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## **GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPMENT IN KARNATAKA**

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**Governance and Development in Karnataka**

**A Symposium in**

*Economic and Political Weekly*

**Edited by**

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**Governance and the “Karnataka Model of Development”  
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**Abstract**

This paper considers the idea of a “Karnataka model of development,” with its emphasis on technology and governance led development. It is the introduction to a Symposium in *Economic and Political Weekly* on “Governance and Development in Karnataka.” Based on the papers in the Symposium, and on the wider literature, the paper explores the interpretation and application of the idea. It argues that while some of Karnataka’s experience does indeed conform to the model and thus holds out lessons for development, there are significant gaps between reality and the model, and these gaps have lessons for development as well.

# Governance and the “Karnataka Model of Development”<sup>1</sup>”

Gopal K. Kadekodi, Ravi Kanbur and Vijayendra Rao

## The Karnataka Model

Karnataka embodies the challenges and contradictions that are faced by the rest of India – spectacular technology-led growth in Bangalore tempered with an abiding sense of the city’s ungovernability, enduring gender inequity and regional disparities, and a visibly increasing gap between urban and rural areas<sup>2</sup>. Yet, Karnataka is also increasingly being seen a model of development. Bangalore’s metamorphosis from a noun to a verb is the archetypical symbol of an India “unbound,” and Karnataka’s pioneering experiment with Panchayati Raj reform under the Hegde government in the 1980’s sparked the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and the consequent and continuing wave of devolutions in finance and power to panchayats. This emphasis on technology-led growth coupled with local government reform is, at least in theory, a singularly innovative strategy to address the challenge of generating growth with equity and can be described as the “Karnataka Model” of development.

The Karnataka model should more accurately be called the “Mysore model” because the strategy was not arrived serendipitously. It has century-old roots in policy decisions taken by the princely state of Mysore. As Manu Bhagavan (2003) has shown, the then Maharaja of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wadiyar, advised by his Diwan cum Chief Engineer M. Visweswaraya, instituted several initiatives to improve the quality of higher education in the state, with a particular emphasis on technology and the sciences. Additionally, in 1905, the Government of Mysore persuaded JN Tata to locate the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore subsidized by a land-grant, and an annual government subsidy of Rs. 50,000. These initiatives did two things – they produced generations of highly trained engineers and scientists in the state, and they encouraged an atmosphere conducive to scientific and technological innovation<sup>3</sup>. Both were, arguably, crucial elements in Bangalore’s “take-off<sup>4</sup>.”

Similarly, the Mysorean roots of panchayati raj go very deep. The historian Christopher Bayly (2006) has recently stated that the terms *panchayat* and “sabha” in the context of village institutions were first articulated by Ram Raz, based on his experience as a “native judge” in Mysore about 200 years ago. These were then adopted by North Indian

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<sup>1</sup> We thank Srilata Batliwala, Arjan De Haan, Jeffrey Hammer, Maitreyi Krishnaraj, Lant Pritchett, and other scholars for their help with this symposium. S. Madheswaran did a splendid job of supervising the conference logistics.

<sup>2</sup> See Narayana (2004) and Sen (2004) for an analysis of the factors behind Bangalore’s high-tech growth and the challenges of extending high-growth rates to the rest of the state.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note another Wadiyar initiative that has had an international impact. The Maharaja of Mysore instituted excellent Sanskrit schools and a university that, along with instruction in texts, taught the theory and practice of yoga. BKS Iyengar and K. Pattabhi Jois were both students at the yoga school and Jois continued his studies at the Sanskrit university. They, of course, went on to spearhead the international yoga movement via the Iyengar and Ashtanga schools that they, respectively, founded.

<sup>4</sup> See Kadekodi (2004a) for more on Visweswaraya’s vision.

writers and subsequently absorbed into the nationalist canon via Gandhiji's vigorous advocacy (Gandhi, 1962). "Modern" PRI reforms in Karnataka can be traced at least as far back as Krishnaraja Wadiyar's expansion of local self-government in 1902-03 which created 8 district and 77 taluk boards. Nataraj and Anantpur (2004) document the subsequent history of panchayat reforms in Karnataka; In 1918, the Mysore Local Boards and Village Panchayat Act was passed which provided for the election of half of the representatives in district and two-thirds in taluk boards respectively; In 1926 a two-tier scheme with village panchayats and district boards was established, abolishing taluk boards, with both bodies provided with power and independent sources of revenue; and in the post-independence period several acts and bills were passed culminating in the 1983 Act under the Hegde government whose provisions were adopted, with a few modifications, by the authors of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Indian constitution<sup>5</sup>.

Karnataka, of course, is not entirely Mysorean. It was constructed by merging Mysore State with the Kannada-speaking parts of Hyderabad, Bombay and Madras in 1956. In particular, the districts that came from old Hyderabad tended to have lower living standards and infrastructure than the rest of Karnataka at the time, and this lag persists to this day causing a high degree of regional imbalance in the state (Sen, 2004). This regional imbalance perhaps has as much to do with geography and climate as it does with policy, but the fact that it has prevailed for two centuries indicates important path-dependencies in government and social action.

In June of 2005 we organized an inter-disciplinary conference at the Institute for Social and Economic Change in Bangalore that examined various aspects of development in Karnataka. In this issue we have selected a few papers from the conference that focus on the theme of governance, largely demonstrating that it remains a daunting challenge -- the theory of the Karnataka Model has far surpassed its implementation. Challenges that remain, beyond regional inequalities, include the slow, incremental, nature of changes in many parts of the state, continuing gender inequalities, several shortcomings in the implementation of the PRI reforms, and a lack of attention to urban governance. Since these concerns are shared by almost every other state in the country, the papers in this symposium have applicability well beyond the state's borders.

#### State and Local Politics, and Governance:

Karnataka has a long history of using political and deliberative means to deal with difference and hierarchy. Chamrajendra Wadiyar, Krishnaraja's father, established the Mysore Representative Assembly in 1881 which was designed to give Mysoreans a forum to air their differences (Bhagavan, 2004). While Brahmins dominated this body, the assembly helped increase the level of political awareness particularly among the two other dominant groups – Lingayats and Vokkaligas. By the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century these two groups formed associations to better their living conditions and to lobby the state government. In 1919 a committee led by Leslie Miller – the Chief Judge of the Mysore high court – defined a category of "Backward Classes" in the state recommending affirmative action for non-Brahmins in educational institutions and state

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<sup>5</sup> Crook and Manor (1998) study the impact of the Hedge's Panchayat reforms.

administrative services, special schools, scholarships, and hostels, to promote living standards among non-Brahmin classes. These measures were quickly implemented and, subsequently, Vokkaligas and Lingayats have become potent social and political stakeholders in the state.

James Manor's contribution examines the contemporary implications of this by examining the political history of Karnataka since 1972. He finds that while several changes have occurred, they have been gradual. This is because, in his view, politicians in Karnataka tend to be tentative, even conservative. Two competing coalitions have contended for power, what Manor calls MOVD (Muslims, OBCs, Vokkaligas and Dalits) and LIBRA (Lingayats and Brahmins). These group dynamics have made power sharing within rainbow collections a necessary condition for stable government. This has made individual politicians less important than institutions, with no dominant political party. Bureaucrats have, consequently, retained considerable power with greater autonomy compared to other states. This has resulted in better crafted policies and more policy continuity. But it has also directed political competition in a way that has led to a marked increase in corruption because of the need to satisfy different blocks of voters.

While caste has remained an important marker of identity it has increasingly begun to signify difference rather than hierarchy. The "materiality" of caste has also decreased – caste is no longer as significant in determining an individual's access to tangible opportunities and assets, and high caste status offers fewer material advantages. Panchayats have become increasingly important, and this has brought group-based political competition to the lowest levels of government. Links between low and high levels of government have shown improvement, but, because of changes in the nature of caste and in local governance, village society has become less cohesive with individuals mattering more than groups.

Tim Besley, Rohini Pande and Vijayendra Rao, turn the focus to an econometric examination various aspects of political behavior within gram panchayats (GPs). Their data come from a household and village survey covering 500 villages, and spread across all the four southern states, with over a third of the data from Karnataka. The data were collected between September and November 2002 and therefore provide a snapshot of changes in gram panchayats about ten years after the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment. Most results in the paper are from regressions with GP or village fixed effects, thus controlling for sources of variation across GPs and villages that are unobserved by the econometricians. The paper reports that reservations for dalits and STs work in the sense that households in GPs that have presidencies reserved for SC/STs are 7% more likely to offer targeted benefits to dalits and STs. On the other hand, the political geography of the GP seems to matter with the Presidents own village showing 10% more investment activity than other villages in the GP.

Gram Sabhas are supposed to be lynchpin of the panchayat system, yet in these data it is found that only 77% of villages held at least one gram sabha in the previous year. Holding a gram sabha seems to have an egalitarian influence with more effective targeting of BPL cards to the poor and disadvantaged. Perhaps because of this landless

and illiterate households are more likely to attend, but, on the other hand, women are much less likely to attend. Finally, the authors examine the role of politician selection within gram panchayats finding that they come from elite groups within the village. Even with reserved categories, elites within those categories are more likely to become politicians. Moreover, politicians are more likely to obtain BPL cards, controlling for their socio-economic status and village level variation, which is evidence for political opportunism<sup>6</sup>.

Kripa Anantpur's paper complements this econometric work, by conducting a qualitative analysis of village politics in 30 villages in Karnataka. She finds that, despite, the increasing prominence of gram panchayats, customary village councils (CVCs) continue to play an important role in village life<sup>7</sup>. CVCs include various categories of "traditional" panchayats including caste panchayats, street panchayats and nyaya panchayats. They perform a range of useful functions including the organization of village festivals, dispute resolution, social services, and informal development activities. Interestingly, they tend to be inter-caste institutions, and serve as deliberative forums with an emphasis on compromise. They interact closely with gram panchayats, in selecting candidates for panchayat elections, encouraging uncontested elections, and selection of beneficiaries. The leadership of CVCs and GPs tend to overlap and villagers tend to view them not as competitors but as complements to gram panchayats<sup>8</sup>. One question this raises is if the activities of CVCs translate into activism in parallel formal bodies, such as water user groups, and whether these formal institutions complement or compete with panchayats.

Ramesh Ramanathan focuses on his experience with Janaagraha, an NGO working on urban governance issues – largely in Bangalore. He makes the important point that with all the talk about the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment, on urban local government, is largely forgotten - an afterthought, ignored in national and state policy. Ramanathan argues that this is a mistake. Participatory planning, and increasing citizen's voice in cities is just as important in urban as in rural areas, and more challenging because of the large size of the population<sup>9</sup>. Janaagraha's work in Bangalore has attempted to do this by a variety of different initiatives which include verifying voter and BPL lists, proposing benefit-sharing schemes with communities who are willing to monitor their members in order to increase tax-compliance. Ramanathan proposes that a framework to adapt the spirit of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment in a manner that will have real impact; 1) Institute Ward Sabhas in a manner similar to gram sabhas, but also have a new tier of government below the ward level that will have a more manageable size; 2) Integrate the different tiers of city government with improved systems of accounting, accountability and monitoring; 3)

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<sup>6</sup> Also see Vijayalakshmi (2006) for a detailed analysis of corruption in Karnataka panchayats.

<sup>7</sup> This echoes Krishna's (2003) findings in Rajasthan.

<sup>8</sup> Note that aside from Panchayat officials and CVCs, there is a third category of people who wield power within the panchayat system - "fixers" - whose job it is to assist in the manipulation of the system (Inbanathan and Gopalappa, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> There is evidence from Delhi that shows that squatter settlements spontaneously tend to form democratically elected panchayat-like governance structures even in the absence of any state-led initiatives (Jha, Rao and Woolcock, 2007) indicating that the potential for deepening democracy in urban areas has been unrealized.



Have sequential and well-defined planning process building from grass-roots discussions on priorities and needs.

### Gender and Governance

Poor governance can have a particularly adverse on impact on women by enhancing conditions of patriarchy. Gita Sen, Aditi Iyer and Asha George demonstrate this in their study of gender inequity in health in Koppal district, which was part of old-Hyderabad state and therefore historically under-developed. Sen, Iyer and George find women's health is affect by systemic failures in both public and private health facilities. Government facilities, despite increasing funding, lack specialists and supplies, while private providers are dominated by informal medical practitioners. In an emergency, women are forced to constantly shuffle between inadequate government facilities and poor quality private providers which are, respectively, plagued by poor accountability and lack of regulation. The adverse effects of this "forced pluralism" are compounded by disjunctions in diagnoses due to discriminatory attitudes. Women tend to have quite high levels of health seeking behaviors, but preventable maternal mortality rates remains high because they are much less likely to be treated for their illnesses than men. Women's complaints are more likely to be listed as "not serious" by medical practitioners reflecting a lower recognition of their needs. A combination of discrimination within the home, poor access to health services, and discriminatory attitudes results in women a systematic disenfranchising of women in the health system.

Devaki Jain further explores the problem of how to best engender public policy, based upon her experiences as a Karnataka-based scholar-activist. She argues that the inherited knowledge-base of public policy is inherently gender-biased because it is constructed within a patriarchal system. Moreover, women continue to lack a voice in policy decisions that affect them despite several years of effort. To break this deadlock, women need to create a strategic "space of their own" but should have a say in all issues of relevance and not just those related to "women's issues." The knowledge base should be engendered by mapping the social and economic location of women both within the household and outside. Participation in leadership and political life, perhaps via reservations, can provide the turning point in changing the gendered nature of decision making<sup>10</sup>. Women need to become economic and political agents instead of passive recipients of special ladders and safety nets. This she calls a "bubbling-up" model as opposed to a "trickle-down" theory of development.

Jain illustrates these points with examples from her work in Karnataka. To demonstrate the gender-bias in information she uses the examples of poverty and sericulture programs in Karnataka. Poverty programs were based on data that data did not adequately capture the extent of women's work or the double-burden they faced in working at home and

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<sup>10</sup> Studies of the impact of this have been mixed but provide an optimistic picture. Duflo and Chattopadhyay (2004) find strong positive effects in West Bengal and Rajasthan, but Ban and Rao (2006) find that in the South Indian states the impact is tempered by institutional issues such as whether the village is upper caste dominated, whether the woman president has served in a previous term, and whether the state has a history of supporting panchayats.

outside. Therefore special studies and surveys were conducted to map gender inequalities within the home, and the extent of women's work outside. This led to a change in policy where programs were modified to allow for the direct targeting of women. Sericulture projects, assisted by the World Bank, were found to systematically deny the possibility that women were significantly involved in silk-rearing and farming activities. A targeted study done to examine this found that they were, in fact, deeply involved – largely within the home - in tending mulberry plants, feeding silkworms, and removing waste. Consequently the projects were modified to improve facilities for women to receive training in sericulture. Finally, Karnataka's pioneering efforts in reserving seats for women in panchayats, supplemented with training, have strengthened their hand in village decision making.

### Some Implications

Governance has become the new buzzword of development (Kaufman, Kray and Zoido-Lobaton, 2002). But it does not matter any more now than it did before. Karnataka has attempted to tackle the problem of good governance, albeit under different labels, for at least a century with distinctly mixed results. However, it is clear that path-dependencies generated by these efforts have made a difference - at least in the world of ideas.

However, the papers in this symposium highlight a common theme of a gap between ideas and implementation, between *de jure* and *de facto* governance. Politics matter. Manor argues that the strong caste-based nature of political coalitions in the state have had the negative effect of politicizing caste in the state in a manner that is perhaps more acute than the other South Indian states. At the same time caste-politics has also resulted in more cautious politicians who have, generally, avoided the excesses of some other states. Coalition politics have led to more stable policies because bureaucrats have retained relatively more power in the state. But, this argument should also be supplemented by examining this continuity within the context of the policies of the Wadiyar regime.

With increasing devolution to panchayats, Besley, Pande and Rao show political considerations have also begun to matter at the village level with village politicians acting in ways that protect their electoral base. Panchayati Raj institutions are not yet working in the manner envisaged by the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, particularly in the irregularities in holding gram sabhas. Corruption is to some extent being localized with evidence of political opportunism by village politicians. On the hand caste-reservations seem to have the desired effect of improving the lot disadvantaged groups. Several concrete recommendations can be drawn from these results, including instituting a system to monitor effective and regularly held gram sabhas, and limiting the number of villages within each panchayat to reduce the extent to which political competition can influence intra-village disparities in panchayat investments, and instituting incentives – such as increasing the salaries of panchayat committee members – to reduce corruption within the PRI system.

Ramanathan demonstrates the utter lack of attention paid to governance in urban areas with the lackluster implementation of the 74<sup>th</sup> amendment. Civil society groups can play a valuable role in changing this by highlighting attention to the problem and by initiating collective action to solve it. Civil society groups, as Anantpur demonstrates, are active also in rural governance – in the form of Customary Village Councils though, unlike urban NGOs, these have long historical roots. They do, however, interact closely with gram panchayats in selecting candidates, influencing village decisions and conducting important activities like dispute resolution that are outside the mandate of gram panchayats. Ramanathan and Anantpur, therefore, identify the singular importance of civil society in improving governance. While the theory of democracy emphasizes the central role of electoral accountability, Ramanathan and Anantpur point towards another type accountability that the political scientist Lily Tsai (2007) calls “social accountability”. Organizations and movements outside government can hold the government to task and cooperate with it to generate better governance. This is true both at the local level as shown in Kerala (Isaac and Heller, 2003), but also, more generally (Fung and Wright, 2003) to correct what can be described as “civil society failure” (Devarajan and Kanbur, 2005).

Sen, Iyer and George highlight two important limitations in the Karnataka Model; First, that the large portions of Karnataka that come from the Nizam’s territories face challenges that are particularly daunting; Second, that systemic challenges in governance have particularly adverse consequences for women – who face neglect within the home and exclusion outside which has adverse consequences for their health. Jain fleshes out where and how gender bias occurs within systems of governance and points out two factors – in the gender-biased nature of how the state “sees”; 1) In the kinds of data it collects and the analyses it conducts; 2) In the fact that women are systematically excluded from decision making processes, a point that is also demonstrated by Besley, Pande and Rao who show that women are much less likely to participate in gram sabhas. It is also implicitly brought out in Manor’s political history which shows that a woman has never risen to prominence in the higher reaches of Karnataka politics.

What lessons can we draw from this<sup>11</sup>? What can other states within India, and countries outside, learn from Karnataka’s experience? First, that good ideas do not always translate into good practices. Second, that deliberative democracy can be nurtured by the state by actively instituting forums for deliberative interaction as in the case of the Mysore Representative Assembly and in gram sabhas in village panchayats. Third, that in order for civil society groups to play useful roles as agents of social accountability – states have to be supportive and responsive to such groups. Fourth, that despite good intentions pervasive forms of discrimination, particularly against women, can persist. Tackling this requires supplementing a gender-specific approach in data collection, with mechanisms that will broaden political participation. Fifth, that deepening democracy is a very slow process with lots of ups and downs, and fits and starts, constant innovation, an active public sphere, and resistance from active social movements. Good governance cannot be achieved overnight, but with persistent efforts it will bear some fruits.

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<sup>11</sup> See Kadekodi (2004a and 2004b) for concrete policy recommendations for Karnataka.

Hopefully, as time goes by, Karnataka's Model of development will better reflect its reality.

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# Change in Karnataka over the Last Generation: Villages and the Wider Context

by James Manor

## I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines social and political changes that have occurred since 1972 – at the village level where most of Karnataka’s residents live, and at higher levels when they affect villages.<sup>1</sup> Throughout this discussion, we encounter an oddity. Important changes have occurred despite the tendency of nearly all state governments to proceed cautiously, concentrating almost exclusively on incremental change. Six major changes are worth noting.

- In 1972 Chief Minister Devaraj Urs broke the dominance that Lingayats and Vokkaligas had exercised over state-level politics since Independence. Since then, Karnataka’s leaders have constructed broad ‘rainbow’ coalitions in which important cabinet posts were given to leaders from every numerically powerful social group.
- In 1983, the state’s party system changed when the Congress Party lost a state election for the first time. Since then, the alternation of parties at state elections has (with one exception) been the norm.
- After 1985, a Janata government generously empowered and funded *panchayati raj* institutions.
- Caste (*jati*) has increasingly come to denote ‘difference’ rather than ‘hierarchy’.
- Society at the village level has become much less cohesive (discussed in see Part V).
- After the late 1980s, a boom in software and out-sourcing occurred in greater Bangalore.

Only the first and the third of these changes were the result of leaders’ decisions to induce dramatic change -- and since 1985, no such decision has occurred.<sup>2</sup>

So change in Karnataka has mostly been gradual, because politicians there have tended to be tentative, even conservative – a word that they will not like. But to ease their discomfort, it should be added that much of what we have seen has been enlightened conservatism – a tendency to pursue incremental changes which anticipate future problems in order to defuse them before they become acute. That tendency is consistent

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<sup>1</sup> The paper largely omits changes that have occurred in the urban sector and in the state’s economy.

<sup>2</sup> One change which might be included in the list but which has been left out was Devaraj Urs’ land reform during the 1970s. It has been omitted because it was radical neither in its intent nor in its impact. As Urs himself recognised, it failed to address the issue of landlessness. It dealt only with tenancy, and that was a far less serious problem here than in other parts of India because owner-cultivators constituted a much larger proportion of Karnataka’s rural population than in other regions.

with the traditions of government in former princely Mysore (roughly the southern half of contemporary Karnataka) since 1881. So is an accompanying tendency towards caution lest powerful interests become dangerously alienated. And yet incremental change has been pursued persistently enough to have a significant cumulative effect.

One result of politicians' enlightened conservatism has been that certain actions which might have served the interests of all rural dwellers – or of disadvantaged villagers – have not been taken. That is regrettable. But other actions have been – for the most part – beneficial. Karnataka has thus avoided the extremes of inaction seen in places like Orissa, and of brutish governance seen in states like Bihar and, recently, Gujarat. Anticipatory changes – beginning with the Miller Committee in the 1920s and accelerating with Devaraj Urs' mobilization of disadvantaged groups – ensured that this state experienced little conflict during the Mandal Commission controversy in 1990. And incremental actions to promote communal accommodation prevented Hindu nationalists from producing the kind of polarization that occurred in many other states after 1990.

We shall see that this enlightened conservatism can be traced to several strong, inter-related tendencies within state governments since 1972. Most governments have tended towards collective leadership in rainbow coalitions -- with leaders from a broad range of social groups exercising substantial influence. Power-sharing at ministerial level has helped make individuals less important than institutions – including the bureaucracy which has suffered less damage than elsewhere. Policies have therefore been comparatively well crafted. And since rival parties have sought support from the same broad social base, policy continuity has been strong despite frequent changes of government.

Because changes have occurred incrementally in Karnataka, they have for the most part endured. They have not produced sufficient dislocation to allow opponents to muster the support needed to restore the status quo ante.

The rest of this paper is divided into four parts. Part II analyses changes at the state level, and Part III considers changes at the village level. Part IV addresses links between villages and higher levels, between which there is greater vertical integration. Part V considers social cohesion in Karnataka.

## **II. THE STATE LEVEL**

Several changes at the state level need to be explored. Those examined below have impinged, at least modestly, upon rural arenas.

### ***Deteriorating Standards?***

In Karnataka today, people often say – rightly -- that standards in public life have deteriorated. For example, in March 2005, a former Chief Secretary of the state stressed

that when civil servants inform ministers (as they routinely do) that a potential action would be illegal, ministers increasingly disregard this advice.<sup>3</sup>

But while standards have slipped, we need to compare this state with others – and when we do, things look less discouraging. In many other states, civil servants no longer warn politicians of potentially illegal actions because they have been thoroughly intimidated by their masters, and because they know that such comments would have no effect. In Karnataka, such advice is still conveyed regularly – and sometimes it is heeded. When institutions and the rule of law have suffered under certain leaders there, steps have repeatedly been taken to restore them. Three things help us to understand this comparatively modest slippage in standards. They are discussed in the next three sections.

### *Mercifully Few Destructive Chief Ministers*

Since Independence, only two destructive Chief Ministers have held power in Karnataka – R. Gundu Rao (1980-1983) and S. Bangarappa (1990-1992).

Gundu Rao became Chief Minister because he offered Indira Gandhi the kind of abject loyalty that, by 1980, she demanded – and because he was a favourite of her son Sanjay. He centralised power in his own hands to an unprecedented degree and imposed ‘civil servant raj’. This had one minor advantage – civil servants tend, for the most part, to maintain certain minimal standards when given their head. But it was outweighed by serious disadvantages. Corruption, which was centralised, soared. Legislators were unable to exercise influence on behalf of their constituents. They were often unable to get appointments even with middle-ranking bureaucrats. Democratic government was thus stifled. And grossly insensitive acts occurred. When farmers were late in repaying government loans, the police seized moveable property – which a sensible Chief Minister would have regarded as politically insane.<sup>4</sup>

Bangarappa did greater damage. He placed unprincipled civil servants in key posts, and exiled the best to obscure postings. Illicit ‘fund-raising’ was a central preoccupation. Bangarappa became the only state-level leader in the last 150 years to encourage parochial conflict – between Kannadigas and Tamils. When this led to rioting in Bangalore, the Chief Minister’s aides rushed to inform him, only to find that he refused to consider their pleas for action until he had completed his badminton game.<sup>5</sup> It was that sort of government.

Two destructive Chief Ministers is too many, but two is a smaller number than is the norm in several other states. And since neither of these leaders served a full five years,

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<sup>3</sup> Interview, Bangalore, 6 March 2005.

<sup>4</sup> His government is discussed in greater detail in J. Manor, “Blurring the Lines between Parties and Social Bases: Gundu Rao and the Emergence of a Janata Government in Karnataka” – which appeared both in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, 15 September 1984, and in J.R. Wood (ed.) *State Politics in Contemporary India: Crisis or Continuity?* (Westview, Boulder and London, 1984) pp. 139-68.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with an official who took the news to Bangarappa, Bangalore, 9 March 1999.



they were unable to institutionalize their damaging practices. In both cases, they were ousted – Gundu Rao by the voters, and Bangarappa by a revolt of legislators who rightly feared voters’ wrath. So the system proved self-correcting, and in both cases, politicians’ accountability to a sophisticated electorate provided the explanation. Once out of office, they were thoroughly discredited and their successors restored standards – something that has not always happened in other states.

### *Corruption and Criminalisation*

Corruption – in terms of the amounts of money illegally diverted -- has increased markedly since 1972.<sup>6</sup> No accurate measurements are possible, but knowledgeable sources consistently attest to this.<sup>7</sup>

Why? First, politicians believe that ‘fund-raising’ can enhance their influence and their chances of re-election. They have sometimes been right about the first of these ideas. If a leader distributes substantial funds among subordinates or even opposition politicians, he<sup>8</sup> can buy cooperation. If he provides money to potential groups of supporters (or their leaders), he may strengthen their organisational capacity and win their backing. This occurred under Devaraj Urs between 1972 and 1980 when corruption first took off. He used illicit funds to establish and then build up caste associations among disadvantaged groups that had previously been poorly organised or entirely unorganised. He felt compelled to do this to prevent Lingayats and Vokkaligas from re-establishing their former dominance.<sup>9</sup>

But the notion that massive ‘fund-raising’ will help to secure re-election is baseless. Parties in power always have far more opportunities to amass illicit funds than do opposition parties. Ruling parties therefore almost always have more campaign funds than their opponents. And yet at the vast majority of elections in Karnataka and other states since 1983, ruling parties have lost. If money decided elections, this would not happen. Politicians pursue ‘fund-raising’, in the vain hope that it will win them re-election. (Because they know that re-election is unlikely, they tend to maximise personal profiteering while the opportunity exists, which also increases corruption.)

Illicit ‘fund raising’ for parties has also occurred because state-level leaders – especially in the Congress Party -- have been required to provide national-level leaders with substantial sums. This process became well established early -- in Devaraj Urs’ time -- to persuade his party’s national leaders not to intrude unhelpfully in the state’s politics.<sup>10</sup>

There are, however, certain important checks and limitations on corruption in Karnataka which are less evident in many other states. Most politicians know that excessive

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<sup>6</sup> This refers to corruption at higher levels. Corruption at the local level is discussed in Part IV.

<sup>7</sup> Note that a Karnataka IAS officer has produced a useful book on corruption which was surely informed by his work in the state. See S.K. Das, *Public Office, Private Interest: Bureaucracy and Corruption in India* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Very few senior politicians in Karnataka have been women.

<sup>9</sup> These comments are based on discussions with Devaraj Urs in Bangalore in 1978.

<sup>10</sup> In interviews with this writer in 1978 and 1980, Devaraj Urs stated this explicitly.

corruption damages their hopes of re-election – by undermining their reputations and their capacity to deliver goods and services. The successors of Gundu Rao and Bangarappa sharply curtailed their excesses because they were seen as politically suicidal.

These limitations have, however, been modest. When a well-informed official in an international development agency saw evidence suggesting that the former Andhra Pradesh government received kickbacks of more than \$1 million dollars on more than 100 occasions, he replied that Karnataka had not lagged very far behind.<sup>11</sup> But kickbacks do not occur at every opportunity,<sup>12</sup> so the overall picture is ambiguous.

The criminalisation of politics in Karnataka is far less serious than in many other states. Consider the contrasts with two.

15 years ago, 155 Uttar Pradesh legislators (out of a total of 425) had criminal records – and things have not improved since then.<sup>13</sup> Karnataka has seen nothing remotely like this. Why? Voters in UP (and certain other states) turn to criminals because (i) government institutions have become so degraded that criminals are seen to offer at least some of the responsiveness that those institutions do not provide, and (ii) political parties have undergone severe decay. In Karnataka, the formal institutions are patently imperfect, and parties lack great organisational strength, but they have suffered far less erosion than their UP counterparts.

Until the early 1990s, the only urban centre in South India with a well-developed criminal underworld was Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>14</sup> During the late 1990s, those criminal organisations extended their influence from the coast across the region extending to Hyderabad -- because the economic boom in Hyderabad created opportunities, and because the ruling party there forged ties to them since it considered them useful allies.<sup>15</sup> The economic boom in Bangalore has no doubt attracted the attention of some criminals. But recent interviews with knowledgeable Karnataka

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<sup>11</sup> Interview, New Delhi, 9 September 2004.

