International Journal of Social Impact
ISSN: 2455-670X
Volume 11, Issue 2, DIP: 18.02.56/20261102
DOI: 10.25215/2455/110256
www.ijsi.in | April-June, 2026

International Journal of Social Impact
A Peer Reviewed Journal

Panchayat Raj Institutions in Karnataka

Dr. Paravin M Shaikh [1]*

ABSTRACT

The state of Mysore (renamed Karnataka in 1973) was formed in 1956 by bringing together the erstwhile princely state of Mysore, four districts of Bombay, three districts of Hyderabad, two districts of Madras and the centrally administered territory of Coorg. Prior to the reorganization of states, development of local government institutions in these five areas had proceeded independently, the devolution of powers and functions having been faster in the British provinces than in the native states.

Keywords: *The State of Mysore, Local Government Institutions*

The attainment of independence introduced an important dimension of democracy. The demand for strong local self-government had been voiced during the freedom struggle. This called for substantial changes in the statutes. These changes were made in 1950 in Madras and Bombay and in 1953 and 1956 in Hyderabad. In the old state of Mysore, two committees, namely, the Venkatappa committee (1950) and the D.H. Chandrasekharaiah committee (1954) recommended major changes in the structure and functions of local government, but no action was taken because of the impending reorganization of states. Thus, in 1956 the new state of Mysore inherited varying patterns of local government from its five integrating areas. Consequently, in 1959, the Government passed the Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act 1959.

POST-1956 PERIOD:

The District Development Council visualized as a coordinating body, its only substantive function being approval of the budgets of the taluk development boards. Village panchayats performed limited local municipal functions. They had the power to levy some local taxes, but these fetched only limited revenue. The taluk development boards and village panchayats had limited fiscal independence and most of their funds came from the government. The decline of interest in panchayati raj at the nation level after the passing away of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was reflected in the state also. Elections, due in 1964, were postponed till 1968 when fresh elections were held. Meanwhile, the state government set up the Kondaji Basappa committee which submitted its report in 1963, recommending the setting up of elected zillaparishads, and exclusion of MPs and MLAs from Panchayati Raj institutions and establishment of nyaya panchayats. A bill based on the recommendations of the committee was introduced in the state legislature, but as the Congress Legislature party was not in favour, it was allowed to lapse. Elections, due again in 1972, were postponed and in 1975 the taluk development boards and

[1] MA, M.Phil, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Economics, Government First Grade College, Alnavar, District: Dharwad, Karnataka, India, E-Mail ID: parveenjangubhai@gmail.com
*Corresponding Author

Received: April 26, 2026; Revision Received: June 25, 2026; Accepted: June 29, 2026

© 2026 I Author; licensee IJSI. This is an Open Access Research distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any Medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

many village panchayats were superseded and placed under administrators. Elections were held in 1978 but these bodies were dissolved once again in 1983.

SECOND PHASE: 1987-93:

The Janata Party government in power at the Centre had set up the Ashok Mehta committee. Its report was made public in 1978. When the Janata Party came to power in Karnataka in 1983, there was a revival of interest in establishing Panchayati Raj with genuine devolution of powers and functions.

THE ACT OF 1983:

The Karnataka Act of 1983 could be regarded as a landmark in the history of local government in India, as it demonstrated for the first time the willingness of a state government to divest itself of substantial powers and functions in favour of sub-state institutions. The new set up was modeled on the suggestions made in the Asoka Mehta committee report, with a two-tier structure-zillaparishads at the district level, and mandalpanchayats for groups of villages-with direct elections to both bodies.

ZILLAPARISHAD:

In the process of devolution of powers, the zillaparishad enjoined primacy as it was recognized that the district was a unit large enough to be nearly sufficient in administrative and technical capabilities-a prerequisite for real decentralization. The zillaparishad was to be fully responsible for planning and implementation of all the development programmes in the district. The mandalpanchayats, on the other hand, were seen primarily as implementing agencies even though they were to have plenary powers in some matters. Zillaparishad members were directly elected, with 25 per cent of the seats earmarked for women and reservation of seats for the SCs and STs in proportion to their population (with a minimum of 18 per cent of seats for them). The MPs and MLAs belonging to the district were entitled to take part in the proceedings and had voting rights, but could not hold office. The adhyaksha and upadhyaksha were given the status and salary of minister of state and deputy minister of the state government respectively.

MANDALPANCHAYAT:

A mandalpanchayat was constituted for a population of eight to twelve thousand (a lower limit of four thousand was imposed for the hilly areas). It consisted of elected members, with one member for a population of four hundred, reservation for women, the SCs and the STs being provided on the same lines as at the district level. Each mandalpanchayat had a whole-time secretary, appointed and paid for by the zillaparishad. Other employees (such as the sanitation staff) were paid out of its own funds. From 1987, nearly 2,500 mandalpanchayats had started functioning. Mandal Panchayats were also given considerable powers. Besides the usual municipal function and provision of local amenities.

