

**Decentralisation And Consolidation Of Democracy  
In Karnataka- 1987-92 : A Study Of Three Mandals**

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CERTIFICATE

Certified that the dissertation entitled "DECENTRALISATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY IN KARNATAKA - 1987-92 - A STUDY OF THREE MANDALS" submitted by Mr. Jayaram Raipura in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY, has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this or any other University and is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Karnataka experiment of re-introducing the decentralised structure of governance below the state level has aroused much curiosity and interest among policy makers and academics. The experiment has been closely watched for some of its distinct features like effective transfer of a sizeable portion of state's resources to the local bodies, creation of a novel two structure of Zilla Parishads and Mandal Panchayats, reservation of seats for women and etcetera. Several studies have been undertaken to evaluate the performance of these bodies and gauge people's response to these structures.

In all these debates and researches on decentralisation, a significant factor not to have received the attention it deserves has been the factor of an organic link between the local bodies and the higher structures of governance. And, how the decentralised structures extend and consolidate democracy, accepted as an ideal form of government, has also not been deconstructed. This study, hence, primarily takes up this task of counterposing an ideal form of decentralised democracy with the actual decentralisation measure, and its implications in Karnataka.

Emphasis has been given for an intensive micro study taking three Mandal Panchayats of a taluk, for an indepth understanding of the changes brought about in the rural

polity by the decentralised structures. This has helped in chronicling and closely reviewing the political developments during the period of April 1987 to March 1992.

The first chapter of this study defines and gives a background to the concept of decentralisation. A categorised review of literature on decentralisation is also provided here. The second chapter analyses the limitations of national democracy and hypothesises an ideal model of decentralised democracy.

The historical backdrop for the study is provided in the third chapter. Details of the earlier model of local governance and the highlights of the new model of decentralisation are also given, in addition to a survey of literature and details of area and approach of study.

The aspects of politicisation, penetration of political parties and new local leadership are dealt in substantial detail in the fourth chapter. A study of trends in party functioning and a section on the dispute settlement are also included in this chapter. The fifth chapter gives a perspective of group identity formation and its role and relevance to rural politics. People's participation in the local structures and their attitudes towards partisanship are also analysed from this perspective.

The conclusive chapter has drawn references from the field experience as elaborated in the earlier two chapters and juxtaposed with the ideal model of decentralised democracy, as developed in the first two chapters. Final abstracts of the reserch are also given in this chapter.

## CHAPTER-I

### DEMOCRACY AND DECENTRALISATION - A FRAMEWORK

A plea for 'decentralisation of democracy' pre-supposes the existence of minimum institutional structures by which the responsibility of the governance of the State is entrusted upon a person or a group of persons chosen in a democratic manner and the acceptance of democracy as the ideal form of government. The ideal is only an approximation where in the interests and opinions of all constituents of the polity are considered for decision making process and the implementation of the collective will. Though the rule of the majority is often the pattern, the existential interests of the minority cannot be disregarded unless undermining the legitimacy of the democratic set-up.

Decentralisation need not be used as a separate input into the democratisation process. Democracy pre-supposes the consent and participation of each and all in the process of governance. The division of labour logic leading to representative and parliamentary democracy offers a realistic compromise to the dilemma of mobocracy and authoritarianism. As representation of a small number would be more realistic and feasible, decentralisation of the governing structures and devolution of real powers to these decentralised structures is a necessity. We shall



examine in subsequent sections as to why this was not to be the reality.

### Why Decentralisation

The motivations for decentralisation in third world countries are varied. In some, the desire of the national elite for greater political legitimacy spawned attempts at decentralisation, while in others, the policies were enacted in response to pressures for greater participation in decision making by ethnic, regional, religious or tribal groups. In most of the countries where it was tried, decentralisation was seen as a way of improving the efficiency of planning and management within which central ministries responded to pressing social and economic problems.<sup>1</sup>

Decentralisation has had varied forms relative to the nature of centralised authority, the intention and intensity of the will of the decentralisers, the level of politicisation and the availability of structural facilities.

A measure of decentralisation is injected to a highly centralised governmental structure to enable efficiency, discretion and increased reach of the governmental sector.

Often, to overcome the rigidity of hierarchy and bureaucratisation, central governments delegate certain functions to semi-autonomous agencies. This is more so when certain entrepreneurial initiatives of the State clash

with the general welfare programmes.

The central governments might transfer specific powers of regional planning, resource mobilisation and developmental works to local governments. This could be either on account of a voluntary obligation to decentralisation or of a calculated measure to meet the ever increasing demands of autonomy seeking ethnic groups and social communities.

This devolution of authority to the local governments, in its purest form, has certain fundamental characteristics. First, local units of government are autonomous, independent and are clearly perceived as separate levels of government, with developmental, regulatory and judicial powers, over which central authorities exercise little or no direct control. Secondly, the local governments have clear and legally defined geographical boundaries within which they exercise authority and perform public functions. Third, local governments have corporate status and the power to secure resources to perform their functions. Fourthly, devolution implies the need to develop local governments as institutions in the sense as organisations providing services that satisfy their needs and as governmental units over which they have some influence. Finally, devolution is an arrangement in which there are reciprocal, mutually beneficial and coordinate relationships with other units in the system of government of which it is a part.

The rationale of decentralisation policies has also been an accepted fact needing little substantiation. Decentralisation can be a measure of overcoming the severe limitations of centrally controlled national planning, by delegating greater authority to officials who are working in the field, closer to the problems. It could also better political and administrative penetration of national government policies into areas remote from the national capital.

From the democratic point of view, it is needed to institutionalise participation of citizens in development planning and management. And by creating alternative means of decision making, decentralisation might offset the influence or control over developmental activities by entrenched local elites. Democratic decentralisation might allow greater representation for various political, religious, ethnic and tribal groups in development decision making that could lead to greater equity in the allocation of government resources and investments. This might also increase political stability and national unity by giving groups in different sections of the country the ability to participate more directly in development decision making, thereby increasing their stake in maintaining the political system.

### **Backgrounder to Decentralisation**

The whole issue of decentralisation as an input for the

strengthening of democracy need be looked in a historical context. The Parliamentary experiment in India need not be considered as "a new way of thinking about authority"<sup>2</sup>. The evolution of Parliamentary Constitutionalism in India since 1919 had given a fair degree of Indianness and easy acceptance to the parliamentary democracy in India. The early educated elite classes, too had idolized the Westminster model of parliamentary rule and looked for the same to be implemented in India. Freedom of the press, an effective civil service bound to rule of law and an apolitical armed force were the additional factors making<sup>3</sup> easy way for the parliamentary model in India.

A semantic polemic in early '60s regarding the variance in meaning between 'Democratic Decentralisation' and 'Decentralised Democracy' led, in<sup>4</sup> actuality, to certain conceptual clarifications. Democratic decentralisation, it was viewed, suggested that decentralisation axiomatically enhances democracy, where in decentralised democracy appeared to be that democracy has first been achieved through the establishment of a centralised governing institution designed to operate under popular control. "It seems further to assume that a democracy so established may, when it is strong enough, carry on some or all of its functions through structures which in various ways and in degrees are more than ordinarily decentralised when this is found to be<sup>5</sup> effective, desirable and not nationally debilitating."

This advertantly simplistic clarifications leads us to two positions; that a State, even when termed democratic, might actually be having only 'national democratic' structures, and that percolation of democratic structures of governance down to the local level depends on a host of 'nationally desirable' criteria. That would mean decentralisation and devolution of governing authority are in consonance with the political development of a society. Infact it were to be so in independent India.

The State, in the Nehruvian era, was said as being relatively autonomous of the vested interests, the landed aristocracy and industrial barons, and centralised enough not to be swayed by any regionally dominant social communities. State were to have various welfare programmes and the people were to 'actively cooperate' in their implementation. The masses were looked as though they were sleeping and just needed to be woken up. The inneumerable social evils and bottlenecks forbidding any such quick progress were either wished away or underplayed.

The high optimism about parliamentary models at the Centre and in the provinces petered down by the end of the '60s. The efforts to decentralise authority and administration from provincial capitals to distict and block level Panchayats through the Balwantray Mehta Commission Report's implementation was premture as the

masses were not politically receptive enough in all the states.

Moreover, it was a period of hot debate over the very merits of decentralisation. Gandhians and Sarvodaya activists were dogmatically committed to 'Gram Swaraj' viewed by Mahatma Gandhi as "...village republics<sup>10</sup> completely self-reliant having all that they want." In contrast, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, a nationalist Dalit leader and Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee, viewed the same villages as "a sink of localism and a den of ignorance and narrow mindedness and communalism." He had further said, "I am glad that the Draft Constitution has discarded the village and adopted the individual as its<sup>11</sup> unit." He had also complained that the village republics had spelled ruination for the country and played no part in the affairs and destiny of the country in having had, an insular 'subsistence' existence and taking no interest whatsoever in the 'national affairs. He was particularly piqued at the oppression and exploitation of the depressed classes by the landed dominant castes, and was completely in disagreement to giving powers to the same local elites when the untouchables and other oppressed groups were steeped in acute poverty and ignorance. Ambedkar wanted the centralised structure of the State, only where in the Dalits could have had competent and upright representatives, to bring about radical reforms in the socio-economic condition of the masses and make people

politically conscious to be on their own.

During the days of this raging debate, one person who could have either hindered or killed the hopes of decentralisation, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was in a fix. Just as he said, "the progress of our Country is bound up with the progress of our villages...and the Panchayats have to lend a big hand in the uplift of the villages through co-operative effort", he also opined, "if the people frittered away their energies by fighting among themselves and running Panchayats on caste and group lines, they would weaken the foundation of the country...if Panchayats indulged in casteism, they would become worthless and it would be better to do away with them altogether."

With these apprehensions, Panchayats remained powerless even when they were democratically constructed in the post 1959 phase. Only Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan had effective block Samitis and Zilla Parishads. In most of the States, the Panchayat bodies were entirely dependent on the states for the delegated powers and finance. Moreover, the states did not reconstruct the PR bodies on time and gradually took back much of the powers and functions which had earlier been delegated. In addition, the period saw an intense row over the land reforms and the landed gentry opposed transferring power to numerically dominant castes which either were tenants and land labourers or owned

small pieces of land. The rise to prominence of the devolution measures has been a subsequent phenomenon.

However, the fact goes uncontested that the record of the democratic polity in a post-colonial set-up and in a hostile environ is no less significant. The socio-economic and cultural changes brought by the early institutionalised parliamentary democracy upon the politics of the Country is equally noted. Though the traditional institutions have got entrenched, as against expectations to the contrary, the increasing politicisation has brought forth radical changes in the politics of the society.

The characterisation of India's democracy as a "gift of the elite to the masses", and the contention that the decentralisation measures hitherto undertaken have only been reformist attempts from above miss out a significant demand factor of democratic politics. Though the elite in India have had a natural and distinctive inclinations towards parliamentary democracy, the pressing needs of the distinctive identity seeking ethnic groups and centripetal tendencies among the provinces could not be undermined as being causal factors for democratic initiation in India. Moreover, the pignant mistrust among the national elites themselves of their understanding of national mainstream left no option but that of a federal democracy.

As for decetralisation, the effective Panchayat Raj experiments in 1980s have come



only after persistent demand for decentralising authority from the national and provincial capitals. With the successes of land reform efforts in various states like West Bengal, Kerala and Karnataka and the success story of agriculture as a surplus income generating occupation even for small land holders, a class of land based aspirants came up with new aspirations in the rural hinterland. The ruling parties in these states rightly mooted the decentralisation idea to spread their mass base and to mobilise the newly emergent class in their ranks.

### Studies on Decentralisation

Decentralisation and Panchayati Raj [the Indian name given to local self-government below the state's level] have been the most widely studied topics by political scientists in India. Infact, two bibliographical volumes scheduling hundreds of books and articles on the subject have also been published. Governmental Committees, Review Committees, Evaluation and Estimation Committees constituted by the Union as well as by various states have also provided exhaustive reports. Writings and studies by academics could be analysed under the following categories:

#### A. General Write-ups

A good number of write-ups have been pleas for decentralisation, local self-government and Panchayati

Raj. Writings of several Gandhians, Sarvodaya activists and Socialists have given credence to decentralisation demand<sup>20</sup> and have kept the debate alive in hard times. The second set of writings include much detailed articles and books emphasising the merits of decentralisation and features of<sup>21</sup> an ideal system of local self-government. Issues like political parties' involvement, the power and reach of the local bodies are dealt in here.

#### B. Theorisation and Model-building Studies

In this category, one set of writings involved purely theoretical approach to the ideal of decentralised<sup>22</sup> democracy. The other set, of course, involved prescriptive and working models of Panchayati bodies' elections, powers<sup>23</sup> and functions. These studies usually had a pattern of critically analysing the prevailing system of local government and prescribing, in its place, a new rule for the distribution of power and functions among the tiers of state governance.

#### D. Studies on Planning and Administration

Various write-ups have come about expressing an urge for decentralised planning and for fixing the development<sup>24</sup> priorities right from the bottom. Another set of studies have probed the niceties of financial administration and have made well meaning attempts at thoroughly studying the relationship between local bureaucracy and the elected representatives and have put forth policy prescriptions<sup>25</sup> for improved correlation in the Panchayati Raj machinery.

#### D. Holistic Studies

Significant studies incorporating all the facets of Panchayati Raj experiment in a state and giving a holistic analysis and evaluation of the impact of a Panchayati Raj model have been few and significant. Such interdisciplinary studies viewing the changing social, economic and political fabric of rural life have been mere extrapolations of localised micro studies and not out of a concerted effort at state-wide macro studies. Comparative studies of Panchayati Raj experiments in two or more states and inter-model analysis have been rare and exceptional.

#### E. Historical Studies

While one set of articles probing the roots of a certain decentralisation measure or a Panchayati Raj experiment in a state have given a deep insight and provided precedents, the other set of studies recording the evolution of local self governing bodies over a period of time in certain territory have served as historical backdrops for studies on later periods and experiments.

