



## Elite perspective and local government institutions – A study in Karimnagar district

Beenaveni Parusharam<sup>1</sup>, Dinesh Kumar<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India

<sup>2</sup> Professor, Department of Political Science, Kakatiya University, Warangal, Telangana, India

### Abstract

In India, where a democratic political framework was suddenly thrust upon a post-colonial society with age-old traditions and culture, elections became the agency for the democratisation of society and politics, as they brought politics within the sphere of the common man and common man into the political arena. They played a central role in mobilising millions of people into the political process, crystallising public opinion on a host of issues, institutional functioning and styles of leadership, and in the emergence and recruitment of a new political elite. Elections have influenced the ways in which the priorities of the political parties and the broad parameters of the incumbent government were laid down. We have seen how elections have effected changes in the existing policies of the government, where rejection or renewal of a regime means rejection or acceptance of a political leadership. Indeed, it was primarily because of the compulsions of the electoral politics that the parties adopted pro-people policies, with an eye either to consolidate their existing electoral base or secure support from newer sections. Even after the introduction of new economic policies, the governments at the Centre and in the States are compelled to carry out welfare programmes and the rival political parties have to compete with each other in projecting themselves as protectors of the interests of the poor and the disadvantaged. Electoral support can be mobilised on emotional grounds and the feelings raised by caste, faction, gender, religion and region, but such attempts have to be backed by some tangible welfare benefits to the members of these groups. The very implementation of the economic reforms have to be justified by the political parties on the ground that they enable the government to spend more on people's welfare. Paradoxical though it may appear, this dichotomy between the usual tendency of the political elite to use ethnic issues for political mobilization and the repeated demonstration by the electorate of their willingness to be mobilized on the issue of bread and butter shows 'forwardness' of the mass and 'backwardness' of the elite.

**Keywords:** Elite, PRIs, 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment act, provisions of reservation, political participation

### Introduction

The constitution of India is federal in structure with strong unitary features. The areas of jurisdiction of the Union and the States are clearly defined and demarcated. Though the government of India enjoys more power than state governments, the states occupy an important role. The effectiveness and efficiency of administration depend on the competence with which the state governments function. The responsibility for implementation of planned programme rests mainly with the states and most subjects who constitute the ingredients of development administration are within the jurisdiction of the states. The system of local self government makes people's participation in government and administration. Thus, the key to the nation's progress on economic and social fronts lies with the states. Under normal conditions the states enjoy a considerable measure of autonomy and the conditions under which the Union can encroach upon the sphere of the state autonomy are defined in the constitution. In a representative democracy, the political power is always exercised by the group of top elected leader. Despite being a minority group, it effectively controls all the effective centres of political power. There is a strong assumption that however much one may try to be democratic in one's political system, there is a strong element of oligarchy in every organization. The larger the organization is, so it is argued, the greater the tendency towards oligarchy.

In democratic system, the memberships of political elites are open to all the people and there is an ever present circulation or alteration in the political elites. The top leaders of elites

usually are in a position to remain in power only for a limited period. New members continuously keep on replacing the old members. Within every elite group, there is always present an inherent struggle for power and leadership. This fact as well as the existence of counter elites in the social system are together responsible for changes in nature, leadership and activities of the elite. Political elite emerge, dominate, fall into decadence and will be replaced by new non-decadent elites.

The assumption of the inevitability of community or caste mobilization for working of Indian polity to the displacement of other categories of mobilization is also not borne out by experience. Indian electorate has often lent support to futuristic and modernist vision about the country. In Nehru's days, for instance, the common people enthusiastically welcomed the ruthless integration of the Indian states, the affirmative action for disadvantaged sections of the society.

India has adopted a democratic and parliamentary system of government and is one of the leading democratic countries in the world scenario. The success of any democracy depends on the political participation of the people and their ability to influence people's politics. Considering the general political participation like voting, it is clear that the voting percentage in various elections in the country is not satisfactory. This means that almost half of the people are not connected to the political processes, their views about the support or opposition to the political system unclear or rather vague.

Paradoxes exhibit seemingly contradictory qualities, but they have their own rationale. In a way, the ouster of NTR could be seen (with hindsight of course) as the tragic outcome of NTR's politics itself. The evolution of the TDP as a party showed how a democratic upsurge among the people could be used, in the name of mass democracy, to establish an autocratic regime. Although NTR lambasted the Congress for perpetuating family rule over the country, he pursued the same line much more vigorously in Andhra Pradesh. Under the prevailing conditions in which political power was treated by the top ruling elite as property to be bequeathed at their will to their family members, the inheritance of power became an issue during the lifetime of NTR himself. On one occasion, he designated his actor-son, Balakrishna, his political heir. Two of his sons-in-law, who occupied crucial positions in the party, did not relish this dynastic wish. In addition, the growing authority of his much-maligned wife, who was so dear to NTR, perturbed his other family members and some senior leaders of the party. The Ministers and MLAs were also unhappy as NTR reduced them to non-entities and did not allow them to use patronage and power to get things done for themselves and their supporters. There was also growing resentment among the elite, given the shifting policy environment in the country, against his 'populist' schemes that they now thought were burdensome, unproductive and anti-development. They saw in Chandrababu, the Revenue and Finance Minister in NTR's Cabinet, a prudent and pragmatic leader with views commensurable to the emergent paradigm of economic development.

