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## PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ANDHRA PRADESH: AN APPRAISAL OF SOME FUNCTIONAL ASPECTS

**Dr.E.A.Narayana**

Professor,  
Department of Political Science and  
Public Administration,  
Andhra University, Visakhapatnam

**Dr. S.R. Subhani**

Faculty of Politics & Public  
Administration  
School of Distance Education  
Andhra University-Visakhapatnam

The panchayati raj is often believed to be the most important political invention of independence India. The panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) are proclaimed as the vehicles of socio-economic transformation in rural India<sup>1</sup>. They are the prime instrument of decentralisation of power at the grass root level. Many states had enacted legislation with a view to making the panchayati raj institutions more vibrant so as to enable them to participate fruitfully in the rural development process. However, barring a few exceptions here and there, the rural local institutions have not been able to make any worthwhile contribution due to many reasons<sup>2</sup>. The meetings have pre-determined agenda. For discussion new subjects can be taken up with the permission of the chair. Personal issues, which are directly related to some members, are often debated at length. On many occasions themes, which pertain to comprehensive rural development, are overlooked due to involvement of vested interests. In decisions taken by the panchayats the acceptance or approval of people's representatives of those in power is a must. This process of decision-making fails to fix correct priorities. The functionaries are influenced by political affiliations in debates and in the decision-making process.

In order to remove the defects in the functioning of panchayati raj institutions, several attempts have been made both by the Union Government and State Governments. The most important initiative in this direction is enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitution amendment Act. The passage of Seventy-Third Constitution Amendment broke new ground in several aspects. Adequate representations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes and women have been provided in the elected bodies at all levels with an enabling provision for a similar reservation for other backward classes. A fixed tenure of five years, regular elections and mechanism to ensure appropriate financial allocations are other measures designed to strengthen these bodies. Assignment of functions in respect of implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice is another important feature of the constitutional amendment.

The provisions of the Seventy-Third Constitution Amendment Act have generated an unmistakable optimism in the minds of the people that the constitutional status accorded to the panchayati raj bodies will help them to become vibrant institutions in rural areas. The enactment of the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional Amendment Act and the



subsequent panchayati raj legislations in states have brought to the fore the significance of grassroots democratic processes. This change in the Indian political system is the result of a growing conviction that Central and the State governments cannot achieve growth and development without people's direct participation and initiative. Hence, the functioning of panchayati raj system has assumed greater importance in recent years. This article examines functioning of panchayati raj in Andhra Pradesh with particular reference to districts in the state.

### **PANCHAYATI RAJ IN ANDHRA PRADESH:**

In conformity with the constitutional amendment the Andhra Pradesh Legislature repealed of its earlier Acts and enacted a new Act namely the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. Under the new Act the Mandal Parishad has been retained as a unit at intermediate level in the three-tier system of panchayati raj in the State. The other two-tiers are Gram Panchayat at the village level and Zilla Parishad at the district level. The Act also provides for the constitution of Gram Sabha at the village level<sup>3</sup>. The first ordinary elections to PRIs in the State, after the implementation of 73rd Constitution Amendment Act were held in 1995. The subsequent elections were conducted in 2001 and 2006. Elections to 14,591 MPTCs, 1094 ZPTCs were held in July 2006. The elections to 21,434 gram panchayats and 2,08,291 wards in the gram panchayats were held in August 2006. Elections to the MPTCs and ZPTCs were held on party basis, while elections to the village panchayats were on non-party basis. The positions at all the three levels were reserved for persons who belonged to the backward classes (34 percent), scheduled castes (17.56 percent) and for scheduled tribes (7.61 percent). Within each of these categories and the unreserved category one-third of seats as well as positions were reserved for women. The major political parties namely Telugu Desam Party, Congress, Bharatiya Janata Party, Communist Party of India, Communist Party of India (Marxist) contested the elections, The newly formed Telangana Rashtriya Samithi also fielded their candidates in the elections.