TALUKPANCHAYATSAMITI:

While the zillaparishads and mandal panchayats constituted the main framework of the Panchayati Raj system, a coordinating and monitoring body called the talukpanchayatsamiti operated at the taluk level. It was headed by a local MLA and had all the mandalpradhans as members. The samiti had, however, no executive powers. Except for providing a position for the MLA in the structure, it did not serve any substantive purpose.

GRAM SABHA:

Another institution which was given statutory recognition was the gram sabha comprising all the adults of the village. The gram sabha was expected to meet at least twice a year and at each meeting the mandalpanchayat was required to present a report of its activities.

POST-73RD AMENDMENT DEVELOPMENTS:

Towards the end of 1992, a new Congress government which had affirmed its commitment to revive Panchayati Raj institutions took office in Karnataka. As it happened, this synchronized with the passing of the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992 by Parliament. As the two-tier structure which had operated in the state had to be replaced by a three-tier structure calling for a rearrangement of devolution of powers to different levels, the government decided to enact an altogether fresh piece of legislation.

THE ACT OF 1993:

The State of Karnataka was one of the first states in the country which revised its Panchayati Raj Act in consonance of the provision of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Karnataka has enacted the Karnataka Panchayat Act, 1993 in April, to establish a three-tier Panchayat Raj System in the state with elected bodies at the village, taluk and district level, in keeping with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment relating to panchayat for greater participation of the people and more effective implementation of rural development programmes. In Karnataka state, there are 20 zillapanchayats, 175 talukpanchyats and 5640gram panchayats. This, the Karnataka model of Panchayat Raj System is characterized by proper devolution of powers and functions at each level.

STANDING COMMITTEES OF ZILLAPANCHAYAT

There are five standing committees functioning at the zillapanchayat(Z.P.) level. They are i) General Standing Committee; ii) Finance, Audit and Planning Committee; (iii) Social Justice Committee (iv) Education and Health Committee and (v) Agriculture and Industries Committee. Each Standing Committee shall consist of such number of members not exceeding five incluiding the chairman. The Adhyaksha shall be the ex-officio member and the chairman of the General Standing Committee, Finance, Audit and Planning. Each other Standing Committee shall elect the chairman from among their members. The Upadhyaksha shall be the ex-officio member and chairman of Social Justice Committee.

TALUKPANCHAYAT:

The talukpanchayats are the second-tier of Panchayat Raj System at the middle level. The total number of seats under talukpanchayats is 3340, out of which 678 are reserved for SCs (277 women reserved seats): 248 for STs (183 are reserved for women) and 1117 for Backward classes (441 for women). As per the new Act, lthe power of talukpanchayat is strengthened by bestowing more powers to the same. In fact, nearly 55 per cent of the scheme-wise allocations go to talukpanchayats against 45 per cent to zillapanchayat. Planning and Financing mechanism is strengthened by creating the post of Assistant Planning Officer (APO) and Assistant Accounts officer (AAO). The talukpanchayats are implementing agencies for government programmes at taluk and gram panchayat level. However, funds for talukpanchayats are routed through zillapanchayats, which leads to delay in releasing the funds.

STANDING COMMITTEE AT TALUKPANCHAYAT

There are three standing committees functioning at the talukpanchayat level. They are: (i) General Standing Committee; (ii) Finance, Audit and Planning Committee and (iii) Social Justice Committee. These committees function at taluk level to execute various development programmes. Each committee consists of such number of members not exceeding six including the chairperson as specified by the talukpanchayat elected by the members of talukpanchayat from among them.

GRAM PANCHAYAT:

The gram panchayat (GP) is the grassroot level Panchayati Raj body under the three-tier PR System. The total gram panchayats in the state are 5640 with their total number of 80,631 seats, out of which seats reserved for SCs are 17,912 for STs 7571, for BCs 26,827 and others 28.321 are reserved. The main function of the GP is identification and selection of beneficiaries and spending money. In addition to this, the main resource is grant-in-aid of Rs.1.25 lakh. Financial powers are restricted to Rs. 5,000 being on any work. At present, two per cent of the stamp duty is going to talukpanchayat instead of gram panchayat. All the GPs are having secretaries to look after the administrative aspects of the village panchayat.

STANDING COMMITTEE AT GRAM PANCHAYAT LEVEL

There are three standing committees for executing the developmental programmes at the gram panchayat level such as (i) Production Committee; (ii) Social Justice Committee and (iii) Amenities Committee. Amenities committee performs functions in respect of education, public health, public works and other functions of the GP. Each committee consists of not less than three and not more than five members including the Adhyaksha and Upadhyaksha as the case may be. An Adhyaksha is the ex-officio member and chairman of Production and Amenities Committees. The Standing Committees perform the functions referred to above to the extent the powers are delegated to them by the gram panchayat.

