CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION
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From the foregoing pages it has been demonstrated that the period between A.D. 1920 and 1950 was crucial and eventful in the history of the development of rural local self-government in Madras State.

A critical analysis of the sources discussed in previous chapters has enabled this writer to come to some important conclusions as regards the origin, growth and decline of the rural local set-up and its fortunes in various limbs of administration. These conclusions are summarised in the sequel.

The idea of self-government and individual autonomy appears to be inborn in Man. However authentic informations on this concept as applied in Polity emanate in the Tamil country only from the beginning of the Sangam Age (circa third century B.C. to third century A.D.)

The Sangam Age witnessed a three-tier rural local self-government at the basic unit of administration. These were the Kurrum, the Nadun, and the Ur; the Ur-manram was empowered to deal with matters concerning the autonomy and local administration.

That concept was so deep rooted that it withstood the mighty Kalabhra interregnum in the political history
of the Tamil country, enjoyed the patronage of the Pallavas and Pandyas and reached its apogee during the glorious days of the Imperial Chelas.

However, this traditional system of local self-government suffered an eclipse when the Muslim rulers penetrated the Vindhyas and plundered South India during the fourteenth Century and after.

The advent of Vijayanagar empire gave a resurrection to the cherished values native to the Tamil country. Yet the highly centralised system of Vijayanagar administration did not provide much scope for the healthy growth of local self-government. The only solace was that it did not completely disappear from the Tamil country.

The end of the Vijayanagar empire virtually threw the Tamil country open to outsiders. The Britishers who began their innings as traders started settling down permanently and had great political ambitions. Lack of consciousness and individuality led the Tamil country to become part of the British Empire in India.

At the outset the East India Company attempted to administer the Madras Presidency through indigenous local self-governing institutions by revising, reforming and adapting them to suit their needs. In spite of the best
efforts of eminent District Collectors like Lionel Place, Colonel Alexander Read, John Hodgson and Sir Thomas Munro, the cohesion of the village communities and their traditional self-governing institutions started disintegrating and showed visible signs of decay.

However, Madras Presidency was in the forefront in introducing administrative innovations and experiments. Thus in 1855 a "Local Fund" was created at the suggestion of the then District Collector of South Arcot as a reserve to meet the expenditure on works of local importance. A number of local fund Acts were passed between 1860 and 1870. But the statutory local boards created under the provisions of those Acts were completely controlled by the Collectors. There was no provision to elect members of these Boards. Their status was far inferior to the Municipal Boards.

The Madras Government appointed the Sullivan Committee a month after the promulgation of the Ripon's Resolution in 1882. Many of the Committee's recommendations were incorporated into the Local Boards Act of 1884. The local Boards that were created as a result of this Act could not survive because they lacked the original and rural concept of local self-government.

The decentralisation commission of 1909 deplored the tardy progress made in the field of rural local self-govern-
ment and emphasised the importance of village as a basic social edifice of great antiquity and stability. The pioneer Panchayat Experiment of later date also failed. Rural local boards needed more powers, more resources and greater participation of local people and non-officials. After a persistent demand in the legislature and public forums the Local Boards Act and the Village Panchayats Act were passed in 1920.

The introduction of Dyarchy in the provincial administration of the Madras Presidency came as a blessing to the concept of local self-government. It became a "transferred" subject and was put in charge of a separate Minister. That minister had the power to reorganise local bodies. The Justice Party which came into the limelight during this period and whose members were urban-oriented, influential and learned leaders. The Justice Party was in office for the entire Dyarchy period, with a break of only three years in the middle.

The Justice leaders who were the staunchest advocates of the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms in 1918-19 exploited fully the devolution of responsibilities for the provision of local services on local bodies which served an important area of local patronage. Before 1920 local government in the rural areas was far less advanced than in the towns. The post Mont-Ford Reforms witnessed a remarkable transfer
of rural boards to Indian Control. The Acts passed in 1919-20 inevitably increased the importance of local bodies and opened them up to a wide range of interests in local areas. The Acts transferred the responsibility for supervising local government from the Collectorate to the Secretariat and Ministers at Madras. The structure and status of local self-government assumed such an importance after 1920 that the Justicist Chief Minister, without exception, regularly kept the local government portfolio for himself!