#### F. Intensive Area Studies

A large number of studies on Panchayati Raj have been multi-disciplinary evaluative and area intensive researches of a certain district or a taluk or a set of village panchayats. Though this type of study is highly patternised, these have neither contributed to theorisation nor have been of much consequence to any integrated study

of local government functioning. None the less a good number of inter-district comparisons have been made with a limited agenda.

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#### G. Rigorous Thematic Studies

Significant have been the attempts at rigorous thematic studies on subjects like the awareness of new structures of governance among citizenry, people's participation in Panchayati activities, the socio-economic background of new local leadership, role performance of local representatives from reserved constituencies and etc. Those studies have individually enriched the canvas of studies on decentralised democracy and have provided the profoundly varied dimensions of study of politics in India.

The studies on Panchayati Raj have suffered certain handicaps. First, these have been narrowly local and narrowly timed, and have avoided inter-state cross cultural comparisons. These studies highlight more the sporadic phenomena than the continuities in democratic and developmental processes. Even while most of the studies have adhered to a set pattern, they have lacked a methodological rigour, and have been isolated phenomena and not part of an integrated all India study.

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Research in the field would have much benefitted if the researchers had adopted a comparative focus and a built-in-bias for inter-disciplinary approach. Moreover, few have attempted to study the sea change of rural politics under Panchayati Raj adequately

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emphasising the dialectics of localism and centralism, and individual and group pre-eminence in politics.

Even though all the above mentioned handicaps in the research on decentralised democracy have not been overcome in this study, two specific objectives not sufficiently addressed to by other studies have been taken up. One is the conception of an ideal model of decentralisation as an input into the process of consolidation of the democracy and the testing of the same hypothesis in the case study undertaken. The other is the study of the changes in local politics on account of decentralised democratic structures with the aid of particular studies on formation of group identity and partisanship.

## NOTES

1. See, Cheema and Rondanelli, Decentralisation and Development: Policy Implementation and Developing Countries (Beverly Hills, Sage Publications, 1983) pp-5-6 for an elaborate discussion of the same.
2. As expressed in Field, John Osgood, Consolidation of Democracy: Politicisation and Participation in India (New Delhi, Manohar, 1980) p-7
3. For a fuller explanation, see, Kohli, Atul, 'Interpreting India's Democracy: A State Society Framework' in Kohli, Atul (ed.) The State and the Poverty in India: The Politics of Reform (Cambridge and New York, OUP, 1986) p-9
4. It was Appleby, Paul H., who made this clarificatory variance in his article 'Some Thoughts on Decentralised Democracy' in Indian Journal of Public Administration (New Delhi, Vol. VIII No. 4, 1962) pp-443-455 and kicked off the polemics which has been joined by many academics since then.
5. Ibid., p-446
6. As in Rajni Kothari, Politics in India (Boston, Little Brown, 1970) and Francine Frankel, India's Political Economy- 1947-77, (New Delhi, OUP, 1978)
7. Prominent among them was the comprehensive 'Community Development Programme' launched in 1952-53 taking a block, of the average size of a taluk, as the primary unit for administrative purposes.
8. Quoted from the Balwantray Mehta Committee Report's introductory remarks explaining the approach of community development programmes- excerpts given in Desai, Vasant, Panchayat Raj-Power to the people (Bombay, Himalaya, 1980) p-380
9. Mention could be made of lack of any major programme to spread literacy among an ignorant population, and continuation of education policy and programmes not any radically different from that of the colonial times. Also to be made mention of is the shelving of the First Backward Class Commission's Report (1957) on the welfare of backward classes.
10. From Mahatma Gandhi's address to students of Calcutta, reported by M.D. in Young India, 17 September, 1925. Mahatma had also said, "Indian village life had so much vitality and character that it had

persisted all these long years and weathered many a storm'. Both these quotations are found in Desai, Vasant, op.cit., p-25

11. Quoted from Dr.B.R.Ambedkar's speech in the Constituent Assembly as reported in Association of Voluntary Agencies for Rural Development(ed.), Panchayat Raj the basis of Indian Polity, (New Delhi, AVARD, 1962) p-25

12. When the members of the Constituent Assembly were hotly debating the pros and cons of decentralisation, 'gram swaraj' and Panchayat Raj, Nehru remained silent and refused to join the issue in Constituent Assembly.

13. Quoted from Nehru's speech at Nagaur in Rajasthan, 2 October 1959, cited in Desai, Vasant., op. cit., p-2

14. The following indicators amply indicate the statement:

Indicators	1950-51	1970-71	1990-91
Population(in millions)	361.1	551.3	844.3
Birth rate(per 1000)	39.9	36.9	29.9
Death rate(per 1000)	27.4	14.9	9.6
Literacy rate(%)	16.7	29.5	52.11
GDP at factor cost (80-81 prices, Rs.Crores)	42871	90426	197419
Per capita NNP (80-81 prices, Rs.)	1127	1520	2142
Index of industrial production(Base:80-81)	18.3	65.3	213.1
Index of agricultural production(Base:trienniry ending 69-70)	58.5	111.5	191.8
Foodgrains output(ml. tonnes)	50.8	108.4	176.2
Finished steel (m. ton)	1.04	4.64	13.40
Cement(m. ton)	2.7	14.3	48.90
Electricity generated (utilities only)(billion KWH)	5.1	55.8	264.6

Source: Govt. of India, Economic Survey, 1991-92, Part-II, p-51.

15. The Congress party itself has lost the aura of the freedom struggle and has changed and re-changed its composition. While the opposition parties have tasted power more than twice at the Centre, various states have been ruled by opposition parties for long durations. The emergence of regional parties, autonomy seeking movements and lower caste organisations have changed the colour of the polity. Pressure groups, interest groups, community organisations and other civil forums have jostled with men in power. Electoral processes and the press have also helped in increased politicisation.

16. As expressed by Kohli, Atul. op. cit., p-9

17. Mathur, Kuldeep. op.cit., pp-1-3

18. Tomar.B.S. Panchayat Raj in India : Literature on Features, Trends and Prospects (New Delhi, Indian Bibliographies Bureau, 1991) and that of Asundi. A.Y. and Chandrappa S., Panchayat Raj system in India: A Bibliography (Bangalore, Biblio-Infon Service, 1989)

19. The Union Government has constituted several Committees from time to time to suggest Panchayat Raj structure. These were, Balwantray Mehta Committee, 1957, Ashoka Mehta Committee, 1978, G.V.K.Rao Committee, 1985, L.M.Singhvi Committee, 1986. However, the actual implementation of these had been left to the state governments as late as 1988. Other governmental study reports like Govt. of India's Panchayat Raj: A comparative Study of Legislations 1961-66 (New Delhi, Govt. of India, 1966) and Ministry of Community Development's Panchayati Raj: A Comparative Study on Legislations (New Delhi, Govt. of India Press, 1962) and similar reports of committees constituted by state governments have also been of significance.

20. For instance, the following could be cited on a representative basis; Narayan, Jayaprakash, Plea for the Reconstruction of Indian Polity (Kashi, Akhil Bharat Serva Seva Sangh, 1959), Gandhi.M.K., My Idea of Village Swaraj, Bhavans Journal 19 June '977, pp-31-32, and Bhavne, Vinobha, Ideal of Gram Swaraj, Bhoodan 3(50) Apr. 1950, 396-97., Sab, Abdul Nazeer, Decentralisation: Karnataka Model Janata ( 85 Nov. 10) pp-56-59

21. Mention could be made of Dey, S.K. Power to the People: A Chronicle of India 1947-67 (New Delhi, Orient Longman, 1969), Krishnamachari V.T., Pattern of Rural Development Kurukshetra (Apr. 1968) pp-509-10., Narain, Iqbal., Concept of Panchayati Raj and its Implications in India Asian Survey (5-9, Sep. 1975) pp-456-66, Kothari, Rajni, Decentralisation the Real Issue Seminar (360, Aug. 1989) pp-14-19

22. Suprisingly, very few articles of merit are to be found in this group. Appleby, Paul H., op.cit.; Narain, Iqbal, Introduction and Emerging Concept in M. Mathur and Iqbal Narain(eds.) Panchayat Raj, Planning and Democracy (Bombay, Asia, 1969) pp-i-xxi and 19-34.; Bandopadhyaya, J., Decentralisation of Power (Calcutta, Socialist Centre, 1964) and others. There have been many attempts at theorising for the Panchayati Raj. For instance, Muttalib, M.A. and Khan, Akbar Ali, Theory of Local Government (New Delhi, Sterling, 1982). Others, who have theorised the PR experiments



include Iqbal Narain, Democratic Decentralisation: The Idea, the Image and the Reality, Indian Journal of Public Administration (Vol. IX No.1, 1963); pp-9-34.

23. For instance, Bhargava, B.S., Electoral Reforms in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Panchayati Sandesh, 26(4) July 1986; pp-9-10; Narayan, Jayaprakash, The Role of Political Parties in Panchayati Raj, The Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. VIII, No.4, 1962; pp-602-608; and, Dutta, Avijit, Fiscal Dimensions of Local Government Reform in Karnataka in George Mathew (ed.) Panchayati Raj in Karnataka Today (New Delhi, ISS and Concept, 1986) pp-101.

24. A comprehensive book on district planning Mishra, R.P. (ed.) District Planning: A Handbook (New Delhi, Concept Publishers, 1980) has recently been published. Other than this, a host of articles like Hooja, Rakesh, District Planning: Concept, Setting and State Level Applications (Jaipur, Aalekh Publishers, 1986) and Chaudhury, P.K. Panchayati Raj in Action: A Study of Rajasthan, Economic Weekly, 16(5-7) February, 1964, pp-211-18.

25. For instance are the likes of Chaturvedi, H.R. Bureaucracy and the Local Leadership: Dynamics of Rural Development (New Delhi, Allied, 1977). Mathur, Kuldip Bureaucratic Response to Development: A Study of BDO in Rajasthan and UP (Delhi, National, 1972) and Muttalib, M.A. > Milieu of Rural Bureaucracy, Journal of the Society for the Study of State Government, 6(4), Oct.-Dec., 1973, pp-199-209.

26. Iqbal Narain and Mathur, P.C. Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan in George Jacob (ed.) Readings on Panchayati Raj (Hyderabad, National Institute of Community Development, 1967), pp-83-109.

27. For instance, Mathur, M.V. and others Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan: A Case Study of Jaipur District (New Delhi, Impex India, 1966); and Venkatanarayanaia and Ram Reddy, Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh (Hyderabad, State Chamber of Panchayati Raj, 1972).

28. See, Iqbal Narain and Mathur, P.C. (eds., Old Controls and New Challenges: A Report on the Pattern of PR Institutions in Maharashtra and Rajasthan (Jaipur, Dept. of Political Science, Rajasthan University, 1969). In addition several edited compilation of articles addressing a particular issue of Panchayati Raj or with a similar framework have been published.

29. For example, Jha S.N., Historical Determinants of the Structure of Panchayati Raj in U.P., Indian Journal of Political Science 32(4), Oct.-Dec. 1972, pp-443-54.

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30. Among these studies, one set attempts for a historical analysis of local politics. Like in Mathai, John, Village Government in British India (New Delhi, Neeraj Publishers, 1983) and Jha, S.N. Leadership and Local Politics: A Study of Meerut District in UP: 1923-73 (Bombay, Popular Prakashan, 1979). The other set of writings are those providing a general historical overview. For instance, Mathur, Kuldeep, Panchayati Raj, Democracy and Politics in India (Mimeograph) (New Delhi, ICSSR Seminar, 26 Dec. 1988) and Desai, Vasant, Panchayati Raj: Power to the People (Bombay, Himalaya Publishers, 1990).

31. For example, Sivanna, N., Panchayati Raj Reform and Rural Development (Allahabad, Chugh Publishers, 1990) and, Lakshminarayana, H.D., Democracy in Rural India: Problems and Processes (New Delhi, National 1980). Both of which are intensive studies of different districts of Karnataka.

32. Mention could be made of, Dubey, S.N., and Murdia, Ratna Structure and Process of Decision Making in Panchayati Raj Institutions (Bombay, Somaiyh, 1976) and Murty, L.S.N., Taluk Development Boards in Karnataka: A Study of their working in relation to Programmes, Processes and Decision Making, Rural Development Digest 4(2) Apr., 1981.

33. Like in, Gurumurthy, U., Panchayati Raj and the Weaker Sections (New Delhi, Ashish, 1987); and Social Background of Zilla Parishad Members in Karnataka ISS Occasional Paper Series (New Delhi, 1989); Madhava Rao, L.S., Varying Role of Collectors in PR Administration in Different States, Quarterly Journal of Local Self Government Institutes 50(3) Jan.-Mar., 1980, pp-617-31.

34. For a fuller discussion of these, refer Iqbal Narain, A Perspective on Research in Panchayati Raj in Verma, S.L. (ed.) Panchayati Raj, Gram Swaraj and Federal Polity (Jaipur, Rawat Publishers, 1990), pp-50-69.

35. Mention must be made of Mr. Iqbal Narain, who has been more than an institution in studying various facets and dimensions of rural politics. More recently the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, has taken up a large project to scientifically study the changing nature of politics where PR institutions have been introduced.

## CHAPTER-II

### DECENTRALISATION AND CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY:

#### A CAUSE-EFFECTUAL RELATION

In the last chapter, we have dealt with the basic conceptions of democracy and the necessity of decentralisation in furthering democracy. We have also had an overview of various studies on decentralisation and its Indian 'avatar', the Panchayati Raj. In this chapter an examination of what after having had democracy as the final arbiter of collective decision making and national governance has been attempted.

An attempt has been made in the first section to conceptualise the necessary higher stages and the ideal wherein democracy gets consolidated. In the second section we shall examine the state and problems of democracy in India and the reasons which hindered the consolidation of democracy. And, in the third section, let us find out if and if so, how far decentralisation can resolve the problems facing democracy in India and be a harbinger of consolidation of democracy.

