CHAPTER III

PANCHAYAT RAJ SYSTEM: MAHARASHTRA, MARATHWADA AND NANDED
Maharashtra

Village Panchayat

Maharashtra became a separate State of Marathi speaking people on 1st May 1960 on economic front; the state has the largest economy in India. Its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at current prices stood at Rs. 1,248,452 crore in the year 2011-12. The state roughly accounts for 13 percent of the national income. The per capita income of the state at Rs. 101,314 in 2012 is among the highest in the country. During the last decade, Maharashtra has registered the highest Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CARG). The economy of the state largely depends on agriculture and industries. On governance aspect, the state feel proud of being the pioneer in India to introduce decentralised planning for development of the people in context of three-tier Panchayat Raj system in 1962 with great deal of enthusiasms and delegation of powers to the newly created Village Panchyat, Panchayat Samit and Zilla Parishad. Pertinently, the state decided to reserve 30 percent seats for women in PRIs on its own initiatives in 1991 even before the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Moreover, the formation of separate and unilingual Maharashtra provided an opportunity to the then political leadership to mould the developmental effort to fulfil the basic need for an all round development of the State. For the convenience of administration, the state divided into four regions such as Bombay- the capital and metropolitan area, Western Maharashtra including Konkan consisting of 12 districts which were part of the old Bombay presidency, Vidarbha- consisting of 8 districts which were formerly in the old Central Provinces and Berar, and Marathawada- comprising 8 districts which were formerly part of the Hyderabad State under the Nizam. Among these four regions, the Vidarbha and Marathawada have remained
undeveloped mainly due to historical reasons and State unpreparedness in the basics of development. In order to eliminate their backwardness, the policy guidelines were incorporated in the Statement of the Government Policy. The main directives in respect of development programs were: To recognise Vidarbha, Marathwada and backwardness of rest of the Maharashtra as the ‘unit of planning’ for the purpose of accelerated development to end of regional imbalance; To formulate special programs for the chronically affected drought areas, the hilly and inaccessible areas, the tribal areas etc. (Koundinya, 2001). For fruitful program implementation, the State kept special attention on perspective of laws governing local self-government system enacted before constitution came into force in Maharashtra. These were Central Provinces and Panchayat Act 1948, Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958 – main purpose collection of land revenue and maintenance of land records, Maharashtra Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samit Act 1961, etc.

**Evolution of Village Panchayat**

Unlike other parts of India, Village Panchayat were not new to Maharashtra. They had traditionally functioned as the main centres of administration before the village communities lost their cohesion due to improved means of outside communication and influence of western civilisation. Historically, the local government institutions in Maharashtra date back to 19th century, when for the first time District Local Boards were established in 1862 in Bombay Presidency. They developed slowly from government created institutions’ to popularly elected bodies over a period of approximately one hundred years. The starting point of local Government was the establishment of district local fund committees under Bombay Act-III of 1869. This was the nominated body
of landholders presided by the Collector. Taluka committee also came to be commissioned about this time.

The next important land mark in the development of local self-government was Lord Ripon’s resolution on local self-government adopted by the British Government in 1882 which succinctly advocated the cause and relevance of local self-government on many grounds like making it as an instrument of political and popular education, as agency to deal with the rural problems effectively and efficiently, assured to ensure the rural masses an independent and autonomous social life. It also provided opportunities for talented people in rural areas to devote themselves to the cause of service to common man and thereby emerge from local to regional and national life. As per the resolution of Lord Ripon, the Bombay Local Boards Act of 1884 was passed to establish district and taluka local boards, the Central Provinces and Berar, the Local Self-Government Act was enacted in 1883 under which the rural local administration area was determined by a group of villages. A local board was constituted for each group and a district council for the district. Mostly, local self- bodies were set up at the district level under the Government of India Act 1919 and local self-government became a provincial subject. The Village Panchayat Acts was passed in various provinces to revive the Village Panchayat and the district board were also amended reducing the power of interference by government directly in their administration. Accordingly, the Central provinces and Berar local self-government Act of 1920 placed the local administration on a sound footing, as noted that “The Central Provinces and Berar Panchayat Acts of 1929 was practically the first step towards establishment of Village Panchayat” (Govt. of Maharashtra, 1961). Also, in the same year, the Sanitary Panchayat was also created, but these bodies had meagre powers and financial resources and they were hardly self-governing in
real sense. However, as found, till 1920 no due interest was taken in the village as unit of administration.