To start with the Justicist Ministers were liberal in their attitude and approach towards rural local self-Government. In tune with the spirit of the 1920 Acts they threw more places and presidentships open to election and in the first few months the Ministry was vigorously pursuing a policy of liberalisation. Then in 1921 Chief Minister Panagal ordered that all Taluk Boards should elect their own Presidents and in 1923 the first District Board President was elected. The District Collectors and Revenue Divisional Officers were all removed from the rural boards. The duties of rural local boards were increased and they were given more independent control over their own budget and consequently they became institutions of unprecedented importance in rural politics and administration.

But soon the Justicist Ministers realised the
potential of local government and tested the gains of patronage in the public services. They resorted systematically to the politics of patronage and started building up a "patronage bank", a group of men obliged to the Ministers. The Ministerial powers of interference were used more generally to make the power of the Justice Party felt throughout the Presidency and to build new networks of support in the mofussil. Lenders of Local boards were forced to depend on the provincial power wielders for nominations to important positions and for favourable decisions in local disputes.

The Local Boards Act of 1920, which conferred an independent status to each class of local boards, put an end to the domination of the official element over the District Boards. True, the Act increased the membership strength of the District Boards as well as the proportion of elected members, their resources and powers. But the Justice Party in power was swayed by petty considerations and swerved away from the proclaimed policy of establishing autonomous democratic rural local self-government. Motivated by a desire to perpetuate itself in power the ruling party attempted to keep the Local Boards under its control by a liberal distribution of political patronage and to maintain the anachronistic membership pattern of the District Boards consisting of ex-officio members, nominated members and members elected indirectly by the Taluk Boards much against
the opinions of the District Boards, legislators, the press and the public. Serious allegations were made in the Legislative Council against the Justice Ministry with regard to the manner of electing the members from the Taluk Boards to the District Boards. The Justice Party was slowly losing the battle and after a decade of struggle the defenders of the democratic rural local self-government restored the principle of direct election of members of District Boards.

Similarly, the invidious distinction made in the manner of electing the Presidents of the Local Boards, a legacy of the past, was taken advantage of by the Justice Party and used for furthering its own party interests. The Justice Party instead of exercising the enabling provision of the Act permitting the District Boards to elect their own Presidents denied the members of the District Boards the right to elect their own Presidents. The reason for this rather undemocratic precedent was that on the one hand the Minister for Local Self-governement very often belonged to the party which commanded a majority in the local boards and on the other a good number of the Presidents of the local boards were also members of the Madras Legislative Council. The Minister for Local Self-Government found it to his advantage to keep those local leaders in good humour! A fierce legislative battle was fought on this issue and the native press able supported the legislative onslaught
against the rigid policy of the provincial Government in this regard. Yielding to the mounting pressure from the Legislature, the Press and the Public the Government conceded the right to the District Board members to elect their own Presidents by amending the Local Boards Act in 1923. Even then the Justice Ministry did not desist from interfering in the election of District Board Presidents. For instance its interference in the election of the President of the Salem District Board was the most blatant. At last, the Local Boards (Amendment) Act of 1930 put an end to the nefarious practice of appointing District Board Presidents and provided for the direct election of Presidents by the members of the District Boards.

Nomination of members by the Government to the District Boards was another point of controversy during the decade 1920-1930. Prior to 1920 the British Officials, by and large, used the power of nomination to secure the representation of all interests not already represented in the Local Boards without any political or partisan end in view. But the post-1920 Dyarchy period witnessed the gross misuse and abuse of this provision. Because of the absence of a clear-cut policy or procedure regarding the composition of the District Boards the Government was carried away by the whims and fancies of the ruling party and as a result the principle of nomination as provided in Sec. 9 of the Local Boards Act of 1920 was not applied uniformly or impartially. On the contrary
the Justice Ministry persuaded itself into believing that there was nothing wrong in nominating party people as members and Presidents of the District Boards! A kind of "Spoils System" was sought to be perpetuated. In fact, nominations were considered to be the "gift of Government". This policy of political expediency "for the purposes of party-breeding or party-building" was opposed tooth and nail inside and outside the Legislative Council and many cases of abuse of the power of nomination by the Justice Ministry were exposed. As a result, this much misused principle of nomination was abolished in 1930.