The provision of reservations to the BCs, SCs and STs in the local bodies is a major experiment in democratising grassroots politics in Andhra Pradesh. It has already brought a radical change in the landscape of caste politics in the State, with thousands of persons from these communities sitting on the representative bodies at every level and becoming trained in the craft of politics. In due course, they will certainly look for positions at the State level. The more backward among the backward castes and the dalits are also becoming assertive, making the caste question more complicated. The struggle by the Madigas for categorisation of SC reservations based on sub-castes and for a 'due share' in political power brought to the fore the issue of ensuring justice within the disadvantaged groups. How the tensions between the contradictory pressures from competing social groups to broaden political democracy will be resolved remains a serious challenge to the political elite in the State. Both the Congress and the TDP enjoy a heterogeneous and diversified social, economic and demographic base, in terms of party membership and local leaders. Electoral support comes from different castes, classes, religious denominations and occupational groups. Women and youth are also divided between the rival parties. TDP seems to have lost some support among Muslims after it entered an alliance with the BJP.

1998 and 1999 elections show that the voters of every caste were divided between the Congress and the TDP, although there were variations in the proportion of support enjoyed by these two parties among different castes. With the emergence of the BJP there was an important shift of the upper-caste vote in its favour from the Congress. That is the reason why nearly two-thirds of the upper caste vote went to the TDP-BJP combine in the 1999 elections. TDP has been consistently polling a greater percentage of votes among the

BCs and its vote was also higher among the peasant OBCs. Among the dalits, the TDP has been polling a consistently low percentage of votes as compared to the Congress; it secured only one-third of the SC vote in the 1998 and 1999 elections. The categorisation of the reservations for the SCs might have helped the TDP to retain support from some dalit sections, despite of the alliance of the TDP with the BJP.

When considering political elites, they are mainly classified into three levels, which are political elites at the national level, political elites at the regional level and political elites at the local level. Among the political elites at the local level, only those who are directly the members of the rural local self institutions are studied in the present research. The members of the three organizations of rural local self institutions / Panchayat Raj i.e. Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad are related to the people at the local level. These local political elites are of special importance as the true identity of democracy and power is known to the people only through Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI).

The Gram Panchayat Heads (Sarpanch), Panchayat Samiti members and Zilla Parishad members selected as the study group are simultaneously representatives of several political parties. Each political party expects them to propagate and spread the political party and these members are working accordingly. Their way of working also continues from time to time according to the convenience and ideology of their political parties. These members directly propagate the principles, ideology and working methods of their political party to the masses, from which the masses gain knowledge of political events and factors and form people's views about political events. That is to say, these members influence the process of political socialization through the role of political party.

Just as members of rural local self institutions are members of a political party, they are also representatives of the Panchayat Raj organization. Their role is directly linked to the development process of the people. The behavior of the members during the implementation of various schemes of the Panchayat Raj and their amplified contact with the public makes people aware of the rules and procedures of the Panchayat Raj Institutions, the various schemes, their nature and benefits, and this creates favorable conditions for political socialization. At the same time Panchayat Raj members act as representatives of the government. Government policies are implemented at the local level through them. These members are bound by the role of the government in any matter. When they act in accordance with government orders and government policies, they are spreading the ideas, functions, role and opinion of the government. To achieve this, various government schemes and programs are carried to implement political socialization effectively.

Members of local self-governing bodies are accepted by the people as leaders of the local area. In doing so, they properly address various issues at the local level and try to keep their leadership stable among the people. To this juncture, they propagate the political ideas that are convenient for them and keep the masses connected with various initiatives, and try to increase the public's contact with the political parties affiliated with them. In other words, the members of the local self-governing bodies represent the ideology, the policies of the government and the work of the Panchayat Raj institutions at the local level.

### Local Self Government Institutions

Local Self Government Institutions are working for the development of the local level and the overall development of the local people. Local Self Government Institutions in Maharashtra are classified as Rural Local Self Government Institutions and Urban Local Self Government Institutions. Rural Local Self Governments also known as Panchayat Raj, Panchayat Raj system is three tiers and at the district levels it is a Zilla Parishad, at the taluka level it is a Panchayat Samiti and at the village level it is a Gram Panchayat.