The British parliament passed the Government of India Act in 1919 by which local self-government was made one of the provincial transferred subjects under the charge of a popular minister. This had a desired effect and Acts were passed in eight provinces in British India for the establishment of village Panchayat. Thus, among many Acts passed by the provinces, Bombay Village Panchayat Act and Central Provinces and Berar Panchayat Act were also passed in 1920. These Acts, which for the first time provided for the formation of statutory Village Panchayat as wholly elected bodies. The supervision and control over the Panchayat was given to the district local boards. But the performance of these local bodies was not found satisfactory due to lack of revenue at their disposal. There were 26 districts local boards working in three divisions (Marathwada, Vidarbha and Western Maharashtra) of the State of Bombay. The Bombay Local Boards Act 1923 governed these local boards. Various duties allotted to the district local boards which classified as obligatory and optional. The obligatory included the construction of roads, maintenance of hospitals, dispensaries, markets and other public utility services like public buildings, public tanks, supply of water etc. The optional functions included various matters which were not absolutely essential but were legitimate objects of expenditure from local revenues. In order to perform their obligatory duties under district local boards, a grant in aid equivalent to 15% of the ordinary land revenue, including non-agricultural assessment realized during the preceding year in the district, excluding the area under the jurisdiction of Village Panchayat and Municipalities. “The grant was subjected to the condition that the board spend in each talukas at least 75% on the basis of 15% land revenue grant with a view that all the taxes were served with that
aid. The district local boards also got income from local fund cess at the rate of three annas in a rupee on every rupee of land revenue realized in the area under the jurisdiction of boards. They were also entitled to levy water cess at the rate not exceeding three annas in rupees. The State Government also assigns a grant-in-aid of two percent of the gross forest revenue to each district local boards realized during the previous year in the board’s area on certain conditions. Government was also paid a grant-in-aid to district local board equal to 50% of the expenditure incurred by them account of payments of DA to their staff. A grant-in-aid equivalent to two-thirds of the salary of the Chief Officer or Engineer was also paid to district local boards (Govt. of India, 1956).

In June 1925, a Hatch Committee was appointed to search of the existing position of the Village Panchayat Act system and to make concrete proposals for increasing its sources of income and to suggest such amendments to the Village Panchayat Acts which would give effect to their proposals. The committee submitted its report in 1926, but, no action was taken to implement its suggestion. Subsequently, a new law, known as Bombay Village Panchayat Act enacted in 1933 which incorporated some of the suggestions and recommendations of the Hatch Committee. This Act was an improvement and progressive over earlier Act of 1920. It conferred voting rights to women for the first time and the Village Panchayat in the Bombay State are governed by the Bombay Village Panchayat Acts 1933. This Act empowered the Village Panchayat to take up socio-economic and various other functions for the rural people. Its shortcoming was the absence of any compulsion to form Village Panchayat even for bigger villages and the absence of provisions for financial assistance to Panchayat by the Government (Joshi, 2002). Further, as per the Government of India Act, 1935, provincial autonomy came into force. Looking
the dynamics, the first government of the Bombay Province felt imperative to amend the existing Bombay Village Panchayat Act. 1933. Accordingly, a bill was introduced in the legislative assembly in 1938 and the new amended Act as Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1939 came into force with certain objectives like to assist and advise the officers of Rural Development department; to control and supervise the work of taluka development association; prepare schemes to organise and supervise all rural development work; create interest in the problems of rural economy and to act as focal centre for all rural development activities. Even, this Act was not free from shortcomings which was absence of any compulsion to form Village Panchayat even for bigger village and the absence of adequate provisions for financial assistance to Panchyat. Due to certain shortcomings, the act of 1939 was further amended in 1947 and 1956 and certain additional functions were also invested in the Panchyat (All India Congress Committee, 1954).

In addition, the Central Province and Berar Panchayat Act of 1946 provided the establishment of Gram Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayat in villages with a population of 2000 above or less population as obligatory on part of Government. If population less 2000, two or more village could be combined to form a group village Panchayat. But in this Act, the judicial and administrative function of village were separated and entrusted to district bodies only to make village as unit of social, political economic and cultural activities. On the other hand, in this new set up the old local boards were also abolished. Again, the present State of Maharashtra arose out of the recommendations of the States re-organisation Commission report (Govt. of India, 1955). After the reorganisation of the State in 1956 and based on its recommendations a comprehensive legislation for village Panchyat called the Bombay Village Panchayat Act of 1958 was passed under which progressive and
comprehensive powers were given to the Village Panchayat to undertake development and welfare measure in the village and as well assigned the work of collection of land revenue and maintenance of land records.

