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## GROSSROOTS GOVERNANCE IN ANDHRA PRADESH: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

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Promotion of democratic values and decentralization of political power can be achieved through local government. Division of labour is the main principle which necessitates the importance of local government. The duties of the Central and State Government are shared by the local government institutions<sup>1</sup>. The most of the writers on the theory of democracy have assumed that the institutions of local government make a major contribution to the success of democracy. It is being felt all over the world that the representative institutions at state and national levels cannot be sustained without the existence of similar institutions below the state governments. Grassroots democracy is a phrase which refers to the effective working of the representative bodies at the local levels. i.e., grassroots levels. It is observed that countries like Switzerland and the USA where rural local government has developed have attracted the interest of the people and drawn the talent from their ranks. These examples justify the maxim that “the best school of democracy and the best guarantee for its success is merely the practice of local government”<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, the place of local government is central to life and breath for the true democratic functioning of a government. Local government is the key stone of the democratic arch.

The local government is part of National Government irrespective of its form – Unitary or Federal, Parliamentary or Presidential. The central government cannot have living contacts with problems of the local area and can deal effectively with the daily routine of local administration<sup>3</sup>. The common man looks towards those institutions which are nearer to him, realising the importance and utility of local bodies<sup>4</sup>. The local government is created under the law for specified geographic boundaries<sup>5</sup>. Today local authorities are fast assuming the role of local executive agencies for implementing national programmes and realising national objectives, in addition to the routine municipal functions. The local government is, therefore, sine qua non for the success of the welfare services in the modern state. Many countries in the world had incorporated provisions in their constitutions relating to local government institutions (LGIs).

For India, the importance of the local government is larger than for any other democracy. The constitutional safeguards and various reforms assure a promising future for the local bodies in our country. It is felt by many including our founding fathers that the solution of the major problem in India lies in the proper, honest and timely functioning of the local government. The Constitution of India embraced the principle of welfare state and democracy. Article 40 of Directive Principles of State Policy provides for organization of village panchayats in the country. The subject local government was included as item five of the state list (List II) in the Constitution, A genuine grassroots democracy has been specifically mandated by the Constitution,

The central and state governments have made pronouncements from time to time high in terms of their intentions to strengthen local government institutions. The governments made efforts, though sporadic, to build capacities of local bodies. Millions of rupees of central and state funds were expended on schemes which fall under the functional domain of local government institutions. However, the directive principle was ignored largely for decades. During seventies and eighties, we witnessed a system of centralized governance. The elected panchayats and municipal governments were assigned limited functions and resources and their tenures were subjected to the whims the government of the day. All these resulted in to decline in the role of LGIs. This situation was sought to be reversed by amending the constitution.

The main intention of 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> constitutional amendments is to strengthen democracy through LGIs. In conformity to the constitutional amendments, the states had amended their local government legislations. Some states had repealed their old laws and made new legislations. With initial hesitation elections to local bodies were conducted in all the states. But in practice real empowerment as envisaged in the Constitution and by the state legislations has not taken place. The revolution as envisaged in the Constitution had not been affected by many states. Without proper devolution of powers and functions, implementation of any scheme of decentralization including the constitutional amendment is meaningless. The role of state is very significant for the progress of the grassroots democratic institutions. An attempt was made in this paper to examine various dimensions of grassroots governing institutions in Andhra Pradesh. The appraisal is based on the data collected from three Panchayat Raj institutions and three Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in the state.

### **Panchayati Raj Institutions:**

In conformity with Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act 1992, Andhra Pradesh Legislature repealed three of its earlier Acts relating to PRIs in the State and enacted the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. The provisions of this Act came into force on 30<sup>th</sup> day of May 1994. The Act is a comprehensive one and covers all the three tiers of panchayati raj system. The Act also provides for Gram Sabha for every village. The Act provides for seven standing committees in the zilla parishad and functional or subject committees in mandal parishads and gram panchayats. The Act provides for direct election of members to the PRIs at all three levels. It provides for participation of political parties in the elections for MPTCs and ZPTCs. The sarpanch of gram panchayat is elected directly by voters in village while the MP President and ZP Chairman are elected among directly elected members. The term of PRIs and their heads is five years. The first ordinary elections to PRIs after the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitution Amendment Act, were held in 1995. The fourth ordinary elections