### Types of Local Bodies in Telangana

In Telangana, the local bodies are categorized into two main types: Panchayats and Municipalities. Let's explore each type in more detail:

1. **Gram Panchayat:** It is the basic unit of local self-government at the village level. Gram Panchayats are responsible for governing and providing services to rural areas.
2. **Mandal Parishad:** It is the intermediate level of the Panchayati Raj system, responsible for a group of villages within a mandal (administrative division).
3. **Zilla Parishad:** It is the highest tier of the Panchayati Raj system at the district level, overseeing the overall development of rural areas within the district.
4. **Municipal Corporation:** It governs larger urban areas and cities. Municipal Corporations have a more extensive administrative framework and are responsible for various services like urban planning, infrastructure development, waste management, and public welfare.

### Importance of Local Bodies in Telangana

Local bodies play a crucial role in Gujarat's governance system. They are the closest form of government to the people, making them the most accessible and accountable authorities. Below are some of the key reasons why local bodies are essential in Gujarat:

- **Grassroots democracy:** Local bodies are the embodiment of grassroots democracy, which means that they provide people with an opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and contribute to the development of their communities.
- **Efficient service delivery:** Local bodies are better equipped to understand the needs and requirements of the local population. This allows them to design and implement more efficient and effective service delivery mechanisms.
- **Better accountability:** Local bodies are accountable to the people they serve. They are more responsive to the needs of the community and are more transparent in their decision-making processes.
- **Developmental focus:** Local bodies are responsible for the development of their respective areas. They are better equipped to identify and prioritize development needs and work towards addressing them.
- **Empowering local leadership:** Local bodies are an excellent platform for developing local leadership and empowering communities. This helps in creating a sense of ownership among the people and encouraging them to take an active role in the development process.
- **Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:** A committee was appointed at the end of the First Five Year Plan, known as Balwant Rai Mehta to evaluate the planned projects

under the Community Development Programme. The report was finally signed on 24th November 1957. The Committee suggested the formation of the three-tier system (village, block and district level) of the local government, there should be direct elections of Panchayats at village level, Panchayat Samiti at block level and Zila Parishad at district level.

- **Ashok Mehta Committee:** The Janata Party came to power in 1977 after 30 years of the Congress Rule at the centre. A Committee was constituted under the chairmanship of Ashok Mehta to review the existing PRI's to identify their short comings and suggest ways and means to revitalize them and Committee submitted its report in August 1978. The Committee recommended the establishment of the two tier system instead of a three-tier system evolved by the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, and desired that all the powers should be concentrated at the district level.
- **73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act (Pre-Amendment Scenario):** Before the 73rd Amendment Act the condition of the Panchayati Raj was not so effective because their powers were limited and elections were not conducted regularly. The Commissions and committees gave various recommendations led to the realization that there was a need to create a strong government by which the local self government gives constitutional recognition. Prime Minister, late Rajiv Gandhi was strongly in favour of strengthening the local bodies by providing constitutional status to panchayats. Prime Minister's commitment to strengthen the village administration had a series of workshops with District Collectors and 'Responsive Administration' between December, 1987 and June, 1988, to understand the problems of rural development in the country. These workshops held in Bhopal, Hyderabad, Imphal, Jaipur and Coimbatore. The workshops were meant to see the problems of rural people and funds being provided by the government for rural development but not any fruitful result came from these workshops and then finally, the proposal of 64th amendment became very important to introduce in the constitution.
- **73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act (Post-Amendment Scenario) 1992:** The 64<sup>th</sup> Amendment Bill (1989), introduced in Parliament for composing panchayats in every state at the village level, intermediate level and district level by providing such powers and functions which are necessary for the local self-government. But this Bill could not pass in the Rajya Sabha. Then the 74th Amendment introduced in September 7, 1990 by V.P.Singh the then Prime Minister of India who proposed that power should be given to the people and this objective can be achieved only by giving the constitutional status to Panchayats. Then again the Prime Minister of India P.V.Narasimha Rao introduced 73rd Amendment in the form of Constitution Bill in September 1991 and the Amendment passed in the Lok Sabha on December 22, 1992 and in the Rajya Sabha on December 23, 1992 and got the President's assent and finally the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act came into force on April 24, 1993. All the states passed complied and adopted new Panchayat legislation by April 23, 1994. But its provision was not made in the Jammu and Kashmir Panchayat Raj Rules, 1996.

### Research Methodology

This paper is prepared on the bases of conceptual and analytical work. The data has been collected from the different source, mainly secondary sources, published and unpublished works i.e., annual reports, notifications, circulars of State Election Commission, Government of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana state, other publications, academic books, and official web sites also used for the data collection.