The decline of the Justicites started in the 1930s and it was exemplified in the passing of the Madras Local Boards (Amendment) Act of 1930, the Madras Motor Vehicles Act of 1931 and the Local Boards (Amendment) Act of 1933. The amendment Act of 1930 stripped the Justice Ministry off its power of nomination and thereby deprived of its instruments of ministerial favouritism and patronage. The Amendment Act of 1930 and the Motor Vehicles Act of 1931 gave rise to serious financial crisis among the District Boards. Even extreme remedies such as drastic retrenchment of local board staff and diversion of local funds failed to prevent the rapid deterioration of the financial condition of the District Boards. Instead of rectifying the mistakes made by passing the Acts of 1930 and 1931 and retracing these steps the Justice Party resorted to the short-sighted remedy
of abolishing the fifty year old Taluk Boards in 1934.

Consequent bifurcation of District Boards provided yet another opportunity to the fast declining Justice Party to sustain its political influence on the local boards. Political considerations weighed heavily in selecting District Boards for bifurcation. In fact the District Boards of Coimbatore, Salem, Ramnad, East Godavari and Vellore were bifurcated with a view to prevent the rival Congress party from capturing those boards. The Justice Chief Minister Bobbili started bifurcating the District Boards wildly because the boards started falling into Congress hands in 1935. North Arcot was divided on the eve of the elections, and Chingleput immediately after the Congress regime had been installed, much against the advise of the Secretariat. The desperate Bobbili Ministry wielded the weapon of bifurcation because it did not want to miss the only chance under the new rules to nominate members to the District Boards after bifurcation and this power was exercised in a partisan manner. Districts were also bifurcated in a way that favoured certain factions and prejudiced others. The Justice Party also hoped that fresh elections after bifurcation would severely strain Congress electoral resources. This political game neither strengthened the District Boards nor saved the Justice Party from the impending disaster.
Again the government's action to divide the Madras Presidency into three electoral circles and to hold local board elections by rotation, though ostensibly intended to "distribute the work every year over a period of three years in the interests of administrative convenience", was in fact a clever move to subserve party interests. The ruling Justice Party hurried through the measure in the Legislative Council patently to postpone the elections in a few District Boards which were under their control so that they could contest the forthcoming general elections to the Legislative Council with advantage. The real object of the Justice Party in introducing the system of election by rotation was obviously to organise the District Boards in such a way as to prevent them from being instrumental in helping the Congress party to capture the District Boards and through them the provincial government, since the Presidents and members of the District Boards were to a large extent responsible for influencing the elections to the provincial as well as the central legislatures. The system of election by rotation enabled the Justice Party to entrench itself firmly in the Madras Corporation and it naturally thought that by introducing such a system in the District Boards administration it could effectively incapacitate the Congress party from sending majority of its members to the District Boards. The attempt to prevent conducting of elections simultaneously in all the Districts was obviously undemocratic.
The performance of the Congress Ministry which succeeded the Justice Ministry in the Madras province in 1937 was no better insofar as its approach to rural local self-government was concerned. The Congress party amalgamated all the bifurcated district Boards and in that process indiscriminate amalgamation of District Boards was resorted to more on political considerations than on administrative requirements. As far as the delimitation of the administrative areas of District Boards was concerned both the Justice Party and the Congress Party were motivated by the Political expediency of party considerations rather than by the salient principle that administrative areas should be delimited in such a way as to enable the local authorities to discharge their functions efficiently.

When the Congress Ministry under C. Rajagopalachari resigned after a short spell of two years in 1939 the provincial administration came under the Advisers' Regime and the decline of the local boards reached its rock-bottom. In 1941 the Madras Local Boards Act was amended and the power to supersede local boards was assumed by the Advisers' Government and the weapon of supersession was wielded with a vengeance against the local boards. In one year alone (1941-42) as many as twelve District Boards were superseded under Defence of India Rules. Between 1941 and 1945 the power of supersession was exercised in the case of twelve out of fifteen boards on political grounds. During this period
the powers of the elected local bodies and their Presidents were taken by Government departments and the local boards became the limbs of the bureaucracy. District Boards were crippled beyond repairs and they were lingering on till they were finally abolished in 1958.