were held to Gram Panchayats in September 2013 and MPTCs and ZPTCs in March 2014. For 17,316 villages 13,369, gram panchayats were constituted. For 656 rural mandals, the mandal parishads were constituted. In all 13 districts the zilla parishads were constituted in the state. For a detailed study Garbham Gram Panchayat in Merakamudidam mandal, Merakamudidam Mandal Parishad and Vizianagaram Zilla Parishad in Vizianagaram district were selected and the information on powers and functions, staff, financial resources, civic services provided and the programmes implemented by three institutions was collected and analysed.

### **Gram Panchayat**

The number of members of gram panchayats in the state varies from 5 to 21. The members of Gram Panchayat are elected from wards. The Sarpanch is elected by all the registered voters in the Gram Panchayat area. The Up-sarpanch is, however, elected by ward members. The Gram Panchayat meets once in a month. The sarpanch presides over the panchayat meetings. The gram panchayats in state provide civic services like water supply, street lighting, health and sanitation. They participate actively in various programmes. There is a Secretary for each Panchayat. The other officials are sanitary inspector, bill collectors, office staff and sanitary workers. The state government pays the salaries of regular staff. The salaries of the contract staff are paid from the own sources of income of the Panchayat. A number of functions relating to development, maintenance, regulations and civic amenities are to be performed by the gram panchayats. Apart from the functions mentioned in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution (73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment) Act, the State Panchayati Raj Act provides some more functions to village panchayats. They are 12 obligatory functions and 27 optional functions. The obligatory functions include the construction, repair and maintenance of roads and culverts, lighting of public places, cleaning of streets, opening and maintenance of cremation and burial ground, sinking and repairing of wells, registration of births and deaths. The optional functions of the Gram Panchayat range from construction and maintenance of dharmasalas to setting up of organizations to promote goodwill and social harmony between different communities.

The activities of undertaken by Garbham Gram Panchayat during a period of 5 years from 2015-16 to 2019-20 are more or less similar. The supply of drinking water received utmost attention from the gram panchayat.<sup>6</sup> The Gram Panchayat is responsible for street lighting and cleaning streets, laying and maintenance of roads and culverts in the village is another important function of the gram panchayat. The Garbham Gram Panchayat participated actively in the implementation of various programmes like SHGs, DWACRA, CMEY, Janmabhoomi, MGNREGS and Swatch Bharat.

The Gram Panchayats in the state levy and collect taxes on properties, advertisements, vehicles, agricultural lands, duties on transfer of property, village produce sold, cess on land, and fees and charges collected for services provided. They receive income from assigned revenues such as entertainment tax, profession tax and surcharge on stamp duty. The per capita grant, salary grant and programme grant are sanctioned to Gram Panchayat. The total income of the Garbham Gram Panchayat during 2019-20 is Rs. 1,168, 507. The major source of income is own source (tax and non-tax source). This income constitutes 78 per cent of total income. The income received by the Gram Panchayat from stamp duty (assigned revenue) and grant

from the government towards amount from the best panchayat constitute 22 per cent of total income. Out of the total income about 45 per cent of amount was paid as salaries to contract employees of the panchayat. The next highest percentage (27 percent) of expenditure is on street lighting and related works. The panchayat spent considerable amount in public health and sanitation (15 per cent) and office (10 per cent) but very meager amount (3 per cent) for drinking water supply. The income and expenditure of Garbham Gram Panchayat gives two important points. First, the own sources of income are as high as 78 per cent of total income contrary to the general opinion that the local bodies depend heavily on external sources of income i.e. mainly government grants. Secondly, major amount of total income of Gram Panchayat was spent on the payment of salaries to the contract employees.

