3: The Ripon Resolution and after:

Lord Ripon made an earnest endeavour to remove the defects that prevailed in the municipal administration of his times. He is considered the founding father of urban local self-government as he implanted the concept of municipal authorities as components of government. Ripon Resolution of 18th May 1882 on local self-government dealt with the bodies, their functions, finances and powers and set the groundwork of local self-governance in independent India. Although Ripon nominated Government as the eventual decision-making authority having managerial powers and
superintendence over the local self-governance system yet his suggestion to assign the actual municipal administration to the elected representatives of the people was epoch-making. The resolution provided for a non-official Chairman and the municipal tasks were certain definite areas as education sanitation, provisions of light, roads and supply of drinking water and such other objects of public convenience. Following the resolution, a number of legislations were enacted in various provinces providing for compulsory election of larger proportions – varying from one half to three quarters. At the commencement, these bodies had more nominated and official members. Later, educated Indians and business interests were given representations in them. Ripon’s free-thinking ideals were however could not be realised in entirely due to an assortment of rationale like not so encouraging mind-set of his successors in this regard, fund constrictions, too much bureaucratic nosiness, etc.

In 1906, the Royal Commission on Decentralisation was set up which made public its report in 1908. The commission made certain noteworthy recommendations concerning the municipal bodies. It suggested, i) an elected president for the municipalities but confirmed that district collectors should continue to remain as President of the Local Boards, ii) that the municipalities be given more authority in deciding about taxes and their budgets, iii) devolution of Government funds for public works, drainage, water supply etc. be taken up by the municipalities, iv) that government control on municipalities in matters of raising local should continue, and v) responsibility of primary education was entrusted to the municipalities. Despite all these recommendations the municipal bodies could not make any substantial progress till the closing stages of First World War.
2.1.4: The Government of India Acts - 1919 & 1935:

The conclusion of World War I was a curtain raiser to the fight for freedom for India. There were pervasive demands for Indian constitutional reforms. Morley-Minto Reforms did not convince the people of India and their dissatisfaction was sustained. Considering this, and also in recognition of their dedicated services to Great Britain during the hostilities, Mr. Edwin Montague, the Secretary of State for India made an pronouncement in the House of Commons that "the policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of the administration and the gradual development of self governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India ...."(Singh, 2000: A-11). This corroborates the piece of information that the British Government had progressively felt it essential to obtain encouragement and support from the Indians. They wanted to trim down the public functions of the Governments in favour of the local administration. It was with this aim in view that Montague-Chelmsford Report was published and Lord Chelmsford on 16th May 1918 declared the "policy of gradual removal of unnecessary Government control and of differentiating the spheres of action appropriate for Government and for local bodies respectively." (Ibid: A-13). It was indeed a fresh initiation in the history of local government in India as the Government itself came out with such pronouncement. The Montague-Chelmsford Reform scheme was personified in the Government of India Act 1919. The preamble to the Act adopted Mr Montague's avowal of August 1917. The Act was enforced in 1920.
Under the Act, local self-government and for that matter the Municipalities became a transferred topic in charge of the ministers. The Municipal local bodies were endowed with greater powers and functions in the realms of education, health, sanitation, public works, agriculture etc. The scope of Government meddling in the municipal local bodies has been reduced and they became responsible to an enlarged body of voters. Quite a few fresh Acts were ratified in different provinces or the existing acts were modified. Enormous fervour prevailed among the people of India and many towering leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, Sardar Ballabh Bhai Patel and Purushottam Das Tandon go into the municipal Councils (Maheshwari, op cit: 21). The working of the municipalities however did not pick up much. In the entirety of India we do not find any noteworthy example, which could be termed as exceptional performance of any municipality. Nehru recorded his experiences in Allahabad Municipal Board as Chairman, “I found myself hedged in, obstructed and prevented from doing anything really worthwhile. It was not deliberate obstruction from anybody’s part...But on the one side, there was the government machine; on the other, the apathy of the members of the municipality as well as the public. The whole steel frame of municipal administration, as erected by Government, prevented radical growth or innovation. The financial policy was such that the municipality was always dependent on the Government...Even such schemes as were legally permissible had to be sanctioned by government and only the optimists, with a long stretch of years before them, could confidently ask for and await the sanction” (1962: 142). This was the state of affairs in Allahabad and as the provincial government in all the provinces ran in the same line and direction, the situation and other municipalities and Municipal corporations could be
gauged well. The principles of the Government of India Act thus could not be realised and the people of India again raised their voice for added reforms. The arrangement of provincial diarchy as embodied in the 1919 Act was unsuccessful to gratify the hopes built upon it. The ministerial responsibility in respect of the transferred matters like that of the local government worked inefficiently (Singh, op cit: A -13). There were large-scale political developments between 1927 when the Simon Commission was constituted to review the working of the Government of India Act 1919 and the enactment of Government of India Act 1935; though, the period chronicled no significant development in respect of the urban local government.