#### Explaining Consolidation of Democracy

In societies undergoing transition from traditional to modern politics, the level of politicisation needed for the

full reach of democracy would be lacking. Hence the democratic structures could work optimally at the national level where in the presence of elites as promoters of democratic functioning and checks and balances upon the perpetuation of elite rule could be ensured. However a benign governance could be expected only where there is a vibrant and healthy democracy at the grassroots. This move from the national democracy to that of a benign and vibrant democracy is being termed as consolidation of democracy.

Presuming the existence of national democracy in the initial phase, the consolidation of democracy would mean the following aspects.

First, the stability and continuity of the institutions of democratic rule, like the Constitution, independent Judiciary, accountability of executive to popular representatives in legislatures must be ensured.

Strict adherence to the rule of law is needed to help the majority to abstain from tyrannical inclinations so as to lend legitimacy to the democratic rule.

Steady economic development at the macro level and real improvement in the standard of living of the people are needed, for, stagnant and regressive developmental results would rob democracy of sustenance and purposive continuity.

There should be balanced growth in all regions or federal units and no undue overplaying or discrimination of any region or social group. As an extension of this, the State should progress towards providing for equity among social groups as a beginning and among individuals as the end.

The democratic structures should strive and provide for social mobility and increased politicisation. Political interest, knowledge and discussions should instill faith in the efficacy of democratic structures. Voting and other participatory problem solving apparatus should be effective enough to involve the populace in the act of governance. In other words, democracy should create right environ for nation building efforts.

Even though the above mentioned specifications for consolidation of democracy are justified from a theoretical and even a legal perspective, the actual requirements are less stringent in most of the developing nations.

### What Ails Present Democracy

The evolution of democratic practices in independent India is closely linked to the political modernisation, which was defined in two ways. While one showed it to be a movement from traditional to a modern

effects of social, economic and cultural modernisation. In this, the former definition posits the direction in which political change should move, the latter described the political changes which actually occurs in modernising societies.<sup>1</sup>

The early modernisation theorists like Rudolf and Huntington and others took western criteria for determining political modernisation. For them, urbanisation, education, secularisation, media participation and etcetera constituted the elements by which 'civic culture' could be developed from that of India's parochial participant culture.<sup>2</sup>

This change and development seem to be taking place in two divergent and yet not contradictory ways in the independent India. The Nehruvian path has involved the State to usher in socio-economic changes and has aspired to enable the individual to break the barriers, act rationally and contribute to the progress. On the otherhand, the Lohiaite way has had high hopes on the very politicisation process to bring into focus class consciousness among various social groups and also hoped that these social movements would bring about egalitarian and political development.

In fact the Indian experience has been a mix of these two. The state has been the most powerful institution of socio-economic change and political legitimacy. As such,

the social groups have competed to have control over State and its institutions. Where as social movements have fought to end the sanctions behind institutions of social exploitation and inspired social groups to collectively surge ahead, the protection of individual rights in turn has saved individuals from the domination of the same rigid and conservative social groups.

By guaranteeing both individual freedoms, and the rights, of association and other political rights democracy in India has enabled this dialectic to grow and lead to political development. However, this process has not been without lacunae and defects. And these have been the causes for ills and imbalances in the present Indian democracy. A schedule of these is given below.

1. The centralisation of State structures has led to dominance over the same by a new class of intellectuals. This class includes the bureaucrats, corporate executives, men in the fourth estate as well as judiciary. Having been the largest beneficiaries of the government-public sector, this nexus has preferred increased bureaucratisation and has hoodwinked the popular political executive.

2. The governance has no more been a people's affair. The cumbersome rules, procedures, processes and a hostile bureaucracy have alienated the ordinary citizenry from

knowing and participating in the act of governance. This intransperancy and distance have sealed the executive from particular criticism and bred complacency among them.

3.The diversity and the social stratification have also been the banes of democracy in India. The first-past-the-post electoral system in large constituencies has accentuated the majoritarian dominance.An interplay of this with the usurpation of positions of parliamentary rule by elites and the increased bureaucratisation has robbed the populace of the true benefits of democratic rule.

The above mentioned ills of the centralised democratic rule in India have led to lopsided priorities in resource allocation,poor and irregular welfare services,regional imbalances in growth and the policies and programmes getting badly implemented. The commonly cited ills like corruption, favouritism and etcetra have been such permanent fixtures that any change in governance at the Central And provincial levels has hardly been of much significance for the ordinary people.

It is true,the basic institutions of democratic rule have continued to exist in India. But the sanctity of many of these has got eroded on account of overuse,corruption and deliberate wreckage.<sup>4</sup> While there has been quite some progress made on the economic front, the regional imbalances in development and economic inequalities have



made the macro progress look sinister.

### A Cause-Effectual Model

The question still remains as to how far the decentralisation measure consolidates democracy, overcoming all the inherent weaknesses of democracy as well as the corruptions already crept into the system.

The initial politicisation of a community creates a demand for local governance and heightens the awareness which would be positively responsive to decentralisation measure. This act of decentralisation transfers certain powers and functions of administration, planning, finance and development to local structures. This devolution of authority diffuses the power centre and effects a redistribution of power between provincial capitals and Panchayat bodies, and gives a strong momentum and dynamism to rural politics.

Administratively, decentralisation creates new tiers of democratic structure which are accountable and responsive in a much more direct and immediate way than are Central and provincial governments. The very physical proximity between the ruling structure and the ruled provides for easier accountability and monitoring of the work of the executive structures.

On the political plan the opening up of decision making and implementation structures

right at the area of public action hightens the pace of politicisation hitherto carried out. The periodic elections to local institutions and the working of people's representatives locally creates political interest, knowledge and a sense of immediacy of democratic structures.

The penetration of modern political institutions of decision making and execution like political parties replacing the traditional modes of authority is made easier and deeper on account of increased politicisation in the hinterland of polity. In addition, there are increased possibilities of modernist group identities like class, interest group and political parties, building over and above the primordial loyalties to caste and religion.

The local democratic structures coupled with the penetration of political parties in a highly politicised atmosphere provide the right opportunity for 'effective' participation. Unlike the people's participation in the earlier times which limited itself to deliberative, prescriptive and mediatory roles, the newly empowered local bodies shall offer adequate rewards for participation in planning, resource mobilisation, resource allocation, execution and judiciary powers. This worthwhileness, proximity, immediateness and efficacy of participation at two or three tiers of Panchayati Raj bodies can create a

high degree of effective participation.

Politicisation and penetration of political parties also provide an opportunity for identification or affiliation with the political parties. Parties' and other class and interest group's affiliation steadily over a period manifests in secular partisanship. An explanation to the question of who is partisan, why and what role has partisanship in the context of overall politicisation brings out the significance and benefits of partisanship.

A state of overall politicisation also involves the development and participation of media in local governance, scope for work by voluntary agencies and similar outlets.

Secular identification with a modernist group entity, be it a party or a movement or even an interest group, added with scope for effective participation in a highly politicised environ would realise the wishes of consolidation of democracy in the rural hinterland.

## NOTES

1. As felt by Huntington, Samuel in Political Order in Changing Societies (New Haven & London, Yale University Press, 1968), pp-35.
2. Quoted from Almond and Verba, The Civic Culture; Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations (Princeton, 1963), p-7.
3. For a fuller discussion of this opinion see Rudra, Ashok, Intellectuals as a Ruling Class (Mimeograph; Delhi School of Economics; May, 1990).
4. For instance, there are more than five lakh cases pending settlement before Supreme Court alone resulting in delay in justice. The overuse of article 256 of constitution and attempts on the part of a national party to undo the article 370 and the provision of constitution of Minority commission could also be cited to show how even the basic law of the land is under attack.

## CHAPTER-III

### DECENTRALISATION EXPERIMENT IN KARNATAKA:

#### AN OUTLINE OF THE STRUCTURE AND THE STUDY

Karnataka state implemented a model of decentralisation below the state level in January, 1987. This experiment has been hailed as being a 'bold step towards democratic decentralisation based on the principles of self-governance and the sovereignty of the people'.<sup>1</sup> The Karnataka model has also been praised for taking democracy to the very grass roots level.

Now, let us examine how much this decentralisation experiment has been of significance in the process of consolidation of democracy in Karnataka.

#### Backgrounder to Karnataka

Like elsewhere in India, politics in Karnataka has been dominated by land, caste and patronage. Till 1972, this manifested in the sea-saw battle between Vokkaligas and Lingayats, the two dominant communities, within the Congress Party Organisation.

Caste has always been an important factor in determining the course of social, political and economic life in Karnataka. In the erstwhile Mysore state, the Brahmins were at the top of the social hierarchy followed by the Lingayats, the Vokkaligas and others. The Brahmins whose numerical strength has been insignificant, were not only major absentee inam holders but also Western educated

elites. In short, they dominated practically every field of socio-political life. But the social structure in Mysore underwent certain changes in 1930s and '40s. These changes took place due to awareness created by the Western educated early literateurs and bureaucrats from the two peasant communities.

Traditionally, Vokkaligas and Lingayats have been agrarian castes with relatively high concentration of land holding. The ownership of land and their majority number gave these castes the superior social status they enjoyed. The other castes like Kurubas, Bedas and SCs/STs comprised largely agricultural labourers and tenants.

The table below gives the picture of the numerical strength of the various castes and communities in Karnataka.

TABLE 3.1

Selected Caste and Community in Karnataka	
Caste/Communities	Percent of state's population
Brahmins	4.23
Vokkaligas	11.82
Lingayats	14.64
Kurubas	6.77
Beda	5.06
Arasu	0.07
Scheduled Castes	13.14
Scheduled Tribes	0.79
Idigas	2.25
Muslims	10.63
Christians	2.09

Source: Karnataka Backward Classes Commission, 1975, Volume II, cited in Lalitha, Nataraj and V.K. Nataraj, 1983, 'Limits

of Population:Devraj Urs and Karnataka Politics',EPW Vol  
XVII No.37,p-1504.

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With the ushering in of democracy based on adult suffrage in independent India, it was obvious that dominant castes in Karnataka with their numerical and landowning significance had secured considerable political power. Meenakshi Jain points it as :

"By the time of independence, dominant agricultural castes had displaced the Brahmins in the Congress Party. Because of their overwhelming superiority over the twice born castes both in numbers and economic power the Lingayats and Vokkaligas in Mysore had emerged as new political elites."

The early lead of these two communities continued for more than two decades. The widespread politicisation of these two communities and the continuance in power of a single party abetted the domination. For instance, Vokkaligas occupied the Chief Ministership of the state till 1956 and Lingayats held sway over the post till 1972.

It is worth remembering here that ever since political independence, the Karnataka situation is characterised by one party dominance. The Congress Party happens to be the single most important Party which controlled political power all through the 1950s, the '60s and the '70s. Therefore, the politics of power in Karnataka is that of the Congress Party. It is known that the dominant castes

in Karnataka dominated and operated as the two power groups within the Congress Party. So the Party relied upon the leverage which Vokkaligas and Lingayats derived from land control and key positions in the vilages.

The major break through in Karnataka political scene came when the Indian National Congress split into two groups, the Congress(O) and Congress(R) in 1969. It had its repercussions in Karnataka too. The majority of the Congress members in Karnataka chose to remain in the Congress(O) headed by Nijalingappa rather than in the Indira Gandhi group. But quite contrary to the majority decision, Devraj Urs, one of the few Karnataka leaders broke away from his political mentor to cast his lot with Mrs. Indira Gandhi.

At this time, Mrs. Gandhi with her slogan of 'Garibi Hatao' and her championing cause of the weaker sections (e.g. 20 point programmes) of the society made a strong impact in the country in general and state in particular. She made an attempt to restucture the Congress with a specific intention of 'eroding the powers of dominant caste' and 'broaden her party's socio-economic base by including the people from outside the dominant landed castes in State politics. Devraj Urs, then emerged as the leader of Congress(R) in Karnataka and made an attempt to organise a grand alliance of all the minority castes against the Lingayats and the Vokkaligas. While doing so, though the importance was given to minority castes he did not



alienate the dominant castes completely. However Urs managed to break the Vokkaligas and Lingayats hold on power through a skillful exploitation of conflicts among and within the groups. Thus the new era of non dominant castes in the power politics of the state emerged.

A comparison of the castewise representation in Legislative compositions in 1967 and 1972 assemblies is given in table 3.2. This makes clear how Urs could build up his new coalition.

TABLE 3.2

COMPOSITION OF KARNATAKA LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY BY CASTE

1967-72 ELECTIONS

Caste/ Community	1967		1972	
	No.	% of the total	No.	% of the total
Brahmins	8	6	11	6
Lingayats	49	36	43	24
Vokkaligas	36	26	52	29
Other Hindus	17	12	37	22
Scheduled Castes	24	17	23	12.5
Scheduled Tribes	-	-	2	1
Christian	1	0.75	5	3
Jain	1	0.75	1	0.5
Muslim	2	1.5	4	2
TOTAL	138	100	178	100

SOURCE: Karnataka Backward Commission Report, Vol IV, quoted in Abdul Aziz and G. Timmaiah, The Political Economy of Land Reform (New Delhi, Ashish, 1983), p-57.

The size and distribution of cultivable land among households of various communities as given in table 3.3 shows interesting facts. Lingayats and

Vokkaligas together constituting only 25% of the population own around 40% of the cultivated land of Karnataka. Eventually the landholdings of Kurubas, SCs, Muslims and other hindu castes comprises more than 52% of the total holdings. Significantly, the latter group constituted the backbone upon which Urs built up his political coalition.

