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“POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF BACKWARD CLASSES IN THE PANCHAYAT RAJ INSTITUTIONS OF ANDHRA PRADESH”

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ABSTRACT

The success of a democratic system largely depends upon the existence and efficient operation of the system of Local Government at the grassroots levels. Local Government, which is also known as 'local self-government' is a system of direct and active involvement of the people of local area into the administration of local affairs, for the satisfaction of local needs with the help of local resources and through organized local efforts. Local Government is always a source for providing political education and training to the people without which they cannot become well-functioning and active participants in the democratic system. Through their participation in the administration of Local Government, the people get psychologically and socially involved in the process of politics and



their achievements at the local level always contribute towards the achievement of the goal of nation-building. Local Government provides a very beneficial opportunity to the people for receiving self-education and training. It has been because of this quality that all the political scientists accept and advocate the importance of Local Government as a training school for democracy and development. The democratic ideals of decentralization, development and increased continuous and active popular participation in the process of nation-building can be secured only through the

organization and working of an efficient system of Local Government. Without a well organized system of Local Government, no democratic political system can be expected to become stable and really developed.

KEYWORDS: Local self government, decentralization, democratic ideals, political participation.

INTRODUCTION:

The makers of our Constitution were fully aware of the imperative necessity of organizing a system of Local Government at the grass root level and using it as a solid foundation for ensuring the stability, strength and health of

the Indian liberal democratic political system. Such a view was clearly stated by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru: "Local self-government must be the basis of any true system of democracy. We have got rather into the habit of thinking of democracy at the top and not so much below. Democracy at the top will not be a success unless it is built on the foundations from below."

The Constitution of India gave a directive to the State to establish, maintain and operationalise a system of Local Government, and the Indian state has been maintaining a system of Local Government in both Urban and Rural areas. In fact, each part of India, that the Urban or Rural, is being locally administered for the satisfaction of local needs by a Local Government. They Local Government can be broadly categorized

into: Rural Local Government and Urban Local Government. The focus of the present paper, however, is on the Rural Local Government in the state of Andhra Pradesh.

Rural Local Government in India is known by the popular name Panchayati Raj. It has been in operation since the early years of independence and it has the responsibility to satisfy the local needs and aspirations of the rural people who constitute more than 70% of the whole population. The Indian state acting under the Constitutional directive given under Article 40 (to organise village panchayats and endowed with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government) took immediate steps for systematically organising Panchayati Raj in India.

Organization of Panchayati Raj in India came as a revolutionary step in the direction of democratic decentralization and rural development. The launching of Community Development Program on 2 October, 1952 set the stage for the organization of Panchayati Raj. On second October, 1953 the National Extension Service was launched. These are initiated as government programs but were designed to secure the involvement of rural people in the task of rural development. However, the inadequate success registered by these programmes during the First Five Year Plan period necessary aided the need to review their working. This task was assigned to the Balawant Rai Mehta Committee.

In October 1957, this Committee submitted its report and suggested the organization of Panchayati Raj system. It was to act both as an instrument of rural local self-government as well as community development programme. The Committee recommended the creation of a three tier structure-Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Zilla parishad at the district level-for securing the objectives of local self-government and rural development through the efforts of the rural community under the guidance and help of the government. The recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee(1) were accented by the National Development Council in 1958 and the Central Government called upon the States to implement these recommendations in their respective areas through appropriate legal enactments. The main inferences of the committee is as follows(2):

- 1.The Community Development and National Extension Service programme has failed to stimulate people's initiative.
2. Local bodies at a higher than the panchayati had generated but they showed little enthusiasm in the community development programme, and
3. Even the panchayati did not play a considerable role in community development in a significant way.

On 2 October, 1959, Rajasthan came to be the first State of the union to provide for Panchayati Raj. And many other states including Andhra Pradesh followed suit. Thus, the whole of rural India came under the Panchayat Raj system. It still continues to be in operation.

Ashok Mehta's Committee, 1977

The functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions in many states revealed that these institutions have been reduced to an extremely peripheral status. Efforts have been made to revitalize and revive these age-old Institutes. When the Janata Government came into power at the Centre in 1977, a fresh attempt was made to put some vigour and vitality in to the Panchayati Raj system. The Ashok Mehta Committee was set up by the Janata Government in 1977.

