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RESEARCH ARTICLE

PANCHAYATRAJ SYSTEM IN TAMILNADU DURING BRITISH PERIOD (1600 AD – 1947 AD) – A STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The article entitled panchayatraj system in tamilnadu during british period – a study, deals about the evolution of Panchayat Raj system inherited from the past in Tamilnadu. It denotes the nomenclature derivation for the word “Panchayat” and it is the body of drenching the thirst of people in economic, Political and social spheres from the particular topography. It also insists upon the Panchayat Raj system is an empirical set up for administration and backbone for Indian democratic properties. It is also stated that in this article that Tamil Nadu is one of the states in India to follow the Panchayatraj system with perfect instances. In ancient period, OOr Avai (Village Assembly) had been running to administer the village. The Kuda volai system in Uthramerur inscription ensures the democratic principles existed in Tamil Nadu. During the Chola period Oor, Sabha, Nadu, Nagaram had a direct link with Chola rulers. At that time of Vijayanagara and Muslim rulers had pushed this system back. At that time of British period this system has been strengthened through the acts legislated in 1882 by Lord Rippon, the father of local self government. The Madras local bodies act 1884 and Madras village panchayat act brought radical changes for sharing power and finance. The act of 1930 over the tax collection and 1946 relating appointment of executive officer and 1948 conference of Ministers of local self Government have ensured and the enhanced the local self government. In post Independence period many comities and acts are being appointed and passed to enhance the power of the local self government. All these program and its credit goes to the administrators of the British rule. The article systematically exhibits the evolution, progress, transmitting from one generation to another and enhanced stage during the British period up to 1950.

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INTRODUCTION

Independence must begin at the bottom. Every village will be a republic or Panchayat having full powers. It follows, therefore, that every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its affairs even to the extent of defending itself against any onslaught from without. This does not exclude dependence on and willing help from neighbours or from the world. It will be free and voluntary play of mutual forces. Such a society is necessarily highly cultured in which every man and woman knows that what he or she wants. In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be a ever-widening, never – descending circles.”¹ Panchayat Raj is the backbone of Indian democracy because it is the only institution through which democracy can successfully be made to reach the masses. In order to strengthen, our nation we have to strengthen our village panchayats and panchayat unions.

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Literally, the term Panchayat Raj means a body of five or more persons called as panchayats either elected or nominated by the people of a village to govern the socio economic, political, administrative geographical, ecological, cultural and legal issues of the people of that village.² In short, it is an easily accessible government to the people of a village to cater to their day-to-day needs and administer them. The concept of Panchayat Raj is an ancient one which has a long history in our country. Especially, Tamil Nadu is the one of the states which still enjoying the fruits of village administration since time immemorial.

Ancient And Precolonial Period (300 BC-1600 AD)

The Panchayat System is in Tamil Nadu which had deep roots. Going as far back as two to three thousand years. The Tradition of Panchayats was well established in the Sangam Age, When Villages were known to have local democracy and were governed by the Oor Avai.³ in this period a system of monarchy prevailed with a strong base of local democracy. The existence of Local Self Government is evident from the

Uthiramerur inscription in Kanchipuram District. The village administration under the Cholas in South India was effective with the instrument of Local Self – Government in the 11th and 12th centuries. The greatest and the most comprehensive group – activity was exhibited by the village assemblies.⁴ The members of a village council were selected through the process of secret ballot called “*Kuda Olai Murai*”

They governed almost all aspects of village community life. The village assembly comprised of adult male members. There were four types of village assemblies, namely Ur, Sabha, Nadu, and Nagaram.⁵ Among them the Sabha was very popular and powerful body. It functioned through an elaborate system of Vaariyams or committees.⁶ These village councils also had effective links with Chola rulers. With the downfall of Cholas, the state experienced a decline of the village autonomy and rise of the centralized feudal administrative system. During the period of the Vijayanagara rulers, a centralized Feudal System was introduced. During the Muslim period the Centralised administration continued causing further decline of the panchayat. The decline continued after the advent of the British.