TABLE 3.3

Distribution of Households By Caste And Size Of Operational Holdings:1961							
Caste/Tribe/ Community	Size of holding(acres)					Total house- holds	No. of house- holds in each caste as % of total.
	Less than 1.0	1.0- 2.5	2.5- 5.0	5.0- 10.0	10.00		
Vokkaliga	9 (1.18)	87 (11.43)	178 (23.38)	244 (32.06)	243 (31.94)	761 (100)	15.18
Lingayat	10 (0.80)	87 (6.88)	176 (13.94)	263 (20.82)	727 (57.56)	1263 (100)	25.19
Kuruba	8 (1.5)	72 (13.44)	145 (27.05)	161 (30.00)	150 (27.98)	536 (100)	10.69
S.C.	41 (7.26)	201 (35.64)	184 (32.64)	102 (13.08)	36 (6.38)	564 (100)	11.25
S.T.	-	1 (16.67)	4 (66.67)	-	1 (16.67)	6 (100)	0.12
Brahmin	19 (6.80)	25 (8.92)	40 (14.28)	63 (22.50)	133 (47.50)	280 (100)	5.59
Other	82 (8.20)	209 (20.90)	251 (25.10)	247 (24.70)	211 (21.10)	1000 (100)	19.95
Hindus	50 (9.16)	105 (19.24)	121 (22.16)	119 (21.79)	151 (27.65)	546 (100)	10.89
Muslim	4	7	8	9	2	30	0.60
Christian	-	4	3	10	10	27	0.54
Jain							
TOTAL	223	798	1110	1218	1664	5013	100.00

Note: Figures in parenthesis are percentages.

Source: S. Seshiah, Levels of living in Karnataka: As Seen Through Village Survey Monographs of 1961 Census, quoted in Abdul Azuz and G. Timmaiah, 'The Political Economy of Land Reforms' (New Delhi, Ashish, 1983), pp-62-63.

For the role he played, Devraj Urs has been described as a pragmatic progressive in state politics. Making best use of the instability in the national politics, Urs brought about radical amendments in 1973 to the Land Reforms Act of 1961. This resulted in the identification and distribution of surplus land to the tune of 1,14,586 acres. Urs also constituted the Karnataka Backward Classes Commission in 1972 with Mr. L.G. Havanur as Chairman to identify and report on the ways and means of amelioration of these classes. In addition, he initiated a number of measures which intended to improve the living conditions of the weaker sections such as liquidation of debts of those who earn less than Rs. 4800/- per annum, pension scheme for those above the age of 60 years, housing sites for the poor etc. Besides, he tried to implement the central government sponsored programmes like IRDP, SFDP and others for the welfare of the weaker sections.

These details do not disprove the reality of the numbers game in the electoral politics. The Lingayats and Vokkaligas have remained to be the largest community group in the later assemblies. In fact, coming to power of the Janata Party in 1983 has been described as the re-assertation of the majority might by these two caste groups. On the contrary, the Lingayats and Vokkaligas have

only played an important role in the coalition and have had to share power with other groups. Moreover, a realisation has dawned upon all leaders of all political parties that it is no longer possible for any single set of social forces to exercise 'dominance in state-level and supra-local politics in Karnataka. They have also learnt that the members of dis-advantaged social groups possess the sophistication to anticipate tangible benefits from genuine representation within political parties, and a party which does not deliver these things will not gain many votes from such groups.

#### Earlier Decentralisation Model

Though the Panchayati Raj institutions are not new to Karnataka, they had functioned with delegated powers under a paternalistic provincial government. The erstwhile Mysore province had had working Panchayats in all villages and had given sufficient autonomy to act within their respective boundaries to these Panchayats. However these were not constituted democratically and were tradition bound.

The Balwantray Mehta Committee report aroused considerable interest in Karnataka too. Much before, the pleas of Sarvodaya activists and persistent demands by socialist leaders for decentralised democracy had oriented the state to be receptive to centre's directive.

The Panchayati Raj system was introduced in Karnataka state with the passing of the Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act-1959. It was formally inaugurated after the completion of the first Panchayati Raj elections by Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the then President of India, on 21st. December, 1960. It had a three tier structure. Spatially speaking, a village Panchayat for a village or a group of villages with 1500 to 10000 population, a Taluk Development Board (TDB) at the taluka level and District Development Council (DDC) at the district level. In addition any village above a population of 5000 could have had a Town Panchayat.

The village Panchayat could have had 11 to 19 directly elected members depending on its population. The chairman was to be elected by the members. The Panchayat was granted 30% of the land revenue collection of the village and had the liberty to impose taxes locally.

The TDBs were to be chief instruments of deocratic governance. They had 15 to 19 directly elected members. While local MLAs and MLCs were represented in the Board, they could not have held any office. There was provision for the nomination of two women and reservations to SC/ST were provided in proportion to their population. The President of the TDB was to be elected by

the members. The TDB had no statutory linking with village Panchayats under its jurisdiction.

All construction activities, promotion and development of economic conditions with special reference to agriculture, and welfare measures for the amelioration of SCs and STs came under the purview of TDB. They could have also constructed/repaired tanks of less than 10 acres. 60% of the land revenue of the taluka was granted to the TDB in addition to the governmental grants of various nature.

The DDC was the least democratically set up body. It had the District Commissioner as its head and the local MLAs, MLCs, MPs, Presidents of TDBs, fifteen district level officers and nominated representatives of SCs & STs and women as its members. The council had purely prescriptive and evaluative functions and worked more as an appendage of the district administration in coordinating and supervising the developmental work.

The tenure of all these Panchayat bodies was for five years. In all there were 8411 village panchayats, 175 TDBs and, 96 town panchayats, and 19 DDCs. Elections to these bodies were irregular and untimely and were held only thrice in a span of twenty-three years, in 1960, 1968 and 1975.

As is evident the TDBs had been entrusted with much of the development work. However studies have shown that these Boards limited themselves to constructing public utilities like roads, school buildings and the like and hardly ventured into any effective developmental work. Moreover, these bodies had limited extractive capabilities.

During the early years of reform, a committee on Panchayati Raj under the Chairmanship of Sri. Kondajji Basappa had recommended, in its report submitted in 1963, the constitution of elected Zilla Parishad at the district level with a non-official as its chairman. The Committee had also recommended the constitution of Nyaya Panchayats. Based on the recommendations of this Committee a bill had been introduced to create and empower the Zilla Parishads. However the bill failed to get passed to be an Act due to political reasons.

#### New Act-Highlights

For the first time in the history of Karnataka, a non-Congress party, Janata, came to power in 1983. Janata's coming to power was grossly on account of the incompetence and misrule by R. Gundu Rao led Congress ministry which squandered the goodwill created by the Urs regime for the Congress Party. The new government was a coalition of all social forces and factions in the state and the power and

spoils were sufficiently widespread to prevent dominance by any one of them.

The ministry had a vocal socialists lobby consisting of Abdul Nazir Sab, J.H. Patel, S.K. Kanta and others. With Chief Minister Ramkrishna Hegde willing, this section resuscitated the report of the Ashok Mehta Committee on Panchayati Raj set up by the Union Janata government in 1978. based on this model, the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samities, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act was framed, discussed and passed in a record time in 1983. The Centre withheld its consent for two years and after severe protests and threats by the state government, the Act received Presidential assent on July 10, 1985.

Karnataka's Panchayat Raj system has been recognised as the most far-reaching effort in decentralised democracy in the country. The objective was to meaningfully carve out a third tier of government at the district level and local units of governance at the very grass roots. Even in the absence of any visible pressure from below, the state government has ceded vast revenue, powers and responsibilities to the Zilla Parishads. Nearly all welfare, developmental and civic functions, with the guaranteed budgetary support, staff and powers to perform these entrusted tasks have been passed on to the Panchayat bodies.



The following table clearly bring out the extent of budgetary transfer to the Panchayat Raj bodies.

TABLE 3.4

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 2Ps' Share In Karnataka State's Budgetary Allocatio  
 (In Rupees Crores)  
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		1987-88	1988-89
Plan	/ Total State Account	870	900
Expenditure	\ Allocations to 2Ps	220	240
Non-Plan	/ Total State Account	3134	3516
Expenditure	\ Allocatio to 2Ps	597	597

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 SOURCE: Desai, Vasant Panchayati Raj: Power To The People  
 (Bombay, Himalaya, 1990), p-242.  
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In addition to allocations on plan and non-plan account, the Zilla Parishad received a substantial share of centrally sponsored schemes implemented by these bodies.

Structurally the Karnataka model has three tiers. But as the Taluk Panchayat Samities were only coordinating bodies comprising ex-officio members and very few functions, the Panchayat Raj system effectively had only two tiers.

The Mandal Panchayat is the first elected tier of the system. It is entrusted with all civic functions and powers and responsibilities for development and welfare programmes with an intra-mandal orientation. The number of seats is one for every 500 population. 2536

Mandals (including 67 deemed Panchayats) have been constituted with 55,188 elected members. 25% of the membership has been earmarked for women (of whom at least one should belong to SC/ST) and 18% for SCs and STs. The Mandal covers a group of villagers with a population, as per 1981 Census, between 8000 and 12000, suitably reduced for the hill areas. The Pradhan and Upapradhan are elected by the elected members of the Mandal. Two representatives of the backward castes also to be nominated by ZP to these mandals.

Mandals have chiefly two sources of income. A per capita grant of Rs. 7.50 is given on the basis of total population in the mandal, and most of the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana allocations are diverted to the mandals to get done the local civic work. In addition, the mandals are also at liberty to tax the shops, business and other entertainment enterprises and the sales in village fairs.

At the village level, Gram Sabhas are required to be convened not less than thrice a year to discuss and review all development problems and programmes of the village, select beneficiaries for all beneficiary oriented programmes and plan for local improvement. Thus these Gram Sabhas are the foundation stone of democracy and development, which senior officers are expected to attend and draw up records of their discussions and

monitor progress thereon.

The Taluk Panchayat Samiti is a purely nominated body comprising ex-officio, all the Pradhans of Mandals in the taluk; all MLAs/MLCs representing any part of the taluk (excluding urban areas); members of the ZP representing any part of the taluk President, TAPCMS; President, PARDB, plus five members belonging to SC/ST, backward classes and women by co-option with the approval of the ZPs. The MLA representing the major part of the taluk is the chairman of the Samiti. This body is entrusted with advisory, supervisory, reviewing and inter-mandal coordination functions vis-a-vis the mandals of the taluk.

The Zilla Parishad is the second directly elected tier of the Panchayat Raj system. Its functions, responsibilities and powers are formulated to render unambiguously the head of the district's development and welfare administration. It administers schemes and programmes transferred to it or evolved by it; maintains cadres for manning the ZP and Mandal staff; formulates the district plan; frames and approves its budget; and approves the budgets of the mandals.

There are 19 ZPs, one for each district (i.e. all except Bangalore urban) with 887 directly elected members. Members of Parliament and members of the State Legislature whose

constituencies cover the district or a part there of are members of the ZPs but do not have the right to hold office in the ZP. Similar reservations for women and SCs and STs as in the case of mandals are provided for the ZPs also. ZPs have one seat for every 28000 population except the Kodagu ZP which has one seat every 12000 population. The Adhyakshas and Upadhyakshs of ZPs are elected by members of the ZP. The Adhyakshas of the ZP has the rank of a Minister of State and the Upadhyaksha the rank of a Deputy Minister. The Adhyaksha has been declared the executive head of the ZP.

The official machinery of the ZP is headed by its Chief Secretary. The post is encadred for the IAS and has been given the status and powers of a major head of department. Each ZP has a planning cell of experts headed by a Chief Planning Officer. Each mandal has a Secretary and the Village Extension Worker/Agricultural Assistant on deputation from government.

At the apex of the Panchayat raj system is the State Development Council which is chaired by the Chief Minister and comprises the Adhyakshas of all ZPs in the state, six ministers of State and Development Commissioner as Member-Secretary. It is to meet once a quarter and provide a forum for continuous review and direction of the Panchayat Raj movement in the State.

The Act involved the setting up of elected Nyaya Panchayats too. However, on account of the apprehensions expressed from certain quarters, its implementation has been deferred by five years. For the ZPs and mandals, elections were held in early 1987 and these elected bodies took office from the first week of April, 1987.

### Earlier Studies-Present Study

Considerable interest has been shown both academically and otherwise about the bold experiment in Karnataka. Newspapers and Journals throughout the country have carried out articles praising the Janata ministry for showing courage to effectively and decisively pass on a major portion of state government's powers, functions and revenue to institutions of district and local governance. However, there have been very few attempts at systemic theorising and understanding the nature and extent of the impact of these new structures.

George Mathew edited volume (1986) contained good many analytical articles on the 1985 Act.<sup>14</sup> One of the early articles by Amal Ray & Kambatla Jayalakshmi<sup>15</sup> analysed the socio-economic background of the newly elected Adhyakshas of ZPs and basing on that information, examined the prospects of reforms in rural areas under the ZPs. The analysts seem to

be convinced that as the ZP presidents are mostly from dominant caste groups they would not strive for the social amelioration of the backward and the Scheduled Castes. In another study,<sup>16</sup> B.S. Bhargava and N. Sivanna have examined the emerging pattern of leadership in Panchayat Raj taking the socio-economic background of the ZP members of the Bangalore rural district. This study concludes that the new leadership has not been any different from that of the earlier pattern in having been from upper-income strata and land owning class. It also states that the hegemony of the dominant castes in the local power structures has persisted. The institute of Social Sciences has done extensive survey collecting details of the socio-economic background of ZP and mandal members.<sup>17</sup>

The Government of Karnataka had instituted two Committees in 1988 headed by K.S. Krishnaswamy and Dr. Honnavar to review the progress made by the new ZP/MP structures and the financial aspects of their administration respectively, and suggest necessary reforms and amendments. Both these Committees have submitted exhaustive reports and suggested wideranging recommendations.

The first set of above mentioned academic studies have been much too thin in their research contents. The social background of the new local leaders does not by itself

decide their behaviour and actions. Mere study of leadership does not also give a holistic picture of the changes in the rural politics. On the otherhand the administrative studies have not taken into account the political aspects of governance or the mutual relation between transparent politics and good administration.