### **PANCHAYATI RAJ IN GUNTUR DISTRICT**

The history of panchayati raj in Guntur district stretches back to a little over 130 years when it was a part of the erstwhile Madras Presidency. The Local Funds Act was passed in A.D. 1871 establishing Local Fund Boards. The area of the present Guntur District was included in the three local fund circle boards created under the Act. The next major landmark in the district was the establishment of Krishna District Board on the 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1885 under the Madras Local Boards Act of 1884 which repealed the earlier Act of 1871. The present parts of Guntur and Prakasam Districts were included in Krishna District.

Consequent on the formation of Guntur District on the 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1904, a separate district board was constituted for Guntur on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April, 1905 with a sanctioned strength of 32 members, of whom 14 were official and 18 non-officials.



The Guntur District Board continued till the formation of the zilla Parishad in 1959. According to the provisions of the Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithis and zilla Parishads Act 1959, the Guntur Zilla Parishad came into operation on December 1, 1959<sup>7</sup>. According to the 1986 Act, the panchayat samithis were abolished and 57 Mandal Praja Parishads (MPPs) were created in their place in the district. The new Panchayati raj Act 1994 has not brought any changes in the size and the number of mandal parishad and zilla parishad in the district. At present, there are 1,025 Gram Panchayats, 57 Mandal Parishads and one ZP in Guntur District. The functioning of each of the three-tieres has been examined in this following article. They are Returu Gram Panchayat, Kakumanu Mandal Parishad and Guntur Zilla Parishad.

### **GRAM PANCHAYAT:**

In the structural hierarchy of panchayati raj, the gram panchayat is the lowest and basic institution. The Andhra Pradesh Panchayati raj act, 1994 which governs the working of the gram panchayats prescribes that 'any' village or group of contiguous village with a population of 500 can be constituted into a gram panchayat<sup>8</sup>. The village Returu came into existence by Guntur District Collector's orders in 1953 and it is a major panchayat in Kakumanu Mandal. This village is 55 kms away from the district headquarters and 8 kms to the mandal headquarters. The total population of the village, according to 2011 census is 2876, out of which males are 1492 and female are 1384. The percentage of literates in the village is 65. The village is well connected with road and rail network. There are postal and telephone facilities in the village. The educational institutions in the village include one Zilla Parishad High School and three elementary schools.

The Returu Gram Panchayat consists of sarpanch and 15 ward members. In 2006 elections, the sarpanch post was reserved for schedule caste (general). Out of 15 wards members four were from general category, two from general (women), two from backward classes and one from BC (women). Three are reserved for scheduled caste (general) and two are reserved for scheduled caste (women) category.

The house tax is the major source of revenue for the gram panchayati. The amount received from this source during 2005 - 2010 is Rs.7,96,113. Water rate is another source of revenue for the panchayat. The amount received by Returu gram panchayat from this sources is Rs. 38,840 during 2005-2010. The next source of income of the Panchayat is the yield from their own property. Among the various items of property, the most promising and the lucrative is the common-land. The Returu Gram Panchayat village earned an income of Rs.7,542 from this source during 2005-2006. The Returu Gram panchayat has constructed one fish tank. The income from the fish tank is Rs.12,68,400 during the same period.

Another important source of income of Gram Panchayat is the grants given by the State Government. The total amount received under the grants-in-Aid for the



last five years is Rs.2,44,980. Each gram panchayat is required to meet at-least twice a month. It can hold meetings whenever necessary. The meetings are generally called by the sarpanch. But if a majority of the ward members present a signed requisition to the sarpanch, he would be under an obligation to call a meeting of the gram panchayat within six days. If he/she does not do so, the ward members themselves, with the permission of the District Panchayat Officer, can convene the meeting by giving a weeks' notice to the sarpanch. The Returu Gram Panchayat held 18 meetings i.e. 10 general body meetings and 8 emergency meetings during 2005-2010. The meetings are generally held on Sunday or on holidays so that it may be possible for all the members to be present. The usual time of the meetings is the morning at 11 a.m. and the venue is the panchayat office. The agenda is prepared by the sarpanch in consultation with his panchayat secretary and other colleagues. The date, time and the place of the meeting are also circulated by him in advance. This has to be confirmed by the ward members who were requested to give information on the regularity of meetings, giving notice and agenda in advance.