The Act of 1935 although was notable for the constitutional history of India yet, it had nothing new to say in the context of local self-government or for that matter the urban local government. The Act had done away with the diarchy and in the Governor’s provinces, provincial autonomy was instituted. The Act concluded a division of power between the Centre and the Provinces. Certain subjects were solely handed over to the Federal legislature, others to the provincial legislature. Issues relating to local government and municipalities were kept as the 13th item in the List II, the provincial Legislative List. Appropriately, all the matters relating to the municipality came under the purview of the provincial legislature. (Government of India Act 1935: 1937: 65, 304). Thus, even the Government of India Act did not deem it necessary to provide constitutional standing to the local self-government. The Act came into force in the provinces in 1937 and since then till the achievement of independence nothing new had been added to the history of municipal administration in India.
2.1.5: Independence and after:

After Independence the Constitution of India was structured on federal guidelines. Indian Constitution has split government functions in three lists; Central, State and Concurrent. Local bodies are sheltered in the State list and governed by State Statutes or in the Union Territories by the Union Parliament. The Constitution of India, which came into force in 1950, has made meticulous provisions for making certain the democratic operation of the Parliament and the State Legislatures. But apart from a circumlocutory reference to the Municipalities, in item-5 of the State list of subjects for the enactment of laws on urban administration, there was no reference in the Constitution of India about urban local bodies. Thus, the Constitution did not make urban local governance an exact constitutional obligation. While the Directive Principles of State Policy refer to village Panchayats (rural local bodies), there is no explicit reference to the urban local bodies. As an outcome, owing to scarce constitutional provisions for urban local self-governments, democracy at this level has not been unwavering. Though the respective Municipal Acts of states provide for recurring elections to municipal bodies at regular hiatus, they are commonly superseded for unspecified phase. For that reason, it has not been possible to even out democracy at this level. In relation to municipal elections the provisions in different states are not consistent. In some States, the State Governments orchestrate elections, while in others; the Municipal Commissions make direct schedules. Therefore, it has been a long felt requirement to conduct elections to the urban local bodies under the auspices of a self-regulating and unbiased body to make certain a more democratic working where all segments of the societal set up are represented. But in absence of a statutory body, the lumber in most cases
rested with the State Governments. But the role of the State Government in this context was never too satisfactory either. Defining the role of the State in this connection, the Taxation Enquiry Commission (1953-54) observed, "it is the responsibility of the State to see that local bodies are efficiently organised, that they perform their functions properly and that they take adequate part in the development of the country. Government control and help should however be not so meticulous or minute as to destroy the autonomy or self-reliance of local bodies" (Report, 1954: 374).