The committee submitted its report in 1978. It recommended for the constitutionalization of the Panchayats, a two-tier system of Panchayats at District and Mandal level, representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the election of Panchayati Raj Institution on the basis of their population, four-year term for Panchayat Raj Institutions, non-interference of government in the functioning of Panchayat Raj Institutions, participation of political parties in local body elections, planning by Zilla Panchayats by taking urban-rural continuum into consideration and compulsory powers of taxation. The committee also suggested for a draft constitutional amendment bill for awarding constitutional status to the Panchayats. The main intention of the committee was to make Panchyats as political institutions instead of being mere developing agencies(3).

In spite of the implementation of the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta and Ashok Mehta committees there were many lacuane in the working of the panchayat Raj system like lack of political awareness,

lack of funds for the Panchayati Raj institutions, groupism and factionalism, party politics, in effectiveness of gram Sabha structural defects etc. In order to overcome all these hurdles, the revamping of Panchayati Raj institutions through the 73rd amendment act was done. The amendment act was brought in for eliminating the defects noticed in the working of panchayat Raj as well as giving a wider representative base and more powers to the Panchayati Raj institutions. The purpose was to revamp the Panchayati Raj in such a way as to ensure its regular, active and efficient working in the rural areas and enable you to help the process of rapid socio-economic develop and of rural India. The recommendations of the 73rd amendment are as follows(4).

A three-tier system of Panchayati Raj institutions shall be introduced on uniform basis throughout the country.

1. Direct elections shall be held at the village level for the Gram Panchayati, and indirect elections at the block and district levels shall be held.
2. Elected chairperson of a Gram Panchayati shall be removed by Gram Sabha with a two-third majority of the members present in the meeting and having presence of at least 50 per cent members of the Gram Sabha.
3. Seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes shall be reserved separately.
4. One-Third of the seats shall be reserved for women (A state may by law also reserve seats or offices of Chairpersons in the Panchayat at any level in favour of Backward classes of citizens).
5. Panchayati Raj institutions will have duration of five years.
6. Disqualification for members of Panchayati Raj institutions shall be similar to the method adopted in connection with the disqualification for members of Parliament and State Legislatures.
7. Chairpersonship is reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes based/upon their population. Reservation will be made also for women to get chairpersonship for panchayats.
8. Minimum age for a person, who intends to hold an office in the Panchayati Raj institutions, is fixed at 21 years.
9. Elections to the Panchayati Raj Institutions are held under the direction of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of State, Hyderabad and the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), New Delhi.
10. Panchayati Raj Institutions will have powers, authority and responsibilities to function as instruments of self-government. Plans for economic development and social justice and schemes for their implementation may be prepared by the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
11. Panchayati Raj Institution shall have power to impose taxes, duties, tolls and fees to raise funds for development programmes.
12. The State would constitute a Financial Commission to review the position of the Panchayats, and
13. Necessary legal safeguards shall be provided for the smooth working of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYAT RAJ IN ANDHRA PRADESH

In 1953, the pattern of local self government in Andhra State had been model on Madras state local self government institution. The Madras District Municipalities Act, 1920, the Madras District Boards Act, 1920, and Madras Village Panchayaties Act, 1950, comprised all the regulations for the local bodies.

In 1953, three types of rural local self government institutions were prevalent in the State. They are (i) District Boards, (ii) Taluk Boards and (iii) Village Panchayaties. The Village Panchayats were grouped under Class I and Class II according to population and income. A Panchayat having a population of not less than 5000 and annual income of not less than Rs.10,000 is per under class I Panchayat. The rest were categorised under class II Panchayats. The number of Class I and Class II Panchayats, was 193 and 3687 respectively in 1956 (5).