The focus of the present study has been precisely this. The politics in Karnataka has undergone significant changes since 1972. The change has not just been at the level of leadership, spoils and patronage but has had various dimensions like social awareness, improved relations of production and political maturity of the people. It has also had such facets like truer representation, group consciousness and partisanship.

In fact the decentralisation measure of Janata ministry is understood as more of a pre-emptive move to capitalise on the rural hinterland. This study, specifically, tries to analyse how the new Panchayat Raj tiers of governance reflect and effect the changing rural politics.

#### Area and Approach of Study

Taking note of the dimensions and intentions of the study, a classical deductive approach based on first person observant impressions is adopted. The researcher has closely gone through the 1985 Act, various reports of

committees, books, journals and articles. Leading public personalities, intellectuals and political leaders have been interviewed. To mention a few are Shri. Rajni Kothari and Shri. K. V. Subbanna, known intellectuals associated with the drafting of the Panchayat Act, Shri. Deve Gowda and Shri. S. R. Bommai, important Cabinet Ministers in the then Janata Ministry and Shri. Mallikarjun Kharge, the present Congress(I) Cabinet Minister for Panchayat Raj affairs.

In addition, for the purpose of intensive study, the Sagara taluk of Shimoga district has been chosen. The taluk was chosen for its representative character in social groups, geographical topography, type of agriculture and level of development.

There are three important caste groups to be found in the Sagara taluk. The 'Havyakas' are a traditionally landowning Brahmin caste and as such, elites in the region. During the haydays of land reform movement in Karnataka, the Havyakas had to surrender much of the paddy cultivated lands to their tenants and could only retain the beetlenut plantations, which have significantly contributed to the prosperity of the community. Otherwise too, the community has devoutly taken to education and other modern tools of socio-economic advancement.



Majority of the tenants to obtain ownership rights due to land reforms belonged to the Deeveru caste, a traditionally toddy tapping community in the region. Being a locally majority group, the caste has been vocally and vehemently upwardly mobile in the last two decades. At the time of the field study, this community was in an upbeat and boisterous mood for having had a person of their community as the Chief Minister of the state and having got elected another of the community to represent the district in the Parliament.

A substantial portion of the population belonged to the broad category of the Scheduled Castes. They were badly divided on caste basis. Dalit Sangharsh Samiti, the lone organisation which could have united them to be a single political block was limited to the taluk headquarters in its activities and influence<sup>18</sup>. Most of the Scheduled Castes were either marginal landholders or landless labourers.

Sagara, being a large taluk has had varied geographical terrain. While the western part comes in the thick belt of hilly vegetation and hence best suited for plantation crops, the eastern half is more akin to the south interior Karnataka. While the beetlenut plantations and paddy fields abound the western half, dry crops are cultivated in the eastern half due to lack of proper irrigation. At

places, tank irrigation supplements the rainfed cultivation.

The two dominant landowning castes of Karnataka, Lingayats and Vokkaligas are not found in large numbers in Sagara taluk. The Malnad taluks and Uttara Kannada district follow the landlord: Brahmin, tenant: Devaru, landless labourers: Scheduled Castes model. However, in places where the tenant population has been in majority, similar patterns of dominance as seen in interior Karnataka could be noticed.

On the basis of the variety offered, three Mandal Panchayats were chosen for the purpose of micro observation of the nuances of the local politics, economic change and social behaviour. It was intended to choose one mandal each of Janata and Congress(I) domination and one more where the support base was dispersed. This criterion by itself offered two models where in the post of Pradhan was held by a Brahmin and a Devaru belonging to Janata Dal and Congress(I) respectively. Again, there was a keen contest between a Brahmin and a Devaru in the third mandal for the post of Pradhan.

Edajigalemane: Situated about 4 kilometres north-west of Sagara town, this mandal has had a substantial Havyaka population and hence, naturally, has had a Pradhan of that community. The mandal was a stronghold of Janata Dal.

Masuru: This Deevaru community stronghold is also the mandal from which the local Congress MLA hails from. Situated about 10 kilometres north of Sagara town, this has been a Congress(I) forte.

Tyagarti: Situated about 12 kilometres east of Sagara town, this mandal is ruled by the Congress(I). As there is not any particular caste dominance in this mandal, it has been a free-for-all witnessing inter party and inter-faction defections. While the first two Pradhans in the mandal were from Congress Party and belonged to Simpiga (tailor) and Havyaka castes respectively, the third has been a Janata to Congress defector belonging to the Deevaru Community.

Attempts were made to meet and interview as many number of members as possible of the mandals studied. The ZP functionaries and representatives and the Secretaries of the mandals also provided valuable information regarding the functioning of the mandals. A specific list of all those interviewed is given in Appendix A.

A host of non-member voting people of these mandals were talked to get their reaction to a set of questions (See Appendix B). This respondent group was handpicked on the basis of caste and apparent economic

status. The researcher also met the local school  
19 teachers, one Doctor of a local government dispensary 20  
and also cross checked the opinions and claims of mandal  
members and Pradhans with other local residents. Eight  
Scheduled caste beneficiaries of Indira Awas Free Housing  
Scheme could also be met. Information about a few disputes  
brought before the mandal could also be gathered. More  
than these, the meetings with scores of ordinary folk  
provided the insight into the changing dynamics of rural  
politics.

This researcher acknowledges that purely  
impressionistic observations need not be scientific enough  
to be extrapolated and generalised. Eventhough intensive  
field survey could be conducted in three mandals of a  
taluk, the researcher has had an understanding of Panchayat  
Raj working in other districts as well. While the  
theorisation of the impressionistic details could be  
genuine and reliable, state-wide generalisations would  
suffer from the obvious variations in micro and macro

21  
dimensions. However, substantive details are provided in  
both the text and the appendixes as well and as much as  
possible to enable the research authentic and dependable.

## NOTES

1. Quoted from Karnataka's former Governor P. Venkatasubbaiah's speech reported by C. M. Ramachandra, 'Panchayati Raj-The Working Karnataka Model', The Hindu (New Delhi, May 4, 1989).

2. As felt by S.K. Dey, Panchayati Raj in Independent India: Some Personal Reflections, in George Mathew's Panchayat Raj in Karnataka: Its National Dimension (New Delhi, Concept Publication, 1986), pp-32-48.

3. Manor, James, The Evolution of Political Arena and Units Social Organisation: The Lingayats and Vokkaligas of Princely Mysore; in Srinivas, M.N. (ed.) Dimensions of Social Change (New Delhi, Allied, 1977) pp169-189.

4. Jain, Meenakshi, 'Congress After 1967: Strategies of Mobilisation' in Low, D.A. (ed.) The Indian National Congress: Centenary Hindsight (New Delhi, OUP, 1988); p-289.

5. Manor, James, Structural Changes in Karnataka Politics, EPW (29th. October, 1977); p-1867.

6. Manor, James, Where Congress Survived: Five States in Indian Election of 1977, Asian Survey (No. 8 August, 1978), p-792.

7. Hettne, Bjorne, The Political Economy of Indirect Rule: Mysore 1881-1947 (New Delhi, Ambia Publishing, 1978); p-337.

8. Manor, James, Pragmatic Progressives in Regional Politics: The Case of Devraj Urs, EPW, (Special Number, February 1980); pp-201-13.

9. Figure extracted from Annual Report 1988-89 Revenue Secretariat, Govt. of Karnataka.

10. Manor, James, 'Caste, Class, Dominance and Politics in a Cohesive Society', in Frankel and Rao (eds.): Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order (Delhi, OUP, 1989); p-356.

11. Ibid.

12. Sivanna, N. Panchayat Raj Reforms and Rural Development (Allahabad, Chugh Publishers, 1990).

13. Manor, James, 'Blurring the Lines Between Parties and Social Bases: Gundu Rao and the Emergence of a Janata Government', in R.J. Wood (ed.) State Politics in Indira Gandhi's India (Boulder, OUP, 1984).

✓14. Mathew, George, 'Panchayat Raj in Karnataka' (New Delhi, Concept Publishers, 1986).

✓15. Ray, Amal and Kambatla, Jayalakshmi, 'Zilla Parishad Presidents in Karnataka: Their Social Background and Implications for Development' EPW (October, 17-24, 1987), pp-1825-30.

✓16. Bhargava, B.S. and Sivanna, N. 'Emerging Pattern of Leadership in Panchayat Raj System: Case Study of a Zilla Parishad in Karnataka, Indian Journal of Administrative Science, pp-321-45.

17. The Institute has come out with two papers in this series, 'Social Background of ZP Members in Karnataka-1989' and Karnataka Mandal Panchayat Members Social Background -1990', and is in preparation of a comprehensive evaluative report of the new Karnataka Raj in Karnataka.

18. One of the local conveners of the Samiti, Mr. S. Naghraj admitted this to the researcher in an interview held on 25th. March, 1992.

19. The researcher visited two primary schools at Masuru and Edaji Galemane and one high school at Tyagarti and had detailed interaction with the school teachers.

20. Only a doctor at the Primary Health Centre of Tyagarthi village could be met as the other two Mandals had only primary units with a nurse and a compounder each.

21. Findings of this questionnaire based survey of people's reaction to the new Panchayat Raj system are presented in the notes as and when the reference comes.

## CHAPTER IV

### ASPECTS OF POLITICISATION, PENETRATION OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND LEADERSHIP

Till now we have understood that democracy has existed at different levels and decentralisation is an attempt at extension of the national democracy down below the provincial governmental institutions by creating local institutions of democratic governance. It was also seen that the initial politicisation brought about at the national level creates a state of awareness and a demand for decentralised democracy. In our hypothesis, we have noted that the decentralisation measure creates further politicisation which in turn goes to strengthen the democratic institutions. This would mean that 'politicisation' is both a cause for and an effect of decentralisation. Before deliberating over how this happens let us understand what it means.

#### Explaining Politicisation

National democracy has meant that with or without their effective participation and explicit consent, people have come to be ruled by a 'band of elite' groups known as politicians. Added to the confusion of the electorally contested issues being far from the issues facing the nation, the once in five years' spaced elections have been prone to be influenced by various undemocratic factions

like money and muscle power and primordial loyalties. As such, large populations are hardly able to exercise them to serve their collective interests.

Politicisation strikes at the root of this ill. The seemingly non-political, apolitical and ignorant peoples are transformed through the instruments of politicisation into group entities consciously directed towards political ends. This is a complex process involving varied structural supports and operations. In this effort, more than the individuals, identifiable groups like rural people, working class or even caste groups are better involved as receivers. The structural supports needed are approachable institutions of representation and governance, elections and etc. For instance, in the absence of a factory union and an impartial body to conduct elections, the workers in a factory would be without any institution to manage their own affairs and an immediate collective body in whom they could be represented. The entry of competing trade unions in the electoral process, and ideas and persons competing to win over the allegiance of the majority workers into their fold create an environ where in the hitherto non-political workers' awareness widen and their ability to make independent choices to further their own interests and that of the society in general increases.



## How Decentralisation Accentuates Politicisation

Primarily, it should be said, it is democracy which brings about the politicisation in a society. However national democracy has its own limitations in bringing about the required levels of politicisation. The motivation for taking active interest in politics comes if the people realise the stakes in the political process and if they feel their participation can act as a cumulative factor to bring about changes. In addition, spoils or political posts are necessary as incentives to induce people take active participation in politics.

Secondly, in electoral politics of first -past -the-post system and majority rule, there is little scope for the minority groups to have their grievances redressed, demands met and to aspire for political posts. The majority system in parliamentary politics occurs in such a cumbersome way that large sections of the population are deprived of an opportunity to be ruling. Usually the people of minority communities and castes and of backward regions get sidelined in this process. And, as always, it is the majority group of that mainstream which benefits from this system.

An effective decentralisation measure can set right this ill of national parliamentary democracy. Just like the institutions of democratic

governance at the Centre and in the provinces, decentralised democracy creates democratic structures at the district and as in the Karnataka case, at the mandal level. The elections to the posts of members of these bodies and from among the members, the executive heads, the competing political parties, people, issues and ideologies bring the whole agenda of polity to the doorsteps of the people. The sheer proximity of the centres of new localised governance and the ordinary people make such interactions and feedback possible on a regular basis. An examination as to how this politicisation has actually occurred in the places studied is detailed below.

#### Modes of Politicisation

Earlier, the only ways and means by which the national and state issues were brought before the people was during the time of elections. As the geographical constituency of a Legislative Assembly membership is as big as comprising an electorate of one and one to one and a half lakh people, even the election campaigners could hardly reach all the voters. Campaigns usually consisted of the election meetings and other publicity and propaganda material and hardly ever was an interaction between the representatives and those who were represented. Even though public debates and discussions and the press coverage of the issues involved in the

elections used to be there, these generally involved the urban and educated populations.

The new system of Panchayat Raj with a Zilla Parishad representative for every 28,000 people and a Mandal Panchayat for every 10,000 (average) population with members representing every 500 people has created a replica and a miniature form of governments at the district and village levels. The elections to these institutions and the day to day working of these have created new modes of politicisation.

Awareness of Governance: As seen by this researcher the level of people's awareness of the new structures of self-governance is very encouraging. Infact while this researcher was interviewing non-member voter population, quite many even had information about the allocations which their mandal had received that year and how much the local shops and other business establishments were taxed by the mandal. The people had complete information of the wealth, sources of income and the activities of their mandal members.

This rural politicisation has particularly been accentuated in two ways. First, the Zilla Parishad government at the districts and more so, the Mandal Panchayats, act as miniature form of government for people's education. The Mandal Panchayat by placing the

structure, issues, problems and finances of governance in a simple way helps people understand the intricacies of democratic governments. For instance, people interviewed readily referred to the local Mandal Pradhans as the 'CM' of the Mandal.