<sup>12</sup> For example, in the mid-1990s, private companies seeking a contract to build a sizeable utility sent representatives to Bangalore to make final presentations before those who would make the decision. After one company's spokesman had finished, he was told by a senior bureaucrat that to secure the contract, he would need to pass Rs. 600,000 through the bureaucrat to the authorities. The businessman made no response and immediately contacted an analyst of the state's politics to ask whether this sounded like a genuine overture. The analyst quickly checked with reliable contacts close to the government, and was advised that it was probably not a genuine demand, for two reasons. The figure of Rs. 600,000 seemed too low for such a substantial project. And this specific bureaucrat was probably not in a position to affect the decision. This looked more like a free-lance attempt by that bureaucrat to make some money for himself. The analyst was advised to tell the businessman to telephone the Chief Minister's office and explain what had happened. The businessman did this and his company then secured the contract without paying a bribe.

<sup>13</sup> This emerged from this writer's discussions with Paul R. Brass, an authority on Uttar Pradesh politics.

<sup>14</sup> Manor, *Power, Poverty and Poison: Disaster and Response in an Indian City* (Sage Publications, New Delhi, Newbury Park and London, 1993) chapter four.

<sup>15</sup> These comments are based on a detailed, confidential and unpublished study of governance in AP undertaken by this writer in 2001, with the assistance of three of the best informed analysts in that state – whose evidence on this point was highly credible.

officials, policemen and journalists indicate that criminal activities still fall far short of levels found in Andhra Pradesh, and that Karnataka's politicians have done far less to develop links with criminals. Karnataka politics has experienced very little criminalisation.

### *Institutions Still Matter More than Individuals*

In many Indian states, political institutions have taken a battering from powerful, self-aggrandising politicians since 1972. Personalised patronage networks predominate over impersonal processes. Bureaucrats have been so thoroughly browbeaten that they and the institutions which they inhabit retain little substance or autonomy. Supposedly independent institutions beyond the bureaucracy have been subordinated to the whims of potent leaders. We have seen far less of this in Karnataka than in many other states. And when such excesses have occurred there, they have usually been followed by efforts to regenerate institutions.<sup>16</sup>

This is mainly explained by three features of Karnataka's politics. First, the preference for rainbow coalitions at the state level has ensured that collective leadership has usually predominated. This has prevented excesses by individual leaders, and limited damage to institutions.

Second, most senior politicians there have risen through the ranks of their parties, so that individuals do not loom larger than parties. It is thus unusual to find a party in Karnataka utterly dominated by one leader. We saw signs of this in the Congress Party under Gundu Rao and Bangarappa (but they were soon ousted), and recently in the Janata Dal (S). But the norm is collective leadership -- which is institution-friendly.

Third, the alternation of parties in power has meant that no leader has been so successful at the polls that s/he becomes more important than the party and can do whatever s/he pleases. This again has spared institutions the kind of damage which untrammelled leaders can do.

Karnataka has also experienced less brutish government than several other states. It has seen nothing remotely like the excesses witnessed under the present Gujarat government, in Haryana under Bansi Lal, in Maharashtra under the BJP-Shiv Sena government, or the surge in deaths in police custody under Naidu in Andhra Pradesh.<sup>17</sup> No Karnataka leader has gone that far.

It is also exceedingly unusual in Karnataka for senior politicians to browbeat civil servants – a common occurrence in some North Indian states and an occasional occurrence in Gujarat, Maharashtra, and Tamil Nadu. As a result, the bureaucracy in

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<sup>16</sup> For more on this process, see J. Manor, "Political Regeneration in India" in A. Nandy and D.L. Sheth (eds.) *The Multiverse of Democracy: Essays in Honour of Rajni Kothari* (Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks and London, 1996) pp. 230-41.

<sup>17</sup> Senior civil servants in Karnataka express astonishment at the "brutal" actions against alleged 'naxalites' under the Naidu government.

Karnataka has maintained greater autonomy, institutional substance, and potential for constructive action than in most other states. That has enabled successive Karnataka governments to develop more intelligently crafted policies than most other governments—including policies that affect the rural sector.<sup>18</sup>

### *Policy Continuity amid the Alternation of Ruling Parties*

Since 1983, the alternation of ruling parties at state elections has been the norm in Karnataka. In some states – most notably Uttar Pradesh since the early 1990s – when governments alternate, huge changes ensue. The policies of previous governments are uprooted and contemptuously discarded, and key administrative posts are systematically purged of civil servants who served the previous government. We have seen very little of this in Karnataka.

This is partly explained by the preference for incremental policy changes. This offers a striking contrast to Uttar Pradesh where dramatic policy shifts by one government,

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<sup>18</sup> The importance of this institutional capacity can be illustrated by a brief account not of policy affecting the rural sector, but of the interactions between Karnataka governments and major international development agencies. In 2002, a World Bank official in Delhi told this writer that Karnataka was the only state government in India that with an impressive capacity to develop its own detailed negotiating positions in its dealings with the Bank. This required the government to generate complex socio-economic analyses and proposals on its own, without help from the Bank which routinely provided such assistance to other state governments – a process that compromised their autonomy. Karnataka could achieve this not because it had more good economists among its senior bureaucrats, but because it managed its bureaucracy in ways that enabled its economists to make crucial contributions to policy making. (The state government also sought advice from formidable analysts available within the state – not least at ISEC.)

By giving bureaucrats greater autonomy, and by providing them with an enabling environment, successive governments have enhanced their own autonomy in their dealings with major international development agencies. This has ensured that the state's finances have been prudently managed, so that Karnataka does not share the desperate need of some other states for donor funds – something which can lead state governments into agreements which undermine their autonomy. Thus when the World Bank offered the J.H. Patel government substantial funds, he was able to take advice from sophisticated advisors and – when they and he found the attendant conditionalities unpalatable – he refused the offer.

The strength of these institutions within the Government of Karnataka has not always endeared it to international donor agencies. In recent years, Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh (Kalyan Singh) and Andhra Pradesh (Chandrababu Naidu) have gone to extraordinary lengths to cultivate major donors at a personal level. When teams from donor agencies arrived in their state capitals, they had extensive access to these Chief Ministers who played the dominant role in negotiations. By contrast, when such teams reached Bangalore, they dealt mainly with Chief Secretaries, Finance Secretaries and their teams of economic advisors. At best, they might be given a meal with Chief Ministers. (The use of the plural is crucial, since it indicates that these practices were followed under successive governments.)

This caused some dismay in donor agencies. Egos were not massaged so assiduously in Bangalore, and it inspired suspicions about whether the real leaders there were serious about development. At one point in the late 1990s, an analyst stressed to a major donor agency that when they negotiated with governments in places like Andhra Pradesh they were dealing with individuals, while in Karnataka they were dealing with institutions. This should have made Karnataka more attractive since it indicated that policy continuity when governments changed was more likely, but that message was not fully absorbed.

This account focuses on high politics and on events that do not bear intimately upon the rural sector, but the same processes – creating conditions in which civil servants can contribute constructively to policy making – have had positive benefits for rural development too. [Interviews since 1998 with senior officials of the state government and at the World Bank in Delhi.]

introduced with extravagant histrionics, are shredded when a new government takes over and introduces radically different policies with still more histrionics. It is also explained by Karnataka's parties' tendency to appeal to the same social base (see the section just below).

When a new government assumes power in Bangalore, it tends to sustain most of its predecessor's policies – with some adjustments but little uprooting. This has produced broad policy continuity which has enabled the incremental changes that nearly all governments have introduced to have – over time – a considerable cumulative effect that has often been felt at the village level.

### *Continuity in Social Coalitions Underpinning Ruling Parties*

Nearly all state governments in Karnataka since 1972 have sought to construct a broadly inclusive rainbow coalition of all numerically powerful social groups. Again Uttar Pradesh differs radically, with contending parties seeking votes from more limited and largely distinct sections of society. Those parties magnify the differences between social groups and encourage antipathy between them. Hence the dramatic changes in policy there. The politics of division and spite that have predominated in Uttar Pradesh for over a decade have almost never been pursued in Karnataka.

These comments about 'rainbow coalitions' refer to more than the representation of different social groups within the state cabinet. It is possible to have relatively fair representation while leaders from certain social groups receive only tokenism – unimportant posts, or inadequate influence over the ministries that they supposedly control. But governments in Karnataka since 1972 have provided leaders from a diverse social groups with genuine influence over reasonably important ministries. Indeed, governments have tended to construct state-level cabinets which are even more broadly representative than the coalitions which voted them into power.<sup>19</sup>

It has, however, become increasingly difficult to build and sustain extremely broad coalitions because tensions between various social groups have grown more acute. Consider Muzaffar Assadi's stimulating arguments that two competing social coalitions have contended for power in the state: MOVD (Muslims, OBCs, Vokkaligas and Dalits) and LIBRA (Lingayats and Brahmins).<sup>20</sup>

If those two coalitions held together coherently, MOVD would always defeat LIBRA. The former contains far more voters than the latter. In practice, most governments since

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<sup>19</sup> This has become especially apparent in the period since the mid-1990s when data from the National Election Study have shown that the social coalitions which elect governments have sometimes been less broad than the array of groups represented in cabinets. But it appears to have been true in earlier periods as well. On the 2004 election, see Shastri and Ramaswamy, "Karnataka: Simultaneous Polls, Different Results, Economic and Political Weekly (18 December 2004) p. 5487.

<sup>20</sup> M. Assadi, "Muslims and Politics of Social Coalition: Some Experiments in the Electoral Politics of Karnataka", Social Action (April-June 2003) pp. 145-58; and "New Political Alignments of Social Groups", Economic and Political Weekly, 21 February 1998, pp. 382-83.

the alternation of parties began in 1983 have tended to appeal mainly to the MOVD groups. But we have often seen variations in this trend.

Governments have reached out to Lingayats and Brahmins as well as to MOVD groups. One was headed by a Brahmin (Ramakrishna Hegde) and two were headed, for a time, by Lingayats (S.R. Bommai and Veerendra Patil). And those Lingayats came from both major parties – Bommai from Janata, and Veerendra Patil from Congress. Since 1983, both parties have given significant representation to all numerically powerful groups. All cabinets have been broadly representative. Both parties have had Vokkaliga Chief Ministers, and though only Congress has had OBC Chief Ministers, Janata has also given them prominence. All Chief Ministers have also sought to include leaders from the two numerically powerful groups that have not provided Chief Ministers – Dalits and Muslims (although there has often been a shortage of Muslim legislators).<sup>21</sup>

The BJP, however, which is no longer a marginal party, has focused mainly upon the LIBRA bloc. This became apparent after Hegde aligned his version of the Janata Dal with the BJP. He was a Brahmin, and Lingayats and Brahmins have loomed large in the leadership of the state unit of the BJP. But he and the BJP recognised that they needed support from other groups. The BJP has sought to mobilize MOVD elements around communal issues – with only limited success. And the BJP and Hegde, until the latter's death, appealed to regional resentments in northern Karnataka. So here again, the dichotomy between MOVD and LIBRA blurs at the edges.

Growing tensions between social groups may end the tradition of 'rainbow coalitions' by making it impossible for politicians to sustain the broadly accommodative approach that has long prevailed. But that has not happened yet. It is also possible that the BJP will gain power after the next state election – because they are the only alternative to the coalition between the Congress and the Janata Dal (S). But if that occurs, it will not be because the LIBRA bloc brought the BJP to power – it lacks the numerical strength to do so. It will be because many MOVD voters turned to the BJP out of frustration with the coalition government. And that will impel a new BJP government to reach out to those people once it takes power – to pursue yet another broad coalition.

### **III. THE VILLAGE LEVEL**

Karnataka's villages have experienced diverse social and political changes in the last three decades. Most of these have occurred gradually, but over time, many have had considerable cumulative effects.

#### ***Social and Economic Change in the Villages***

In the years since 1972, agriculture has gradually declined in importance – both economically (as people turn increasingly to non-farm incomes), and socially (as the

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<sup>21</sup> The main reason for this is that Muslim voters are spread unusually evenly and thus thinly across the state. They form a very substantial bloc in only three of the 224 assembly constituencies (interview with E. Raghavan and Imran Qureshi, Bangalore, 9 March 2005).

inter-dependence and hierarchical bonds anchored in old patterns of agricultural production have been eroded). Change in this sector has been incremental but persistent, so that in many areas, the old social order has substantially crumbled. This is apparent from studies by G.K. Karanth, V. Ramaswamy and others. These indicate that there is much less order in village society, and that old rituals – and the collective arrangements for the management of resources linked to them – have withered.<sup>22</sup>

G.S. Aurora has explained the background to these changes.<sup>23</sup> He notes a decline in the number of larger land holdings and an increase in the number of medium, small and marginal holdings. The numbers of marginal farmers and landless labourers have increased. Many artisans have been “forced to join the ranks of the rural proletariat” as goods used by rural dwellers have come increasingly from urban industries.

The proportion of lands put to non-agricultural uses has risen from 4.2% in 1956-57 to 6.7% in 1997-98. The commercialisation of agricultural household economies has become a “dominant pattern”. In former times, farmers concentrated on growing cereals, partly for payments in kind under the old *jajmani* system. Now, as that system has disintegrated, they cultivate other crops for the market and pay workers in cash -- loosening the old, hierarchical social ties which also implied interdependence. As it has diminished, dependence on external market forces – which carries serious risks -- has grown. The use of high yielding varieties has increased, and with it the need for costly inputs. To obtain these, farmers must take sizeable loans, and when crops fail, this has led to farmers’ suicides. (Far fewer of these have occurred in Karnataka than in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, but the total in the former – over 400 – is still alarming.)

Four themes from Aurora’s analysis are immensely important.

- The potency of hierarchy and interdependence within villages has declined.
- Links to and dependence upon external forces have increased.
- Individuals now count for more than collectivities within villages – which increases both the liberty and the vulnerability of individuals.
- The result is a society that is more open and democratic, but in which people face greater risks -- since the old hierarchical order entailed not only injustices but certain collective protections against uncertainties.

### ***Changes in the Role, the Importance and the Materiality of Caste***

Given these changes, caste (*jati*) has diminished in importance, especially in one crucial respect. It has increasingly come to denote ‘difference’ rather than ‘hierarchy’. This has

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<sup>22</sup> See in particular chapters 11 to 14 in R. Baumgartner and R. Hogger (eds.) *In Search of Sustainable Livelihood Systems: Managing Resources and Change* (Sage Publications, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks and London, 2004).

<sup>23</sup> G.S. Aurora, “Core Issues in the Agrarian Economy and Society of Karnataka” in *ibid.*, pp. 247-64. His focus was on Kolar District of Karnataka, but his comment apply to nearly off of the state.

caused certain invidious practices to decline, but it has also inspired greater tensions and conflicts between caste groups. We see this in other states too.<sup>24</sup>

This monumental change has occurred gradually. When a visitor mentioned it to Krishna Raj, the late editor of the *Economic and Political Weekly*, the latter stressed that what surprised him was that “it took so long”.<sup>25</sup> At present, we lack a full understanding both of why the change occurred and why “it took so long”. M.N. Srinivas stressed the importance of the decline of the *jajmani* system that provided the material underpinnings of caste hierarchy<sup>26</sup>, and he was probably correct. The role of politics was ambiguous. Political mobilization on caste lines tended to strengthen caste consciousness and at times reinforced hierarchies. But the post-1972 mobilization of disadvantaged castes in Karnataka, and the egalitarian logic of one-person-one-vote undermined it.

Government policies also had an ambiguous impact. On the one hand, policies after 1972 favouring disadvantaged groups contributed to the decline of hierarchy. On the other, one reason that “it took so long” has been the cautious, incremental nature of economic liberalization in India. Its leaders have carefully avoided radical changes common in China and much of Southeast Asia – because in a democratic polity, they are unwilling to risk massive social dislocation. In China, around 200 million peasants have been induced or forced off the land. Many of them live precariously round major cities, seeking work. This poses serious risks of political disorder. The Chinese leaders, with their formidable coercive power, are prepared to countenance this. Nothing remotely like that, or like the “social change in fast forward” seen in Indonesia,<sup>27</sup> has happened in India.

But despite the gradualism, immense changes have occurred. One key example is a decline in the material utility of caste. Two decades ago, this writer argued that caste (*jati*) in Karnataka existed not just at the level of ideas, sentiments or identifications, but that it possessed materiality. A villager’s caste status and connections played a major role in determining whether s/he could gain access to tangible opportunities and assets.<sup>28</sup> Today, this remains true to some extent. But high caste status offers fewer material advantages, and low status offers at least somewhat fewer disadvantages than before. And other things have gained in importance in providing or denying opportunities to villagers (see below).

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<sup>24</sup> For evidence from Madhya Pradesh, see A. Mayer, “Caste in an Indian Village: Change and Continuity, 1954-1992” in C.J. Fuller (ed.) *Caste Today* (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1997) pp. 32-64. See also D.L. Sheth, “Secularisation of Caste and Making of New Middle Class”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21-28 August 1999, pp. 2502-10.

<sup>25</sup> Interview, Mumbai, 27 September 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Interviews with him, Bangalore, in 1996 and 1998.

<sup>27</sup> This phrase belongs to Anne Booth, an Indonesia specialist at the University of London.

<sup>28</sup> J. Manor, “Karnataka: Caste, Class, Dominance and Politics in a Cohesive Society” in F. Frankel and M.S.A. Rao (eds.) *Dominance and State Power in Modern India: Decline of a Social Order*, (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1984) volume one, pp. 322-61.



### ***The Proliferation of New Channels Linking Local and Higher Levels***

This topic is discussed more fully in Part IV, but it is important to note it here, since it alters dynamics within villages. Far more channels now exist to link individuals within villages to higher levels in the system. Some of these – the electronic media (especially satellite television,<sup>29</sup> but also telephones) mainly provide villagers with more information than they could obtain 30 years ago. But others – improved roads, transport, *panchayati raj* institutions, other government structures, and civil society organisations – enable individuals to develop links to the wider world, which they can sometimes use to access new opportunities.

### ***Individuals Matter More, and Social Institutions and Groups Less...***

As caste (*jati*) -- a social institution -- has gone into decline, villagers seeking opportunities have increasingly turned to individuals who can (in G.K. Karanth's words) "get things done".<sup>30</sup> And those doing the seeking have also often operated as individuals rather than on behalf of the social groups from which they come. Thus, social institutions and groups matter less, and individuals matter more than before.

### ***...But One Political Institution Matters More – Panchayati Raj***

At the same time, however, the comparatively generous empowerment and funding of *panchayats* in Karnataka have given – the *gram* (village) *panchayat* – a political institution -- considerable importance in most villages. This has had ambiguous implications on two fronts.

First, the growing importance of this democratic political institution has acted as a counterweight to what might be termed a tendency towards anarchy within villages -- which might follow from the decline of a substantially undemocratic social institutionism caste (*jati*). But since people interact with *gram panchayats* not just collectively but also as individuals, it has in part enhanced the growing importance of individuals.

Second, the empowerment of *panchayats* has sometimes enabled villagers to solve problems on their own. But since *gram panchayats* often need administrative assistance from higher up to implement some decisions – like construction projects – villagers must still reach out to higher levels. When that happens, individuals' connections higher levels are important. So here again, the results have been ambiguous. (*Panchayats* are discussed further in the section just below, and again in Part IV.)

### ***Corruption At and Near the Village Level***

Corruption at lower levels presents a mixed, but somewhat less grim picture than at the state level. Here as at the state level, our evidence is limited. But the following,

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<sup>29</sup> See in this connection W. Crawley and D. Page, *Satellites over South Asia: Broadcasting, Culture and the Public Interest* (Sage Publication, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks and London, 2001).

<sup>30</sup> Interview, Bangalore, 9 April 2005.

sometimes unproven, points are probably accurate. Corruption occurs at lower levels for diverse reasons. Even candidates seeking lowly offices feel compelled to spend substantial funds – and to take out loans that must be repaid out of money illicitly raised. The market in transfers impels low-level bureaucrats to find similarly large sums, with the same result. And when a nexus develops at the sub-district level among a small number of government employees and elected politicians, development funds may be diverted into their pockets. We have, however, seen the emergence in recent years of significant correctives to this last type of malfeasance – as the result of the empowerment of *panchayats*.

In Karnataka, as a consequence of democratic decentralisation, the number of people involved in corrupt activities has increased. That was inevitable when the number of elected offices increased in 1987 from 224 (assembly seats) to over 50,000 (seats on *panchayats*). But the key question is whether the overall amount of money stolen has declined. Evidence from Karnataka clearly indicates that it has.

Before 1987, when development funds reached the sub-district (*taluk*) level, four or five persons (the Block Development Officer, the Assistant Engineer and influential non-officials) often met behind closed doors, stole a substantial portion of that money – around 40%, say people involved – and presented the remainder to ordinary people as 100% of the development budget. After 1987, when the system became so transparent that hundreds of people in every *taluk* knew what 100% of the budget actually was, such grand theft became impossible. Estimates in 1993 placed the overall amount of funds stolen under the new system at around 5%.<sup>31</sup> That figure may have increased in the ensuing years, but even if it has, the picture is still substantially brighter than before the empowerment of *panchayats*.<sup>32</sup>

#### **IV. LINKS BETWEEN VILLAGES AND HIGHER LEVELS**

The number of channels that provide potential links between villages and higher levels has multiplied over the last 30 years. This is the result of the emergence or growing importance of four institutions/actors discussed below.<sup>33</sup> Before we examine them, it is worth noting that two institutions do not qualify for inclusion here. First, the role of the police -- who have become more responsive in urban Karnataka<sup>34</sup> -- has scarcely changed

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<sup>31</sup> This is discussed in more detail in Crook and Manor, *Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998) chapter two.

<sup>32</sup> It is worth adding that the computerised Bhoomi programme, providing land certificates -- by-passing village accountants who took bribes for this service -- is said to have reduced petty corruption by an estimated Rs.895 million annually. Public Affairs Centre, *A Report Card on Bhoomi Kiosks* (Public Affairs Centre, Bangalore, 2004). Some readers may suspect that that figure is an exaggeration – and Narayana Gatty have found evidence to indicate that in northern Karnataka, villagers prefer to pay the traditional bribes rather than incur the inconvenience of travelling to computer kiosks within their taluks. But even if the actual figure were only half of that amount, it still represents a significant decline in corruption.

<sup>33</sup> A fifth, market forces, might be added to this list. But that is best left to economists to analyse.

<sup>34</sup> Independent surveys by the Public Affairs Centre found public satisfaction levels with the city's police rose from almost zero in 1994 to 17% in 1999, and then to 83% in 2003. See, *Development Outreach*

in rural areas. Second, the capacity of political parties to penetrate into rural arenas has declined over the last three decades. But let us consider four more encouraging changes.

### ***The Proliferation of Government Programmes and ‘User Committees’***

National and state governments currently implement a vastly greater number of programmes in rural Karnataka than in 1972 -- providing new channels between villages and higher levels. And since many of these programmes create ‘user committees’ to consult villagers or their representatives (on health, education, forestry, etc) – and since in this state (unlike many others) *panchayats* influence those committees – fresh opportunities exist for local preferences to flow upward into the policy process.<sup>35</sup> It should be stressed, however, that rural Karnataka has not witnessed the dramatic increases in government responsiveness that occurred in Bangalore under S.M. Krishna during the late 1990s.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Panchayati Raj Institutions***

*Panchayats* were substantially empowered and funded in 1987, and since then – despite a decline in their powers – they have remained reasonably strong by Indian and international standards. This system has proved more successful than most others across the world, partly because its accountability mechanisms are unusually reliable.<sup>37</sup>

Their role in providing links between villages and higher levels is ambiguous. In certain respects, it is limited. *Panchayats* exist at village, *taluk* and district levels, but this has not resulted in sustained interactions between elected members at different levels -- partly because *panchayats* at the intermediate *taluk* level are comparatively weak. But information flows have increased massively, both upward and downward. Governments find it far easier to transmit information downward because elected *panchayat* members can interpret policies to villagers in ways that the latter comprehend. And officials at higher levels have experienced a massive increase in information flows from below – so they feel better able to perform their tasks.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Political ‘Fixers’***

Comments above on the increasing importance in villages of people who can “get things done” refer to the large number of local-level ‘fixers’ who seek to arrange things with persons in authority at higher levels. Two recent studies of ‘fixers’ in Karnataka<sup>39</sup> found

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(March 2004) p. 12; and J. Manor, “Successful Governance Reforms in Two Indian States: Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh”, report to the World Bank, 2004.

<sup>35</sup> By linking most ‘user committees’ to *panchayats*, Karnataka has avoided serious problems often found elsewhere. See J. Manor, “‘User Committees’: A Potentially Damaging New Wave of Decentralisation?”, *European Journal of Development Research* (spring, 2004) pp. 192-213.

<sup>36</sup> See again, the Public Affairs Centre surveys and Manor, “Successful Governance Reforms...”.

<sup>37</sup> Crook and Manor, *Democracy and Decentralisation*...

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter two.

<sup>39</sup> J. Manor, “‘Towel over Armpit’: Small-time Political ‘Fixers’ in India’s States” – published in a shorter version in *Asian Survey* (September-October 2000) pp. 816-35, and in a longer version in A. Varshney

that many of them do not come from the traditionally dominant landowning groups, and that those who do are usually not involved in cultivating patrimonial ties to clients. They develop different types of relationships from those associated with the old village hierarchies and with Lingayat/Vokkaliga dominance. They have tended to erode those hierarchies. Most ‘fixers’ are more accessible than dominant caste leaders in the old hierarchies.<sup>40</sup> And they help the democratic process to work more effectively, and government institutions and actors to become more responsive.

### *Civil Society Organisations*

Civil society organisations also provide villagers with more links to higher levels than three decades ago. Today, they can be found in most rural arenas. Local-level associations tend not to connect villagers with higher levels, but many which originate at higher levels seek to forge links to the grassroots. We must not, however, overstate the coverage of the latter. It is unlikely that more than a minority of villagers are reached by such organisations.<sup>41</sup> So most important links between villages and higher levels are provided by the other three institutions and actors discussed above.

## **V. HOW ‘COHESIVE’ IS SOCIETY IN KARNATAKA?**

To conclude, let us consider the answers to this question that emerge at the village and higher levels. In 1984, this writer argued that Karnataka was a ‘cohesive society’ – not as cohesive as more homogeneous societies, but more cohesive than the societies found elsewhere in South Asia. This was true despite invidious hierarchies and injustices within it. The key to the explanation was the exceedingly low incidence of landlessness in former princely Mysore.<sup>42</sup>

This had two important implications. First, hierarchies and inequalities there were not as extreme as in other regions of South Asia – so that we encountered less of the harsh exploitation found elsewhere, and less severe alienation among the exploited. Second, since old Mysore set the political tone for the enlarged state after 1956, accommodative politics which offered at least something even to disadvantaged groups took firmer root there than in other Indian states.

Is society in Karnataka today still as ‘cohesive’? The simple answer is ‘no’, but the details are complicated. At the village level, caste hierarchies have eroded. Since those

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(ed.) *India and the Politics of Developing Countries: Essays in Memory of Myron Weiner* (Sage Publication, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks and London, 2004) pp. 60-86; and A. Inbanathan and D.V. Gopalappa, “Fixers, Patronage, ‘Fixing’ and Local Governance in Karnataka”, Working Paper 112, Institute for Social and Economic Change, 2002. See also Anirudh Krishna’s research on similar actors in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, whom he calls *naya netas* in for example, *Active Social Capital* (Columbia University Press, New York, 2002).

<sup>40</sup> Inbanathan and Gopalappa, *ibid.*, p. 18.

<sup>41</sup> In Bangladesh, where national-level civil society organisations are more formidable than state-level equivalents in Karnataka, they estimate that they reach only around 20% of the rural population. Interview with the head of one of the two most formidable organisations, Dhaka, 7 March 1993.

<sup>42</sup> Manor, “Karnataka: Caste, Class...”

hierarchies entailed objectionable practices, this change that can be seen as ‘progressive’. But it has also undermined the limited sense of interdependence and mutuality, which offered certain protections against uncertainties. The old hierarchies proved remarkably durable because they adapted incrementally as conditions changed.<sup>43</sup> They bent without breaking – until recently.

Over recent decades, ‘caste’ has come to denote difference more than hierarchy. The bonds linking higher and lower status groups have become more tenuous. Villagers look for help less to neighbours who have high ascriptive status than to people who “can get things done”. And those people are often not of high caste status.<sup>44</sup> Thus at the village level, Karnataka has become a much less “cohesive” society.

People who can “get things done” usually achieve this by using connections and channels to higher levels in the system. Such channels have proliferated over the last three decades. This has made villagers less inclined to try to solve problems through their own collective efforts and more inclined to look beyond the village for assistance.<sup>45</sup>

This proliferation of channels does not mean that society in Karnataka has become more “cohesive” in another way – in terms of vertical ties between villages and higher levels. Society is more vertically integrated. But the bonds that connect the villages with higher levels are too impersonal, impermanent and unpredictable to yield anything like “cohesion”. We have seen a decline in social cohesion at the village level, and an increase in mostly political and economic integration between the local and higher levels. But the latter does not suffice to compensate for the loosening of social bonds at the grassroots.

There are greater tensions between castes – although some analysts argue that this is substantially explained by better reporting of such matters. There is evidence of at least a modest increase in suspicion between Hindus and religious minorities – despite the failure of Hindu nationalists to elicit much popular response through campaigns about Ayodhya or in Hubli and Chikmagalur.<sup>46</sup> Retreats by recent state governments on the issue of land reform have inspired some popular anger over concessions to globalization and private companies. Policy changes on common property resources have inspired some ‘naxalite’ activity.