The meetings are presided over by the sarpanch. The panchayat secretary is present normally in the meeting. The sarpanch or the ward member at whose initiative the meeting has been called makes a short speech in which he explains the agenda and the circumstances that have led him to ask for the meetings. Thereafter, each of its agenda items will be taken up and discussed. As regards debates no formal rules of procedure exist. A ward member can speak any number of times. But this does not mean that proper decorum may not be maintained. All efforts are made to hold the meetings in as orderly a manner as possible. Perfect freedom of debate is enjoyed by the members. They can reply and frankly express their views. Sometimes the discussions become hot and tempers fray. On no occasion, however, has a gram panchayat meeting end in pandemonium. At the end of the discussion, decisions are taken. The decision has been made on a majority vote. The prevalent practice is that of a consensus.

The Returu gram Panchayat had undertaken many activities during the period of five years, i.e. from 2006 – 2011. These activities can be broadly classified into two categories – civic amenities and development activities. From the civic amenities point of view, Indian villages, until very recently, presented a poor picture. The life of the people was miserable. But new consciousness seems to have drowned upon them and they now feel the necessity of certain basic amenities. The village leaders have consequently begun to realize their responsibility. The Returu Gram Panchayat has, of late, done some work in this field. The supply of drinking water has received the maximum attention. The problem is perhaps severest in Guntur district. The existing water tanks have been renovated in the village. The total number of wells renovated in this village under Food for Work Program is 25. Another activity is the laying and improving of village streets and pathways. In Returu 86 gravel streets have been paved under the JRY, and Member of Paraliament grants. The total length paved in this village is 23 kms. The Returu Gram Panchayat has also provided lamp posts in



important streets. The Gram Panchayat pays per annum Rs32,873 as electrical charges. The Panchayat also maintains the system of scavenging in the public places. The services of 2 sweepers are utilized for this purpose. The Panchayat maintains reading rooms and community centers for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

The Gram Panchayat is also expected to help improve the economic condition of the villagers. The panchayat is involved actively in various programmes namely development of women and children in rural areas(DWCRA), chief minister empowerment of the youth, national social welfare programmes like old age pension scheme; unemployment beneficiaries, girl child protection scheme and Rajiv Argoya sri program. The Returu gram panchayat has implemented all these programmes. A total of 637 persons were benefited from the village under various programmes during the period of five years.

### **MANADALA PARASHAD**

The Kakumanu Mandal Parishad consists of 14 Mandal Parishad Territorial Constituencies Members (MPTC) and one co-opted member from Muslim minority community. The sarpanch of 13 gram panchayats, M.L.A and M.P. from the Mandal are permanent invitees to the meetings of the Mandal Parishad. In 2006 Mandal Parishad Elections, out of 14 MPTC's, five are reserved for general category, three reserved for general women, one for BC(women),two for reserved for a scheduled caste(general) and one for scheduled caste(women) category and one for scheduled tribe (general) .The people in the Mandal returned the equal number of candidates belonging to Congress [I]and TDP. The co-opted member belongs to the TDP. Hence, the TDP got the majority and has its persons as the President and Vice-President of the Mandal Parishad.

The Mandal Parishad of Kakumanu is equipped with administrative machinery which is headed by an officer called Mandal Parishad Development Officer. The Mandal Parishad Development Officer is responsible to execute the development programmes in the Mandal. He is assisted by the Mandal Education Officer, Mandal Engineer, and Extension Officer for Co-operation and Rural Development. The MPDO has control of over the office staff and also the village secretaries in the Mandal. The main sources of revenue of Kakumanu Mandal Parishad can broadly classified into two categories namely assigned revenue and grants. The assigned revenues include share from stamp duty, entertainment tax, land cess, mineral cess and sinerage cess. The total assigned revenue is Rs 7, 44,080 during 2010 – 2011 year. The Government of Andhra Pradesh release grants to Zilla Parishad every year for different purposes. The Zilla Parishad in turn allocates grants to the Mandal Parishads. The Kakumanu Mandal Parishad received grants during 2006-2011(5 years period) under the heads of accounts of Community Development, Primary Education, Social Welfare, Women and Child Welfare and Per-capita Grant. Total amount of grants is Rs 7, 44,080 in the year 2010 – 2011.