After Independence, the local self-government in rural areas received a great deal of importance and since the First Five Year Plan it got tremendous momentum. But it was not so in case urban local administration. The unchanged arrangement of urban local government was persistent as it was during the pre-independence period. There was no structural transformation whatsoever. While on the other hand urban clusters were growing with rapidity. There are two kinds of statutory provisions creating a municipal authority, like the Bombay Municipal Corporation Act (1888), the City of Nagpur Corporation Act (1948) and the Delhi Municipal Corporation Act (1857), or it may authorize the state government concerned to establish a Municipal Corporation (Municipality, Municipal Authority, Municipal Council or Municipal Board) such as the Bombay Provincial Municipal Corporation Act (1949), Gujarat Municipalities Act (1964). The scope of the Municipality's power as well as the government control over Municipality/Municipal Council depends on the law endorsed for its establishment. Currently the statutes bestow/wider controlling clout on the State Government. This is due to two arguments: firstly, the Constitution of India does not differentiate the powers and the responsibilities of the municipal authorities and secondly in
the absence of any clear cut delineation of powers and the responsibilities it is understandable that State Governments manage and monitor municipal authorities.

After attainment of freedom, municipal government in India was incorporated with planned progress of the country. As an upshot of such a consideration recent years have observed a mounting appeal and a perception of the significance of local-self government as a source of services to the local community as well as an apparatus of democratic self-government. Local government is an indispensable part of the government composition: the level of government closest to the populace and in the most excellent situation - both to engage them in the decision-making practice of improving their subsistence environs and to utilize of their knowledge and potential in the endorsement of all round improvement of the local community. During the Third Plan period (1961-66) the planners have realised the actuality of rapid intensification of urbanisation and the necessity to focus attention on urban affairs.

It acknowledged the dilemma of urbanisation thus, "Urbanisation is an important aspect of the process of economic and social development and is closely connected with many other problems such as migration from villages to towns, levels of living in rural and urban areas, relative costs of providing economic and social services in towns of varying size, provision of housing for different sections of the population, provision of facilities like water supply, sanitation, transport and power, pattern of economic development, location and dispersal of industries, civic administration, fiscal policies, and the planning of land use. These aspects are of special importance in urban areas, which are developing rapidly. The number of
cities with a population of 100,000 or more has increased from 75 in 1951 to 115 in 1961, and their population now forms about 43 per cent of the total urban population.” (Third Plan Document: Ch-33: 26). It further disclosed that at the local level, municipal administrations alone can assume adequately the task of providing the services needed for development in urban areas, expansion of housing and improvement of living conditions. Most municipal administrations are not strong enough to carry out these functions. They should be sufficiently strengthened by increasing their resources and personnel and by enlarging their jurisdiction and functions. Where the present limits of the selected urban areas are insufficient to cope with the problem, they should be extended. In the case of growing towns, it would be desirable from the beginning to provide for larger rather than smaller municipal areas, so that these towns and the rural areas surrounding them can be developed together in a coordinated manner without having to face difficulties later, on account of separate jurisdictions. Inevitably, municipal administrations have larger functions than in the past for providing civic services. It is envisaged that a large proportion of towns will in future have separate development plans of their own and these will be integrated with the plans of States. In this context, a careful review of the administrative and financial measures that should be taken in cities with a population of one lakh or more other than the metropolitan areas should be undertaken in each State. (Ibid: Ch, 33: Para 33).

As a result of this, during the Third Plan period several Committees were formed to consider and analyse different facets of the urban local bodies. In 1963 the committee on the Training of Municipal Employee and the Committee of Ministers on Augmentation of Financial Resources of
Urban Local Bodies were constituted. Similarly in 1966 the Rural Urban Relationship Committee, was constituted to look at the entire structure of urban local government in India and to put forward measures for more competent and effectual operation of the urban local bodies and also to develop a vibrant rapport between the urban local governments and rural local bodies.