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<sup>43</sup> For evidence of this durability, consider for example a survey of social attitudes conducted in the early 1980s by K.C. Alexander. He questioned village respondents in Alleppey District of Kerala, Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu and Mandya District of Karnataka. In the first two of those places, the old hierarchies had been so extremely unjust that they had broken down. In Mandya District, however, the old hierarchies were far less inequitable – so he found that the hierarchies lived on. K.C. Alexander, “Caste Mobilization and Class Consciousness: The Emergence of Agrarian Movements in Kerala and Tamil Nadu” in Frankel and Rao, *ibid.*, volume one, pp. 392-400.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with G.K. Karanth, Bangalore, 5 March 2005.

<sup>45</sup> See for example, the arguments of G.K. Karanth, V. Ramaswamy and others in chapters 11 to 14 of Baumgartner and Hogger (eds.) *In Search of...*

<sup>46</sup> See for example, M. Assadi, “‘Dargah Versus Peeta’: Hindutva’s Politics of Appropriating Syncretic Culture in Karnataka”, *Indian Journal of Secularism*, July-September 2003, pp. 93-109.

We see more resentment in rural areas about state governments' urban bias than three decades ago, and greater exasperation in northern Karnataka over regional disparities. State governments are more preoccupied with ensuring that benefits flow to Kannadigas rather than to linguistic minorities. On each of these fronts, we see growing impatience within a specific group -- rural dwellers, northerners and Kannadigas -- with the grand political settlement that has emerged from state governments' pursuit of incremental change and broad accommodations embracing a large diversity of social groups. These three groups are vastly powerful. Rural dwellers and Kannadigas constitute huge majorities, and one perceptive analyst of Karnataka's politics argues that northerners often decide state election outcomes.<sup>47</sup>

Frustrations within such formidable groups raise serious concerns about the sustainability of two important themes in Karnataka over recent decades. The first is accommodative politics at the state-level, the tendency of leaders to construct broadly inclusive cabinets since 1972. The second is the 'enlightened conservative' tendency to undertake change in anticipation of potential conflicts – to defuse them before they become acute, in order to sustain accommodative politics.

Will the increasing frustrations and social tensions at lower levels undermine accommodation at the state level? Perhaps not, unless much greater antipathy develops between social groups than we have seen thus far – and maybe even if it does. State-level politicians are likely to cling to the view that their ambitions are best served by developing broadly inclusive accommodations. That persuaded leading Lingayats and Vokkaligas not to seek a restoration of state-level dominance after Devaraj Urs had changed politics in 1972. That persuaded successive Chief Ministers to include in their cabinets leaders even from groups that had given them little electoral support – because this maximised their appeal. Even if social tensions grow more acute, that logic may still apply. The main potential exception to this is the BJP, which might pursue communal polarization if it came to power. But some leading analysts have long expected them to conform to the accommodative tradition if they take office.

In 2006, they finally managed to do so – in coalition with elements of the Janata Dal (S). The compulsions of coalition government have thus far prevented dramatic actions by BJP leaders that might prove polarizing. Indeed, confusion and occasional conflicts within that government have prevented it from achieving much of anything during its first few months in power.

Whatever happens in the future, it should by now be apparent that certain important changes have occurred – mostly incrementally – over the period since 1972. Village society in Karnataka is less cohesive, but more integrated with higher levels, as a result of the proliferation of channels linking the villages to those levels. It is less self-regulating (as a result of the decline of the old social hierarchies), but (as a result of *panchayati raj*) somewhat more self-governing.

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<sup>47</sup> This is E. Raghavan, editor of the Economic Times, Bangalore. His view is not shared by this writer.

It is a less quiescent and orderly society, characterised by greater (caste, regional, linguistic, urban/rural and perhaps communal) tensions and, at times, conflicts. And the loosening of hierarchical social bonds has made it possible, for the first time, that class conflict may become important in rural Karnataka. State-level politicians' preference for broadly inclusive accommodations, and the incremental changes that flow from them, have provided inadequate responses to interest groups caught up in these tensions.

And yet despite that, government has become more responsive. That is partly the result of the reasonably generous empowerment of *panchayati raj* institutions. But it is also explained by the introduction of participatory mechanisms (mainly 'user committees' and self help groups) that promote at least some consultation in various developmental sectors. These have been introduced both by governments and by some civil society organisations.

These things are patent realities, but they and politicians' accommodative habits may not suffice to prevent greater tension and turbulence in the society and politics of the state. Karnataka has become more democratic – thanks in part to the decline of the old hierarchies – but it has become more difficult to govern. The instruments available to those doing the governing -- mainly formal institutions, agencies and programmes, since party organisations lack strength -- have not suffered the sort of damage seen in some other Indian states, and have increased in number and penetrative capacity. But this has not eased the long-standing difficulty of ruling parties at getting re-elected, and if tensions continue to intensify, they could eventually bring an end to the accommodative tradition in state politics.

# The Political Economy of Gram Panchayats in South India

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## 1. INTRODUCTION:

The Indian experiment in local village democracy – galvanized by the passage of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment in 1993 - is among the most ambitious in history. Moreover, the experiment with Panchayats in India is of global interest given the array of similar policy experiments going on around the world.<sup>1</sup> It comes at a time when economists are re-engaging with political economy issues in their thinking about policy.

It is unsurprising, therefore, to find that Panchayats have attracted significant academic attention<sup>2</sup>. Since 1993 village governments in India, Gram Panchayats (GP), have been responsible for maintaining local amenities such as village roads and drinking water facilities, and for identifying beneficiaries for federal and state poverty alleviation programs. A key motivation for the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment was the belief that local governments may be better placed (than, say, centrally appointed bureaucrats) to identify and respond to villager needs. It was also held that villagers may find it easier to monitor local politicians. Democratization of the public service delivery system has, thus, been a central element of the Indian decentralization experiment.

This paper reviews findings from a research project on the political economy of Indian Gram Panchayats in four states in south India. The research is based on a household and village survey covering 522 villages in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The decentralization experience of these four states shows significant variation (Matthew and Buch, 2000). Karnataka was one of the pioneers of the Panchayat movement, and was the first Indian state to mandate regular Panchayat elections. Fiscal decentralization has advanced the most in Kerala, with forty percent of state expenditures allocated by Panchayats. Kerala Panchayats are characterized by high levels of villager participation and regular villager meetings. Andhra Pradesh took a different route and, till recently, sought to energize a political alternative to the Panchayat system -- the Janmabhoomi program. Finally, Tamil Nadu continues to have relatively weak Gram Panchayats with limited devolution of policy powers.

We examine how features of the Panchayat system, in particular the design of political institutions affect how it target resources towards economically and socially disadvantaged groups in the village. We also examine politician selection. One of the striking features of the Panchayat experiment is how it has led to a new political class,

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<sup>1</sup> See Bardhan (2000) and Crook and Manor (1998) for background discussion.

<sup>2</sup> Shortage of space precludes us from surveying the extensive emerging literature. Recent contributions include Bardhan and Mookherjee (2000), Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004a, b), Foster and Rosenzweig (2001), Chaudhuri and Heller (2004), Manor (2004).



many of whom had never held public office previously. We examine how selection mechanisms in Indian villages affect politician outcomes.

The paper is organized as follows. In the next question, we discuss survey design. Section three discusses some background institutional issues. Section four reviews some concrete findings from the research while section four pulls together the policy implications.

## 2. SURVEY DESIGN

Our data come from a village- and household- level survey conducted in Andhra Pradesh (AP), Karnataka (KA), Kerala (KE) and Tamil Nadu (TN). The survey was conducted between September-November 2002. Sampling occurred in multiple stages, and consisted of purposive sampling up to the level of blocks and random sampling within these blocks. Our final sample consists of 527 villages belonging to 201 elected GPs.<sup>3</sup>

For each pair of states, we selected two districts (one per state) that shared a common boundary.<sup>4</sup> The district pairs were selected, with one exception, to focus on districts that, prior to the linguistic reorganization of states in 1957, had belonged to same administrative unit. Our sample consists of nine districts - Bidar (in KA) and Medak (in AP) from the erstwhile Hyderabad, Pallakad (KE), Coimbatore (TN), Kasargod (KE), Dakshin Kanada (KA), Dharmapuri (TN), and Chithoor (AP), all from erstwhile Madras Presidency. In KA, we also sampled Kolar district which was a part of erstwhile Mysore.

For each pair of districts which shared a common boundary three pairs of blocks were selected (that is, 3 blocks in each of the two districts).<sup>5</sup> Two blocks form a pair if they lie in different states but are 'linguistically similar'. Using 1991 census block level data we defined two blocks to be linguistically similar if, of all the blocks in the district, they have the highest fraction of households with the same mother tongue. The top three matches entered our sample. Linguistic similarity is a good proxy for shared cultural history, given the prevalence of caste and linguistic endogamy. Hence, language matching provides a partial control for "unobservable" socio-cultural differences. The historical and administrative similarity of linguistically matched blocks was checked using princely state maps and the Report of the States Reorganization Commission (Govt. of India, 1955).

In AP, KA and TN we randomly sampled 6 GPs per block and within a GP all villages if the GP had 3 or fewer villages. If it had more than three villages, then we selected the Pradhan's village and randomly selected two other villages.<sup>6</sup> To account for the much

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<sup>3</sup> See Besley, Pande, Rahman and Rao (2004b) for an extended discussion of the project.

<sup>4</sup> One district in KA (Kolar) that shared boundaries with both AP and TN entered the sample twice. The same holds for one district in AP (Chithoor)

<sup>5</sup> If one district was matched with 2 different districts then 6 blocks were chosen from it (three per match). In one block in KE an additional block was sampled as a check on our language matching. This gave us a total of 37 blocks (12 in KA, 9 in AP and TN and 7 in KE).

<sup>6</sup> We excluded all villages with less than 200 persons from our sampling frame. All hamlets with population over 200 were considered as independent villages in drawing the sample.

higher GP population in KE we sampled 3 GPs per block and 6 wards per GP in KE. This procedure gave a total of 201 GPs and 527 villages. Our survey used four different questionnaires to collect data at the village, politician and household level.

We conducted household surveys (20 per village) in a random sub-sample of 259 villages giving us a sample of 5,180 households. The household questionnaire obtained information on household's socio-economic status, household structure, views and use of public services in the village, private government benefits. Respondents were also asked to rank-order problems in the village. Since the sample is divided between male and female and SC/ST and non-SC/ST respondents this provides yet another source of information on gender and caste differences on preferences about village problems.

We also surveyed an elected member of the GP in every village (with precedence given to the GP head if he/she lived in that village) - this gives us a household sample of 544 elected officials. In addition to all the questions on the household questionnaire politicians were also asked a series of questions about their conduct of GP activities.

At the village level we administered a questionnaire using Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) techniques (Chambers 1994) to a group of men selected to represent different caste groups in the village. The PRA questionnaire assessed villager views on problems in the village, the work done by the GP and prevalence of political oligarchy. For the last, we asked respondents to list the extent to which the Pradhan, former Pradhan and the Vice-Pradhan controlled prominent activities in the village. We also obtained a detailed listing of castes within the village, and land distribution both within and between castes. The PRA-based questionnaire was separately fielded to a (i) group of women and (ii) group of SC/ST individuals. These PRA obtained separate measures of women's and SC/ST problem ranking vis-à-vis public service delivery.

Finally, we undertook an audit of all public goods in the village. This was conducted by an independent enumerator who visually assessed the quality of schools, clinics, roads, drinking water, and sanitation. The enumerator was also asked to identify the extent of GP involvement in improving these facilities.

### **3. BACKGROUND**

It is important to begin by engaging with the details of the Panchayat system and its operation. Schedule XI of the Indian Constitution defines the functional items for which states may devolve responsibility to Panchayats. While states vary in the extent to which they devolve policy powers to the Gram Panchayat, most Gram Panchayats have responsibilities of civic administration in the village together with limited independent taxation powers. On average, roughly 10 percent of a GP's total revenue come from own revenues with the remainder consisting of transfers from higher levels of government.

While the ambit of GP policy influence varies across Indian states, GPs typically perform (at least) two distinct policy tasks. The first is beneficiary selection for central and state welfare schemes. These are “low spillover” public goods because the benefits are likely

to accrue to individual households. These include a variety of transfer programs such as schemes that provide beneficiary households with funds to acquire housing, private electricity and water supply. Eligibility for these schemes is usually restricted to households below the official poverty line. Most schemes also require that a minimum fraction of beneficiaries be SC/STs.

An important part of a GP's job, and one on which we focused in our research, is identifying households which are 'Below the Poverty Line', or BPL households. Possession of a BPL card makes the household eligible for an array of government schemes, ranging from subsidized food through the public distribution system to free hospitalization. The GP, in collaboration with state government officials, is supposed to identify (via a census) households with income below the poverty line, and prepare the list of BPL households. This list, and subsequent selection of beneficiary households under various schemes (from among the BPL households, is supposed to be ratified in Gram Sabha meetings. All BPL households are eligible for a BPL card, also often provided by the government. This procedure makes the allocation of BPL cards highly political and the success or failure in targeting needy households a key issue. 87 percent of the politicians in our sample stated that elected GP politicians were responsible for BPL card allocation.

The second area of GP policy activism is the construction and maintenance of village public goods such as street-lights, roads and drains. These are "high spillover" public goods since the benefits accrue more broadly across members of a village. The GP decides the distribution of these public goods within the village and across villages within a GP. It also determines the quality of provision.

Two important institutional features of the Gram Panchayat which are specific to decentralization in India are political reservation and village meetings (Gram Sabhas). The 73rd constitutional amendment mandated political reservation in favor of SC/ST for the Pradhan<sup>7</sup> position, and required that the extent of such reservation in a state reflect the SC/ST population share in that state. It also required that no GP be reserved for the same group for two consecutive elections.

Panchayat legislation also requires that the Pradhan consult with villagers and ward members in deciding the choice of beneficiaries and allocation of public goods. This is supposed to be done via village meetings, or Gram Sabha meetings, called by the elected local government to discuss resource allocation decisions in the village. Seventy six percent of the villages in our sample reported have at least one Gram Sabha meeting in the last year. However, final decision-making powers in a GP are vested with the Pradhan.

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<sup>7</sup> Also known, depending on the state, as President or Sarpanch.

## 4. FINDINGS

In this section, we discuss some of the results from the research under three headings. We first study how the Panchayat system is targeting resources across households and villages. We then discuss political participation and the operation of Gram Sabha's. Finally, we will discuss the selection of politicians and its consequences. Table 1 gives the basic data from our sample of households and villages from which the following analyses are drawn.

### 4.1 Targeting

One of the key problems in targeting public resources is to get them to those who need them most. One key hope for the Panchayat system was that it would use the political process to create more effective targeting to needy households and villages. Our data allow us to look at these issues at both levels as we have detailed data on which transfers households receive and which villages are favored. We focus on the targeting of scheduled caste and scheduled tribe households (SC/ST). SC/ST households have suffered from significant historic social and economic disadvantage, leading to worse contemporary outcomes for this group. An important aim of the Indian state's welfare policy has been to target resources towards this group (Pande 2003).

In Besley, Pande, Rahman and Rao (2004a), we use our household survey data to measure the provision of household public goods. Here we used only 4059 households of which 981 were SC/ST spread across 193 villages.<sup>8</sup> We measure a household's exposure to low spill-over public goods by a dummy which equals one if it had a house or toilet built under a government scheme or if it received a private water or electricity connection via a government scheme since the last GP election. Approximately 7% of the sample households fall in this category.

We also examine the activity of Gram Panchayats at the village level. For our key measure -- an index of GP activity on high spillover (i.e. village-level) public goods -- we use information from our audit of village facilities. Specifically, we used an index based on whether the GP undertook any construction or improvement activity on roads, drains, street-lights and water sources within a village since the last GP election. (The index is normalized to lie between 0 and 1.) Roughly 79% of our sample villages experienced GP activism on at least one of these public goods.

We were interested in investigating whether the activity at the household or village level is related to reservation status. To capture a village's reservation status, we constructed an indicator variable equal to one if the village belongs to a GP where the Pradhan is reserved for an SC/ST. We used two different variables to measure the political influence of a village - the first equals one if the Pradhan resides in that village, and the second equals one if the GP headquarters are in that village.

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<sup>8</sup> We did not use data from Kerala in this study as the process of allocation in Kerala was very different.

The results are reported in Table 2. Column 1 reports results from a regression where the left hand side variable is a dummy variable denoting whether the household benefits from a government scheme. The regression includes village fixed effects to account for any factors that differ between villages and affect the extent of targeting. The main finding is that SC/ST households are more likely than non-SC/ST households to receive household transfers suggesting that these groups are targeted within villages. In column (2), second row, we examine the interaction between being from an SC/ST group and having a Pradhan from a GP that is reserved for an SC/ST. We observe a positive coefficient indicating that SC/ST households living in a reserved GP are 7% more likely to receive a transfer under government schemes relative to living in non-reserved GPs.

The column (2) regression explores whether this effect is robust to controlling for whether the household lives in the Pradhan's home village. Here we find that there is no benefit to an SC/ST household from either living in the Pradhan's village or from living in the village where the GP headquarter is located. Thus, it appears the improved targeting of SC/ST households is generated from reservations.

Our results suggest that having a reserved Pradhan does indeed further the end of getting better targeting towards SC/ST households. This complements the results on targeting towards women by female Pradhans found by Chattopadhyay and Duflo for Rajasthan and West Bengal and the evidence on state level targeting of SC/ST households by SC/ST politicians reported in Pande (2003).

Another important aspect of targeting concerns resource allocation across villages. To examine this, we look at measures of village activism at the village level as measured by the GP activism index. We find that this index is on average 0.05 points higher in the Pradhan's village. This is equivalent to a 10% increase in village activism by Panchayats. There is no advantage to being in the GP headquarters. Moreover, having a reserved Pradhan has no consequences for village level targeting.

As Table 1 shows, 39% of our sample villages have Pradhans drawn from them. These also tend to be the larger villages within a GP. We interpret the result in column (3) of Table 2 as a consequence of political geography, though we cannot rule out the possibility that larger (and potentially richer) villages both house the Pradhan and are more successful at lobbying for public goods. States that have only one village per GP are clearly not going to create an advantage for any particular village whereas those with many villages per GP face a distributional issue. If the Pradhan is from a particular village on a repeated basis, then our results suggest that this may create a serious distributional bias.

## **4.2 Gram Sabhas**

The Gram Sabha has often been considered the lynchpin of the Panchayat system. It has the potential to structure democratic institutions to ensure fair and efficient allocation of public funds. The idea that encouraging citizen participation can improve the workings of a democracy is also echoed in the political science literature. One role for

participation emphasized in that literature is to improve the flow of information into the political process beyond that available by electing representatives. Thus, Verba et al (1995) characterize political participation as "information rich" acts and observe that:

"From the electoral outcome alone, the winning candidate cannot discriminate which of dozens of factors, from the position taken on a particular issue to the inept campaign run by the opposition ..., was responsible for the electoral victory." (page 10).

There are two main ways in which such meetings may improve the workings of government. First, relative to elected representatives, these meetings may better reflect citizens' preferences on issues such as how to target resources to the neediest groups. Second, by providing a forum for monitoring the actions of elected representatives they may reduce agency problems in politics, and the extent of corruption.

While holding Gram Sabhas is compulsory, their frequency and content owes a lot to the discretion of elected officials. Officials from the State or District administration can also have a role in this by choosing not to attend, and therefore making the Gram Sabha less attractive to hold. It is also the case that a well-attended meeting may have no bite on policy decisions. We exploit our household and village surveys to examine the determinants of participation in Gram Sabha meetings, and whether having a Gram Sabha meeting affects beneficiary selection for welfare programs.

In our PRA survey, we asked about whether a Gram Sabha meeting had been held in the past six months. The household survey also asked individuals about Gram Sabha attendance. Table 1 show that only 77% of villages held Gram Sabhas in the last year. This suggests a considerable degree of non-compliance with the law. In our household data, Table 1 shows that only around 20% of our sample households report having attended a Gram Sabha meeting.

Besley, Pande and Rao (2005a) looks at the probability of holding a Gram Sabha meeting at the village level and find evidence that this is related to village literacy with more literate villages more likely to hold meetings. Quite why this is true is hard to discern in these data. However, it parallels a larger literature emphasizing the civic benefits of greater education.

In Table 3 (based on Besley, Pande and Rao (2005a)) we use household data to examine who attends Gram Sabha meetings, and whether holding Gram Sabha meetings is correlated with needy households access to public welfare as measured by receipt of BPL cards. All specifications include village level fixed effects which control for variation at the village level.

In column (1) the dependent variable is whether the household respondent attended a Gram Sabha meeting in the past year. We observe that illiterates are less likely to attend a Gram Sabha meeting than others. However, this effect is somewhat offset if the household lives in a village with greater overall literacy. This reinforces the idea that

literate villages have stronger civic cultures. It is also interesting to observe that SC/ST households and landless are also more likely to attend Gram Sabha meetings in villages that have a greater number of literate households. Note that this is not a Kerala specific effect since the regressions control for variation at the village level using fixed effects.

These findings are notable for two reasons. First, there is some suggestion of a political externality from living in a more literate community. Second, Gram Sabha meetings seem to be a forum used by some of the most disadvantaged groups in the village - landless and scheduled castes/tribes. This suggests that these groups find the Gram Sabhas useful and that Gram Sabha meetings may play some role in moving policy in a direction favored by these groups. Indeed, a key function of Gram Sabhas is to target resources to poor households. We now look for evidence of the latter.

In column (2) we estimate a household regression which exploits within village variation in individual characteristics to examine whether the targeting of BPL cards differs depending on whether the village had a Gram Sabha in the last year. The results show that illiterate households in villages that have held Gram Sabhas in the past year are more likely to have a BPL card. There is also evidence of greater targeting of BPL cards towards landless households. In Besley, Pande and Rao (2005a) we interact the characteristics that represent disadvantage - illiteracy, landlessness and schedule caste/tribe -- with the village literacy rate instead of whether the village had a Gram Sabha meeting. All three of these interactions are also significant. This does raise the possibility that holding a Gram Sabha meeting is correlated with other village characteristics that are important in shaping the way in which public resources are targeted. Therefore we cannot say that holding a Gram Sabha has a causal effect on targeting. This is not an issue we can resolve with the existing data. However, these encouraging results on Gram Sabhas clearly deserve further careful investigation.

Our results contribute to a wider debate on how institution design can shape public resource allocation and how the poor can increase their voice in public institutions. It is frequently remarked that poverty is much more than material deprivation and that the poor may receive much less voice in the political process. Moreover, a good deal of cynicism attends initiatives to strengthen that voice.

While the context is very specific, our results sound a more optimistic note. The illiterate, landless and SC/STs are significantly more likely to attend Gram Sabha meetings than other groups. Moreover, there appears to be more targeting towards these groups where Gram Sabha meetings are held. The results are also suggestive of some externalities from literacy in the political process at the village level.

On a less optimistic note, we find that women are less likely to attend Gram Sabha meetings than men. Women respondents are around 20% less likely to attend a Gram Sabha than men. Whether this has significant consequences for public resource allocation needs further investigation. But it is clear the representativeness of Gram Sabhas is likely to be affected by this. Other tools such as gender reservation in

Panchayat representation may go some way towards remedying this (see Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004a)).

### 4.3 Political Selection

By the year 2000, the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment led to the institution of 227,698 new village governments, Gram Panchayats (GP), staffed by over two million elected representatives. Whether these individuals have different skills and motivations from those who previously made political decisions is hard to discern. However, there is a growing body of evidence that political selection is an important consideration in political systems and the current context is an excellent one to think about this.

The Downsian model of politics, which has dominated political economy for over a generation, has no role for political selection. The role of politics is to seek out the policy position of the median voter, and not to examine who implements that policy. But there is now increasing attention paid to the role of political selection in reforming and improving politics.

Little is known in general about characteristics of politicians and how they differ from the general population. Table 4 gives some insight into this in the current context. It compares the sample of 540 politicians with the household sample in our data. We report two sets of comparisons. First, we use our entire sample to compare politician and non-politician households, and report the t-test for differences in means across these two populations in column (3). Second, we restrict attention to SC/ST households and examine whether within this group politician and non-politician households differ (columns (4)-(6)). In all cases, we weight the non-politician sample by the population share of SC/ST households in the village to account for our purposive sampling of SC/ST households.

Looking across columns (1)-(3) an immediate finding, which is not particularly surprising, is that politicians are an elite group. Politicians, on average, own 5 acres of land which is more than twice the average landownership of non-politician households. The likelihood that a politician comes from a household with a history of involvement in politics is 25%, as against a mere 6% for non-politician households. Most politicians in our sample do not report politics as their primary occupation. This, in part, reflects the fact that most of them are first time entrants into politics. While both politician and non-politician households tend to rely on agriculture, politicians are significantly more likely to be cultivators than agricultural laborers. Politicians are also much more likely to be educated, enjoying an advantage of around three years of education per capita. They are also much more likely to read a newspaper which reflects greater literacy in the population group.

Columns (4)-(6) show that reserved politicians who belong to SC/ST also tend to be elites compared to their comparison group (non-politician SC/ST households). Both SC/ST politician and non-politician households are, however, economically disadvantaged relative to the general population. Thus, while reservation is bringing wider participation



in politics, it tends to do so by picking elites from among traditionally disadvantaged groups.

Whether having a political elite that is also an economic elite is moot. It may reflect concerns about village politics being dominated by a set of narrow interests. However, it may also be the case that the more educated and knowledgeable citizens are better placed to run the village and to provide citizens with what the public goods and transfers that they need.

The last two rows of Table 4 show, however, that the political elite is more likely to claim BPL cards and to participate in public works programs in spite of them appearing less disadvantaged in economic dimensions. This is evidence of political opportunism. While the difference in unconditional population means for politician and non-politician households receiving a BPL card is insignificant, in Besley, Pande and Rao (2005b) we show that within villages this effect is statistically significant. However, there is evidence that the effect is diminished when politicians are more educated.

Overall, these results reinforce the need to have a good understanding of the process of political selection and its consequences in village government.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The mainstream economics literature now engages with political economy issues in trying to understand what makes government work. The study of Panchayats provides an excellent basis for thinking how the insights of modern political economy can contribute to our understanding of public service delivery in India. While the Panchayat system has many specific features, there are potentially general lessons for experiments in democratic decentralization elsewhere.

The mantra of decentralization is that it will achieve policies that better reflect the needs of citizens living in village India. Our results on Gram Sabhas and their link to targeting provide some support for this idea. The fact that reserved politicians target differently in three of our states also reinforces earlier findings that reservation the Gram Panchayats can achieve policy change.

But there are important unresolved issues. Politicians remain opportunistic undermining the most romanticized view of village government. The fact that this may change with selection of politicians suggests that there needs to be further focus on methods to draft an honest and competent political class. Policy measures that are worth debating include enhanced training for village politicians and use of wage incentives.

The question of how to ensure that Gram Sabhas are held is clearly important. Policies here could include better monitoring from above or finding means to enhance power of citizens to call Gram Sabhas.

Finally, our results call for a better debate about political geography and institutional means to guarantee that villages get an equal share of resources given that the Pradhan's village appears to benefit most of all. This could be in terms of redrawing Panchayat boundaries to create more Panchayats which contain only few villages or to have a more explicit mechanism for rotating the Pradhan's chair.

It is clear that there is much yet to be learned about how Panchayats work and to think of ways of improving the way in which they make policy. However, conducting studies based on large samples of villages seems like an important way forward to enhance the quality of policy making and to understand whether democratic decentralization is fulfilling its promise.

**TABLE 1: Descriptive Statistics**

<b>Household data</b>	Mean
SC/ST household	0.23 (0.42)
Illiterate	0.27 (0.44)
Landless	0.38 (0.48)
Wealthy	0.29 (0.45)
Ever attended Gram Sabha	0.20 0.40
Possess a BPL Card	0.22 (0.43)
Received Private Good	0.06 (0.24)
Politician	0.09 (0.292)
<b>Village data</b>	
Literacy Rate in 1991	0.42 (0.182)
Fraction of villages which had a Gram Sabha in last year	0.77 (0.41)
Pradhans Village	0.39 (0.48)
GP Headquarter	0.31 (0.460)
Pradhan Reserved for SC/ST	0.20 (0.403)
Public Good index	0.45 (0.30)

Notes: All variables based on survey data, except the village literacy rate which is from the 1991 Census of India. Wealthy is a dummy=1 if household possesses a watch, a fan and either a TV or radio.

**TABLE 2: Effect of SC/ST Reservation on resource allocation**

	Private good		Public goods
	Household data		Village data
	(1)	(2)	(3)
SC/ST Household	0.048*** (0.016)	0.041 (0.025)	
SC/ST Household*Pradhan reserved for SC/ST	0.071** (0.031)	0.071** (0.031)	
SC/ST Household*Pradhan village		0.03 (0.025)	
SC/ST Household*GP headquarters		-0.019 (0.025)	
Proportion SC/ST Households			0.041 (0.042)
Pradhan Village			0.048** (0.023)
Pradhan reserved for SC/ST			-0.003 (0.039)
Pradhan Village*Pradhan reserved for SC/ST			0.003 (0.051)
GP headquarter			0.041* (0.023)
Fixed effects	village	village	block
Observations	4059	4059	395
R-squared	0.11	0.11	0.67

Notes: "Private good" is a dummy variable which equals one if the household's house or toilet was built under a government scheme, or if it received a private water or electricity connection via a government scheme, all since the last GP election. "Public good" is an index of whether the GP undertook any construction or improvement activity on roads, drains, streetlights and water sources after the last GP election. The SC/ST Household dummy equals 1 for SC/ST households. The Pradhan village dummy equals one if the Pradhan resides in the given village. The GP headquarter dummy equals 1 if the GP headquarter is located in the village.

Robust standard errors in brackets. \* significant at 10%; \*\* significant at 5%; \*\*\* significant at 1%

**Table 3: Gram Sabhas: Participation and Resource Allocation**

Dependent Variable Village Characteristic	Attended Gram Sabha	Received BPL Card
	Literacy Rate	Gram Sabha
	(1)	(2)
Illiterate	-0.103*** (0.028)	-0.042* (0.026)
Illiterate*Village Characteristic	0.183** (0.078)	0.091*** (0.030)
SCST	-0.029 (0.040)	0.094** (0.042)
SCST*Village Characteristic	0.139 (0.097)	0.062 (0.047)
Landless	-0.073** (0.029)	0.018 (0.030)
Landless*Village Characteristic	0.232*** (0.066)	0.067* (0.035)
Female	-0.086*** (0.030)	-0.009 (0.010)
Female*Village Characteristic	-0.242*** (0.076)	
Upper caste	-0.007 (0.018)	-0.028* (0.016)
Wealthy	-0.027* (0.016)	-0.079*** (0.014)
Fixed effects	Village	Village
Observations	5240	5364
R-squared	0.25	0.4

Notes: Standard errors in brackets are clustered at village level. Regressions also include respondent age and age squared as controls.