The raison de être of Taluk Boards was to ensure both local knowledge and local interests on the part of the members and as instruments of political and popular education. They were doing commendable work. The Royal Commission on Decentralisation (1907-1909) expressed itself in favour of retaining the Taluk Boards. The Madras Local Boards Act of 1920 conferred a distinct status on them with separate powers and funds. There was a phenomenal increase in the number of Taluk Boards from 119 to 208 between 1920 and 1930. The Presidents of Taluk Boards served as Honorary Organisers to promote village panchayats to some extent. A decade of Development of Taluk Boards freed them from official control and they became independent middle tier rural institutions of unprecedented importance in local politics and administration. But the ruling Justice Party instead of allowing the Taluk Boards to flower into and flourish as autonomous local institutions used them as handy lever to promote party interests in general and to perpetuate party patronage in particular. Though it was ordered in 1921 that all Taluk Boards were to elect their own Presidents unless otherwise directed by the Government, the Justicist
Chief Minister in course of time never hesitated to use the withholding power to delay the election of Presidents of some of the Taluk Boards, to deny the powers to elect their Presidents in some other cases, to bifurcate and trifurcate some Taluk Boards and to reconstitute few others to suit his party's political convenience!

The Justice Party suffered a serious reverse in the 1926 elections and the provincial political morality reached a low ebb which was reflected in the policy of Dr. P.S. Subboreyan's Ministry towards local self-government. The change of Ministry did not result in any change in the governmental policy towards local administration. As before, it was guided more by political expediency and extraneous considerations than by a firm policy on sound principles. The Subboreyan Ministry which considered smaller boards as wasteful, uneconomical and inefficient in 1928 changed its stand in 1930 due to legislative opposition and defended them as useful, economical and efficient! The Local Boards Act of 1920 was amended in 1930 with the view of constituting Taluk Board in each revenue taluk but the Subboreyan Ministry was not there to implement it! Consequent upon the Amendment Act of 1930 the Taluk Board Presidents were not to be represented in the District Boards since all the seats in District Boards were to be filled by direct election. The succeeding Ministries were, therefore, not interested in them since they were deprived of an effective lever to control Taluk Boards.
through District Boards. The installation of the Muniswami Ministry and the Bobbili Ministry ironically coincided with the steep decline of the Justice Party as well as the rural local self-government.

Though the Amendment Bill of 1930 was introduced by Dr. P. Subboreyen and was passed into Act during the Chief Ministership of B. Muniswamy Naidu, the Raja of Bobbili who succeeded B. Muniswamy Naidu instead of continuing the process initiated by his predecessors went back from the commitment of his party to constitute smaller boards at one stroke! The financial crisis faced by the Taluk Boards was the cumulative result of the wrong policy pursued by the several successive Ministers of Local Self Government. In the 1930s the Justice Party was in doldrums and the Justice Ministers were no better than the tools of the Secretariat. In that fatal decision of abolishing half a century old Taluk Boards the Bobbili Ministry was carried away by the bureaucracy headed by O. Coren Smith I. C. S., Secretary to Madras Government. Political and popular education concept of Lord Ripon was again sacrificed at the altar of economy, efficiency and centralisation. It was obviously a party measure with a political motive, since the Taluk Boards ceased to be the bases of election operations. The abolition of all the 288 Taluk Boards irreparably mutilated the basic structure of the rural local self-government in the Madras State.
For the first time in the history of rural local self-government in the Madras province a separate Village Panchayats Act was passed in 1920. The Act raised high hopes and it was expected that the Panchayats formed under the new Act would function as free, autonomous and really significant basic units of rural local self-government. The proclaimed aim of the Justice Party was to resuscitate and reorganise the Village Panchayat system in the State. In fact the provincial government was expected to be shaped as a superstructure on the foundation of village panchayats. But the way in which the new Panchayat Act was implemented belied all expectations.