### **Mandal Parishad**

The Mandal Parishad is constituted for revenue mandal in rural areas of Andhra Pradesh. The MP consists of MPTC members, Members of central and state legislatures and one co-opted member. The district collector, the sarpanchs of gram panchayats and the presidents of agricultural marketing committees in the mandal are the permanent invitees to the mandal parishad meetings. The mandal parishads in the state convene the meetings as stipulated in the Act. This is very clear from the meetings held by the Merakamudidam Mandal Parishad. A Mandal Parishad is supposed to hold one ordinary meeting every quarter. Special meetings can also be convened. The mandal parishads in the state including Merakamudidam mandal parishad concened meetings as stipulated in the Act. The Merakamudidam mandal parishad held 21 ordinary meetings and 2 special meetings on revised budgets during 2015-20 (5 years). Many resolutions were passed by the mandal parishad in the meetings. The meetings of Mandal Parishad had devoted much time to the supply of drinking water, roads and communication and staff problems. The mandal parishad exercises all powers conferred on and perform all the functions entrusted to it by or under the State Act. Mandal Parishads is given the responsibility of implementation of rural development programmes. The functions of mandal parishads are given in schedule I and II of state Act<sup>7</sup>. Schedule I is a reproduction of Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. The functions under Schedule II are classified under categories of (1) community development, (2) agriculture, (3) animal husbandary and fisheries, and (4) health and rural sanitation. In this way a wide range of functions have to be performed by mandal parishads. Even through the mandal parishad is expected to perform many functions the data reveal that only a few functions and very limited programmes are being undertaken by the Mandal Parishad. The Merakamudidam mandal parishad had undertaken only four programmes namely old-age pensions, primary education, MGNREGS and mid-day meal scheme<sup>8</sup>.

The mandal development officer (MPDO) is the administrative head of mandal parishad. The MPDO is assisted by Mandal Engineering Officer, Mandal Agriculture Officer, Mandal Education Officer, Executive Officer and office and field staff. Some of the posts sanctioned to the Mandal Parishad are vacant. The posts of MPDO are also vacant. The Mandal Agricultural Officer is the in-charge of MPDO of Merakamudidam Mandal Parishad. The Mandal Parishads in the state have no taxation powers. The rents on shops, fees, fines and income from auction of fruit bearing trees and fish ponds are the own sources of income of Mandal Parishads.

The Mandal Parishads receive income from land cess, surcharge on stamp duty, entertainment tax, seigniorage fees and mineral cess. It is, however, observed from the data on financial resources that the mandal parishads are more dependent on government grants than on their own sources and assigned revenues. The details of financial resources of Merakamudidam Mandal Parishad make this point clear. The assigned revenue is only 15% of total income. The remaining 85% of total income is from grants.

### **Zilla Parishad**

The Zilla Parishad is the apex panchayati raj institution. The Zilla Parishads are organized for all the 13 districts in Andhra Pradesh. The Zilla Parishad consists of ZPTC members, members of union and state legislatures and two co-opted members. The members of ZPTCs are directly elected for a term of 5 years. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Zilla Parishad are elected by and among ZPTC members. The Zilla Parishad meets once in 3 months. The powers and functions of Zilla Parishad are mainly coordinating, advisory and supervisory in nature. In addition to the above functions, the Zilla Parishads in the state implement various welfare and development programmes in rural areas. These programmes include roads, bridges, minor irrigation, education, social welfare, water supply, agriculture, animal husbandry and fisheries. The Zilla Parishads have no power of taxation. The Zilla Parishad receive income from own sources, assigned revenues and grants. The income from own sources and assigned revenue is, however, very meagre. The data on different sources of Vizianagaram Zilla Parishad indicate that the Zilla Parishad is dependent heavily on government grants.

The execution of resolutions of Zilla Parishad constitute the responsibility of the administrative machinery. The Chief Executive Officer oversees Zilla Parishad administration. He is supported by the Deputy CEO, Accounts Officer and Education Officer. The subordinate staff include superintendent, senior assistants, junior assistants, typists, and other office staff. In addition, the officers and employees working in mandal parishads are under the management of Zilla Parishad. The engineers, planners and district level programme officers are given status independent of the Zilla Parishad. So the number of officers working in Zilla Parishad had declined.