According to the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati raj Act 1994, a Mandal Parishad is supposed to hold one ordinary meeting every month. It can also convene special meetings, for which a notice of 6 days is required. During the year, 2009-2010 in the Mandal Parishad Kakumanu, 13 meetings were conducted (ordinary-9, emergency-4). As regards attendance, the members appeared to have shown a responsible degree of interest in the Mandal Parishad work. The average attendance of all categories of members is 85 percent. It is reported that all the women members are attending the meeting regularly. The sarpanches, Members of the State and union legislatures and the Mandal level officers who are the invitees of the Mandal Parishad have, however, taken comparatively less interest in the Mandal Parishad affairs.

The elected members made a pointed reference to the continued and deliberate absence of the legislators from the meetings. Most of them complained that they (the legislators) come to the meetings only when they had some personal motive. At Kakumanu it was mentioned that the MLA and the Member of Parliament had never come to the meeting of the Mandal Parishad. The legislator's lack of interest in the working of panchayati raj institutions is not a feature peculiar to the District of Guntur or Andhra Pradesh alone. It is a tendency noticed almost everywhere in the country<sup>10</sup>.

The Mandal Parishad of Kakumanu passed 136 resolutions in these 13 meetings held during 2009-2010. Out of 136 resolutions more than half of them are on agriculture. The construction and repair of water channels, procurement of seeds, fertilizers and tools, disbursement of agriculture loans and subsidies, laying out of demonstration plots and seed forms, caring on production campaigns, etc. are the important aspects of agriculture that have been frequently considered in the Mandal Parishad meetings. Social service occupied second place. The subject to which the much time has been devoted is the supply of drinking water. Other subjects that have been common are the opening of the primary health center, medical and veterinary dispensaries and timely supply of medicines, administration of veterinary dispensaries, vaccination campaigns, enforcement of anti-adulteration measures, methods to check the spread of epidemics, etc., have also been discussed. The educational problems such as the opening of new schools, providing additional accommodation to expanding institutions, repairing school buildings, etc., have also been frequently discussed in the Mandal Parishad meetings. The meetings of Mandal Parishad have also devoted considerable time to the problem of roads and communications. Quite a large number of resolutions have been adopted to request the State government to construct more roads. More than one-fourth of the resolutions have been passed on staff problems, like regularization of the services of temporary employees, the provident fund scheme, the adoption of self rules, purchase of stores, distribution of grant-in-aid, constitution of committees, adoption and amendment of a variety of byelaws, rules and regulations, etc., Thus, a wide range of subjects have been discussed in Mandal Parishad meetings and passed resolutions.



The Kakumanu Mandal Parishad has undertaken rural development programme like Food For Work, Rajiv Arogya Sri, Two Rupees Rice Scheme., Praja Padham, Rajiv Palle Bata, Adarana, etc. during the last five years. Under food for work programme, the payment for the food grains worth Rs.78, 60,639 were sanctioned to the Kakumanu Mandal for the year 2009-2010. Under the Prajapadam programme, an amount of Rs.15, 88,998 was sanctioned to the Mandal Parishad. This amount was utilized for providing drinking water in villages and repairs of wells and tanks in the Mandal. About 400 people benefited under the adarana scheme from the Kakumanu Mandal. Rural sanitation scheme was launched during the year 2008 to improve the sanitation of individuals. By the end of March-2006, about 1,227 individuals were benefited under this scheme from the Mandal. Each family or individual was supplied material worth Rs.2,000/- for the construction of lavatories. In the Mandal, 343 women groups were formed and got the revolving fund of Rs 28, 98,000, under DWCRA scheme, Gas connections were given to 1506 women of these DWCRA group. The Kakumanu Mandal Parishad spent an amount of Rs.42,55,323 sanctioned under the Jawahar Gram Samruddhi Yojana during 2007-2008. This amount was utilized for construction of the village roads, construction of primary school buildings, providing drinking water and improvement of infrastructure facilities.