The district is divided into two revenue divisions of Karimnagar and Huzurabad. These are sub-divided into sixteen mandals. There are 210 revenue villages and 276 Gram-Panchyats in the district. The elections will be held in seven mandals Manakondur, Shakarpatnam, Huzurabad, Saidappur, Jammikunta, Ellandakunta and in Veenavanka mandals in the first phase. For seven ZPTC seats, 39 members are in the fray and for 89 MPTC seats, 208 members are going to contest in the elections.

### Reservation Policy Providing a Space for Political Empowerment to Weaker Sections

The confidence that they can contest elections without reservation could be one of the indicators. The survey shows that their confidence level is at present very low. The support rendered by reservation to women empowerment, therefore, should not be ignored. Reservation gives SCs, STs, and women an edge over general candidates to get elected. Therefore, they prefer the continuation of reservation although a majority of Gram Panchayat members are also in favour of continuation of the reservation to women, the reasons are different. Large numbers of GP women members are economically poor and socially deprived. They have hardly any chance to express themselves openly. They are afraid of speaking anything in a presence of village elders. In addition, a large majority of women members are daily wage earners their primary concern is to earn bread for the family and have no time to indulge in politics. It is because of this kind of atmosphere prevalent in the village community that women members of GPs have a strong fear that in the absence of reservation, their chances of getting elected are remote and bleak. The ZP women members are no doubt better placed in terms of education comparatively. They seem to have long political experience and are regulated by the party higher-ups. Therefore, they held the views as guided by the political party they belong to. No political party disfavours reservation. Moreover, ZP women members have a feeling that the party leaders approach them only if they are in power. Accordingly, their views they do not want to lose their ZP membership. They are desirous of retaining their socio-political status and position.

### Conclusion

Election studies in recent years show that a large proportion of voters are more concerned about local issues in exercising their vote than national issues. National issues might be more important to the activists, party leaders and the elite, whose role cannot be underestimated in influencing the voter's decision, but as far as the common voter is concerned, awareness of the national issues and any importance attached to them tends to be low. The voters are more influenced by the developments in their vicinity and tend to rely more upon local leaders who could mediate between them and the government, rather than great leaders

who can speak on issues of public policy. Conversely though, it can also be argued that voters do make rational choices as they vote to parties or candidates who would help to satisfy their immediate needs – such as ration cards and house sites, loans and financial assistance, drinking water, schools for their children, roads, employment, transport facilities, etc. Thus voters clearly perceive their vote as a means of improving their living facilities and conditions. Such a voting tendency is based on the belief that it is the responsibility of the government to cater to their needs. The Panchayati system in India is not purely a post-independence phenomenon. In fact, the dominant political institution in rural India has been the village panchayat for centuries. In ancient India, panchayats were usually elected councils with executive and judicial powers. Foreign domination, especially Mughal and British, and the natural and forced socio-economic changes had undermined the importance of the village panchayats. In the pre-independence period, however, the panchayats were instruments for the dominance of the upper castes over the rest of the village, which furthered the divide based on either the socio-economic status or the caste hierarchy. Voter's fault is, however, mitigated by the fact that the ambit of democracy is limited as yet. Secondly, the gap between the top and the bottom remains too great for the two to get integrated in the daily business of governance. Therefore, leaders continue to be moulded less by the preferences of the people as they are articulated from day to day, than by manoeuvrings at the top level. The gap could be reduced by making more sincere efforts for implementing the Panchayati Raj schemes for empowerment of the people at the grass roots level. But in most parts of the country, state level leaders are working harder for sabotaging the schemes than implementing it, because most of them feel threatened by greater empowerment of the people.

The impact of the socio-economic structure on the working of Panchayat Raj Institutions highlights come of the constraints inherent in development process. The caste hierarchy which characterizes rural life in India is found to be actively prevalent newly emerged Telangana State Karimnagar District. However, there are certain apparent changes in the socio-cultural aspects of caste system such as maintaining physical distance and inter-relations among the people. But it is mostly confined to middle and upper caste only and Harijanas continue to suffer isolation from the mainstream of village life. Paradoxically cast continues to play an important role in the developed a vested interest in the perpetuation of the caste system. As a result, the working of panchayat raj system which is intended to bring about social changes has itself become a victim of the caste divisions. Cast consciousness and the resulted divisive tendencies are hostile to community spirit without rural development is almost impossible 4. Added to this education a catalyst for change is largely absent in Karimnagar District. The economic pattern of Karimnagar District in tune with the social pattern is based on inequalities. The lower castes depend on their physical labour mostly working in the fields of the rich. This economic gap perpetuates social hierarchy on the one hand and results in the monopoly of political power on the other.

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