Undermining Local Democracy
Parallel governance in contemporary South India

LALITA CHANDRASHEKHAR
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Parallel Governance in Contemporary South India

Lalita Chandrashekhar

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To my parents
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AG</td>
<td>Area Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANM</td>
<td>Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APERP</td>
<td>Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASHA</td>
<td>Accredited Social and Health Activist</td>
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<tr>
<td>BADP</td>
<td>Border Area Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>BCM</td>
<td>Backward Classes and Minorities</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDA</td>
<td>Bangalore Development Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>BDO</td>
<td>Block Development Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEO</td>
<td>Block Education Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIC</td>
<td>Block Implementation Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>BJP</td>
<td>Bharatiya Janata Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BLEC</td>
<td>Block-level Expert Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>BPL</td>
<td>Below Poverty Line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRC</td>
<td>Block Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BSDB</td>
<td>Bayaluseeme Development Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWH</td>
<td>borewell with handpump</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BWSSB</td>
<td>Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAG</td>
<td>Comptroller and Auditor General</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAPART</td>
<td>Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community-based Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDP</td>
<td>Community Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>CDPO</td>
<td>Child Development Project Officer</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFT</td>
<td>Cluster Facilitation Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>CM</td>
<td>Chief Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMEY</td>
<td>Chief Minister’s Empowerment of Youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>CPI</td>
<td>Commissioner for Public Instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPI (M)</td>
<td>Communist Party of India (Marxist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRC</td>
<td>Cluster Resource Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRP</td>
<td>Cluster Resource Person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSDS</td>
<td>Centre for the Study of Developing Societies</td>
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<tr>
<td>DANIDA</td>
<td>Danish International Development Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDA</td>
<td>Delhi Development Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>DDP</td>
<td>Desert Development Programme</td>
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<td>DDPI</td>
<td>Deputy Director of Public Instruction</td>
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</table>
x  Undermining Local Democracy

DfID  Department for International Development
DIC  District Implementing Committee
DPAP  Drought-Prone Areas Programme
DPC  District Planning Committee
DPEP  District Primary Education Programme
DPU  District Project Unit
DRDA  District Rural Development Agency
DSERT  Department of State Education, Research and Training
DWACRA  Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas
DWDA  District Watershed Development Agency
DWDO  District Watershed Development Officer
EC  Executive Committee
EO  Education Officer
EWS  Economically Weaker Section
FNGO  Field NGO
GoK  Government of Karnataka
GP  Gram Panchayat
GVS  Gram Vikas Samiti
HIG  Higher Income Group
HKDB  Hyderabad-Karnataka Development Board
HRD  Human Resources Development
IADP  Intensive Agricultural District Programme
ICDS  Integrated Child Development Service
IDF  Initiative for Development Foundation
IIM  Indian Institute of Management
IMF  International Monetary Fund
ITDP  Intensive Tribal Development Programme
IWDP  Integrated Watershed Development Programme
JBIC  Japan Bank for International Co-operation
JD (S)  Janata Dal (Secular)
JD (U)  Janata Dal (United)
JFM  Joint Forest Management
JFMC  Joint Forest Management Committee
JRY  Jawahar Rojgar Yojana
JSY  Jala Samvardhana Yojana
JSYS  Jala Samvardhana Yojana Sangha
KAWAD  Karnataka Watershed Development Programme
List of Abbreviations

KBCDC  Karnataka Backward Classes Development Corporation Limited
KHB    Karnataka Housing Board
KLLADS Karnataka Legislators’ Local Area Development Scheme
KMDC   Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation Limited
KPTCL  Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited
KRWSSA Karnataka Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency
KSAPS  Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society
KSCB   Karnataka Slum Clearance Board
KSCSTDC Karnataka Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation
KSSP   Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad
KSWDC  Karnataka State Women’s Development Corporation
LDF    Left Democratic Front
LNGO   Lead NGO
LO     Local Organization
MADB   Malnad Area Development Board
MAYA   Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness
MIG    Middle Income Group
MLA    Member of Legislative Assembly
MLC    Member of Legislative Council
MoA    Memorandum of Association
MoEF   Ministry of Environment and Forests
MoRD   Ministry of Rural Development
MP     Member of Parliament
MPLADS Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme
MWS    mini-water supply scheme
MYRADA Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency
NABARD National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development
NASDORA National Authority for Sustainable Development of Rainfed Areas
NCRWC  National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution
NGO    Non-Government Organization
NHG    Neighbourhood Group
NRHM   National Rural Health Mission
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tr>
<td>NTFP</td>
<td>Non-Timber Forest Products</td>
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<td>NWDPRA</td>
<td>National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas</td>
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<tr>
<td>OBC</td>
<td>Other Backward Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDS</td>
<td>Public Distribution System</td>
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<tr>
<td>PHC</td>
<td>Public Health Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIA</td>
<td>Project Implementing Agency</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIP</td>
<td>Project Implementation Plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPMU</td>
<td>Project Planning and Management Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>PRA</td>
<td>Participatory Rapid Appraisal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI</td>
<td>Panchayat Raj Institution</td>
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<td>PRIA</td>
<td>Participatory Research in Asia</td>
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<td>RDPR</td>
<td>Rural Development and Panchayat Raj</td>
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<td>RGRHC</td>
<td>Rajiv Gandhi Rural Housing Corporation</td>
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<td>RIDF</td>
<td>Rural Infrastructure Development Fund</td>
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<td>RKS</td>
<td>Rogi Kalyan Samiti</td>
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<td>RWDEP</td>
<td>Rural Women Development and Empowerment Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>SC</td>
<td>Scheduled Caste</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCERT</td>
<td>State Council of Educational Research and Training</td>
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<td>SDC</td>
<td>Swiss Development Corporation</td>
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<td>SDMC</td>
<td>School Development and Monitoring Committee</td>
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<td>SFDA</td>
<td>Small Farmers Development Agency</td>
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<td>SGRY</td>
<td>Sampoorna Grameen Rojgar Yojana</td>
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<td>SHG</td>
<td>Self-help Group</td>
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<td>SPMSU</td>
<td>State Programme Management Support Unit</td>
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<td>SSA</td>
<td>Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan</td>
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<tr>
<td>SSLC</td>
<td>Secondary School Leaving Certificate</td>
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<td>ST</td>
<td>Scheduled Tribe</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUJALA</td>
<td>Sujala Watershed Development Project</td>
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<tr>
<td>SWS</td>
<td>Sujala Watershed Sangha</td>
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<tr>
<td>TDB</td>
<td>Taluk Development Board</td>
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<tr>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>Telugu Desam Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>TEC</td>
<td>Tank Executive Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>TIC</td>
<td>Taluk Implementing Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>TP</td>
<td>Taluk Panchayat</td>
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<tr>
<td>TUC</td>
<td>Tank User Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUG</td>
<td>Tank User Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UDF</td>
<td>United Democratic Front</td>
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<td>UEE</td>
<td>Universal Elementary Education</td>
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<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ULB</td>
<td>Urban Local Body</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td>Vigilance Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>VDC</td>
<td>Village Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>VFC</td>
<td>Village Forest Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>VGKK</td>
<td>Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra</td>
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<tr>
<td>VHSS</td>
<td>Village Health and Sanitation Samiti</td>
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<tr>
<td>VWC</td>
<td>Village Watershed Committee</td>
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<td>VWSC</td>
<td>Village Water Supply Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>WDC</td>
<td>Ward Development Committee</td>
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<tr>
<td>WDD</td>
<td>Watershed Development Department</td>
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<tr>
<td>WUG</td>
<td>Water Users’ Group</td>
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<td>ZP</td>
<td>Zilla Panchayat</td>
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FOREWORD

Karnataka has been one of the premier states in the country in institutionalizing Panchayati Raj. Following the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act 1983, district government became a reality in the state. Consequently, the President of the Zilla Panchayat enjoyed a high status and wielded considerable power. The passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution, whereby 29 subjects were devolved to the districts, gave an additional fillip to the institution of Panchayati Raj.

However, the gains in the field of local government — panchayats and municipalities — were short-lived. Slowly but surely, the Panchayati Raj institutions have suffered a visible erosion. Bureaucrats and elected members of the state legislature have been increasingly bypassing the panchayats and becoming power centres in the districts.

One way by which the local governments are being bypassed is through the institution of parallel bodies. These bodies perform functions which indeed belong to the panchayats and municipalities. This volume takes up the case of parallel institutions set up under the Registration of Societies Act 1860 in Karnataka. It considers the societies set up in the sphere of education, such as the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, watershed development, tank rehabilitation, water supply and sanitation, etc. It also critically looks at the phenomenon of parallel bodies in the housing, environment and forest, health and social welfare sectors, etc.

Thus, new institutions have been set up under the aegis of Societies at the district, taluk and village levels. It is this phenomenon that the book goes into in some detail. These institutions are set up under centrally-sponsored schemes which bypass and undermine the Panchayati Raj institutions. The elected members of the panchayats are completely in the dark regarding these programmes. The flow of funds is also not through the panchayats but through the new institutions set up by the societies.

Sideling the Panchayati Raj institutions is especially worrisome as it undermines the aspirations of the people at the local level.
Theoretically, the panchayats are in charge of a large slice of the developmental cake, since 29 subjects have been devolved to them. But, in practice, decision-making takes place in parallel fora. These trends have to be reversed. Parallel bodies and through them parallel governance, should not have the assent of the state or the centre. The parallel bodies which have been formed have to be made accountable to the local governments. The people, through their elected representatives in the panchayats and municipalities, should be made privy to the developments taking place in their districts. This is the only way to promote grassroots democracy.

Dr Lalita Chandrashekhar has done in-depth research into this problem. She has put in hard work under the able guidance of Professor B. S. Baviskar, Senior Fellow of the Institute of Social Sciences, to collect primary and secondary data and to make a cogent analysis. This is an insightful book for the policy makers, panchayat functionaries and all others concerned with local governance. I am sure this study will make a positive impact on the present system so that the panchayats and municipalities could become ‘institutions of self-government’ as envisaged in the constitution of India.

15 October 2010

George Mathew
Director, Institute of Social Sciences
New Delhi
Prior to taking up this assignment, I had done one project for the Institute of Social Sciences on the subject of Panchayat Raj in Karnataka, for which I had done three months of fieldwork in Hoskote taluk of Bangalore Rural District. Therefore, I was familiar with the institution of Panchayat Raj on the ground. However, when Dr George Mathew asked me to do a study on ‘parallel bodies in Karnataka’, I did not know what a ‘parallel body’ was. I had heard the term being bandied about in academic discussions but no one had actually defined the concept. Mr. Raghunandan, then Principal Secretary to the Government of Karnataka (GoK), Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, set the ball rolling by asking me to do a round of the Government Departments in Bangalore and ascertain the parallel bodies started by them. I proceeded to obtain information on the numerous schemes, both central and state, in the various departments. I then took up Kolar district to view these schemes and the parallel bodies they gave rise to on the ground, focusing on a village where I resided for a month to get first-hand experience of these bodies.

But it was the short spell of fieldwork in Chamarajnagar town, the headquarters of the district with the same name, that opened my eyes to the magnitude of the problem of parallel bodies and the institutional changes sought to be introduced at all levels of governance through them. Here, I viewed parallel bodies in the field of primary education at the district and taluk levels, which had been set up under the aegis of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. I found that there were not just community-based organizations (CBOs) at the village level, as I had seen in my earlier fieldwork, but there were district-level and taluk-level parallel bodies as well, in which decision-making took place, sidelining the Zilla Panchayat and the Taluk Panchayats in the district, whose members did not have even a rudimentary knowledge of these schemes. At the state level, there was a parallel bureaucracy under the aegis of a Society which had considerable autonomy in implementing its programmes. At the national level, one invariably came across a mission statement, from
which the implementation spread downwards in a supposedly ‘fast-track’ mode.

All this convinced me that the institutional changes which have been introduced in governance in recent years are not confined merely to a few changes at the village level. Rather, they have a much larger significance as they involve structural changes in the decision-making and executive bodies from the national to the village level. Most importantly, they are changes which undermine and sideline local elected bodies. Moreover, this is taking place at a time when a large chunk of the developmental cake, namely 29 subjects, has been devolved to local elected bodies or Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs), following the 73rd Amendment.

The institutional changes which are being introduced are an attempt to change the very notion of governance as we know it. For, while these changes are brought about through autonomous societies which, at present, handle roughly only 10 per cent of the development agenda, the intention is to incorporate them into the mainstream in due course of time. It is these changes which we will seek to understand in the present study.

This book, then, draws the attention of the reader to the institutional changes sought to be made in the governance of his country, both administratively and politically. We all know that reforms are going on at a rapid pace in this country. It is important to understand these reforms and the direction in which they are taking us. This study began in July 2004. The writing of the manuscript was concluded on 30 January 2008 and further updated till 30 December 2009.

There needs to be more debate on this issue of reform. If this book contributes towards the debate, it would have served its purpose.
I am grateful to Dr George Mathew for having the confidence in me to give me this project. Professor B. S. Baviskar meticulously went through all the drafts and encouraged me till the very end. To him I am very grateful. I also thank Dr A. R. Vasavi for arranging for my stay in Chamarajnagar and permitting her team of field officers to assist me for the three days that I was there. My sincere thanks are also due to two senior bureaucrats, Mr Chiranjeev Singh and Mr T. R. Raghunandan, who went through the draft and gave me their encouraging and helpful comments. Similarly, I thank Dr Manu Kulkarni and Professor B. S. Bhargava for their comments on the preliminary draft. The late Mr L. C. Jain, doyen of self-government in India, read an excerpt from this study and I thank him for doing so and for being highly appreciative of this work. I thank Dr Sarah Joseph for her many kindnesses. The family of Muniyappa in the village of Hosahalli shared their home and hearth with me, a wonderful experience that I cherish and for which I am very thankful. Last, but not the least, I thank my husband Prabhat and son Vikram for their support and encouragement.
INTRODUCTION

Local self-government or Panchayat Raj, as it is called in Indian parlance, is an important institution which, while it harks back to ancient times, has been re-invented and has emerged in a new avatar in modern times, taking into consideration relatively new concepts like gender and caste equality in its elaborate arrangement of reservation and rotation of seats to include women and the backward castes. It was based on the traditional notion of a democratic coming together of the elders of the village to solve the everyday problems of the villagers, such as conflicts between neighbours or even within the family. In Karnataka, it included the Holeya or the so-called ‘untouchable’ caste in its fold, pointing to the status which these groups enjoyed as integral members of the village community.

Local self-government is an important institution anywhere in the world but especially so in the Indian context. It helps in the administration of the country by involving the people at the grassroots. This realization led to the first impulse in the post-independence period for the setting up of local representative institutions under the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, following the failure of the Community Development Programme (CDP) to make an impact on rural life. Political decentralization takes into account the wishes and sensitivities of the people in the governing of their own affairs, whether it is with regard to the creation and maintenance of village infrastructure, relief operations following an epidemic or a natural calamity or conflict between villagers or even between villages. Thus, the necessity and importance of local self-government cannot be overemphasized. Not only would it restore the self-esteem of the villagers after centuries of colonial rule but it would take a lot of the burden of administration off the shoulders of the state government. Moreover, the alienation of the rural people, which one is witness to today, would be considerably reduced as they become aware of the fact that they are being consulted and that their voice is being heard in the administration of their own affairs by the state and the centre.
Local self-government or Panchayat Raj has to succeed if only to complete the project of democracy that the nation embarked upon when it became a sovereign democratic republic. A democratic unfolding of the polity has been going on for the last few decades from a system with an inordinately strong centre and only one major political party, the Congress, to the states emerging as power centres in their own right, the presence of numerous political parties and even coalitions of parties. With such a sophisticated political system at the centre and the states for which the country has been internationally lauded, will the democratic unfolding not reach its logical conclusion and bring in local self-government?

If the economic reforms ushered in during the 1990s are to succeed, it is imperative that the government of the day carries the people along with it and this can be achieved only by strengthening local self-government and the political accountability that comes with it. In this way, the perceived ill effects of globalization can be mitigated. On the contrary, the economic reforms that have occurred since the 1990s have succeeded in sidelining local self-government in Karnataka and perhaps elsewhere as well.

The onus of successful globalization or integration into the global economy then falls squarely on the shoulders of the central and state governments. Foreign donors and multinationals have their own agendas and perspectives but it is the Indian State which has to take responsibility for the governance of its people. As Joseph says, ‘Critics of development in India have claimed that the model of development followed by the Indian State, with the approval of other countries and international agencies, has been elitist, technocratic and State-led. Goals were often framed without consulting those who would be adversely affected by new projects like dams or industries. And in the name of development, violence was sometimes perpetrated on the poor’ (2004: 9). Too often, claims of efficiency and economic growth have been put forward to adopt an apolitical stance towards development. But this is in fact counter-productive and in the long run will defeat the purpose. Globalization will succeed in India only if it takes the people into confidence. It has to be shown how they will benefit by the economic reforms sought to be introduced. This requires a keen sensitivity on the part of the State to the issues and problems that are agitating the people and a willingness to have a dialogue with them. The path may be slower but it will be surer and less painful than it is at present.
Local self-government, as we know it, was instituted during British rule and has acquired a momentum in independent India, particularly after the 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Constitution. However, there are many pitfalls along the way and this is what the book discusses. Not only are there powerful vested interests which are against the transferring of powers and functions to local bodies but in recent times, a number of parallel bodies have been set up in the rural areas which are performing the functions which legitimately belong to the sphere of local government. Moreover, these bodies are keeping local governments at arm’s length, maintaining a cursory relationship with them, if at all, and not taking them into confidence. This study goes into the prevalence of these parallel bodies in the rural areas. It also considers the problems of local self-government in its interface with numerous parastatal bodies.

The problem of parallel and parastatal bodies cannot be understood without reference to the institution of Panchayat Raj. Chapter 2 gives an outline of the institution of Panchayat Raj as it has developed over the past few decades at the national level and Chapter 3 discusses Panchayat Raj in the state of Karnataka. India has a firm grounding for Panchayat Raj institutions (PRIs) in its history and culture. However, local self-government, as we know it now, was initiated during British rule and continued in many of the states after Independence. It was firmly put in place after it was written into the Constitution as the 73rd and 74th Amendments and this was followed by Conformity Acts in all the states. The states vary in their attitude towards parallel bodies. Chapter 4 gives an outline of parallel bodies in a few states. Chapter 5 makes a distinction between the concepts of parastatal and parallel bodies and briefly discusses parastatal bodies in Karnataka. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on parallel bodies or autonomous societies in two areas, namely primary education and watershed development in Karnataka. It is observed that the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and watershed development programmes are not only parallel schemes set up by the central government but they have given rise to parallel bodies at the district, taluk and village levels. Consequently, these bodies undermine the representative nature of the polity at the local level as decisions are taken in these bodies and outside the Panchayats. The Panchayats are sought to be placated by involving them in a very cursory manner, such as by co-opting their elected representatives into these parallel bodies. This is the moot point of the book. Thus, the nature of the engagement of these schemes with the Panchayats
is highlighted. Chapter 8 looks at some more of these autonomous societies in Karnataka and the manner in which they have changed the institutional landscape in the direction of almost completely sidelining the bodies of elected representatives at the local level. Chapter 9 draws some conclusions and makes suggestions regarding the strengthening of local bodies in Karnataka.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN INDIA

Local Self-Government

The Indian subcontinent is no stranger to the concept of local self-government. It was a part of ancient Indian society and culture. It refers to

the administration of a locality — a village, a town, a city or any other area smaller than a state, by a body representing local inhabitants, enjoying a certain degree of autonomy, raising a part of its revenue through local taxation and spending it on services which are local in character as distinct from the services provided by the State or central agencies' (Venkatarangaiya and Pattabhiram quoted in Srivastava 2002: 3191).

The essence of local government, then, was the freedom that the community enjoyed in organizing its institutions of government and giving shape to them. There was a degree of flexibility inherent in these institutions, which had the sanction of the community and of the ruler. Local self-government was more widespread, more real and more successful in ancient times than during British rule or during the post-independence period. As Srivastava says,

‘The village community in ancient India had a tradition of autonomy in terms of organization, functions and finances. The powers, authority and responsibility had evolved over a period of time and had the sanction of society; it did not devolve nor was it handed over to the community by the fiat of a ruler’ (2002: 3191).

Majumdar divides the functions of these institutions into two categories — judicial and executive (1918). The village, through its Panchayat, decided various types of civil and criminal cases. Disputes were settled to the satisfaction of the affected persons and the verdicts given by the Panchayat were binding on them. Redressal was often through a system of compensation which was worked
out by the Panchayat and was generally in the form of imposition of fines. The village Panchayat was thus a powerful instrument in dispensing justice at the local level. Hindi films, particularly those of the 1960s and 1970s, dramatically portray the writ of the Panchayat and its influence on the lives of the villagers. The Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act, 1983 tried to capture this aspect of Panchayat Raj but the function of dispensing justice or *nyaya* was subsequently dropped from its purview. Nevertheless, Panchayat members in the villages of Karnataka today do attempt to settle disputes and their popularity and general acceptance by the people is closely linked to their ability to successfully perform this role, as brought out by this writer in her study of Gram Panchayats (GPs) in Hoskote taluk of Bangalore Rural District (Chandrashekhar 2008).

The Panchayat also performed various executive functions, such as maintenance of public order, management of land vested in the village community, construction and maintenance of public works, such as the excavation of tanks and wells and the damming of water courses. Given its central role, the Panchayat was not hesitant to tax its inhabitants. Mookerji gives an account of the main sources of revenue (1920). They included not just land revenue, which was the most important source, but, interestingly, taxes on workshops and professions as well. The weaver, oil-monger, goldsmith, potter, etc. were suitably taxed. Thus, not only were important functions like ‘minor irrigation’ and water supply in the hands of the panchayats but they were not shy of imposing taxes, unlike the situation today.

The system of local government was more or less intact when the British arrived on the scene in the 17th century and established their rule in the 19th century. It led Charles Metcalfe to famously remark in 1830 that ‘the village communities are little republics, having nearly everything they can want within themselves’. Thus, the concept of local self-government and the institutions that go with it are part of the hoary traditions of the Indian subcontinent.

All this changed with the coming of British rule. Strong centralizing tendencies gradually but surely set in. The need of the hour for the colonial power was to gain firm control over the Empire. Slowly, local institutions were subordinated to the need for a strong central government.
Local Government during British Rule

Local government in the sense of periodically elected representatives responsible to the electorate was introduced in India by the British. In 1687, the first Municipal Corporation was set up by the East India Company in Madras with the authority to levy taxes. The Company believed that ‘the people would willingly pay five shillings for the public good, being taxed by themselves, than six pence raised by our despotic power’ (Maheshwari 1984: 15). Local government got a statutory base with the Charter Act of 1793 which established municipal administration in the three Presidency towns of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. In 1842, the municipal administration was extended to the district towns in Bengal.

A perusal of local government in the province of Bengal will give us an idea of the functioning of these institutions. In 1870, ‘chowkidari panchayats’ were constituted, whose sole purpose, as the name indicates, was the collection of a tax to maintain village watchmen (chowkidar) (Bandyopadhyay et al. 2003). In 1885, District Boards were constituted at the top, Local Boards in the middle and Union Committees below. Members of the Local Boards and Union Committees were elected by a highly restricted electorate of property owners. Members of the District Boards were indirectly elected by the Local Boards. Government officials wielded considerable authority over these Boards. In fact, the Boards had to function strictly under the control of the district bureaucracy, and the district magistrate was Chairman of the District Board. In 1919, with the passing of the Bengal Self-Government Act, the functions of the Boards became quite wide. They included, apart from municipal functions, the construction of roads and the establishment of primary schools and libraries. However, the Boards suffered perpetually from a lack of resources and were largely unable to perform the developmental functions as provided in the Act.

In 1882, Governor General Lord Ripon resolved to make local government self-governing and to initiate small beginnings of the independent political life. To this end, Lord Ripon’s resolution was quite avant-garde in that it stated that local bodies should have mostly elected members, state control over them should be indirect rather than direct, local government personnel should operate under the administrative control of the local bodies and these bodies should
be endowed with adequate resources to carry out their functions (Maheshwari 1984). However, the by now well-entrenched bureaucracy scuttled his intentions and considerably whittled down his reforms.

It may be asked why the British government embarked on the formation of local self-governing institutions at all. One reason was to raise taxes in what they believed was a painless manner though this was largely resisted by the people, who refused to pay them. There was also the problem of politically and economically integrating the country. The introduction of these institutions ‘made it possible for the State to penetrate deep into the countryside and simultaneously put in place a reliable information system’ (Bandhyopadhyay et al. 2003). It enabled the government to recruit a new group of collaborators in the countryside apart from the erstwhile permanently settled zamindars. It ensured a modicum of peace and tranquility, necessary to carry out the imperialist exploitation of the Indian countryside. And, most importantly, it consolidated the bureaucratic rule of the colonial government.

The question we must ask ourselves is why the mindset created by a colonial power to serve its own interests continues unabatedly after Independence. How long will it take for the common man or ordinary villager to come into his own, regarding this vital issue of local self-governance?

**Panchayats in Independent India**

The centralizing forces that were set in motion during British rule continued unabated following Independence. The ‘gram swaraj’ that Mahatma Gandhi had envisioned did not see the light of day. Instead, only a cursory mention of the subject was made in the Directive Principles of State Policy (Article 40) which enjoined on the states to ‘take steps to organize village panchayats and to endow them with such powers and authority as to enable them to function as units of self-government’. Although the term ‘self-government’ was used, it was not elaborated on.

The top-down approach of the central government was called into question when it was realized that the Community Development Programmes (CDPs) initiated by it for the rural areas were not making any headway due to lack of people’s participation in them. A committee set up by Balwantrai Mehta suggested a way out of the impasse by stating that ‘public participation in community works
should be organized through statutory representative bodies’. Thus came into being a three-tier system which was set up at the village, block and district levels. This may be regarded as the first generation of PRIs in India. The new experiment in rural development relied on a democratic approach involving a partnership between elected representatives and government officials.

The block-level Panchayat Samiti was the focal point of this experiment in decentralization and its jurisdiction was made co-terminus with the development block. It was responsible for development pertaining to agriculture, animal husbandry, minor irrigation, sanitation, health, primary education and so on. Village-level Panchayats were responsible for the maintenance of village roads, provision of water supply, sanitation, etc. The district-level Zilla Parishad co-ordinated the functions of the Panchayat Samiti.

The period between 1959 and 1964 has been described as the golden age of the first generation of PRIs (Mathew 2002: 14; see also Mathew 2000). The new local elected bodies were enthusiastically welcomed by the people and young leadership had begun to emerge at the local level. By the mid-1960s, Panchayats had emerged in most parts of the country. Inaugurating the first Panchayat Raj set-up in Nagaur in Rajasthan on 2 October 1959, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru pointed out that it was a revolutionary and historic step. There were 217,300 village Panchayats covering 92 per cent of the rural population (Mathew 2002: 15).