In view of the inconveniences countered by urban local government bodies, the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee pointed out that local government could no longer remain mere mechanism of political erudition and civic scruples. As an alternative they have to become institutions for the backing up social and economic development of local communities as well as an integral part of the National Government. The committee also have made noteworthy recommendations on a variety of facets of local government like the criteria for constitution of municipal bodies with the need for a clear delineation of powers, functions and resources of urban bodies. As far as the municipal government was concerned, it was assumed to be a state function. Entry of the State List in the Seventh Schedule of the Constitution of India gives legislative power to the State with regard to municipal laws, establishments, constitution and powers of local governments. Except for recognising local-self government as a critical part of the system of government, the Constitution does not confer any independent status or power to local government bodies.

No remarkable advancement was made in respect of the urban local government except that of the multiplication in the numbers of the municipalities, and the study units and committees set up by the Government, till the later part of the last century when the historic
Constitution 74th Amendment Act was passed. In 1991 when the Bill was under the process of presentation before the Parliament total number of urban local bodies in 1991 was 3592, including 55 Municipal Corporations for larger cities (among which are 23 metropolitan cities), and the urban population was over 217 million in that year. The population size of the more autonomous Corporations ranges from about 10 million for Bombay to 81,400 for Shimla; and from 1.4 million in Jaipur to 2700 in Sangat for the Municipal Councils (c.f. Sundaram 1996: 57).

2.1.6: The 74th Constitution Amendment Act: The Broad features

The legislative genesis of the 73rd and the 74th Constitution Amendment Acts, 1992 dates back to the Constitution (64th Amendment) Bill, which was initiated in the Parliament in July 1989 owing to the enterprising efforts of the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. It was the foremost endeavour to bestow constitutional status on urban local governments in India. Though the Bill’s broader objective of invigorating urban local government was respond to favorably, some of the niceties were disapproved of and the bill was eventually routed in the Rajya Sabha. It is worth mentioning here that the key criticism directed against the bill was that it allowed the States little discretion in the pattern of local self-government reforms.

Later, the 72nd Constitution Amendment Bill for rural local bodies was introduced in the Parliament along with the 73rd Constitution Amendment Bill for municipalities in September 1991 by the Government of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. Both the Bills were referred to a Joint Select Committee of the Parliament and they were ultimately passed as the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendment Bills in December 1992.
State Assemblies of more than half the States ratified the bills, the President of India gave his assent on April 20, 1993. The amendments were then officially enacted through the issuance of government notifications. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 Constitution went into effect on 1st June 1993.

As there was no alteration in the list of items in the Seventh Schedule, the urban local self-governments, remained as a State issue, which necessitates that, any legislation improving upon the structure of local governments has to be, at the end of the day, ratified at the state level. The execution of the Constitutional necessities therefore entails the States to approve compliance acts, which either brings in fresh legislations or made improvements upon the existing legislations, to streamline the State laws with the provisions of the amendment.

The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 represents the boldest initiative anywhere in the world for dispersal of local democracy in urban areas. The Act has acted upon the recommendations of the Rural-Urban Relationship Committee and seeks to provide more power and authority to the local bodies. It is in fact, the first serious attempt to ensure stabilization of democratic municipal government through constitutional provisions. The 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 should introduce fundamental changes in the 3,000 urban local bodies presently existing. It finally gave a concrete shape to the Government of India’s commitment to vest power in the hands of the people. Accordingly it envisages enabling people to participate in development processes at ward, municipal, district, metropolitan and regional level. The empirical evidence of such optimism
could be realised only after the incorporation of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 in the existing Municipal Acts.

The Following are the salient features of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act, 1992:

**Mandatory provisions:**

1. Division of the Corporation into Wards.

2. Direct election of members from the electors.

3. Direct election of Chairpersons of the Municipality.

4. Provision for Ward Committees in Municipalities having a population of 03 lakhs and more.

5. Reservation of seats of members to women belonging to Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe people and also for women (General) at a percentage.

6. Reservation of seats of members to the women separately and to the people belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities at a specified percentage.

7. Reservation of offices of Chairpersons to the people belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe.

8. Reservation of offices of Chairpersons to the women belonging to the Scheduled Caste, Scheduled Tribe and general.

9. Duration of Municipality.

10. Additional disqualifications prescribed for elections.

11. Holding of elections to the Municipalities before the expiry of the term of office.
12. Appointment of judicial authority for deciding the questions of disqualification.