In addition, before the Bombay Village Panchayat Act, 1958, many acts relating to Panchayat were in operations namely Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1933, the Hyderabad Gram Panchayat Act 1956 and the Central Province and Berar Panchayat Act 1946. Needless to say the unification of these Panchayat Acts has brought number of advantages, particularly unified approach and new outlook towards Panchayat, simplification of the administrative and other problems and giving a fresh impetus to their development. According to section 5 of the Panchayat Act of 1958, the State is committed to set up a Panchayat for every lowest administrative unit, and therefore has to be by some standard a viable unit consistent with other requirements. Therefore, Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958 stated that in future no Panchayat or group of Panchayat should be organised with a population of less than 500 and if necessary a suitable legislative amendment should be undertaken. As per the 1958 Act certain administrative steps taken by the State Government to make the village panchayat a legal entity for every village. Accordingly, above 20,000 Panchayat covering above 35,492 villages had been set up with a population above 281 lakhs. The specific feature of Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958 were that the Gram Sabha consist of all adult resident in the village; establishment of district village Panchayat Mandals for every district to take care of Village Panchayat; making a job of secretary of the Village Panchayat a government paid job; entrustment of the work of land revenue collection and maintenance of village records to Village Panchayat; payments of 25% to 30% of land revenue collected in the Village Panchayat; institutions of Naya Panchayats for five or more village with more judicial powers. Again as per this
Act the district village panchayat mandal was also constituted for every district for supervision and control over the village panchayat. The collector and the district Panchayat officers were the Chairman and Secretary of the mandal respectively. The Chairman of other district bodies and seven to twelve members elected Sarpanch were also the members of this mandal. Further under this Act, the salient features of Village Panchayat are: a village is divided into wards and each word is ads a constituency and assigned certain number of seats. Certain seats are reserved for women and harijans. The election is by ballot but ironically the election is contested by communal and caste basis for securing power and continue to work against each other. The Village Panchayat assigned to look after village sanitation, road, communication, medical aid, marketing arrangements, social welfare activities and cooperative society, public health, etc but ironically education hub of developing people’s knowledge was not given to Village Panchayat. However, gradually Panchayat were developed with full-fledged administrative units of the village to fulfil all requirements of village, and government department worked for a village through their panchayat. Further under this Act there was also provision that sarpanch will be elected and not nominated. There shall be Secretary appointed by the Government to assist the Gram Panchyat. Even the revenue officers help the Panchayat in recovery of dues and removal of encroachments on public property. In short, wide powers concerning every sphere of public welfare and development were delegated to them. This is the history of evolution of local government in general and Panchayat in particular in Maharashtra. In fact, as found, no co-ordination exists between Panchayat and corresponding activities of the government in all development and welfare activities. Previously, the State Government had a separate panchayat department but with the passage of time, it had been amalgamated with the
Social Welfare Department. The department will regulate the work of Panchayat by giving one trained secretary for a group of one to three panchayat. The Government also appointed one inspector for the Panchayat in each development Block consisting of one hundred villages. Though the Government had no power to supersede any Panchayat and only could do to recommendation but in letter and spirit regulate the Panchayat in absolute form.

**Committee Perspectives**

Maharashtra after becoming a separate State on 1st May 1960, the government setup a committee under the chairmanship of Shri V.P.Naik to study the recommendation of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee report on democratic decentralisation and devolution of power and to suggest the ways for the development of rural areas through administrative machinery within a period of three months. The committee had interaction with political leaders, people and other stake holders and submitted its report by 15th March 1961 with certain recommendation that the district level body (The Zilla Parishad) the nodal agency must be a unit of developmental administration with adequate function and finance. Accordingly, a comprehensive legislation on Maharashtra Zill parishad and Panchayat Samit Act 1961 Act was enacted in May 1962 which spelled three-tier Panchayat Raj system. Thus, Maharashtra became the eleventh State in India to adopt the three tier system of Panchayat Raj. The main purpose was to achieve intensive and coordinated local development. Justification made district as a unit of administration; various developmental schemes be implemented by district, taluk and village level administrative officers; all programmes would be implemented under the overall guidance of the Zill Parishad. The Committee further added that the
local bodies be provided with financial resources in order to enable them to plan and implement all schemes of local nature with efficiency, speedy and autonomy. Further, a periodic review recommended on working of local bodies in order to receive considerable help from government and would help in carrying out modification needed in the Act, rules, procedure and variety of other arrangement required for achieving the best possible implementation of the local sector activities and effective execution (Govt. of Maharashtra, 1961). On the whole, V.P. Naik Committee incorporated specific provisions to involve all the three bodies in the development of local resources and planning for socio-economic development of the respective areas. Under the section 100(4) of the Act “The Zilla Parishad shall endeavour to promote planned development of the district by utilising to the maximum extent, local recourses and for that purpose Zilla Parishad have to prepare annual and long term plans after taking into account the plans prepared by their Panchayat Samiti. Similarly, under section 108(a) Panchayat Samiti shall prepare an overall plan of works and development schemes to be undertaken in the Block for enabling the Zilla Parishad to prepare its development plan”. Likewise, Village Panchayat as per items 59 and 60 of the village list have also to prepare plans for development of their villages and also programmes for increasing the output of agricultural and non agricultural products of the villages. They cover the areas related to economic development and social welfare are agriculture, education, public health, water supply, roads, sanitation, animal husbandry, rural housing, etc. By and large, the committee was on expectation that in this process of decentralisation it should be possible to establish democratic bodies, invest them with necessary authority and provide them with suitable administrative machinery and financial resources, so that they would be able to plan and implement all schemes of local nature with efficiency, speedy and
Thus, Maharashtra Government accepted all the major recommendations of Naik Committee and promptly enacted the Maharashtra Zilla Parshad and Panchayat Samiti Act 1961 being “An Act to provide for the establishment of rural areas of Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samiti and Village Panchayat to assign them local government functions and to entrust the execution of certain works and development schemes of the State Five-year plans to such bodies and to provide for the decentralisation of powers and function under certain enactments to these local bodies for the purpose of promoting the development of democratic institutions and securing a greater measures of participation by the people in the said plans and in local and Government affairs”. With the passing of 1961 Act the administrative machinery of the Zilla Parishad began to act with effect from 1st May, 1962. Election of Sarpanchs to Village Panchayat, Chairman of Panchayat Samiti and President and Vice-President of Zilla Parishad were done and the democratic organisation began to function with effect from 15th August, 1962.