However, between 1964 and 1977, PRIs underwent a decline. Powers and functions originally devolved to local elected bodies were taken away. In many states, elections to Panchayat Raj bodies were not held for years. Financial resources of PRIs were drastically curtailed. Programmes launched by the central and state governments bypassed the Panchayats. One such parallel programme was the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (IADP). The Jayaprakash Narayan Committee of 1960 had pointed out that ‘there is no longer any valid reason for continuing individual allocations subject-wise’ (Jain et al. 1986: 39). But the onslaught on the nascent PRIs continued unabated. Schemes such as the Small Farmers Development Agency (SFDA) and the Intensive Tribal Development Programme (ITDP) were launched which were outside the purview of the Zilla Parishads. Eventually, by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi’s time, PRIs had almost ceased to exist.
The question is: Why was this fledgling institution of Panchayats sought to be done away with? According to Mathew, the bureaucracy, local vested interests and the elected representatives in the state legislatures and in Parliament feared the ascendancy of local leaders and ‘ganged up’ to end these nascent attempts at democratic decentralization. It was a grand alliance between the bureaucracy and the central and state-level political elite (Mathew 2002: 12).

As a reaction to the extreme centralizing and authoritarian tendencies during the emergency, PRIs got another shot in the arm. The Janata Party (1977–79) appointed the Ashok Mehta Committee to go into the problems of Panchayat Raj. It re-affirmed the importance of Panchayat Raj for grassroots development and recommended the participation of political parties in Panchayat Raj affairs. This led to the holding of elections on a party basis except at the village level. It suggested a two-tier structure of Zilla Parishad and Mandal Panchayat as the administrative set-up for Panchayats. While the Balwantrai Mehta Committee had regarded the block as the epicentre for development, the Ashok Mehta Committee re-assigned this role to the Zilla Parishad at the district level, since it viewed the district as the main centre of decentralization under the state. The Committee also recommended reserved seats for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and two seats for women.

A few states took enthusiastically to the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee. The West Bengal government was the first to implement the recommendations even before they were officially released. In 1983, the Karnataka government passed the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayats Act, which has been a model for local self-government elsewhere.

The Acts, or amendments to earlier Acts passed, following the Ashok Mehta recommendations, generated a series of reforms which may be regarded as second-generation reforms. In Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka, elections were held on party lines for the first time. These elections evoked a lot of interest among the people who referred to them as ‘mini-general elections’. An important innovation was to reserve seats for the weaker sections of the population. In Karnataka, 20 per cent of the seats were reserved for SCs and STs and 25 per cent for women.

Here, it may be pointed out that in those states where Panchayat Raj made considerable headway in this period, the whole exercise was
politically driven. For instance, in West Bengal, Panchayat Raj was taken to the rural hinterland by the Left Democratic Front (LDF), of which the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI [M]) was the major constituent, and in Karnataka by the Janata Party. According to Ghosh and Kumar, ‘those parties that seek to infiltrate rural areas and expand their party organizations would be inclined to create panchayat structures’ (2003: 225).

In West Bengal, under ‘operation Barga’ (1978–81), ‘about a million acres of vested land was distributed among 2.5 million beneficiaries who were landless or land-poor peasants. Half a million households were given title to homestead plots. Land reform thus directly benefited a little over four million rural households — a significant proportion of the rural population’ (Bandyopadhyay 2003: 881). According to Bandyopadhyay, land reform successfully broke the stranglehold of the landed aristocracy in rural West Bengal and ushered in a new class of middle and upper peasantry, which the LDF government assiduously wooed in order to form the much needed rural base which it did not have. The institution of Panchayats, which had been lying dormant for almost two decades without a single election, came in handy in politically accommodating this rising middle peasantry within the party. Thus, in the 1978 elections held for the three-tier panchayat system in West Bengal, the party, which hitherto had a membership limited to the Kolkata metropolis, now put up about 80,000 candidates, belonging largely to the peasantry (ibid.: 882).

In Karnataka also, the expansion of Panchayat Raj into the rural areas was politically driven. According to Mathew, ‘the year 1983 was a watershed in the history of Panchayati Raj in Karnataka. For the first time, the Congress Party lost power in the State and the Janata Party formed the government. One of the election planks of the Janata Party was the reinvigoration and revitalization of Panchayati Raj Institutions’ (2000: 5). In the ensuing Panchayat elections, held in 1987, the Janata Party gained control of 11 Zilla Parishads directly and five with the help of its legislators and ex-officio members, whereas the Congress (I) gained control of only two Zilla Parishads on its own and one with the help of its legislators. In the Mandal Panchayat elections, the Janata Party won 1,311 mandals whereas the Congress (I) captured 689 mandals. In the remaining mandals, no party gained a majority. Clearly, the Janata Party, riding on the Panchayat elections, had made a sweep of the rural countryside. The Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act,
1983, introduced in the legislature by the Janata Party, now ushered in
decentralization to an unprecedented degree (Mathew 2000: 5).

However, Mathew goes on to add that while the Act was able to
initiate changes in the Panchayat Raj functioning, it could not sub-
stantially alter the Panchayat leadership or the rural power structure,
which continued to be dominated by upper-income, landowning and
dominant caste members (2000: 5).

On the whole, the second-generation reforms attempted by the
Janata Party at the centre also failed to rejuvenate PRIs. Slowly,
the central and state governments began to withdraw financial and
administrative support to these institutions. Apart from the few
states mentioned above, the other states were not enthusiastic about
the reforms. In Tamil Nadu, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, elections to
Panchayats were not held for years. The problem of parallel bodies
to Panchayats again reared its head. Large rural development and
poverty alleviation schemes were assigned to newly created field
agencies or the district administration. The District Rural Development
Agency (DRDA) was a case in point. It was established in every state
to implement poverty eradication schemes sponsored by the central
government in collaboration with state governments and came under
the purview of the District Commissioner. PRIs were inexorably
sidelined.

Again, there came along a third-generation reform of PRIs. This
was engendered by Rajiv Gandhi who initiated the resurrection of
Panchayat Raj, this time through a constitutional fiat which came
into effect during P. V. Narasimha Rao’s tenure as Prime Minister.¹
Ostensibly, the reason given was to plug the leaks in the disbursement
of funds of the government’s various programmes in the rural areas.
But there may have been a political motive as well. The opposition
parties were in power in many of the states and they were clamouring
for greater administrative and fiscal powers to be given to the states.
By empowering local governments and thus creating alternative power
centres in the states, the Congress at the centre may have wanted to
give the opposition parties a taste of their own medicine.

The 73rd Amendment to the Constitution became an Act in 1993
and placed Panchayat Raj on a sure footing. It may be regarded as an
important landmark in the history of Panchayat Raj in India. Most
countries are content to let their local government be governed by
statutory laws. Only four other countries in the world have enshrined
local government in their Constitutions, namely Germany, Japan,
Brazil and Nigeria.
The Constitutional Amendment may be regarded as the third generation of Panchayat reforms in India. It unequivocally created a third tier of local self-government, after the Centre and the States (Mukerji 1993). In Article 243G, mandatory direction has been given to the state legislatures to endow Panchayats with such powers and authority as to enable them to function as institutions of self-government. There are now over 3 million elected representatives in the Panchayat bodies, over a million of whom are women. Hitherto disadvantaged sections of the population such as the SCs, STs and Other Backward Classes (OBCs) now have a role to play in local self-government.

The 73rd Amendment

The 73rd Amendment is a path-breaking piece of legislation which provides a thoroughly democratic framework for the institution of local self-government. It provides for the formation of a Gram Sabha which consists of all the persons registered on the electoral rolls of the village. The role of the Gram Sabha is to assist the Panchayat in matters in which public participation is necessary. One of its functions is to assist the Panchayat in finalizing the list of beneficiaries for the various schemes. It is also called upon to assess, from time to time, the working of the Panchayat, thus acting as a watchdog of the Panchayat and also to give suggestions regarding the nature of the activities to be taken up by the Panchayat. Thus, the Gram Sabha is an important institution which has a deliberative and watchdog role within Panchayat Raj.

There is reservation of seats for SCs and STs in Panchayat bodies in proportion to their population. The reservation extends to chairpersons of Panchayats at all levels as well. There is also reservation for not less than one-third of the seats and offices for women.

Other salient features are (i) a five-year term; (ii) fresh elections within six months in case of supersession or dissolution; (iii) power to impose taxes; (iv) setting up of a State Finance Commission every five years to review the finances of the Panchayats and to make suitable recommendations on the distribution of funds between the state and local elected bodies; (v) setting up of a State Election Commission for holding Panchayat elections; and (vi) setting up of a District Planning Committee to prepare a draft plan for the whole district, comprising both Panchayats and municipalities.
The Act also enjoins on the state governments to transfer 29 subjects to the PRIs which are listed in the 11th Schedule of the Constitution. These are: agriculture including agricultural extension, land improvement, implementation of land reforms, land consolidation and soil conservation; minor irrigation, water management and watershed development; animal husbandry, dairying and poultry; fisheries; social forestry and farm forestry; minor forest produce; small-scale industries, including food processing industries; \textit{khadi}, village and cottage industries; rural housing; drinking water; fuel and fodder; roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication; rural electrification, including distribution of electricity; non-conventional energy sources; poverty alleviation programme; education including primary and secondary schools; technical training and vocational education; education including non-formal education; libraries; cultural activities; markets and fairs; sanitation, including hospitals, primary health centres and dispensaries; family welfare; women and child development; social welfare, including welfare of the handicapped and mentally retarded; welfare of the weaker sections and in particular of the SCs and STs; public distribution system and maintenance of community assets. Thus, a large number of subjects were now placed in the functional domain of PRIs.

Thus, the 73rd Amendment clearly and unequivocally placed Panchayat Raj on a democratic footing, ratified by the highest authority in the land, the Constitution. The states were enjoined to pass Conformity Acts within one year of the passing of the 73rd Amendment and all of them did so.

Kerala took to the Act at this rather late stage but like everything else it does, it did so with a vengeance, so much so that it is now regarded as a model of decentralized planning worldwide. Karnataka, which had begun Panchayat Raj on a strong wicket with its 1983 Act, now fell behind with an increasingly bureaucratic hold over PRIs and the emergence of numerous parallel bodies.

The campaign for decentralized planning in Kerala was politically driven and was spearheaded by the CPI (M). The decision to launch the campaign was preceded by a number of micro-level experiments in participatory planning carried out in some left-dominated Panchayats, with the support of the Kerala Sasthra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) (Chathukulam and John 2002). The campaign was launched with the announcement of the LDF government that 35 per cent to 40 per cent
of the Plan funds would be given to local bodies. This was an important decision for, from now on, Panchayats held the purse strings for local development. In the case of parallel bodies, as we will see, the funds go to these bodies, leaving the PRIs poor and ineffective. The State Planning Board of Kerala, which had a predominance of members owing allegiance to the CPI (M), assumed leadership of the campaign. The patronage and inspiration extended by E. M. S. Namboodiripad, whose commitment to decentralization was well known, served as a key motivating force in the campaign effort. According to Chathukulam and John, ‘people’s planning was seen by the left as a means of offsetting the forces of liberalization and privatization by optimal use of the capacity and resources of local government for economic development and maintenance of social services’ (2002: 4918). According to Isaac and Franke, in 1996–97, 2 million out of Kerala’s population of 30 million were involved in planning the programmes of the new Panchayats (2000: 321). What took place was no less than an attempt to transform ‘existing State institutions into empowered deliberative bodies’ (ibid.: 6).

It is a measure of the success of Panchayat Raj in Kerala that an obscure Panchayat like Perumatty in Palakkad district was able to stand up to a major multinational company like Coca-Cola and protest the ‘depletion and contamination of the area’s groundwater’ (Vijayalakshmi 2003: 16). This is in stark contrast to the way in which the victims of the Bhopal gas tragedy (when a cloud of poisonous gas was released accidentally from the Union Carbide factory) were treated. Not only did they get compensated 20 years later, but they received a paltry amount of ₹25,000 each, which works out to a little more than ₹1,000 for every year of suffering and for the loss of earning. In an editorial entitled ‘Too Little, Too Late’, The Hindu pointed out that ‘the Madhya Pradesh government has a great deal to explain why it did not monitor a plant, using dangerous chemicals in the manufacture of insecticides when it was located next to a large human settlement’ (2004a). One wonders if the outcome would have been different if there had been an effective local government body in place.

Though firmly enshrined in the Constitution and successfully implemented in a few states, in the vast majority of states, the implementation of the Act left much to be desired. In most of the states, the transfer of funds, functions and functionaries to PRIs has been less than impressive (Mahi Pal 2004). Another lacuna in the functioning of PRIs is the role of the District Planning Committee (DPC). According
to Article 243ZD of the Constitution, DPCs are to be constituted to integrate rural and urban plans made by Panchayats and municipalities. But even after the passing of a decade of the conformity legislations by the states, many of them are yet to constitute DPCs. And even among those that have constituted DPCs, their functioning leaves much to be desired. In most cases, they are not functioning at all. In any case, these committees are chaired by ministers and officers of the state government, leaving little room for local initiative.

These drawbacks in the functioning of PRIs may be attributed to its being a nascent institution and they are not insurmountable. However, new challenges have arisen since the early 1990s, which we will consider below.

**Recent Challenges to PRIs**

The new challenges to Panchayat Raj stem from the changes in governance structures introduced in the early 1990s. In 1991, the Indian economy came close to a collapse due to a balance of trade crisis. At this point, the Indian government turned to international agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These institutions provided loans to the government to overcome the crisis. They also put in place structural adjustment programmes whereby almost all sectors of the economy came under reform. The attempt was to convert state-dominated economies to market-oriented ones (Khan 2002). To this end, they imposed conditionalities whereby non-government organizations (NGOs) were to be incorporated into the process of development and to actively participate in developmental activity.

Over the last two decades, there has been a prolific growth of NGOs in the country. This is particularly true of Karnataka. One of the main tasks of these NGOs is to set up user committees, also known as CBOs. Thus, many user committees or CBOs have made their way into the rural countryside. It is not unusual to visit a village in Karnataka and to find a Vishwa (World) Bank meeting in progress, as the villagers will inform you. These various user committees have their branches at the taluk and district levels and even at the state and national levels where they are organized into autonomous societies.

In Karnataka, these societies, which have been created in a mission mode and enjoy a great deal of freedom from bureaucratic and legislative controls, receive funds from the centre and pass them on
to their state, district and village branches, completely oblivious of the existence of PRIs. There is no accountability of these societies to PRIs. As such they form a parallel set-up to PRIs. They routinely engage in functions which constitutionally belong to the purview of the Panchayats, according to the 11th Schedule of the 73rd Amendment. Thus, increasingly, development in the rural areas is taking place through these societies which have been registered under the Registration of Societies Act, 1860.

This poses a huge challenge to PRIs which are being mauled by the presence of these societies at the state level and their corresponding District Implementing Committees (DIC) at the district level, Taluk Implementing Committees (TIC) at the taluk level and CBOs at the village level. The might of the centre, state and multilateral funding agencies (such as the World Bank and the Japan Bank of International Co-operation) have come together and are currently ranged against the Panchayat Raj system. This is a pity since it is taking place in a state which was once renowned for its local self-government.

The NGOs and CBOs profess to maintain an apolitical stance. They perform various functions, be it water supply or sanitation, watershed development, health, primary education, etc. without taking the PRIs into confidence. They maintain only a minimum and cursory relationship with the Panchayats, if at all. Hariss calls it the ‘de-politicization’ of development (2001). We will show, in the course of this study, that decisions regarding these developmental activities are blatantly taken in bodies outside the PRIs.

As the US Congress-appointed Meltzer Commission had pointed out in a critique of the IMF and World Bank, careful research has shown that the IMF’s conditionalities have little predictable effect on borrowing countries and in fact often worked perversely by ‘restricting the role of national institutions and the development of responsible democratic institutions’ (EPW 2000: 1232–1233).

However, the centre and states must bear the major share of the blame for allowing the various societies and CBOs to function independently of PRIs. According to Ghosh, the Bretton Woods Institutions, which not only equate but give preference to NGOs over PRIs, alone cannot be faulted for the current poor state of affairs (2002). Their role would not have been possible without the active concurrence and encouragement of the Indian political leadership. In a hard-hitting article, he squarely lays the blame for the ‘development debacle’ at the door of the ‘indigenous ruling elite’. He says, ‘In discussing the
burning issues of the development debacle in many poor countries, we
cannot ignore the primary role and responsibility of the ruling political
class … If the IMF were to blame, no less blameworthy are the ruling
political class and their accomplices’ (ibid.: 3981).

Ramachandran, an authority on Panchayat Raj, puts it succinctly.
In a list of dos and don’ts to the Union government, he says, ‘Don’t
allow externally supported projects to spawn user groups and other
community-based organizations delinked from the PRI system’
(2004: 5).

Thus, in the current scenario, while the CBOs are flush with funds,
PRIs do not have the wherewithal to perform even the minimum
maintenance functions of the assets and utilities of the village, let
alone the developmental functions which have been ascribed to them
by the Constitution. They are indeed the poor cousins of the CBOs!
According to Govinda Rao, ‘after deduction of charges for electricity
and other facilities by the State government in the general purpose
transfers, very little is left. The bulk of what is available is needed for
administration, leaving the local governments in a position unable to
execute any developmental schemes’ (2001: 10).

In fact, NGOs and CBOs are often placed on par with local gov-
ernment in government literature and this has been vehemently criti-
cized by some scholars. Vyasulu questions this practice. He says
that PRIs are the state at the local level and NGOs which belong to
the voluntary sector cannot be placed at par with them (2003). In a
humorous vein, he says, ‘local government, the panchayat system, is
the State, in all its majesty… It is not an NGO!’ (ibid.: 34). He points
out that the State has been defined in Article 12 (Part III, Fundamental
Rights) of the Constitution as follows:

In this part, unless the context otherwise requires, “the State” includes
the Government and Parliament of India and the Government and the
Legislature of each of the States and all local or other authorities within the
territory of India or under the control of the Government of India (ibid.: 51).

Thus, he concludes that “panchayats” are “government” in an essential
sense. ‘It is in no sense comparable to a credit co-operative or a water-users
association, however democratic they may be in their functioning … Just
as we elect our parliament and legislatures, so do we elect our panchayats’
(ibid.: 53).

In conclusion, Panchayat Raj is an extremely important institution,
particularly in the highly stratified society peculiar to this country.
It is an institution with a long history which has evolved over a period of time to suit the requirements of this society and region. It has put in place a reservation system to take care of the marginalized and underprivileged sections of society. It has a cultural content which gives it legitimacy in the eyes of the people and yet it has been shaped to suit modern conditions. It is an institution which has to be put to good use and strengthened. What is happening now is the reverse. Panchayat Raj has to be allowed to function so that it reflects the needs and aspirations of millions of people, who today lack a voice in the development agenda. Political decentralization is the need of the hour. Without this, we cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, call ourselves a democratic nation.

Notes

1. In 1989, Rajiv Gandhi introduced the 64th and 65th Amendment Bills for PRIs, which were passed in the Lok Sabha but lost in the Rajya Sabha. Subsequently, the Bills were passed in both Houses of Parliament during Narasimha Rao’s tenure as Prime Minister in 1993.

2. Where the Gram Sabha has been accorded an executive role, as in Madhya Pradesh, it goes against the grain of the Act. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

3. The author has not gone into the accountability of these societies at the state and national levels. However, in an interview, Chiranjeev Singh, Development Commissioner of Karnataka (retd), assured me that questions regarding the schemes implemented through societies do come up in the state legislatures and even in Parliament. What is clear is that there is no accountability of these Societies to the PRIs. Interview with Chiranjeev Singh, 15 June 2008.
Local self-government or Panchayat Raj in Karnataka has been described variously as going through ups and downs, one step forward, two steps back, etc. On the one hand it is regarded as being in the vanguard of Panchayat Raj among all the states, on the other it is strongly criticized. In this chapter, we will enquire into the state of the institution of Panchayat Raj as it exists at present. But before we take a look at the ground reality, we will take a brief look at the history of PRIs in Karnataka through its Acts.

**History of Panchayat Raj through its Acts**

Panchayat Raj in Karnataka dates back to 1862 when a ‘local fund’ was established for constructing roads and other subsidiary works. By 1874, local fund committees were established in each district. But these committees were dominated by official members who were unresponsive to the needs of the people. In 1902, the Mysore Local Boards Act established a three-tier system with a nominated Chairman at the Village Panchayat level, a Sub-divisional Officer as President of the Taluk Board and a District Commissioner as President of the District Board. Local self-government had not yet arrived on the scene.

It was only in 1918, with the passing of the Mysore Local Boards and Village Panchayat Act, that elected members found a place in the system, allowing them some access to the decision-making process. This reform was motivated by the Mysore government looking over its shoulder at the Madras Presidency where changes were taking place in response to the Montague Chelmsford reforms. Thus, for the first time, the Act provided that elected members should be vice-presidents of taluk and district boards. In 1926, the government enacted one more piece of legislation, namely the Mysore District and Mysore Village Panchayats Act, providing village and district panchayats with powers and resources to carry out basic civic amenities. By 1927, all
the nine districts of the erstwhile Mysore State had elected members as board presidents. According to Aziz, ‘All these measures were intended to loosen the hold of bureaucrats and to induct people’s representatives into the local government system’ (2000). However, Sivanna is skeptical of these reforms. He quotes James Manor, ‘The princely government’s policy of reluctance towards local boards was apparent … the local boards very frequently faced an acute shortage of funds’ (Sivanna 2002: 111). He concludes, ‘There was no constructive encouragement and support for the development of boards and panchayats during the thirties and forties’ (ibid.).

The next great milestone in Panchayat Raj was the Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act, 1959 which was inspired by the Balwantrai Mehta Committee report. It laid emphasis on the active involvement of the people in development. The new legislation, which covered all parts of the re-organized state, provided for District Development Councils at the district level, Taluk Development Boards (TDBs) at the intermediary level and Village Panchayats at the village level. The Village Panchayats had 11–19 elected members depending on the population of the village or group of villages. There was reservation for SCs in proportion to their population and for women, whose number on the Panchayat would be not less than two. The Chairman and Vice-chairman were elected from among the members as they are today. There was a Secretary to look after administrative matters. The TDB consisted of 15–19 elected members with reservation for SCs and women as for Village panchayats. The local MLA/MLC was also a member. The Block Development Officer (BDO) was the executive head of the TDB. He was assisted by extension officers and village level workers. The BDO was the implementing officer for most of the central and state government schemes. The District Development Council consisted of the presidents of the TDBs and the MPs, MLAs and MLCs whose constituencies fell within the district. As such, it had no directly elected representatives. It was mainly an advisory and coordinating body and the Deputy Commissioner of the district was its ex-officio president.

Thus, for the first time, there were elected members at the village level and at the taluk level. It was the beginning of the democratic impulse in local government. Research studies showed that the TDBs, which were the main executive bodies, functioned well, and were able to make the development process more participatory and responsive.
However, Sivanna points out that there was no perceptible change in the local social structure. ‘Members belonging to Other Backward Classes, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and women did not make any impact on the power structure’ (Sivanna 2002: 117). In fact, it was ‘the local elite, drawn from socially and economically advanced communities which had the upper hand’ (ibid.) in PRIs. They ‘hailed from two dominant communities, viz. Lingayats and Vokkaligas’ and their share in the total membership in TDBs was 27.72 per cent and 23.18 per cent respectively, thus accounting for over 50 per cent of TDB membership (ibid.). Unlike Kerala and West Bengal, where land reform and literacy movements preceded Panchayat Raj and hence helped to consolidate it, there was no such corresponding movement in Karnataka.¹

A fresh impetus for democratization of PRIs came from the centre when the government appointed the Ashok Mehta Committee to restructure and rejuvenate Panchayats. The Committee, which submitted its report in 1978, recommended the district as the first point of decentralization below the state level.

The 1983 Act

Keeping in mind the Ashok Mehta recommendations, the Government of Karnataka passed the pathbreaking Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samitis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act in 1983. This was the first time in Karnataka that a political party took up decentralization as an issue to fight the elections with. When the Janata Party came to power, its Chief Minister, Ramakrishna Hegde and the Minister for Panchayats, Nazir Saab, showed a high level of commitment to the cause of decentralization. As such, local self-government got a tremendous shot in the arm and the Act became a model for decentralization.

Under the Act, the district-level body became a directly elected body as well. There was reservation for SCs and STs in proportion to their population with a rider that the minimum reservation should be 18 per cent. There was also 25 per cent reservation of seats for women. The voting age was reduced to 18 years, bringing the youth into the political process.

But, most importantly, the President of the Zilla Parishad had considerable powers vis-à-vis the bureaucracy. He also enjoyed a high status. He was the ‘executive head’ of the ZP. He had the status and
position of a minister of the state government and the Vice-President had the position of a Deputy Minister of the state government. The chief secretary (now called CEO of the ZP), who himself was a senior bureaucrat, senior even to the Deputy Commissioner of the district, had to work under the supervision of the President of the ZP who wrote his annual confidential report. The President of the ZP had a very high standing in the district and people approached him to solve their problems. Moreover, all the district-level officers and staff of the various government departments worked under the ZP which coordinated their activities. The ZP was now an effective mechanism for incorporating the needs and wishes of the people into the developmental activities of the government. Thus, under the 1983 Act, the local polity came into its own and district governance became a reality.

Planning now had a bottom-up approach as formulating and implementing the plans was undertaken by the ZP. Thus, there was now an integrated development of the district. This was aided by the fact that the lowest level of Panchayat Raj was the *mandal*, which consisted of about 20–22 villages. This made it an economically viable unit and funds were available for investing in infrastructure. The period of five years, from 1987–92, when the Act was in effect, saw an increase in the number of schools, hospitals, roads, etc. in the rural areas.

The Taluk Panchayat Samiti now became a purely nominated body consisting of the presidents of the Mandal Panchayats in the taluk, the MLAs and MLCs and ZP members of the taluk, five members belonging to the SCs, STs, Backward Classes and women. The MLA representing the taluk was the president of the Samiti. The TP was essentially an advisory body to assist the Mandal Panchayats in the implementation of schemes.

The Mandal Panchayat was an important institution. It had a range of developmental activities including construction and maintenance of services such as water supply and sanitation, street lighting, roads, and the promotion of health, safety, education and general wellbeing of the people. It also engaged in the formulation of plans for agricultural production, fisheries, forestry, soil conservation, promotion of cottage and village industries, etc. Its resource base was also quite broad. It could levy taxes on buildings, entertainment and markets and charge a fee for grazing cattle and water supply. It also got income from non-tax resources like rent, forests, etc. In addition, it received per capita grants from the ZP.
The Act provided for a Gram Sabha (village council) consisting of all the eligible voters of a village. It was envisioned as a platform where the people could express their needs and aspirations and also hold the officials and elected representatives accountable.