The Vizianagaram Zilla Parishad received income from many sources. The total income from different sources for the year 2019-20 was Rs.136,30,12,521. Out of the total income the income from own sources is very meager i.e. less than one percent.<sup>9</sup> Only 2 percent of income less from assigned revenue. The grants constitute the remaining 97 per cent of total income. The data on different sources revenue indicate that the Zilla Parishad depends heavily on governments grants. The Vizianagaram Zilla Parishad implemented various welfare as well as development programmes in the rural areas of the district. These include roads, buildings, minor irrigations, education, SC, ST, BC and women welfare, agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries and rural water supply. An analysis of these programmes undertaken in the district and amount spent on each of these programmes clearly gives an idea that these programmes were implemented with the grants from central and state governments.

## Urban Local Bodies

The Andhra Pradesh Legislature enacted two separate legislations in May 1994 - one for municipalities and the other for municipal corporations. The Municipal Corporations Acts of Hyderabad, Visakhapatnam and Vijayawada were amended. In present state of Andhra Pradesh there are four legislations for urban local bodies namely Andhra Pradesh Municipalities Act, Andhra Pradesh Municipal Corporations Act, Visakhapatnam Municipal Corporation Act and Vijayawada Municipal Corporation Act. All these legislations incorporated all the mandatory provisions of the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Act. Before the implementation of central and state legislations there were three types of ULBs namely Municipal Corporations, Municipalities and notified area committees. The municipal corporations and municipal councils are continued. The notified areas committees were abolished. The Nagar Panchayats are constituted for small urban areas. There are now 16 municipal corporations, 78 municipal councils and 31 Nagar panchayats. The first ordinary elections to ULBs were conducted in March 1995. The second, third and fourth ordinary elections were conducted in 2000, 2006 and 2014 respectively. Three different urban local bodies namely Palakonda Nagar Panchayat (Srikakulam District), Parvathipuram Municipality (Vizianagaram District) and Kakinada Municipal Corporation (East Godavari District) were selected for interactive study.

### Nagar Panchayat

In Andhra Pradesh, the Nagar Panchayats are formed by upgrading the major panchayats. They work under the provisions of Andhra Pradesh Municipalities Act. The number of wards in Nagar Panchayats is 20. The voters in the wards elect ward members. The ward members elect Chairman and Vice-Chairman. The Commissioner appointed by the state government. He looks after the Nagar Panchayat administration. The other employees are accountant, superintendent, health inspector, sanitary supervisors and sweepers who work under the control of Municipal Commissioner.

The Gram Panchayat in Palakonda was upgraded in 2013. Out of the different sources own sources of income is the highest. It is as high as 94 per cent of total income in 2018-19. The own sources of income contributed not less than 71 per cent in any year of 5 year period. The next important source of income is assigned revenue. The share of surcharge on stamp duty for transfer of immovable property is assigned to Nagar Panchayat. The contribution of assigned revenue to the total income varies from 8.8 per cent (2015-16) to 28.31 per cent (2019-20). The income from grants and contribution is very meager. It is less than 1 per cent in 2019-20, less than 2 per cent in 2015-16 and 2017-18, 2.31 per cent in 2016-17 and 5.5 per cent in 2018-19. The total income from various sources clearly indicate that the major source of income is own sources of income. The amount of income from grants and contribution is very small contrary to the general observation that the local bodies depend heavily on government grants.

The Palakonda Nagar Panchayat provides services to town dwellers. It undertakes some development programmes also. For these activities the Nagar Panchayat spent large amount. The highest percentage (i.e. 54 per cent) of amount was spent on establishment during 2019-20. The expenditure on administration varies from year to year. It was 4.95 per cent in the year 2019-20 and 15.65 per cent in the year 2017-18. More than 40 per

cent of amount was spent on civic services. The civic services provided by Palakonda Nagar Panchayat were water supply, street lighting and sanitation. The expenditure on programmes was not significant during the years from 2015-16 to 2018-19. It was very meagre in the year 2019-20 (0.11 per cent). The programmes undertaken by Nagar Panchayat were Janmabhoomi and Mavuru programme<sup>10</sup>.