STRUCTURE:

At the base of the Panchayati Raj structure is the Gram sabha, consisting of all the registered voters in the village. The sabha is expected to meet at least twice a year and make recommendations. Every village or group of villages having a population in the range of 5,000 to 7,000 (minimum of 2,500 in hill area) will have a gram panchayat with one member for every four hundred population. The gram panchayat will have three standing committees, which can coopt members of farmers' clubs, mahilamandals, Yuvakmandals, and so on. Every taluk will have a talukpanchayat, one member being elected for a population of ten thousand. Members of the LokSabha and the state Legislative Assembly representing the whole or part of the taluk and members of the Rajya Sabha and the state Legislative Council registered as voters in the taluk will be members of the TP. One-fifth of the adhyakshas of the GPs in the taluk will also be members by rotation for a period of one year each. At the district level, there will be an elected member of the zillapanchayat for a population of 40,000 (30,000 in three hill districts). Members of Parliament and the state legislature and all adhyakshas of the taluk panchayats will be members of the ZP by the virtue of office. In both TPs and ZPs, the ex-officio members will have the right to vote but not to hold office.

RESERVATION:

Reservations apply to both membership and offices at all three levels. The reservations for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes will be proportional to their population with a minimum reservation of 15 per cent and 3 per cent respectively. One-third of the total number of seats and offices are reserved for the backward classes. There will be a one-third reservation for women under all categories, reserved or unreserved.

FUNCTIONS:

The act spells out in three separate schedules the functions to be performed by panchayats at the different levels. These cover all the subjects included in the Eleventh Schedule of the Constitution. Interestingly, under the act, the government may by notification withdraw, amend or add any activity covered by the entries in the schedules.

CRITICISM OF THE ACT:

The act attracted considerable criticism on the grounds that it was not designed to establish Panchayati Raj institutions truly as units of self-government. In comparison with the earlier legislation of 1983, it was argued the new law marked a step backward in terms of democratic decentralization and had once again brought in local bodies which were closely controlled by the state government and functions virtually as its agency. When the new bill was being considered by the legislature, opposition parties in the Upper House has pointed out that even the preamble to the ,Act did not make a reference to the concept of self-government. The government had to give an assurance at that time that the preamble and certain other provisions would be amended later.

AMENDMENTS TO THE ACT:

In the general elections to the state Legislative Assembly towards the end of 1994, the Janata Dal party was swept to power and one of the first announcements of the new government was the intention to revamp the act of 1993 so as to restore autonomy of the kind obtaining under the earlier 1983 act. With this end in view, an expert committee (the Nayak Committee) was constituted in February 1995, which submitted its report in March 1996, recommending wide ranging changes in the act of 1993.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS:

The question of carving out new districts from the large districts of the state had been raised from time to time and also looked into by more than one high level committee. The Janata Dal government finally decided in 1997 to go ahead. In this direction, the amendments to the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 effected during that year incorporated provisions for consequential arrangements with regard to the position of the new bodies, division of funds and liabilities, and the like. With the formation of seven new districts in 1998, the number of ZPs has gone up form twenty to twenty seven. The creation of three more districts has been shelved for the time being on account of local controversies.

A SUMMING UP:

It is legitimate to ask whether, judging from the experience so far, Panchayati Raj institutions in Karnataka can be considered to be really functioning as units of local self-government. Has participatory governance been established, in which the voice of the underprivileged is also

heard? Has the local administration become more transparent and accountable? Has there been any change in the quality and pace of socio-economic development?

CONCLUSION

Viewed overall, Panchayati Raj in Karnataka is still evolving and one cannot clearly see how it will shape in future. The Seventy-third Amendment undoubtedly marks a significant advance but its limitations are also apparent. Without question, the state law under which the Panchayati Raj bodies are constituted should be so designed as to make participatory local governance possible. But though the law can ensure the form of local government, it cannot guarantee its content. In the ultimate analysis, it is the commitment of the political parties, the elected representatives and leadership at the national and state levels to devolution of political and administrative power which will determine the character of these institutions.

REFERENCES

1. Bhargava, B.S., 'Panchayati Raj and the Janatha', PanchayatSandesh, Delhi, Vol. 1, Nos. 5-6, September 1977, pp. 13-15.
2. With the remaining of the State as 'Karnataka' on November 1973, the Act is now called the Karnataka Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act.
3. Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India – Published by Institute of Social Sciences, Bangalore, 2000, pp. 133 – 135.
4. The Government of Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act 1985, Government Press, Bangalore, p. 134.
5. Srinivasan, S, Role of PRIs in management of rural health, research report series – 1, National Institute of Rural Development, Hyderabad, 2000, p. 13.
6. Uma Joshi, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Kurukshetra, April, 1995, Vol. 43-44, pp. 22-26.
7. Status of Panchayat Raj Institutions in the States and Union Territories of India, Institute of Social Sciences, 2000, pp. 133-144.

Acknowledgments
The author DR. PARAVIN M SHAIKH, Associate Professor of Economics, Government First Grade College, Alnavar, District: Dharwad, Karnataka, India the Department Who wish to thank of Collegiate Education, Government of Karnatak for their Encouragement and Support.

Conflict of Interest
The author declared no conflict of interest.

How to cite this article: Shaikh, P.M. (2026). Panchayat Raj Institutions in Karnataka. *International Journal of Social Impact, 11*(2), 575-580. DIP: 18.02.56/20261102, DOI: 10.25 215/2455/110256