In order to make three-tier PRIs most effective, the Government of Maharashtra appointed various committees such as Shri A.K. Majumdar Committee in 1966 to examine the staff organisation of Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samities; Administrative Reorganisation Committee in 1969 headed by Shri M.N. Heble, Secretary to the Government, General Administration Department for examining the utilisation of various funds allotting to Zilla Parishads for local development; committee headed by A.U. Sheikh, Secretary, General Administration Department to find out the role of Panchayat Raj bodies in agricultural production; Evaluation Committee in 1971 under the Chairmanship of Shri L.N. Bongirwar which endorsed regular election, direct election to Panchayat Samiti instead of indirect one, non-interference of inevitable influence of the Members of Parliament and of State legislature,
etc. (Darshankar, 1979) The Committee recorded the observation as “In this we shall have to reckon with the fact that the legislators being representatives of their constituencies have a direct interest and involvements in the working of the Panchayati Raj bodies. They have also, as might perhaps call, a certain amount of higher wisdom and experience and thus are in a position to guide the destinies of the Panchayati Raj bodies on the right path (Bongirwar Committee Report, 1971). However, the Bongirwar Committee, for reasons given by the Naik Committee, endorsed the view that the Members of Parliament or the state legislature should not be included as the ex-office councillors or even as associate councillors in the Panchayati Raj bodies. However, the recommendations of the Bongirwar were not accepted by the State Government. As MLAs and MPs felt left out from the local development process as result of prominence given to three-tier PRIs. In view of this, a legislature committee of MLAs and MLCs had been constituted in 1973, known as the “Panchayat Raj Committee” which had the powers to insect and review the functioning of the two upper tiers, and submit an annual report. The members of the committee paid visits to a few selected Zilla Parishad, Panchayat Samit and the Village Panchyat to review the working of these institutions. The committee had the powers to call for any information and explanations from any persons holding office under these institutions, including the Secretary of the concerned department. In spite of these powers, the members of these legislative assembly who made up this committee were constantly apprehensive about losing their importance in case of the office bearers of these tiers were given more powers. Similarly, the Government of Maharashtra appointed the District Planning and Development Committee (DPDC) in October, 1974 which comprised the President of Zilla Parishad and selected member of Legislative Assembly’s as non–official nominee was a
compact body of ten persons. However, in June 1979, all the members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly found a place in the executive committee of the DPDC. This made the executive committee of DPDC very bulky. So, in 1982 an attempt was made to cut down the size of the executive committee by including only the selected members of Parliament and Members of Legislative Assembly. But this attempt was failed and the order of the Government June 1982 was revoked. It is often found that Zilla Parishad could not plan for the whole district and they deal with only a small portion of the developmental out lay of the district. However, an analysis of the share of the Zilla Parishad in the total developmental efforts in the district shows in 1981-82 that for example, of both plan and non-plan outlays were taken into account the proportions of Zilla Parishad comes to 51 percent because of resistance from outside to the Zilla Parishad adopting the role of the planners for the district. Bongirwar Committee observed in their visits to various Panchayati Raj bodies that they could not find out any particular evidence to show that there was any conscious and systematic planning in the local set-up under Zilla Parishad due to undue interference from government agencies.