### **Municipal Council**

The municipal council is set up by the State Municipalities Act for the administration of small towns or cities. The municipal councils consist of three types of members-Councilors, co-opted and ex-officio members. The councilors are elected from wards. The number of wards of municipalities varies from 21 to 45. The MLAs and MP are the ex-officio members. The ward members elect two co-opted members, Chairman and Vice-Chairman. There are statutory and non-statutory committees to attend the work of various municipal matters. The municipal council makes rules governing its proceedings and by-laws to implement the Municipal Act. The council has the power of appointment of certain categories of the staff. The Council is authorized to supervise administration of the municipality. The Municipal Commissioner is the head of the administration. He is supported by different functional, technical, administrative and support staff. The entire administration is divided into sections and each section is entrusted with specific responsibilities.

Parvathipuram Municipality is one of the oldest Municipality in the state. It was established as third grade municipality in 1959. It is now First Grade Municipality with an area of 11.24 sq.kms. The major source of income of Parvathipuram Municipality is own sources (both tax and non-tax sources) which contribute about 79 percent of total income in the year 2019-20. The revenue from assigned revenue contributed to 16 per cent of total income. The income from grants and contribution constituted 5 per cent. The data on financial resources of Parvathipuram Municipality make it clear that there is significant increase in total income in all five years i.e. Rs.4,81,57,431 (2015-16) to Rs.8,58,91,494 (2019-20). The amount of grants is very less when we compare it with other sources of income including the assigned revenue.

Just like any other civic body the Parvathipuram Municipality is responsible for well-being of its civic community. The Municipality have been supplying gallons of water to the town<sup>11</sup>. The laying and maintenance of internal roads is the responsibility of the municipality. Another civic service being provided by the municipality is street lighting. Public health and sanitation is the major task of the municipal administration. In order to address urban poverty, the municipality had implemented Environmental Improvement of Urban services and Urban Basic Services Programme for the poor in the town. As part of the Swachh Bharat town dwellers were encouraged to construct individual toilets. The Parvathipuram Municipality spent considerable amount on operation and maintenance of civic services. It is more than half of total expenditure in 2015-16, and more than one-third in 2017-18 and 2019-20. The programme expense is less than two percent during 2015-16, 2016-17 and 2017-18 and more than 4 per cent in 2018-19 and 2019-20. The amount spent on the wages to workers i.e. establishment expenses vary from 38 per cent (2016-17) to 44 per cent (2018-19). The office maintenance and related expenditure i.e. administrative expenses constitute about 9 per cent in 2015-16 and 2016-17, 13 percent in 2017-18 and 16 per cent in the years 2018-19 and 2019-20. The expenditure on

wages and office management is more than expenditure on civic services and programmes during the financial years from 2017-18 to 2019-20

### **Municipal Corporation**

All the 13-district headquarters in the state have municipal corporations. For cities of Vijayawada (Krishna District), Rajamahendravaram (East Godavari District) and Tirupati (Chittoor District) have also municipal corporations. The Municipal Corporation is mandated with three authorities namely corporation, standing committee and commissioner. The Corporation, constituted by elected corporate and standing committee with more political and administrative authority and municipal commissioner with administrative authority are the corporation authorities. The Commissioner has the responsibility of implementing of resolutions of the deliberative wing. The standing committee serves as a link between the deliberative and administrative wings. The Mayor and Deputy Mayor are also integral part of corporation. The Corporation is more empowered in terms of executive power as compared to other forms of urban local government. The Corporation is empowered to constitute special committees, wards committees, zonal committees, joint committees and ad-hoc committees.

The Kakinada Municipality was upgraded into Selection Grade Municipality in 1986 and Municipal Corporation in 2005. The jurisdiction of Kakinada Municipal Corporation is spread over an area of 31.69 sq.kms<sup>12</sup>. The administration of Kakinada Municipal Corporation is divided into 8 sections. These sections are for establishment, accounts, revenue, engineering, public health, town planning, MEPMA and urban poverty alleviation. The Municipal Corporations in the state use different sources-regular, contract and out sourcing-to recruit employees. The existing human resource structure depicts that the municipal corporations are more dependent on out sourced employees. In Kakinada Municipal Corporation, for instance, only 61 per cent of total employees are permanent employees. There are vacancies in the sections of the corporation. The level of vacant position is as high as 59 per cent in engineering section.