13. Constitution of District Planning Committees in all districts.

14. Constitution of Metropolitan Planning Committee if there is a metropolitan area in any State.

15. Devolution of powers to the Municipalities.

**Discretionary provisions**

The Act has given discretion to the State Legislature in respect of the matters specified below:

1. Composition of Municipalities.

2. Composition of Ward Committees.

3. Method of choosing the members to the Ward Committees.

4. Manner of choosing the Chairperson to the Ward Committees.

5. Deciding the powers and functions of the Ward Committees.


7. Percentage of reservation of offices of Chairpersons to the people belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

8. Percentage of reservation of offices of Chairpersons to women.

9. Rotation of reserved seats of members of municipalities in different wards of Municipalities in different ordinary elections.

10. Rotation of reserved offices of the Chairpersons of the Municipalities in different elections.
11. Prescribing functions and powers to the Municipalities.

12. What taxes, fees, tolls and fees etc. to be levied by the Municipality.

13. What should be the accounting procedure.

14. What are the powers to be prescribed in the financial administration of the Municipality.

15. Who should be the auditor for auditing the accounts of the municipality.

16. Deciding the nature, content and extent of powers, which the State Legislature can delegate from the State to the Municipality.

Notwithstanding the provisions of the 74th Constitution Amendment Act 1992, which approved of a constitutional eminence for urban local governments, the position of municipalities in India persists to be miserable and characterised by negligence as weighed against Panchayati Raj Institutions in India. Most important limitations have been put upon urban local governments by mounting their tasks without allowing them appropriate fiscal supports. Views expressed by the Ministry of Urban Development and Poverty Alleviation to the Eleventh Finance Commission affirm that the financial situation of the urban local governments is far too inadequate vis-à-vis the requirements.... It also emphasised that a special attention need to be given to the small and medium towns (Reports on Eleventh Finance Commission for 2000-2005). There persists a spacious breach between the powers approved to the urban local governments on paper and the genuine state of affairs they confront at the ground level and mainly at the time of their implementation.
2.1.7 The Status of Urban Local Government in Assam:

With the British occupation of Assam after the Burmese confrontation, Guwahati was constituted as one of the administrative hubs of the British Rulers and Assam was acknowledged as a protectorate. On 28th March 1824, Guwahati was passed under the authority of the British from Burmese administration and in 1828 the township of Guwahati was made the nerve centre of administration with the inclusion of Lower Assam. According to Holiram Dhekial Phukan (cf. Hazarika, 2002); a living spectator of these transformations, the British set up offices of administration at the base of the Nilachal hillock, the seat of Goddess Ma Kamakhya.

The contemporary pattern of Municipal administration in Assam is the making of the British. Prior to 1826 there were Municipal Boards in the State. The date and year of establishment of the Town Improvement Committee however could not be ascertained; but it has been ascertained that in 1836, the Bengal Government placed Rs. 3000/- from the proceeds of the town house tax and ferry fund. Although this Town Improvement Committee is not a governmental body, it was also not a voluntary group either. It was subject to the control of the Provincial Government and as it had made use of the public funds, its balance sheets were subject to the audit of the Provincial Government. During the middle of 19th Century there is the space to accept as truth that several town improvement committees in the line of Guwahati were established in Nagaon, Golaghat, Dibrugarh, etc. “In 1849, the Commissioner of Assam sought permission of the Government of Bengal for the levy of Municipal tax in Burpeta (Barpeta), Mungeledya (Mongladoi), Golaghat, and North Lakhimpur which was accepted by the Bengal Government in principle. But when the
final proposal was submitted the Provincial Government rejected the proposal on the ground there was no legislative sanction”.