The other way politicisation occurs is by way of day to day and regular interaction of people with their elected representatives. To satisfy the ever demanding nature of the constituents, the members of the local body are compelled to explain the resource position and constraints of the mandal to the people. The sheer proximity of these elected representatives to the people make them answerable to all enquiries and accusations.

However, the level of awareness about these structures of governance varied between peoples. The educated people and those residing near the headquarters of the Mandal Panchayat had better knowledge of panchayat affairs than the illiterate and those residing in far off places.

#### Attitudes towards Political Process:

A discernible change in people's attitude towards politics was also observed. The respondents were specifically asked to explain what they felt about the governmental work and facilities in the period before Panchayat Raj came and the one at present. A majority of them felt that after the coming of the new structures they

have had very many facilities like approach roads, drinking water facilities, street lights etc. Some even said that the combined changes that have happened in their village in the last five years was more than all that had occurred in the last forty years.

Four distinct kind of attitudes were observed among the respondents about the new Panchayat Raj bodies. First was a kind of enthusiastic participation seen usually among the friends and relatives of the mandal representatives. This group was all praise for the PR experiments and listed out all the 'achievements' and initiatives of the mandal in the preceding years. Most of them also complained that the finances available with the mandals was meagre and the limited success of the mandal was essentially because of that. They pleaded for more grants under the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana and wanted all the Zilla Parishad developmental works to be channelised through the mandals only.

The second type of response group was that of those who felt satisfied by the performance of the new local bodies. This was the predominant response in the three mandals that this researcher observed. The response often contained the mentioning of a few public works that the mandal had undertaken and being satisfied with having at least what they have newly got. When asked repeatedly if they had any complaints against the working of the mandal they either mentioned one or two public

facilities which they wanted for their locality/vicinity or felt that the mandal has not done anything to help them particularly.

Acquiescence was the third type of group response. This response was observed specially among those who had not benefitted from the mandal programmes and from the elderly citizens. Quite a significant number of respondents felt that the mandal has not meant anything to them at all. When asked about mandal works, they felt that their vicinity or village has not had any or enough of the mandal's public works. A few who even refused to respond to the questions of this researcher stating 'there is not anything to speak of' could also be grouped in this category.

Those spoke against the very Panchayat Raj structures or those who spoke cynically of the works of mandal are classified in the fourth category of responses. These usually spoke of the corrupt practices of Pradhan and other members, of the mandal having been a pocketborough of certain leader or of a certain caste group and of the increased personal enmities and group clashes on account of the coming of the mandal Panchayat. When this researcher cross checked the respondents, it was found that a couple of them were defeated in the elections to the mandal memberships and as such had been sidelined in the village affairs. None the less, the allegations were

valid and genuine in many a case.

The increased awareness is bringing about positive attitudes towards government among the people. They no more fear the local officials and confidently enter the government offices with a sense of belongingness. People have also come to look towards their representatives at mandal and Zilla Parishad levels to keep a watchful eye on the government services and redress the snags, if any.

#### Penetration of Political Parties and Leadership

A society undergoing politicisation needs secular political institutions for necessary impetus and structural support. Political parties are one such which can fulfill this role. There has been a raging debate whether political parties' involvement in the politics of local self government is necessary or not. While the Gandhian and Sarvodaya advocates have pleaded for partyless elections and constitution of Panchayat Raj bodies, there has been a vocal group of Political students and political leaders who have prescribed elections on party basis and constitution of local self government by the party holding majority support. Infact many have even urged the governments to enforce anti-defection rule as it is in force in Parliament and state legislatures.

One of the latent objectives of the introduction of the new Panchayat Raj structures in Karnataka by the then Janata ministry was that it may help the party to

spread itself and have organic links with the politics in the hinterland. Infact it was successful to a very large extent. out of the 54,894 seats to which elections were held in January 1987, the Janata Party bagged 27,333 (50.27%) seats as against Congress' 20,676 (38.03%), while BJP, CPI, CPM, Independent candidates and others together accounted for 6355 (11.69%) seats. In the Zilla Parishad elections, out of the 883 seats contested, Janata won 447 and out of 881 it contested, Congress won 396 seats. There were 829 independent candidates also in the fray, though they could win 37 seats only.

However, the all-Karnataka proportion of distribution of seats between the two major political parties was not seen in the three mandals studied intensely. The party break-up of these mandals is given below.

TABLE 4.1

PARTY REPRESENTATION IN THE MANDALS STUDIED

	Edajigalemane	Masuru	Tyagarti	Total
Janata Dal	8	2	6	16
Congress	6	13	11	30
Ind./Others	-	-	-	-
Nominated	2	2	2	6
Total members	16	17	19	52

The reason for this divergence is the role played by the influential and dynamic local legislator, Mr.Kagodu Timmappa. The Congress party had



controlled two of the three i.e., Masuru and Tyagarti mandals. Edajigalemane mandal was held by Janata Dal. The Janata led Shimoga Zilla Parishad nominated members have remained loyal to the party which nominated them. With this, the two parties, Janata Dal and Congress have had a respectable representation in all the three mandals. Though the absence of any independent member could be attributed to the chance factor, the trend of preference for party candidates should not go unnoticed.

On enquiry, most of the elected members claimed that they won out of their personal standing and popularity in the village. They, however, admitted that party nomination gave legitimacy to this personal standing of theirs and avoided the possibility of facing one more party candidate. On a holistic estimation it was found that but for party support and nomination, it would not have been possible for both members and the Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan to get elected from their respective constituencies.

#### Voting Consistency in Elections to the Post of Pradhan

The three mandals studied exhibited three different models of voting consistency. The Edajigaemane mandal saw total consistency in members affinity to parties as well as their support to the Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan. Hence the office bearers belonging to Janata Party (later Janata Dal) enjoyed continuous spell for one full term.

In the Masuru mandal, consistency in party affiliation was seen. However, an informal arrangement made at the beginning of term for sharing the post of Pradhan among two members, both of Congress and from the same community, broke up when the time for the change came. The incumbent forced his way through. The dispute which ensued was resolved by the local MLA who hails from the same mandal.

The Tyagarti mandal saw both party defections and intra-party shift in loyalties to the post of Pradhan. Originally, an informal arrangement had been agreed upon to share the posts of Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan between two pairs of aspirants, all of Congress Party. When the second half of the term was mid way through, two Janata members of a certain caste went over to the Congress party and with the support of the Congress members of their own caste, captured the post of Pradhan. The incident poorly reflected on the affairs of that mandal and was more laughed at than resented by the people of the mandal.

In all, the party affiliations of the mandal members seemed quite resilient even under threats and bribes. And, by the corollary of representative democracy, this consistency in party loyalty of the mandal members may be said to be reflecting on the attitudes of the general electorate too.

### Trends in Parties' Functioning:

The political parties' functioning and functionaries were also observed in the three mandals. Even though there were not any party properties or offices in the mandals, the parties had had a working structure. The taluka centre, Sagara, had the party offices of Janata Dal, Congress and the BJP. This taluka unit acted as the command center for all the party functionaries in the mandals.

In Edajigalemane and Masuru mandals the respective Pradhans acted as the heads of their parties' structure. Prominent opposition members in these mandals, acted as the chief representatives of their respective parties. As such while the Pradhan, one K.M.Suryanarayana headed the Janata Dal unit of the mandal, a respectable opposition member, S.K.Chandra spoke for his party in the mandal. In Masuru, while the Pradhan K.Holliyappa of Congress was the chief of the mandal unit of his party, another young opposition Janata Dal member K.B.Gurubasappa, belonging to a respectable Lingayat family, headed his party's unit. These local leaders were the ones who were contacted for mobilisational purposes during elections by the taluk and district party leaders.

The third mandal had been in a state of disarray as regards party matters. While the Janata Dal had faced dissensions and defections, the Congress was a divided lot on purely caste grounds.

Considering party mobilisation and activity, the Janata Dal in all the three mandals had a low key profile. H.V.Chandrashekhara, the local Zilla Parishad member, Janata Dal, deplored the sorry state of affairs of his party and opined that the demoralising trend was due to the party's defeat at the Lok Sabha election of June-July 1991. He felt that a 'new wave' at the state level favouring his party was needed to rejuvenate the local units.

The other party, Congress, seemed to be in robust health. The party sympathisers showed keen interest in readily identifying themselves with the party. The overwhelming personal hold and influence of the local Congress MLA was widely referred to by the respondents. Infact the Pradhan of Masuru mandal claimed that he has got 'innumerable' number of members registered on the rolls of the party to help his leader in the then keenly contested (early 1992) intra-party elections. On being further enquired, he confided that most of the newly enrolled members belonged to his own caste.

Not a single mandal member owed his allegiance to the Bharatiya Janata Party nor did party hold any mandal in the Sagara taluka. Even then, in the July 1991 election to the Lok Sabha, the BJP candidate polled 32,462 votes while the JD candidate came third with a mere 3,608 votes in the taluk segment. This has belied the importance which the parties had given to the grassroots party build up.

### The Role of Leadership

The ZP and mandals have thrown up a new generation of local leaders. These leaders have shown keen interest in understanding the processes of governance and have been the missing link between the rural masses and the cumbersome bureaucratic machineries of government. While they have articulated the preferences and priorities of the masses at the tiers of planning and resource allocations, they have been of vital utility in impressing upon the people the constraints of democratic rule.

The following observations made have had the base of a detailed study by mode of interviews with various local leaders and verifications of claims and counter claims in the three mandals.

The new mandal members have instantly been recognised as the leaders of their respective communities. As the system offers to have elected a representative for every 500 population, communities with even 15 to 20 houses in a village have had the ability to get their person of choice elected. This in turn has provided opportunities for even minority groups to have a say in the affairs of the local governance.

The local leaders have been under tremendous pressure from the demands of the people. Even though cases of over-asking and demands at wrong places were often

observed, the general requests of the people were found to be genuine and appropriate. These demands have kept the members constantly on the watchout to get developmental works sanctioned to their village, locality and vicinity. They are found guiding and escorting the illiterate and ignorant villagers to the financial institutions and other governmental departments and helping to get the work done at the earliest.

All the mandal members, Pradhans and Upa Pradhans met were questioned whether they dealt in any mediation and dispute settlements. The standard reply was a claim that they looked into and did their best to solve the local disputes. The Pradhan of Edajigalemane informed that not a single case has been left unattended to go unresolved to the police station. The researcher followed two such cases of disputes one each at Masuru and Tyagarti.

A case of 'bagair-hukum' land appropriation was reported at the Hirenellur village of Masuru mandal. Though the contiguous land appropriation, especially in case of soppina tota (woods adjacent to a beetle-nut plantation), has been a practice normally uncontested in the Western Ghats, this particular case involving the Brahmin (Havyaka) appropriators took an unexpected turn. The mandal with obvious Deevuru Community (a Backward caste) dominance ordered the appropriators to file an application of intent to the mandal and, meanwhile, stop making use of

the appropriated land. Sensing that further trouble could be in line, the appropriators withdrew from the appropriated land. This incident had enraged the local Havyaka population against the mandal and especially its Pradhan.

At Kudigere village of Tyagarti mandal another case involving land ownership was studied. The local Scheduled Caste (Adi Karnataka) families had laid claim for ownership rights over a 3 acre land which they had been cultivating 'for long'. The legal owners of the land, a Veerashiva family, held only 12 acres of land and could hardly be put under land ceiling provisions. The case, when brought before the mandal, was resolved in favour of the legal owners of the land itself. When this researcher questioned the mandal Pradhan had not the mandal decision deprived the scheduled caste families of some permanent support to live on. Pradhan replied that as otherwise, the case would have gone to the court and would have been decided in favour of the legal owners only. He also claimed that mandal's decision saved the precious resources of both the parties to the dispute from being needlessly spent in the legal processes.

In all, the mediatory role of the local leaders depended on their image of being impartial, unbiased and dignified. The standing of these leaders was determined by the 'good things' they had delivered as having been members or office bearers of the mandal.

### Entrepreneurial Initiative:

When the Panchayat bodies took office there were high hopes on the role to be played by the local leaders. It was expected that they would take up entrepreneurial initiatives like market information, seeds and manures procurement and initiate better and scientific practice of practice of agriculture. The hopes have not come true fully as the local leaders themselves are looking for the State departmental organisations to deliver the goods. However, the number of these men of resources taking to contractorship has increased significantly. These leaders have taken to private entrepreneurship in taking up contracts of governmental as well as mandal's petty-piecemeal jobs. Though the Panchayat Act prohibits the members from taking up their own mandal's contracts, the rule has been circumvented to their benefit by the Pradhan and other prominent members. Infact in two mandals , it was informally agreed upon to hand over the job to the member or whomever that member wishes, in whose constituency the job is sanctioned. This arrangement had minimised the trouble and allegation of misappropriation for mandal Pradhan, also provided an extra service of privilege for the member.

This researcher checked up whether any ZP or mandal functionaries have wrested control of the sole cooperative institution in the taluk, the Beetlenut Sellers



Association. This was not to be found. However, it was known that the local mandal Pradhans and other prominent members were kept informed of the market trends and given a say at the local collection centres.

In summation, it could be said that the Panchayat Raj bodies have given opening for newer means of representation. The newly emergent local leadership openly talks and understands politics. It is apparent that a grass-roots' tier of political activists, articulators, communicators and leaders who can shoulder the task of local self-governance has emerged.

### NOTES

1. The researcher conducted an survey of voter population's reaction to new Panchayat Raj structures with a set of questions. This set is scheduled in Appendix-B.

2. For a historical analysis of this debate, see Bhargava.B.S.Panchayat Raj System and Political Parties (New Delhi, Ashish, 1979) pp-8-16

3. Source:Office of the Chief Electoral Officer,Karnataka,1987; as quoted in ISS-Occasional Papers Series-7,Karnataka Mandal Panchayat Members Social Background 1990(New Delhi, ISS, 1990).