The First Phase: 1959-65

The Government of Andhra Pradesh approved the recommendations of the Balwanth Roy Mehta (1957) committee and formed the three tier Panchayati Raj system in the state. The statutory village panchayats in the Andhra area had already been constituted under the Madras Village Panchayaties Act, 1950, while Gram Panchayaties existed in the Telangana area under the Hyderabad Village Panchayaties Act. With the existence of Panchayati Samities and Zilla Parishads, all the three bodies at the village, block and district level became

corporate, statutory and representative bodies. They could acquire, hold and disposed of property and enter into contracts.

The A.P Gram Panchayati Raj Act, 1964

The Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayati Raj Act, 1964, superseded the previous Gram Panchayati Acts of Andhra and Telangana. Under this Act, the pattern was set up for future structure of Panchayati Raj in the state. Every village had to consist of a Gram Sabha and met at least twice a year to consider the annual statement of accounts and audit, the report of the administration of the previous year, the programme of works for the year ahead, and the proposals for fresh taxation or for enhancement of existing taxes. Usually the Sarpanch will preside over the Gram Panchayat. It is presided over by the deputy sarpanch, when the sarpanch is absent(6).

The Second Phase: 1965-70

In view of mounting criticism from various sections, including legislators against panchayat raj institutions, the Andhra Pradesh Congress Legislature party constituted a Committee in March 1968 to consider all aspects relating to panchayati raj and to suggest necessary amendments to the concerned Act. It had 12 M.L.As as Members, while J.Vengala Rao, Ex-President of the Andhra Pradesh State Chamber of Panchayat Raj was the Convener. The major recommendation of the committee to improve the position of the Zilla Parishads annual income and grants-in-aid given to them should be raised from 25 paise to one rupee(7). Very meager changes were made in the panchayati raj structure during the second phase.

The Third Phase: 1970-78

Another important Committee which went into various aspects of panchayati raj institutions in Andhra Pradesh was set up in 1971. It was headed by C.Narasimham. The Committee had strongly recommended for setting up of a Local Authority Finance Commission for every five years on the basis of the National Finance Commission(8).The authorities should be entrusted with government, to remove a Sarpanch, Vice-Sarpanch or a member of the Gram Panchayati.

Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act-1994

The State Government made some amendments to the existing laws conceiving the Panchayat (which discussed in the previous chapter) Raj Institutions in the light of the Constitutional (73rd Amendment) Act. According to the Act, Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Bill was passed by the State Legislative Assembly on March 30, 1994. The new Act, called the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 came into force on May 30 1994, by replacing the earlier Acts. In accordance with the provisions of the Act a three tier structure comprising of Zilla Parishad at the district level, Mandal Praja Parishad at the intermediate level and Gram Panchayat at the village level were constituted in the State. Since then the Act has been amended from time to time during the last ten years of its operation to make it more effective.

Important features of A.P. Panchayati Raj Act of 1994

The following are some important features of A.P. Panchyat Raj Act, 1994(9)

- 1.Provision of organic linkage among the three tiers for enabling the Sarpanches of the Gram Panchayats to attend the General Body meeting of the Mandal Parishad. Similarly, the Presidents of the Mandal Parishad are entitled to attend the General Body meetings of the Zilla Parishad without the right to vote on the resolution.
- 2.Provision of the norm of two children, whereby a candidate with more than two children will be disqualified to contest in the elections or to continue as a member in any one of the Panchayati Raj bodies.
- 3.A member who is absent for three consecutive meetings is deemed to be disqualified thereby to ensure the regularity of the members of the functioning of panchayaties.
- 4.Joint cheque power for the operation of Gram Panchayats fund is provided to the Sarpanch of the Gram Panchayati along with a member purposively selected by the Gram Panchayati.
- 5.The scheme of selection of Gram Panchayats is another unique feature in the State. Committees have been

formed at the State, District and Mandal level for the selection of best Gram Panchyats and inducements are provided to stimulate the panchayats.

6.The Power to call for information from the Village Development Officer (VDO) has been entrusted to the Gram Panchayats.

7.Co-option to minorities given to provide representation to all sections including the community in the village, and

8.Provision for bringing no-confidence motion against the heads of Panchayati Raj Institutions only once in their five year term, not in the first two years after holding of the office.