The responsibility for the formation of village panchayats was entrusted with Honorary Registrars/Organisers, who were mostly the Presidents of Taluk Boards, without monetary or legal support. They were ill-prepared and ill-equipped for the stupendous task of organising and registering panchayats and proved quite unequal to the task. The Justice Ministry had not evinced much interest in drafting the services of the honorary workers as it had shown in the formation of District and Taluk Boards. This was because the village panchayats were not centres of power and could not be used to further their political ends.

The post of the Registrar General of Village Panchayats, an administrative innovation, was created with the intention of supervising the work of bringing village panchayats into
existence, to help in the formation and working of the panchayats, to elevate and coordinate their activities and to ensure uniformity in the formation of village panchayats. Though there was a phenomenal physical expansion of village panchayats under the official guidance of the first two Registrar Generals—N. Gopalaswamy Iyengar and T.K. Rutherford—there was no uniform expansion of panchayats and there were conspicuous variations in the number of panchayats in the several Districts. The proceedings of the Registrars General clearly indicate the varied character of the methods employed; the quantity of work turned out also was not uniform. The development of Village Panchayats was uneven, slow and tardy. The Registrars General had singularly failed to ensure uniform rate of progress in the development of panchayats. It must also be noted that the Registrar General was saddled with the triple responsibility of advising and supervising Honorary Organisers, inspecting the Municipalities and District Boards and helping to spread compulsory education in the districts. Instead of increasing the staff of the Registrar General to cope up with the increased work the Government associated the District Collectors with the task of organising village panchayats! This was a clear confession of failure of the Registrar General and the transfer of Control to District Collectors proved to be "a source of great dissatisfaction and discouragement to the panchayats".
The formation of informal voluntary village panchayats left much to be desired. They enjoyed neither legal backing nor financial support from the Government. As late as 1926 information about the exact number of such panchayats and the year in which each panchayat was organised was not available! The working of these panchayats was not carefully watched and guided either. Statutory panchayats were organised without taking into consideration the progress, if any, made by the informal panchayats, which were allowed to languish for want of statutory powers and assured resources.

The Panchayat Act was found defective since it failed to provide a remedy in case the villagers refused to meet and elect members of Panchayat after the constitution of a panchayat had been ordered, nor did it provide for the compulsory functioning of an apathetic or recalcitrant panchayat. Instead of amending the Village Panchayats Act suitably to make the panchayats the basic units of rural local self-government and to enable the villagers to conduct their affairs in a manner that would make them self-reliant and self-sufficient the village Panchayats Act was repealed in 1930 and the village panchayats were brought under the ambit of the Local Boards Act! It was done in haste before assessing the effect and impact of the transfer of well-established panchayats to the control of the District Collectors. The consequent introduction of a complicated and costly administrative machinery destroyed the simplicity
of the panchayat administration and as a result the scope of panchayat activities was delimited and the village panchayats were relegated to a position of insecurity and unimportance.

The amended Act of 1930 put an end to the nostalgic hope of reviving the ancient village institutions and instead converted the newly created village panchayats into replicas of the smallest units of local administration as obtained in England. The Panchayats became an arena of a different kind and their powers and functions came to be viewed from a different angle. Under the dual control of the Taluk/District Boards and the Inspector of the Municipal Councils and Local Boards the conditions of the Panchayats became unsatisfactory and administrative supervision ineffective.

The creation of a separate village Development Fund had given a great impetus for the development of the Village Panchayats. But the fund was not properly administered with a specific purpose. During the short period of its existence (1930-34) the Government permitted diversion of the fund to cover deficits in the budgets of the District and Taluk Boards to the utter detriment of the development of Village panchayats.

The introduction of provincial autonomy and the consequent formation of the Congress Ministry was in no way
helpful to the healthy development of the panchayat system in the Madras province. Since the Taluk Boards were abolished and the District Boards stripped of any political value or importance the Congress Ministers used village Panchayats as pawns in the game of party politics to serve their party ends. There was a general apathy among the legislators in general and among the Congress Ministers in particular in matters relating to rural local self-government. With the result the power to supersede village panchayats was delegated to the Inspector of Municipal Councils and Local Boards.