**TABLE 4: Selection of Politicians**

Sample:	All			SC/ST		
	Politician	Nonpolitician	ttest for difference of means	Politician	Nonpolitician	ttest for difference of means
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Landownership	5.705 (0.353)	2.025 (0.086)	10.118 [0]	2.374 (0.296)	1.055 (0.170)	3.862 [0]
Family political history	0.258 (0.019)	0.065 (0.005)	9.874 [0]	0.213 (0.037)	0.060 (0.010)	3.900 [0]
Agricultural laborer	0.066 (0.010)	0.237 (0.008)	-12.660 [0]	0.161 (0.033)	0.460 (0.019)	-7.880 [0]
Cultivator	0.481 (0.021)	0.217 (0.008)	11.533 [0]	0.315 (0.042)	0.145 (0.014)	3.830 [0]
Years of education	7.276 (0.186)	4.750 (0.103)	11.860 [0]	6.161 (0.421)	2.880 (0.174)	7.180 [0]
Newspaper readership	0.692 (0.019)	0.342 (0.010)	15.810 [0]	0.613 (0.044)	0.220 (0.018)	8.280 [0]
BPL received	0.253 (0.018)	0.230 (0.007)	1.170 [0.23]	0.363 (0.043)	0.340 (0.016)	0.460 [0.64]
Public works program	0.091 (0.012)	0.040 (0.003)	3.904 [0]	0.121 (0.029)	0.084 (0.010)	1.170 [0.23]

Notes: The non-politicians means are weighted by fraction SC/ST households in the village to account for purposive sampling of 4 SC/ST households per village. The p-values for the ttest are provided in square brackets.

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## **DYNAMICS OF LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN KARNATAKA\***

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## I. INTRODUCTION

Governance discourse tends to focus strongly on formal political institutions. This is particularly true at the local level where decentralised governance has become synonymous with local governance. Given this strong focus on formal decentralised structures of governance, the role of customary village councils in local governance often gets overlooked. There are two reasons for this. It is generally believed that formal institutions are (a) quite distinct from the customary institutions and are relatively free of 'traditional' influences that bear on them; and (b) more powerful than the customary ones, and so tend to 'drive them out'. However, the extent to which these assumptions are in consonance with local reality is debatable. Decentralised local government structures such as Grama Panchayats co-exist with customary village councils and often interact with them. Development outcomes, either positive or negative, at the local level are often determined by these interactions.

Karnataka has a fairly long and impressive history of decentralisation. Democratically elected local government structures were institutionalised and political space created for marginalised groups long before the 1992 amendment that made Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) constitutionally mandatory<sup>1</sup>. Despite this, local governance in Karnataka has not become fully formalised. At the village level, elected Grama Panchayats continue to co-exist with customary village councils (CVCs), which are rooted in traditional practices, values and power relations. It is widely believed that customary institutions are instruments of caste dominance, oppressive in nature and shrinking in face of modernity, especially with the introduction of formal, elected, local Gram Panchayats. While these perceptions are not completely wrong, the research indicates that the picture is more complex.

In reality, CVCs –

1. generally are inter-caste institutions consisting of caste leaders of different caste groups represented in the community and act as forums of deliberation with an emphasis on compromise rather than simple rule enforcement.
2. in addition to enforcing 'traditional' rules and norms, also perform a range of useful functions at the village level often in a non-repressive manner.
3. rather than disappearing in the face of modernity, often interact in a positive manner with the 'so-called' modern, formal local institutions that are said to be replacing them.

This indicates that local governance in Karnataka is a complex and contested site where formal and informal local governance institutions complement each other in some instances and are in conflict at others.

The objective of this paper is to unpack the dynamics of local governance in Karnataka by studying the interaction between two sets of rural institutions, (a) the formal, elected *Gram Panchayats* (GPs), mandated by the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to the Indian Constitution in

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<sup>1</sup> The 1992 constitutional amendment (73<sup>rd</sup>) established an elected three-tier government structure at the sub-state level known as Panchayati Raj Institutions.

1992, that typically cover a group of natural villages; and (b) the informal, long standing, village level CVCs, which undertake dispute resolution and a wide range of other activities at the level of the individual natural village. On the basis of field research in 30 villages in Karnataka, this paper tries to present a more holistic picture of CVCs, including their role in village governance and service delivery (Section 2) and the ways in which they interact with *Grama Panchayats* (Sections 3). The concluding section analyses the implications of this interaction and its influence on local democracy in Karnataka.

## II. LOCAL GOVERNANCE IN KARNATAKA

Karnataka is one of the better-developed states in India. Land reforms and other developmental initiatives and opportunities aimed at backward classes and dalits in the '80s has created a society that is not as polarised as some of the other states in India. This has led to the formation of a fairly cohesive society (Manor, 1997). A less well-known fact about Karnataka relates to its long experimentation with decentralisation. Attempts to devolve powers to local bodies had been initiated even before independence (Natraj and AnanthPur, 2003). A serious effort to decentralise its political structures in Karnataka came about in the 1980s. The first major landmark in Karnataka was the 1983 Act, which introduced a two-tier, elected sub-state level governance structure. A notable feature was 25 per cent reservation for women in these bodies even before this was mandated by the Constitution. Elections under this Act were held in 1987. The 1983 Act was substituted by a new law in 1993 (the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993) to accommodate the mandatory provisions brought in by the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the Constitution. The 1993 Act provides for a three-tier structure – Zilla Panchayat (district level), Taluk Panchayat (Block level) and Gram Panchayat (village level).

### ***Grama Panchayats:***

Of the three tiers of PRIs, Grama Panchayat is the most important tier as it is directly involved in local governance specially given its proximity to the rural population.

### **Some of the key features of Grama Panchayats in Karnataka are as follows:**

- Democratically elected bodies
- Elections conducted once in five years.
- Constituted for a group of villages (5-7000 population) with one representative for every 400 population
- 33% seats reserved for women and 33% seats reserved for OBCs
- Reservation of seats for SCs & STs in proportion to their population
- Reservation for the post of president and vice president
- Tied and untied funds from the state and central governments.
- Vested with powers of taxation

Given that *Grama panchayats* have become institutionalised and influential, one would expect that customary village councils (CVCs) at the village level in Karnataka to have become defunct and faded away. In fact it is generally believed that the 'traditional' *village panchayats*, studied and documented by Ishwaran (1968), Srinivas (1987) and

others no longer exist in Karnataka. Village elites, instead of the *village panchayat*, are now seen as mediators of power relations and influencing the process of local governance (Inbanathan, 2000). But field research in 30 villages from three different districts<sup>2</sup> of Karnataka indicates that CVCs are not only prevalent but also quite active in all 30 villages. Rather than declining CVCs continue to be ubiquitous and influential.

### ***Customary Village Councils***<sup>3</sup>:

CVCs are one among a variety of local institutions, structured mainly around caste, that exist in Indian villages. This is true of Karnataka also. The type of local institutions range from caste *panchayats*, street *panchayats* to CVCs. Of all these local institutions, CVCs are the most important category of institutions from a democracy and governance perspective mainly because intra-village caste *panchayats* and/or street *panchayats*<sup>4</sup> (for a single street or a group of streets) operate at sub-village level and have limited authority – restricted to a caste group in the case of caste *panchayats* or limited to the population of a street or few streets in case of street *panchayats*. But the CVC is an apex body with jurisdiction over the entire village. They are not formal political institutions, which have a set of clearly delineated responsibilities. Rather they are better comprehended as a ‘pattern of dialectic, decision and action’ (Mandelbaum, 1970). CVCs play a central role in village governance by maintaining social order and ensuring community harmony and thus fostering village solidarity. CVCs are long-standing institutions that draw their legitimacy from ‘traditions’ and customs and are quite distinct from the modern associations that are formed as part of external interventions such as user committee groups, micro-credit groups etc for a specific purpose. However, leaders of the CVC are often found represented in ‘modern’ local bodies such as watershed committees, water and sanitation committees, forest committees etc.

Customary Village councils go under a wide variety of local names in Karnataka. In southern part of the state, particularly in Mysore district, CVCs are known locally as ‘*panchayati*’ (Council), ‘*Halli panchayati*’ (Village Council), ‘*nadu*’ or ‘*nadu panchayati*’ (Regional Council), ‘*nyaya panchayati*’ (Justice Council) or even ‘*nyaya samiti*’ (Justice Committee). In northern Karnataka particularly in the area covered by the former Dharwad district, the terms ‘*pancharu*’ or ‘*Hireru*’ (village elders) are prevalent, while in one village the CVC is known as the ‘*Civic Board*’. In Raichur district the normal term is ‘*Daiva*’ (God). However, for the purpose of this paper I will refer to them as *customary village councils* (CVCs).

Unlike *Grama panchayats*, CVCs function at the village level and have authority only over the ‘natural’ village within which it operates. Typically a single *Grama Panchayat* may include several CVCs. In contrast to *Grama Panchayats*, the basic structure of CVCs is rooted in ‘tradition’ and customs. Srinivas describes ‘village councils’ (CVCs) as being ‘informal and flexible’ bodies with ‘no hard and fast rule about who should

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<sup>2</sup> 10 villages each from Mysore, Dharwad and Raichur districts were chosen to study the interaction between the formal and informal local governance institutions.

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed description of CVCs, see ‘Rivalry or Synergy? Formal and Informal Local Governance in India’, IDS working Paper No.226, June, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> I came across street panchayats in only one big village where the ILGI was relatively weak.

constitute them'. He has also observed a variation in membership over space and context (2002:81). Mandelbaum's (1970) detailed study of 'village *panchayats*' from different parts of the country indicates a similar flexible pattern of representation. Basically there are two types of CVCs based on the caste composition of the village. (a) In a single caste village the caste *panchayat* also operates as the CVC, (b) but in village with multi-caste population, the CVC is a broader forum that includes the caste leaders of all caste groups. Essentially all CVCs have a core set of leaders of various caste groups represented in the village. However, the variation is visible in the extent of inclusion of other members such as SC leaders, GP members and new leaders. Caste leaderships tend to be hereditary titles but the inclusion of new members is based on more modern criteria such as education, mobility, their political linkages, ability to interact with government officials and so on. There are instances of corrupt or discriminatory CVC leaders being replaced with those that have the respect of the entire village community (Ananth Pur, 2004).

CVCs broadly have a similar pattern of representation – a set of members or *panchas* headed by a leader- *Yajamana*. The membership to CVCs is intrinsically embedded in caste and gender. Virtually all *panchas* are men and are usually the caste leaders<sup>5</sup> of individual caste groups present in the village. The size of a CVC is broadly proportional to the number of caste groups present in a village. Although headed by *Yajamanas*, CVCs are rarely, if ever, *controlled* by a single, dominant caste leader or big landowner of the village. It is perceived as a more deliberative forum, where decisions are arrived at after discussions and consensus. This 'egalitarianism' is not unique to Karnataka CVCs but also found in the village councils of Rajasthan where '*panchas*' (representatives) of all caste groups sit as equals on the central platform'. (Krishna, 2002: 136).

A major criticism against CVCs is that they reinforce caste and gender hierarchies. The pattern of representation in the CVC, to a certain extent, confirms this view. This is particularly visible in the marginal representation, in CVCs, of Scheduled Castes<sup>6</sup> (SC) in some villages to complete exclusion of women in all the 30 villages. However there is evidence that many CVCs are adapting to the changing socio-political context. For instance, there is a better representation for SCs in villages with dominant SC population (at least in three villages SC and Scheduled Tribe members were the *Yajamanas* of the CVC) and in a couple of villages, female elected members of the formal *Grama Panchayat* sometimes were invited to join in the deliberations of the CVC for specific purposes<sup>7</sup>. Krishna finds that in Rajasthan, 'though representatives of the scheduled castes (previously known as untouchables) sit some distance apart or even at a lower level from other *panchas*, they have equal say in the decision, particularly when a person from their own caste group is involved as a party' (Krishna, 2002:136). In Karnataka, particularly in some villages of Mysore district, SC leaders sit together on the same platform with other caste leaders while resolving disputes. This ability to adapt has made

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<sup>5</sup> Some caste groups in a few villages have a leadership, usually hereditary but at times elected, and accounts (of funds collected by that particular caste group for religious and other purposes) that are checked by the people belonging to that particular caste group around every Hindu New Year. Caste Panchayats have jurisdiction over all families belonging to that caste in the village. These organisations are often quite formal and institutionalised.

<sup>6</sup> Those belonging to caste groups previously considered as 'untouchables'.

<sup>7</sup> Specially disputes related to women.

CVCs more pluralistic (with limitations) and also able to project a more modern image to outsiders.

Many CVCs have also begun widen their base of representation in an attempt to adapt to local democracy. Apart from the core membership (caste based), CVCs include other members many of whom are members of the elected *Grama Panchayats*. and their membership in the formal *Grama Panchayats*. The emergence of new and parallel leadership at the village level is not a new phenomenon and is commonly found in most rural areas (Bailey, 1960, Beteille, 1971, Krishna, 2002). But Karnataka seems to differ in that the 'new leaders' often find a place on CVCs and play active roles there (Ananth Pur, 2002).

CVCS do not have any permanent source of income. Donations collected for religious activities and fines imposed on villagers found guilty during the dispute resolution purpose are the two main sources of income. CVCs ability to raise local resources is reported in greater detail elsewhere. In Karnataka CVCs perform a wide range of useful, collective activities. With the formal elected *Grama Panchayat* taking care of the development needs of the villagers, CVCs have not become redundant as they provide valuable services to the rural citizens that are not offered by the formal *Grama Panchayats*. The following is a list of activities/functions that CVCs generally perform at the village level. CVCs may perform some or all these functions depending upon their influence and degree of activism.

1. All 30 CVCs were involved **religious activities**, such as organising religious festivals, rituals and processions (*Jathre*), temple construction, repairs and maintenance. In some villages a separate temple committee is constituted to oversee the preparations for the Village Jathre. Such temple committees tend to be much more broad based and consist of leaders of the CVC along with other village notables. Most CVCs collect donations- cash or kind- from the villagers for these activities.
2. CVCs were involved in **dispute resolution** in all 30 sample villages. They not only arbitrate disputes but also help maintain local law and order and thus play a key role in the internal regulation of villages. The types of disputes that come before the CVCs include petty disputes, thefts, encroachment issues, minor property disputes, drunken brawls and marital problems. Criminal cases are handed over to the police. Villagers do not necessarily see dispute resolution by CVCs as an end point, but rather as the first opportunity for justice because it is quick, affordable and accessible.<sup>8</sup> In most villages, villagers have the option of approaching the police station or the formal legal system if disputes are not satisfactorily resolved there. On an average 80% of local disputes are resolved by the CVCs in these 30 villages. There are also a few instances of pending disputes being brought back from the law courts to the CVC for resolution.
3. CVCs also provide **social services and support** to those in need. There are a number of cases of CVCs' helping destitute or widowed women to get a share of

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<sup>8</sup> While in most cases villagers respect the ILGI as an institution capable of delivering fair judgement, there are instances where ILGIs have been accused of being biased and corrupt.

their husbands' property, helping widows in the village to get widow pension and/or ration cards, collecting funds from the villagers to help accident victims (generally from poor families), arranging funeral rites for the insolvent people, organising mass marriages for the poor, donating stationery to local school children, or supporting the education of gifted students. CVCs have also played a significant role in maintaining communal harmony in villages with substantial Muslim populations. CVCs in 24 out of 30 sample villages were involved in providing various forms of social support to the villagers. However these activities are not part of their regular functions and are taken up as and when required.

4. Some CVCs have also taken up **development activities** using their own initiatives and resources. CVC members have donated or solicited donations of land from villagers or neighbouring villagers for building roads, schools, anganwadis (pre-schools), community halls and/or living quarters for village government functionaries such as local nurses, teachers, and doctors. CVCs in 23 out of 30 sample villages were involved in some sort of development activities but the degree of activism varied significantly. CVCs are not always successful in mobilising cash resources for development purposes but are more influential in soliciting donations of land or labour from the villagers for development purposes. This is mainly because there is a general feeling among the villagers that development activities are the responsibility of *Grama Panchayats* and should be funded by the government. However, a couple of CVCs have managed to raise resources for own development projects. Some of the innovative activities of the two CVCs are listed below –
  - Constructed an approach road to the village. Villagers also donated tractors, labour and some adjoining land to widen the road.
  - Purchased 4 acres of land for the construction of a high school building in the village, ensuring that female students had easier access to higher education.
  - Purchased land for building a small hospital in the village.
  - Built a community hall which is available free of charge for local weddings
  - Organised health camp in the village.
  - Repaired and modernised the local school by donating T.V., sound system.
  - Organised a legal awareness camp in association with *Grama Panchayat* members, local youth club and women's groups<sup>9</sup>.
  - Concerned with the receding ground water table in the village, one of the CVC has purchased 1.5 acres of land, for Rs. 50,000/- from their own contributions, for constructing a tank. Subsequently, the CVC collected funds from higher tiers of local governments and local MLAs<sup>10</sup> and MPs<sup>11</sup> and further extended this tank by

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<sup>9</sup> One of the CVC leaders in this village, who is also a practicing lawyer, initiated this legal awareness camp by linking up with the district legal cell, which gives free legal aid to the citizens. A range of issues such as Hindu personal law, Muslim personal law, legal aspects related to land revenue, vehicles, property rights and others were discussed. The villagers not only participated in large numbers but also were interested in making this an annual event.

<sup>10</sup> Each Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) is given Rs. 40 lakhs as constituency development fund.

<sup>11</sup> Each Member of Parliament (MP) has access to 20,000,000 million rupees for development activities in his/her constituency.

another 2.5 acres. This tank has not only regenerated the water table in the village but also provides a regular source of water for the villagers.

These two are rather exceptional cases as not all CVCs exhibit the same level of innovativeness in initiating development activities. But reports from different parts of the state indicate that CVCs do play a significant role in local development activities and either substitute or complement formal development initiatives.

5. Another area where the CVC is becoming an important actor in local governance, relates to **informal resource mobilisation**. CVCs, in all the villages studied, were involved in some form of informal resource mobilisation. The amount raised per year may range from a minimum of Rs.1000/- to a maximum of Rs.1,00,000/-. Informal resource mobilisation may include donations or contributions in cash and kind. Many CVCs maintain bank accounts and submit the expenditure statement to the villagers once a year. Apart from raising resources for religious purposes, CVCs also play an important role in mobilising resources for development projects. Increasingly a number of development projects initiated through GP now require matching contributions from the villagers. It is here that the CVC's ability to raise local funds comes into play. One such programme is the rural water and sanitation programme, which requires 10% matching grants to be raised by the community. While in a few villages, CVC has been successful in raising this matching grant, in others the project was not initiated, as the CVC was not involved in the process. Some CVCs have also donated money collected through fines (from the process of dispute resolution) and additional or left over funds collected for religious festivities for this purpose. However, as mentioned above, there were just two cases of CVCs mobilising local resources on their own for village development.

How are CVC decisions enforced? The CVC leaders I interviewed agree that their decisions, particularly regarding dispute resolution, are not absolutely enforceable. One or other party to the dispute has the option of accessing formal police or judicial channels. CVCs still manage to enforce most of their decisions through social pressure. For example, a person who has openly violated the dictates of the CVC does not find support in the village in times of need or distress unless he or she openly tenders an apology to the CVC for violating its dictates. However, the legitimacy of CVCs and the extent to which they are able to enforce their decisions are somewhat contested. There is a general perception that they no longer enjoy the influence they once did when formal local institutions were relatively weak. But they remain very influential. Villagers, especially women, believe that in a context where they are still distant from the formal law and order mechanisms like the police and the judiciary, there is a need for locally-rooted institutions that provide justice and maintain local law and order.

While the institutional structure of CVCs embodies an inherent contradiction to the democratic principles, their functional characteristics complement the functions of local democratic institutions. But despite their progressive and functional aspect, as an institution dominated by the village elite, CVCs are largely seen as vehicles for 'elite



capture' of local democratic institutions and processes. The extent to which this proposition is valid is tested in the next section where I explore the different ways in which CVCs interacts and influences Grama Panchayats.

### III. INTERACTION WITH GRAMA PANCHAYATS:

In India, the Constitutional amendment that mandates local governance has remained silent on the role of 'Informal/customary institutions' in local governance. It does, however, make provision to accommodate the tribal laws and customs for tribally dominated regions. In fact special Constitutional provisions have been designed to protect the tribal governance structures by bringing the tribally dominant regions under the Vth schedule of the Constitution and providing them a central role in local governance. In 1996, a national level legislation – 'The Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas) Act 1996' - allowed for the accommodation of the tribal laws and customs in tribally dominated regions.<sup>12</sup> This development came in the wake of objections and protests that formal, local governance structures as mandated by the Constitution would impede and destroy the tribal ways of life (Mahi Pal 2000). CVCs do not get similar recognition in the Constitutional amendment mandating local governance. This makes the role of the CVCs in formal, local politics in the Indian context somewhat unique, as they do not have any legally or formally assigned role to play in the process of local democracy. The interaction between CVCs and Grama Panchayats has remained largely un-explored as these two institutions occupy different spaces, mainly state and non-state spaces. They also operate at different levels - formal and informal levels. This makes the interaction almost invisible not only to the outsiders but also to the villagers.

CVCs interact and influence GPs various ways. I've grouped these interactions into two main categories.

- (a) Influence over GP Elections (IGPE)
- (b) Involvement in GP Activities (IGPA)

#### **(a) Influencing GP Elections (IGPE):**

CVCs try to influence the GP elections by –

1. Trying to **influence the choice of candidates** for GP elections – in 29 out of my 30 research villages, CVCs have played a role in influencing the selection of candidates for GP elections held during years 2000 and 2005. However the data reported here pertains to 2000 GP elections. The process of influencing the choice of candidates for elections may take place either before nominations are filed or when they are being finalized. There have been instances of CVCs asking some candidates to withdraw in favour of their candidates. However, the dictates of the CVC may not always be accepted, as contesting local elections has become a 'prestigious' issue to the villagers. This is especially true of the village youth. The CVC, as a village forum, not only exhibits caste and gender monopolies but also has an inherent age-ist bias. Village youth, while allowed to participate in the

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<sup>12</sup> India has a significant tribal population. It is estimated that they constitute about 8 per cent of the total population. Quotas are provided for the tribal population in various spheres to make the governance and development process more inclusive.

- CVC meetings, are not permitted to speak unless permitted by the CVC leaders. Thus the village youth, traditionally excluded from the CVC, have begun to use the GP elections and membership to establish their influence in village politics while the CVC tries to utilize GP elections to extend its sphere of authority. These tensions rather than dissipating are likely to exacerbate in the future. But in situations where contested elections have taken place, villagers admit that most of the successful candidates were those originally chosen by the CVCs.
2. Trying to contest elections themselves or through their relatives thus leading to **overlap of leadership** in both institutions – In 26 out of my 30 villages, some form of overlap of leadership exists. For example, the *Yajamana* of the CVC in one village is also the president of the *GP*. In another village, a CVC leader was the previous president of *Grama Panchayat*. In the same village, the son of the CVC *Yajamana* is presently a member of the *Grama Panchayat*. In a number of villages, *panchas* are also members of the *Grama Panchayat*. The extent of overlap of leadership for all 30 villages is around 32% of all GP seats. Overlap of leadership also occurs with higher tiers of local governance such as Taluk Panchayats and Zilla Panchayats. However this aspect has not been included in our research as elections to Taluk and Zilla Panchayats are contested on the basis of party politics and I have not investigated the influence of party politics on the choice of candidates.
  3. Ensuring that their candidates **hold the positions of president or vice president of GPs** where possible – CVCs has played an important role in ensuring that elected GP members from their village get access to the positions of president or vice president of GP. Even in cases where CVCs have not been fully successful in influencing the choice of candidates for GP elections, they have played a decisive role in ensuring that the position of president or vice president is allocated to their village. However this is mainly dependant upon the type of reservation that is applicable to that particular GP. In 13 out of 30 sample villages the CVC had played a role in securing the position of president and/or vice president to the candidates from their village. Overall, about 28% of positions of president or vice president were held by either CVCs leaders or candidates selected by them in 30 sample villages.
  4. Trying to control election outcomes by encouraging **uncontested elections** - CVCs have tried, where possible, to concretise their choice of candidates by trying to ensure ‘unanimous’ (uncontested) elections. In 18 out of my 30 sample villages ‘unanimous’ elections took place in 2000: in four cases all the seats were uncontested, and in 16 villages at least one or more seats were uncontested and a total of 38% of GP seats were filled up through uncontested elections in the 30 research villages This appears to be in accordance with the general trend in Karnataka. In the 2000 *Grama Panchayat* elections, 26 per cent seats of all GP seats in Karnataka were filled by ‘unanimous’ elections (The Hindu, 1st March, 2000). However CVCs’ influence in controlling election outcomes by ensuring unanimous elections is not absolute but subject to a range of factors both external

and internal. Involvement of political parties, reservation of seats, village youth aspiring for leadership positions, and increased awareness in local political participation and representation have all contributed to a visible decrease in the percentage of unanimous elections. A preliminary look at the results of the 2005 GP elections reveal that the number of seats filled up through uncontested elections in these villages have come down significantly.

**(b) Involvement in GP Activities (IGPA) –**

In almost all the villages I studied, the CVC leaders play an important role in negotiating with the formal, local representatives and institutions for benefits to the village even where they have had little involvement in the selection of formal local representatives. CVC leaders and members play an important role in the (a) implementation of development projects and (b) selection of beneficiaries for anti-poverty schemes.

- a) **Implementation of development projects** - By and large the CVC supports its GP members in ensuring that development projects allocated through the Grama Panchayat are delivered to the village. Consultations with the local leaders, regarding the implementation and location of development project in the village, by the GP members are most common. Often the CVC influences decisions related to the location of roads, streetlights, water taps or drainage. The CVC leaders constantly put pressure on the elected members for development projects such as construction or repairs of school buildings and community halls, provision of drinking water, roads, and drainages. This was evident in all 30-study villages. CVC leaders also monitor their performance and erring or inefficient elected representatives are often pulled up.

In addition, the CVC also try to improve the village infrastructure by soliciting donations, in cash or kind, for village development as mentioned above. The involvement of the CVC in the implementation of development projects can be a positive feature of local democracy as it encourages local participation and decision-making in the development process. But this intervention assumes negative undertones if these decisions are biased in favour of the village elite as it has an adverse implications for the welfare of the village poor.

- b) **Selection of beneficiaries for anti-poverty schemes** - An important aspect of the influence deals with decisions impacting directly on the poor. The process of selection of beneficiaries for anti-poverty schemes takes place in the Grama Sabha – the village assembly. All adults in the village are members of the Grama Sabha and are allowed (and expected) to participate in this process. Those representing the CVC often use this formal space to influence decisions regarding the selection of beneficiaries. The CVC leaders feel they are better placed to identify beneficiaries as they are better attuned to the local reality. The involvement of CVCs in this process often makes it more transparent. But this democratic decision making process gets subverted when it is used to strengthen the CVC's position in the village, by favouring those that support them. Field research indicates both these two types of outcomes.

A comparison of the interaction between CVCs and GPs in 30 sample villages indicates a wide inter-village variation in the level of interaction. CVCs also seem to be more active in more developed districts like Mysore and Dharwad compared to Raichur, which is one of the backward districts. However my sample is too sparse to analyse this statistically.

### **Villagers' perceptions of CVCs' interaction with GP:**

The field data depicts a rather a negative view of CVCs as institutions undermining local democracy. People representing the CVC, it appears, not only influence the choice of candidates, but also try to control elections outcomes by ensuring uncontested elections and where possible attempt to occupy formal positions. The impact of this influence is especially visible in women's *re-election* to Grama Panchayats (Ananth Pur 2002). By denying rural citizens a chance to participate in free and fair elections, CVCs seem to be subverting the process of democracy and capturing local democratic institutions. This view, by implication, perceives rural citizens as mute, passive recipients of this process.

In order to assess the awareness and perceptions of villagers regarding the interaction between CVCs and GPs, a perception survey was carried out in all 30 villages. Based on random sampling, a total of 2183 villagers (of which 51% were males and 49% were females) were interviewed. Villagers' awareness regarding the role played by CVCs in influencing GP elections as well as their involvement in GP activities was assessed. A series of cross-tabulations was carried out to study the levels of knowledge of different groups of people regarding the interaction between CVCs and GPs. Variables such as gender, caste, occupation, age and literacy were cross-tabulated with levels of knowledge. In general, cross-tabulation indicates that independent variables such as literacy, occupation, caste, and landholding make little difference to the levels of knowledge. Perception survey of villagers from 30 villages indicates that villagers are quite aware of the role played by the CVC in local elections. Nearly 74 per cent of the surveyed villagers were aware that CVCs were involved in selection of candidates for GP elections. Villagers were not only aware of the CVC's role in local elections but also, at times, supported and at others, opposed the CVC's influence over local elections. The role played by CVCs in election process is perceived by the villagers in different ways: as making the democratic process more efficient; as reducing unnecessary expenditure on election campaigning; or maintaining community peace as elections are seen as fostering factionalism within villages. Even the overlap of leadership is not perceived as 'elite capture' by the villagers but a way of choosing effective and efficient leaders; those capable of performing and serving the village better by bringing development to the village. Unanimous elections where effected and accepted is seen as reducing costs (campaigning expenses), time and effort by the villagers.