## **ZILLA PARISHAD**

The Zilla Parishad of Guntur consists of three categories of members namely elected members, ex-official members and co-opted members. There are 57 ZPTC members in this Zilla Parishad directly elected by the people living in the rural areas of the District. For the election of members of ZPTC, each mandal is considered as a territorial constituency. Among the total ZPTCs, 9 are reserved for SCs, 3 for STs, 14 for BCs and the remaining 31 for other communities. Further there are 18 women of all categories among the ZPTC members. The ex-officio members are the Members of Legislature Assembly and Members of Parliament belonging to the district. There are two co-opted members who belong to the religious minorities living in the District. These co-opted members are elected by the ZPTC members of the Zilla Parishad. The Chairmen of District Cooperative Market Society, Zilla Grandhalayas Samstha and District Cooperative Central Bank, the District Collector, and the presidents of all the 57 Mandal Parishads in the District are the permanent invitees to Zilla Parishad meetings.

The Guntur Zilla Parishad has seven standing committees to assist it in its work. The members of the Zilla Parishad elect among themselves the members of each committee. The number of members varies from committee to committee. The Chairperson of Zilla Parishad is ex-officio member of all the Standing Committees and also the Chairperson of four Committees namely, (1) Standing Committee for Planning and Finance (2) Standing Committee for Rural Development, (3) Standing Committee for Education and Medical Services and (4) Standing Committee for Works. The District Collector is the member of all the standing committees. Each committee



has to meet not less than six times in a year to transact its business. All the standing committees met 9 times during 2009 to 2010. The attendance for the meetings of these committees ranges between 50 to 60 per cent on average. Along with the members, the district level officials of the development departments in the district also attended the meetings of these committees. In their meetings, the committees discuss the matters relating to their respective subjects and take decisions, which are placed before the Parishad for its approval.

The administrative wing of the Zilla Parishad is headed by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who is appointed by the State Government. He is responsible for the implementation of the resolutions of the Zilla Parishad and its standing committees and also for running the administration of the Parishad and also the various institutions working under its control. Usually, an officer- belonging to the cadre of IAS will be appointed as the CEO. In the case of Guntur Zilla Parishad, mostly non-IAS officers are appointed as the CEOs so far. He is assisted by Dy. Chief Executive Officer, Accounts Officer, Parishad Educational Officer and other office staff.

The Zilla Parishad derives its income mainly from two sources- own sources and grants. Own sources include share from land cess (mineral cess and Sine rage cess, stamp duty and from staff quarters, ferries, and shops. The Zilla Parishad receives grants under different heads of accounts such as secondary education, social welfare, minor irrigation, engineering works, rural water supply per capita grant, etc. The income received by the Guntur Zilla Parishad, under the own sources over a period of time of 5 years, from 2005 – 06 to 2009 – 10, is Rs60, 19,376. The total amount grants received by the Guntur Zilla Parishad as grant during the last Five Years are i.e from 2005 – 06 to 2009 – 10 is Rs 39,30,59,083.

The Guntur Zilla Parishad has been meeting according to the stipulation of the statute and depending upon its need. It held 33 meetings during 2009 – 2010, out of which 28 are ordinary and 5 special meetings. The meetings have been quite well attended by the members of all categories. It is found on an average that the attendance of elected and co-opted members is 65 percent more than that of State and Union level Legislators whose attendance is reported as 45 percent.

The attendance of the district level officers is very impressive. The Chief Executive Officer, who is to assist the Zilla Parishad Chairman in the conduct of the meetings, is always present. It is reported that the proceedings were conducted in accordance with parliamentary procedure. The speeches of members are dignified and forceful and generally transcend the narrow barriers of caste, politics, and group loyalties. The leaders, however, quoted instances when the members had shown undue bias for the areas they represented. It was observed that the agenda was so heavy that it was not possible to do justice to every item. The average number of items discussed in a meeting is twenty nine. The study of the minute book of the Zilla Parishad gives an idea about the concern of the members on problems of the district. The Zilla Parishad passed 230 resolutions during 2009-10 on various



aspects of social services and rural developmental sectors. Among the social services, important items discussed were the administration of primary health centers, rural medical dispensaries and veterinary hospitals, general sanitation problems of country side, improvement of the water-supply for drinking purposes, eradication measures for checking epidemics, expansion of educational facilities, inadequate accommodation in schools, etc. The meetings of Zilla Parishad have also been concerned with the procurement of seed fertilizers, agricultural aids, and the repairs and construction of water channels.