Many village panchayats were superseded on political considerations and erstwhile Congressmen were appointed as Special Officers for the superseded Panchayats. The Congress Minister himself defended such appointments by saying that the Congressmen who were appointed Special Officers became Government servants after appointment! The Local Boards (Amendment) Act of 1939 which prevented panchayat Presidents from seeking re-election soon after their removal from office was enacted with the intention of preventing persons who belonged to the Justice Party from the possible recapturing of Panchayat Boards from Congressmen. Panchayat Presidents were removed from office under one pretext or other and Panchayat Boards were superseded patently to suit party interests. There are a number of instances to show that the Congress Government had shown partiality to Panchayat Boards with a view to protecting and promoting its party interests. Instances of political interference by the
ruling Congress party into Panchayat administration were exposed on the floor of the legislative Council. In short, in the post-dyarchy period, the political interference of the ruling party into the affairs of rural local self-government sapped the vitality of the grass-root village institutions.

Reports of the Inspector of Municipal Councils and Local Boards indicate that the development of rural local self-government reached its rock bottom under the Advisers' Regime. Factions, local disputes, favouritism, political cliques and victimisation further weakened the Panchayat Boards. Official unconcern replaced the personal touch of the non-officials towards the Panchayats. The situation reached such a pass that "clerks and bill collectors took prominent part in making and unmaking (panchayat) boards". The Advisers' Regime in an attempt to "restore efficiency" in the working of Village Panchayats sought to place them under the immediate charge of the District Collectors and the Board of Revenue! The Village Panchayat Bill of 1941, prepared by the bureaucratic rule to achieve this end was a typical official exercise in the name of administrative efficiency. Thanks to the opposition from the press, the public and the nineteen member Advisory Committee constituted to examine the provisions of the Bill, the bureaucratic Panchayat Bill was not enacted into law. The Panchayats were reeling under the dual control of the
District Boards and the Inspector of Municipal Councils and Local Boards. Their position was pitiable and official control was ineffective. The Advisers' Regime revived its attempt to bring the panchayats under the control of the District Collectors and enacted the Madras Village Panchayats Act of 1946 just before the popular Ministry assumed office. The Act was nothing but a renewed bureaucratic attack on the democratisation of panchayat Government and a blatant attempt at centralisation and state control over the local institutions.

The Congress Ministry headed by T. Prakasam rightly allowed the Village Panchayats Act of 1946 to lapse in 1948. The change-over from the Advisers' Regime to popular government, however, did not make much difference so far as the development of panchayats was concerned. The elections for Local Boards were postponed and their life time extended. The legislative opposition feared that the party in power, taking advantage of this situation, might try to consolidate its party strength. The Congress Government perpetuated the very method that they had been condemning and treated the same path as was done by the Advisers' Regime. The outward form of the Government changed but the style of functioning remained the same. The Madras Village Panchayats Act of 1950 accepted the Directive principle of State Policy to establish "autonomous units of self-government" but the Panchayats were neither "Autonomous" nor "self-governing units" under the Act.
The impact of the Civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements on the rural local boards was deleterious if not disastrous. The involvement of local institutions in the national freedom struggle impaired their efficiency. In fact in the beginning of 1920s most of the Presidents of District Boards were not in favour of involving local boards in the national or provincial politics and the informal conference of Presidents of District Boards and Chairman of Municipal Council held in March 1922 amply demonstrated their attitude in this regard. But the Justice Party capitalised on the situation created by the non-cooperation movement started by Gandhiji for its own political ends. With the Congress voluntarily going into wilderness, the political field was left open for the Justice Party to take its advantage in two ways: to appease the British Masters and civil servants and to prevent Congressmen from entering local boards. To achieve this, Raja of Panagal, the Justice Chief Minister, got a resolution passed by the Legislative Council obliging the members of local bodies to take the Oath of Allegiance to the King-Emperor! The Oath served as a convenient pretext to exclude Congressmen from the local boards. The total involvement of Congressmen in the Civil disobedience and non-cooperation movements deprived the local boards of the valuable services of selfless, loyal, dedicated and patriotic members of the localities. Consequently the calibre and competence of the members of the local boards became unenviable and their
minds were filled with a desire for power and patronage. Considerations of "relationship and friendship" reigned supreme. The non-participation of the non-cooperating Congressmen in the local elections left the field open for all sorts of persons whose interests were anything but the development of autonomous, healthy, democratic rural local self-government.