Apart from this, an apex body called the State Development Council was constituted, consisting of all the ZP presidents of the state with the Chief Minister as head. It served to link the ZP presidents with one another and with the state.

The 1983 Act, when implemented, did not take long to show results. A younger, more vibrant and well-educated leadership came to the fore in PRIs. There was a sizeable representation of landless persons — 25 per cent in Mandal Panchayats and 10 per cent in Zilla Panchayats. The Krishnaswamy Committee observed that 'virtually in all the districts, the operation of schools and health facilities have improved vastly' (Sivanna 2002: 125). Villages were found to be better lit, there was provision for drinking water and housing conditions of the SC/ST population had improved. Aziz points out that ‘a considerable amount of social and economic infrastructure such as school and hospital buildings, shopping complexes, bus shelters, roads, bridges and culverts had been provided’ (2000: 3523).

However, all was not well with the PRIs. Cracks were developing in the structure and Aziz points out some of the deficiencies (2000: 3523). First, the reservation for SCs, STs and women did not extend to the offices of President and Vice-President in either the Mandal Panchayat or the ZP. Thus, these categories of persons were left outside the seats of power. According to Aziz, the seats of power were occupied by members of the dominant communities of Vokkaliga and Lingayat. Second, the institutional structure had many weaknesses. The PRIs lacked funds and depended heavily on grants from the state, compromising its autonomy. The planning function was not suitably discharged and the Gram Sabha did not meet regularly. Finally, when the term of the PRIs was over in 1992, elections were not held and administrators were appointed to carry out the functions of the local elected bodies. It was an abrupt end to a golden era in local self-government.

**The 1993 Act**

Panchayat Raj got another shot in the arm with the passage of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. This provided the much needed
Constitutional guarantee to PRIs whose norms could no longer be flouted with impunity. Karnataka was the first state to pass the Conformity Act in 1993.

The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 established a three-tier system of elected, decentralized governance at the village, taluk and district levels. The members are to be elected on a non-party basis at the GP level and on a party basis at the other two levels, under the supervision of a State Election Commission. Reservation of seats for SCs and STs in proportion to their population continues. There was an enhancement of reservation for women with a third of the total number of seats being reserved for them. Reservation for Backward Classes was introduced. Reservation of seats was extended to the offices of President and Vice-president in all three tiers. Thus, backward sections of the population now had access to the seats of power. The Act also provides for a Gram Sabha to be convened twice a year.

However, certain provisions of the Act were retrogressive and have brought forth strong criticism from academicians and others in favour of decentralization. These relate, first, to the position of the elected representatives vis-a-vis the bureaucracy and secondly, to the control of the State government over the local body. As Mathew says, ‘The panchayats have, in no uncertain terms, been made subservient to the officials and an appendage of the state government’ (2002: 69). Now, the tables were turned and the CEO became more powerful than the President of the ZP. The 1993 Act made the CEO the executive head of the ZP. The new Act merely empowered the President to convene, preside over and conduct the meetings of the ZP. Second, the office of the President of the ZP was dealt a severe blow by reducing its tenure from five years to 20 months! As if this was not enough, the President of the ZP lost his ministerial status.

The ZP also lost administrative control of its officials in the matter of recruitment, postings, transfers, etc. which it had under the 1983 Act. According to Section 155 (3) of the 1993 Act, ‘The government or any officer or other authority authorized by it in this behalf shall have power to effect transfer of the officers and officials so posted either within the taluk or from one taluk to another taluk.’ In other words, even the transfer of a peon in the panchayat will now rest with the bureaucracy (Mathew 2002: 69). According to late T. R. Satish Chandran, a feature which stands out by its absence is that there is no provision for establishing its own cadres of personnel in panchayats. As the position stands, Panchayats have no powers of recruitment,
undermining local democracy

transfer and discipline over their staff (2000). Discussing the personnel policy of the Panchayats, Meenakshisundaram points out that ‘steps will have to be taken to constitute cadres for the PRIs, if these institutions have to effectively discharge the responsibilities cast on them’ (1994: 207).

Another area where elected representatives of Panchayats have lost control over the bureaucracy is in the working of the government line departments. Under the 1983 Act, the officials of the line departments worked under the leadership and overall supervision of the ZP to whom they were accountable. This is no longer the case, as is brought out in a study on decentralization conducted by the World Bank.

According to this study, the officials of the line departments in the districts are no longer accountable to the ZP President but are accountable to the CEO of the ZP (Rajshekhar et al. 2000: 73; see also Vyasulu 2003: 86). It is the CEO who writes the confidential reports of the heads of the line departments and reviews the confidential reports of the staff below the district level. The applications for leave, travel bills, loans, etc. go to the CEO. The heads of the line departments are also accountable to their parent departments. Thus, the head of one of the line departments noted that he is accountable to both his Director (in Bangalore) and the CEO of the ZP, but he regards himself as more accountable to his Director as the latter is responsible not only for appointments but for promotions as well. (Rajshekhar et al. 2000: 73).

The CEO himself is not as senior an officer as he was in the past. As a result, he tends to look up to the state level officials. On the other hand, he tends to control the ZP and very often ‘convinces’ the ZP President of a particular line of action. Now it is the CEO who takes the decisions regarding the District Plans (Rajshekhar et al. 2000: 74).

Second, the 1993 Act gives the state a stronger hold on panchayats. According to T. R. Satish Chandran, the state government has retained more power with itself vis-à-vis the Panchayats in the 1993 Act (2000). This government control over the ZP is apparent from a clause in the Act which says that the CEO shall submit to the state government all resolutions and laws that, in his opinion, are inconsistent with the Act and other laws of the state. Such resolutions have to be brought to the notice of the state government within 15 days of ZP meetings and be implemented only as decided by the state government. The 1983 Act had no such provision.

Mathew points out that a ‘serious lapse refers to the amendment section of the act’ (2002: 70). Section 312 of the Karnataka Act
vests the power to ‘omit, amend or add any activity, programme or scheme covered by or mentioned in Schedule 1, 11 or 111’ in the state government (2002: 70). It can be done by notification in the gazette after which it is merely placed before the legislature. ‘This provision makes the powers and functions of the panchayats dependent on the sweet will of the governments of the time, sabotaging the very concept of self-government’ (ibid.).

H. P. Chelavaraj, Member of the Bangalore Rural ZP, said in an interview to this author that the state government passes amendments to the Panchayat Raj Act without taking the members of the PRIs into confidence. As an example, he said that the Constitution had given the President of the ZP discretionary power to reallocate 10 per cent of the budget funds from one programme to another, making for some flexibility in spending. However, this power has been withdrawn. According to him, ‘Higher level officials merely called the ZP Presidents and placed the new rule before them.’ He felt miffed by the treatment meted out to the ZP presidents and added that ‘taking into consideration the opinion of the ZP President should be made a rule.’

While reducing the status of the ZP President, the Act enhances the position of the MLA. The MLAs had felt threatened by the growth of PRIs. The new Bill fully restores the power and patronage of MLAs in their constituencies. Thus, people have reportedly stopped approaching the ZP President as they did under the 1983 Act and resumed their visits to MLAs to solve their problems. The Deputy Commissioner, who had only residuary functions under the 1983 Act, has now bounced back. The DC and the MLA are today important power centres in the taluk.

Summing up the present-day scenario in an article entitled ‘No More A Model for Other States: Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act’, L. C. Jain, a doyen of local self-government, said in response to a journalist’s query:

The new Amendments struck at the spirit of the old Karnataka Act — political autonomy, administrative autonomy and fiscal autonomy. The post of Chief Secretary was removed because the officers found it demeaning to be working under the President of the ZP. The centre of decision-making shifted to the Chief Minister’s office and in the District, the Collector became all-powerful’ (Sharma 2001: 15).

What is more, financial powers moved back to the state government.
All this has had an impact on the degree of political decentralization in the state. The ZP members raise issues in the general body meetings of the ZP but they are not taken seriously. They make a lot of noise but it is a case of a lot of sound and fury, signifying nothing. The elected representatives are aware of this and say that the general body meetings have become a farce (Rajshekhar et al. 2000: 75). Moreover, a large part of the agenda of the elected representatives is discussed in meetings held by various parallel bodies at the district, taluk and village levels, as we will see in the following chapters. This is a far cry from the position of the ZP members under the 1983 Act.

The political clout of the ZP members is further weakened by their president holding office for a mere 20 months.4 No sooner is he able to grasp the niceties of his office than his term is over. Add to this the elaborate guidelines and mystification of the various state and central government schemes which only the seasoned bureaucrat can grasp and the discomfiture of the elected representative is complete.

Urban areas did not remain unaffected by the decline in local self-government. When the term of the Bengaluru Corporation ended on 23 November 2006, elections did not take place and there has been no elected local self-government for the city for the past three years. Elections to the new, expanded Corporation took place on 21 February 2009.

The problem with such a scenario as it stands today is that the people’s wishes and aspirations do not find an avenue of expression. Development is implemented by officials who lack accountability to the people. As such, development takes on a technocratic hue rather than a people-oriented one. The alienation of the people from the democratic process is palpable to the visitor to the rural areas in Karnataka. The woes of the farmers, poor and dispossessed fall on deaf ears, leading to great suffering and often culminating in suicide. According to Sainath, nationally, one farmer’s suicide took place every 30 minutes between 1997 and 2005. He cites a study conducted by K. Nagaraj of the Madras Institute of Development Studies which points out that farmers’ suicide rates are high in Karnataka compared to suicide rates in the general population and are next only to Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh (The Hindu 2007a and 2007b).

From the account above, it is clear that the political decentralization that had taken place during the Mandal days has all but evaporated. Below we will take a look at the source of the pressures on Panchayat
Raj. Briefly, these pressures emanate from two sources: (i) MLAs; and (ii) parallel bodies.

**MLAs and DCs as Power Centres in the District**

As mentioned earlier, MLAs or state-level elected representatives are loathed to see their power in their constituencies diminished by the elected representatives of the PRIs. Thus, MLAs across all the political parties are not in favour of local self-government. Says Madan Mohan, a long-time observer of Panchayat Raj in Karnataka, ‘None of the MLAs belonging to the different political spectra appear to be in favour of granting powers to grassroots institutions’ (TOI 2005a).

This is evident in the ping-pong battle taking place between the MLAs and the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj (RDPR) Department regarding selection of beneficiaries. There are two, and only two, functions which, at present, are solely taken care of by the Panchayats at the village level. These are housing, and water supply and sanitation. But even these have come under flak from the MLAs who feel that the powers concerning these subjects have been taken away from them. Take the Housing Department. The beneficiaries of the various housing schemes were selected, not in the Gram Sabha, but by a committee at the taluk level which was chaired by the MLA. Then, a Government Order issued in October 2004 by the RDPR Department took away all powers from the MLAs for allocation of housing under Ashraya, Ambedkar, Indira Awas, Navagraha and Prime Minister Gramodaya Yojana (Gramina Awas Yojana) housing schemes. As per the order, only the GPs can select the beneficiaries openly in Gram Sabhas, according to the respective programme guidelines (TOI 2004b).

The news item pointed out that the committees would not be abolished but they would no longer select the beneficiaries.

Three weeks later we are told that the Gram Panchayats in the State are likely to be stripped of the power to allocate sites under the Ashraya scheme to economically weaker segments of the society. The State government is contemplating to reconstitute Ashray committees and entrust them the responsibility of distributing sites. The move apparently comes in the backdrop of opposition from the
MLAs, who hitherto headed the committees ... The volte-face, it is said, was because MLAs were complaining that they have no powers left with them (Deccan Herald 2004b; see also TOI 2004d).

In pursuance of their stand, the members of the opposition staged a dharna in the Legislative Assembly on 2 February 2005 (The Hindu 2005b). The Chief Minister, Dharam Singh, told them that the government was also thinking on their lines (Deccan Herald 2005b). Senior Minister Mallikarjun Kharge said that even the members of the ruling coalition were for restoring the old system. However, it was the union government which had directed that all the central housing schemes should be implemented through GPs (ibid.). A way out of the impasse was sought by separating the Ashraya Housing Scheme, which was a state scheme, from the other housing schemes, so that it could be implemented through the legislators (ibid.). As a result of this conflict, ‘the Ashraya committees for the year have not been constituted’, said the Housing Minister Anjana Murthy (ibid.). The losers were the people since no Ashraya houses were allocated for the year.

The matter did not end there. Almost three months later we are told that there was no role for legislators in housing and water schemes, according to the Minister for RDPR, H. C. Mahadevappa. He said that ‘it is for the Gram Sabha to select the beneficiaries and it is final. It will not be possible either for the Chief Minister, the Deputy Chief Minister or himself to interfere in the powers which have been transferred to the PRIs’ (The Hindu 2005d). Three months later, we are again told that ‘the Chief Minister N. Dharam Singh informed the Legislative Assembly that the government will constitute Urban Ashraya committees under the chairmanship of Members of the Legislative Assembly’ (Deccan Herald 2005c). It is still not clear how the ongoing tussle between the MLAs and the RDPR ministry will end.

A similar tussle has been going on with regard to water supply. During the drought in Karnataka, the drinking water problem in the villages was severe. The Tumkur TP pointed out that the state government had released ₹1.50 crore to the Deputy Commissioner to alleviate the situation. He, in turn, had not consulted the panchayats regarding the solution to the problem. Rather, ‘the Deputy Commissioner invited only MLAs to the meetings on providing drinking water’ (The Hindu 2002a). The Vice-president of the Taluk Panchayat said that neither the DC nor the District In-charge Minister cared to ‘consult
the panchayat members about the water scarcity*. Yet, ‘it was always
the panchayat members who faced the wrath of the people’ (ibid.).

This tussle continued into 2005. A news item in the *Deccan Herald*,
dated 25 January 2005, states that ‘members of the legislative assembly
cutting across party affiliations, expressed serious dissatisfaction over
the government handing over the responsibility of drinking water
supply and implementation of other important projects to village
panchayats, despite these local bodies not having proper infrastructure
or resources’ (*Deccan Herald* 2005a; see also *The Hindu* 2005a). A few
days later, there was the following report in *The Hindu*: ‘Bowing to
the opposition’s pressure, the Chief Minister, N. Dharam Singh on
Wednesday announced that the government will constitute taluk
level committees headed by members of the legislative assembly to
implement drinking water schemes’ (*The Hindu* 2005c). Almost three
months later, a report in *The Hindu* stated that there was ‘no role for
legislators in housing, water schemes’ (*The Hindu* 2005d). This has
created a lot of confusion as to who performs the function of drinking
water supply and sanitation as well as housing.

Decentralization of power does not occur without a struggle. It is
but natural that the MLAs feel threatened by elected representatives
from local bodies. Therefore, for effective political decentralization
to take place, the people have to assert their right to have local self-
government at the district level as well. According to Chiranjeev
Singh, retired Development Commissioner of Karnataka (in an inter-
view with the author), ‘There has, as yet, been no groundswell of opin-
ion in favour of local self-government, unlike in the case of dalits and
women where social movements have indeed taken place.’ Finally,
the two parties, i.e., the elected representatives of the state and the
local bodies, will have to sit together and resort to the task of ‘activity-
mapping’, that is, chalk out their respective functions and areas of
influence. This task is not an impossible one, if undertaken with a
measure of seriousness.  

To my mind, currently a more serious threat to local self-government
comes from centrally-sponsored projects which receive funds from
bilateral and multilateral institutions. As mentioned above, only two
functions are being carried out by the Panchayats and even they are
under threat. A vast array of functions is being carried out by parallel
bodies. They get loans from multilateral agencies and then proceed to
set up societies and CBOs which, in turn, go about their task of imple-
menting the functions completely oblivious of Panchayats. They bear
no accountability to the Panchayat whatsoever. In other words, the centre, in collaboration with international lending agencies and the tacit acquiescence of the state, has turned into a massive change agent in governance. In the following chapters, we will examine the kind of changes in governance that have been introduced by these agencies.

The curious point is that the quantum of funds received from these multilateral lending agencies is not much, amounting to about a mere 10 per cent of the project cost. Moreover, the funds are in the form of loans which have to be paid back in course of time. Yet, the impact of the institutional changes in governance sought to be introduced by these centrally-sponsored schemes is immense, and will ultimately change the manner in which government is run and developmental schemes are administered.

**Pressure from the Centre and Multilateral Institutions**

Almost all the government departments in Karnataka have started projects with funds from bilateral and multilateral institutions. These projects are in fast-track and mission-mode, for which new institutions have been created. Societies, DICs, TICs and CBOs are some of the institutions which never existed before and have suddenly sprung up. Implementation for these projects is done through NGOs.

The problem is that the whole new set-up has not linked itself to PRIs. It works independently of the Panchayats and does not see itself as accountable to the locally elected bodies of the people. These newly created parallel bodies claim to be apolitical. But by distancing themselves from elected bodies and sidelining them, they are, in effect, ‘depoliticizing development’ which, in itself, has a political content. Political decentralization is given the go-by.

The RDPR Department has done its best to rectify the situation. It issued an order on 16 October 2004, transferring over 170 state-sector schemes, including externally aided projects like Sujala and Jal Samvardhan, to Panchayats, along with the funds needed to execute these projects. The order, for the first time in the country, hands over control of development schemes worth Rs. 1,800 crore to the gram, taluk and district panchayats. This would have been an important milestone in decentralization.6

Under the Order, ‘Parallel bodies should not be established to implement the subjects devolved to PRIs. Such institutions constituted
at the district level should be reconstituted under the chairmanship of the adhyaksha or CEO of Zilla Panchayat.’ It also states that the ‘World Bank or external aided projects should be implemented through PRIs only’. But whether this Order will be taken seriously by the departments is a moot point. When this author met some senior officials of the various departments, they said that they had indeed received such an Order and would call a meeting to deliberate on it. According to the Times of India (TOI), ‘a senior officer of Jala Samvardhane Yojana Sangha under the Water Resources Department noted that “for sometime now we have been under pressure from the RDPR Department to bring our tank users’ groups under the purview of GPs. Recently, a notification to the effect was also issued by them.” Sources connected with the Sujala Watershed Development Project under the Agriculture Department also said that such a proposal was before them. “Our department is yet to take a decision,” they said’ (TOI 2005b).

But the entire exercise seems to have been more in the nature of wishful thinking by the RDPR Department. There has been tremendous opposition both from the multilateral institutions and from the MLAs to the Order. An argument of PRIs ‘lacking infrastructure’ and hence not capable of implementing developmental projects was put forward by the World Bank. According to the TOI,

the World Bank has urged Karnataka government to rethink its decision to award powers to the panchayats to implement development projects funded by the bank … their fear is that project implementation will slow down if it is implemented by the panchayats as they do not have the required infrastructure (2004c).

The Hindu commented, ‘The World Bank’s observation that the local bodies lack the skill and infrastructure to execute, supervise and evaluate the project is ironical, considering that it is currently funding the project for devolution of powers to panchayats’ (2004b; see also Deccan Herald 2004a). Apparently, the fact that the capabilities of the Panchayats could be raised to perform the functions which have been devolved to them by the Constitution has eluded them.

The MLAs are also not in favour of the Order. According to the TOI, ‘most MLAs are unhappy because this order wrests administrative control of their constituencies from them. In the absence of a Panchayat Raj minister, CM Dharam Singh is being petitioned not to go ahead with the decision’ (TOI 2004a).
To sum up, there was a brief, shining moment for Panchayat Raj in Karnataka during the 1980s when the Janata Government under Ramakrishna Hegde ushered in Mandal Panchayats. However, the neoliberalism of the 1990s, which emanated from the centre and had the tacit acceptance of the state, spawned a number of parallel bodies which have turned a blind eye to Panchayat Raj. Political decentralization does not have a role in this scenario. The very notion of democracy at the grassroots is now a nebulous, even discounted one.

The Ground Reality

In order to study Panchayat Raj on the ground, this researcher undertook the study of parallel bodies and panchayats in one village, which is the headquarters of a GP in Mulbagal taluk of Kolar district. Hosahalli is a big village consisting of a population of about 1,850 in about 250 households. There are a number of castes in the village, namely the Brahman (10 households), the Vokkaliga (70 households), the Banajiga (50 households), Muslims (40 households), SC (AK) (40 households), ST (Naik) (10 households), Ganiga (10 households), Vaishya (5 households), Lingayat (3 households), potter (3 households), washermen (3 households) and barber (3 households). There is a large tank adjoining the village. The villagers grow millet (ragi), groundnut and paddy, the latter in areas near the tank. Some of them have mango trees. Milk production is a major occupation as is silkworm rearing. The latter is so particularly for the landless villagers who buy the mulberry and rear the silkworm in large baskets called chandrangi. But this cottage industry has been hit by the influx of cheaper Chinese silk in the market. Muslims in the village are involved in the marketing of silk as well as mango. As the villagers put it, ‘milk and silk are the main sources of our income’. There are also a few lorry drivers, teachers, and even three lawyers and a doctor.

The village is set in a picturesque locale. As you drive towards the village, you see a large 200-acre tank on the right side. As you enter it, you encounter the village square, or rectangle, in this case, with shops on the two longer sides of the rectangle. A newly built temple with intricate carvings lies on one side of the rectangle and on the other side is the GP building. The village is well-endowed in terms of infrastructure. There is a Government Middle School, a government-aided High School, two new hostels, one a Backward Classes and Minorities (BCM) hostel and the other an SC/ST hostel, a hospital, a
Panchayat Raj in Karnataka

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veterinary hospital, a bank, a post office and a telephone exchange. The
temple was quite recently constructed after demolition of the old one.
Artisans were brought from Tamil Nadu to carve the images on the
new temple. There is also a new and big mosque inside the village. The
old one was demolished and a new one built six years ago. The bank,
post office, telephone exchange and middle school came up during
the Mandal period of local governance. There are three borewells in
the village, two overhead tanks, one constructed by DANIDA and
another by the Panchayat, and three handpumps.

As pointed out earlier, Hosahalli is a multi-caste village. The
Vokkaligas are the dominant caste, having the largest number of
households and owning most of the land (see Srinivas 1987). There
is also a sizeable Muslim and SC population.

Regarding landholding, there are about 15 big landholders, that is,
those who own more than 20 acres of land. Of these, 11 are Vokkaligas,
two are Muslim, one is a Brahman and one is a Shetty.9

Community-based Organizations (CBOs)

Now, let us take a look at the CBOs in the village and their presidents.
The biggest scheme in the village is the Sujala Watershed Develop-
ment Scheme, of which the President is H. Gopal. He is a big land-
holder and a Vokkaliga or rather one who reportedly is passing off as
one. The School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) is
in the hands of Bhima Gowda, a Vokkaliga who is head of one of the
old landowning families in the village. The Village Forest Committee
(VFC) is headed by another Vokkaliga landowner, Manjunath. And,
last, the state government-led Stree Shakti or women’s empowerment
scheme is in the hands of one Sita Devi, a Shetty by caste. Interestingly,
none of the Muslims or SCs heads any of these CBOs.

The persona of H. Gopal is an extremely interesting one and it is
only befitting that we should begin our description of the leaders of the
CBOs with him.10 Gopal was born into a poor family belonging to the
carpenter caste, according to the villagers. His grandfather migrated
to Hosahalli from a nearly village. His father had a small holding of
about two acres in the village. Gopal hails from a large family of six
brothers. He passed his SSLC (Secondary School Leaving Certificate)
exam and got a Diploma in Electrical Engineering from a college in
Bangalore. He worked for a while in Bharat Gold Mines, KGF. But
the work did not satisfy him and he resigned and came back to his
village ‘for upliftment of the poor’. He had set his sights on a career in social work and politics.

In 1970, the prominent Brahman in the village D. Venkatakrishnaiah, recognizing Gopal’s intelligence and earnestness, picked him up and groomed him for a career in politics. Venkatakrishnaiah was the biggest landlord of the village. He was also the village Patel or Headman. During the days of village panchayats, which were formed under the Mysore Village Panchayat and Local Boards Act 1959, he was Chairman of the village panchayat.

Through Venkatakrishnaiah, Gopal met a number of political leaders of the District. He became a protégé of MLA M. V. Venkatappa, a Congressman and ex-Speaker of the Karnataka Legislative Assembly. He was the right-hand man of Venkatappa in the village. The villagers said that Venkatappa did not directly mingle with the people but relied on Gopal to develop a rapport with them. There was the small matter of caste. This was taken care of by Gopal marrying a Vokkaliga girl from a distant village.

When I met Gopal, I found him to be articulate and urbane and, above all, a person who was extremely enthusiastic about whatever he did.

With Venkatappa’s assistance, Gopal was able to bring a number of schemes into the village. The Swachcha Grama Scheme became operational in the village in 2001–2002. The Scheme was used to pave the road of the village rectangle as well as roads inside the village, construct box-drains and toilets. It was a World Bank, ‘demand-driven’ scheme of ₹20 lakh per village, of which the villagers had to contribute ₹2 lakh. One lakh was to be given in cash and 1 lakh in kind. Gopal, through the MLA, was also instrumental in bringing in the Navagrama Housing Scheme whereby an entirely new layout was developed adjoining the village, consisting of 104 houses. Incidentally, both the Schemes are GP schemes, that is, they come to the GP which has to administer them but it is Gopal who controlled them. Two new hostels were also built in this part of the village, one a BCM hostel and the other an SC hostel. Gopal took me around the new housing scheme as well as the two hostels, both impressive achievements. But the biggest prize of all was the Sujala Watershed Project which came into the village in 2003. At the time of my fieldwork, Gopal was trying hard to get the Jala Samavardhane or Tank Rehabilitation Project but it was eluding him. He said that in anticipation of the scheme, he had removed the encroachments on the tank bed and de-silted the tank at a cost of ₹5 lakh.
Gopal has complete control of the GP in the village. As mentioned above, the Swachcha Grama Scheme and the Navagrahma Housing Scheme are GP schemes. Gopal was also instrumental in building the new Panchayat building. The Panchayat was earlier housed in a *chowdi*, that is, it had merely granite pillars and a stone roof. Gopal not only controls the implementation of the schemes which come to the GP but he also selects the beneficiaries. He also looks after the Water and Sanitation Committee in the village. He formed an Education Society in 1983 and opened an aided high school in the village which now has 300 children on its rolls. He is President of the Karnataka Milk Federation Dairy in the village. He has also started his own Mahila Mandal or Women's Self-help Group.