On receipt of a request of citizens of Guwahati as forwarded by Major Jenkins, the Bengal Government in the year 1850 declared that the Bengal Municipal Act 1850 to be in force in the town of Guwahati. However it was not operationalised instantaneously. Under the Act it was on 1st January 1853 that the first and the only Municipal Board was established at Guwahati. (Venkata Rao, 1963: 32) with Captain Rowlatt as the Ex-Officio President, James Herriot and C.K. Hudeon as members; however since its foundation the financial shape of the said board was wobbly. The District Municipal Improvement Act 1864, which was brought into operation in 1865 in Guwahati, replaced the Municipal Act 1850. In the year 1866, the capital of Assam was relocated at Shillong. Later on, in 1874 Assam was made the Chief Commissioner’s Province (Hazarika, 2002: 9). The Town Improvement Act was in force from 1850 to 1864 but it was a disappointment because the ingredient of the general consent of the people was the missing linkage. In the intervening period the financial position of the Government of India was in an appalling shape owing to a numerous reasons that had led to financial emergency and that in turn consequenced in a universal messy situation in the administrative organization of the country. On the other hand there was coincidental administrative laxity and bedlam, which had resulted from the independent status of several municipal governments in India. As pointed out a significant occurrence was Assam being established into a Chief Commissioner’s Province in 1874, ever since then slow but sure development of local self-governance was made in Assam. Our specialism of contention will focus on the growth and maturity of municipal
government at Guwahati. The Government of Assam adopted the Bengal Municipal Act 1876 in 1878. Correspondingly four classes of local bodies – first class, second class, unions and stations were established all over Assam and Dibrugarh, Goalpara and Sylhet founded into second-class municipalities in 1877. Guwahati was formed into a first class municipality under Act V (BC) of 1876; in 1878 an Act III (BC) of 1884 was subsequently introduced in 1887. There were ten members in the Municipal Committee; six of who were elected, till about 1900, the Deputy Commissioner always filled the post of Chairman. The township of Guwahati had at that time an expanse of 2.95 sq. miles. There were 14 miles of road maintained by the Municipality of which 9 miles were metalled. The Guwahati-Shillong Road and the Trunk Roads were under the Public Works Department. The major levies and tolls of the municipality were a tax of 7.5% on the annual charge of a holding, latrine tax and a water tax. Other resources were funding from the government and proceeds from ponds, markets and ferries. The income in 1900-01 was Rs. 53,225. The major heads of expenses were conservancy and water supply. The outlay of administration in 1900-01 was Rs. 2491. The population of Guwahati according to 1901 census was only 11,661. In 1891 census it was 8283. The population of the town increased very slothfully notwithstanding Guwahati being developed as a base of government. As it happened over the decade of 1881 to 1891, population of Guwahati including North Guwahati (North Guwahati was excluded from the Guwahati Municipality from 1891) in reality declined from 11,692 in 1881 to 10,817 in 1891. The major ground for this dawdling progression was the sluggish inflow of the native inhabits of Assam to Guwahati. Late Jugal Das (1997: XX), in a journal of the municipal workers' body published in 1978 and also in one of his books titled
'Ranathal', published in September 1997 has wonderfully narrated the pleasant old days of the nonchalant lifestyle of Guwahati. The Guwahati Municipal Board in the past years had maintained a very limited arrangement of water supply. Water of the Brahmaputra pumped into the four water tanks located at four points of the township, was distributed by pipeline. But most of the Guwahatians of those days used to obtain their drinking water from those tanks. During the winters a water carrier was engaged by the Municipal Board of Guwahati to dust water in the roads to downgrade the dust-caked environment of the township. The roads of Guwahati used to be illuminated at dusk by kerosene lanterns set on poles that were positioned at convenient distances. Sanitation of Guwahati was pitiable. Fevers like malaria and *kalazar* and bowel ailments were common although smallpox was showing signs of being burned out. With the upgrading of sanitation through construction of drains and enhancement of water supply in the town, prevalence of cholera, which earlier used to take a heavy toll on the native populace, was also rapidly dwindling in the subsequent years.