The Madras Government branded the Non-Cooperation Movement as "disloyal" and listed a number of activities of the local boards as to be construed as participating in and promoting such a movement. When many a District Board passed "disaffected resolutions" and deliberately defied Government orders they were treated as "political gesture or demonstration" and the Government thought it expedient not to resort to the extreme step of superseding or dissolving the defiant District Boards. Though the Justicites were no sympatrisers of the Non-Cooperation Movement they diplomatically desisted from resorting to the drastic remedy of superseding the so called disloyal District Boards since they were the portals of party patronage! But the Advisers' Regime amended the Madras Local Boards Act in 1941, assumed the power of supersession and wielded that weapon mercilessly against the local boards which participated in the national struggle. Even Panchayat Boards involved themselves in controversial political activities and invited the wrath of the Advisers' Regime. As a result of such political involvement the
rural local boards were reduced to a position of anaemic appendage to the provincial bureaucracy.

Similarly the personal conduct of officers and servants of local bodies, particularly their participation in political activities was regulated and restricted. Regulation 14 defined "political movement" and prohibited servants of local bodies from taking part "in any political movement in India or relating to Indian affairs". The new Regulation cancelled an order passed in 1938 removing the ban on the employment in the local boards of persons convicted in connection with the Civil-disobedience or Non-cooperation movement and the local board servants who participated in political activities were debarred from holding appointments.

The Madras Local Boards Act of 1920 was amended four times during the period under study. It was amended in 1930 with a view to abolish the Union Boards, to place the village panchayats and the District and Taluk Boards under the same statute and to repeal the Madras Village Panchayats Act of 1920. The second amendment to the Act (1933) authorised the Government to regulate the methods of recruitment and service conditions of local board employees and to take over the power of appointing them. The Act was amended for the third time (1939) with a view to prevent a removed President from seeking re-election till the next ordinary elections. The Amendment Act of 1946 restricted the sphere of the District Boards to
non-panchayat areas and their functions were virtually limited to education, public health and maintenance of roads. Thus it will be seen that these amending Acts were negative, restrictive and undemocratic, calculated to centralise powers regarding local boards in the hands of the provincial Government.

Similarly the Madras Village Panchayats Act of 1920 passed with the object of providing for the administration of Village affairs by the villagers themselves and thereby develop the system of self-government in the rural areas was repealed in 1930 to the detriment of the development of panchayats. The Madras Village Panchayats Act of 1941 brought out during Advisers' Regime, placed village Panchayats directly under the control of the District Collectors and entrusted with them all control formerly vested statutorily with the District Boards; armed the Government with clear powers of superseding village panchayats; provided for the ex-officio membership of the Village Headmen and Karmans as part-time executive officers; and further tightened the control of the Government over the panchayats by providing for the appointment of a whole time executive officer with sweeping powers to be paid from panchayat funds! Though the Act was not brought into effect during Advisers' Regime many of its provisions were adopted in the Madras Village Panchayats Act of 1950. The series of experiments made on the Village Panchayats viz., formation of voluntary panchayats, appointment of Honorary
organisers of panchayats, creation of the post of Registrar-General of Panchayats, formation of statutory panchayats and the involvement of District Collectors in their formation, classifying village Panchayats as Local boards along with District and Taluk Boards and constituting a separate Village Development Fund proved to be dubious, doubtful and definitely detrimental to the development of the Village Panchayats and served only the political interests of the ruling parties.

Thus the history of the development of rural local self-government in the Madras State over a period of three decades (1920-1950) reveals broadly three distinct periods, viz. a) an Era of Experimentation (1920-1930); b) a Decade of Decadence (1930-1940); and c) a period of Bureaucratic Centralisation (1940-1950). Though the initial liberal approach of the Justice Party and a watchful legislative criticism were responsible for the vigorous growth of rural local bodies during the first decade, politicalisation, political involvement of local boards in the national politics and the subsequent bureaucratisation of local administration sapped the vigour and vitality of rural local self-governing institutions during the next two decades.