Equally the influence of the formal processes and institutions on the informal cannot be disregarded. As *Grama Panchayats* have become institutionalised and influential, villagers have begun to consider contesting local elections as being important and prestigious. This has led to an increased interest in local political participation and representation. Consequently a slow resistance to CVCs' influence over local election processes is emerging. In a couple of villages, the CVC *Yajamanas* who belong to the

dominant caste groups, have little interest in controlling nominations as all the seats in the village are reserved for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. In another case, there was opposition within the village to the list of 'consensus candidates', as there were a number of villagers interested in contesting elections. In yet another village, some people did not accept the unanimous choice of a CVC *Yajamana's* son as the candidate for *Grama Panchayat*, and nominated another candidate. Although the CVC *Yajamana's* son went on to win, the show of dissension itself indicates the changes that reforms from above, in the form of reservation of seats and the process of democratic decentralisation, have initiated in the rural regions. This view is further substantiated by the fact that there are at least couple of instances of *panchas* or their kin losing the elections to candidates who were not part of the CVC. This indicates the increasing importance of creating formal spaces as it has the potential to act as a counter to the local political monopolies that CVCs often represent.

Villagers do not view these two institutions as competitive but as complementary, each serving different purposes and needs. This view is clearly reflected in their institutional preferences<sup>13</sup>. Cross-tabulation of different variables such as gender, age, caste, and education with preference shows some interesting results. In general, There is a clear gender difference in preference. (a) Women prefer CVCs more -36% as compared with 17% to men. (b) 40% Men prefer GP more than CVC –but a slightly lesser percentage of men – 35% - want both CVC and GP.

Two of the main reasons cited for wanting 'both CVC and GP' are that (1) the CVCs offer useful services not offered by GPs and (2) the CVCs make the formal process more transparent and accountable. Women prefer CVC as they feel that it provides local law and order at the village. Women's clear preference for CVCs, despite the fact that they find no representation in CVCs, and the general shift towards wanting both institutions with increase in literacy indicates that the important role played by CVCs in local governance is often not recognised by the 'outsiders' who view them as oppressive and moribund institutions.

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<sup>13</sup> I'd asked an open-ended question as to which institution people preferred and why. Based on the answers given I categorised them into 5 groups- (a) don't know (b) Only ILGI, (c) only GP, (d) Both ILGI and GP (wanting both the institutions) and lastly, (e) Neither.

<b>Table 1. Villagers' Attitudes to Local Governance Institutions.</b>						
Respondents' preferences for Customary Village Councils (CVCs) and/or Grama Panchayats (GPs) (%)						
	<i>CVC only</i>	<i>GP only</i>	<i>Both CVC and GP</i>	<i>Neither</i>	<i>Don't know</i>	<i>Total</i>
All respondents	27	32	27	9	5	100%
Female respondents	36	25	20	12	7	100%
Literate respondents	22	36	34	5	3	100%
Illiterate respondents	30	29	22	12	7	100%

Source: Open-ended question about adult villagers' preferences were asked in the baseline survey conducted in 2002-2003. We have interpreted and grouped the responses.

In addition, qualitative and other data collected through interviews and focus group discussions illustrate the impact of formal processes in not only reforming CVCs but also producing better development and governance outcomes. For instance,

- CVCs with high and synergistic interaction with *Grama Panchayats* are also engaged in initiating own development activities and engaging in public-private partnerships with formal institutions for development projects. CVCs are taking on new roles that involve interaction with formal institutions. Some do more than work with and through elected *Grama Panchayats*: in relating to higher levels of government and electoral politics, they have become significant actors in their own right. CVCs are supplementing and complementing formal development initiatives.
- The constructive interaction between CVCs and *Grama Panchayats* has also positive implication for local governance. Focus group discussions with poorer groups in the villages were carried out to assess their awareness and opinion about the programmes of the *Grama Panchayat* and the involvement of the CVC leaders in this. Awareness and satisfaction with *Grama Panchayat* programmes and activities was high in villages with high IIGP compared to others. In these villages, the villagers also reported that corruption, an important indicator of governance, was less because of the involvement of the CVC leaders in *Grama Panchayat* activities. Villages with low IIGP had high reports of corruption by *Grama Panchayat* members and less satisfaction with the activities of the *Grama Panchayats*.

#### IV. CONCLUDING COMMENTS:

Research in Karnataka indicates that CVCs play an important role in local governance not only as social institutions but also as agencies that impact development process. In a context where local governance is being formalised and decentralised up to the village

level, these institutions assume importance as they play a significant role in local governance.

Two key findings that stand out from this research are:

- (a) CVCs co-exist, interact with and influence GPs and this influence is not always negative. What we see in Karnataka is a 'hybrid' situation. Villagers are not only aware of this interaction but also seem comfortable with this hybridity of having access to both institutions. Rather than conflicting, CVCs in Karnataka seem to complement the initiatives of *Grama Panchayats*<sup>14</sup>.
- (b) CVCs are more active in interacting and influencing GPs in better developed districts compared to less developed districts. This indicates that CVCs are not disappearing but reinventing themselves with development and modernity.

The notion that development or progress is associated with defined patterns of institutional change has a long history. The modernization theory of the 1950s and 1960s was but one highly articulated version of that general pattern. So too has been the recent insistence by most international aid and development agencies that 'good government' in developing countries is in large degree a matter of adopting certain standard political and legal institutions. These assertions of the value of what is sometimes termed a form of 'institutional monoculture' inevitably generate counter-reactions. Some of the most productive counter-reactions are based on empirical research. They demonstrate (a) that dichotomous notions of bad (= old) versus good (= new) institutions often leave us unable to explain effective institutional performance; and (b) that it is generally very important not to confuse the form of institutions with the functions that they carry out. Effective institutions can often be characterised in terms of 'institutional dualism': the combination of putatively 'traditional' (= old) with 'modern' (= new) norms, relationships and practices (Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith, 2005). CVCs in Karnataka could be viewed as an example of institutional dualism, and, for practical policy purposes, treated in the same way that Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith (2005:2) enjoin us to think about the treatment of dualistic institutions generally: to distinguish those that "serve, or at least do not contradict, the majority's needs and aspirations, from similar looking organisations that block or even reverse improvements in economic performance and social welfare"; and to recognise "the hidden positive functions of certain dualistic practices, such as giving poor people access to resources or allowing them an informal voice in the political system."

The purpose of the paper is to present a clearer understanding of the local institutional arrangements in Karnataka and the ways in which they interact with each other. Evidence from the field indicates that the CVCs influence local democracy in many ways and this merits further enquiry, especially in the context where policy makers, donor agencies and NGOs have been investing resources, both financial and human, to strengthen formal,

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<sup>14</sup> Preliminary regression analysis indicates that ILGIs are most active and interactive where GP headquarters are located in the same villages as ILGIs and where these GPs are effective and efficient. Here GP efficiency is measured by their revenue raising as assessed through their Total Own Revenue collection and their outcomes/outputs assessed through people's awareness and satisfaction with GP performance and activities.

elected local institutions. For this investment to be productive a better and deeper understanding of the dynamics of local governance is essential.

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# **Federalism, Urban Decentralisation and Citizen Participation**

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## SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT- AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE

### **Federalism and Urban Decentralisation in India**

With all the focus on Panchayati Raj institutions in India, urban decentralisation has received far less attention in the country, suffering for long from policies that saw urbanisation as a trend that needed to be slowed if not stopped altogether.

With the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments in 1992, we completed the federal puzzle in our country, creating units of local self-government at the rural and urban levels. While there are still enormous challenges in implementing the legal provisions with regard to rural decentralisation, tremendous energy is being expended within many state governments to solidify this process. Issues such as untying of funds, streamlining of programmes, capacity building and training of Gram Panchayat members are among the hottest potatoes being tossed around in state legislatures.

So, in this journey towards a healthy federalist governmental arrangement, the patient incrementalism of policy-makers seems to be working fairly well. While there are gaps in intergovernmental institutions that can oversee and regulate the interchanges, given the magnitude of the local government initiative in the last decade to expand of the base of the third level, it seems that enough is going well. As George Mathews says, *“The Panchayats–Districts and below are now treated as third stratum of governance. ...Today in India if there is a strong Centre it is not by virtue of its powers over other units but because the lower units – States, Districts, Blocks, Villages–are powerful. This is exactly opposite of what India started with. Thus, one can say that strong regional and state level political parties have strengthened India's democracy and federal character.”*<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, these statistics hide an uncomfortable truth: the base of the pyramid is expanding only for rural local government. Such leadership is sorely lacking in urban decentralisation. Caught in the penumbra of the spotlight on their rural brethren, urban dwellers are finding themselves in a governance vacuum, with all signs of the situation worsening. Consider the following statistics for Karnataka<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy at Work : Evolving Federalism Through Political Representation in Socio-Cultural Pluralism; By George Mathew, Director Institute of Social Sciences

<sup>2</sup> Urban Development Department, Government of Karnataka, and Department of Panchayati Raj Institutions, Government of Karnataka

<b>POLITICAL REPRESENTATION RATIOS, 2000</b>							
RURAL KARNATAKA			URBAN KARNATAKA				
POPULATION		3.2 crores		POPULATION		1.7 crores	
Level	No. of units	No. of Reps	Level	No. of units	No. of Reps		
Zilla Panchayat	27	890	City Corporations	6	410		
Taluk Panchayat	176	3,255	City Municipal Councils	40	1,308		
Gram Panchayat	5,659	80,023	Town Municipal Councils	81	1,919		
			Town Panchayats	89	1,373		
Total No of Elected Reps		84,168	Total No. of Elected Reps		5,023		
Citizen: Rep Ratio		380:1	Citizen: Rep Ratio		3,400:1		

The representation ratio between citizens and their elected representatives is almost ten times larger for urban areas. In a city like Bangalore, the ratio is 42,000 citizens for 1 Elected Representative. One possible interpretation of this could be that government is more than 100 times further away for the resident of Bangalore than the average rural dweller.

In addition to this, the idea that every registered voter is a member of a Gram Sabha, and should participate in decision-making through this vehicle is one that at least has formal sanction in rural decentralisation, if not much track record.

In contrast, urban areas have the concept of the Wards Committees, which are meant to be constituted for the City Corporations. In Bangalore for example, there are meant to be 28 (recently revised to 31) such Ward Committees, which are fatally hampered by the combination of a debatable nomination process, limited citizen representation and an ambiguous mandate.

So, while it may seem reasonable to believe that decentralisation is now only an implementation challenge in India, the reality is that we have an extremely skewed federalist structure at the third tier. And this situation is getting worse, because while India was 28% urban at the turn of the century, it is projected to be 46% urban by 2030.<sup>3</sup>

This failure to have a coherent rural-urban approach to decentralisation is a big lacuna in Indian federalism. Indeed it is astonishing that – despite the general rigour that has characterised India’s approach to democratic institutionalisation, often correctly placing due process at a premium to short-term outcomes – there has been such an intellectual vacuum with respect to urbanisation, with very few champions of the cause.

This lopsided approach can be traced even to the drafting of the two seminal pieces of legislation that have given rural and urban local governments their current positions– the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments respectively – and perhaps explains the

<sup>3</sup> World Urbanization Prospects: the 1996 revision. Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, Population Division, United Nations. 1996

difference in attitude that people in government have towards these two forms of local government even today. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment was the culmination of over four decades of struggle and intense debate by a range of players: three generations of Gandhians, advocates of rural self-government, and champions of three-tier federalism. This saw numerous initiatives at promoting Panchayati Raj institutions as well as two national committees separated by two decades – the Balwantrai Mehta Committee in 1957, and the Ashok Mehta Committee in 1977. Associated with this energy – possibly because of it - there is also a great deal of documentary evidence on the evolution of rural decentralisation in India. Unfortunately, this richness of material is absent when it comes to urban decentralisation. There were some noises about urban challenges through the early decades of our Independence with the constitution of an All India Council of Mayors which consistently demanded greater urban autonomy. The mid-80s saw the crystallizing of some of this energy: for example, one of the recommendations of the National Commission on Urbanisation (NCU) was to suggest that Article 40 of Directive Principles of State Policy - requiring states to organise Panchayats as units of local self-government in rural areas – be expanded to include urban areas as well.

In discussions that this author has had with some of the key actors in the drafting of the 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment, this is the picture that emerges on how this amendment came about: even as the original Amendment (64<sup>th</sup> CAA) for Panchayati Raj was being drafted during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister in the late 80s amidst much debate, one of the senior Congress Party members asked the Prime Minister what was being done about municipalities. Until this issue arose, no protracted debate on this subject had occurred across the country, and no advocates of urban self-government had as yet emerged on the Indian political landscape – at least none who had national impact. At this point, given the urgency in passing the laws, an urban decentralisation amendment (65<sup>th</sup> Amendment) was drafted within a period of a few months, mirroring in some ways the structural aspects of rural decentralisation, capturing in others the unique needs of urban areas, but missing the essential spirit of the rural amendment – the centrality of the citizen and the bottom-up nature of local self-government.<sup>4</sup> Both amendments failed to pass, and were eventually passed in 1992 as the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments respectively.

This gap, created at the very genesis of the 74<sup>th</sup> Amendment, continues to plague urban decentralisation even today: our cities and towns do not have bottom-up structures that create more proximity between the citizen and their urban local government. And without citizen participation, federalism is like a batsman without a partner at the crease: decentralisation of what is called the 3 “F”s – funds, functions and functionaries – needs to be accompanied by accountability as well. This accountability ought to be directly to citizens, rather than to some other level of government. One form of such accountability is to provide formal opportunity for citizens to participate in local governance. Citizen

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<sup>4</sup> Conversations on the subject that the author has had with Mani Shankar Aiyar and Mr. Sivaramakrishnan, both involved in drafting the original 66<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendment that dealt with urban decentralisation. Both the rural and the urban bills were defeated in parliament, and were only re-introduced after Rajiv Gandhi's death in 1993, under Narasimha Rao's tenure as Prime Minister, eventually passing as the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Amendments to the Constitution.

engagement is one of the critical success factors for federalism.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, some would claim that citizen participation is at the heart of democracy itself<sup>6</sup>. The absence of the opportunity to participate has other consequences beyond poorly functioning urban local governments, and these are related to the political education of the urban Indian. In a young democracy such as India's, local governments act as a political kindergarten to educate the citizen. In the absence of this, the urban voter is not only disconnected from government, but also illiterate about the politics of change. So today, when we are often confronted with a cynical citizenry, it begs the question: what comes first, the indifference or the disempowerment?

## SECTION 2: THE CONTEXT - A CITIZEN PERSPECTIVE

Our cities and towns in India provide many comforts: livelihood opportunities; relatively better infrastructure than rural areas; access to choice in education and healthcare, and so on. While the quality compares poorly with developed countries, conditions are superior to what is available even a few miles outside the urban boundaries.

However, viewed in a different sense, our urban centres do not have an essential "rooting", an organic connection between the urban citizen and the government. From the point of view of the individual citizen, there are significant gaps in urban living. Examples abound: there is no opportunity to participate in decisions on local development, no mechanism to stop the illegal violation of the local park, no system to prevent the neighbour's residence from being converted into a hospital that could soon dump toxic waste in the storm water drains, no grass-root answer to manage the voter roll errors which are upwards of 40% in urban areas, no space to even vent one's frustrations. While the urban resident can see herself as a producer of urban goods and services, or as a consumer of urban comforts, she cannot so easily see herself as a citizen. In fact, her identity as a citizen in urban India is one that is minimally developed, if at all.

These gaps exist for everyone. For those within government, be it a Supreme Court judge, a Cabinet Secretary or an employee of the railways, they know all about the empty edifice of citizenry and often come to terms with their civic emasculation by leveraging their positions and titles. Even for the elite, this same sense of disconnection prevails: the industrialists, the writers, the media, the film-makers, the intellectuals, even the activists. None of them can individually survive in the city without the coping mechanisms that their particular position offers them: their networks, their identities. Strip away these identities, and the hollow shell of basic "citizenry" will provide cold comfort. Imagine if this is true for the "empowered" urban Indian, what it could be doing to the 35% and more of the urban dwellers who are the urban poor. They are twice forsaken, once because of their state, and once by the State.

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<sup>5</sup> Fiscal federalism for emerging economies: lessons from Switzerland? Publius; 1/1/2003; Hosp, Gerald  
<sup>6</sup> "India: Development and Participation" (OUP, 2002) by Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen. In the 3-pronged framework that the authors use to assess democracy in India – ideals, institutions and practice – the only element that finds place in all three prongs of the framework is the participation of citizens.

The fabric of any society begins with the individual, her sense of empowerment, her belief in her own agency. In a society that is static or changing at a leisurely pace, most challenges can be addressed at a similar pace. However, in a society that is urbanising rapidly, the changes are faster: old identities are being wiped clean and being replaced with an aching vacuum, where the underlying rules of engagement are increasingly transactional. And this is what is happening in our urban areas. Alienation is the underbelly of urban living in our country.

It sounds odd to be talking of urban residents needing to be treated in the same vein as the rural citizen, when one compares the quality of life in urban India with the rural areas. However, in this context, the comparison is not about roads or water supply, education or health care, employment opportunities or gender equality. It is about the fundamental right to be treated equally as a citizen fully engaged in the democratic process, with the same rights and responsibilities.

### SECTION 3: SUMMARY OF JANAAGRAHA'S EXPERIENCES

Against the backdrop of a state that has not provided enough toe-holds for the urban resident to assert his identity as a citizen, grass-root work continues to show that people do not stay still, they react to this reality. It is not that people don't care, or don't want to address this. Across the length and breadth of this country, local communities sprout like wild grass, bringing groups of people together to address their local problems. Whether it is in the form of Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs), neighbourhood groups in urban slums, or even less formal community-based groups, these display an energy for change that in many cases has tremendous potential.

And in the study of these communities, one discovers remarkable stories of self-help: of cleaning their streets of garbage, of procuring water supply in their slums, of community policing and so on. But equally striking will be the observation that these demonstrate either a complete detachment from the state, or at best an ad-hoc, situational arrangement with the government. They will also show the power of collective action, rather the empowerment of an individual citizen.

In Bangalore, over the past few years, we have attempted to right this ship of decentralised urban governance through a citizen-led initiative for participatory democracy called Janaagraha (meaning Jana Agraha, or the moral force of the people). During this time, we have accumulated piece after piece of evidence to suggest that while the urban resident cares, and wants to take part, the state has not only denied her the formal spaces to engage, but often actively thwarts this desire.

Examples of work that we have been involved with over the past few years in Bangalore:

- A ward works campaign was Janaagraha's launch, between December 2001 and May 2002: getting citizens to participate in the allocation of ward-level funds for local development. This was the first campaign of Janaagraha, and marked our



approach: a collaborative one, emphasising partnership between citizens, their Corporators, and the city administration. Done for the financial year 2002-03, citizens from 65 wards took part in this exercise; in 32 of these wards, citizens came together in strong numbers, and actively negotiated with their Corporators and BMP administration; in 22 of these wards, citizens were happy with the final works list that was produced. This represented a total of Rs. 10.7 crores of works, out of a total ward works list of Rs. 50 crores. A total of more than 5,000 citizens took part in the exercise, and hundreds of volunteers were involved in conducting the training programmes, and providing the engineering, technology and support activities. Since there was no formal space for such citizen participation in ward-level planning, each ward success was the result of one or more of a unique set of conditions: a resolute citizenry, a willing elected representative, a supportive administration. Where these enabling conditions did not exist, the results were marginal or non-existent. The experience demonstrated that citizens are willing to engage, take the trouble, and even compromise on their own needs, so long as they perceive the process as scientific, transparent, and fair. Institutionalising this engagement would increase citizen participation manifold.

- In the 2004 national elections, many citizen communities wanted to be involved in increasing voter registration and voter turnout. There is sketchy documentary evidence to suggest that urban voter rolls have error rates that are 40% - 45%<sup>7</sup>, arising primarily from non-registration of valid voters, and bogus entries in the list. Rural voter lists also have errors, but these are less than half the urban error percentages. Also, several initiatives in various states have had significant impact in correcting voter lists in rural areas. To name one successful exercise, the MKSS exercise of getting the CEC to have the voter list read out formally at all rural ward sabhas (80-100 households) in Rajasthan resulted in a CEC notification (order 23/2003-PLN-II), resulting in the correction of over 7 lakh voter entries. Unfortunately, the CEC provision for the urban voter was a much-diluted one, requesting that the list be read out in mohalla committees or Resident Welfare Association meetings; this is because there is no similar politically legitimate platform for such an exercise, there is no ward sabha or grama sabha for the urban voter.

The only alternative for communities is to conduct door-to-door verification of the voter list. This suffers from two weaknesses: one, it is not a formal exercise of the government machinery; and two, it is extraordinarily time- and people intensive. In spite of this, a pilot exercise was conducted in two polling stations, which showed that the error rates were in the region of 45%. Unfortunately, there could be no institutional redressal of the matter, since the entire election machinery by this time was occupied with other pressing matters like EVMs, candidate disclosure and the rest.

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<sup>7</sup> Lok Satta study in Andhra Pradesh, available on their website: [www.loksatta.org](http://www.loksatta.org). Also confirmed by Janaagraha in a sample study of 2 polling booths in Bangalore during Elections 2004.

Hence, the urban voter list continues to be error-prone, due to the lack of equality in treatment of the urban voter. Is it any surprise that voter turnout is low and tending to become lower in urban areas, across all elections in our federalist system?

- A “Ward Vision” campaign conducted between June to December 2003, where citizens at the ward level got together to prepare a vision for their ward. In 10 of the city’s 100 wards, over 2,000 people attended 5 workshops to prepare detailed documents for their wards, including the expenditure requirements, and the sources of funds. After analysing the funding sources, they discovered that the city was only collecting 30% of the potential property tax revenues at the ward level, and hence suggested an innovative plan to raise compliance. Called Ward RECI-P (Revenue Enhancement with Citizen Participation), they suggested that citizens would support the city administrators to increase revenues, with the condition that a portion of the increased revenues be allocated for local ward development.

Hailed as an innovative public finance solution to help local governments by eminent economists and public policy experts, this proposal is still awaiting a response from the local government. The actual citizen plans would have done any government department proud: detailed, prioritised projects, with estimated costs. However, because there was no formal mechanism for these plans to be produced in a participatory process, they are lying in cold storage. The result is that the citizen participant is fast becoming an activist, demanding their rights: while some are willing to trudge this path, it is too large a burden to place on all citizens.

- While all Janaagraha’s campaigns encouraged citizens across the spectrum to participate, the experiences in the first campaign showed that the poor needed additional focus to bring them to the governance table. With this in mind, an exclusive campaign was undertaken, focused on the urban poor. Swarna Jayanti Shehari Rozgar Yojana (SJSRY) is a Government of India urban poverty alleviation programme. Unfortunately, the record of implementation of this programme was less than satisfactory in the Bangalore area<sup>8</sup>. In 2002 Janaagraha conducted a survey in respect of loans sanctioned under Swarna Jayanthi Shahari Yojana and produced a report titled “Case studies on delivery of loans to the urban poor”<sup>9</sup>. This led to the creation of ANKUR (Alliance for Networked Kinship of Underprivileged Residents), a platform which envisaged participation of all the stakeholders of SJSRY i.e. Government, NGOs, Beneficiaries and Banks. A pilot project steered by the Karnataka Government’s Department of Municipal Administration was undertaken over a period of 12 months, with the following features:

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<sup>8</sup> “Urban Poverty Alleviation India” by Supriti, Sharon Barnhardt, Ramesh Ramanathan, Ramanathan Foundation, 2002

<sup>9</sup> Janaagraha report submitted to Directorate of Municipal Administration, Government of Karnataka

- Bringing all the stakeholders on a common platform
- Identification of Nodal branches for disbursal of loans
- Standardisation of loan application forms
- Joint identification of beneficiaries by the community, bankers & NGOs
- EDP training for beneficiaries mandatory before release of loan
- Participation of NGOs in the formation & nurturing of Thrift & Credit Groups

The performance under the pilot project was as follows<sup>10</sup>:

Components of SJSRY	No. of Groups	Coverage of BPL families	Loan amount (Rs. in Lakh)
USEP loans (ME)	0	341	78.72
DWCUA	3	45	3.75
TCGs	234	3656	125.00
Total	237	4042	207.47

While the results on improving the bank linkage through the SJSRY pilot were promising, Janaagraha's purpose for improving the functioning of the SJSRY programme in Bangalore was a different one, related to the structural presence of community groups in the scheme: a pyramidal clustering of neighbourhood groups (NHGs), neighbourhood committees (NHCs) and Community Development Societies (CDS), representing over 1 lakh BPL families in Bangalore.

The SJSRY programme not only provided a single platform through which to link to what was supposed to be a readymade community structure of the poor at the grassroots, but also one that was empowered to demand development outcomes from various arms of government that worked in the area of urban poverty (slum improvement boards, housing boards, city corporations etc) through the Articles of Association of the CDS, which were registered societies.

However, the experience was that the city-wide SJSRY platform provided little tangible benefit to the poor in terms of public service outcomes, or governance outcomes. There were several impediments to this process:

1. The formal mandate to demand outcomes was only with the CDS, the apex institution, and not with the lower-level community structures like the NHC and NHG. The six CDS's that were established for the entire city meant that each CDS had a massive coverage area of 1/6<sup>th</sup> of the city, covering approximately 15,000 urban poor families.
2. There was little social connection among the members of the CDS, since they came from different parts of the city, with no prior inter-personal contact.

<sup>10</sup> SJSRY Pilot Project documentation reports submitted to GOK, and available with Janaagraha

3. Very little capacity-building effort had been expended for the CDS members, who were officially vested with a fair degree of authority to demand the presence of various government agencies, and pass binding resolutions for actions by these agencies, but little real use of these powers.
4. CDS meetings did not take place within the geographic boundaries of each CDS (itself a vast geographic stretch), but at the nodal SJSRY office. Members did not get travel compensation or any pay for the time and cost in participating in the CDS meetings. As a result, few of the CDS meetings were well-attended, and often did not even have quorum.

Janaagraha's efforts, over an 18-month period, in attempting to make an exclusive, legitimate, government-authorised platform for the poor work to bring them better local services were less than successful due to a variety of reasons: one, grass-root resistance from the administration despite senior-level leadership; two, the limited duration of the pilot; three, the inherent structural considerations of the programme that the CDS was too large and removed a platform to provide meaningful engagement for the poor.

While the first two issues are part of any social change process, the third issue gave us pause to see if it was even worthwhile to make the CDS work. This resulted in an effort to work with the local neighbourhood communities. The responses at this level were far greater, with poor residents willing to engage on issues that mattered to them locally: water supply, sanitation, electrification of lanes, health concerns and so on. It was interesting that the poor were willing to engage at a neighbourhood level that did not have any formal legitimacy, while not using a platform like the CDS that had power, but was somewhat removed from their specific concerns.

There was one additional positive experience: given the reasonable level of middle-class involvement in other campaigns of Janaagraha, they expressed interest in knowing more about the SJSRY campaign, and working with local community clusters of the poor in their wards. This resulted in Janaagraha linking the middle-class with the urban poor at the ward-level, with many interesting positive outcomes<sup>11</sup>.

- One of the significant issues that arose in the SJSRY campaign was the choice of beneficiaries, and the veracity of the BPL list. There were many claims by NGOs that the list had many flaws in it, and even by other government departments (the Food and Civil Supplies Department refused to use the SJSRY list for the release of its BPL ration cards).

Arising out of this, Janaagraha undertook a separate exercise to verify the BPL lists across 3 government agencies: Food and Civil Supplies (F&CS), Municipal Administration (DMA) and Karnataka Slum Board. A detailed report prepared jointly by Janaagraha and these 3 agencies has been submitted to the Government

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<sup>11</sup> Documentary examples of middle-class and poor interactions available with Janaagraha

of Karnataka.<sup>12</sup> The key finding of the study was that the list of common BPL names among all three agencies was less than 6%. Given the startling nature of the statistic, it was clear that substantial work needed to be done to improve the quality of the BPL list. The proposal submitted to government suggests the creation of a Common BPL List (CBL) that could be used by all government agencies. While no action has been taken on the report, it must be admitted that this process would only eliminate multiple lists, and not necessarily address the issue of the authenticity of the list itself.

There were several learnings that emerged out of these experiences for Janaagraha:

1. While the myth of the cynical urban citizen is not without merit, there are still sufficient numbers of urban residents willing to participate. Over the past three years, more than 1 lakh citizens have participated at some level in one or more of Janaagraha's activities<sup>13</sup>. And this is when there is no formal sanction for citizen participation. Robert Putnam writes of the level of citizen participation in Portland, Oregon at 10%, where citizen participation was actively encouraged by the city government.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, these are large proportions at the grassroots, numbers that could ensure robust participatory outcomes. There is nothing to suggest that they cannot be achieved in urban India when formal roles are given to citizens.
2. Even though the CDS platform for the poor provided a great level of political legitimacy to the poor, there were several lacunae that prevented it from being used appropriately. One possible explanation could have been that real political legitimacy needed to come at a level that was much more personal, much closer to home for the individual to feel empowered. Also, the CDS platform was a parallel form of political legitimacy, which – in the long run – would only undermine the legitimate political structures of local government. It could be argued that the demands of the poor are best achieved within the institutional framework of governance, rather than establishing structures outside it.
3. The lowest level of political representation is the unit of the ward, one that has a reasonable limited geographic boundary, a political representative, and the possibility of a grass-root platform for direct political participation. It seems that the ward ought to become the unit of all endeavours, with the establishment of additional structures within it, to ensure organised citizen participation.

This hypothesis has some merit to it, when looking at the Kerala experience with poverty alleviation (including SJSRY), through a programme called Kudumbashree. The SHG members of Kudumbashree have secured many outcomes for themselves

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<sup>12</sup> "Common BPL List Report", a joint report submitted to Government of Karnataka by Food and Civil Supplies, Municipal Administration, Karnataka Slum Board and Janaagraha, 2004. Available with Janaagraha

<sup>13</sup> Janaagraha campaign documents

<sup>14</sup> "Better Together" Robert Putnam

outside of the Kutumbashree programme, through their participation in the Grama Sabhas of the participatory planning campaign that the state has established.<sup>15</sup>

4. The BPL list experience demonstrated that while administrative reforms are critically needed to ensure proper targeting of beneficiaries, there also needed to be a grass-root component, where beneficiary identification could be done at a locally legitimate level itself.