Moreover, after twenty-five years of Panchayati Raj institutions existence, a Second Evaluation Committee was constituted in Maharashtra in June 1984 and in June 1986 under the Chairmanship of Shri P.B. Patil which suggested remedies for overcoming the weakness of the Panchyat Raj bodies and to make it as planning bodies. It also suggested measures to augment the role of Zilla Parishad in district planning. The committee aptly commented on such a deteriorating situation. In words like as a result, two types of consequences appear to have emanated. By establishing the same purpose, two organisations one of the State Government and another of the Zilla Parishad-
there has been wastage of financial resources, man power etc. The more serious consequences has been that the work which the Zilla Parishad have been doing in connection with the relevant subject of activities in comparison being considered less important. Therefore, generally this leads to the contradiction in the field of activities of the Zilla Parishad. Further, in respect of some of its own activities in the district, the Zilla Parishad is required to compete with the State government (Govt. of Maharashtra, 1986). The committee also observed that with the establishment of District Planning and Development Council – another centre of power at the district level – the status of Panchayati Raj Institutions has been further undermined. Though it has been further recognised that the function of the planning in respect of the activities transferred to the Zilla Parishads should rest with them but this is now being progressively administered by the DPDC. Therefore, the Patil Committee rightly observed that “It would not be an exaggeration to say that the present planning system is not conducive to provide local participation and initiative”. It recommended reservation of seats for weaker sections so as to make it adequate and effective. It further recommended representation of women should be at least twenty-five percent of the total elected representatives, and co-option of one member from voluntary agencies doing work in rural areas. Again it noted that there should be more share of Zilla Parishad in the implementations of district level schemes in rural areas like roads, irrigation, soil conservation, forestry, adult, informal, primary and secondary education, etc. On the whole the second Panchayati Raj Evaluation committee of Maharashtra provided adequate measures on devolution of power and functions to be transferred to Zilla Parishad. In addition, it also recognised that the members of Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament being representatives of people do have a legitimate role to play in
the planning and developmental activities in the district. In light of this, it recommended a new committee called District Development Planning Evaluation Committee under the Chairmanship of the president of Zilla Parishad to take charge of the planning, development and evaluation activities of the district. However, Patil Committee report on Panchayati Raj Evaluation of Maharashtra provided adequate measures on devolution of power and function for the fulfilment of the original objectives of democratic decentralisation.

In brief, some of the recommendations of Patil Committees are: All the district level schemes and programs concerning rural development like irrigation, education, soil conservation, forestry, road, health, etc should necessarily and always be transferred to the Zilla Parshads; The State Government should not establish a separate machinery, organisation, office, society or agency at the district level or below for the purpose of planning, implementation and administration of any of the subjects of activities and these should be transferred to the Zilla Parishad; Appointment of a Finance Commission to look after the budget allocation by State Government and its proper utilisation by PRIs, as suggest measures of generating own fund by PRIs for development rural people; Representation of women in PRI bodies should be at least twenty-five percent of the total elected membership; Co-option of one member from Voluntary Organisation working developmental work in the district; Being peoples representatives’ the members of Legislative Assembly an members of Parliament should rendered constructive advise, not unilateral influence, to the President of the Zilla Parishad in planning and developmental activities of the district; etc. On the whole, this committee recommended that Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samit Act 1962 and Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958 should be unified.
Pertinently, the main features of the Maharashtra Panchayat Raj are: The District level authority is an important unit as well as a powerful executive body. The Block level authority works as a sub-committee of the Zilla Parishad; The Zilla Parishad Councillors are indirectly elected by adult franchise system; The Member of Legislative Assembly and Members of Parliament are not co-opted on the Zilla Parishad Council on grounds that there should be full scope for local leadership, because the latter should not feel overawed by the former; The Collector is kept out from the working of Panchayat Raj, but an officer of the same rank from Indian Administrative Services cadre called Chief Executive officer is placed in entre charge of Zilla Parishad; The Deputy Chief Executive Officer is an ex-office Secretary of the Zilla Parishad; The State Government has to transfer most of the developmental activities to the Zilla Parishad and empowered to carry out all the developmental activities in the rural areas in the district i.e. agriculture, education, health, animal husbandry, etc. Over six decades, Panchayat Raj has been adopting these above measures in carrying out developmental activities for development of rural people.

**Reorganization of PRIs**

The Government of Maharashtra followed the provision of 73rd Constitutional Amendment to activate Panchayat System within a year. Through this Act, a minor changes made in Bombay Village Panchayat Act, 1958, the Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti Act 1961, which came into force on 24th April, 1994. These are: The reservation for SC, ST and women has been provided for as envisaged in the 73rd Amendment. As per the provisions of the Act the Government of Maharashtra made provisions for 27 percent reservation of seats in every Gram Panchayat for backward class of citizen; A State Election Commission was set up in April 1994 with the responsibility of preparation
and conduct of electoral rolls and conduct of election to the Panchayat Raj bodies, as per the 73rd constitutional amendment Act; State Finance Commission (SFC) appointed in 1994 to review the financial position of Panchayat and to make recommendations for its overcome; Gram Sabha was given as mandatory to hold by the Gram Panchayat in the month of April and October or twice as per convenience in every year; In pursuance of Provisions of Panchayat (Extension to Schedule Areas) Act, passed by the Parliament in 1996, the Maharashtra Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samits (Extension to the Schedule Areas and amendments Act was passed in 1997); Many schemes like education, public health, family welfare, sanitation, water supply, etc have been transferred to the Zilla Parishads. However, many such schemes are only partially transferred to the Panchayati Raj bodies. The line department and DRDA continue to have major control over the planning and implementation of the schemes. The PRIs mostly act as the delivery units. Since the inception of Zilla Parishads in 1962, many Rural Development programs with financial outlays such as IRDP, NREP, DPADA, Social Forestry, Diary Development, etc, in fact, were not entrusted to Zilla Parishad. Instead, a separate society (DRDA) under the Societies Act has been established for implementing them.