Gopal, now in his late 50s, joined the Congress Party way back in 1968. He said that he was District Congress General Secretary for 10 years, District Congress Vice-President for 15 years and State Youth Congress Secretary for five years. However, he was disappointed as he was not given a ticket to stand for election. For 15 years he has been the leader of the village and has built up a number of vote banks in the village. Through Pyare Saab, the leader of the Muslim community, he has the undisputed loyalty of the Muslim population of the village. Through Chowdappa, SC leader, he has the complete support of the SC community. And through Somashekhara Shetty, head of the traditional village panchayat, he has the ‘elders’ of the village with him.11 Thus, at election time, he becomes a very important person for district- and state-level politicians, as he can swing the votes one way or the other. This is just what he is believed to have done in the last election, when it is believed that he supported Alangur Srinivas, the Janata Dal (Secular) (JD [S]) candidate, against his guide and mentor M. V. Venkatappa, the Congress candidate, as he was piqued at not being given a ticket. In the election, the JD (S) got the largest number of votes from Mulbagal taluk and A. Srinivas won the election.

However, he is not wholeheartedly accepted by the Vokkaligas, perhaps because of his caste antecedents. Yet, even they grudgingly acknowledge that he has done a great deal for the village. His detractors point out that in the process of benefiting the village, he has also been benefited and has amassed a great deal of wealth. He lives in a big house. Besides that, he owns a number of buildings in the village. One of his brothers is contractor for a number of village works.

As mentioned earlier, one of the biggest prizes that Gopal has got for the village is the Sujala Watershed Development Project. It is a World Bank project in which the implementation of the works is with
an NGO. According to Srikrishna Reddy, Field Guide, the project started in 2002 and will last for a period of five years. Kolar District has 11 taluks, 578 villages and 22 Sujala sub-watersheds. Hosahalli is one such sub-watershed. It consists of 29 villages and six hamlets and covers an area of 6,812 hectares. From these 35 villages, all the water drains into the Hosahalli tank which is why the sub-watershed is named after Hosahalli village. ₹3 crore has been earmarked for the Hosahalli sub-watershed.

Though ‘watershed development’ was devolved to the Panchayats, the local GP has nothing to do with the project. The money comes directly from the State Sujala Society to the CBOs of Sujala, which we will examine later. There are nine micro-watersheds in the Hosahalli sub-watershed. Each micro-watershed has an area of 500–600 hectares and includes three to four villages. It is taken care of by the Field Guide of the NGO.

According to the project report, the project builds mainly water-harvesting structures such as bunds, farm ponds, de-silting of existing ponds, recharge of pits for borewells, mini percolation tanks, check dams, nalla bunds, boulder check and cattle protection trenches. It also raises tank foreshore area plantations, that is, it does agro-forestry or bund plantation of silver oak, pongamea glabra (honge mara), etc. It also plants mango, sapota and cashew in the fields of the farmers.

In Hosahalli, Sujala has built a bund around the Hosahalli tank. It has also constructed farm ponds, bunds, etc. in farmers’ lands and helped the farmers to plant fruit trees. Mango trees are the most sought after as they do not require much water except in the initial stages. The farmer is responsible for performing the labour on his land. He either performs it himself or hires labour. It is a demand-driven programme. For water harvesting structures on his field, the farmer contributes 10 per cent and for construction of an earthen bund, 20 per cent. For horticulture, the farmer contributes 35 per cent of the cost of the plant. The rest is given by Sujala.

Gopal drove me around the Hosahalli micro-watershed and showed me the water-harvesting structures. They were rather impressive. But the problem of projectivization of watershed development was evident. On one side of the road, which came under the Sujala project, were farm ponds, check dams and what-have-you, while on the other side, which was outside the project terrain, the land was seemingly uncared for and bereft of any structures. I was told that this does result in heartburn for those villages which are not included in the Sujala project.
Now, let us turn to the CBOs which have been started by Sujala. Each micro-watershed has a number of CBOs or Sujala Watershed Sanghas (SWS). There are three types of Sanghas, namely the Area Groups (AGs), the Executive Committee (EC) and the Self-help Groups (SHGs). There are three AGs—A, B and C—in Hosahalli, which are, as the name indicates, area-based farmers’ groups, each group covering a number of hectares.

The EC, consisting of 14 members, is a body registered under the Registration of Societies Act. The President of the Hosahalli Sub-Watershed Committee is the aforementioned Gopal. Interestingly, the other notables of Hosahalli have also been included in the Committee. Krishna Reddy is Vice-president and Sita Devi is one of the 14 Directors of Hosahalli Sub-watershed. Thus, Sujala makes it a point to bring various factions in the village onto the table, so as to pre-empt any problems which may occur as a result of factional conflict. The Field Guide said that he had difficulty in getting Krishna Reddy to sit with Gopal at the same table!

Apart from the SWS Executive Committee and the AGs, Sujala also has SHGs. These are micro-credit and savings groups for the landless poor. Sujala adopts already existing SHGs or may start new ones. These, then, are the CBOs begun by Sujala in the villages of the Hosahalli micro-watershed.

The next CBO which we will consider is the School Development and Monitoring Committee. The President of the Committee is Bhima Gowda, a man in his 60s. He is a Vokkaliga landlord of the village who lives in a large house built by his grandfather. He was the first graduate in the village. He is related to a number of political leaders or MLAs from Kolar. He has had a long stint in politics and is well-versed with not just state-level politics but national politics as well. He said that he had gone to Delhi in 1977, during Janata Party rule when Morarji Desai became Prime Minister. At that time he was a member of the Janata Party and later became a member of the JD (S). He was now with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), as a follower of Surendra Gowda, who is a cousin of the JD (S) MLA Alangur Srinivas and to whom Bhima Gowda himself is related.

He is a strident critic of Gopal. He said that there was misappropriation of the midday meal scheme when Gopal was President of the SDMC. Regarding this, he and the Headmaster of the local high school had sent a written complaint to the Deputy Commissioner.

The third type of CBO in Hosahalli is the Self-help Group (SHG) which is the women’s empowerment group. Sita Devi is the leader
of one such SHG in the village. She received her training from the Mysore Resettlement and Development Agency (MYRADA) and Initiative for Development Foundation (IDF). In turn, she trains others in the taluk. On a particular day, five groups are called and she imparts training to them.

She is a female leader of the village. She and her husband work as a team. They belong to the Vaishya caste. A capable organizer, she has been trained as a Resource Person for Stree Shakti for Mulbagal taluk by the Women and Child Development Department. She said that she had started the Stree Shakti SHG group in the village two years ago. There are 20 members in her group. Of them, two are Vokkaligas and the remaining SCs. Six months after starting the Stree Shakti Sangha, the government of Karnataka gave them ₹5,000 as a revolving fund. Her Stree Shakti group gives loans to its members. With this, they go into sheep rearing or sericulture or other small businesses. They make handicrafts, dolls and woollen items. A film has been made on their activities. They also engage in small-scale entrepreneurship. For instance, they bought baskets (chadrangi) used to rear silkworm and rented them out to silk workers.

Sita Devi has also worked as a Cluster Co-ordinator of DANIDA to raise awareness of cleanliness and motivate people to pay their water tax and build toilets. She is a Director on the EC of Sujala. She is an arch rival of Gopal and was very critical of him. She said that she was instrumental in opening a Thirumala Milk Centre in the village after funds were misappropriated by the KMF Milk Dairy, run by Gopal.

There are two Swashakti SHGs as well in the village. Swashakti is a World Bank-aided programme. It is an older project, having been started in the village 15 years ago, whereas Stree Shakti is a relatively new project.

Finally, there is the Village Forest Committee (VFC), which has nine members. Manjunath is the President. According to Sita Devi, ‘there is a VFC in the village and I am a member. However, it is not doing any work. It is a namesake (naam ke vaasthe) Committee. There are no meetings. Every month they come and take my signature.’

There is no Water and Sanitation Committee in Hosahalli GP. I was told that due to conflict within the Committee, it was wound up and fresh elections have to be held. Hence, here the GP directly handles water and sanitation issues which, in other words, are in the hands of Gopal. However, other neighbouring GPs do have such a
Committee where it is a sub-committee of the GP. These, then, are the local organizations or CBOs in Hosahalli.

These CBOs have been set up in the villages under centrally-sponsored schemes in collaboration with the World Bank and the Government of Karnataka (GoK). The Sujala Project which gives rise to AGs, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan which gives rise to the SDMC, the Joint Forest Management Project which set up the Village Forest Committee and the Water and Sanitation Committee which was set up initially under DANIDA and later under the Rajiv Gandhi Drinking Water Mission are all centrally-sponsored schemes. Only the Stree Shakti Scheme has been set up wholly by the GoK. We will consider these schemes in greater detail in Chapter 8. Now, we will take a look at the indices of participation, equality and sustainability which the World Bank claims are the priorities of these projects.

Regarding participation, there was a complete lack of it in the AGs of the Sujala Project. When I asked a farmer why it was so, he replied, ‘We have no time to join committees. We have to go to our fields.’ The farmers said that they went directly to the President or the Secretary if there were any problems. Venkatesh, the NGO Field Office Project Manager of Sujala, admitted that the AGs were not functioning well, the reason being that, apart from the work in their individual fields, the project does not have any collective activities which would sustain their interest in the group.16 He said that once the funds are over, he feared that the EC itself may not run. The SHGs, on the other hand, are a savings group and have a revolving fund in which they have a keen interest. This will sustain them even after the project closes down. Venkataramanappa, Technical Officer in the Watershed Department, Kolar said that the government’s role was to give technical inputs to the NGOs as well as supervise the training that was imparted to the members of the CBOs. He termed the participation in the AGs as ‘sluggish’.17 He said that, altogether, it was a ‘costly affair as the CBOs disintegrated after their accounts were closed’. Thus, participation and sustainability are major problems which these CBOs face and they are most likely to shut down once the project is over and the funds dry up. A lot of money literally gets washed away.

Regarding issues of equality, it was found that Sujala’s assistance is cornered by the big landlords. Those with small holdings of half an acre of land or so do not get any help from Sujala. The SCs in the village stated that ‘we have not benefited from Sujala. It is providing only for lands close to the tank which are low-lying.’ According to the
SCs, Sujala is doing only one side of the village lands, that is, lands along the tank bed whereas they have small holdings, half to one acre, on the other side of the village. On their small plots, they grow ragi, a rain-fed crop. Three households also do share-cropping with the Vokkaligas, that is, they grow crops on Vokkaliga land and the harvest is shared on a 50:50 basis. Only three persons belonging to the SC community have taken plants from Sujala. One is Chowdappa, the relatively well-off brick-kiln owner who is an SC leader, a GP member and a follower of Gopal. Apart from him, two others, both of whom have two acres of land, have also taken plants from Sujala.

Most of the SCs are landless. As such, they rely mainly on wage labour or coolie for which they get ₹50 a day. They tend not to keep cows since they cannot take care of them, being away all day at their agricultural coolie. Only five households have cows. Interestingly, four households have 10–15 sheep. There are 10 Naik (ST) families in the village. None of them has land, they are all coolies. The SCs said that Gopal had helped them in getting 10 Ashraya houses. He had also allotted 20 houses to the SCs in Navagrama Housing Colony. However, one old woman said that only if you work in Gopal’s fields do you get help.

Most of them said that they do not belong to any sangha or CBO, though a few said that they are members of SHGs. Clearly, they were not involved in the CBOs of the village and, if they were, it was only a token membership. All castes may be represented in the CBOs but the leadership was firmly in the hands of the dominant castes, which had farmed out the posts of office-bearers amongst themselves. According to Manjunath, ‘some persons have captured the posts of President and Vice-President in all the Committees, though the incumbents of the posts are supposed to be changed periodically’.

The concept of watershed development was devised to help people who live in fragile eco-systems and to bring them out of poverty. However, the Sujala Project seems to have bettered the conditions of the landowners and done very little or nothing for the poor who are landless or have small holdings. As such, it has increased the already existing inequities in the village.

To sum up, the centrally-sponsored and World Bank-aided Sujala Project has not engendered the whole-hearted participation of the people in its CBOs. Its sustainability is suspect as once the funds dry up, as one day they must, the CBOs will cease to be. And last, it has not had an orientation towards helping the poor farmer or agriculturalist
with a small holding on the wrong side of the village to come out of the morass of poverty. Thus, equality issues remain and are likely to get exacerbated in the village.

Participation is no better in the other CBOs. There are eight members caste-wise, one President and one Secretary in the SDMC. Bhima Gowda, President of the SDMC, said that meetings are held only when the need arises. In any case, he said, the members do not attend the meetings. When required, they come and sign the register. The decisions are taken by the President, Headmaster and important persons of the village.

Regarding the VFC, we have already pointed out that it is not doing any work in the village.

Now, we may turn our attention to the GP in the village.

**The Gram Panchayat (GP)**

Hosahalli is the headquarters of the GP of the same name. The Hosahalli GP consists of 14 members, of whom four are from Hosahalli. They are H. Gopal, Muniyappa, Shantamma and Gowramma. The latter is President of the GP. The remaining 10 members come from the other villages in the GP. The reservation system is strictly followed so that all of them come from one or other of the reserved groups or from the general group. This applies also to the posts of President and vice-president. For instance, Muniyappa stated that he comes from the BCM (A) group.\(^{19}\) (see Chapter 5, n. 7).

All the four GP members of Hosahalli were said to be ‘unanimously elected’. In my earlier study, I have pointed out that when the phrase ‘unanimously elected’ is used, it has to be viewed with some amount of scepticism. It invariably means that there has been no election, rather ‘selection’ has taken place by a dominant individual or group (Chandrashekhara 2008). This applies to Hosahalli as well. In this case, the dominant individual was the above-mentioned GP member and President of Sujala, H. Gopal. According to Bhima Gowda, critic of Gopal, there would have been at least two or three other contenders for GP membership, if they had been allowed to stand. All four GP members were, in fact, Gopal’s yes-men (and women), whom he had handpicked for the posts and who willingly did his bidding.

According to the GP Secretary, the GP takes care of roads, drains, streetlights, housing schemes such as the Ashraya, Indira Awas and Ambedkar schemes, water and sanitation and the Sampurna Grameen...
Rojgar Yojana (SGRY). Its total income is about ₹5 lakh per annum, mostly in tied funds. At the same time, the state is deducting ₹2,75,000 as electricity charges!

The GP has got the Swachcha Grama Scheme and the Navagrama Housing Scheme. It also takes care of the water connections as Hosahalli does not have a separate Water Committee, unlike the other GPs.

Under the Swachcha Grama Scheme, the roads, especially the rectangular road in the centre of the village, have been made concrete roads, toilets have been constructed and drains have been made. Under the Navagrama Housing Scheme, 104 houses have been built in an area adjoining the village. The new extension covers six acres. The land was acquired by the GP at the rate of ₹50,000 per acre.

Thus, the GP has limited resources and limited functions. The CBOs in the village, as mentioned above, have appropriated many of the functions of the statutory Panchayat. Moreover, they get handsome resources directly from their district units.

These CBOs, though performing functions which have been devolved to Panchayats under the 73rd Amendment, work independently of the Panchayat. They do not maintain any relationship with the body of elected representatives. Sujala has nothing to do with the GP, leave alone being accountable to it. The funds come straight to the Sujala Executive Committee. Not even the ‘entry point’ activities, costing ₹1 lakh, which the GP is supposed to do, according to the Sujala manual, have been done by it.

However, GP members are members of these CBOs. There is one GP member in each of the farmer’s AGs. There are two GP members in the EC. One is Gopal who, as we pointed out, is also President of the Sujala EC. Thus, GP members have been co-opted into these CBOs. Perhaps the belief is that by co-opting GP members into the CBO and thus according them token membership, the CBO will gain a measure of legitimacy in the eyes of the villagers and the government.

Similarly, the Stree Shakti group led by Sita Devi has nothing to do with the GP. She candidly stated that ‘we have no connection with the GP. However, we call them (the elected members) for our functions.’

Thus, there is no accountability or even relationship with the body of elected representatives. Adding insult to injury, the CBOs go one step further and regard themselves as rivals of the statutory Panchayat. This became evident in the case of Stree Shakti when its leader Sita Devi
told me that the village ration shop set up under the Public Distribution System (PDS) should be with Stree Shakti, instead of with the GP. She informed me that a government order had been passed giving it to Stree Shakti, but it had not yet been implemented in Kolar. Similarly, she said that the electricity charges were also to be collected through Stree Shakti with 20 per cent commission through a government order, but this also had not been implemented so far in Kolar. Apparently, in an effort to encourage the women’s empowerment scheme, the government has sent out wrong signals regarding some of the functions, which, however, ought to be routinely performed by the GP.

Not only have the CBOs overwhelmed the GP but the latter is completely dominated by one individual, Gopal. One of my informants told me that the GP President was only a rubber stamp. One GP member said that ‘without Gopal, there is no meeting’. Gopal was GP President from 1995–2001 and has not relinquished control of the Panchayat since then. Presidents may come and go but he is the de facto head of the Panchayat. We have already pointed out that the GP schemes such as Swachcha Grama Yojana and Navagrama Housing Scheme were brought into the village through the initiative of Gopal and are controlled by him. The selection of beneficiaries is done by him in consultation with the MLA.

The questions to be asked are: Would the leaders of the various CBOs have been able to exercise so much clout had they been mere farmers? Do not the emoluments which flow directly to these CBOs, which are not inconsiderable, buttress their position in the village vis-a-vis the GP? Have not these committees helped create very powerful individuals in the village with a lot of money power, to whom the others in the village are subservient? In fact, it was observed that the conflict between the leaders of these CBOs was largely over money matters, that is, over the proceeds that came into the coffers of the various CBOs.

Thus, the GP has been rendered completely ineffective. The institution of the Gram Sabha is also not taken seriously. According to Krishna Reddy, Vice President of Sujala Executive Committee, ‘the Gram Sabha is not being held’. In local parlance, interestingly culled from Deccani Hindi, it is a naam-ke-vaasthe institution. Important decisions regarding the village are taken by H. Gopal and the ‘elders’ headed by Somashekhara Shetty.

Gopal is proactive with regard to his loyalists and is known to sideline his detractors when it comes to benefits from the GP, Sujala
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and other schemes. His man Muniyappa, also a GP member, looks after the PDS in the village, that is, he has the license to run the village ration shop. Shantamma, SC member of the GP is Chowdappa’s wife, another of Gopal’s men. Chowdappa is a prosperous man compared to the other SCs. He has four acres of land and two borewells. He has a brick-kiln, where I met him firing bricks. His son has the cable network business in the village. On the other hand, people who do not kowtow to Gopal find themselves sidelined in the matter of obtaining benefits from the various schemes.

From the above, it is clear that the landowning individuals from the dominant caste in the village have farmed out the CBOs amongst themselves. They stand to gain immensely from the money that comes directly to these parallel bodies, which they control. Without these schemes, they would have been mere farmers, albeit having somewhat larger holdings as compared to the others and enjoying a higher status but little else. Now, the stakes are high and there is rivalry among them to corner the schemes, all of which (except the micro-credit savings scheme of Stree Shakti) are centrally-sponsored. The most powerful gets the biggest scheme and perhaps a few other schemes as well. In this village, the savvy H. Gopal had not only the huge Sujala Scheme in his kitty but other schemes as well such as the Swachcha Grama Yojana, the Navagrama Housing Scheme, etc. He was trying to obtain the Jala Samvardhane Yojana or Tank Rehabilitation Scheme for the village at the time of the fieldwork. He also had complete control of the GP. The other notables have to make do with the lesser schemes. But they have all benefited monetarily from the centrally-sponsored and externally-funded projects that have come into the village.

The implications of the advent of CBOs into the village are not difficult to comprehend. By increasing the money power of the dominant caste, it inevitably increases the hold of this caste on the village. Second, the dominant individual gains a paramount status in the village and his patronage can make or mar one’s wellbeing. Third, the GP perforce has to succumb to the power of this individual or group and becomes a handmaiden for the designs of the powerful. The institution of the GP is completely sunk by the CBOs that surround it.

It need not be this way. It must be ensured that the GP members, who are elected representatives of the people, be given their rightful place in the village institutional structure. The positions of President and Vice-president must be respected and upheld. All other local
organizations or CBOs must be organically linked to the GP and function through it. The funds for the various schemes should come to the GP and be disbursed by it. The other local organizations should acknowledge the supremacy of the body of elected representatives that forms the GP and be made accountable to it.

Hosahalli may be an extreme example of the sinking of a GP. The author has come across GPs in Karnataka which have been able to hold their own in the institutional landscape of the village. But this case does bring out the odds that are stacked against the GPs in Karnataka, particularly due to the presence of CBOs.

To sum up, Panchayat Raj in Karnataka has been characterized by ups and downs or a forward and backward syndrome. It has not been able to reach its logical conclusion of empowering the local people and strengthening democracy. At only one point in its career, that is, during the chief ministership of Ramakrishna Hegde, was it politically driven. The Mandal Panchayats set up at that time were a good example of district government. But the experiment was short-lived. Since then, there appears to have been a regression. The bureaucracy has gained an upper hand over the elected representatives of the local bodies. The MLAs across all parties seem to be ranged against Panchayat Raj. But perhaps the biggest threat to Panchayat Raj comes from the parallel bodies set up by the centre and the state in collaboration with the World Bank and other multilateral and bilateral institutions. The CBOs profess to be apolitical and do not look in the direction of the body of elected representatives. There is no relationship with them, leave alone accountability. They receive funds directly from their district and state offices and have no use for the statutory Panchayat.

The advent of CBOs in the village has created a category of leaders who have a vested interest in them. It has increased the money power and clout of these leaders. There is increased conflict between the leaders themselves over the gains from the various schemes. The people have become more subservient to these leaders, who largely belong to the dominant caste, than ever before.

The GP is the only institution which has a rotating leadership based on the reservation system. Members of the Backward Castes and SCs and STs as well as women get an opportunity to head the GP. A strong Panchayat Raj system would have brought about greater equality in both caste and gender. However, at present, the experience is not a good one. The GP is starved of funds and a lot of its money
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goes towards payment of its electricity bills. Very few functions are performed by it. Most of the functions, particularly developmental ones, have been appropriated by the CBOs. With the power and money available to the leaders of the CBOs, the GP President finds himself/herself functioning as a rubber stamp. He/she has to give in to the will of these leaders. This results in the almost complete demise of the institution of the GP.

Notes

1. However, Chief Minister Deveraj Urs, in the 1970s, did attempt to bring the backward castes and minorities together politically, thus challenging the might of the dominant castes. He was successful but his success was short-lived. After his death, the dominant castes of Lingayat and Vokkaliga bounced back to take over the reins of power, during the chief ministership of Gundu Rao. Urs policies had been too moderate to bring about structural change. According to Lalita Nataraj, ‘What appears to us is that Urs’s policies did little to alter the basic equation in land relations. The Land Reform Act which he brought in, progressive though it was, did not touch the landless agricultural labourers. By implication, it did not touch Harijans’ (see Nataraj and Nataraj 1984: 52).

2. Interview with H. P. Chelvaraj, Member, Bangalore Rural District ZP, 19 April 2006. Chelvaraj got so worked up during the interview, at the predicament of a ZP member today, that when I asked him at the end of the interview what his future plans were, he replied testily, ‘Hanging from the nearest tree!’

3. A. Indira points out three main weaknesses in the GP finances in Karnataka. These are (i) the major share of the monies allocated is spent on salaries; (ii) there is a multiplicity of schemes, which overlap with each other — these cannot be pooled for obvious reasons and therefore serve only a limited purpose; and (iii) there is no discretion about the spending as the expenditure is clearly demarcated, and local changes cannot be made as per local requirements. See Indira (2004); see also Rao (2001). Rao points out that after deducting the cost of electricity at source by the state government, very little is available for actual spending by local bodies (2001: 22).

4. Union Panchayat Raj Minister Mani Shankar Aiyar’s commitment to decentralization is well known. However, he can only make suggestions as local government is a state subject. He had suggested that the terms of the Presidents and other office-bearers of the Panchayats should be increased from 20 months to five years. See ‘20-month Term Too Short for Panchayat Chiefs’ (The Hindu 2005f; see also the Editorial, The Hindu 2005e). This suggestion has not yet been acted upon.

5. A beginning has been made in this direction. ‘Activity mapping’, or the unbundling of subjects into smaller units of work and thereafter assigning them to the different levels of government under the principle of subsidiarity (by which an authority should perform only those tasks which cannot be performed at a more local level), is a process of functional devolution which has been put forward and discussed in two national committee reports, namely the Mani
Shankar Aiyar Committee Report 2004 (A Compendium of Resolutions of the Seven Round Tables of Ministers in Charge of Panchayati Raj, July–December 2004) and the Veerappa Moily Committee Report 2007 (Second Administrative Reforms Commission — Sixth Report. Local Governance). However, to what extent ‘activity mapping’ has indeed been successfully implemented has yet to be ascertained.

6. Chiranjeev Singh mentioned to this author that he had signed the government order devolving the 29 subjects to local government on 16 October 2004. ‘I knew there would be strong opposition so I took personal responsibility for seeing the GO through,’ he said. Interview, 15 July 2008.

7. The names of the village and the leaders of the CBOs have been changed in order to protect their identity.

8. This is a rough estimate of the number of households by caste in the village as told to me by the villagers and the GP Secretary.

9. This, again, is a rough estimate of the number of landholders as told to me by the villagers.


11. There is a traditional ‘Village Panchayat’ in Hosahalli led by one Somashekhara Shetty, apart from the statutory Village Panchayat. This Panchayat consists of 10 ‘elders’ of the village and includes all the major castes in the village such as Vokkaligas, Banajigas, Vaishyas, Brahmans and SCs. They sit together to hear complaints and settle disputes regarding marriage, land issues, etc. They also decide on the dates to celebrate the various festivals in the village. Interview with Somashekhara Shetty, 19 December 2004.

12. Interview with Krishna Reddy, 13 December 2004


15. Interview with Manjunath, 11 December 2004


18. Interview with Chowdappa, 5 January 2005.


21. Just as the CBOs are carved out and dispersed among the elite landowners, so too are the political parties. Four political parties are represented in the village — the JD (S), Congress, BJP and Janata Dal (United) (JD [U]). Membership in these parties is fluid, with leaders changing parties depending on which way the wind blows at the district and state levels.
PARALLEL BODIES

In the last chapter, we had a glimpse of parallel bodies as they operate at the village level. In this chapter, we will examine the concept of parallel bodies and the manner in which they impede the functioning of Panchayat Raj in the country.

The parallel bodies that we refer to in this study are the numerous societies and agencies which have been set up by the central government. They are a relatively new phenomenon, having been formed in the years after Independence and particularly after the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution came into force. They have largely come into existence through executive fiat such as notices in the government gazette or government ordinances. Mathew defines a parallel body as ‘any formal structure which reduces the full capacity of Panchayati Raj Institutions directly or indirectly’.1 According to Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), ‘the term parallel body … refers to those bodies whose functional domain overlaps with that of the panchayats’ (2001: 4). PRIA first drew our attention to the existence of parallel bodies in several states such as Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala, thereby showing that the phenomenon was widespread. There have been studies of parallel bodies in West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh as well.