Interestingly, the study on the effectiveness of Grama Sabhas also found that “targeting of landless and illiterate individuals is more intensive in villages that have held a Gram Sabha meeting. Moreover, these effects are economically significant with an 8-10% increase in the probability of receiving a BPL card in a village that held a Gram Sabha.”<sup>16</sup>

The correlation between the conducting of Grama Sabhas, and the improvement in the quality of the BPL list in such areas, suggests that similar outcomes could be likely with urban sabhas as well.

5. Voter list issues are somewhat similar to the BPL list issue, in that there are concerns with the quality of the list, both in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Even if there were a one-time clean up of the list, it begs the question of how this can be done consistently over time. A structural solution to this question would be one where there is a politically legitimate platform for the voters in a polling booth; given that the numbers involved (approximately 1000-1200 voters), compare with those of grama sabhas in the rural areas, there could some merit to this argument.

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<sup>15</sup> Several documents on the convergence of the People’s Planning process in Kerala, and the poverty alleviation programme called Kudumbashree

<sup>16</sup> Participatory Democracy in Action: Survey evidence from South India” Tim Besley, Rohini Pande and Vijayendra Rao, Journal of the European Economic Association (forthcoming), 2005

## SECTION 4: INSTITUTIONALISING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION – A PROPOSAL

From a constitutional standpoint, there has always been a bias towards the rural voter, whether it be the Directive Principles of State Policy or the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment.<sup>17</sup> While the voter was a central figure in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment, in the 74<sup>th</sup> CAA on urban decentralisation, there is no mention of the phrase “a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls”. Even in Article 243S, which discusses the Ward(s) committee, the Amendment is still engaged with institutional arrangements rather than recognising the centrality of the registered voter, as in the case of rural decentralisation.<sup>18</sup>

These Constitutional Amendments have percolated down to State laws for rural and urban decentralisation that mirror these biases. Two reports were prepared to assess urban decentralisation - the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRCW), and the Sen Committee Report to review Decentralisation in Kerala. However, these reports, while making incisive observations about the poor functioning of urban decentralisation and the need for greater citizen involvement, did not go far enough to fill the fundamental gap in the architecture of decentralisation to give a clear and formal to every urban voter.<sup>19</sup>

Janaagraha’s experiences in Bangalore are not unique – they reflect those of many other civil society and community-based organizations across the country. Collectively, they provide substantial evidence that urban residents – even in large metros – care deeply about their city, and wish to participate. Indeed, the amount of social energy that can be harnessed is extraordinary, if the appropriate structures are made available to the citizen.

Urban local governments also face a range of other challenges that require changes in law, jurisdiction, administrative streamlining, decision-support systems etc. Credible, realistic solutions are available for these issues as well, so that a holistic governance environment can be created in urban India. We cannot adopt an “either-or” approach to

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<sup>17</sup> Directive principles of state policy: Article 40, which states “Organisation of village panchayats. The State shall take steps to organise village panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.” Article 243b of the 73<sup>rd</sup> CAA which states “Gram Sabha” means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of

Panchayat at the village level;”

<sup>18</sup> Article 243S which states “(ii) The Legislature of a State may, by law, make provision with respect to- (a) the composition and the territorial area of a Wards Committee; (b) the manner in which the seats in a Wards Committee shall be filled.”

<sup>19</sup> National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRCW Report): One example is suggestion 1.62 c, which only requires “knowledgeable residents” of a ward to be included. If this were suggested for rural decentralisation, there would have been howls of protest, with justified accusations of elite capture of political institutions. Similarly, in the Sen Committee Report for Kerala, the concept of the Ward Sabha is not thought of as mandatory, but rather as a vehicle that can be used only in smaller municipalities (population less than 1 lakh). In 1991, there were 296 Class 1 cities with a population greater than 1 lakh, out of the 3,610 urban centres in the country. They contained over 65% of the total urban population in the country, meaning that over 150 million Indians are living in cities and towns that would be considered too large for them to exercise their fundamental rights as citizens.

resolving issues of urban governance: all reforms are required, and we need to find the intellectual bandwidth and institutional energy to push for all necessary reforms.

The suggestions for reforms in municipalities being made here will concern themselves only with two aspects: one, ensuring that the urban citizen has access to a platform for full freedom of expression; and two, that this mechanism also functions as a platform of accountability from the local government. Both these aspects are being clubbed together under the broad heading “Institutionalising citizen participation in urban areas”.

Any response to such a demand for citizen participation needs to address the following issues:

1. The creation of a mechanism for every registered voter to participate in issues of local government, in a meaningful manner. This means creating an appropriate tier below the ward-level.
2. An unambiguous role for these ward- and sub-ward platforms, so that there is a seamless integration between their role, and that of the municipality. This role should be comprehensive, extending from planning to budgeting to oversight and financial authority, and possibly also to spatial planning issues like zoning, change in land use and comprehensive development plans that can be built bottom-up.
3. The integration of the internal systems of the municipality to support such a decentralised architecture: appropriate accounting and budgetary systems; administrative support; establishment of necessary bank accounts; ward maps and GIS systems; data collection mechanisms at the ward-level on issues like building starts and other such economic activities; voter rolls and BPL lists, and so on.
4. A calendar of activities that define clearly how these grassroots decision-making systems are linked to the processes at the municipality. For example, the municipality budget is to be placed before the Taxation and Finance Committee at a certain time of the year, normally around January. It is then placed before the Council within a few weeks, for approval. In any proposed system decentralisation, full teeth to their roles can only be provided if they have a say in the budgeting process. This means that a calendar of their budgeting process needs to be created, to synchronise with the overall municipality calendar.

In fulfilling the above requirements, the first is the most critical: the establishment of the appropriate legitimate political and accountability “spaces”. Once these are done, then these spaces can be mandated with functions, roles and responsibilities, with appropriate support systems, to fulfil these responsibilities.

This document concerns itself only with the first issue: the structure of decentralisation that links urban governance to the last citizen. The other issues of functions duties and responsibilities are addressed separately in a separate document. The figure below illustrates the solution being suggested:



**Figure: Proposed Urban Decentralisation Structure**

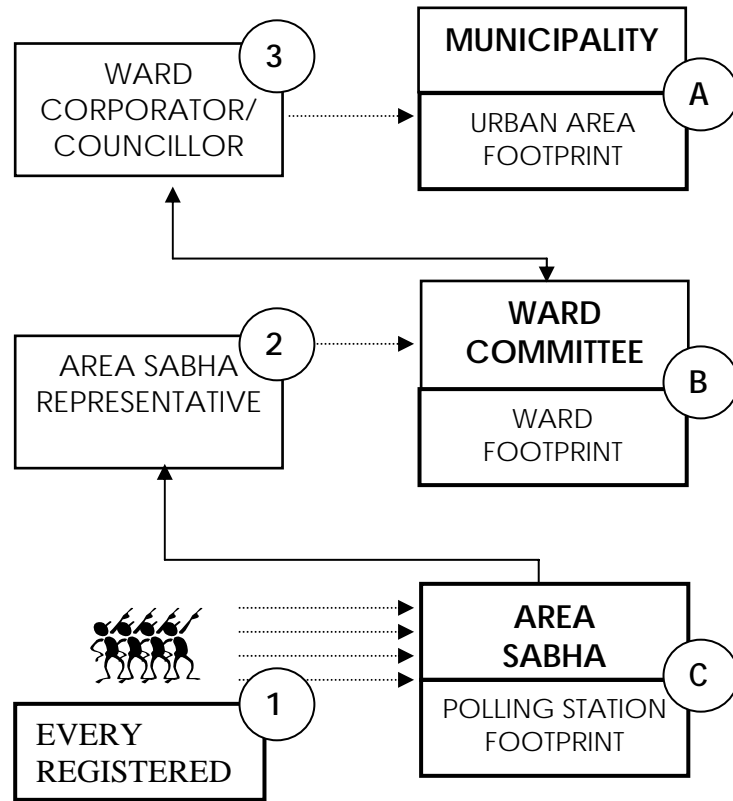


Figure 1 above describes the proposed structure in detail:

It can be understood in terms of PLATFORMS and PARTICIPANTS.

**PLATFORMS:** There are three, at the level of the Municipality (A), at the level of the Ward (B), and at the level of the Polling Station, called the Area Sabha (C). There shall be a Ward Committee in every ward, irrespective of the size of the Ward or the Municipality. While the first two are well-known, it is the Area Sabha that is being newly introduced. The footprint of every polling station could be the smallest unit in such an architecture; this could be called an Area Sabha. Each of these is a legitimate, formal space, which will be defined in terms of constitution, composition, functions, duties and responsibilities.

**PARTICIPANTS:**

Every registered voter of a polling booth (boundaries of the polling booth will be defined by the Election Commission) shall be a member of that Area Sabha. This creates an urban equivalent of the Grama Sabha, retains a reasonable level of intimacy, and recognising the unique features of urban dwellings.

At the next level of the Ward Committee, the current practice of nomination to the Ward Committee can be replaced by a nomination of an Area Sabha Representative from the Area Sabha. The benefit of this structure is that it automatically adjusts for the size of a municipality or ward, rather than have a prescribed single size being defined for a Ward Committee. Large municipalities would have wards with greater population, more polling booths, and hence more Area Sabhas, resulting in larger Ward Committees. Smaller municipalities would have smaller population in each ward, hence fewer Area Sabhas and fewer members in each Ward Committee.

The elected Councillor of the Ward shall be the Chairman of the Ward Committee, and continue to represent the Ward in the Municipal Council.

**Role of informal structures:** The presence of a formal structure of decentralisation to the citizen will create the appropriate participatory and accountability mechanism for the citizen. However, this does not mean that informal community structures like local resident associations, neighbourhood groups and ward-level federations will become less important. If anything, these structures can now become more effective beyond their social role, by linking their public issues at the grassroots into the appropriate platform, either the Area Sabha or the Ward Committee. The lessons from rural decentralisation indicate that while informal structures are important, parallel power structures should not be created.

Janaagraha has prepared a draft “NAGARA RAJ BILL”, embedding the above structure into a legal document, with details like the constitution, composition, functions, roles and responsibilities of the Area Sabhas and Ward Committees. This document has emerged out of the examination of the platform that was provided with the 74th Amendment, the good work already done by some selected states like West Bengal and Kerala, and also the grassroot experiences from a citizen standpoint. The drafting has been done in a manner that would allow the Bill to be passed separately, or included as an Amendment

to the Municipalities Acts of States as a chapter exclusively dealing with Institutionalising Citizen Participation in Urban Governance. Some sections of this Act could require other parts of a state's Municipality Act to be modified, such as the budgeting process mentioned above.

The structure above solves many problems of urban governance described in the earlier sections of this document, as detailed below:

1. It will give formal voice to every voter to participate in issues of local governance, removing the lopsided treatment of the rural and urban voter that has prevailed since the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> Constitutional Amendments were passed.
2. This 3-tiered municipal governance structure will also create accountability of the municipality directly to the citizen herself. Issues of transparency, decision-making, and so on can be addressed at the level of the Area Sabha, rather than creating complex processes of reporting to State Government bureaucracies.
3. These platforms will also expose citizens to the need to participate, rather than stand on the sidelines and complain. While participation cannot be expected to be widespread, this process of political engagement will bring citizens closer to government, and seek solutions to public issues from our public institutions rather than outside them. In some sense therefore, Area Sabhas are as much about government accountability to citizens as they are about citizens' accountability to themselves.
4. The creation of local engagement allows for localised solutions to emerge, as well as a flexibility and dynamism that are healthy attributes for any institution.
5. Other institutions could also use these platforms to integrate into their requirements: even a small handful of Area Sabha members can verify membership rolls to the voter lists, and maintain the accuracy of the voter lists. The Election Commission, in turn, could formally use the Area Sabha to update the voter lists. Similarly, departments of government that require BPL lists could have these verified at the level of the Area Sabha, much like the Grama Sabha experiences in rural India. The Police department could use the Area Sabhas for community policing initiatives. Disaster management situations will have a readymade, widespread grassroot platform for information dissemination and coordinated action.
6. Given the nature of the Area Sabha, its composition will be heterogeneous, cutting across caste, community and economic lines. Engagement at the Area Sabha could therefore have significant social implications, in generating social capital in ways that are otherwise unlikely to occur.
7. A few important findings with respect to Grama Sabha functioning warrant some discussion here, in light of the potential implications for Area Sabha functioning:
  - a. Literacy levels and Grama Sabhas: the positive correlation between literacy levels and grama sabha functioning holds positive implications for Area Sabha, given that urban literacy levels are higher than rural.
  - b. The evidence suggests that Grama Sabha meetings "seem to be a forum used by some of the most disadvantaged groups in the village - landless, illiterates and scheduled castes/tribes. This suggests that these groups find the Gram Sabha useful and that Gram Sabha meetings may play some role

in moving policy in a direction favored by these groups.” The same could be true of urban Area Sabhas as well, possibly solving an issue of elite capture in urban planning and public expenditure.<sup>20</sup>

- c. The study finds correlation between levels of awareness of the Grama Sabha, and levels of participation. A case can be made that given the density of urban settlements, and more powerful tools of communication, coupled with higher literacy rates, the likelihood of greater awareness of Area Sabhas could also be greater, thus leading to potentially greater participation. This higher awareness also has another possible effect: how it changes the mental attitude, from emasculation to empowerment. Irrespective of whether a voter participates or not, she now has the knowledge of the opportunity to participate. This needs to be measured as well, in terms of what voters begin to feel about “empowered”, irrespective of their actual participation.
  - d. The Grama Sabha findings also observed that participation from women is lower in rural areas. here again, Area Sabhas could be more powerful as a forum for women, given higher levels of literacy and emancipation of women in urban areas
8. If anything, the hypothesis could be that not only will the sabha concept work well in urban areas, and generate socially equitable outcomes, but that these could also be a more significant presence in local governance issues than rural areas, and possibly more successfully address universal participation issues across caste, economy and gender.

The proposed benefits of citizen participation in urban areas are in the realm of hypotheses. These need to be urgently tested, not only for their own reasons, but also the positive and normative impact they can have on rural decentralisation, and the cross-fertilisation of successful practices and learnings. Such common platforms across rural and urban centres could also create mechanisms for rural and urban citizens to reach out to each other directly, rather than only through removed political processes. This has major significance in peri-urban areas, and the fringes of urban growth, where deep schisms are being created everyday due to the damaging consequences of jurisdictional schizophrenia.

## CONCLUSION

India stands at the inflection point of two critical trends: the increasing importance of local governments, and a critical mass of urbanisation. Both these have significant implications for governance outcomes on a range of important quality-of-life issues for citizens. Citizen participation is not just a moral argument, it is a strong accountability mechanism for local governments. While rural participation is imbedded in the

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<sup>20</sup> Governance in the Gullies: Democratic Responsiveness and Leadership in Delhi’s Slums, Jha, Rao and Woolcock, World Bank Paper, July 2005. The study shows the presence of “informal leaders (who) are accessible to all slum dwellers, but (that) formal government figures are most accessed by the wealthy and the well-connected.” This highlights the need for legitimate participatory spaces in urban areas, open to all voters across the social spectrum.

Constitution, citizen involvement in urban areas is still very indirect. This needs to be urgently corrected. This paper describes the context of urban decentralisation, the need for citizen participation, and also offers a solution that can be imbedded into law at the State and Municipality levels, without having to change the Constitution. There are credible reasons to believe that substantial benefits can accrue by creating institutional mechanisms for citizen participation in urban areas.

February 17, 2006

## **Systematic hierarchies and Systemic failures:**

### **Gender and Health Inequities in Koppal District**

**Gita Sen, Aditi Iyer and Asha George<sup>1</sup>**

#### **1) INTRODUCTION**

Although Karnataka is among the more socially advanced southern states of India, it lags behind its other southern neighbours, particularly Kerala and Tamilnadu on many dimensions. According to the Karnataka Human Development Report of 1999, Karnataka was in the middle among the 15 major states on many dimensions of human development (GOK 1999). The primary reason for this middling position is that average indicators for the state conceal striking disparities among the districts within it. The northern districts of Karnataka, of which Koppal is one, form a cluster of poorly performing districts that pull down these average indicators<sup>2</sup>.

Koppal is one of the poorer districts in Karnataka where drought periodically takes its toll on the agrarian economy. The lack of income and livelihoods security forces people to migrate or undertake work at great risk to their health. Deprivation is widespread. Public services, including for health, exist but are inadequately developed and largely of poor quality. Even private services, because of the widespread poverty of consumers, tend to be thin on the ground, and leave much to be desired in terms of their quality. Belief systems are strongly gender-biased; traditional practices include many that are inimical to women's health and well-being. Poor women's lives are marked by low levels of literacy, inadequate diets, hard labour, below minimum wages, recurring fatigue and illness.

In the midst of these hardships, poor women are also more vulnerable to inferior health outcomes due to denial of their human rights, including their reproductive and sexual rights. Maternal morbidity and mortality are high even as son preference and high infant death rates contribute to repeated childbearing. Reproductive morbidity is common but is often unspoken or taken as a 'natural' part of women's existence. Anaemia is endemic but is only casually – and ineffectively – addressed by public health programmes. Many of these problems have clearly been present over a long period of time. More recently, the threat of HIV infection looms over the region, and infection rates including among women have been going up sharply due to a combination of poor awareness, weak prevention, cyclical out-migration for work, and the denial of women's sexual and reproductive rights. Koppal shows up poorly in many of the health indicators that health administrators and policy makers use.

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of work done at the Indian Institute of Management Bangalore under the Gender and Health Equity Project. We would like to especially thank Chandan Mukherjee for his unstinting willingness to provide statistical and econometric advice and Shon John for competent statistical assistance. We also wish to acknowledge our anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on the first draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> See the Report of the Nanjundappa Committee (GOK 2004) for a detailed analysis of the historical and contemporary reasons for these intra-state disparities.

Health and health care inequities in Koppal reflect *systematic hierarchies* based on gender, caste, economic class, and life-stage; they also reveal *systemic failures* in health care services, both public and private. Although over the years, the government has implemented many public health programmes, they appear to have made little difference to girls' and women's health status or health care access on the ground. Three main reasons can be attributed. *First*, significant gender biases, low levels of health awareness and lack of acknowledgement of certain health problems by families and by health providers have a negative impact on health-seeking behaviour. *Second*, widespread poverty and, especially recently, rising health costs reduce access even to public health services. *Third*, government health services have tended to be so top-down in their approach, so gender-biased (or at best gender-blind), so poor in quality and so unresponsive that they have been unable to bridge the gap between service providers and their intended beneficiaries. On the other hand, NGO-implemented projects have tended to be difficult to replicate or scale up.

The unfortunate interplay between systematic hierarchies and systemic failures makes it possible for families and communities on the one side and health providers on the other to exonerate themselves and hold the other side responsible for poor health status and outcomes. Families and communities tend to blame health providers for insensitivity, negligence, and the sheer absence of services; health providers typically hold the view that women and their families are ignorant, superstitious, and careless. Our research reveals undoubted elements of truth on both sides. Nonetheless the 'blame game' diverts attention away from the absence of accountability by both, and the low levels of acknowledgement overall of women's health needs. At the same time, however, changes are also occurring. For instance, whether because of government awareness programmes or not, health seeking by women and their families from private and public providers is far higher than one might anticipate, especially for maternal health. Despite this, preventable maternal deaths continue to be high, and women die in unconscionable numbers from causes related to childbearing.

The paper will present empirical evidence and analysis of health inequities in 60 villages<sup>3</sup> in two *talukas* (sub-districts) of Koppal. It draws on insights gained through research, community mobilisation and institution building efforts for the Gender and Health Equity Project. It will argue that both the systemic and the systematic elements need to be tackled if any policy or programme changes are to really take hold. The research to date has had four main components:

- A health survey of 1920 households;
- A census of private health care providers;
- Qualitative research about government service delivery;
- Qualitative enquiry into maternal deaths.

## 2) KOPPAL DISTRICT – HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND GENDER

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<sup>3</sup> 56 villages were selected by MSK, four of which have tandas large enough to be considered administratively by MSK as separate villages, which leads to the total of 60 villages. A tanda is a sub-group of houses populated, in the project site, by a ST group (Lambanis).

Karnataka with its population of 52 million accounts for a little over 5% of the population of India (Census of India, 2001). The present Karnataka state was formed in 1956 by combining Kannada language districts from the then states of Madras, Hyderabad, Bombay and Coorg with the former princely state of Mysore. As was true in other parts of India (e.g. Kerala), the area under the princely state of Mysore was better on social and economic indicators at independence than the districts that had been under direct colonial rule. On the other hand, the Northern part of the state belonging to the old “Hyderabad Karnataka” which was under the Nizam’s rule, tended to be much worse off.

These differences have persisted after independence as noted by the Nanjundappa Committee’s Report (GOK 2004). While many reasons such as the drought-proneness of agriculture, and semi-aridity can be adduced for the greater poverty of the northern districts, significant gender inequalities and biases seriously hamper social and economic development in this region. These inequalities are a major reason for the poor health and other indicators of the region. They also come in the way of government health programmes and constrain their effectiveness while providing a ready excuse for government functionaries and even NGOs for their own limitations.

Table 1: District-wise selected key indicators of Karnataka

Sl no	Districts	Percent female literacy	Percent girls married below 18 years	Percent current users of FP Method	Percent birth order 3 & above	Percent safe delivery	Percent complete immunization	Percent decadal population growth rate	Regions
1	Hassan	59.32	15.20	75.10	19.70	69.70	92.80	9.66	Old Mysore
2	Shimoga	67.24	16.50	69.30	22.80	83.00	92.90	12.90	Old Mysore
3	Kodagu	72.53	22.00	70.60	18.80	79.40	94.80	11.64	Old Mysore
4	Dakshina Kannada	77.39	4.50	63.70	32.00	91.50	86.00	14.51	Old Mysore
5	Uttar Kannada	68.48	15.00	66.00	27.20	86.10	89.90	10.90	Bombay Karnataka
6	Udupi	74.02	4.50	63.70	32.00	91.50	86.00	6.88	Old Mysore
7	Mandya	51.62	37.00	71.70	26.10	61.90	88.00	7.14	Old Mysore
8	Mysore	55.81	47.90	65.40	23.90	69.70	92.70	15.04	Old Mysore
9	Bangalore Rural	78.98	21.05	63.00	16.40	79.10	83.70	34.80	Old Mysore
10	Bangalore Urban	78.98	37.00	60.10	26.10	90.60	77.00	34.80	Old Mysore
11	Chitradurga	54.62	30.05	59.90	34.40	53.80	88.40	15.05	Old Mysore
12	Tumkur	57.18	27.10	61.30	27.30	63.50	88.00	11.87	Old Mysore
13	Dharwad	62.20	36.50	61.20	37.40	65.30	74.80	16.65	Bombay Karnataka
14	Chamraj Nagar	43.02	47.90	65.40	23.90	69.70	92.70	9.16	Old Mysore
15	Chikkamagalur	64.47	37.00	71.40	26.10	78.00	83.50	11.98	Old Mysore
16	Kolar	52.81	33.50	57.10	29.70	59.20	90.60	13.83	Old Mysore
17	Gadag	52.58	36.50	61.20	37.40	65.30	74.80	13.14	Bombay Karnataka
18	Belgaum	52.53	55.80	61.80	36.70	68.60	64.80	17.40	Bombay Karnataka
19	Haveri	57.60	36.50	61.20	37.40	65.30	74.80	13.29	Bombay Karnataka



Table 1: (Cont'd)

Sl no	Districts	Percent female literacy	Percent girls married below 18 years	Percent current users of FP Method	Percent birth order 3 & above	Percent safe delivery	Percent complete immunization on	Percent decadal population growth rate	Regions
20	Bellary	46.16	44.20	50.40	48.60	54.00	52.60	22.30	Hyderabad Karnataka
21	Davangere	58.45	35.50	59.90	34.40	53.80	53.80	14.78	Old Mysore
22	Bijapur	46.19	64.80	47.10	43.00	50.10	53.20	17.63	Bombay Karnataka
23	Bidar	50.01	67.60	50.60	52.90	52.50	50.30	19.56	Hyderabad Karnataka
24	Raichur	36.84	57.10	45.40	52.80	48.00	37.20	21.93	Hyderabad Karnataka
25	Gulbarga	38.40	47.70	39.20	53.70	47.70	25.30	21.02	Hyderabad Karnataka
26	Bagalkot	44.10	64.80	47.10	43.00	50.10	53.20	18.84	Bombay Karnataka
<b>27</b>	<b>Koppal</b>	<b>40.76</b>	<b>57.10</b>	<b>45.40</b>	<b>52.80</b>	<b>48.00</b>	<b>37.20</b>	<b>24.57</b>	<b>Hyderabad Karnataka</b>

Source: GOK 2003, Pg 10

Koppal, a small northern district carved out of the erstwhile Raichur, is a dry district with four talukas, a population of 1.193 million, and an overall literacy rate of 55% (IIPS forthcoming). Its indicators are near the bottom for the state. Table 1 which includes a number of human development indicators places Koppal at or very near the bottom on many of these. Although not uniformly the lowest on all the sub-indicators, this is cold comfort since it lies fairly close to the worst levels for all. Table 2, drawn from the all-India district level Rapid Household Survey conducted in 1998-99 under the Reproductive and Child Health (RCH) programme corroborates this for a number of specific health-related indicators for women.

Additional data from the same source (IIPS forthcoming p 48-49; Koppal – Key Indicators) reveals the following: age at first cohabitation among currently married women (ages 15-44) was below 18 in 73.9% of the cases; 41% of them had illiterate husbands; and 51.4% of girls married during 1999 (until the survey) were below 18.

Table 2: Range of RCH indicators in Karnataka

	Indicators	Minimum	Maximum	Koppal
1	Girls married below 18 (%)	2.2 Kodagu	59.4 Raichur	51.4
2	Illiterate eligible women (%)	19.9 B'lr urban	74.9 Raichur	66.8
3	Total fertility rate	1.37 Mandya	2.98 Raichur	2.77
4	Birth order 3 and above (%)	11.9 B'lr urban	51.0 Gulbarga	48.2
5	Infant mortality rate (per1000 live births)	16.3 B'lr urban	88.7 Koppal	
6	Knowledge of any modern family planning methods (%)	97.3 Raichur	99.8 Gulbarga	98.5
7	Current use of modern FP methods (%)	40.3 Gulbarga	73.5 Mandya	42.4
8	Full antenatal check-up (%)	12.8 Gulbarga	49.8 Bangalore rural	24.4
9	Safe delivery (%)	41.2 Gulbarga	95.7 Bangalore urban	52.8
10	Full immunisation (%)	48.1 Gulbarga	95.2 Bangalore urban	50.2
11	Eligible women aware of HIV (%)	37.7 Raichur	89.2 Kodagu	41.4
12	Use of gov't health facilities for antenatal care (%)	7.2 Uttar Kannada	60.6 Kodagu	19.4

Source: IIPS forthcoming

For women in Koppal, in addition to a life of hardship shared with poor men, gender power takes the form of curtailed autonomy and domestic violence. Women are married into their in-laws' households while very young, making it harder for them to have a voice of their own. Once married there is tremendous pressure to bear children, especially sons. The health implications of having closely spaced pregnancies at a young age further exacerbate existing malnutrition, anaemia and the risks of future maternal morbidity and mortality.

Apart from son preference, high fertility in northern Karnataka (Sekher et al. 2001), is also a counter to high neonatal and infant mortality with the trade off being women's reproductive well being. It is not considered unusual for a woman to have repeated miscarriages or abortions. The reasoning being that if a pregnancy is lost, a woman can always get pregnant again (Umamani & Yogananda 2003). Yet such attitudes hold significant risks for women's health, especially considering existing levels of unrecognised but high reproductive morbidity. Maternal deaths, however, represent only the extreme end of a continuum of underlying maternal morbidity. Not only are the risks to women of maternal mortality and morbidity undervalued, but so are their direct linkages to neonatal well being and survival.

Such risks to women's and newborn health are heightened by the hazards of poverty as has been documented in various studies in different parts of south India. In Andhra Pradesh, all of the women dying from pregnancy and obstetric complications were reported to have been working as labourers for subsistence reasons (ANS 2001). In Tamilnadu, many women who had uterine prolapse ascribed their condition to heavy manual labour within a week or fortnight following delivery, possibly explaining why the mean age for developing symptoms was 26 years (Ravindran et al 1999). In southern Karnataka, women continued to undertake strenuous work until late in their pregnancy (Mathews et al. 2001). When pregnant and postnatal women are forced to do heavy manual labour in order to survive, health education messages asking them to "take rest" while pregnant have little relevance to the hard reality of their lives.

### **3) METHODOLOGY**

Our research uses both quantitative and qualitative methods to study the patterns of systematic hierarchy and system failures in health-seeking behaviour and access to health care. The quantitative data are based on a cross-sectional survey designed to document intra- and inter-household inequities in health care-seeking during sickness and pregnancy. It also sought to elicit household level attitudes to education of girls, attitudes to gender power, and domestic violence. A household census conducted prior to the survey in 60 villages enumerated 15,358 households and 82,901 individuals. A unistage-stratified sampling design was adopted with households as the sample units. The project villages under each PHC were grouped, and each group treated as a separate stratum. With eight PHCs in the project area, there were thus eight strata. A sample was drawn from each stratum to the extent of 12.5% of all the households within it leading to 1920 households.

#### 4) SYSTEMATIC HIERARCHIES

Our broad starting hypothesis was that intersecting hierarchies of economic class, caste and gender (as well as the individual's position in the life cycle) would affect attitudes to her health needs, and health seeking behaviour. In this paper we do not go into the details of all these intersections, but only focus on the ways in which gender affects health seeking behaviour. Nonetheless it is impossible to avoid commenting on the class and caste realities that permeate and define people's lives, their perceptions, and their behaviour because of their possible interactions with gender hierarchies.