Despite the fact of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act 1992 and its adoption by the government of Maharashtra, but in ‘letter and spirit’ not followed duly as observed. The Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958 has not been amended and this schedule containing section 45(2) also remains with the State Government in an unaltered manner. Likewise, the Maharashtra Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samit’s Amendment Act, 1994 has not altered section 100 and 101 of the two schedules dealing with the subjects within the purview of Zilla Parishads and Panchayat Samities. The power to amend these schedules under section 100(2) and 101(2) also remains with the State Government. Similarly,
section 45 and the schedule enumerating 82 subjects of Village Panchayat of Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958 has not been amended and this schedule containing section 45(2), also remain with the State Government in an unaltered manner. In sort, the Government of Maharashtra is still following the old pattern of Panchayat Raj system. Even it is seen that the Amendment Act of 1994 has not touched the large part of the 11th schedule. Even then, the Panchayat Raj System in Maharashtra is unique in some respects. The Zilla Parishad is pivotal as main executive body. The Panchayat Samiti plays subdued role as it acts as a sub-committee of the Zilla Parishad. The members of the State Assembly and Parliament representing various constituencies within the jurisdiction of of Zilla Parishad are excluded from membership of the Parishad. Election to the Zilla parishad is direct and not indirect. However, after 73rd Amendment, as per the Maharashtra Human Development Report, 2002 women constitute over 40 percent of the Chair Persons of Panchayat Samitis and 29 percent of Sarpanchs of the Village Panchyat. Similarly, representations of the SCs and STs have increased by 14 percent and many of them have also been elected from the unreserved posts.

**Electoral Process and Party Politics**

On conduction of election to these representatives of PRIs, by and large, since state formation the Congress Party has emerged as the dominant party which professed Nehruvian vision of democratic socialistic Maharashtra. The party with the help of newly emerging PRIs looked upon as the instruments to extend democracy to the masses in the rural areas, to usher in the area of economic prosperity and egalitarian society. Over the years, the Congress Party controlled not only the State Government but also the PRIs. The foremost Congress Party coincided with the dominance of the Maratha caste
which enjoyed a decisive power in the State as a whole, largely due to its numerical strength, economic and political clout and high ritual status. However, Shiv Sena in alliance with Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) challenged the Congress Party in 1995 and claimed share in controlling PRIs. Subsequently, the Congress Party divided in 1999 and Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) under the leadership of Sharad Pawar fragmented the local political share controlled the PRIs. In Maharashtra election to rural local bodies always play a crucial role in the state politics for two reasons. First, they accommodate a large number of local aspirants within the network of formal power. Second the rural local bodies helped the consolidation of the state level political parties at the grass root level. The direct election of local bodies ensured a competitive recruitment developed by the state political parties. As observed many state and national level important political leaders come through used to come from a background of competitive local politics (Palshikar, 1999). Therefore, election to rural bodies always play significant role in state politics. As show, elected representatives in three-tier bodies backed by congress party dominated during 1962 to 1992 and latter Shiv Sena and BJP supported candidates control local bodies. In fact, since the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts (1993), many academics and activists have been hoping for a democratic revolution at the grass root level. But, as observed, these amendments have only given enhanced constitutional status to the local bodies in the state. Further, it is observed that the provision regarding direct elections every five years, the formation of state level finance commission and election commission, reservation of seats for women, though, are some noteworthy features introduce by these amendments, but the main devolution of power on the basis of eleventh and twelfth schedules has been to the state legislatures. Hence, the status of ZP, Panchyat Samiti and Village Panchyat continues as
agencies simply implementing various schemes devised by the state and central government. On the other hand, the local bodies simply exist as primarily political structure facilitating entry of workers into formal structures of power. Actually, these structures do not facilitate democratisation of decision-making power, nor do they ensure transparency in the functioning of the government machinery at the local level. It only helps to strengthen the political linkages between state level leadership and district level leadership and local workers on the other hand.