4. Figures quoted in ISS Occasional Paper Series-6 Social Background of ZP Members in Karnataka-1989(New Delhi, ISS, 1989) pp-8-9

## CHAPTER V

### PARTICIPATION AND PARTISANSHIP:

#### A GROUP PERSPECTIVE TO RURAL POLITICS

This chapter deals with two other most important factors, participation and partisanship, which are influenced by the introduction of structures of local governance. The logic of how decentralisation accentuates politicisation and penetration holds good in the case of these two factors too. The creation of the essential structures and the provision of incentives in terms of political posts and other spoils to be claimed act as necessary impetus to intensify the processes of participation and partisanship.

People's participation was itself one of the reasons for which the debate over decentralisation had its real beginning in 1950s. The poor results of the early Community Development programme were attributed to lack of people's interest, enthusiasm and participation in these. Decentralisation, in terms of district, block and village tiers of local self governments, was suggested as the only possible remedy to set right the snags in rural development programmes.

The slackening standard of efficiency, improper planning, poor implementation and rampant corruption in bureaucracy have over the years resuscitated the need of people's participation. While the Press and other people's

vigilance bodies have been keeping more than a watchful eye over the public institutions of rule, a strong need for people's authority to control these has also been put as a demand.

Panchayat Raj experiments have been tried out just to provide for this long felt need. The Karnataka Act of 1985 provides for a fully representative Zilla Parishad with independent and substantial finance, Mandal Panchayats with necessary minimal resources to keep them functioning, and the Gram Sabhhas for the people to air their needs and grievances and monitor the work in the mandal.

#### Avenues for People's Participation

The urge to participate in the new structures was explicitly evident from the very beginning with a very high percentage of voting in the elections to the mandals. Infact the voting percentage for ZP, which has vast powers compared to the paultry power and resources with the mandals, was lower than that of the voters turnout for the latter's election. This could also be attributed to the strong voting motivations inspired by an intensive and personal campaign by the contenders for local supremacy.

Nearly all the respondents this researcher met, informed that they had voted in the last elections to the ZP and mandals. A couple of them who had not voted were quick to inform that they were not in the village on the day of the polls or were out of the mandals

on some unavoidable work. And, barring a few who complained against the violence in the mandals, nearly all expressed their eagerness to vote in the next Panchayat elections. This attitude was further confirmed when a majority of them wanted the elections to be held immediately to the then superceded mandals and Zilla Parishads.

#### Gram Sabhas:

The Karnataka Panchayat Act of 1985 had required the mandals to hold Gram Sabha meetings at least once in six months in all the villages of the mandal. In these, the Pradhan of the mandal was to give a report of the mandal's resource position and activities, to elicit people's responses and to select the beneficiaries under the various schemes of assistance. The experience of three mandals studied differed on this account.

There were four rounds of Gram Sabha meetings held in the Edajigalemane mandal. All of these had been held in the first three years. The Pradhan of the mandal complained that the local population had not shown any interest in participating in the Gram Sabhas. He recalled that the Participant number had not crossed sixty in any of the Gram Sabhas held. When this researcher enquired the same with the people, there were two kind of reactions. One was that of having had complete faith in the capability and integrity of the Pradhan and their respective members. The other set of people said they had

listed out all their requirements from the mandal but were only told by the Pradhan in the subsequent meetings that the resources were not sufficient enough to provide these facilities. This second group had lost faith and shunned away from the later Gram Sabhas. This apparent contradiction had led to not holding of the Gram Sabhas in the last two years.

Masuru showed a different case, one of negligence towards Gram Sabhas. Two of them were held in Masuru village and nowhere else was there any Gram Sabha in the mandal. The allegations of misappropriation were rampant against the Pradhan. Yet none in the mandal would dare call a Gram Sabha and discuss things, for fear of displeasing the Pradhan. In the mandal, four Scheduled Caste families who had benefited from the Indira Awas Free Housing Scheme could be met. All of them were landless labourers and previously lived in thatched huts. Infact the entire hamlet lived under similar conditions and there could hardly have been any criteria to prefer one to the other. There was not also any trace of any bribes being paid for the benefits.

The third mandal, Tyagarti, though in a state of internal fights and bitter animosities had had six rounds of Gram Sabhas in all the three important mandal segments. Proposals by mandal Pradhan for the betterment of the segment and the proposed names of the beneficiaries were discussed and, here too, the names suggested by the local

mandal representatives were accepted after little deliberation. Later, a group of villagers complained that the Pradhan had a dominating voice in the Gram Sabhas and as such their persistent allegations of biased selection of beneficiaries went unheeded in the meeting.

Hence, a mixed response of people's participation was found in the Gram Sabhas meeting of the three mandals. However what was more interesting was a group response and reaction to the happenings in the mandal as against the expectations of each individual exercising his right to participate independently. This factor is looked into in details in the next section.

#### Group Identity in Local Politics:

A feature found conspicuously when this researcher visited the villages and wanted to talk to the villagers was that of being directed to certain individuals who were held in respect by others. At times, even some mandal members refused to do much talk and preferred to take this researcher to some other prominent member who would, "tell you better". Often, these individuals were not the earlier 'respectable elderly heads of families' and instead were much younger men of 30 to 40 years. These local leaders were always literate, relatively better educated, mobile and articulate men who took interest in politics. All the castes in the village had such informally accepted spokesmen. This was certainly the case with the minority

castes in a village. Among the majority castes in the village, there were more than one spokesman or there were protagonists who dissented from the opinions expressed by such spokesmen.

These individuals had previous experience in cooperative institutions, youth associations and at times in caste organisations. They frequented the mandal headquarters as well as taluka headquarters and tried to get done the things of their kinsmen. They enquired the income and expenditure of the mandals. Having been educated, they were in a position to understand the rules and regulations, and had the wherewithal to see their way through. Their political activities were closely linked to economic services like seeds and manure procurement, marketing of goods and etc. Even though their functioning is similar to that of the local leaders discussed earlier, they may not be elected representatives but often work as contacts and spokesmen for their small communities.

Why and how does this group identity happens in local politics is a serious question. The interests and opinions of the individuals of a group may not be expressed by one person, but they tend to be similar unless in extraordinary circumstances. The possible reasons for this are discussed below.

Ordinarily, the caste groups in a village have close familial and group loyalties which are the



primary bonds deciding all other relationships. In most of the cases the position and interests of the members of a community would be more or less similar. Caste, also being the primary moving factor in electoral politics, co-determines the political positions of the group. As such participation by all the community members is considered unnecessary and leads to division of labour.

A large population in the countryside has been inherently apolitical. Such frowns as 'politics is not for us' and 'which Country are we to rule' are most common. People constantly express their desire to be left alone with their economic and social life. However even these people are caste conscious and exercise their choice alongwith their kinsmen.

The politics of new Panchayat Raj requires certain abilities on the part of the participants. Minimum education, freer mobility, ability to speak as well as stand up and stick to one's own position are necessary in addition to a relatively well off and independent economic status. These requirements effectively neutralise the participatory opportunities of large numbers of people. The pressures of elderly among the caste groups and the desire for cohesion in the group further consolidate this group identity.

Though it cannot be taken as a general rule, it is true that the economic position, i.e., the class character, of a

caste group in a particular region would more or less be the same. While the dominance of the elite groups brings together the lower class-caste groups, the upward mobility of the latter threatens the hitherto privileged position and hence, unifies the former. The challenge of modernity and the conflicts of interests between social groups threatens alike the beleaguered traditionalist, underprivileged protagonist and the minority elite to play it safe within the secure precincts of group identity.

#### Managing Conflicts of Interests:

The socio-economic conditions in the countryside especially after the onset of a structured political set up where in the positions of authority and spoils of the rule are there for stakes, leaves out enough scope for conflicts of interests and the resultant social division, animosity and violence. Handling of this social cleavage is as important as benign governance and developmental efforts. How has this challenging task been handled by the functionaries at the mandal level is examined here.

The three mandals studied provided varied instances of conflict management. As the intensity of the conflicts ranged from thin to acute, the complexity of the solutions also varied accordingly. In all, three patterns - dominance, accommodation and exclusion/deprivation- of management responses were observed. These were not made use of exclusively, but were exercised simultaneously with different combinations to meet

different situations.

The Pradhan of the Edajigalemane had full scope for dominance for having been from a socially and economically dominant majority caste of the mandal. However such authority was used sparingly and successful accommodative practices had been worked out. While taking all major decisions, the Pradhan consulted and always had the consent of a prominent congress member belonging to the Pujari caste. For all other distributive matters and selection of the beneficiaries, the representatives of the concerned areas were given full say. This effectively had eliminated all possible avenues of conflict among the mandal members. However it was found that the pradhan had not taken any initiative on his own to assist the poorer sections, specifically, the tribals in the area.

Contrary to the Edajigalemane mandal, the Pradhan of the Masuru mandal exercised complete dominance both over his own community as well as mandal affairs in general. The Pradhan had a group of members belonging to his own caste and another Lingayat member of Janata Dal to support him and this small group took all the decisions including awarding contracts and selection of beneficiaries. Opponent groups within the party and other caste groups like Havyakas and Scheduled Castes were excluded from and deprived of any privileges.

As in other cases, the Tyagarti mandal offered a complex situation. The first two Pradhans of the mandal were largely accommodative giving decisive say to the members in development activities and selection of beneficiaries in their areas. They also consulted the elders of the sizeable caste groups in the mandal. However the third Pradhan who usurped the office with the help of caste members of Janata Dal and Congress parties, distributed the spoils of the office amongst his own men and showed scant regard to other members and peoples of the mandal.

The extent of the comprehensivity of the patterns of management of conflicts by itself determined the extent and intensity of the discontent and protest in the mandals. For instance, Tyagarti mandal witnessed virulent and vocal protests and when this researcher visited the area, the situation was very volatile. In case of Masuru mandal, the economic status and the blessings of the local MLA had enabled the Pradhan to ignore the discontent and still enjoy a dominant position.

#### Partisanship in Rural Politics

The primary task in the rural polity is to transform the people steeped in traditional perspectives of primordial loyalties into democratic participant citizens. The institutionalisation of decentralised democratic structures still awaits a cultural institutionalisation of

recognition and adoption of the political parties in people's mind. Partisanship is an integrative mechanism serviceable to this end. It relates the ordinary citizens to the political system through the parties active in it. Where partisanship exists, it is possible to say that the new system has had an impact and that people are orienting themselves constructively to it.

Partisanship is generally referred to as a psychological sense of affinity with a party.<sup>2</sup> The party is said to be a reference group; and in identifying with it, people are also defining themselves politically. Partisanship is a major crutch which helps people in a democracy to respond meaningfully to political issues and make choices, when they have to do so with low levels of information and rather primitive conceptual understanding of how different problems relate to one another.

Partisanship offers some promise that political participation will be channelised constructively through parties, elections and other influence networks. It induces people to work within a constitutional framework and plays an important role in building what Rajni Kothari has called "tradition of constitutional behaviour" sustaining and legitimising the formal structure of authority.

Few people actually belong to a political party in the sense that they carry a formal membership card or pay

dues. Infact the very proposition of being partisan is in itself a significant feature in rural areas, perhaps more significant than partisan direction and intensity. Hence, in our study, we asked the people if they identify themselves with any party.

There have also been two more alternatives to this party partisanship which largely act as snags to party affiliation. These are people's affiliation to traditional or sectarian institutions and people's identification with a personality instead of the party in which he is in. In our pattern of study we took note of all these variations to bring out a clear picture.

#### Identification with Personalities and Traditional Institutions

A significant feature of politics in Karnataka is the hold and influence of the community 'Mutts' over their respective populations. The seers of these Mutts decide and determine the candidatures of parties in elections. At places, the caste associations also hold remarkable influence over the population to make or mar the prospects of electoral candidates. People's loyalty and devotion to these institutions forces the leaders to toe the line of these conservative elements.

In the mandals studied, while the general trends were found in lesser intensities, certain distinctive features did stand out. The influence of the mutts which is found

as a dominating influence in other parts was found only among the small Lingayat section of Masuru and Tyagarti mandals. These minority populations were outnumbered in electoral politics and their associations with the Mutts was more to preserve their identity than for any political purposes. The mandal members belonging to these communities too relied on the support of similar minority castes in the villages.

The Havyaka population showed a strong sentiment of caste association. Nearly all the respondents of this community interviewed were in one way or the other associated with the caste association. Though it was common assumption that the Havyakas vote en bloc in the Parliament and Assembly elections, the mandal representatives belonging to the community were evenly spread out between Janata Dal and Congress.

The most prominent community of the region, Deevuru Community, did not have any Mutt or strong caste association to control the community people. However the local leaders of these communities wielded considerable influence over the communities; for instance, in the Sagara taluka were the two Deevuru leaders, Kagodu Timmappa and Dharmappa. As Mr. Timmappa was more popular and in a position of power, any of his followers expressing discontent used to be immediately dubbed as 'agents' of Mr. Dharmappa. The Pradhans of both Masuru and Tyagarti mandals, belonging to the Deevuru community,

admitted that they owed their position to the grace of Mr. Timmappa. Even the interviewed people of the community stated that whoever nominated by Mr. Timmappa was sure to win the elections.

Group Identities and Partisanship:

Even in the face of the deviations and transgressions caused by primordial loyalties, partisanship was seen quite on a secular basis. But instead of individuals or families being basic units of partisan entities, there were the group formations in villages that took decisive sides. The leaders or spokesmen of the groups were the ones strongly politicised and participated in the political activities. The leanings of these country men, determined the positions the community was to take. Even though such leaders of the community could have faulted or misguided the people on a couple of occasions and made hay, the general interests of all in the group/community would just had to be protected or rewarded.