The DRDA is one of the early parallel bodies and was set up in the various states in the mid-1970s to develop rural areas. It has been the principal body at the district level to oversee implementation of the anti-poverty programmes of the Rural Development Ministry. Headed by the Collector or the District Magistrate, it is expected to coordinate with other departments, non-governmental organizations and financial institutions to gather support and resources. At present, only five states, namely Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal and Karnataka, have merged the DRDA with the Zilla Panchayat. In all the other states, the DRDA is functioning separately and, at present, there are 571 DRDA cells in the country (Panchayati Raj Update 2004b: 7).
Many scholars have pointed out that these bodies are unconstitutional. According to L. C. Jain,

‘Article 243N of the 73rd Amendment required the States to review and alter all existing legislation relating to subjects assigned to panchayats and nagarpalikas as per Schedule Eleventh and Twelfth within one year, to ensure that such pre-existing Acts did not impinge upon or thwart the autonomy of local self-government. But Article 243N has not been heeded by any State. And a number of State enactments, by virtue of their being inconsistent with the letter and spirit of the Amendment, continue to assail the autonomy of the panchayat raj institutions. A number of parallel bodies are functioning under these otherwise null and void enactments, some which pre-existed the Amendment and some new parallel bodies which have been set up contrary to law, after the Amendment came into force. Thus laws which have become null and void are being kept alive to thwart, if not sabotage, the working of the Constitution Amendments,’ he concludes (Jain 2003).

Now, we will examine the nature of decentralization that has taken place in the states. Decentralization in the states may be said to have occurred along a spectrum with PRIs taking precedence at one end of the spectrum as in Kerala and West Bengal and with parallel bodies such as CBOs enjoying the upper hand at the other end of the spectrum as in Andhra Pradesh. While both these institutional frameworks are needed to carry decentralization forward, it is important to understand the relationship between them and to clearly spell out their activities and their spheres of influence so that they do not work at cross purposes with one another.

At the beginning itself it may be pointed out that this research takes the stand that PRIs and CBOs cannot be placed on par with one another. As a body of elected representatives, PRIs have the mandate of the people and have to be given precedence. If development occurs without taking them into confidence and making them the ultimate decision-making body, the people on the whole are likely to be left out of the process of development. This will sooner or later manifest itself in a negative verdict at the polls as happened in Andhra Pradesh with the government of erstwhile Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu.

Below, we will examine the kind of decentralization that has taken place at the two ends of the spectrum, namely Kerala and Andhra Pradesh. We will find that, by and large, in the former case, the Panchayat is at the centre of planning and development and the
other local bodies are organically linked to it. In the latter case, the CBOs bypass the Panchayat and even take precedence over it and hence may be regarded as parallel bodies *par excellence*.

### The Kerala Example

Decentralization in Kerala has been hailed as a path-breaking movement and has been appreciated worldwide. According to Isaac and Franke, it is ‘one of the most radical of its kind and conveys important lessons for the worldwide struggle for democratization’ (2000). It was an extremely ambitious programme, seen in the fact that the state government devolved 40 per cent of the state exchequer to PRIs. Money for planning and development was no longer a problem as it is in many states. Another feature of decentralization in Kerala is that the GP was given a central place in the decentralization programme, rather than the other tiers of Panchayat Raj.

Decentralization was a pet project of E. M. S. Namboodiripad. When the Communist Party came to power in 1957, E. M. S. tried to usher in Panchayat Raj but his efforts were short-lived with a change in government. In 1967, a second ministry led by E. M. S. again sought to introduce Panchayat Raj bills, but to no avail (Sharma 2003). It was the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments which gave a fillip to Panchayat Raj in Kerala. The Kerala Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 was passed when the United Democratic Front (UDF) government was in power and it gave substantial powers and functions to the GP. It was in this scenario that the People's Planning Campaign was launched in 1996 by the LDF government when it came to power.

To bring about decentralization in the state through planning was indeed an innovative and bold idea. It required tremendous mobilization skills which the left parties apparently felt they had garnered through their previous successful campaigns in land reform and literacy. According to Lieten, ‘the policies of the E. M. S. government, specifically the land reforms and the educational reforms, have played a major role in creating the enabling environment’ (2002: 1541). Unlike other states, where Panchayat Raj and other people-oriented programmes were largely rhetorical in nature, in Kerala the government meant business. This is seen from the elaborate stages that the planning process went through in its new decentralized avatar.

Interestingly, the people’s campaign began where it should, at the bottom, that is, at the level of the Gram Sabha. The first step was
mobilization of people in the Gram Sabha. An awareness of the institution of Gram Sabha was made by organizing ‘Janadhikara Kalajathas’ or theatrical processions on the theme of power to the people (Sharma 2003: 3836). Subsequently, Gram Sabhas were set to work — to meet and discuss developmental problems in the ward. In order to facilitate open discussion by ordinary people, the Sabha was divided into small groups where people could have their say without feeling intimidated by a large audience. This resulted in an identification of needs by the Gram Sabha in the various sectors.

Many more steps were to follow such as collection of data from the local offices and integration of this data into printed development reports. These were discussed in a Panchayat-level meeting of about 250–300 people known as development seminars. Next, task forces in each sector were formed with a member of the Panchayat heading one or other of these task forces. Each task force was expected to prepare projects, from which the Panchayat selected those to be included in the annual plan. Next, the annual Plan had to be placed before the Gram Sabha as also the list of beneficiaries. After obtaining its approval, the Plan was sent to a Block-level Expert Committee (BLEC) consisting of retired and serving officials for vetting the projects and granting technical sanction. Once this was done, it was sent to the DPC for approval. After this stage, the implementation of the Plan began. The implementation was done by Beneficiary Committees drawn from the Gram Sabha (John and Chathukulam 2002).

In this massive exercise of planning, a large number of people took part and a large number of groups were formed. The genius of Keralites for forming associations has been remarked on by a few scholars. Perhaps this goes back to the experience they gained in the earlier campaigns for land reform and literacy as well as their high rating on the human development index, especially in the fields of education and health. Whatever be the reason, there is no doubt that lakhs of people came together in one group or another to actualize the Plan campaign. That some of these groups are parallel to PRIs is the critique of some scholars. Below, we will take a look at some of these groups and whether they deserve to bear the epithet of parallel structures.

The GP has a number of support groups which brings it close to the people and helps it in discharging its functions. Some of these groups are Ward Development Committees, Neighbourhood Groups (NHGs) and even Family Groups as well as SHGs. Each Panchayat has 12–15
wards and each ward has 15–20 NHGs or ayalkootam consisting of 40–50 households. Finally, there are ‘family clubs’ consisting of about 10 neighbouring families within the NHG (2003). There are also SHGs of women within the NHG.

The Family Clubs help to promote ‘mutual help, co-operation and collective action among member families’ (Sharma 2003: 3843). The NHGs serve as information outlets regarding panchayat development projects. They play a decisive role in the selection of beneficiaries, and benefits of the various programmes were distributed through the NHGs (ibid.). They also help to resolve neighbourhood conflicts which would otherwise have gone to the courts (John and Chathukulam 2002: 1942). Thus, they reduce the burden of the local Panchayat member in local dispute management.

Each NHG also has a number of SHGs consisting of women members. In Chempu Panchayat, studied by John and Chathukulam, the number of members in an SHG ranged from 9 to 27 with an average of 16 (2002: 1945). They point out that 66 per cent of the female population (over 18 years of age and under 70 years) in Chempu was covered by membership of SHGs totalling 210. Also, that 77 per cent of the membership comes from below the poverty line. All the SHGs were registered with the Panchayat.

The SHGs serve as micro-credit institutions for their members. The average weekly contribution of a member in Chempu was ₹11. The money collected in an SHG was deposited in banks and was then taken out and given as loans to the members. In addition, the SHGs received grants from the Panchayats.

But the SHGs did not serve merely as micro-credit groups. With the seed money collected by them, the members started numerous ventures such as sale of household provisions, coir making, fish vending, preparation of papad, sale of dry fish, making of sweets, manufacture of curry powder, ready-made garments, sale of choir products, sale of prawn, mat sale, soap manufacturing, rice selling, vegetable production, tailoring, curd manufacture and sale, pickle manufacture, etc. (John and Chathukulam 2002: 1947, n. 9). Most importantly, these goods find a ready market amongst the local population.

The SHGs are also a forum for discussing local problems and issues which would be of interest to women, such as their children’s education, the immunization programme, panchayat schemes, etc. (John and Chathukulam 2002: 1945). Thus, unlike in other states where SHGs are merely micro-credit groups, here they take on many more functions which help in the empowerment of women.
John and Chathukulam point out that there has been a proliferation of SHGs since 1998. They attribute the spectacular rise in the formation of SHGs to the fact that from 1998–99 onwards, 10 per cent of the Panchayat funds was set aside for women (2002: 1945). They state that ‘the panchayat has been the motivating factor in the formation of these self-help groups’ (2002). They further state, ‘Unlike in other parts of the country, where non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been in the forefront of SHG formation, in Kerala, the intervening role of the Gram Panchayat, and to a lesser extent, Block Panchayat members, has been the major factor accounting for the rise of these groups on an extensive scale’ (ibid.: 1945).

The Ward Development Committee (WDC) is a very important body in the Panchayat Raj system in Kerala. As mentioned earlier, each GP has 10–15 wards in it. John and Chathukulam say that it is ‘perhaps the most powerful and prestigious body that has come into place following the plan campaign’ (2002: 1946). It is composed of two elected representatives, one male and the other female, from each of the NHGs in the ward. The President of the WDC is the Panchayat member from that ward and a Secretary or Convenor is elected from among the members. The selection of beneficiaries is done by the ward and is then forwarded to the GP and approved by the Gram Sabha. John and Chathukulam are somewhat wary of the WDC and say that ‘the rise of WDCs as powerful institutions has led to eroding the status of the panchayat as a local government’ (ibid.). However, it must be borne in mind that the WDC and the Panchayat are organically linked and it is the Panchayat which holds the purse strings.

This is in strong contrast to the SHGs and CBOs in Karnataka which are parallel to the PRIs. Moreover, these parallel bodies hold centrestage and the Panchayat is oriented towards helping and supporting them instead of the other way around, as we will see in Chapter 6.

Thus we see that PRIs in Kerala, particularly the GPs, have had a central role in the People’s Plan and in developmental activities in Kerala. All the groups mentioned above are organically linked to the Panchayat. The rise of social capital in this state has been phenomenal and yet it has not been accompanied by a delinking from PRIs. There has not been a concomitant depoliticization of society, as mentioned by Harriss, regarding the social capital encouraged by the World Bank (2001). Rather, this social capital at the grassroots has been firmly yoked to PRIs which are essentially political in nature. This has ensured that the peoples’ wishes and desires are articulated in the body politic.
It has resulted in social capital being put to use to enhance the lives of the ordinary people, especially the poor.

However, Kerala is not entirely devoid of parallel bodies. There are two committees which have come in for criticism as parallel bodies. These are the Block-level Expert Committee (BLEC) and the District Planning Committee (DPC), which we will examine below.

After the GP has formulated its Plan with the help of its task forces and the Plan has been approved by the Gram Sabha, it is placed before an Expert Committee. These committees were set up at the block, district and state levels and consist mainly of volunteers who are ‘retired officials, officials in service and non-official experts’ (PRIA 2001b: 14). The District Collector is the head of these committees. At the block level, ‘it was a rather large committee with as many as 80 members’ (ibid.). The Committee, for greater effectiveness, is subdivided into a number of sub-committees. Projects are first scrutinized by the sub-committees before they are either given technical sanction or are rejected by the Expert Committee at the block level. The district- and state-level committees perform similar functions at their levels.

The functions of the BLEC are two-fold: (i) scrutinize the Plan documents submitted by the GPs from the technical point of view and advise the DPC of the feasibility of the various project proposals. The DPC takes the final decision. Funds are given to Panchayats only for those projects approved by the DPC; (ii) provide guidance to the Panchayats in technical matters in the formulation of their projects. The standing committees of the Panchayat do not have the expertise to assess the technical feasibility of their projects. Here, the Expert Committee comes in to assess this technical feasibility.

While this arrangement looks alright on paper, PRIA points out that in practice, there are a number of difficulties. In its study of parallel bodies, it found that 65 per cent of the respondents gave a negative answer regarding the performance of these expert bodies. PRIA mentions the following problems: (i) they were exerting an extra-constitutional influence; (ii) political discrimination was practised; (iii) the BLEC members do not visit the site and are ignorant of the local situation; and (iv) the expert committees do not have adequate expertise, but they exploit the technical ignorance of the elected members. Thus, ‘serious objections and fears have been expressed by a large section of the panchayat members, that these
parallel committees are usurping the powers of the panchayats’ (PRIA 2001b: 15). PRIA states,

under the guise of technical feasibility, the decision-making power of the panchayats has been mortgaged to the parallel bodies, which follow a rather technocratic-bureaucratic approach and without adequate field study and consultation with the members of the local bodies, either make drastic alterations in the projects or reject them completely (ibid.: 16).

As mentioned above, the District Collector is the head of the Committee.

The second parallel body, as mentioned above, is the DPC. According to T. R. Raghunandan, Secretary, Government of India,

In many of the states, the DPC is emerging as the fourth tier of local government. In fact, it is becoming another centre of power. This is the case with Kerala. Every plan has to be sanctioned and approved by the DPC. And the Collector is the co-Chairman of the DPC. So, the DPC is an insidious mechanism by which the Collector gets a commanding role. The whole thing is stage-managed. It is not decentralized planning but decentralized petitioning. People submit their petitions. Eventually, who gives the clearance is a well-guarded secret; it goes all the way up to the DPC. The politics of patronage is very high in the DPC.3

Thus, the Expert Committees and the DPCs in Kerala are mechanisms by which the planning process, which is painstakingly undertaken by the elected representatives, may be unceremoniously set aside by bureaucratic-technocratic officialdom.

However, all said and done, Panchayat Raj in Kerala is functioning much better than it is in many of the other states and it has empowered the local citizenry. It is not surprising that it was a Panchayat in Kerala, namely the Perumatty Panchayat, which stood up to the multinational giant Coca-Cola, refused to renew its license for its Plachimada plant and finally had the plant shut down. Thus, Kerala may be regarded as at one end of the spectrum where parallel bodies are concerned, in that the numerous bodies recently set up are not parallel but are organically linked to the GP which is the central institution at the local level, with the possible exception of the Expert Committee and the DPC.

We may now take a look at Andhra Pradesh, which I submit is at the other end of the spectrum, in that the whole system of CBOs became parallel to the Panchayat under the Janmabhoomi programme.
The Case of Andhra Pradesh

Andhra Pradesh, under the chief ministership of Chandrababu Naidu, put in place the Janmabhoomi programme, under which development works, which should have come under the purview of the Panchayats, were instead done by Janmabhoomi. Inspired by a South Korean programme called Saemoul Undong and a Malaysian programme called Bhoomiputra, the Janmabhoomi programme had a structure parallel to the Panchayats, which we will examine below.

At the village level was the Habitation Level Committee, which was the basic unit of the programme. The 28,245 villages of the state were divided into 67,505 habitations (Reddy 2002: 874). This unit is thus smaller than the village itself. Janmabhoomi conducted its own Gram Sabha, which consisted of the adult population in a habitation. The members of the Habitation Level Committee consisted of the leaders of the various CBOs, such as the SHGs, NGOs, the Watershed Committee, Users’ Associations, Women’s Thrift Groups set up under DWACRA (Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas), CMEY (Chief Minister’s Empowerment of Youth), etc. These groups consisted of nominated members or, at best, members elected from a very small electoral base, unlike the elected representatives of the panchayat. But the Panchayat was not entirely forgotten. The member of the GP for the concerned Habitation Level Committee was also a member of this Committee, a feature that is found in Karnataka as well. Needless to say, these individuals, plucked as they were from the Panchayat, had a nominal role to play in the Habitation Level Committee (ibid.: 878).

At the mandal level of the Janmabhoomi programme was the Mandal Nodal Committee headed by the Nodal Officer, an important government functionary in the Janmabhoomi programme. There were 1,100 nodal officers to run the programme in 1,125 mandals in the 23 districts. This body may be regarded as parallel to the Mandal Parishad of the Panchayat Raj system and was a central institution in the Janmabhoomi programme. Above the Mandal Nodal Committee was the Janmabhoomi District-level Committee which was parallel to the ZP of the Panchayat institutions. This Committee was headed by the District Collector. The state-level committee was headed by the Chief Minister. These committees had no links with PRIs. Thus, there was an unabashed replication of parallel structures to PRIs which has not taken place to this extent in any other state.
Interestingly, the all-important government line departments were connected to the Janmabhoomi institutions and not to the Panchayat institutions. Thus, the Panchayats were isolated from both the government line departments and the CBOs. The chain of command did not include the PRIs at any point. The sidelining of the PRIs was systemic and complete.

On the other hand, the Janmabhoomi Nodal Officer at the mandal level wielded a lot of power. A bureaucrat, he was appointed and answerable to the Collector who, in turn, reported to the Chief Minister. The structure of the Janmabhoomi programme was dominated by bureaucrats and NGOs, and there was practically no room for the elected representative, except in a very cursory manner as a co-opted member. Moreover, they were not answerable to any of the PRIs, such as the Mandal Panchayat or the ZP. Unlike the Kerala case, where the neighbourhood and other groups were organically linked to the Panchayat, here there was a parallel structure par excellence which completely bypassed the Panchayats.

Next, we will see the works undertaken by the Janmabhoomi programme and the funding provided for these works.

The works taken up by Janmabhoomi included construction and whitewashing of school buildings, cleaning streets, laying down of roads, sanitation, enrolling children into schools, holding free medical aid camps, immunization of children, chlorination of drinking water, desilting of tanks, watershed programmes, etc. (Reddy 2002: 876). These works look suspiciously like those which ought to be performed by the PRIs and were accorded to the local government by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. But, in Andhra Pradesh, they were performed by Janmabhoomi. In fact, Janmabhoomi claimed to be a 'government at the doorsteps' (Prajala Vadaku Palana) in which public officials came to the people and attended to their problems.

Regarding the funding of these works, no separate funding was allocated to the Janmabhoomi programme. Instead, central funds allocated for rural development under the Jawahar Rojgar Yojana (JRY) and other programmes, which should have gone to PRIs, were now diverted to the Janmabhoomi. According to Reddy, ‘Many centrally-funded rural development programmes have become inactive during this period, if not shelved’ (2002: 877). In addition to this, the World Bank preferred to give its loans to Janmabhoomi. Reddy continues, ‘The World Bank encourages its loan amounts to be spent through Janmabhoomi and other related programmes rather than local panchayat institutions, as it permits the State government to entrust the work to stakeholders such as Self-Help Groups, Water Users’ Associations, Village Education Committees, etc.’ (ibid.). Under the Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Project (APERP), the World Bank has granted ₹2,200 crore to the state for different sectors such as primary education, primary health, rural roads, irrigation, nutrition and child health and public enterprise reforms (ibid.: 873; see also Harshe and Srinivas 2000: 1889). The result was that while the Panchayat funds were meagre and dwindling, the CBOs were flush with funds. According to Mr Jangaiah, a Sarpanch of a GP in Nalgonda district, his Panchayat got ₹13,000 (Sainath 2004b). On the other hand, reports Sainath, ‘The funds poured into the committees (read CBOs) by the Government and its foreign donors ran to millions of rupees, in many cases.’ It is no wonder that the density of these parallel bodies in Andhra Pradesh was very high compared to other states and that control of these committees or parallel bodies was intense. For example, in one GP in Nalgonda, ‘elections’ to the ‘mother’s committee’ were
postponed four times as rival groups clashed. That the electorate was a small group of people is seen from the fact that the total electorate for this poll did not exceed 55 (ibid.).

The funds were disbursed from the Chief Minister’s office to the Collector, head of the District-level Committee, and on to the mandal revenue officer in the Mandal-level Committee and to the habitation level officer in the Habitation Level Committee. They completely bypassed the Panchayats. As such, as mentioned above, the Panchayats were starved of funds. It is not surprising that the attendance at the parallel Gram Sabhas conducted by Janmabhoomi was very high, especially in the first few rounds when there was a lot of enthusiasm for the programme, while hardly anyone attended the Gram Sabha of the PRIs, if indeed it was conducted at all. ‘In practice,’ says Chandra Mohan Reddy, a Sarpanch (Chairman) in Mahbubnagar, ‘a huge parallel structure emerged. One that simply bypassed the people and crippled Panchayati Raj in this State’ (Sainath 2004b). Explains Reddy, ‘the parallel setup led to a sharp centralization of power (2002). New committees came up at the village level that were not elected by the people as a whole. Only by small groups with vested interests ... not a single one of these was answerable to the panchayat. They were run by small cabals, each with a chairman who could control them. But the funds went to them. Not to the elected panchayats who lost all decision-making powers (Sainath 2004b).

Manor terms it as a ‘potentially damaging second wave of decen-

The Janmabhoomi programme represented a de-politicization of development just as it represented an enhanced bureaucratization and NGO-ization of development. For, under the programme, the representative body of PRIs was rudely brushed aside and sidelined. At the same time, a number of CBOs came into existence. These consisted of SHGs, Village Education Committees, Health Committees, Vana Samrakshana Samitis or Village Forestry Committees, Water Users' Associations, DWACRA or thrift groups of women, CMEY, etc. Indeed, Janmabhoomi envisaged collaboration between the state government and stakeholders, who constitute various CBOs, SHGs and NGOs.4 There was no place in its scheme of things for local representative institutions like Panchayats. The devaluation of the political and highlighting of the technocratic approach is evident in
Naidu proclaiming that politics and development do not go together. Hence, Naidu often proclaimed himself to be the CEO of the state.

That the changes initiated by the Chandrababu Naidu regime backfired on it is seen in the ouster of that regime, lock stock and barrel, in the 2004 Assembly elections. The setting up of the Janmabhoomi programme and the consequent total sidelining of Panchayats was not taken well by the people. According to Sainath, ‘Chandrababu Naidu’s “vision” of Andhra Pradesh endeared him to donors, corporates and the media. It distanced him from ordinary people’ (2004a).

A post-poll survey conducted by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi, showed that ‘over half of our sample of voters in the Assembly elections thought that the economic policies of the Chandrababu Naidu Government had only benefited the rich … A sense that gains from the World Bank loans and economic restructuring were not being properly shared, or used for the benefit of the State is apparent’ (Yadav et al. 2004). Apparently, Naidu and his government were not in touch with the mood of the electorate and this may possibly have been due to his not heeding the local elected representatives.

The Other States

While the other states of the Union may not have developed a system of parallel bodies as in Andhra Pradesh, nevertheless they do have their share of parallel bodies which are performing the functions which should be done with the cognizance of and under the supervision and control of the Panchayats. Hence, they fall within the spectrum of states having Panchayat Raj at one end as in Kerala and parallel bodies as in Andhra Pradesh at the other. PRIA has brought to light some of these parallel bodies in the different states.

In Haryana, there is the Gram Vikas Samiti (GVS), which is a parallel body created ostensibly to increase the efficiency of the developmental work at the village level. PRIA points out that the funds for this work go directly to the GVS and not to the Panchayat. Moreover, the sanction of either the BDO or the Panchayat President is not required for doing the work. In such a situation, the GVS has more clout than the statutory Panchayat.

Inevitably, there is a scramble to get membership of the GVS. This creates divisions and discord in the Panchayat, as those who are left out of the GVS are resentful. But, perhaps most shocking of all is
that the funds which accrue to the GVS are distributed by the Chief Minister in a ceremony called ‘Sarkar Apke Dwar’ (government at your doorstep). The CM has the discretion to choose the villages he wishes to bestow the funds on and these may follow his political affiliations. In other words, the GVS is apparently being used by the ruling party to stay in power (PRIA 2001b).

In Himachal Pradesh, the Vigilance Committee (VC) has set itself above the Panchayat and ‘considers itself superior to the panchayat and is constantly on the look out for loopholes or mistakes in the functioning of the panchayat’ (PRIA 2001b: 10). This gives the impression that the GP is accountable to the VC. A ‘utilization certificate’ has to be obtained from the VC by the Chairman of the Panchayat which is hard to come by. In some cases, Panchayat Presidents have bribed the chairperson of the VC in order to get the certificate.

In the Uttar Pradesh Sodic Lands Reclamation Project, Water Users’ Groups (WUGs) have usurped the functions of the Panchayat. According to PRIA, the WUGs have been entrusted with formulating plans related to development and management of irrigation which is the task of the Water Management Committee of the Panchayat (PRIA 2001b: 7). Similarly, construction, maintenance and management of drains, which fall under the purview of WUGs, are actually the responsibility of the Panchayat Construction Committee which is the legally authorized body to undertake all the construction work in the village. The WUGs have also been entrusted with deciding the rates of water to be charged from each member of the group.

Similarly, in Gujarat, there is the Joint Forest Management Committee (JFMC) that is carrying out the cultivation and sale of minor forest produce. It comes into conflict with the Panchayat which has the same function (PRIAb 2001). The Gujarat Panchayat Act vests the minor forest produce of the area in Village Panchayats and states that the income from sale of the produce be part of the Panchayat fund. In fact, the JFM Committees have more financial resources than the Panchayats and this is distributed among its own members. The point is that these funds could well have augmented the resources of the Panchayat, had they not been siphoned off by the JFM Committee.

Another state which has bypassed local representative democracy is Madhya Pradesh. It introduced the Gram Swaraj System in January 2001 whereby nearly all the powers exercised by the GP were transferred to the Gram Sabha consisting of all the adult members in the village. The decision-making body was now the Gram Sabha and
projects were to be overseen by committees elected by the Gram Sabha from among its members. These committees would manage the funds for all government and donor-funded development programmes.

While on the face of it, the move seems to be idealistic in terms of getting the people to directly handle their own affairs, Manor points out that most countries are cautious of resorting to such a system of direct democracy (2001). Given that Gram Sabhas hardly meet and are not taken seriously by the people here, can they operate eight Standing Committees, he asks. He concludes, ‘doubts about the Gram Sabha’s ability to cope with what may be severe overload lie behind many analysts’ preference for representative over direct democracy” (ibid.: 716).

There may have been a political motive for the change to direct democracy. The Chairmen (Sarpanch) of the GPs had become assertive and were a thorn in the flesh of the state legislators. They needed to be cut down to size. Chief Minister Digvijay Singh is said to have famously remarked, ‘I did not expect Panchayat Raj to become Sarpanch Raj.’ In the ensuing Assembly elections, however, it was Singh and his government who had to eat humble pie as they were voted out. According to Chopra, ‘the mistake cost him dearly … It appears that panchayat leaders in Madhya Pradesh used their electoral clout to press for their priorities' (2004; see also Panchayati Raj Update 2004b: 124).