##### a) *Economic class and caste*

The economic position of a household is largely defined, in this poor and largely unirrigated agricultural district, by relationship to land, which in turn defines the extent of the household's dependence on sending out its members as casual wage labourers. As Koppal is a dry and drought prone region, agricultural productivity depends not merely on the amount of land owned but also on the possibility of ground water irrigation. Bore wells and "pump sets" are important assets for this reason. In our survey, most households (84.1%) owned some land, but only 24.3% owned pump sets. The overall share of landless and small (< 5 acres) unirrigated farm-owning households was as high as 51.8%. 23.9% of households owned unirrigated land equal to or above 5 acres. Households owning irrigated land constituted only 24% of all households.

Our survey did not undertake a detailed study of the quality of irrigation, but this is obviously important in determining the extent to which a household can rely on income from self-employment versus sending out family members as wage labourers. Overall, the major source of income for most households was through self-employment (53.4%), followed by casual wage labour (39.8%). Regular wage employment was rare, as only 5.2% of the households derived their income from it. This picture varied considerably by the household's landholding.

Landless households depended mainly on casual wage labour (61.6%) and artisanal work such as basket or pot making (21.1%). Among unirrigated landholding (< 5 acres) households, only 36.1% managed on self-employment; 57.9% of these also depended on casual wage labour. By contrast, self-employment without resort to casual wage labour characterised the larger unirrigated landholding (equal to or > 5 acres) households (70.1%), as well as the irrigated landholding households whether small (72.8%) or large (91.1%). Nevertheless, it is clear that owning a plot of land larger than 5 acres or owning a small irrigated plot does not insure almost 30% of such households from casual wage labour.

Most families (78.3%) owned the houses they inhabited. However, only 29.1% of the owned houses were *pucca*<sup>4</sup> structures. Around one-fourth (or 22.7%) were semi-*pucca* structures but 48.1% were *kuccha* structures. While electricity was not uncommon, very few of even the *pucca* houses had piped water (15%) or toilets (4.2%). Government-allotted housing was only 14.3% of the total (much less than the 26.7% population share of SC/ST households for whom such

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<sup>4</sup> Adopting the NSS definition, we defined pucca houses as those that had pucca roofs and pucca walls. Semi- pucca houses were those that had pucca roofs but kuccha walls, or kuccha roofs but pucca walls. Kuccha houses were those that had kuccha roofs and kuccha walls.

housing is meant), not all of which was *pucca*, and only 57% of which had electricity while none had toilets or piped water supply.

Table 3: Caste, class and landholding

	Percent landless	Percent owning less than 5 acres of unirrigated land	Percent owning 5 or more acres of unirrigated land	Percent owning less than 5 acres of irrigated land	Percent owning 5 or more acres of irrigated land	Percent casual wage earning households	Percent distribution of all households
Upper castes	13.3	28.6	29.1	8.5	20.2	24.7	28.3
Middle castes	11.4	35.2	28.0	9.8	15.6	36.9	37.8
SCs / STs	20.9	45.8	14.3	11.7	7.2	59.2	26.7
Muslims	29.6	31.2	17.1	8.5	13.6	39.9	4.1
All households <sup>1</sup>	15.9	36.0	24.0	9.8	14.3	39.8	100.0

Source: Gender and Health Equity household survey

Note: <sup>1</sup>3% belong to other castes

Caste variations tend to follow the economic class patterns<sup>5</sup> as can be seen from Table 3 above. Upper castes have more large irrigated holdings than the average; while they also have more landless households than the middle castes, this may reflect the fact that almost 9% have regular employment as the major source of income. Middle caste landholding is near the average for all households although they have less irrigated landholding above 5 acres than the average. SC/ST households have higher proportions of landless and casual wage labourers.

How do these variations in the economic and social status of households translate into health-seeking behaviour? Are there significant differences across households and within them by gender, age or life-cycle status?

b) *Health care needs and gendered health seeking*

The survey classified illness by its duration – short-term (lasting < 3 months) or long-term (> 3 months), and by its severity.<sup>6</sup> Self-reported morbidity was high overall, with 82% of households reporting at least one sick person during the reference period. Considerable care was taken in designing probes to overcome the well-known biases in self-reported morbidity, although this may not have been completely successful because our interviewers were local people who were trained by us but were relatively inexperienced. Treatment seeking for illness was also high – almost 90% of illnesses reported for girls / women, and over 90% for boys / men were treated.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> A detailed enumeration and checking of caste groups was undertaken; details are available in Annexure 3 of Iyer (2005).

<sup>6</sup> Severity for short-term sickness was measured in terms of difficulty in eating normally, in doing regular work in – and outside – the house, and being able to go outside the house. For long-term sickness, severity was measured in terms of difficulty in going to school, doing housework or other work, and in income-earning.

<sup>7</sup> The high levels of treatment-seeking in our survey may be affected by two factors: the confounding of illness with treatment, wherein people only acknowledge illness as such if it is treated; second, the fairly broad definition of treatment-seeking used in the survey. Nonetheless, even our qualitative and in-depth inquiry into the circumstances of maternal death reveals the same phenomenon of high-levels of health seeking.

Within this overall picture, health-seeking behaviour varied along a number of dimensions, such as gender within the household, and also by the economic class of the household, and the duration and severity of the illness. Economic class in this analysis is represented by per capita household consumption expenditure quintiles.<sup>8</sup>

The analysis below first presents some cross-tabulated data for short- and long-term illnesses. For short-term illnesses the responses were classified into two categories based on whether the person ever received treatment. For long-term illnesses, the responses were classified into three categories based on whether the person ever received treatment, and whether the treatment was discontinued. Multinomial logit regressions were also run on the data to check for the nature and statistical significance of interactions among economic class and gender<sup>9</sup>.

Table 4.1: Health-seeking by gender and economic class

Gender-based groups within per capita consumption expenditure quintiles	Short-term sicknesses		p value <sup>1</sup>
	<i>Ever treated (%)</i>	<i>Never treated (%)</i>	
<b>Quintile 1 (poorest)</b>			
Female	1488 (89.0)	184 (11.0)	0.000
Male	1334 (96.5)	48 (3.5)	
Total	2822 (92.4)	232 (7.6)	
<b>Quintile 2</b>			
Female	1385 (84.5)	255 (15.5)	0.000
Male	1285 (94.1)	80 (5.9)	
Total	2670 (88.9)	335 (11.1)	
<b>Quintile 3</b>			
Female	1587 (89.5)	187 (10.5)	0.000
Male	1201 (94.9)	64 (5.1)	
Total	2788 (91.7)	251 (8.3)	
<b>Quintile 4</b>			
Female	1304 (93.7)	87 (6.3)	0.000
Male	1179 (97.4)	32 (2.6)	
Total	2483 (95.4)	119 (4.6)	
<b>Quintile 5 (richest)</b>			
Female	1170 (89.1)	143 (10.9)	0.000
Male	942 (98.3)	16 (1.7)	
Total	2112 (93.0)	159 (7.0)	

Source: Gender and Health Equity household survey

Notes: Totals are population estimates

Percentages are over the total number of sicknesses within each quintile & sex group

<sup>1</sup>Chi-squared test, degrees of freedom = 1

<sup>8</sup> The plausibility of these self-reported consumption expenditure data has been crosschecked by examining the distributions and also comparing the corresponding National Sample Survey data.

<sup>9</sup> There are clearer hypotheses about how and why gender and class might influence health seeking than there are for caste. Caste is likely to affect the choice of provider and quality of care obtained, but not the decision of whether or not to seek treatment. Our analysis of gender and caste vis-à-vis health seeking for short- and long-term sickness shows that caste per se does not discriminate among households when it comes to discontinued-, or non-treatment. Interactions based on caste are part of our ongoing work but not explored in this paper.

Table 4.1 shows that, for short-term sickness, the proportions of girls/women who were never treated<sup>10</sup> was significantly higher than the same proportions of boys/men within every expenditure quintile. However, there is not much variation across the expenditure quintiles per se; treatment levels generally appear to be high regardless of household economic class.

Table 4.2 suggests that for long-term sickness, there were both gender and economic class differences (in the expected directions) among those with continued treatment. There were also significant gender differences in all the quintiles for those who were never treated. Girls/women were more likely to never be treated for long-term illness in all households. However, when treatment was discontinued, it appeared to vary both by economic class and by gender. Furthermore, these gender differences are not uniform across the quintiles, indicating the presence of interactions between gender and economic class, which we tested further with the regression analysis.

Table 4.2: Health-seeking by gender and economic class

Gender-based groups within per capita consumption expenditure quintiles	Long-term sicknesses			p value <sup>1</sup>
	Continued treatment (%)	Discontinued treatment (%)	Never treated (%)	
<b>Quintile 1 (poorest)</b>				
Female	632 (49.1)	465 (36.1)	190 (14.8)	0.000
Male	494 (59.5)	296 (35.7)	40 (4.8)	
Total	1126 (53.2)	761 (35.9)	230 (10.9)	
<b>Quintile 2</b>				
Female	638 (50.8)	466 (37.1)	151 (12.0)	0.000
Male	654 (71.9)	216 (23.7)	40 (4.4)	
Total	1292 (59.7)	682 (31.5)	191 (8.8)	
<b>Quintile 3</b>				
Female	789 (56.7)	421 (30.3)	181 (13.0)	0.000
Male	631 (70.3)	182 (20.3)	84 (9.4)	
Total	1420 (62.1)	603 (26.4)	265 (11.6)	
<b>Quintile 4</b>				
Female	798 (65.0)	309 (25.2)	120 (9.8)	0.001
Male	543 (67.6)	219 (27.3)	41 (5.1)	
Total	1341 (66.1)	528 (26.0)	161 (7.9)	
<b>Quintile 5 (richest)</b>				
Female	812 (66.9)	283 (23.3)	119 (9.8)	0.000
Male	546 (73.1)	169 (22.6)	32 (4.3)	
Total	1358 (69.3)	452 (23.0)	151 (7.7)	

Source: Gender and Health Equity household survey

Notes: Totals are population estimates

Percentages are over the total number of sicknesses within each quintile & sex group

<sup>1</sup>Chi-squared test, degrees of freedom = 2

The foregoing discussion suggests that the lower and more insecure the household's economic status, the greater the chance that health seeking will be rationed within the household, and this is

<sup>10</sup> We refer to sick persons and sicknesses interchangeably while discussing Tables 4.1 and 4.2, because most persons (73.9%) in fact reported only one sickness.

borne disproportionately by girls and women. This suggests that greater economic security (and higher income levels) may reduce the rationing phenomenon, and with it some but not all of the health-seeking differences between women and men. However a caveat is in order. While we may be tempted to assume that the improvement is because of income security, economic vulnerability may not be the only reason; other factors such as educational status may play a role as well.

Logit regression analysis with interaction terms for gender and economic class (using two models – Model 1 for the aggregate sample, and Model 2 with dummies for male versus female and poor versus non-poor) presented results that corroborate those above, and extend our understanding<sup>11</sup>. For *short-term illnesses*, Model 1 suggests that the likelihood of not being treated is significantly higher if the person is older, female, or poorer, or if the illness is less severe. Children and the young may be more likely to be treated (in an area with higher than average infant and child mortality rates) because of concerns about their greater vulnerability; it may also be the case that in this poor region, older people are less likely to take time away from work for short-term ailments. This requires further qualitative investigation. Gender bias clearly discriminates against all women whether poor or non-poor. However although the aggregate sample suggested significant economic class differences, Model 2 only showed some economic class differences among men (10% significance level), and not among women.

For *long-term illnesses*, Model 1 showed that the likelihood of continued treatment is higher the more severe the illness, or if the person is male, the head of the household, or belongs to the top two expenditure quintiles. Whether the person was an income earner or not in the household was also highly significant but in an unexpected direction suggesting that income earners were less likely to be continuously treated. Our tentative explanation for this is that there is a trade-off between earning income and receiving treatment (possibly because of the time and distance involved in seeking treatment) and therefore income earners may never be treated or may discontinue treatment.<sup>12</sup> Model 2 showed that gender differences in continued treatment were strong (1% significance level) in the poorer groups but not among the better off. There were also significant differences (1% significance level) between poorer and better-off women, but not between poorer and better off men. Thus poorer women were less likely to receive continuous care for long-term illness than better-off women, and also compared to poorer men. The test for the interaction between gender and economic class showed that gender differences in the likelihood of continued treatment were also significantly different between the poor and the better off.

There were some differences in the variables affecting complete non-treatment versus discontinuation of treatment. In Model 1 a person was more likely to never be treated for a long-term illness if the illness was less severe, but also if the person was female or from a poorer household (only 10% significance level), or an income earner. Model 2 showed significant gender differences (1% level) within both richer and poorer households. There were significant class differences among women (5% level) but not among men. Gender is clearly a more important

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<sup>11</sup> While the cross tabulations have been presented by quintile, we believe that there is variation even within the poorest and the better-off quintiles. This variability is being explored in our on-going work. For the purposes of this paper, the regressions were run using a fairly standard dichotomy between poor (bottom 3 quintiles) versus better-off (top 2 quintiles).

<sup>12</sup> This runs counter to received wisdom and further exploration is clearly warranted.

discriminator than income when it comes to never being treated and economic class also impacts more strongly among women than among men.

On the other hand, treatment was more likely to be discontinued (Model 1) if the person was from a poorer household, was not the head of the household, and was an income earner. These effects were not however uniform for men versus women. Model 2 with interactions showed some gender differences among poorer households (10% significance level), but no gender differences among richer households. But economic class was a more important discriminator among women than among men as there were no economic differences among men, but strong differences between richer and poorer women.

These results suggest that gender and economic hierarchy operate at different levels and interact in important ways. If we think of being treated at all versus never being treated as the first level, it is gender that discriminates more between people, and even economic class differentiates poor from non-poor women, but does not differentiate between men. Once people begin to receive treatment, it is economic class that seems to be more important than gender per se, but even here class appears to operate specifically for women and not for men. The disaggregated Model 2 provides far more nuance to our understanding of the interactions than the aggregate Model 1. These 'layered' interactions are explored further in our ongoing work.

An examination of the reasons given for lack of treatment throws some more light on basic gender power differences. For both females and males, the major reasons for never treating or discontinuing treatment were only a few: either the illness was not considered serious by the patient or the family, or the treatment was too expensive, or the patient felt s/he was not getting cured. Short-term illness among men was also not treated because they said they didn't have the time for treatment. However the relative importance of the reasons given by women and men varied. Never treating either short or long-term illness because they thought it was not 'serious' was the most important reason for women. For men, expense was the dominant reason for never treating illness. Expense was an important barrier to treatment for women as well but lack of acknowledgement of illness (as reflected in the statement that it was not serious) was the more salient barrier. This barrier has its roots in powerfully ingrained gender norms that instil in women from an early age a lack of confidence or self-worth, a lower recognition of their needs, and a value to suffering in silence. Men have few such internalised norms of behaviour.

Both women and men gave 'not getting cured' as a major reason for discontinuing treatment for long-term illness. More detailed analysis of the evidence shows that women tended to give up treatment more quickly.



Table 6: Percent distribution of main reasons for non-treatment of sicknesses

Main reason for no treatment	Short-term sicknesses		Long-term sicknesses			
	Never treated		Discontinued treatment		Never treated	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
	N = 856	N = 240	N = 1944	N = 1083	N = 760	N = 237
I did not know what to do	6.4	0.0	1.5	0.7	9.6	3.4
I did not think it was serious	39.1	23.3	11.1	12.6	42.6	29.1
Family did not think it was serious	11.9	10.0	1.2	2.2	12.5	6.8
No one to accompany me	2.8	3.3	0.7	0.0	3.2	3.4
I didn't have the time	2.8	10.0	1.6	0.0	0.9	3.4
Too expensive	23.1	46.7	20.0	21.6	17.6	40.5
Health provider unavailable	1.9	3.3	1.6	3.7	0.0	3.4
Health provider unhelpful	0.0	0.0	1.2	0.0	0.0	3.4
Medicines make me ill	0.9	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.1	0.0
Not getting cured	3.6	0.0	43.4	30.0	5.1	6.8
Other	7.4	3.3	4.7	5.8	7.4	0.0
No response	0.0	0.0	13.0	23.4	0.0	0.0
Total (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Gender and Health Equity household survey

Notes: Totals are population estimates

Our discussion in this section highlights the fact that systematic hierarchies of economic class and gender play an important role in structuring the health-seeking behaviour of households. While it is noteworthy that the extent of health-seeking overall is high, there are also important ways in which it is distributed across different groups. Such rationing appears to happen both because of economic constraints, and also on the basis of deeply ingrained gender norms.

### 5) Systemic failures

The systematic hierarchies within communities and households that limit health-seeking behaviour favouring women, are compounded by major failures of the health system. These failures are discussed in this section with a particular focus on maternal health. Systemic weaknesses have been documented in our research through a census of private health providers that was undertaken in the 60 villages, as well as in the surrounding larger villages and towns within the district. Information was collected about the characteristics of traditional birth attendants, spiritual and traditional healers, provision stores selling tablets, private doctors, rural medical practitioners (RMPs)<sup>13</sup>, medical stores and laboratories. Detailed qualitative information of the government health services was also obtained through in-depth observation and interviews.

<sup>13</sup> RMPs stands for rural medical practitioners. They are also sometimes called registered medical practitioners, although the Medical Council of India no longer registers them. They are usually men who primarily practice allopathy despite not having any formally recognised medical qualifications. We considered all those private doctors who did not hold current formally recognised medical degrees (MBBS, BAMS, BHMS, BUMS, BYNS, BDS) as RMPs.

In addition to this survey research, we documented the experiences of 12 women with obstetric complications, 9 of who died despite seeking care from health providers from primarily one *taluka*. These data provide compelling information that highlights how poor women in need of obstetric services interact with plural, unaccountable, and unregulated health systems in Koppal.<sup>14</sup>

*a) Government health provision*

The Karnataka Government has established an extensive network of health facilities structured according to a hierarchy of services based in theory on population norms<sup>15</sup>. Facilities have proliferated due to the preference of elected representatives for sanctioning PHCs and hospitals in their own constituencies and due to the availability of budget lines for infrastructural development. Several PHCs had new labour rooms constructed with funding from the Reproductive and Child Health programme and foreign funding supported infrastructural improvements of secondary level hospitals, with the aim of improving referral.

In Koppal, this investment in infrastructure has not translated into comprehensive emergency obstetric care as none of the higher-level government facilities have all the required specialists or critical supplies. Neither policy makers nor implementers have addressed the lack of technical inputs for emergency obstetric care (including abortion) by ensuring the availability of specialists, upgrading the emergency skills of existing personnel and ensuring their access to critical supplies such as blood, anti-epileptic and haemorrhage drugs.

Even if the logistics of ensuring emergency obstetric care through appropriate inputs, supplies and staffing were addressed, there still remain large managerial barriers to improving the effectiveness of maternal health care services. A key contribution of the Karnataka Task Force on Health and Family Welfare was to highlight the need to address vacancies at the primary health care level (GOK 2001). Medical officers, lab technicians, nurses and male junior health assistants (MHWs) were recruited within the district on a contract basis, while junior female health assistants (ANMs) were selected for training and recruitment at the state level. Although staff postings are biased against equity considerations through corruption, vacancies in primary health care service delivery in Koppal have substantially improved.

However progress on the more systemic problems identified by the Task Force (corruption, neglect of public health, distortions in primary health care, lack of equity, implementation gaps and weak ethical imperatives) has been more difficult to achieve. These cannot be addressed through managerial reforms alone. They require strategies to combat the political pressures that sustain such inequitable features of health systems.

*b) Private health providers*

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<sup>14</sup> Detailed analysis is available in George, Iyer and Sen (2005)

<sup>15</sup> CHC, PHCs and sub-centres are supposed to cover populations of 100,000, 30,000 and 5,000 respectively. In 2001, PHCs and sub-centres in Karnataka were catering, on average, to smaller populations than specified by national norms: 20,817 and 4,285 respectively. CHCs, on the other hand, were dealing with larger population loads than envisaged – 1,40,117 persons (GOI 2004).

In addition to the government health system, a large number of informal providers including spiritual and traditional healers, shopkeepers selling tonics and tablets, traditional birth attendants and RMPs exist at the village level. Our provider survey interviewed 548 providers working in the 60 villages covering a population of about 82,000 people. This included 35 spiritual healers, 133 traditional healers, 178 traditional birth attendants, 47 RMPs, 1 qualified Ayurvedic doctor, 152 provision stores and 2 medical shops. Although there are a few private specialists in the largest towns, the rural reality of Koppal is defined by a health care market dominated by informal providers. The district capital in contrast was where we interviewed 65% of qualified private doctors<sup>16</sup>, 41% of medical shops and 50% of laboratories. The 4 largest commercial towns surrounding the project area, including the district capital, accounted for 36% of 90 RMPs, 93% of 43 private doctors, 84% of the 70 medical shops and all the 8 laboratories interviewed through our census.

The end result of the combination of an unaccountable government health system and an unregulated private health system is that women have few qualified providers who can handle obstetric complications. In an emergency, women and their families are forced to run from one provider to the next, often back and forth between government and private providers, all too often without being assured of the services they desperately need.

This forced pluralism is reflected in health seeking behaviour during delivery. In terms of assistance during childbirth, according to our household survey the main provider who helped women during normal deliveries were: traditional birth attendants (60%), RMPs/private doctors (14%), relatives (18%), ANMs and lady health visitors (6%) and government doctors (0%). When there was a complication during labour some women did seek more 'skilled' providers by turning to RMPs/private doctors (26%) and government doctors (8%). Nonetheless 45% of women with complications still sought the help of traditional birth attendants as a main provider.

Apart from their dominant role in assisting women during delivery, traditional birth attendants, unlike other health providers, play an important role in cleaning, massaging and bathing both mother and child for several days after delivery. Traditional birth attendants also take ritual care of the placenta. They are trusted and familiar village level confidantes, who assist women with home deliveries in the customary squatting positions to which women are accustomed. But, despite being so responsive to women's needs, it is a concern that only 36% of traditional birth attendants in the project area reported following 4 of the 5 "cleans" needed for a safe delivery.

Unlike traditional birth attendants, RMPs are less involved in the time-consuming work of assisting women during the long hours of delivery and the hard work of caring for mothers, their babies and placentas after birth. Yet RMPs are more literate and command more social status than traditional birth attendants. RMPs are perceived by communities to be much more responsive than government health workers, although they have fewer qualifications (or none at all). Unlike government health workers they will make house visits regardless of the time of day, live in the village and can always be relied upon to provide injections and tablets. Indeed during and after delivery an RMP's primary role is to provide oxytocin, tetanus toxoid and vitamin B injections. However, the irrational use of oxytocin, especially in injection form, can lead to a higher risk of

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<sup>16</sup> This includes practitioners with degrees in dental sciences, Ayurveda, Unani, Homeopathy and Allopathy. Out of 43 private doctors, 13 (30%) were allopaths.

uterine rupture, higher fetal distress and maternal morbidity. In addition to providing and charging for injections, RMPs also seem to play an important role in mediating access to health care for poor, often illiterate families, unfamiliar with larger towns and formal health care institutions.

Women's experiences of child-bearing in Koppal have to be seen in the context of the weaknesses of these plural health systems. Our research shows that women and their families made heroic attempts to seek health care prior to and during delivery. These iterative efforts by families and women result in ineffective outcomes because health systems fail to acknowledge women's requests for help and are not held accountable for the systemic failures that continue to allow women to die. It is our argument that these gendered failures in acknowledgement and accountability are responsible for the multiple delays that prevent women from accessing the effective care that could save their lives.

Family planning, antenatal care and a stress on institutional deliveries are critically important, but when they are not integrated into a continuum of care, they are not sufficient to save women's lives. All the maternal deaths we documented in Koppal did receive antenatal care and live within accessible distance of a subcentre or PHC. And they made serious efforts to seek out health providers, both private and public. Yet despite all their efforts, the women died.

#### *c) Gender biased services*

Gender bias serves to devalue, and worse, stigmatise women's experiences, their bodies and biological processes. For example, in southern Karnataka, pregnancy is seen as a time during which 'dirty' or 'bad fluids' are accumulated in the body, bleeding after delivery is considered important as it drains the body of this bad blood. Delivery is also a ritually polluting process, after which a long period of cleansing and penance is required. During this post partum period, elders enforce restricted mobility, diets and fluid intake for newly delivered mothers (Kilaru et al., 2004). These biases directly interfere with the recognition of obstetric complications, like haemorrhage, as well as inhibit health care seeking in the postnatal period.

Health professionals also de-legitimise women's point of view. One reason why women are not able to get effective care despite physically accessing government facilities is due to the lack of agreement between women and health providers about what their health needs are. Although women seek help for labour pain, medical officers diagnose them with lower back pain or 'false' labour pain. This disjuncture between women's experiences of labour pain and its medical diagnosis indicates several problems in communication and care seeking. Women might be misinterpreting their experiences or health providers may be misunderstanding the situation. Social bias may also be at play by inhibiting women from speaking freely about their intimate reproductive health concerns with health providers from a different gender, class, educational and caste background. At the same time, health providers may have social biases that invalidate women's experiences. Finally, biases may exist in the technical understanding of what constitutes labour pain. Due to these factors, the process of seeking care and advice may be quite complex in practice.

Access to government facilities for institutional delivery once successfully negotiated does not mean an end to marginalising experiences. It is not just that cleanliness is not assured, but that the

treatment received by women can be dehumanising. Women and their families are often left in labour rooms by themselves. They have to trust health workers who are strangers, often having to seek them out from other wards or their quarters. Women are expected to deliver in a position that is different from what they are used to at their homes and which helps the health worker more than it helps them. Even for normal deliveries, medical rituals involve shaving the pubic area, administering IV drips, repeated deep vaginal examinations and episiotomies. Health workers learn their skills in hospital wards giving orders to women in labour who are allowed little control over their situation. Yet if complications arise, health workers tell families, who are neither informed nor in control, to be prepared to face the consequences (Caleb Varkey 2004).

Women with poor entitlements within families and in health systems tolerate high levels of pain, discomfort and humiliation. Not only are their rights to protest weakened by their unequal access to resources, including finances, expertise, and authority, but also because of the shame that surrounds women's bodies and the 'normalisation' of many women's reproductive morbidities. Explicit gender bias thus operates to disenfranchise women objectively through unequal status, and also normatively through disempowering normative local traditions and medical frames of knowledge.

## **6) Conclusion**

Our experiences based on the Gender and Health Equity project in Koppal have highlighted the interplay of systematic hierarchies and systemic failures in determining health outcomes for poor women. Government providers of services often blame communities for their ignorance and superstition, while people accuse providers of bias, neglect and irresponsibility. What our research shows is that there is partial validity on each side but neither is true by itself.

A striking finding of our quantitative and qualitative research and field level interactions is that, whether for general illnesses (short or long-term) or maternity, women and their families invest considerable effort and resources in many instances in seeking health care. Yet the combination of poverty, biased gender norms, and unresponsive and unregulated health systems results in this investment going to naught. The result is that disproportionately women suffer illnesses and die from entirely preventable causes.

While our research has focused on two *talukas* of a single district, we can probably extrapolate our findings to much of northern Karnataka. What should be obvious is that these systematic and systemic factors underwritten by gender bias and underpinning gender biased outcomes must be addressed urgently if the state is to fulfil its development potential.

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Annexure 1: Results of logit regressions – estimates of odds ratios

Independent variables <sup>2</sup>	Short-term sicknesses		LONG-TERM SICKNESSES					
	Logit Regression Non treatment=1 Otherwise=0		LOGIT REGRESSION Continued treatment=1 Otherwise=0		MULTINOMIAL LOGIT Continued treatment=1			
					Discontinued treatment=2		Non-treatment=3	
	Model 1 <sup>1</sup>	Model 2 <sup>2</sup>	Model 1 <sup>1</sup>	Model 2 <sup>2</sup>	Model 1 <sup>1</sup>	Model 2 <sup>2</sup>	Model 1 <sup>1</sup>	Model 2 <sup>2</sup>
Age	1.017 ***	1.017 ***						
Sex (dummy: female=1)	2.703 ***		0.667 ***		1.153		4.170 ***	
Income earner (dummy: non-earner=1)			1.668 ***	1.658 ***	0.632 ***	0.636 ***	0.496 ***	0.498 ***
Household head (dummy: others=1)			0.690 **	0.688 **	1.764 ***	1.773 ***	0.714	0.714
Severity	0.811 ***	0.809 ***	1.119 **	1.114 **	0.936	0.939	0.767 ***	0.769 ***
Economic class (dummy: non-poor=1)	0.622 **		1.453 ***		0.696 ***		0.658 *	
Male, Poor (dummy: d1)		2.349 *		0.945		1.041		1.129
Female, Non-poor (dummy: d2)		3.908 ***		0.924		0.817		3.180 ***
Female, Poor (dummy: d3)		5.610 ***		0.528 ***		1.448 *		5.505 ***
Sample Size								
<b>Tests</b>								
Coeff.(d1)=Coeff.(d3)		***		***		*		***
Coeff.(d2)=Coeff.(d3)				***		***		**
Coeff.(d3)-Coeff.(d1) =Coeff.(d2) <sup>3</sup>				**		*		

Notes: Notations: \* significance at 10% level, \*\* significance at 5% level, \*\*\* significance at 1% level

Definitions: Economic class: Poor: bottom 3 quintiles, Non-poor: top 2 quintiles

Severity: Number of difficulties due to sickness

<sup>1</sup>Model 1 tested the independent effects of the explanatory variables on treatment-seeking outcomes

<sup>2</sup>Model 2 tested interactions using non-poor men as the reference group, and dummies for poor men, non-poor women and poor women. Economic class and sex were dropped to avoid multi-collinearity.