The reorganization of the local self-governance introduced by Lord Ripon throughout India had a bearing in Assam as well. The Chief Commissioner of Assam engaged the Municipal Boards to go along the propositions embodied in the Ripon Resolution of 1882. In 1887, the Government of Assam implemented the Bengal Municipal Act of 1884 in Dibrugarh, Guwahati and Sylhet, which made provisions for the levy of taxes, though the Bengal Municipal Act of 1876 was sustained concurrently here because it provided for stations and unions. Thus, both the Acts were in operation in Assam throughout the period between 1887 and 1923 and this period is distinct with the surfacing of a number of local
self-governing authorities throughout the expanse of Assam. In fact the local self-governing institutions have seen a teeming escalation in India from time to time principally during the British rule and for administrative conveniences a number of permutations and combinations were tried in terms of these local administrative structures.

The next milestone in the saga of the development of municipal administration is the publication of the Report of the Royal Commission on Decentralisation in 1907, which mainly recommended the establishment of different forms of municipal governments outside the Presidency towns. In Assam up to 1914, two types of municipalities were working, one in agreement to the Bengal Municipal Act of 1876 and the other according to the Bengal Municipal Act 1884. Both these legislations dealing with municipal administration made the working of local self-governing authorities cumbersome in many respects. This ununiform archetype of municipal administration challenged the government of Assam with plentiful of botheration. Hence the Government of Assam sensibly discarded the recommendations of the Royal Commission of Decentralisation explaining that the scheme was not of workable politics with the exception of that the municipal board concerned should support plague outlay. Besides both Acts were found to be redundant and lacking in parity of the changing times and society. So the necessity was felt straight away for an innovative legislation, which should provide for a Non-official Chairman and the election of a generous number of Municipal Commissioners, this was a different step towards broad-basing the urban local governments. Keeping this in consideration the Government of India pronounced a resolution in 1914. Following this the Government of Assam readied an outline of the resolution embracing the principal contours on
which the legislation should be undertaken. But the legislation was deferred till the launch of the Morley Minto Reforms 1919. At long last in 1923 the legislation came in to being (Chakravarty, 1979: 49).

The Act of 1923 effected supplementary modifications in the management of urban local governments of Assam. This Act specified a gamut of principles that were quite sweeping, The Municipal Boards were set on a democratic foundation and suffrage happened to become everybody's right, all the stations and unions were abrogated. The Municipal Commissioners were elected by direct elections. They consecutively voted the Chairman and the Vice Chairman from amongst them and they were non-officials. The Municipal Boards were gifted with improved capacities. The Act of 1923, unwrap the arrangement of urban local governments in Assam to a large scale and made possible the functioning of an elected structure in municipal administration, the Act was operational for the subsequent thirty five years at a stretch till 1956 when another Act called the Assam Municipal Act 1956 was approved which caused further variations in the constitution of the Municipal Boards and the procedures of urban local governments were further democratised.

Time journeyed through and a multitude of inventive guiding principles and approaches galvanized municipal legislations that were created by the various provincial legislatures even though many area-specific variations that were affected were not very fundamental in nature, they hence had enormous possibility for more modifications and they could change for the better. These legislations of urban local governance and their realistic appliance unquestionably brought about several and comprehensive alterations and effects in the lives of those communities
who came under their purview, those transformations and impacts have been very intense and apparent over the years. The tradition of urban local governance in Assam has been slowly but surely shaped up over the years as a product of the indefatigable labours of distinguished celebrities of Assam. The historical processes of urbanisation, modernisation and industrialisation have shared in the evolving of urban local bodies in Assam. It may be evoked that the current organization of municipal governments was by and large pioneered in the country in the British institution with inconsequential modifications wherever considered to be crucial.

In 1969, the Government of Assam enacted the Gauhati Municipal Corporation Act and accordingly a municipal corporation was established in the city of Gauhati in the year 1974 that was operationalised from 14th February of the same year.