The total income of the corporation during 2019-20 is Rs.10432.85 lakhs. About two third of the income is from own sources (both the tax and non-tax sources). The income from grants contributes 28 per cent. The income from the assigned revenue is 752.93 lakhs (7.22 per cent). The income from the different source makes it clear that the Kakinada Municipal Corporation is not dependent on the government grants. The fund allocation decisions in Kakinada Corporation revolve either to use funds to defray capital or recurrent expenditure. Capital expenditure is allocated with the objective of deriving future benefits in long-run that focused on infrastructural development and long-term investment on service facilities. The main purpose of these expenditure centered on the financing of operational activities and refinancing installments of investments. The amount of Rs.9342.12 lakhs was spent by the Kakinada Municipal Corporation for different purposes during the year 2019-20. An amount Rs.1025.38 lakhs (11 per cent) was spent on pay and allowances to contract and out-sourcing employees of the Corporation. More than half of the total expenditure is on capital and maintenance expenditure of remunerative enterprises. The Kakinada Municipal Corporation had also



incurred expenditure on roads (Rs.1526.90 lakhs), buildings (Rs.77.16 lakhs) drains (Rs.825.72 lakhs), public health (Rs.43.52 lakhs) and sanitation (Rs.1067.78 lakhs)

### **Concluding Observations**

The 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitution Amendment Acts had raised great hope and anticipation among many particularly the advocates of decentralized governance. The performance of grassroots governance in Andhra Pradesh is not up to the expected level. The Government of Andhra Pradesh claim that almost all subjects have been devolved but the actual situation in the State is different. An examination of civic services provided and programmes implemented by the LGIs reveals the actual situation. The LGIs provided civic services like drinking water supply, street lighting and public health and sanitation. The expenditure on civic services incurred varies from 37 per cent to 59 per cent. The programmes undertaken by the LGIs are SHGs, Housing and Janmabhoomi. A few ULBs take up the programmes under UBSP and MEPMA. The way powers and responsibilities were endowed in local government institutions fall short of expectations. The transfer of powers and functions to LGIs is at discretion of the states. So, transfer of powers and functions are not mandatory. The result is that while the Constitution envisages considerable autonomy to the LGIs, the state governments have been reluctant to part with their powers. The functional domain of LGIs in Andhra Pradesh pertains only to traditional civic functions. Without proper devolution of powers and functions, implementation of any scheme of decentralization including the constitutional amendment is meaningless. Therefore, a serious attempt to transfer powers and functions should be initiated immediately.

The financial decentralization in Andhra Pradesh is far from satisfactory. There is no specific formula on the basis of which finances are devolved to local governments and there is no consultation between state government and local government on the principles that need to be adopted in financial devolution. The reason is the state government is reluctant to devolve required financial resources to the local government. The state legislature authorizes the local bodies, by law to impose taxes, duties, etc., and assign to the local bodies such taxes and duties levied and collected by the state government. There is also provisions for grants-in-aid to the local bodies from the consolidated fund of the state. The financial position of the LGIs has, however, not improved. The position of gram panchayats, nagar panchayats and smaller municipalities is much worse and at times they find it difficult even to meet their establishment costs. The local bodies rely more on fiscal transfer from the state government in the form of shared taxes, assigned revenue and grants. The release of grants from both the Union Government and state government is not regular. At times while the union government release its share; the state government will not release its share. The paucity of funds that local governments experience is also due to inadequate own sources of revenue. In order to overcome the fiscal deficit of local governments, the state government shall initiate concrete measures. The principal recommendations made by central and State Finance Commissions should be accepted by the State Government.

The state government had not transferred the accompanying functionaries even for the limited devolved functions. They are many posts vacant in the LGIs. The important posts like Mandal Development Officer are vacant. The posts like a revenue officer, accounts officers and auditors are vacant in municipal corporations.

Most of the vacant positions are occupied by in-charge officers. The in-charge officers hold temporarily vacant positions. This practice leads to the overburdening of officers with different responsibilities. The LGIs should have a proper plan to fill the vacant positions. The state government should give priority to fill the vacancies and see that adequate staff are made available to the LGIs.

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