Most of the group entities were affiliated to parties in a rather loose way. The positions taken by the group in the preceding elections and the position of the party in different tiers of government determined the intensity of the group's party identification. For instance, the Congress was in power in the state as well as the dissolved mandals of Tyagarti and Masuru. Hence the Deeveru, Gangamata and Scheduled Caste groups in these



mandals readily identified themselves with the Congress and claimed having strong links with party leaders. Whereas, the Havyakas and Lingayats who had supported the Janata Dal in the ZP and mandals, lied low at the time of this study, for, the Parishads and mandals had been superseded by the State Government and the Janata Dal had twice been drubbed in elections.

These groups' party affiliation seemed to have been prevalent at least since the last Panchayat elections five years ago. There was a distinct possibility, however, for these loyalties to change given a change in the caste equations between parties at the state level or due to defection by any powerful local leader.

The group entities keenly followed the policies and positions of their respective parties and made sure these are not against their interests. For instance, the Gangamata and SC/ST families often mentioned and thanked the government for the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana, under which they were the wage earners and Indira Awas Free Housing Schemes.

The intensity of party identification of these groups also determined the rewards due for them. This mutual process of loyalty and rewards strengthened the need and efficiency of party identification.

Individual partisanship was not altogether absent in the mandals. These usually belonged to the rural middle

class and, often, were fairly well educated. Their number depended on the relative socio- educational advancement made by social groups in the village. they belonged, as seen by this researcher, either to Havyaka or Lingayat caste, and their number hardly crossed a couple of families. Even these individuals had a dual support syndrome of identification with one party at the state or national level and with another party or a local leader of that party at the mandal level. They also stressed that local considerations subverted their otherwise strong party affiliations.

In all, the group formations in the villages have been the primary and decisive factors in influencing the people's participation and partisanship. These group entities have also provided informal channels for community representation and for easier identification for the purpose of equal distribution of posts, benefits, and other spoils. While, on the one hand, these have initiated the political process where it had not existed hitherto, they have, on the other hand, come in the way of individuals' participation and partisanship on a secular basis.

## NOTES

1. There was about 10% to 12% difference in percentage voting between ZP and mandals in the 1987 elections. Infact, a strong motivation on people's part to vote for the representatives at mandal level also ensured a good percentage of voting for ZP membership.

2. For an elaboration of the concept, see: Barber, James Daniel, Readings in Citizen Politics: Studies of Political Behaviour (Chicago; Markham, 1969) p-61; and Field, John Osgood, Consolidating Democracy: Politicisation and Partisanship in India (New Delhi, Manohar, 1980) pp-55-74.

3. Kothari, Rajani, Tradition and Modernity Revisited, Government and Opposition, 3 (Summer, 1988), p-282.

4. See questions 9-12 in Appendix-B.

## CHAPTER-VI

### TOWARDS CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY - A REAL BEGINNING

How far has the decentralisation measure effected the consolidation of democracy as viewed in the second chapter of this thesis, is a matter of serious contention. The reforms brought about have been substantial, yet the direction towards which these are addressed have been widely divergent. The earlier studies<sup>1</sup> on Karnataka experiment have taken into consideration the representation which the different communities have got in the zilla Parishad for basing their conclusions. Perhaps, a detailed and intensive study of the processes at work in the rural politics through close first person observation would have best suited such evaluative purposes. Moreover, any change initiated in the rural polity is discernible rather clearly only in a localised study.

The Karnataka experiment had quite many positive aspects. At the structural level, a rule-structure for equi-distribution of the denoted resources of the district among the mandals has been a significant step. The per-capita grant and the funds under the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana distributed on balanced and equitable principles have ensured that the developmental and other public works are distributed equally among all the mandals in the district.

The overarching contribution of the decentralisation measure has been the intense and widespread politicisation it has brought about. The proximity to rule and the rulers has enabled the ruled to interact on a day to day regularity and have an understanding of and acquaintance with the rules. People have no more been strangers to institutions of governance. They have also monitored and regulated the state services like health and education.

The new awareness created among the people has helped them to articulate their wants in a better way. The oppressed peoples like the landless labourers, Scheduled Castes, tribals and others have also been strongly pulled into this process of politicisation. This has lessened the hitherto ignored and underplayed socio-economic exploitative practices like forced labour at meagre wages, caste distribution and etc.

This politicisation has impressed upon the common people the stakes in governance, and by creating miniature structures of governance, has highlighted the necessity of people's involvement apart from creating a sense of efficacy of people's governance in the rural areas. The new democratically elected representative leadership has attempted, with the structural support of political parties, to de-bureaucratise the system. The political

executive at local levels has been quite successful in making the local administration accountable and responsible. The priorities of the people have got reflected in the planning, and substantial improvements in the implementation are there for all to see for themselves.

The party penetration has meant that the people have been brought in, and integrated into, the broader political spectrum. The new batch of the local leaders has provided representation to the minority social groups i.e., caste groups having a few families residing in villages. The prospect of competition and accreditation for newer batch of leaders in miniscule constituencies, as in the mandal memberships, has for the first time given leverage for miniscule caste groups of villages in electoral politics and enfolded them in the prevailing political atmosphere.

On the social plane, by offering power and spoils at stake, decentralisation has brought to fore the social conflicts in the villages. However, the penetration of parties has moderated the tone and tenor of these conflicts by linking and posing them as broader struggles waged on behalf of the peoples by the political parties. This mutuality of support, patronage and protection among the social groups of the parties has

opened up more flexible avenues for social mobility and liberalisation.

Localisation has balanced the benefits and resource allocation among regions as well as social communities. It has also put severe restrictions on the tyrannical inclinations of the majority group. Even though the local elites' power base has risen considerably, the diversity in caste composition of this elite group has come to mean the diffusion and distribution of the political and distributive power which hitherto had centred in the provincial capital or among the prominent district level leaders. Moreover, stricter regulations on expenditure of funds of the local bodies on prescribed plans and programmes and for the welfare of certain poor and depressed social groups have been of significance in emphasising local bodies' role in socio amelioration and equitable distribution of public income and resources.

Group formations in the rural areas have emerged as the working units for all political - participatory and partisanship - purposes. Even though they have essentially come together as caste interest groups or fractions there of, these latently rigid entities have been dynamic and flexible in actuality and have been the kinetic motive factors in grassroots

politics. In addition, the stratagem of participatory role and partisan positions of these groups has distinctly and dominantly been on secular considerations.

This does not, however, mean that decentralisation has brought about consolidation of democracy in Karnataka. There have been major handicaps and innumerable snags which have hindered the process. An examination of these is in order of things.

As for politicisation, there were both qualitative and quantitative limitations. Even though significant numbers of the majority and dominant groups in the villages were drawn into the political process, it was limited only to the educated or reasonably well to do of the minority groups in the villages. Substantial portion of the rural population is still apathetic to the Panchayati reforms.

People's expectations of the new local bodies have continued to be narrow and traditional. Most of the mandals' works, hence, have been limited to laying roads, constructing bus shelters and, at best, provision of drinking water facilities. Direct and effective developmental initiatives, like newer irrigation facilities and agro-based rural industries on co-operative basis have been limited.



The spread of political parties has also not been in an organised way. Many a time even the Pradhans of mandals had not been formal members of the party. The organic link of certain parties with grassroots units was crumbling under pressure of continued severance of power. There were no systematised functioning in enrolling party members, holding elections and running party offices.

Local leaders have circumvented the balancing role of the opposition parties by co-opting and sharing the spoils of authority with the prominent members of the opposition. At places, the sheer dominance of local leaders has marginalised any dissent and opposition possible. In such cases, the erosion of efficacy of rule and disincentives for participation have considerably weakened the local bodies.

People's participatory response has been nowhere near the expectations. People's interest and attendance in the Gramsabhas itself has been found lacking. And, instead of utilising the mandal as a collective institution for participatory developmental efforts, they have come to look up to mandals to fulfill their needs. While the group entities in villages have at least been the functional political units, it cannot be said with certainty that these have not provided easy avenues for co-optation and sharing of spoils among elites. Till the time awareness

and participatory practices sink down at least to the level of family units, neither will the group interests be properly forwarded nor will the institutions of local democracy be strengthened.

The traditional loyalties of caste have still had a sway over the partisanship behaviour of the individuals. Here too, though the collective partisanship behaviour of the identifiable groups in the villages has well been appreciated, partisanship on an individual basis would have got reflected in more committed leadership working to people's priorities, in addition to being socially liberal and flexible in itself.

The participatory and partisanship factors were also expected to act as catalysts for the spread of secular political institutions replacing the traditional institutions of caste and clan loyalties. However, at least for now, this has not been the case and, on the contrary, the traditional institutions themselves have tried to influence politics by their strong group participatory and partisanship roles.

Finally, two inter-related factors of dominance by the supra-local elites and the social amelioration of the backward and oppressed remain to be explained. Earlier

studies on the decentralisation experiment in Karnataka have viewed that the already existant dominance of the majoritarian peasant castes have received a shot in their arm on account of the local bodies. However, the study in the three mandals by this researcher showed that this was not acceptable as a generality. The thorough politicisation of all the social groups in the villages has made politics more open and transparent. Any exercise of sheer dominance by the majority groups in villages could only be at the cost of their obvious majoritarian dominance and the legitimacy of rule. Such dominance, at its worst, could take the form of blatant pilfering of funds of local bodies. In actuality, the electoral politics and the necessity of physical support apparatus have made inevitable the involvement and cooperation of the minority and backward groups in the villages.

Dominance is one, social amelioration of the poor and depressed classes is another. Even though the majority and dominant groups in mandals have not tried to dominate over all others, they have done little to economically assist the poor and depressed classes but for grudgingly enacting the legally prescribed percentage of expenditure out of mandal funds exclusively for benefitting the Scheduled Castes and Tribes. People, however, felt that these paltry sums spent have been an improvement over what has accrued to the benefit of these

communities all these decades. In addition, the decentralisation measure has propped up an increasingly vigilant and articulate young leadership among the poor and depressed classes. With the structural support of local bodies, elections and parties, and with stakes in power, authority and spoils, it is up to these populations to struggle it out for a greater share of the local resources and wealth. This struggle could as always integrate and draw support from the broader and unified struggles of poor and oppressed struggles in larger areas.

Karnataka has remained being a cohesive and relatively egalitarian society with a stable democracy. Decentralisation, in actuality, has tested the validity of this generalisation at much deeper levels in much effective terms. Does this experiment lead to a phase of consolidated democracy is a difficult question to be answered in an experimental period of mere five years. The early and clearly discernible indications, however, are definitely positive and a pointer in this direction. It could certainly be stated that the new decentralisation experiment in Karnataka from 1987 to 1992 has initiated a real beginning towards consolidation of democracy.

**NOTES:**

1. Ray, Amal and Kambatla, Jayalakshmi, Zilla Parishad Presidents in Karnataka : Their Social Background and Implications for Development, in Economic and Political Weekly, (Oct. 17-24, 1987), pp-1825-30; and Bhargava, B.S. and Shivanna, N., 'Emerging Pattern of Leadership in Panchayati Raj System : Caste Study of a Zilla Parishad in Karnataka', Indian Journal of Administrative Science, pp-321-45; and, Institute of Social Sciences, The New Panchayat Raj in Karnataka: An Evaluation, (New Delhi, ISS, 1992). The last one, however, has also been based on an all-Karnataka field survey.
2. Ray and Kambatla, op.cit., p-24, Bhargava and Sivanna, op.cit., p-340 and Institute of Social Sciences, op.cit., pp-126-128.

## APPENDIX-A

The following is the list of all the functionaries of the Zilla Parishad and the mandals interviewed. These elaborate interviews were conducted between 15th. of March to 10th. of April 1992.

1. Mr. Rameseshan, S. - Chief Secretary, -2P, Shimoga.
2. Mr. R. R. Kusgoor - Chief Planning Officer- ,,
3. Mr. H. C. Mahadevappa - President - ,,
4. Mr. H. V. Chandrashekhar - Member - ,,
5. Mr. Patel Rangappa - ,, - ,,
6. Mr. Basavaraju - B. D. O. - Sagara, Taluk.
7. M. Subbakrishna - Secretary - Edajigalemane, Mandal.
8. Mr. Suryanarayana - Pradhan - ,,
9. Mr. K. S. Timmappa - Member - ,,
10. Mr. Narayanappa - ,, - ,,
11. Mr. S. Ky Chandra - ,, - ,,
12. Mr. Bhaskar, V. - Secretary - Tygarti Mandal.
13. Mr. T. K. Krishnappa - Pradhan - ,,
14. Mr. A. K. Kariyappa - Member - ,,
15. Mr. Veerabhadraiah - ,, - ,,
16. Mr. Gutyappa - ,, - ,,
17. Smt. Kalavatamma - ,, - ,,
18. Mr. Yashodhana - Secretary - Masuru Mandal.
19. Mr. K. Holiyappa - Pradhan - ,,
20. Mr. K. B. Gurubasappa - Member - ,,
21. Mr. Basavanyappa - ,, - ,,
22. Mr. H. N. Narayanappa - ,, - ,,
23. Smt. Huchchamma - ,, - ,,

## APPENDIX-B

The following is the set of questions made use of as a standard reference while taking the response of the voter population of the mandals studied.

### (1) Information and Awareness

1. Who is your mandal Pradhan?
2. Name all the villages under the jurisdiction of your Mandal?
3. Under whose governance is your Zilla Parishad presently?

### (2) Attitude

4. Have there been any benefits to your village/surroundings from ZP/MP?
5. It is said Panchayat Raj decentralises corruption and not power and authority. Is this right in the light of your experience?
6. Should there be elections to continue this system of ZP/MP?

### (3) Participation

7. Had you cast your vote in the last ZP/MP elections?
8. Had you ever demanded the convening of Gram Sabha / Had you been participating in the Gram Sabha regularly?
9. Had you taken part in any rally/conference/struggle outside your Mandal in the last five years?

**(4) Identification / Affiliation**

10. Can you name any ZP/MP member who would protect your 'own' interest?
11. Have you been a member/or taken participation in your community/caste organisation?
12. Have you been consistently supporting any regional/national party?



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