West Bengal is a state which has been relatively successful in implementing Panchayat Raj, yet even this state has not been entirely free from the phenomenon of parallel bodies. Here it takes the form of the Village Development Committee (VDC) which was created by an amendment to the West Bengal Panchayat Act in 2003. The VDC is constituted from among the members of the Gram Sansad, also called Gram Sabha in the other states. According to Bandyopadhyay, there is nothing wrong in constituting a body from among the Gram Sansad members, if it merely has a supervisory role over the GP and exercises some control over it. The problem arises when this Committee takes on an executive role which constitutionally belongs to the GP. With this amendment, the VDC advises the Gram Sansad and the recommendations of the Gram Sansad are in turn binding on the GP. Thus, executive power is being transferred onto a deliberative body (Bandyopadhyay 2003: 4827).

To sum up, the above examples of parallel bodies clearly show that these bodies are widely extant in many states; they have appropriated
the functions of PRIs and have thus come in the way of this nascent institution developing in its own right. I am here not arguing that these bodies should be entirely done away with. They do have a place but their functions have to be welded in with the PRIs. It is imperative that these ‘parallel’ bodies function in the full knowledge of and with the full confidence of the PRIs, which should be placed at the apex and which should serve as the co-ordinating body of these institutions. With this change in their mode of functioning, they will lose the unseemly epithet of ‘parallel’. Rather, they will be organically linked to the PRIs.

Institutions of local government must be given a chance to deliver. It is only through trial and error and a hands-on approach that these institutions will be strengthened and will finally come into their own. It is extremely important that development in India carries the people along with it by utilizing rather than sidelining the institutions of representative democracy.

Notes

1. Personal communication with the author.
2. I am grateful to Remani Ratnakar, Ex-Councillor, Kannur Town municipality, for explaining to me the gelling of these groups with each other and with the GP.
4. The multiple Committees or CBOs set up by the Naidu regime provided political space for his party, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP). According to Powis’ study of 18 villages in Nalgonda and Prakasham districts in Andhra Pradesh, ‘It was common for village leaders to express the opinion that Chandrababu Naidu has created these committees to extend political employment for TDP cadres in the State’ (2003: 2620).
5. The TDP–BJP alliance led by Chandrababu Naidu was swept to power in 1999 when it won 192 of 294 seats in the Assembly and 36 out of 42 Lok Sabha seats. In 2004, it was shown the door by the electorate. The crushing defeat covered every region, coastal Andhra as well as Rayalaseema and Telangana. Naidu was rejected as fully in urban as in rural areas. In general, voters decimated the TDP.
5
PARASTATAL BODIES IN KARNATAKA

There has been a decline in the importance of PRIs in Karnataka, as pointed out in Chapter 3. According to C. Narayanaswamy, ex-ZP President, who has had a working experience of the problems of PRIs in Karnataka, ‘The State political and bureaucratic leadership is unwilling to hand over power to PRIs and they want to retain the patronage that goes with it.’ In an article entitled ‘Karnataka Puts the Clock Back’, Mathew points out that with the passing of the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993, the powers of officialdom have increased and the powers of the ZP President have been reduced to make him a ‘weak and titular head’ (1994: 68). Thus, the CEO of the ZP has the power to suspend the order of a GP if he considers it ‘unjust’. Similarly, the Commissioners have this power in the case of TPs and the state government in the case of ZPs.

This decline in PRIs has been accompanied by a growth of parallel and parastatal bodies in the state. Numerous Boards, Corporations and Societies have been set up here. (However, Karnataka is one of the states in which the DRDA has been merged with the ZP.) It is these that we will proceed to look at in the following chapters.

Here, we make a conceptual difference between the parallel body or Society on the one hand and the parastatal Boards and Corporations on the other. The parallel Societies have been set up by the government line departments from the state level to the village level. Thus, the line department is split, one portion being the Society which has been newly created under the Registration of Societies Act, 1860, and the other portion being the old line department. There are now two sets of bureaucracies in many of the departments, one following the new rules set up by the Society which invariably features public–private participation and the other going by the old rules pertaining to the line department. There are also new institutions which have been created at the district, taluk and village levels under the Society, which are parallel to PRIs. Examples of such institutions are the DIC, the
TIC and the CBO. Quite often, these Societies emanate from the centre itself as missions and are set in fast-track and mission-mode. This indeed seems to be the new mantra in governance, set up by the central government in accordance with its reforms. The new model in its entirety has been achieved only in a few departments so far, such as the Primary Education and Literacy Department which has set up the Society of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan. But the others are well on their way there, e.g., the Watershed Societies. These Societies and their corresponding institutions at the district, taluk and village levels will be the focus of our study in the following chapters.

In this chapter, however, we confine ourselves to parastatal bodies, namely the many Boards and Corporations. This is another kind of parallel body. However, it is simply an outgrowth or extension of the department and it functions independently of the department. As such, it does not seek to change the structure of the department from within, as with the Society. Thus, it is less ambitious than the Society, at least in the creation of new institutions at the district, taluk and village levels. For instance, the Social Welfare Department saw many of its functions take on an independent hue as parastatal bodies such as the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Corporation, Backward Classes and Minorities Corporation, etc. The Social Welfare Department itself, though now having a lesser number of functions under its wings, did not, however, undergo a structural change.

This does not mean that it is of less import than the Society. As with the Society, there is no accountability of the parastatal Board or Corporation to the local PRIs. For example, ‘the welfare of weaker sections’ is one of the 29 subjects devolved to local bodies. But, since the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Corporation is a parastatal, this vital agenda is not discussed in the ZP or any other Panchayat, for that matter.

**Parastatal Institutions**

Parastatal bodies have an older history than Societies. They were formed in the early years of the 20th century. In fact, the first such Commission was set up in 1864 in the three Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras at the instance of the Royal Sanitary Commission (Maheshwari 1984). Since then, a plethora of single-purpose agencies have been set up, such as the various Improvement Trusts in the major towns. Interestingly, the Delhi Improvement Trust was replaced in 1958 by the all-important Delhi Development Authority (DDA).
These improvement trusts were nominated bodies with a majority of civil servants on their Boards. Thus, the trend whereby bureaucrats wielded power with regard to local developmental issues goes back a long way in time.

Parastatals are thus single-purpose agencies created by Acts passed by the state legislature to fulfil certain specific functions, be they water supply, sewage works, supply and distribution of electricity, etc. Karnataka has a large number of parastatal bodies. The Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB), Karnataka Slum Clearance Board (KSCB), Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), Karnataka Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation (KSCSTDC) are only a few examples of parastatal bodies in this state. Since the initiation of the economic reforms in the 1990s, parastatals have become an easy and convenient way of bringing in ‘change’ by the bureaucracy.

The rationale for setting up these institutions was that the tasks they perform are far too technical and complex to be done by the local municipal bodies or PRIs. Moreover, they cover large populations which extend beyond the limits of a single municipality. Also, these bodies are run more efficiently by bureaucratic heads rather than by elected representatives, whose political bickering comes in the way of the smooth delivery of these vital services.

However, these so-called advantages are offset by a number of disadvantages. First and foremost, in a democracy, the overarching decision-making power should rest with the local elected representative. When technocrats or bureaucrats head a body, it has been found that they lack sensitivity to the problems of the common man or even knowledge of the conditions in which he lives. On the other hand, the elected representative of the Panchayat or municipality is well aware of the situation on the ground and, moreover, he has to be responsive to the wishes of his constituency if he is to win the next election. Thus, it is the elected body which should be the apex body which will then perform the task of co-ordination of the numerous parastatal bodies. There should be accountability of the parastatal to this apex body. If this is not so, there will be a complete sidelining of the poor, a phenomenon which is so apparent in our metropolitan cities. While posh residential colonies spring up almost overnight, the poor get a shabby deal in their slums, with little or no facilities in terms of water, electricity and toilets. In Karnataka, the mayor is a ceremonial head with one-year tenure. He commands little respect from the urban populace who know that
they have to go to the bureaucratic authority for help. Thus, the mayor is a practically invisible entity in our cities.

Even on the question of efficiency, the plea for parastatal bodies does not hold. For, it has been found that the lack of co-ordination between these parastatal bodies results in inefficiency and chaos. For example, a road will undergo repairs soon after which it will be dug up to put in cables, after which it has to be repaired again! This not only causes inconvenience to people but is a wasteful expenditure.

In this chapter, we will first take up for consideration a few of the numerous Boards and Corporations set up by the state government. We will also take a look at the Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLAD) and its equivalent in the state, namely the Karnataka Legislators’ Local Area Development Scheme (KLLADS) for state legislators. The latter two are not, strictly speaking, parallel bodies but rather parallel schemes and hence warrant discussion.

The problem of parastatal and parallel bodies was on the agenda of the Round Table Conference held in Mysore on 28 August 2004 which was attended by this author. It was presided over by the Union Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Shri Mani Shankar Aiyar. We reproduce below the following table which was presented at the Conference. It pertains to parallel and parastatal bodies in Karnataka and it has been reproduced below as Table 5.1.

The first 10 bodies in Table 5.1 are parastatal bodies. These are the various Area Development Boards, Backward Classes and Minorities Development Corporations, etc. which will be discussed in this chapter. The remaining bodies in the table are parallel bodies, set up under the aegis of Societies. These will be discussed in the following chapters.

**Boards and Corporations**

Boards and Corporations are parastatal bodies. They are single-purpose organizations which, while being part of government, enjoy a certain amount of autonomy, as they are incorporated bodies. As such, they are independent from normal government functioning regarding such matters as appointments, raising of loans from banks, expenditure, etc. And yet, the state government often stands guarantee against the loans taken by them and even gives them a corpus of funds from its own treasury. While they are audited by the Comptroller and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Name of Parallel Body</th>
<th>Created by (Central, State Govt/Donor)</th>
<th>Nodal Agency/Department</th>
<th>Date/Number of the Order of Creation</th>
<th>Objectives Behind Creation</th>
<th>Targeted Beneficiaries</th>
<th>Areas of Operation (No. of Blocks/Villages)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hyderabad-Karnataka Area Development Board</td>
<td>State Government Planning Department</td>
<td>March 1992</td>
<td>To develop infrastructure in HKDB Area</td>
<td>Bellary, Bidur, Gulbarga, Raichur, Koppal and Harapanahalli taluk of Davangere district</td>
<td>Mysore, Chamarajnagar, Kodagu, Chickmagalore, Hassan, Mangalore, Udupi, Shimoga and Uttara Kannada</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Malnad Area Development Board</td>
<td>State Government Planning Department</td>
<td>March 1992</td>
<td>To develop infrastructure in MADB Area</td>
<td>To develop border taluks</td>
<td>Bangalore (R), Tumkur, Kolar, Hassan, Chitradurga, Dharwad, Belgaum, Bijapur</td>
<td>52 Border Taluks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Bayaluseeme Area Development Board</td>
<td>State Government Planning Department</td>
<td>October 1994</td>
<td>To develop border taluks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Border Area Development Programme</td>
<td>State Government Planning Department</td>
<td>1991–92</td>
<td>Development of Border Areas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Karnataka Legislators' Local Area Development Scheme</td>
<td>State Government Planning Department</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>To develop infrastructure in MLA constituency</td>
<td></td>
<td>Entire State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>Organization Name</td>
<td>Government</td>
<td>Department</td>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme</td>
<td>Central Government</td>
<td>Deputy Commissioner</td>
<td>To develop infrastructure in MP constituency</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Karnataka State SC/ST Development Corporation</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>SC/ST Corporation</td>
<td>March 1975</td>
<td>For the financial development of SC/ST's</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Karnataka Backward Classes Corporation</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Social Welfare Department</td>
<td>1977</td>
<td>Skill development and self-employment ventures for Backward Classes</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Social Welfare Department</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Welfare of Minorities</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Karnataka Women's Development Corporation</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Women &amp; Child Development Department</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>Overall development of women</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Village Forest Committees</td>
<td>Central Government</td>
<td>Forest Department</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Joint Forest planning and management</td>
<td>Forest Areas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Jala Samvardhana Yojana Sangha</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Minor Irrigation Department</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Community-based tank irrigation</td>
<td>Selected tanks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued...)
TABLE 5.1 (Continued…)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Name of Parallel Body</th>
<th>Created by (Central, State Govt/Donor)</th>
<th>Nodal Agency/Department</th>
<th>Date/Number of the Order of Creation</th>
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<th>Areas of Operation (No. of Blocks/Villages)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Sarva Shikshana Abhiyan</td>
<td>Central Government</td>
<td>Education Department</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Educational Reforms</td>
<td>All children (6–14 years of age)</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Sujala Watershed Project</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Agriculture Department</td>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Watershed development</td>
<td>Rural Population</td>
<td>5 districts only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Stree Shakthi Programme</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Women &amp; Child Development Department</td>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Organization of women into SHGs for thrift and credit</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Rajiv Gandhi Rural Housing Corporation Ltd</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Housing Department</td>
<td>October 2000</td>
<td>Implementation and monitoring of State Housing Programmes for economically weaker sections</td>
<td>Rural &amp; Urban Areas</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Karnataka residential Education Institutions Society (KREIS)</td>
<td>State Government</td>
<td>Social Welfare Department</td>
<td>1999</td>
<td>Opening and maintenance of schools for weaker sections</td>
<td>Rural Areas</td>
<td>Entire State</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Auditor General (CAG), their losses do not appear in the tally of the state deficit.

The members of Boards and Corporations are largely nominated members and the heads are often political appointments, believed to be disgruntled members of the ruling party who have not found a berth elsewhere. When they find that they have not been included in the Council of Ministers, they need to be placated; hence their appointments as Chairmen of the various Boards and Corporations. The important point is that, as parastatal bodies, they take care of functions which constitutionally have been devolved to local bodies, such as infrastructure, welfare of weaker sections, women and child development, etc.

The Area Development Boards were set up for the development of the backward regions of Karnataka, namely the Hyderabad-Karnataka area, the Malnad area and Bayaluseeme. Thus, three Boards were set up, namely the Hyderabad-Karnataka Area Development Board (HKDB), the Malnad Area Development Board (MADB) and the Bayaluseeme Development Board (BSDB). These Boards come under the administrative control of the Area Development Division of the Planning Department. The HKDB and MADB were set up in 1992 while the BSDB was set up in 1994.

According to Ambaji Rao, these Boards were actually conceived in the 1980s when the then CM, the late R. Gundu Rao, constituted a Committee headed by N. Dharam Singh to suggest ways to remove regional imbalances in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region. The Committee submitted a detailed report calling for the formation of a Hyderabad-Karnataka Development Board with an allocation of ₹350 crore to implement developmental programmes for 10 years.

However, succeeding governments failed to set up the Board. It was finally constituted when S. R. Bommai was CM, but no financial allocation was made. It was late CM Veerendra Patil who got an Act passed in 1991 to allocate funds to the Board. Patil fixed priorities for the Board and as long as he was the CM, all attempts to deviate from the priorities were not allowed.

But under CM S. Bangarappa, who succeeded Patil, the priorities were ignored and legislators got the upper hand in deciding the works to be taken up by the Board. The same was the fate of the MADB and the BADB.

Patil had provided the Board with ₹50 crore in the first year and promised to increase the allocation by ₹10 crore every year. But the
assurance was not honoured by his successors who failed to provide even ₹50 crore a year to the Boards.

The Boards largely take up infrastructure development in backward areas. The money for the works is made available to the MLA to implement works in his constituency. The Boards prepare annual Action Plans based on the local MLA’s demands which are forwarded to the Minister concerned for approval.

Ambaji Rao stated that the money for the Boards has been drastically reduced: ‘In 2000–01, ₹75.00 crore was allocated to the HKDB whereas in 2003–04, only ₹32.70 crore has been allocated to the HKDB. Similarly, in 2000–01, ₹42.50 crore was allocated to MADB but in 2003–04, the figure has come down to ₹18.50 crore.’

Apart from the above three Boards, the Area Development Division of the Planning Department also looks after implementation of the Border Area Development Programme (BADP) and the KLLADS. Both these schemes are being implemented through Deputy Commissioners and not through PRIs. We will take a look at the KLLADS later. The BADP was set up in 1992 and is being implemented in 52 border taluks in 16 border districts. The works it takes up are related to infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, health, primary and secondary education and anganwadi buildings, water supply works, veterinary hospitals, etc. Here also the grants have been reduced, e.g., there was a budgetary grant of ₹9.06 crore during 2000–2001 which has come down to ₹2.75 crore in 2003–2004.

Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment mentions infrastructure development such as ‘roads, culverts, bridges, ferries, waterways and other means of communication’ as one of the 29 functions of the PRIs. So also are health, primary and secondary education, water supply, etc. In taking up these works, the Area Development Boards and the two schemes are clearly infringing on the functions of the PRIs.

**Karnataka Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation (KSCSTDC)**

The KSCSTDC is a parastatal body set up with the express purpose of taking care of the welfare of the SCs and STs. However, one of the functions enunciated in Schedule 11 of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment is ‘welfare of the weaker sections, and in particular, of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes’. Thus, this parastatal is also infringing on the functions of PRIs.
The KSCSTDC was set up in 1975 for the economic development of SCs and STs. Prior to 1975, the problem of SC/ST economic development came under the purview of the Social Welfare Department. The Corporation has a share capital of ₹150 crore in the ratio of 51:49::state:centre. This is used as margin money in giving loans in all the schemes of the KSCSTDC.5

The Corporation has three main schemes which are as follows:

(i) Land Purchase Scheme;
(ii) Self-employment Programme; and
(iii) Gangakalyana Scheme

Under the Gangakalyana Scheme are the following:

(i) Individual Irrigation Scheme;
(ii) Community Irrigation Scheme; and
(iii) Lift Irrigation Scheme

The Gangakalyana Irrigation Scheme is the most popular. Under the Community Irrigation Scheme, 8–15 acres of land belonging to SC/ST families are provided irrigation facility free of cost. Depending upon the availability of water, 2–3 borewells are drilled and other facilities like erection of pumpsets, energization, construction of storage tanks and laying of pipelines are provided. The unit cost fixed for an 8-acres project is ₹2.53 lakh and for 15 acres, ₹3.59 lakh (Government of Karnataka, Social Welfare Department, Annual Report 2003–2004: 112; see also Karnataka SC/ST Development Corporation Ltd, Annual Action Plan 2004–2005).

There is also an Individual Irrigation Scheme in which borewells and pumpsets are provided to individual beneficiaries in the SC/ST category. The unit cost is fixed at ₹75,000 out of which ₹65,000 is subsidy and the remaining ₹10,000 is in the form of a loan.

According to Baburao Mudbi, MD, Karnataka SC/ST Development Corporation Ltd, the schemes are implemented directly by the SC/ST Corporation. Applications are collected for the schemes and scrutinized. Then the money is released by the Corporation through the banks to the beneficiaries.

The Land Purchase Scheme was launched to provide land to the landless agricultural labourers by purchasing lands from non-SC/ST landholders with a unit cost of ₹60,000. Under the scheme, 50 per cent
is subsidy and 50 per cent is term loan. The loan carries 6 per cent interest per annum and has to be repaid in 10 annual instalments. The cost of the land is fixed by the Committee headed by the Deputy Commissioners of the District (Government of Karnataka, Social Welfare Department, *Annual Report* 2003–2004: 110). Interestingly, the land is registered in the name of the housewife. The scheme started in 1990–91.

The Self-employment Programme was started mainly to help unemployed and underemployed SC/ST persons to improve their economic condition by taking up gainful economic activities. Under this scheme, financial assistance is provided to start a small-scale industry or to purchase a vehicle. The project cost under the scheme ranges from `50,000 to `10 lakh. It comprises of the beneficiary’s contribution at 5 per cent of the total amount, margin money at 20 per cent subject to a maximum of `1 lakh sanctioned by the Corporation, and 75 per cent as loan from banks and financial institutions. The margin money has to be repaid at 2 per cent interest.

These are excellent schemes on paper. But how are they being implemented? Since the issues related to their implementation do not come up in the General Body Meetings of the PRIs, it is not possible to gauge the success of these schemes on the ground.

The selection of beneficiaries of these schemes has not been left to the Gram Sabha of the PRIs, which is the mandated institution for performing this function for all the 29 subjects devolved to the PRIs. For the popular Gangakalyana Scheme, the selection of beneficiaries is done by a Committee headed by the local MLA. For the Land Purchase Scheme, the selection is done by a Committee headed by the Deputy Commissioner. And it is only in the case of the Self-employment Scheme that the selection is done by the PRIs. The President of the District Selection Committee is the CEO of the ZP and the President of the Taluk Selection Committee is the Executive Officer of the TP. It may be noted that the ZP President has not been made President of this Committee but rather the task has gone to the CEO of the ZP. Similarly, the TP President has been left out in the cold in favour of the Executive Officer of the TP.

The problem with parastatal bodies is that, since their schemes do not come under the purview of the PRIs and hence are not monitored by the people or by their elected representatives, there is no public knowledge about these schemes and how well they are being implemented. In fact, this author drew a blank when she enquired about these schemes from among the general public.
The Auditor’s Report points out the lacunae in the schemes. It says, ‘The Company (parastatal) has maintained the fixed assets register. However, the particulars entered in the said register are incomplete and the location of the assets is not identifiable. As explained to us, the management during the year has not physically verified the fixed assets at Head Office. In the absence of adequate fixed asset records and also due to non-verification of fixed assets by the management, the discrepancies, if any, are not ascertainable’ (Government of Karnataka, Karnataka Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation, 28th Annual Report 2002–03 2003a: 65).

Had the PRIs been in the knowledge of and participated in the implementation of the scheme, the fixed assets developed by the schemes would be common knowledge and hence easily verifiable. Now however, it is shrouded in mystery, as the auditor’s report points out.

Second, the auditor’s report points out that there is a lacuna with regard to the recovery of dues. It says, ‘The parties (viz. beneficiaries) to whom loans or advances in the nature of loans have been extended by the Company under various Schemes are not regular in repaying the Principal amount as stipulated together with interest thereon. In our opinion, the Management has not taken adequate steps for recovery of these dues. No provision for penal interest has been made as stipulated in the loan agreements. The required information with regard to quantum of such pending instalments, interest and penal interest is not made available for verification. Hence, we are unable to comment on the same. Adequate steps have not been taken to obtain acknowledgement of debt in time and details in respect of time barred debts are not available’ (Government of Karnataka, Karnataka Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation, 28th Annual Report 2002–03 2003a: 65).

Here again, the PRIs could have been utilized to bring pressure on the beneficiaries to pay their dues. Altogether, the above two points are a strong indictment of the schemes and the manner in which they are being implemented. The participation of PRIs in the implementation of the schemes would have gone a long way in mitigating these problems. Then, accountability of the parastatal will be not only to its so-called shareholders but also to the people in general, and especially to those sections of the population for whom the schemes were intended. Karnataka has the dubious distinction of being the fourth most corrupt state in the Union. This appellation could have
been avoided, to a large extent, by resorting to PRIs as watchdogs of infrastructural development.⁶

**Karnataka Backward Classes Development Corporation Limited (KBCDC)**

The KBCDC was established by late Shri D. Devaraj Urs, CM of Karnataka, in 1977 under the Companies Act, 1956. The objective of the KBCDC was to promote activities for the benefit of the Backward Classes and assist the poorer sections among them in the development of skills and self-employment.⁷ As the ‘welfare of weaker sections’ is listed as one of the functions of the PRIs in Schedule 11 of the 73⁴ Amendment to the Constitution, the functions performed by the KBCDC constitutionally belong to Panchayat Raj bodies. However, they are being performed by the parastatal KBCDC. As such, the funds which should go to the Panchayat Raj bodies are being diverted to this parastatal, leaving PRIs that much weaker, both in funds and functions. Moreover, the problem of monitoring the schemes available to the Backward Classes arises, as the PRIs, which are in the knowledge of what is going on at the village level are not utilized for this purpose.

The KBCDC has many schemes, of which the Chaitanya Scheme and the Gangakalyana Scheme are the most important.⁸ The Chaitanya Subsidy cum Soft Loan Scheme extends loans upto ₹1 lakh to take up self-employment activities in the field of dairy, sericulture, and purchase of bullock cart, power tiller, etc., in collaboration with banks/financial institutions. Those belonging to the Backward Classes and whose family income does not exceed ₹22,000 per annum are eligible for these loans. The Corporation gives ₹5,000 as subsidy and 20 per cent as margin money to be repaid at 4 per cent interest. The Backward Classes are also eligible for loans from the National Backward Classes Finance and Development Corporation through the state channelizing agencies at concessional rates of interest. The state government has stood guarantee for ₹78 crore to obtain these loans from the National Corporation (Government of Karnataka, Karnataka Backward Classes Development Corporation, *26th Annual Report and Accounts 2002–03*, 2003b: 29).

The Gangakalyana Irrigation Scheme is similar to the one prevailing in the Karnataka SC and ST Corporation schemes discussed above. There is a Community Irrigation component and an Individual Irrigation Component in the scheme. The main difference is that
here there is an income criterion for availing the scheme, that is, the beneficiary should not have an income which is more than ₹22,000 per annum and he should be a small or marginal farmer.

In the case of the Chaitanya Scheme, the mode of selection of the beneficiary is through the District Committee, of which the ZP CEO is the Chairman and the District Manager of the Corporation is the Member-Secretary. The other members are officials of the various departments such as agriculture, industry, etc. The ZP President has again been left out as head of the Committee. In the Gangakalyana Scheme, the MLA presides over the Selection Committee which recommends the names of the beneficiaries for the Group and Individual Irrigation schemes. The point is that the Gram Sabha is not involved in the selection of beneficiaries in either of the schemes. Moreover, accountability is to the Board of Directors and not to the PRIs. Thus, neither the people nor their elected representatives have a clear idea of the activities of the Corporation.

**Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation Limited (KMDC)**

The minorities, namely the Muslim, Christian, Jain, Sikh and Buddhist population in the state, constitute 14.46 per cent of the total population, according to the 1991 Census. As the minorities are also regarded as belonging to the ‘weaker sections’ of the population, they too should have come under the purview of the PRIs. However, the parastatal KMDC was established in 1986 by the GoK with an authorized share capital of ₹50 crore and a paid up share capital of ₹36.91 crore to take care of the interests of the minorities. At the district and taluk levels, the KMDC combines its office with the Backward Classes Development Corporation except in the seven districts of north Karnataka.9

The schemes offered by the KMDC are similar to those of the two Corporations mentioned above. There is the Swavalambana Margin Money Scheme which is similar to the Chaitanya Scheme. Loan facilities are provided through banks/financial institutions for business, services, industries and agriculture-based activities for projects upto ₹1 lakh. The Corporation sanctions 20 per cent of the project expenditure as margin money to be repaid at 7 per cent interest. The rest is provided by the financial institutions. A subsidy of ₹5,000 is also provided by the Corporation (Government of Karnataka, *The Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation. Seventeenth Annual Report and Accounts 2002–03*).
There is also the Term Loan Scheme under which the Corporation extends loans for schemes approved by the National Minorities Development and Finance Corporation, which releases 85 per cent of the project expenditure. The KMDC gives 10 per cent of the expenditure at a rate of 7 per cent interest and the remaining 5 per cent is met by the beneficiary.