BRITISH PERIOD (1600 AD – 1947 AD)

With the advent of the British rule, the ancient Local Governance through village councils started disintegrating under the pressure of centralized British administrative system. Further rapid industrialization disturbed the delicate economic fabric in the rural areas and threw the village artisans and labourers into unemployment. This ultimately shattered the basic structure of the Local Self-Governance. In course of time even the British administrators realized the significance of local – Governance. The origin of decentralized Local – Self Governance under the British rule can be traced to introduction of Towns Improvement Act XXVI of 1850 and the constitution of District road Fund in 1854.⁷ This was followed by the many enactments of democratic decentralization viz., Towns improvement Act of 1865 & 1871 and Madras Local Fund Act 1871, by the then of Viceroy Lord Mayo. Local Fund Boards were setup to construct, maintain and repair schools, roads, hospitals with in their area. “The process really began under the conservative Lord Mayo and not Liberal Lord Ripon. The major motive was to tackle financial difficulties by shifting changes for local requirement on to new local taxes.”⁸

The next stage in the growth of Local Self – Government started when Lord Ripon, the father of Local Self – Government, became viceroy. His famous resolution of 1882 gave a greater and more real share in local Government to the people.⁹ The main points of the 1882 resolution are; i) Local bodies should have mostly non – Government members and chairman., ii) The State and Central Control over the Local bodies should be indirect rather than direct., iii) These bodies must be endowed with adequate financial resources to carry out their functions. To this end certain sources of local revenue should be made available to the local bodies which should also receive suitable grants from the provincial budget, iv) Local Government personnel should operate under the administrative control of the local bodies. The Government personnel who are deputed to the Local Government are subject to this control, v)

The resolutions of 1882 should be interpreted by the provincial Government according to local conditions prevalent in the country.¹⁰

The Madras Local Bodies Act, 1884

This Act was passed by Lord Ripon in 1884. This Act was a milestone in the Development of Panchayat Administration, Three categories of local boards. That is District boards, Taluk boards and Union boards came into existence through this Act.¹¹ Under the Union boards, major and minor unions were constituted. The District and Taluk boards were entrusted with a number of functions. The Union boards were constituted for a village or a group of villages. These boards would levy house tax. Their main function consisted of laying public roads. Maintenance of dispensaries, public health etc.¹² The Government appointed a Royal Commission in 1907. Its report was released in 1909, which elaborated further the principles enunciated in the Ripon’s resolution. The commission recommended that “it is the most desirable, in the interests of decentralization and in order to associate the people with the local task of administration, that an attempt should be made to constitute and develop village panchayats for the administration of local village affairs”.¹³

Madras Village Panchayat Act 1920

In the year 1920, Madras Village Panchayat Act came into force. This brought about radical changes in the Panchayat System. The powers of taxation of all the three categories, i.e. District, Taluk and Unions boards were enlarged.¹⁴ The boards were authorized to levy professional tax on companies, as well as a pilgrim age tax. The union panchayats were empowered to elect their presidents. The Madras Local Boards Amendment Act was passed in 1930. In accordance with the new act, the office of the inspector of Local Boards and Municipal Councils were created. For each District, a District Panchayat Officer was appointed. The Taluk boards were abolished in 1934 while the District boards and the panchayats continued till independence. The 1930 Act had also assigned development functions to the panchayats. The latter had been vested with powers to collect house tax and professional tax. Consequently, the revenue and expenditure of both major and minor panchayats registered a significant growth.¹⁵ The Village panchayat Act 1946 provided for the appointment of a full-time Executive officer by the Government. The Government assumed powers to dissolve and supersede the Panchayats. It also exercised powers to re-constitute them. In August 1948 a Conference of Ministers of Local Self-Government resolved that local bodies must be constituted on the basis of adult franchise. During the Post-independence era, the first enactment on the democratic decentralization was the Madras Village Panchayat Act, 1950.

Conclusion

India has faced a lot of challenges in the Political, economic and administrative fields and they have been met with successfully. Today there are rapid changes in various fields at every stage in the path of development. The basic principle behind all administrations is to protect the interest and welfare of the people. The Local Governments (local bodies) render a yeomen service to the people in finding out their needs to them and providing several facilities and necessary reforms were introduced in the structure of Local Government so as to

make them more elective and useful to the people. Tamil nadu is the pioneer in the growth of the Local Self-Government. During the British period separate acts were passed which exclusively dealt with the way of the functioning of the local bodies. The foremost and the most significant of these act was the one passed in 1884 during the Viceroyalty of Lord Ripon. As per the Act of 1884, Local self-governments were established for the purpose of collecting taxes for three years. The Royal Commission on Decentralization appointed by the British Government n 1907 made a significant contribution towards the progress of the self-governments. Consequently an act was passed in 1920.

Balwandaroy Metha Committee on Local Self-Government made the following observation. "All development schemes envisaged for the local areas should be implemented only through elected bodies of the respective areas". Such tasks will be successfully and exhaustively performed only by the popular local governments. In post-independence period many committees were appointed and acts were passed by the various governments to enhance the local power of the local self-government. At present the extensive power has been offered to the elected bodies of the local self-government to the benefit of the rural, semi urban and urban areas the power given to the public mass is the perfect scale to measure the real democracy For all these progress is completely based on the British Rule which is the real pioneer of the local self-government to our people.

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