With regards to campaign in local bodies’ elections, it found no genuine issues prevalent in local area dominated the scene. The Shiv Sena - BJP through their meetings and press briefing tried to project the elections as a test of strength for the present state government. Similarly, congress party looked upon the local elections as an opportunity to establish themselves as a major force over the other. Besides, another feature of local election campaign is that though Maharashtra has a very wide network of NGOs and activists belonging to extra-parliamentary organisations and movements but these never intervene in local elections in an effective manner. On the other hand, these NGOs are often eager to share decision –making power and implementation authority with politicians and bureaucrats. They hardly undertake any concerted effort to define the agenda, educate the public, and initiate debate at local level even in their respective areas of activity. It is ironical that they keep their distance when the ‘plebeian’ aspect of politics is under way and intervene only at the ‘expert’ stage, like imparting training to PRI members. Such ‘non-governmental’ interventions contribute partly to de politicisation of the decision making process and an extent trivialise the role of local political process. They rarely touch the core problems of PRI system. As observed, even group of social activists and localised movements, too, choose to remain
on the fringe of the election campaign. Perhaps, they have been facing dilemma of choosing Sena-BJP, Congress Party and other localised party. This may be either the local movements do not posses strength or they are frustrated with party-electoral process and remain isolated from this carnival of democracy. In fact, such isolation of NGOs and local (people’s) movement poses a nagging problem to local governance system. Firstly, this phenomenon underscores a separation between civil societies ‘interventions’ and ‘formal’ politics involving state. Such separation makes state more insensitive and pursuit of formal power more personalised. Secondly, it depoliticises all ‘grass roots ‘action, orienting the latter to a flurry of fund relate activity by a few well-meaning persons. Thirdly, the withdrawal of NGOs and movements (or their ineffective) concerning to party electoral processes perpetuates an artificial separation of the social and political arenas of activity and interventions. Therefore, it is necessary to take initiative and intervene on part of NGOs and local people’s movement in local electoral process. If not in selection of candidates, then at least, in raising certain issues in the campaign agenda for shaping voters’ choices. In fact, this does not happen. As a result, established political parties, the local ‘party less’ elements, the local press and local networks of power dominated the entire local election process suiting to their best interest and not for the common people( Palshikar, 2002). Besides, in all local level elections the most visible trend is the election of (or at least candidature of) large number of relatives of already active politicians of all parties. As observed, almost half the party candidates were nephews, nieces, brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, etc. of the present generation active in state politics at local level. Such local level election, in reality, paves the way for the next generation of politicians. This trend indicates that in local PRIs elections it is extremely difficult in rural Maharashtra to enter into politics unless one
has a family connection. Sometimes, it is paradoxical that voters at many places defeated the candidates of existing power holders, still a large numbers of ‘relatives of politicians’ have managed to get elected. Despite the fact, such election gives opportunity too many new comers and first timers to be elected as people representatives. Even with all limitation of electoral politics, these elections have brought into the political process a very large number of local representatives of Women, OBCs, SCs, and STs. As it appears that, this development has a tremendous democratising impact. But in reality, the mere entry of these new social forces into politics has the least effect of democratising our political process. They have not been successful in building social pressure of state intervention. They are passive and not preceded by struggle. Simply, they have come as largesse of the state. How much democratisation can take place through such state intervention is difficult to answer. Because, political parties appears adopt mechanical and casual approaches to these social forces. In fact, parties never respect these social forces. Only at election time, there is a search for a ‘proper’ candidate; particularly women candidate. The change has not covered political parties. Rather, encouraging more Women, OBCs, SCs and STs to join the parties. But, political parties commonly adopt ‘panel’ system for their party workers who can retain positions of power. In this way, the approach of political parties has reduced the democratising potential of this new phenomenon. Added, in spite of reservation, the political agenda continues to be insensitive to the dalits, tribal’s, OBCs and Women. Major political parties do not have much to say for these sections of society. Only pave the way to these social forces to enter politics without any struggle. Thus, political establishment afford to retain the usual agenda and turn these social forces into instrument of the same old agenda. In short, in Maharashtra State politics much resource is going towards
local bodies and as well all political parties have very high stakes in controlling the local bodies.