We have seen how the Panchayat Raj System has been reformed and improved upon by the governments of the day to make it more responsive and cater to the needs of the requirements of the society. We shall now discuss how political participation of the backward classes has been growing by years at country level, state level and more particularly at the Local bodies level

Table-1: Elected Backward castes Representatives of Andhra Pradesh Local Body Elections In2001, 2006 And 2014 (Zilla Parishad) District Level

Elected as	Total in 2001	B.C	Total in 2006	B.C	Total in 2014	B.C
a. ZP Chairpersons	22	07	22	08	22	07
b. ZP Vice Chairpersons	22	05	22	09	22	08
c. ZPTC Members	1,098	376	1,098	367	1,098	363

Source: State Election Commision of Andhra Pradesh.

The Table-1 throws light on the backward caste representatives elected to the local body elections (Zilla parishads) in the years 2001, 2006 and 2014. In the 2001 elections conducted to the zilla parishads, out of 22 zilla parishads Chairpersons, seven chairpersons were from backward castes. Likewise, out of 22 zilla parishads Vice-chairpersons, 5 were from backward castes. Out of 1098 ZPTC Members 366 belong to the backward castes. Similarly, in the year 2006 elections conducted to the zilla parishads. Out of 22 Zilla Parishad chairpersons, eight persons were from backward castes and out of 22 zilla parishads Vice-chairpersons 9 were from backward castes. Out of 1098 ZPTC members 347 were from backward castes. In the year 2014, elections are conducted to the zilla parishads. Out of 22 zilla parishads chairperson posts, 7 were occupied by the the backward castes and similarly out of 22 zilla Parishad Vice-chairperson posts, eight posts were occupied by the the backward castes. And out of 1098 ZPTC members 363 belong to the backward castes.

Table-2: Elected Backward castes Representatives of Andhra Pradesh Local Body Elections In 2006 And 2014 (Mandal Parishad) Mandal Level

Elected as	Total in 2001	B.C	Total in 2006	B.C	Total in 2014	B.C
a. M.P.Ps	1,098	381	1,098	431	1,098	377
b. MPTCs	16,589	5988	16,589	6457	16,148	6125

Source: State Election Commission of Andhra Pradesh.

The Table-2 depicts the backward caste representation in the mandal parishads. In the year 2001, elections were conducted to the mandal parishads. Out of 1098 mandal Presidents, 371 were representatives from backward castes. In the 2006 elections conducted to the mandal parishads, out of 1098 mandal Presidents, 431 belong to the backward castes. Similarly, out of 16589 MPTCs, 6437 belong to the backward castes. In the

year 2014, elections are conducted to the mandal parishads. Out of 1098 mandal President posts, 347 were occupied by people belonging to backward class. Similarly, out of 16, 148 posts of MPTCs, 6095 were occupied by the people belonging to the backward castes.

Table-3: Elected Backward castes Representatives of Andhra Pradesh Local Body Elections In 2006 And 2014 (Village Panchayats) Village Level

Elected as	Total in 2006	B.C	Total in 2014	B.C
a. Village Sarpanches	21,469	9911	21,649	10213
b. Ward Members	2,17,789	90147	2,18,208	93712

Source: State Election Commission of Andhra Pradesh.

The Table 3 depicts the Backward castes representation in the Village Panchayats . In the local body elections held in 2006, out of 21, 469 village sarpanches 9911 from backward classes. Likewise, in the local body elections held in 2014, out of 21, 649 village sarpanches who are elected, 10213 belonged to backward classes. Out of 2, 17, 789 Ward members who were elected in the local body elections of 2006, 90147 were from backward classes. Likewise in the local body elections conducted in 2014, out of 2,18, 208, 93,712 were from the backward classes.

We can gather from the above three tables, namely, Table-1, Table-2 and Table-3 that the backward classes have taken advantage of the reservation that has been provided to them in all the three tier of Panchayati Raj institutions namely the Gram panchayat, the Mandal parishads and Zilla Parishad. If we analyse the three tables we can gather that the backward class representation is up to 33% of all the total posts that were contested. From this we can gather that the political participation of the backward classes has grown enormously after the implementation of the 73rd constitutional amendment Act and this act has been a veritable boon for the backward classes because it has facilitated their representation up to 33% in the local bodies of Andhra Pradesh.

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