The KMDC also has the Gangakalyana Scheme of Community and Individual Irrigation Schemes as well as job-oriented training programmes. The Arivu Scheme of the Corporation helps meritorious students with financial assistance to complete their course in medical, engineering and dental studies. The loans have to be repaid after completion of the course with 2 per cent interest.

As with the above mentioned Corporations, the schemes are excellent. However, there have been problems with the maintenance of accounts and the selection of beneficiaries. The auditors of both the Backward Classes Corporation and the Minorities Corporation have pointed out that accounting of the interest on the margin money loans and other loans have been done on a receipt basis rather than on an accrual basis and that this is contrary to accounting standards.

Regarding selection of beneficiaries, the non-utilization of an institution like the Gram Sabha, where everyone is in the knowledge of everyone else’s affairs at the village level, has had deleterious consequences on the implementation and monitoring of the loans. Thus, in an expose conducted by the Lok Ayukta, the TOI reported that ‘the Lok Ayukta’s fears that the KMDC offered loans to non-existent persons were confirmed when they stumbled upon a large pile of carefully stored letters, which were actually notices sent to fictitious loanees and returned by the postal department to the KMDC’ (2004e).

**Karnataka State Women’s Development Corporation (KSWDC)**

The KSWDC was established in 1987 with an authorized share capital of ₹10.12 crore. The main schemes of the Corporation are the Udyogini Scheme for Women Entrepreneurs, the Women’s Training Programme, the Devadasi Rehabilitation Programme and the Marketing Assistance Scheme.10

The Udyogini Scheme encourages women to become entrepreneurs by providing ₹1 lakh in loans from banks and a subsidy from the KSWDC. Applications are received in the district office of the Deputy Director of Women and Child Department. According to Vasantha Prema, Administrative Officer, KSWDC, the Selection Committee
Parastatal Bodies in Karnataka consists of the Deputy Commissioner of the District and the CEO of the ZP but she stated that these two officials will soon be removed from the Committee, as they do not attend the meetings which then get postponed. However, if one thought that these officials would now be replaced by elected members of the PRIs, it is not so. Now, it will be the Deputy Director of the Women and Child Department who will head the Committee, with other officials of the Department such as the Child Development Project Officer (CDPO) and the Bank Manager as members.\textsuperscript{11} The point here is that the ZP President does not figure in the Selection Committee at all, either before the change or after. Following the change, the scheme is now entirely in the hands of the line department, and the presence of even the CEO, leave alone the elected representative of the ZP, is no longer required there.

In the Women’s Training Programme, reputed organizations give training to women in different fields such as tailoring and embroidery, beauty parlour, computer hardware assembly, bakery products training, motor vehicle driving training, masonry training, welder training, etc. and the course is sponsored by the KSWDC.

The Devadasi Rehabilitation Programme is extant in the seven districts of north Karnataka where the devadasi problem is significant. Awareness and health camps are conducted through the medium of \textit{jatra} or village festival, e.g., during the Yellamma \textit{jatra}. The Corporation also assists devadasis in taking up income-generating activities.

Thus, it is clear that there are excellent schemes for the amelioration of the weaker sections of society. But PRIs have not been used in the implementation and monitoring of the schemes. In fact, they have been completely left outside their purview. This is a pity, for a great opportunity for ensuring the success of the schemes on the ground has been lost. In turn, PRIs would have been benefited and strengthened if they had been given a chance to prove their efficacy in the implementation of these schemes. We next turn our attention to the MPLAD Scheme.

\textit{Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme (MPLADS)}

Yet another scheme which is being implemented at the discretion of legislators as are the above mentioned Area Development Boards is the MPLADS. But unlike the Area Development Boards, this is a central government scheme which is implemented through the Deputy Commissioner. And, unlike the Area Development Boards, which are
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on the decline, the allocation for this scheme has been going steadily upwards.

MPLADS was introduced in 1993 by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao. During his tenure, not only did PRIs get Constitutional recognition through the passage of the 73rd and 74th Amendments, but the MPLADS was also announced. According to this scheme, each MP is entitled to suggest to the district head small developmental works capable of producing durable assets within his constituency. The scheme started with an annual allotment of ₹1 crore per member, which was raised to ₹2 crore later. The MP has full discretion to suggest the site and type of work to be done under the scheme.

Sezhiyan has done an exhaustive study of this scheme. As a veteran parliamentarian (1962–84), he is in a unique position of understanding the scheme as an insider and yet bringing a great deal of objectivity and scholarship to it. He points out many lacunae in the scheme. First, the scheme is unconstitutional as it provides for an executive role for the legislator, whose role is strictly to legislate or pass laws for the country. Sezhiyan points out that by participating directly in the administration of the country, the MP loses his ability to control the administrative ministries of the government. According to him, ‘The scheme has weakened the prime objective of legislative control over the administration’ (2005: 3).

Second, there are numerous flaws in the way the Scheme is being administered. Two audit reports were submitted by the CAG which have drawn attention to the problems. According to the first audit report, ‘Even after seven years of the operation of the scheme, the ministry did not have a suitable accounting procedure’ (2005: 3). The audit reports pointed out discrepancies such as absence of accounting systems, lack of effective monitoring by the nodal ministry which did not have a complete and updated picture of the works under implementation, unspent balances which were not refunded and instead were shown as expenditures, entrustment of works to contractors which was prohibited by the guidelines, etc. All of this points to financial mismanagement of the scheme. Moreover, the two audit reports submitted by the CAG were not taken seriously. Sezhiyan points out that the Public Accounts Committee, while doing commendable work on other reports, did not submit its report on the findings of the two audit reports on the working of the MPLADS.

But most importantly, from our point of view, Sezhiyan points out that ‘the greatest damage done by the scheme has been to obstruct the
process of decentralization of authority and resources towards the emergence of village level self-governments’ (2005: 5). He says, ‘I am not so much worried about the failure of the scheme as the damage it has done to the process of decentralization.’ In a chapter entitled ‘Perils of Parallel Planning’, he points out that there is considerable overlap between the functions to be performed by PRIs as enunciated in the 11th and 12th Schedules of the 73rd and 74th Amendments and the MPLADS. He says, ‘Before formulating the Scheme and listing the works to be undertaken under the Scheme, the Government and the PM should have been fully aware of the works allotted under the two Schedules constitutionally for the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the Municipalities’ (ibid.: 94). As it is, ‘All the 23 items of work meant to be implemented by the MPs with the MPLADS funds are from 29 subjects of the 11th Schedule,’ he quotes Mathew as saying (2005: 107). Thus, many of the central government schemes are in competition with the MPLADS. For example, the Sampoorna Gramin Rojgar Yojana (SGRY), the biggest scheme of the central government, also aims at the creation of durable assets for the community as does the MPLADS. Similarly, the rural drinking water and sanitation programmes are also being replicated by MPLADS as is the rural housing programme. This leads to a diversion of funds to the MPLADS which should normally have gone to the above programmes. Also, the works undertaken under the MPLADS are ad hoc and isolated from the planning process at the district level. ‘The programmes and works under the national and state planning were at least open for discussion, criticism and investigation by the legislatures and their Committees. The MPLAD Scheme remains isolated, without any accounting or accountability to any other body’ says Sezhiyan (2005: 96). It puts paid to the process of planning. Finally, as the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC), in its Consultative Paper on ‘Decentralisation and Municipalities’, points out, ‘the provision of public funds to an MP to be spent on his or her choice in their constituency is in fact helping the MP to “nurse” that constituency and increase his or her own political clout and influence at public expense’ (ibid.: 106). The amount of money available to the MP is not inconsiderable as, in a five-year term he will have as much as ₹10 crore at his disposal.

If the MPs are given a scheme, can the legislators at the state level be far behind? Karnataka has its own Karnataka Legislators’ Local Area Development Scheme KLLADS which was set up in 2003. As the
name suggests, this scheme, like the MPLADS, is again treading on the toes of PRIs. The KLLADS is left to the discretion of the state-level legislator and is done at the level of the legislator’s constituency. The ostensible aim is to provide a certain degree of flexibility in taking up works which are otherwise not covered by other government programmes. It is also largely used for infrastructure development. And the allocation for this Scheme has been steadily going up. From ₹75 crore in 2001–2002 it was increased to ₹120 crore in 2002–2003 and again an allotment of ₹120 crore was made in 2003–2004.

The drawbacks of this scheme are similar to those for the MPLADS. The difference is that the KLLADS has a greater bearing on PRIs than has the MPLADS. This is because the MLA’s constituency is almost contiguous with the constituency of the ZP and the President of the ZP is often politically in competition with the MLA while the constituency of the MP is much bigger. The presence of this large sum of money at the disposal of the MLA to create assets in his constituency gives him an undue advantage in the ZP and TP where he already has an overwhelming presence.

To sum up, numerous Boards and Corporations have been set up since the mid-1970s which serve as single-purpose agencies to perform functions which constitutionally belong to the PRIs. They are parastatals which are largely an extended arm of the state government. They enjoy a measure of autonomy and freedom that the department does not have. They consist largely of nominated members who are headed by a state-level politician.

The Area Development Boards were set up to develop infrastructure in the backward regions of the state at the discretion of the MLA. While these Boards are on the decline, the MPLAD and KLLAD schemes are on the ascent, in which development of infrastructure at the discretion of the MP and MLA has been extended to all the constituencies in the state.

The four Corporations discussed above are taking care of sections of the population which come under Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment. They receive vast sums of money which would have gone to the PRIs to take care of the vulnerable sections of the population in their jurisdiction. As such, they take away from the functional effectiveness of the statutory Panchayat at the local level. These bodies are parallel to the PRIs and do not involve the PRIs at all except in making the ZP CEO the head of some of its schemes. But in the case of the Women’s
Corporation, even this concession to Panchayat Raj has been done away with and the selection of beneficiaries is now entirely in the hands of the line department, that is, the Women and Child Development Department. The lack of utilization of PRIIs like the Gram Sabha has resulted in the drawing up of beneficiary lists which are not genuine as has been pointed out by the Lok Ayukta and the physical location of the assets has not been identifiable as per the Corporations’ own auditor’s reports. The MPLAD and KLLAD schemes also have their drawbacks as they put paid to the concept of local level planning and give the state-level legislator an undue advantage in the ZP and TP where he already has an overwhelming presence.

The schemes are excellent in themselves but since they are routed through parastatals, they do not come within the purview of PRIs and are not discussed in the General Body Meetings of the ZP or TP. Neither the people nor their elected representatives are in the knowledge of these schemes, let alone be critical of their implementation. As such, monitoring and supervision of the expenditure on the schemes and their actual implementation leave much to be desired. It may not be an accident that Karnataka is known to have a high level of corruption and has been indicted as the fourth most corrupt state in the country. Routing of schemes through parastatal and parallel bodies may be one reason why they do not come within the domain of public knowledge, which, in turn, has a bearing on the level of corruption in the state. In all this, it is the common man, or the person for whom the scheme was intended, who suffers.

**Notes**

1. Interview with C. Narayanaswamy, 6 April 2003.
2. The author has not gone into the issues of accountability of the parallel and parastatal bodies to the state legislature and Parliament though this is a moot point which needs to be examined.
4. Information given by Ambaji Rao, official in the Area Development Division of the Planning Department, 17 August 2004.
5. Interview with Baburao Mudbi, IAS, Managing Director, Karnataka Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe Development Corporation Ltd, 16 August 2004.
6. The detractors of Panchayat Raj point out that PRI members are themselves corrupt and it is, in fact, a case of decentralized corruption! However, it is a form of corruption which cannot be hidden for long from the local populace. And the people have the power to not re-elect the corrupt leader in the next election.
Karnataka has the distinction of being the first state in the country to develop a detailed and comprehensive list of Backward Classes called the Havanur Commission Report. Since then, the classification of Backward Classes has been developed into a fine art in this state. In all, there are five categories of Backward Classes: Category 1 consists of the Most Backward Castes and gets 4 per cent of reservation benefits. There are 94 castes and numerous sub-castes in this category. There is no income criterion for this category and they are treated at par with the SCs. Category II consists of the More Backward Castes. This category is divided into (A) which has 15 per cent reservation and has 102 castes and numerous sub-castes included in it; and (B) which is simply classified as ‘Muslim’ and has 4 per cent reservation. Category III (A) of the Backward Castes consists largely of the Vokkaliga castes and sub-castes and also the Banajiga castes and sub-castes. It has 4 per cent of the reservation. Finally, Category III (B) consists of the Lingayat and Maratha castes and sub-castes and has 5 per cent of the reservation. All the categories except the first have an income stipulation, that is, the Creamy Layer Policy of the government applies to them whereby the income of the beneficiary or his parents should not exceed ₹2 lakh per year. There have been three reports on the subject, namely the Havanur Report in 1977, the Venkataswamy Report in 1986 and the O. Chinnappa Reddy Report in 1994.

Interview with Mr H. Kamanna, Bangalore, 2 September 2004.

Interview with Mr Ramraj Urs, Manager, Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation, 2 September 2004.

Interview with Ms D. P. Vasantha Prema, Administrative Officer, Karnataka State Women’s Development Corporation, 21 September 2004.

Ms D. P. Vasantha Prema confirmed that this change in the Selection Committee did in fact take place when I met her again in August 2006.

The scheme has attracted a lot of public attention. There was a discussion on the MPLADS in the media, both electronic and print. See Ramachandran (2005); see also articles by Chenoy (2004), Datar (2003) and Vyas (2003), and Panchayati Raj Update (2004).
Having discussed parastatals in the previous chapter, we will now turn our attention to Societies and the numerous DICs, TICs and CBOs which have been set up under the aegis of these Societies in recent times as part of the New Economic Policy’s reform agenda. In this chapter, we will examine the Society par excellence, namely the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA).

The fiscal crises of the early 1990s prompted the central government to take another look at the institutional mechanisms for delivering social services to the people. During the late 1980s, bilateral projects were initiated between donor countries and the Indian government on an experimental basis in a new institutional format. This format included the setting up of a Society consisting of principal stakeholders such as the government, the donor agency and an NGO to implement the project. Thus, a number of Societies came into being, such as the State Watershed Development Society to work in the field of poverty alleviation, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), with funds from the World Bank, to work in the area of primary education and the Mahila Samakhya in the field of women’s education, which received funds from the Dutch government.

The Chairman of the Society was generally the Development Commissioner of the state. The Society enjoyed a considerable measure of autonomy. With regard to the DPEP, Sarangapani and Vasavi note,

The programme is the responsibility of an independent implementing samiti or society, created for this purpose and headed by an IAS officer. The commissioner for public instruction and other members of the department of education and the DSERT (Department of State Education, Research and Training) are ex-officio members of the board. However, the society can function completely independently of the norms and hierarchical structures of the department of education (2003: 3402; my emphasis).

The funds came directly from the donor agency and the Society was free to operate its own finances. It was free to pick and choose
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its own staff and develop its own systems and procedures. It was free to hire consultants and pay them a high remuneration.\(^1\) As the nodal organization, it set up its own monitoring mechanisms and often made mid-course corrections.

Emboldened by the pilot projects set up under the aegis of Societies in the 1980s, the Karnataka government increased the number and widened the scope of these Societies and many new ones were set up to cover larger areas and perform more tasks. Thus, almost all the departments of the GoK set up Societies. Thus came into being a partnership between the Society which, while autonomous, was nevertheless headed by an IAS officer, the NGO which was entrusted with implementing the project and the funding body, which was generally a multilateral institution like the World Bank. This was the new mantra of governance of centrally-sponsored schemes in Karnataka.

This new model of governance through a Society did not include PRIs, which were unceremoniously bypassed. True, these Societies were set up shortly before the 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment to the Constitution came into force in 1993. But should they not have been wound up following the 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment? Vyasulu enquires, ‘One has to ask if such Societies are needed now. Cannot the panchayats take over such responsibility?’ (2003: 32). This is especially the case as the Societies are performing the very functions that are listed in Schedule 11 of the 73\(^{rd}\) Amendment as falling within the purview of the Panchayats. This makes these Societies, which are mere registered entities under the Registration of Societies Act, ultra vires of the Constitution.

The earlier Societies had taken up work on a small scale. For instance, the DPEP in the field of primary education in Karnataka included only four districts in Phase I of its programme in 1994 and seven districts in 1997. With the re-organization of districts in November 1997, four of the latter seven districts were bifurcated or trifurcated, so that the total number of districts under DPEP in Karnataka went up to 16.\(^2\) But the SSA, which took up where the DPEP had left off, has scaled up to include primary education in the entire state consisting of 27 districts. This has serious consequences as it bypasses PRIs throughout the state and not just in pockets, as was the case earlier. When we realize that almost all the departments in Karnataka have started Societies, we understand the magnitude of the problem of bypassing PRIs. It would not be incorrect to say that Karnataka will soon be governed in a fast-track, mission mode sort of way, which is bypassing established political and administrative institutions and
processes. This is the crux of my argument which I will, by and by, develop below.

At the very least, these Societies ought to have set up links with PRIs. The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 provides for just such a link-up under Section 61 A. But apart from one or two Societies, such as the Rural Drinking Water Scheme which works through the GP, the vast majority of Societies have no links with PRIs. Rather, they keep a distance from the Panchayats, which they regard as ‘political’ and hence unsavoury, as something with which contact is to be avoided.

In this and in the next two chapters, we will examine the working of these Societies in Karnataka. This chapter will consider the SSA, a Society set up for the universalization of primary education. We will see the new institutional mechanisms created for the purpose as also the links, if any, with PRIs. In the following two chapters, we will view some of the other Societies functioning in Karnataka in the field of development. This will indicate the extent of changes in the institutional set-up of governance in Karnataka.

**The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)**

The SSA is a centrally-sponsored scheme for the universalization of primary education in India. According to the *Framework for Implementation of the SSA* brought out by the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, ‘The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is to provide useful and relevant elementary education for all children in the 6 to 14 age group by 2010. There is also another goal to bridge social, regional and gender gaps, with the active participation of the community in the management of schools’ (Government of India 2000).

The SSA was launched in 2000–2001 with the objectives of (i) all children in school, Education Guarantee Scheme, Alternative School, ‘Back-to-School’ camp by 2003; (ii) all children complete five years of primary schooling by 2007; (iii) all children complete eight years of elementary schooling by 2010; (iv) focus on elementary education of satisfactory quality with emphasis on education for life; (v) bridge all gender and social category gaps at primary stage by 2007; and (vi) universal retention by 2010.

These are ambitious and laudable goals, particularly since primary education has been woefully neglected since Independence while higher education received relatively more attention.
Thus, it is not the goal with which we have any contention but the method by which it is being sought to be implemented. For, the government has chosen the Society mode of implementation which bypasses the PRIs. This will be considered in some detail below.

**SSA in Mission Mode**

According to the Government of India, ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan is the comprehensive and integrated flagship programme of Government of India, to attain Universal Elementary Education (UEE) in the country *in a mission mode*’ (2000; my emphasis). Two key structural innovations took place with the introduction of SSA and indeed the DPEP before it. These were (i) resorting to the formation of a Society to implement the programme with a measure of autonomy enjoyed by the Society; and (ii) placing the programme of UEE in a mission mode or fast track, ostensibly to speed up the process of achieving universalization of elementary education by 2010. The guidelines to the DPEP state, ‘The Programme would be implemented in a mission mode through registered State level autonomous societies’ (DPEP Guidelines, www.educationforallinIndia.com/page87/html).

Both these innovations are bold steps and have far-reaching consequences on a number of institutions such as the educational bureaucracy and institutions of local self-government. According to Ayyar, apparently an insider, the Society mode of implementation did not come in without a measure of opposition. He says, ‘The society model of implementation was … designed to usher (in) a new form of managing primary education.’ Reminiscing on the reservations that were expressed regarding this decision, he says, ‘If I may walk down on the memory lane, this was not an idea which was readily acceptable to some in the World Bank and also to academics who were derisive of the conventional enclave-type project implementing units and who, therefore, advocated that educational reform should be done through the system itself. Or to use the imagery of Kenneth King, the reformer should use the front door leading to the system and not the back door’ (2005: 51). Justifying the decision to go in for a Society to implement the UEE, Ayyar says,

> Our stand was that a frontal assault is not always expedient. *The Challenge of Education*, the National Policy on Education 1986, and its Programmes of Action had eloquently articulated the widely prevalent view that the education departments are in a State of utter disarray .... The changes
that are needed in the system at large were to be developed and tried out in a parastatal structure like the State society which was part of the system but could function autonomously and be more professional, inclusive and outcome-oriented (2005: 52).

Here, the genesis of the notion of the Society as a means to introduce a new form of governance has been cogently articulated. Implementation through a Society began with the DPEP as an experiment and was carried forward into the SSA. As I have pointed out earlier, the scale of implementation makes all the difference. While the Society mode of implementation may have had little consequence on the smaller canvas that was the DPEP or, for that matter, any of the innovative educational programmes that preceded the SSA, it has major consequences on institutional structures when it is scaled up to the entire state as in the SSA.

We will now examine the consequences of implementation of UEE through a Society on PRIs. They are as follows:

(i) bypassing of political institutions and processes;
(ii) a re-deployed bureaucracy; and
(iii) parallel fund flows.

(i) Bypassing of Political Institutions and Processes

At the ZP level

The ZP is an august body of elected representatives at the district level. It is the seat of local self-government. However, a perusal of the minutes of the meetings of the ZP (in Bangalore Rural District) for two years, 2003 and 2004, shows that the issues taken up in the General Body Meetings of the ZP are few and far between. They refer to schemes of the Housing Department such as the Ashraya Scheme and schemes of the Department of Water and Sanitation such as the Rajiv Gandhi National Drinking Water Mission and Swajaldhara, a drinking water scheme. There is also mention of National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), Rural Infrastructure Development Fund (RIDF), Swachcha Grama Scheme and Pradhan Mantri Gramodaya Scheme. Going by the minutes of the ZP meetings, these appear to be the only schemes that are handled by the ZP.
There is no mention of the schemes handled by the numerous Societies that dot the rural landscape and operate in a large number of areas such as education, maintenance of tanks and water bodies, watershed development, health and what-have-you, and have large amounts of funds available to them. In other words, these Societies do not come under the purview of the ZP and are not discussed in its General Body Meetings. This is a serious transgression of local democracy.

Two ZP members had raised the issue of a large number of schemes bypassing the ZP. In the minutes of the meeting of the Health and Education Standing Committee which was held on 21 June 2003 in the Bangalore Rural ZP Hall, it is recorded that Mr Chelvaraj, member of the Committee, had said, ‘So many new and different programmes have come in education department but education department has not shown these programmes to ZP members. This is the development style of education department nowadays.’ Again, Chelvaraj is quoted in the minutes as making the following suggestion, ‘He suggested to bring the new programmes before ZP members and (said that) information of the new programmes must be provided to the ZP general body meeting. Then the education department has to take decisions in implementing these programmes after discussion with ZP members in meeting.’ Clearly, Chelvaraj was articulating the view of the ZP members that they should not be kept in the dark regarding the schemes in the Education Department. Rather, it is they who should be the decision-making body in respect of these schemes (minutes of Health and Education Standing Committee of Bangalore Rural ZP held on 21 June 2003).

On another occasion, it is recorded in the minutes of the General Body Meeting of the ZP held on 27 September 2004, ‘The President of the ZP (Ramesh K.) said to the Deputy Director of Public Education Department that the information of all the programmes under the SSA should come to this meeting’ (minutes of General Body Meeting of Bangalore Rural ZP held on 27 September 2004).

These two members of the Bangalore Rural ZP, namely Chelvaraj and Ramesh K., one a member of the Health and Education Standing Committee and the other the President of the ZP, were voicing their apprehension that the ZP was completely unaware of the SSA programmes in their district. Chelvaraj further pointed out that the ZP members should be involved in the decision-making process of the programmes.
Our research showed that information regarding the SSA and indeed the decision-making on primary education at the district level was in fact taking place in another forum called the District Implementation Committee (DIC), also known as SSA Committee. Let us take a look at the members of this Committee. A perusal of the members present at a meeting as well as the members who were absent gives us a list of the total membership. Now, we will examine the members present as well as the absentees at the meeting of the Committee which was held on 17 October 2003 in the ZP hall, Chamarajnagar. They are as follows:

**Members of the DIC Present at the Meeting**

1. President, SSA Committee and ZP President, Chamarajnagar
2. Vice-president, SSA Committee and President of Education Standing Committee, ZP, Chamarajnagar
3. Executive President, SSA Committee and CEO of ZP, Chamarajnagar
4. Member-Secretary, SSA Committee and Deputy-Director of Public Instruction (DDPI), Education Department, Chamarajnagar
5. Member, Health and Education Standing Committee, Chamarajnagar
6. Member, Health and Education Standing Committee, Chamarajnagar
7. Member, Health and Education Standing Committee, Chamarajnagar
8. District Literacy Committee Secretary, Chamarajnagar
9. Deputy Director and Principal, DIET, Mysore
10. Dr Sudarshan, VGKK (Vivekananda Girijan Kalyan Kendra), Biligiriranganabetta
11. Dr Aquinas, Holy Cross, Hanur
12. K. C. Rangayya, President, Sriram Chandra Education Institute, Chamarajnagar
13. Dr Jayadev, Secretary, Deenbandhu Institute, Chamarajnagar
14. BEO, Chamarajnagar
15. BEO, Gundlupet
16. BEO, Kollegal
17. BEO, Hanur
18. BEO, Yellandur
Members Absent at the Meeting

1. Honorable President, SSA Committee and District Minister-in-Charge, Chamarajnagar
2. Food and Civil Supplies Minister
3. Agriculture Minister
4. Rajya Sabha Member
5. MLA
6. MLA, Gundlupet
7. MLA, Chamarajnagar
8. MLA, Kollegal
9. MLC
10. MLC
11. MLC
12. Member, Health and Education Standing Committee, Chamarajnagar
13. Member, Health and Education Standing Committee, Chamarajnagar
14. Member, Health and Education Standing Committee, Chamarajnagar
15. President, District Primary School Teachers’ Association, Chamarajnagar
16. President, Inner Wheel, Chamarajnagar

This, then, is the membership of the DIC. This shows that the DIC is an important body at the district level, consisting of the ZP President who chairs the meeting, ZP members of the Standing Committee on Health and Education consisting of the President of the Standing Committee and five members, the CEO of the ZP, the bureaucrats concerned with education in the district such as the Deputy Director of Public Instruction (DDPI) and the Block Education Officers (BEO) of the five taluks, some important NGOs of the area such as Vivekananda Girijana Kalyana Kendra (VGKK) run by the well-known social worker Dr Sudarshan, who works among the tribal people of the area and Dr Jayadev, founder of the Deenbadhu Institute, a boy’s orphanage. Those who did not attend the meeting but are nevertheless members include the Minister-in-Charge of the district, a few other ministers, MLAs and MLCs of the district.