**Marathwada Region**

Maharashtra, a developed state of India is comprises of four administrative divisions namely The Konkan, Western Maharashtra, Vidarbha and Marathwada. The latter area formerly was under the Nizam’s rule (erstwhile Hyderabad State) known for its backwardness and regional disparity. Historically, the backwardness of the region was conditioned by the various atrocious rulers like Maratha and Mughal king, and last by Nizam of Hyderabad State from 1724 to 1948 (224 years). Marathwada remained under Nizam’s theocracy and oppressive feudal and communal regime. People had no stake in administration and development programs. Towards the first half of twentieth century, the freedom movement of Gandhiji and then Swami Ramanand Teerth and a host others laid the foundation stone for freedom of Hyderabad State from Nizam,s rule. After much struggle this region merged into the Indian Union in 1948. In 1956, with the reorganisation of State, the Marathwada region joined to the bilingual Bombay State which was parts of present Maharashtra and Gujarat State. Now, the region covers eight districts namely Aurangabad, Jalna, Parbhani,, Beed, Latur, Osmanabad, Nanded and Hingoli. Though Marathwada enriched in culture, art, sculpture and centre of many political and social movements against alien rulers, but inequality, exploitation, casteism, gender disparity, illiteracy, dalit atrocities, etc remains prominent over centuries. Even after independence, the regional disparity and backwardness in all fronts continues unabated. In education, the enrolment in school finds quite low; drop out and stagnation manifests quite high. Similarly, symptoms of economic backwardness inform of per capita income and employment quite abysmal. Agriculture is the vital source of livelihood but,
high prevalence of land lord, absentee land lord, high bonded labour, low irrigation facility, massive land under drought, poor infrastructure for agricultural production, low access to market and transport, etc are a common phenomenon. As compared to state average (37.24%) the proportion of irrigation in Marathwada is as low as at 22 percent of land. Equally the supply of fertilizers by the state government, providing subsidy, sanctions loan not adequate to the region. In addition, distribution of land size, holding and investment of input are quite unequal among farming community. Nearly forty percent of farmers are landless, forty percent are marginal and small farmers (up to 1-4 acres), ten percent medium farmers (up to 10 acres) and rest ten are large farmers. The cropping pattern shows that the seventy percent of the lands are used for cultivation of jawar, rice bajara and other kharif and rabi crops for consumption purpose and the income these are gradually reducing over the years. On the other hand, the cash crops like cotton, banana, grapes and sugar cane cultivation are rising phenomenally which is the monopoly of landed gentry. The de-peasantization, indebtedness, bondages, ruthless exploitation, and concentration of coercive power in the hands of landed gentry, extraction of share crops as far as possible contributed stagnancy of land and impoverishment of the cultivators. Besides, currently land man ratio is decreasing in alarming rate due to land acquisition for MIDC, SEZ, purchase of lands by builders, plotting of land etc further jeopardizing life of farmers. Over all, disparity in agricultural system stands constraint for enduring cultivation and productivity of land. Therefore, farmer often commits suicides driven by mounting debts and triggered by crop failure by natural calamities which are a common phenomenon of this region. With regards to education, historically remains undeveloped due to alien rule. There were no deliberate efforts made to provide educational facilities to all sections of the society.
which was facilitating spread of casteism, communalism, inequality and factionalism. Also, this had resulted lack of access to higher reaches of employment and occupation in enhancing quality of life. After freedom and merged with Indian union, the State and Central Government has initiated number of educational development programs of primary, secondary and higher education in this region with aims to make accessible common masses to overcome harsh economic inequality, deep rooted social prejudice, disparity against women and disadvantages, castes, communities and avail benefits from development programs meant for them. Over the years, no doubt number of educational institutions, both private and government established and kindled aspiration about the overall and comprehensive development of Marathwada region. Nevertheless, at macro level higher education seems doing well but at micro level they still have a long way to go to fulfil expectation of common masses. With regards to health, industrial sector and other infrastructure facilities’ there is wide disparity between prosperous Western Maharashtra and backward Marathwada which so far has not been arrested rather increasing unabated (Maharashtra Govt. Indicators and Backlog Committee (IBC) Report, 1997). The proportion of regional backwardness of Marathwada increased from 23.56 percent in 1984 to 29.62 percent in April 2000, while in the rest of Maharashtra it declined from 37.32 percent to 22.12 percent in the same period( The Planning Commission Report, 2003 performance Evaluation of Statutory development Boards in Maharashtra). This apart, implementation of various rural development programs under national five-year plans, since last six decades, has very little impact on alleviating poverty of vulnerable groups.

Having portrayed the general socio-economic condition of Marathwada, it is worth presenting the general scenario of the study district of Nanded.
Nanded District

Nanded is reckoned as a backward district of the Marathwada region of Maharashtra state. Its backwardness is attributed to the several years of rapacious feudal and exploitative role of the Nizam of Hyderabad. In the year 1724, the district was given to Nizam by the Moghals (Gazette of India). Then it was become the part of Nizam rule until the provision of linguistic state province. The district is divided into three revenue divisions and around 80 percent of population live in rural areas and survive depending upon the agriculture. The various caste groups SCs like Mahars, Chamars, Matang; ST like Gond, Bhil, Koli, and dominant caste like Maratha, Brahmin etc lives in Nanded district. According to 2001 census data, SC population is 18.25% of total population higher than the Maharashtra State percentage 11.09%. The total number of villages situated around 1612, and 1310 Gram Panchayats are operating as local self government for imparting smooth governance to people. Despite the fact, the district is still under the trap of feudal impact, illiteracy, unemployment, child labour, and frequent natural disaster like drought, earthquake, famine, shortage of drinking water etc are a common phenomenon. Though various development programs like ITDP, IRDP, DWCRA, SFDA, etc are being implemented since six decades through DRDA, NGOs and other agencies, even then has very little impact on quality of life of vulnerable sections of society. As regards of Human Development Index is concerned, Nanded stands low in literacy rate (66.7% against State 82.9 percent), infant mortality rate 31 percent out of 100 (Maharashtra State Bureau of Health Intelligence and Vital Statistics, 2010), poverty incidence 75.4 percent against State 35.2 percent (Government of Maharashtra, 2009), per capita Health Expenditure 174 against state 187 (Accountant General (AG) Government of Maharashtra, 2007), low Relative Human Development Status 0.55 in income,
education etc. With regards to PRIs status in Nanded district around 63 members are in Zilla Parishad, 126 members are in 63 Panchyat Samity, 10264 members in 1309 Gram Panchyats. Hence, for removing backwardness and effective implementation of development programs for common people, a greater reliance is placed on these PRIs since its 73rd Constitutional Amendment.