<sup>3</sup>The test was modified for continued treatment of long-term sicknesses to Coeff. (d1)-Coeff. (d3) =Coeff. (d2) because apriori coeff (d2)>coeff (d1)>coeff (d3)



October 6, 2005

*To be or not to be:*

## **Problems in locating women in public policy**

Devaki Jain

This paper discusses some of the problems women face in gendering public policy. It suggests that the impediments faced lie largely in the nature of women's location in the social landscape. It also suggests that despite considerable progress in the general understanding of this social landscape we now have, and despite women lobbyists' efforts at skillful strategies for a more responsive public policy, the value of these efforts have not been sufficiently recognized by policy makers. Nor have they made significant dent on them. One may wonder whether this failure is due to our inadequate tools to enforce our voices. Knowledge is not enough. The paper elaborates on how women's collective identity can be forceful politically when backed by knowledge and gives examples of this from Karnataka. New developments in decentralisation of governance, has opened possibilities for women's agency at local level. Paradoxically, developments at global level have the possibility of undermining this process. We can only therefore confront this not by integrating into the existing development paradigm and attempting small changes at local level but by evolving a different development paradigm that will ensure justice for the majority of the poor and women.

Women face three problems in incorporating their concerns in public policy. Firstly, how can we have "woman" as an exclusive category given the heterogeneity among women. Women, belong to all the classes, castes religions, political ideologies, and cultures in society. Thus to project an identity of 'woman' as defined by feminine experience to represent a collective point of view or opinion, is a challenge. Yet a case can and has been made for taking 'woman' as a specific category( as an imaginary) on the basis of the fact across these conventional divides various forms of discrimination converge. Indeed it was this recognition, namely, the experience of discrimination against women across all social groups that led the pioneers on women's rights, the founding mothers of the UN's conventions to craft the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The universality of discrimination against women gives them an identity across differences. But discrimination alone cannot overcome the other problems of gendering mentioned below.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> C. Morrisson, J P Jutting, 'Women's Discrimination in Developing Countries: A New Data Set for Better Policies', World Development, Vol. 33, No. 7, July 2005, pg 1065-1081

The second question arises from the flawed nature of inherited knowledge. Women Studies has demonstrated how knowledge of society and knowledge about women are constructed by patriarchal biases- that all knowledge is gendered.<sup>2</sup> A very typical example relates to women's work. What kind of work is called work, how work is valued, the measures used determine the value of their work are all determined by the perception of women's work by society, official agencies, and men. As a result, women's work is under counted, under estimated and often is invisible. There are dichotomies such as public and private space<sup>3</sup> and hierarchies<sup>4</sup> embedded in language and practice. For example, the large space occupied by the majority of women workers is called "informal" implying its secondary status to the so called formal sector. The non monetized sector is either accorded a lower value or no value compared to the monetised.<sup>5</sup> – an approach totally invalid for a largely subsistence economy where the non monetised sector is substantial. Thus if a policy arises out of such inherited "flawed" knowledge, women advocates would not want to participate in it. They would not like to engender it. They would like to deconstruct it or challenge it or reject it.

Thus integrating into an existing framework has problems. If the formulation of public policy, that arise out of the accepted theories and frameworks and out of given data and analysis are unacceptable to say a group, like women, or dalits<sup>6</sup> then their integrating into that set up, sitting at committees or negotiating tables is surrender. In so far as we start from a premise that is inaccurate and flawed, it can lead to undesirable results. But this staying away, also has its negative effects, i.e. exclusion. This is one of the dilemmas. In the language of the feminists this is often posed as: "do we want a piece of the poisoned cake<sup>7</sup>?" or another way of raising the same question, "do we want to swim in the polluted stream?" Hence ideas like integrating, gendering, mainstreaming, used now in current discussions, for inclusion of women in policy making efforts do not achieve desired results.

The third problem arises out of women's unhappiness over constructing "boxes", to contain phenomena within strict boundaries. To women, such boundaries are invalid especially where boundaries are fluid. They do not easily accept attempts at imputing a false identity and deriving judgements on that basis. If one defines the boundary of

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<sup>2</sup> Devaki Jain, Women's Participation in the History of Ideas: The Importance of Reconstructing Knowledge for National Institute for Advanced Studies, INDIAN INSTITUTE OF SCIENCE, Feb 6<sup>th</sup>, 2004, Bangalore; Devaki Jain, Power Through the Looking Glass of Feminism. Paper Presented in Symposium on Gender of Power University of Leiden, Netherlands 1986.

<sup>3</sup> Devaki Jain, PRI impact on private structure (Domestic sphere) How Important is the private public dichotomy. The Case of the EWRS, Seminar Women in Panchayat Raj (27-28 April 2000, New Delhi)

<sup>4</sup> Devaki Jain, Valuing women- signals from the ground, Opening Session For the University of Maryland, Broad theme: Cultural diversity and universal norms, June 1<sup>st</sup> 2001

<sup>5</sup> Goldschmidt-Clermont, Luisella. Unpaid Work in the Household: A Review of Economic Evaluation Methods. Geneva: ILO, 1981

<sup>6</sup> Gopal Guru. How Egalitarian Are the Social Sciences in India?, Economic and Political Weekly, Vol. XXXVII No. 51 December 14, 2002

<sup>7</sup> Devaki Jain, "The Role of Peoples Movement in Economics and Social Transformation", paper presented at the Opening Thematic Plenary for "Economic and Social Development", at 1999 Seoul International Conference of NGOs, "The Role of NGOs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Inspire, Empower, Act", (October 10-16, 1999 Seoul, Korea)

identity as women's ways of doing things it is rejected as "essentialism". If one suggests that waged work for women empowers them it is called "instrumentalism". There is a tendency, amongst the women advocates themselves to question every notion or concept which attempts an arrival at a boundary for identity fixing. I call this the *nethi nethi syndrome*, borrowing from the Upanishads. It is definition by negation.<sup>8</sup>

But such an over critical viewing of identity that negates any bounding, impedes the participation of women in policy as a political presence drawn from a collective identity. An identity tag, (based on some markings, bodily or through the experience of subordination and exclusion), is crucial for claiming rights and special attention.<sup>9</sup> Such a clear identity tag, which is more easily available to say dalits, or to "blacks" in Africa or other white nations, is difficult to forge for the woman- identity due to her presence in all these other categories with all their separate politics. Gendering public policy is intimately related to our answers to these questions.

In a book I have just completed called "**Women, Development, and the UN - A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice**,"<sup>10</sup> I have reviewed the historical struggle of women to be understood and included and given space and citizenship on an equal basis in the international arena of justice. I found that whenever women did achieve some "success" by breaking through the male bastions of knowledge and power, it was through strategizing on collective identity as woman, as well as by inclusion of even one woman in a drafting committee. I call this strategizing space a *place of one's own*<sup>11</sup> or *the women's tent*<sup>12</sup>. While *the place of one's own* is needed to develop self-confidence, to face the bigger world, it also made the "outside" see the "tent", as a separate entity. This perception perpetuates the *Women for women by women to women syndrome*, a syndrome which is excluding women not only from recasting and reordering development, but also denying the course of development to reflect the lived experience of women. Policy issues are not only about women's issues. Women need a say in all issues as co partners in the development of society. Thus *the place of ones own* can be a power house or a ghetto, or both.

The 60-year review referred to above does point to some useful directions for women's participation in social change. First, there is value and usefulness in bonding across differences on the identity of woman, and strategizing in meaningful ways for inclusion in public affairs. Hence an organized voice represented by the women's tent, is a crucial brick in this effort. Such an inclusion is necessary for instance, if we have to stem militarisation. Then women's tent can also be a peace tent.

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<sup>9</sup> Devaki Jain, Globalism and Localism: Negotiating Feminist Space, Rethinking Gender, Democracy And Development: Is Decentralisation A Tool For Local Ownership Of An Effective Political Voice?, Ferrara University and Modena University, 20-22 May 2002, Italy

<sup>10</sup> Devaki Jain, Women, Development, and the UN- A Sixty-Year Quest for Equality and Justice, Indiana University Press, to be released in August 2005, New York, (Website: www.unhistory.org or book can be ordered from IUP by email: iupress@indiana.edu)

<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, A Room of One's Own\_ (Granada, 1977 Published: 1929)

<sup>12</sup> In many international conferences women organized a separate 'tent' where many activities were carried out- with an autonomy not available in the general conference schedules.

Secondly we need knowledge that delineates concealed details regarding differences within households and families, between the sexes, and in the various processes of reproduction, production, exchange. We may call this mapping the social and economic location of women in the above landscapes. Knowing can be a first step

Thirdly power, claimed through some semblance of a collective identity, a USP [?] or flag. There has been much discussion on this issue,<sup>13</sup> of building a maintainable unity, a united stand. This continues to be a quest. However it is suggested here that it is increasingly being argued that participation in leadership, in formal politics,<sup>14</sup> can provide the turning point. Bonding across difference on the identity of woman, and strategizing for inclusion as a collective voice can redress all aspects of gender derived discrimination: whether it is the demeaning gaze, the mind set; the stereotypical perceptions of women's roles and capabilities, or the embedded discriminatory practices – all these are linked elements of gender relations. The recent conference in New York called Beijing +10<sup>15</sup> revealed again the continuing disjunction between the reality on the ground and the sense of progress created by the “visibility”<sup>16</sup> level, achieved by gendered analysis.

This disjunction can be seen in two opposite trajectories relating to women and development. The first trajectory is the emergence of a strong political presence in the national and international scene of the women's movement. There is now a widespread consciousness of the necessity of engaging in gendered analysis that recognizes both difference and inequality and their implications for development design. The other trajectory reveals that the situation on the ground for many women, especially those living in poverty and in conflict-ridden situations, seems to have worsened, despite the fact that it has been addressed specifically by both the State and development thought.

The question that arises then is, why does this disjunction exist after decades of what appears to be a vibrant and ostensibly effective partnership between policy makers and the women's movement? How much of the oppositional trajectories can be attributed to the external atmospherics of global power politics and its attendant economics? How much can be attributed to other factors, such as the style of functioning and priorities of the women's movement or its experience of the gendered institutional architecture of governance?

Two examples from Karnataka of gendering policy will be discussed to illustrate these problems- the problem of differences between women, need not be a hindrance; one can

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<sup>13</sup> Longino, Helen E. (1993), 'Feminist Standpoint theory and the Problems of Knowledge', *SIGNS* Autumn vol. 19 no. 1, 201-212

<sup>14</sup> UN Economic and Social Council, 2000, Assessment of the Implementation of the System-Wide Medium-Term Plan for the Advancement of Women 1996-2001; Report of the Secretary-General, Commission on the Status of Women, Forty-fourth session, 28 February – 2 March 2000; Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Held in Beijing from 4 to 15 September 1995; Including the Agenda, the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (Extract), in *The United Nations and the Advancement of Women*, 649-735

<sup>15</sup> Commission on the Status of Women – Forty Ninth Session, New York, 28<sup>th</sup> Feb-11<sup>th</sup> March 2005

<sup>16</sup> Devaki Jain, “Spaces and Hopes”, *The Hindu*, April 3, 2005

address the common experience of discrimination and inequality by women as a group. We can build adequate knowledge of the social embeddedness of gender roles then intervene in policy by studying the impact of gender insensitive formulations and identifying areas where interventions are possible.

**The first** is drawn from an attempt made **in Karnataka** to *Integrate Women's Interest into a State Five Year Plan (1983)*<sup>17</sup>.

**Before we discuss the actual study it is pertinent to recall the tremendous advances made in understanding women's work. Without this background knowledge one would not have been able to evaluate any policy or program.**

The field of women's work became one of the major research domains both nationally and internationally. It was one of the most creative pursuits, influencing international organizations like the ILO. This focus helped to underline the ground realities in the developing countries. Women's movement then began to address the core issue of survival security for the principal defender of the family, namely the woman. This generated discussion on issues such as measurement and inclusion of invisible unpaid work of rural women work, discrimination in wages, job security and revaluing what was called the "informal" sector.

This new research about women as workers entered the development discourse. They looked at practices of national data collecting agencies that list women engaged in domestic work as unemployed. Concern and analysis about unequal wages, discrimination of women in the workplace, women's double burden of work for wages and work at home, the role that the tasks women perform to make possible other members' involvement in marketable production or service, and the absence of social security for women who perform unpaid labor at home. From a more narrow and focused approach on women's status vis-à-vis men, this research broadened the scope of investigation to look at the broader implications of global and national economic, political, and social changes and their impact on women's lives in their entirety.

**The study was initiated in the 80's by ISST partly, because of the impetus of the overall 'ideology' that was developed in international fora, of bringing women into development; and partly due to our interest in finding ways to enable women move out of poverty. It should be recalled that it was around nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties that women's studies and women's advocacy were emerging as major players in the struggle for women's equality. There was now a recognition that the "household" needed to be broken open – as it was not as believed, a "benign" shelter for all its inhabitants.**<sup>18</sup>

Individuals within households had highly disparate locations in power, apart from inequalities in occupations, health and education. This disparity amongst individuals

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<sup>17</sup> "Integrating Women's Interests into State Five-Year Plan," submitted to the Ministry of Social Welfare, Govt. of India in September 1984, used in an article by K.S. Krishnaswamy and Shashi Rajagopal, *Women in Employment: A Micro Study in Karnataka*, Based on the ISST Bangalore Report, in ed., by Devaki Jain and Nirmala Banerjee, *Tyranny of the Household- Investigative Essays on Women's Work*, for the workshop *Women in Poverty*, Shakti Books, New Delhi, 1985.

<sup>18</sup> *The Household Trap: Report on a Field Survey of Female Activity Patterns*. P.215-246. In *Tyranny of the Household*. Edited by Devaki Jain and Nirmala Banerjee, New Delhi, Vikas, 1985; Nancy Folbre, *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint*. Routledge, New York, 1994

seemed to be more enlarged the lower one went down in the asset/ income scale. Inspired by the international efforts at documenting the disparate impact of development between men and women, the study focused on examining the reach of the anti poverty programmes on women. What emerged was that the household was not benign and definitely not a level playing field for men and women. In the poor households women had a different source of income from men. The study came up with the idea that women within poverty household should be independently identified and reached out to with anti poverty programs such as IRDP. We found setting a target for women within such programs was flawed on many counts, not the least by inappropriate development offers and false reporting by functionaries.

This was further corroborated during the process of preparing a report for the Karnataka State Planning Board called District Level Planning for Social Development<sup>19</sup>. For the report District Level Studies were commissioned – one from a backward district i.e. Gulbarga and one advanced i.e. Dakshina Kannada. Achieving a target of covering couples of reproductive age with contraceptive services was irrelevant in Dakshina Kannada (a district in Karnataka's west coast, known for advancement in social indicators) where the fertility rate had already reached one, and in some villages less than one, but the fund allocated to the district continued to be allocated only for that purpose and when its irrelevance was brought out nothing could be done to shift the funds from limiting contraception to more advanced health care.<sup>20</sup>

Planned development appeared, as it does even now, as blind rubber stamping of schemes. An even more significant lesson was, that the methodology being used did not reach poor men either. **The process was completely flawed for men and women amongst the poor or deprived.** It transpires **that method** adopted for stimulating development was critical, even superceded the task of gendering or integrating women into development.

**The second** is a project undertaken in Karnataka by the World Bank<sup>21</sup> to improve the quality of the cocoon in the sericulture industry. The project did not use the available knowledge about women's work.

Sericulture was one of the dominant land based activities in Karnataka and the perception of the policy designers was that women were not an issue in this project. It was perceived that women were basically using thrown away cocoons which had holes in them to make garlands. They were seen as not engaged in the basic chain of production and the sale of cocoons. An actual investigation that sought to break down tasks in the chain of production revealed that while mulberry was grown by the farmers, the men, it was women who not only picked the leaves but looked after the trays in which the silk worms

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<sup>19</sup> District Level Planning for Social Development, Devaki Jain, Chairperson of Sub Committee, Karnataka State Planning Board (1994), Government of Karnataka

<sup>20</sup> Report from Dakshina Kannada by Shalini Rajaneesh, IAS

<sup>21</sup> Assessment of women's roles- The Karnataka sericulture development project, ISST, 1982. Task force on sericulture, for a world bank funded project, Government of Karnataka

were nursed or nurtured. The silk worms are usually kept in trays called chandrikes in shelves inside the home and have to be fed mulberry leaves every three hours just like a child, and the offal has to be removed as frequently so that they do not get diseased. Women in the strong sericulture farming areas complained that not only were their houses completely cramped with silk worms leaving hardly any place for the kitchen or their children, but the silk worm was more demanding than the child as it had a compulsive demand for leaves every three hours. Thus they were awake most of the night and most of them had chronic illnesses due to the suffocating atmosphere in the hut and the unremitting labour of cocoon rearing.

Despite their being the main rearers of worms, the women were not at all brought into the project. They were not given the training on better rearing on what were the special characteristics of feeding and health for the new worms that were introduced' they did not receive information about the new fodder; not shown how to upgrade the quality of the yarn they spent time on. Thus women's contribution to the process of silk manufacture was unrecognized with consequences for policy. It appears that the old Ester Boserup<sup>22</sup> story of the nineteen seventies where she bemoans the non recognition of women as farmers continues.<sup>23</sup>

As a result of lobbying both in Washington and in Karnataka with the government, a task force on sericulture was set up by the Government of Karnataka with the principal secretary of agriculture as its chair. All the relevant agencies were around the table and the meeting was to show that there needs to be greater inclusion of women as workers in the sericulture development programmes. It was found that this classical invisibility of women workers, especially when the productive work is within the home had deprived them of being engaged in the training for improved rearing practices as well as marketing

There was no hostel accommodation for women at the Sericulture Training Institute, a state government institution. A proposal was made, by the Task force, to build a women's hostel using another government scheme called "Hostels for working women". However, the task force neither sustained itself nor did it make for any transformation in the lives and concerns of women in the sericulture project.

A similar experience is recorded of the matching study that ISST took up with the Tasar<sup>24</sup> industry in Maharashtra. Again women were major workers but unrecognized and nothing that was done. The report funded by the Swiss development corporation tried to change this perception but it had no impact. The studies undertaken by Institute of Social

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<sup>22</sup> Boserup, Ester. *My Professional Life and Publications 1929-1998*. Copenhagen Press, 1999.

Oral communication: Maithreyi Krishnaraj's study of Women in Agriculture- a millennium study for the government of India, which she had titled "women farmers of India" on publication was retitled 'women in agriculture' by the publisher in 2004!

<sup>23</sup> Devaki Jain, "Are we knowledge Proof? Development as Waste", speech delivered at Lovraj Kumar Memorial, Lecture, New Delhi, 26 September 2003 (Reprinted in *Wastelands News*, Vol. XIX, No. 1, August-October 2003, Society for Promotion of Wastelands Development, New Delhi, pg. 19-30

<sup>24</sup> Inter-state Tasar Project, Report on a field survey Chandrapur District of Maharashtra, Institute of Social Studies Trust, 1982

Studies Trust (ISST) in various parts of India, and in Karnataka.<sup>25</sup> presented information on women's productive roles, and argued that the projects were losing out on success by not recognising this. While this resulted in gendered analysis, it did not change the project

Some new opportunities are emerging in India, and more strongly in Karnataka. These may help us incorporate the lessons learnt from history, mentioned earlier in this essay. To reiterate: we had talked of i) the usefulness and value of bonding across difference on the identity of woman, and strategizing for inclusion ii) the need for knowledge about women's various productive and other roles and their location within household, families and community .iii) power claimed through a collective identity

An aspect of the Karnataka landscape of governance and development, which offers some niches, some conduits for affirming these views is the long standing, and politically well supported decentralized management of development, especially the economic and social justice agendas.

For example as far back as in 1994-95, Karnataka's State Planning Board (earlier called Economic Planning Council (EPC)). set up two subgroups in 1994, one for **District Level Planning for Employment**, and other for **District Level Planning for Social Development**. The main task of the sub group was to provide effective social and economic security to the poor, improve the quality of administering these services. , all at the district and sub district level of accountability .Interestingly, in 2005, the Planning Commission has set up an Expert Group, to draw up guidelines for the States on what they call grassroot planning for development, and the thrust is to reduce if not efface the state dictated schemes, the pre packaged development bundles that are handed out, and leave planning to local communities to design the use of untied funds.

The sub group working with secretaries to government of each sector and some CEOs or Chief Secretaries of Districts as they were called at the time, was able to rationalize the 75 schemes into 15 bundles. And suggested that instead of having 15 schemes coming out of 15 departments even these could be bundled into a Social Development Service, as **one sector** and the fund could be used for "*Provisioning of social development services to the poor*". *with* the functionaries attached to the service coming under one nomenclature called **social development services providers**. Thus the departmental lines would be liquefied, and the multiple schemes, would be consolidated without losing the overall intention.

One of the suggestions made by the sub group was that there should be social mapping of the state, to show variations in human development indices between districts in order to identify gaps in performance and to spot inter-district variations, was not implemented. However this compliance came later. During the 1995 -97 Karnataka developed a Human Development report that put together district level indicators and indices (Human Development in Karnataka 1999, Planning Department, Government of Karnataka, 1999) – a first in State Level Human Development Reports in India.

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<sup>25</sup> Impact of Sericulture pilot project in Karnataka- An Evaluation, ISST, 1989



In neither of the illustrations from Karnataka, given above was this opportunity for intervention yielded a clear ‘tool’ to tell us what to do and how to intervene. However there is now, as we write this article an opportunity to engage with political power due to the clearer, more firm legally and politically ordained devolution of economic planning power and funds to the locally elected bodies, in Karnataka.

Significant changes have been brought about in the State fiscal 2005-06 (embodied in the State Budget). State sector schemes pertaining to the 29 subjects in schedule of XI of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment, have been merged in the district sector schemes to be implemented by the panchayat institutions. From 1.4.2005 about Rs. 3500 crore have been thus devolved to panchayat institutions at grama, taluka and zilla levels. The Departments have been asked to amend and issue afresh all government orders, notifications, circulars etc. in accordance with these charges.

Most importantly some of the negative features in administration have also been removed. Departments are directed not to establish parallel bodies which were scuttling devolution intended by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment. Existing parallel bodies are to be now reconstituted under the chairmanship of the adhyaksha of the Zilla Parishad. Besides, World Bank or external aided projects are to be implemented through PRIs only.

Right from the beginning when the Ramakrishna Hegde Government in Karnataka, in collaboration with Nazeer Saab,[?full name] the Minister for Rural Development brought in legislation not only to set up elected local councils but also reservation for women. Women elected to Councils have been invited to meetings held by women’s organizations and attempts are made to give them a collective identity and give them a sense of knowledge based confidence. As the panchayat raj movement grew and broadened with the introduction of the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments by the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the SS Foundation, for example, got even more deeply engaged in strengthening those women who had been elected to serve on these councils.

One of the first initiatives that they took was to bring them under one organisation namely “An Association of Elected Women Representatives”. While this may look baffling since the representatives come from different parties, in Karnataka it was found that women were willing to join an association of themselves across party lines. They seemed to need that collective strength in order to generate the self confidence to bring voice into the meeting. The women’s collectives and collectivities also have an additional glint, namely they are united across class, where poor and non poor women engage in issues which impact women like domestic violence or water, or reproductive health, especially in urban slums and rural areas.

Using the collectives especially at the level of gram panchayats, the Foundation then built three other programmes on these groups – The Foundation then initiated similar projects in three of the other southern states, Kerala, Andhra and Tamil Nadu and is now co-ordinating a net work of agencies in these four states all of which are engaged in creating collectivities of these elected women and enabling them to strengthen their technical skills as well as their political presence in the local self government institutions.

Rather than “train” them they have been formed into groups and these groups engage with themselves to create their own space, debate among themselves and devise programmes instead of being in mixed councils. Women’s capability for collective action, and their women’s capability to form collectivities are transforming many programmes, processes and outcomes.

Currently, many women’s organizations are partnering with State governments, to strengthen the capability of women elected to these Local Self Government’s to participate if not lead development in their areas. For example, Singamma Sreenivasan Foundation has made a novel endeavor, to enable women (EWRs) to construct budgets, such that the interest of women and other subordinated groups is safeguarded. It is not just a programme to raise awareness about budget amongst local women politicians but to enable women to direct the economy from a space available to them. This helps them to understand, participate and transform local budgets.

The design of the effective participation has been enabled by collaboration with Janaagraha - an urban NGO which uses three cornered stakeholders meeting - namely the civil servant who is the commissioner of the municipality, the ward committee and the elected corporators to have a transparent process of understanding and influencing revenue collection and expenditures and monitoring out comes. This method has been tried in two municipalities – Mysore and Tumkur. The municipalities have changed their budget allocations as a result of collective lobbying by the elected women corporators across party lines. Similar experience has been found in two other pockets of Karnataka – Bijapur and Bellary

Another project that they were “exposed to, was to use their kitchen gardens for growing medicinal plants. This has now caught the imagination of the gram panchayats and at least four districts will be engaged in a movement for environment security, health security and livelihood security through the growing of medicinal plants.

The outcome of these exercises is that in the Mysore City Corporation: women’s issues were not only included, but allocations to certain women’s schemes were increased in the Budget 2005-06.

To day, the situation and character of the various actors in governance have shifted quite dramatically and in significant ways. The State is receding from its earlier role as being responsible to the citizens for their well being especially provisioning of basic securities. Civil society including the women’s movement is becoming stronger on the one hand but also paradoxically more fragmented. International configuration of power is changing, with the UN’s influence receding and the other world organisations like World Bank and other multilaterals like the WTO occupying centre stage. The market economy, signified by the corporates are playing a larger role in national and international governance than before, including the provisioning of public goods. There is also a return to conservative politics, and various forms of fundamentalism, across the globe.

Simultaneously there are the usual paradoxes in women's domain. There is an increase in the political participation of women in governance, especially at the local level. There is an increase in the capabilities and power of the women's movement, in knowledge and organizational capacities in informal economy as workers and traders. and to contest violence against women. There is a shift in the nature of employment opportunities. There is increasing absorption of female labour into the new opportunities for earning income like in export processing and simultaneously a decline in the opportunities for men. This arises because of the nature of the growth poles and the nature of the organisation of production and trade. Women are on the move, selling either their bodies or their time into earning income for their families. . The UN report on women and development for the year 2004<sup>26</sup> shows how the largest group or proportion of workers uncovered by any protection are women, and women migrants. The demand for women as workers in the flesh trade has made the flow of women across borders jump by leaps and bounds. The value of the flesh trade is now greater than the value of the trade in narcotics

At the very beginning, women's quest was for equality or for overpowering, if not efface inequality. The strategy of leveling the playing fields by bringing in laws, introducing the power of rights, and finding ways to move women out of what looked like disadvantaged positions seemed all right for several decades. But it was clearly not enough. There was deep, widespread, unimaginable, and invisible discrimination. The women's movement responded to this by making inequality visible, but that did not take care of the ignorance and non-recognition of women's value as citizens, workers and providers. Their contribution to society is equal if not even richer in value than men. So the movement generated new knowledge to show the role of women in development--again with the expectation that revealing truth would lead to women's equality with men. But that strategy still disabled them because they had no voice in the determination of their lives and its road map. Thus, the notion of equal participation, of equal power, of leadership was worked into the notions of ways to redress inequality

What we have seen is that while knowledge has increased and been funnelled to the policy spaces, the advice of women, their leadership in directing public policy has not happened .to a corresponding extent. The old method of "integrating " through women only packages, mainly social development package schemes for women continues.

The revelatory aspect of this story can be summarized in the importance of space not only in funds but at the level of the intellect, for the excluded to claim their rights. Decentralisation with a quota of 1/3 seats of women has opened a new gateway in India and especially in Karnataka. But it is not enough.

**The first need is to reconsider the paradigm of development itself, the identification of the engines of growth. Instead of seeing the poor as a target group who need special ladders within a framework of economic development, enabling them to become economic and political agents could itself become the engine of growth. Thus, from a "trickle down," or social safety net**

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<sup>26</sup> Department of Economic and Social Affairs, DAW, 2004 World Survey on the Role of Women in Development – Women and International Migration, UN, New York, 2005.

**approach, it would be useful to look at what can be called the "bubbling up" theory of growth. This alternative theory argues that putting incomes and political power in the hands of the poor could generate the demand and the voice that would direct development. The purchasing power and the choices of the poor could direct the economy to a pro-poor or poverty-reducing economy. The review of the past seems to suggest some dramatic reversal of the current theories of where the engine of growth lies if the interest is in poverty eradication.<sup>27</sup>**

**Mahatma Gandhi in fact had designed such a theory and a proposal for its practice. To some extent it could even be said that such a theory is close to, though not the same as, Keynes's theory of stimulating an economy by generating effective demand. Here the further detailing is, Whose effective demand? Whose purchasing power? Gandhi's talisman, his test for action, was this: "Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test: Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man/woman whom you may have seen and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him."<sup>28</sup>**

A major fault line that runs through narrations of history and their knowledge base-- whether it is political, economic, or social history, is the failure to take note of, to understand and respect and absorb, women's ideational and intellectual skills and outputs in the area of theoretical and analytical knowledge. While some of the values emerging from the understanding of poverty, inequality, discrimination, conflict resolution, deepening participation, method, politics that this interaction or partnership generated has been applied or followed upon belatedly, recognition of the intellectual and leadership powers of women has remained in the ghettos. The *minds of men* have not changed.

And for that to happen, it seems that it is necessary to recast the development framework, to come out with a treatise, a theoretically stand alone development model which satisfies the external world changes and yet women's quest. The movement did some of this twenty years ago, at Nairobi, through DAWN, the third world network<sup>29</sup>. But another such framework is needed now and it can be done if women put their minds together. Women's brilliant struggles, need to be treated as a BODY of knowledge, chiseled into **theory**, into an intellectual challenge to what "is" i.e. the currently dominant ideas for national and international advancement. The importance of an **intellectual theoretical construct** out of the ground experience, which can claim **space** in the world of theoretical discourse, cannot be minimized. A new Das Kapital or Wealth of Nations, is the only bomb that can explode the patriarchal mind set and exclusion of the real agency of women in public policy.

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<sup>27</sup> Devaki Jain, "Enabling Reduction of Poverty and Inequality in South Asia," in Population and Poverty: Achieving Equity, Equality and Sustainability (New York: UNFPA, 2003), 99-100.

<sup>28</sup> Devaki Jain, *Minds, Bodies and Exemplars: Reflections at Beijing and Beyond* (New Delhi: British Council, 1996), 8.

<sup>29</sup> The Bangalore Report – A Process for Nairobi at Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era, Institute of Social Studies Trust, New Delhi, 1984

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