The development activities undertaken by Zilla Parishad of Guntur include minor irrigation, construction and maintenance of roads, maintenance of schools and provision of drinking water. The Zilla Parishad has so far constructed 209 minor irrigation tanks which irrigate agriculture land to the extent of 3,48,617 hectares. Besides, the Zilla Parishad has been arranging repairs to sizeable number of irrigation tanks and wells each year. The Zilla Parishad has taken up the maintenance of 257 secondary schools, The Zilla Parishad has undertaken the supply of drinking water to the people living in the rural areas of the district with the funds granted under two different schemes, namely Comprehensive Protected Water Scheme[CPWS] and Protected Water Supply Scheme[PWS], sponsored by the Central and State Governments respectively. The Guntur Zilla Parishad completed during the period under study 514 works under both these schemes. The Zilla Parishad has constructed 1323 roads connecting various villages in the district. The total length of these roads is about 4440 kms.

## **CONCLUSION:**

The panchayati raj system was established throughout the country to strengthen the democracy at the grassroots level and provide suitable machinery for the socioeconomic development of the countryside. However, The PRIs in Andhra Pradesh do not have basic infrastructure. Out of 21,943 gram panchayats, only 10,729 gram panchayats have their own buildings. Due to this the files, records and documents are not maintained properly. As such it is suggested that providing basic infrastructure should be given top most priority so that the works could be carried out effectively and efficiently.

The educational level of the leadership decides the effectiveness of PRIs. The poor educational level of leadership is one of the important factors that hinder the success of PRIs. It is a fact that unless men of quality equipped with a reasonable standard of general education are elected to these bodies, their functioning cannot improve. However, it is not possible to prescribe a minimum educational standard as one of the qualifications for membership in a democratic set up which rules out the possibility of splitting up the electorate on any basis whatever, including education. So the leaders may be given training in the functioning of the PRIs. None of the leaders of gram Panchayat, Mandal Parishad and Zilla Parishad selected for a detailed study had undergone training. The composition of the leadership also necessitates training.



Since members belonging to weaker sections i.e SCs, STs, BCs and women have entered into PRIs, because of reservations to these groups at large scale, proper training for them is highly essential. Hence, the State Government should make necessary arrangements for the training of panchayati raj non-officials and the question of persuading them to attend training courses should be given full attention.

As regards the objective of panchayati raj namely the development of the concept of participatory democracy at the local level, much success seems to have been achieved. The meetings of the PRIs are held regularly and more times than required by the statute and are largely attended. This is sustained by the fact that the number of meetings held by gram Panchayat is 15, Mandal Parishad 13 and Zilla Parishad 33 during the year 2010. The meetings have been well attended by the elected and co-opted members. The members of State and Union legislatures are, however, less interested in the panchayati raj affairs.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh had also not evinced much interest in transferring the powers and functions envisaged in the legislations. Very few functions were transferred and the State Government preferred to transfer the subjects in a phased manner. The findings of the study clearly show that very few functions are being performed by the PRIs. The State government had also ignored the PRIs in the implementation of rural development programmes and packed the committees supervising the programmes with ministers and officials.

The panchayati raj system in the State cannot function effectively unless the issue of devolution of powers and functions is resolved speedily. All the 29 items included in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution are to be transferred to the PRI's. The question of the functional efficiency of panchayati raj institutions is intertwined with the issue of resources placed at their disposal. The panchayati raj institutions in Andhra Pradesh are authorized to levy taxes on a large number of items. The yield from them is, however, small. These are inelastic sources of revenue. The panchayati raj institutions depend heavily on the grants from the Government. The funds sanctioned by the Finance Commission were not released to the panchayati raj institutions regularly. The State Government should, therefore, allocate needed financial resources to the panchayati raj institutions. The implementation of the recommendations of the State Finance commission has to be expedited.

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