The list of members of the DIC of the SSA shows that this decision-making body consists not only of a few ZP members, notably the ZP President and Standing Committee members but also of a number
of NGOs in the area as well as the state-level elected representatives of MLAs and MLC. Out of 34 members in the DIC, only nine were from the ZP.

Thus, decision-making regarding the SSA has been taken out of the hands of the General Body of the ZP and placed in a different forum consisting of NGOs and state-level elected representatives. In this way, local self-government is severely undermined.

In an interview, Dr Jayadev gave this author an account of the DIC meeting. The ZP President had presided over the meeting. It was like a mini-ZP meeting, the only difference being that instead of the members of the General Body of the ZP, there was a motley crowd of NGOs, officials and ZP Standing Committee members, not to mention the ministers, MLAs and MLCs who were not present at that particular meeting. It was business as usual, with the DIC members questioning the officials regarding the implementation of the SSA programme. For instance, the President of the Health and Education Standing Committee complained that some of the civil works were still pending and the BEO was giving wrong information to the meeting regarding these works. The CEO then ordered that all the BEOs of all the blocks should give reports of the works done immediately.

There has been limited administrative decentralization and the SSA scheme comes to the district in the form of a package containing a few options such as construction of school rooms, toilets, teaching–learning materials, etc. SSA money is sanctioned as a package and there is little freedom in spending it. Decision-making at the district level merely involves deciding to which school one or the other facility will be made available during the course of the year. In this, there is some scope for negotiation between the Standing Committee members who are the elected representatives of the ZP and who ‘represent the political wing of the DIC’ and the officials, as to where a particular facility should go. For example, the elected representatives ask to sanction a school in their block and the ZP President supports them. After some wrangling with the officials, the matter is decided in the meeting. Thus, the DIC decides how and where the grants awarded to the district under the SSA scheme should be spent.

Another function of the DIC is to supervise and monitor the SSA programme. In this regard, the members are expected to give a report reviewing the programmes of SSA. One such report was shown to this author by Dr Jayadev, who had submitted it after visiting a number of villages. In his report, Dr Jayadev had commented on the civil works
done as well as the teaching–learning materials supplied to the schools. For instance, he had pointed out that bandsets had been provided to the schools but they remained unused, the reason being that the PT teacher had no training in them. He had concluded that the ‘bandsets have involved excessive expenditure. This is not good.’ He suggested that ‘in purchasing teaching–learning aids and library books, teachers should have more say and pressure of higher officials should be done away with’. Another point he made was with regard to transparency. He noted,

The money released in SSA schemes is known only to the Headmaster (HM) and to no one else. No teacher knows about it. The HM should discuss this with the teachers. Also, the details of grants by SSA should be pasted on the school wall.

Dr Jayadev told this author, ‘I do inspection of the SSA programme in the various schools and my feedback is taken seriously. I bring irregularities to the notice of the DIC.’ Apart from how to spend the SSA money and monitoring the works, the DIC also takes up issues such as attendance in schools, the problem of drop-outs and bonded labour, etc.

We welcome Dr Jayadev’s observations and suggestions. But, the point is, should this not be placed before the ZP General Body? In the absence of such a procedure, is the whole exercise a legitimate one? For, in all this, the DIC emerges as a parallel body to the ZP. It is presenting issues to its members which should rightly be presented before the elected representatives in the General Body Meeting of the ZP. It takes decisions, however limited in their scope, given the limited decentralization which has taken place, which should rightly be taken by the elected representatives of the ZP. And it also performs the supervisory and monitoring functions which should be performed by the ZP.

The DIC cannot be regarded as a legitimate body to perform the above mentioned functions. This is a case which amounts to deception of the general public. For, though administrative decentralization to local elected bodies is believed to have taken place, matters are, in fact, not heard, discussed and debated and critically analysed in the General Body Meeting of the ZP, but in a parallel body, the DIC. However, the general public is under the impression that it is being discussed in the ZP.

Moreover, the DIC has co-opted into its body the ZP President and the members of the Standing Committee on Education and Health.
One may well question the role of the Standing Committee in becoming a part of the DIC. Should it have been allowed to become a part of the DIC or SSA Committee, as it is called? As a Standing Committee of the Zilla Panchayat, does it not owe allegiance to the ZP and the ZP only? Can it have a truck with any other body; can it place its services before another body? Can it be co-opted by any other body? These are questions which we ought to ask ourselves.

One would think that the Standing Committee of the Zilla Panchayat is a body set up by the Zilla Panchayat, enjoying its powers and exclusively accountable to it, and through it to the people. Neither the state government nor anybody else has ownership of the Standing Committee Reports till they are placed before the General Body meeting of the ZP and become public. These are important issues which have to be discussed. What is happening now is that a few members of the ZP are being plucked from the ZP body and are substituting for the latter as the ‘political wing’. Nothing on the SSA programme comes before the entire body of elected representatives of the ZP, only before a few of its members, that is, the Standing Committee members and the President of the ZP and that too in the parallel DIC meeting. Thus, the DIC meeting consisted mostly of officials, NGOs and state-level elected representatives. The result of this method of functioning is that the body of elected representatives of the ZP is made redundant and is unaware of the SSA programmes which, however, constitutionally fall within their jurisdiction.

Sometimes, even the Standing Committee members are dispensed within the decision-making process, as a report in Panchayati Raj Update suggests. Entitled ‘Notices to DDPIs (Deputy Director of Public Instruction) for Overlooking ZP Committee’, it says,

Bangalore Urban District Deputy Commissioner and CEO of Bangalore Urban Zilla Panchayat, C. S. Narayanswamy issued show cause notices to the Deputy Directors of Public Instruction (DDPI) of north and south districts of Bangalore for finalizing the list of schools under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan without consulting the panchayat’s standing committee on education. He also directed the DDPIs to call a meeting of the standing committee before giving effect to the list prepared by them (2004: 127).

From this, it is clear that only the Standing Committee and not the general body of the ZP is routinely taken into confidence regarding the SSA programmes in the district.

All this has belittled and reduced the role of the elected representative of local self-government and made a mockery of it. For should he not
be pointing out the discrepancies and pulling up the officials involved in the General Body Meetings of the ZP? Indeed, this task is ably performed by the General Body members of the ZP, as any visitor to their meetings will testify. Or is his role merely that of someone who is co-opted into another body where he has to be negotiated with and pacified with some loaves and crumbs thrown in his direction? Is this not belittling the role of the elected representative of the people? Will the people respect a leader who is seen as a negotiating agent and not as a man who represents them in a democratic forum?

Another serious fall-out of this method of operation is that it enhances the role and importance of officialdom, particularly that of the CEO vis-à-vis the elected representatives. For the CEO is privy to the deliberations in both the ZP and the DIC. One may say, so also is the President of the ZP but the head without the body, or, rather, a truncated body consisting only of Standing Committee members, is not of much use. Moreover, the executive power lies with the CEO. As Dr Jayadev said in his interview with this author, ‘The ZP President has an ornamental post. The real power is with the CEO.’ If one bears in mind that almost every government department has set up a Society to execute its major schemes, one can understand that the power of the CEO is multiplied many times while the power of the ZP President and elected members is correspondingly diminished. Thus, we end up with an emasculated ZP and a greatly reinforced officialdom. As Vyasulu told this author in an interview, ‘The Societies are totally run by the bureaucracy.’ The people’s desires and aspirations do not find expression.

Thus, while sidelining the body of elected representatives, the NGOs and state-level elected representatives have been included in the decision-making, supervision and monitoring functions of the SSA at the district level. This is patently unconstitutional.

**At the TP Level**

The sidelining of elected representatives of the local self-government does not take place only at the district level. It goes all the way down to the taluk and village levels in a thorough-going and systematic fashion. At the block level, which corresponds to the taluk, is the Block Implementation Committee (BIC). There are five educational blocks in Chamarajanagar District. The BIC is parallel to the TP. It deals exclusively with the SSA programme and is better known as the SSA Committee. In fact, when we first made enquiries about the BIC, we
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Sámartya, the implementing agency of the SSA Programme, drew a blank and found later that there was indeed such a Committee but it was simply called the SSA Committee.7

The BIC (or SSA Committee at the block level) has seven members. As with the DIC and ZP, so with the BIC, the President of the TP is the President of the BIC. So also, the MLA is the Honorary President of the BIC as he is of the TP. These are the two elected representatives on the BIC, one of them being a local government elected representative and the other being a state-level elected representative. The remaining members are nominated members and officials. The BEO is the Member-Secretary of the BIC. The other members are the Block Resource Centre (BRC) Coordinator (an SSA employee), the President of the Primary School Teachers' Association and two educationists of the area.8 The BIC is, quite clearly, a parallel body to the TP.

From the list of members given above, it is clear that there is only one representative of the local elected body. The TP has 26 elected representatives but only one of them finds a place in the BIC. Perhaps this is because the TP does not have a functioning Standing Committee on Education and Health as does the ZP.

Since the DIC is the main decision-making body in the district with regard to the SSA programme, the BIC merely implements the decisions of the DIC at the block level. According to Mujir Ahmad Khan, Cluster Resource Person (CRP) of the SSA, ‘The SSA Committee is only an advisory body at the taluk level where some political influence can be exercised. The members of the Committee mostly visit the schools and monitor the work.’ Meetings are not held regularly. Rather, they are held only when the funds for the SSA programme are released by the DIC. The money goes from the DIC to the BIC into the joint account of the BEO and the BRC functionary.

Here, it may be pointed out that the BRC and the Cluster Resource Centre (CRC) are new institutions set up by the SSA to achieve its goals. Thus, while sidling the existing democratic institutions, it has been very innovative in setting up a large number of new institutions, including the DIC and the BIC as well as the BRC and the CRC. The SSA seems to have had a free hand in setting up all manner of institutions under the Society mode of implementation done in fast-track and mission-mode.

At the GP Level

While the DIC and BIC are parallel bodies at the ZP and TP levels respectively, the School Development and Monitoring Committee (SDMC) is a parallel body at the level of the GP.
The SDMC consists of nine parent representatives of the village school. One of the parents is the President and the Headmaster of the school is the Secretary. The ex-officio member of the SDMC is the Panchayat member residing in that village. Nominated members of the SDMC consist of donors of land or equipment to the school, since in the new scheme of things the school belongs to the ‘community’ and must be taken care of by it. Hence, the relatively well-off members of the ‘community’ automatically find a place on the SDMC. Any NGOs connected with the school may also be on the SDMC. The term of the SDMC is for a period of three years.

First, the SDMC performs functions that constitutionally belong to the GP. Second, it receives funds directly from the DIC and BIC. Thus, funds which should have gone to PRIs are diverted to the SDMC. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the SDMC in Karnataka maintains no links with the PRIs. On the other hand, it is the GP that is often called upon to support the activities of the SDMC, as and when required. We will examine this one-sided relationship in some detail. But first let us take a look at the mandated functions of the GP and the SDMC.

According to an Amendment to the Panchayat Raj Act, 1993, no. 1202, October 2004, the GP has the following functions in the field of primary and secondary education:

(i) ensure full enrolment of school-age children;
(ii) maintain school buildings and playgrounds;
(iii) exercise vigilance on regular attendance of teachers and students and report to the concerned;
(iv) campaign for full enrolment and reduction of drop-outs;
(v) assess the drop-out position and initiate appropriate action to reduce it; and
(vi) assist TPs in the distribution of study material to target-group students.

Thus, GPs have responsibilities to their constituents in the above mentioned tasks. If there are SDMCs, they may perform the above tasks but they have the constitutional responsibility to report these matters to the GP. In other words, they have to keep the GP of their area informed of the situation in their schools. This is not happening in Karnataka. The SDMCs operate on their own without so much as a glance in the direction of the constitutionally appointed
elected body of the GP. According to a baseline study conducted by the District Quality Education Project of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore, ‘Some Panchayat members felt marginalized as they were not directly involved with the functioning of schools. This has led to tensions between SDMC and Panchayat members’ (2003: 17).

A perusal of the Government Circular on the Establishment of School Development and Monitoring Committees in Government Primary and High Schools in Karnataka, issued on 30 March 2001, sees mention of a long list of the powers of the SDMC and another list on the duties and functions of the SDMC but nowhere does it mention the need for accountability of the SDMC to the local elected body. This makes the SDMC a parallel body, working on its own and accountable only to the SSA institutions of the BIC and DIC above it and to the autonomous Society of the SSA at the district level.

On the other hand, while no report of SDMC functions is placed before the General Body of the GP, the latter is expected to lend its support in whatever way it can in the discharge of those functions. This became clear to this author when she visited a few villages in Hoskote taluk of Bangalore Rural District.

**A One-sided Relationship**

In Rampura village, Hoskote taluk, Bangalore Rural District, the SSA had sanctioned the building of two new classrooms adjoining the present primary school. An amount of ₹1.5 lakh had arrived but the government land allotted for the new rooms was not free of encroachment. Members of one family in the village had been using the place to store their cowdung for the past one year. When the Headmaster asked the family to clear the place, they refused and this was followed by a clash. Then, the GP stepped in. It sent a letter to the family, asking them to remove the cowdung or else it would take action. The warning had its desired effect and the next day the place was cleared and the encroachment removed. Following this, the SSA was able to construct the two new classrooms.

Other functions performed for the school by the GP were: wiring and electrical connection for computers in the school, leveling the school grounds and providing money to celebrate school functions. In addition, the TP had constructed a borewell in the school premises. Given the meagre resources at the command of the PRIs, this was...
all the activity that they could accomplish. The major work such as
collection of new classrooms, toilets, compound wall, etc. is done
by SSA, without taking the GP into confidence. In fact, the PRIs
have an Engineering Department, which is increasingly being marginal-
ized. As one ZP member of Bangalore Rural District pointed out
in the General Body Meeting of the ZP held on 7 September 2004,
‘the SDMCs do not have any technical knowledge regarding drinking
water schemes, toilets and school rooms. How do they do all these
tasks? We have no information regarding this. So please give us this
information.’ In other words, the ZP was not even informed of the
work done by the SDMC.

In the village of Santhanur, also in Hoskote taluk, the functions
of the GP were very similar to what has been noted above, that is,
providing electrical connections and water facility, leveling the school
grounds and celebrating school functions. The GP had set aside
₹25,000 for all the 10 villages which came under it for the above men-
tioned tasks. In addition, the TP had built eight kitchens for the akshara
dasoha midday meal scheme in eight of the villages and two were
pending at the time of the fieldwork. The kitchens had been built from
funds obtained from the SGRY, a central government scheme.

According to a baseline study conducted by the District Quality
Education Project in Chamarajnagar mentioned above, ‘of the 21
panchayats we surveyed, in 56%, school featured as a concern and they
had contributed from the panchayat funds to improve the infrastructure
of schools in their areas’ (2003: 17). Thus, there was a clear interest of
the Panchayat in the schools in which its children studied. However,
there was an overlap of ‘infrastructure development’ functions by the
SSA and the PRIs. While the SSA was given the responsibility and
the funds for the major infrastructure developmental activities such as
constructing new classrooms, compound walls, etc., the PRIs were not
to be left behind and were engaged in similar but lesser activities like
constructing a kitchen or a borewell. This is in spite of the fact that the
PRIs have an Engineering Division which the SSA does not have.

We were told that in Santhanur, the selection of the SDMC
members is done by the important (read rich) persons of the village
(mukhyastharu). For the Independence Day function, the mukhyastharu
had provided the plates and glasses for the meal. In other villages,
they have been approached for furniture, e.g., a chair for the computer
table, sports equipment, etc. and have been invited to donate these
articles to the school. In other words, the mukhyastharu of the village
are being overtly recognized and, indeed, being given a role to play in the school and the SDMC by virtue of their status as wealthy persons of the village. Perhaps this is what is meant by ‘handing over the village school to the community’. This is the very opposite of the reservation system extant in the GP.

The SDMC has nine parent members, all of whom have children studying in the school. They are elected for a period of three years. They require the signature of the MLA to become members, as according to Government Order No. ED1PBS2001 issued on 7 August 2004, the MLA is empowered to constitute the SDMC Committees. He is the Chairman of the Selection Committee of the SDMC. In addition, the 'big men' (mukhyastharu) of the village are also members. We were told that meetings are called not on a regular basis, but only when they are needed to discuss an issue or when the funds for some activity arrive. Similarly, in the village in Kolar district studied by us, the SDMC rarely met and decisions were taken by the SDMC President, a notable or mukhyastharu of the village, and the Headmaster. Members do not attend the meetings. They simply come and sign whenever a function is held in the school. Decisions are taken by the President, the Headmaster and the important people of the village.

However, in the villages where NGOs are active, the picture is somewhat different. This was the case in Chamarajnagar, where a District Quality Education Project of the National Institute of Advanced Studies, was functioning to improve the quality of education in primary schools (Vidyankura 2006). Here, we found that regular monthly meetings were called and the GP member of the village was present at the meeting. But the sheer large scale of the schools in the state makes it practically impossible for NGOs to hold the hand of every SDMC. This brings us to the role of NGOs in the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan programme.

The Role of NGOs

There are a number of NGOs functioning in the area of primary education in Karnataka, e.g., Vidyankura, mentioned above, which is concerned with improving the quality of education, Azim Premji Foundation which is involved in the midday meal scheme, etc. Below, we will consider NGOs which are engaged in the area of 'capacity-building' of rural, decentralized institutions.
Movement for Alternatives and Youth Awareness (MAYA) is the main NGO in the field of primary education. Begun in 1989, it works, among other things, in the area of ‘capacity building’ of rural decentralized institutions, also known as CBOs, like the SDMC. What does this ‘capacity building’ mean? The SSA and other World Bank-funded projects give a great deal of importance to ‘community participation’ and even ‘community ownership’. Article VII of the Jomtien Declaration, released at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990, in a section entitled ‘Strengthening Partnerships’, states,

National, regional and local educational authorities … cannot be expected to supply every human, financial or organizational requirement for this task. New and revitalized partnerships at all levels will be necessary: partnerships between government and non-governmental organizations, the private sector, local communities, religious groups and families (Jomtien Declaration 1990).

It is the forging of these new partnerships that ‘capacity building’ implies and which is the brief of the NGO. This is reiterated in the guidelines for DPEP which states that ‘a beginning has to be made with district as the unit of planning’. It adds that there should be ‘a genuine community involvement in the running of schools and building up local level capacity to ensure effective decentralization of educational planning’ (DPEP guidelines, http://www.educationforallinindia.com/page 87.html, accessed 27 October 2010).

In ‘Broad Strategies Central to SSA Programme’, the SSA document mentions ‘community ownership’, It states, ‘the programme calls for community ownership of school-based interventions through effective decentralization. This will be augmented by involvement of women’s groups, village education committee members and members of panchayat raj institutions’ (http://www.educationforallinindia.com/SSA1.htm, accessed 27 October 2010). While the DPEP document did not mention PRIs, the SSA does. It goes on to say, ‘SSA envisages cooperation between teachers, parents and PRIs, as well as accountability and transparency to the community.’ But the notion of ‘community’ is left vague. Under ‘Financial Norms under SSA’ it states, ‘All funds to be used for upgradation, maintenance, repair of schools and Teaching Learning Equipment and local management to be transferred to Village Education Committee/School Management Committees/Gram Panchayat or any other village/school level
arrangement for decentralization adopted by that particular State/UT’ (my emphasis). From the above it appears that the state has a number of options to choose from and the GP is one of them. In a document entitled ‘Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan: Framework for Implementation’, the SSA points out that it is called a framework and not a guideline in order to ‘allow States to formulate context specific guidelines within the overall framework’ (‘SSA Framework for Implementation’ 2000: 4).

Thus, we are given to understand that there is a degree of flexibility in interpreting the SSA programme at the state level. If this is the case, then how has Karnataka fared? For this, we will have to take a look at the work of the main NGO in the field of primary education in Karnataka, namely MAYA, and the manner in which it interprets ‘capacity building’ of the CBOs such as the SDMCs. MAYA is a big NGO which works in 18 of the 27 districts of Karnataka. Therefore, it has a major impact on the nature of the relationship between the CBOs and PRIs. What kind of interface does it encourage between the SDMC and the PRIs in its ‘capacity building’ endeavours?

According to MAYA, for the first time, it brought the different ‘stakeholders’ together in a partnership. In the villages that come under the Thumbala GP, the first such attempt at ‘a joint meeting comprising the GP members, constituent SDMC members and the education coordinator representing the Dept. of Education was facilitated at the GP level’ (MAYA 2004: 11).

In the meeting, ‘SDMC members briefed the others regarding their work so far and the areas in which support of the GP and the Department of Education is required. The Panchayat members, on their part, discussed ways in which they could support specific issues’ (MAYA 2004: 11; my emphasis). ‘The meeting at Thumbala GP served as a precursor to the formation of a formal structure at the GP level to address school development …’ (ibid.).

Here, we find the crux of the relationship between the different ‘stakeholders’ in school development in Karnataka, as encouraged by the NGO. The SDMC holds centre-stage. The GP has been accorded the role of supporting the SDMC, i.e., removing the obstacles in its way in the task of school development, as we saw in Rampura and the other villages. At the same time, while soliciting the support of the GP, there is no mention of any accountability to the GP on the part of the SDMC in the form of a report of the works done or the finances involved. This has not been encouraged by the NGO in its ‘capacity-building’ exercise.
Moreover, as we saw in the DIC and the BIC, the member of the GP who belongs to the village in which the school is situated is on the SDMC Committee. In other words, one GP member, powerless in his individual capacity, has been plucked from the GP, perhaps to lend a degree of legitimacy to the actions and programmes of the SDMC. The General Body of the GP is not given the time of day. It is not consulted regarding the SSA programmes and activities in the GP, let alone made accountable to.

As stated in Prajayatna, the journal brought out by the NGO which is the ‘education reform’ wing of MAYA, ‘Since the elected representatives are also members of the SDMC, it provides an opportunity for direct interaction between the parents, teachers and elected representatives to discuss and jointly take decisions regarding the school’ (2003: 13). However, some of the GP members are unhappy with this state of affairs. The baseline study conducted by the District Quality Education Programme points out that ‘some panchayat members felt marginalized as they were not directly involved with the functioning of schools. This has led to tensions between SDMC and Panchayat members’ (District Quality Education Project, 2003: 17).

Prajayatna has facilitated the setting up of a body at the GP level, analogous to the BIC at the taluk level and the DIC at the District level and calls it the ‘SDMC network’. It consists of all the SDMC Presidents within the area of the GP, the President and Secretary of the GP and the CRP of the area, who is a functionary of the SSA. This then is a body which is parallel to the Gram Panchayat and bears no accountability to the latter. According to Keshav, a Prajayatna functionary of Hoskote taluk, ‘we (the SDMC network) conduct meetings every one or two months. School level planning is discussed and consolidated here. The Gram Panchayat is expected to provide drinking water, take up repair work for the school building etc.’ With this innovative institutional mechanism, the development of parallel bodies in the field of school development and monitoring is complete from the district level to the village level.

That the GP has been making significant contributions to the local school, monetary and otherwise, is clear from Prajayatna’s report. It gives the following examples of contributions made by the GPs in Karnataka for school improvement.

The Gram Panchayat (Bidaluru GP, Devenhalli Taluk, Bangalore Rural District) has given Rs. 10,000 for Government Higher Primary School repair
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in Bidaluru, Rs. 35,000 for constructing compound wall in Malegenahalli and Rs. 20,000 for repairs of Anganwadi in Anighatta, besides taking up other school infrastructure work (Prajayatna 2003: 19).

In Karimuddanahalli GP, Hunsur Taluk, Mysore district,

The Gram Panchayat appointed a Hindi teacher from Basavanahalli for Karimuddanahalli School and arranged an honorarium of Rs.500 for the teacher. The panchayat has also made provisions for water and toilet facilities besides arranging the sanction of Rs. 1.5 lakhs for High School building in Karimuddanahalli (Prajayatna: 19).

To sum up, these examples show, as does the Rampura and other examples cited above, that the GPs have been making contributions and extending support to the SDMCs. However, the SDMCs, or for that matter, the Village Education Committees or the School Betterment Committees which were earlier versions of the SDMC (all CBOs) in the field of primary education, have, in turn, not been made accountable to the elected representatives of the GPs of the area, either by invoking Section 61A of the Panchayat Raj Act wherein they become a sub-committee of the Panchayat or simply by placing their finances and performance before the concerned General Body of the GP. Thus, an organic relationship between the CBO in the field of education and the PRIs has not been developed in Karnataka. Rather, it is a one-sided relationship where the PRI is the giver and the SDMC is the recipient of its concern and support. This is a case of taking advantage of the elected representative and, at the same time, not accepting his role as the people’s representative, which calls for a measure of accountability on the part of the CBO.

It may be noted that the NGO responsible for capacity-building in this field had ambitions plans (‘redefining existing structures and creating alternate structures’, according to Keshav) and a blank slate to work on. It has chosen to develop an asymmetrical relationship between the CBO and the GP, with the CBO having the primary role and the GP having a secondary or supportive role. If we recall that there is not one CBO in an area but several, we can understand how the PRIs are being used, yet sidelined and undermined.

Thus, in the new dispensation of ‘reform’ since the early 1990s, political decentralization is being thrust aside, while avowedly ‘a-political’ CBOs, with ‘capacity-building’ assiduously carried out by NGOs, are being encouraged to take centre-stage.
(ii) A Redeployed Bureaucracy

While elected representatives of local bodies have been unceremoniously sidelined and undermined, there has been a corresponding redeployment or repositioning of the bureaucracy. What strikes the visitor to the offices of Societies based in Bangalore are the plush interiors of either newly constructed buildings in the centre of the city, like the SSA office, or buildings taken on rent in posh localities like that of the Jalasamvardhana Yojane (JSYS), a tank-rehabilitation Society or the Karnataka State AIDS Prevention Society (KSAPS). A far cry from the staid, old parent Department, if one may call it so. A visit to the new office gives the impression that it is flush with funds, a comment that has been made by Sarangapani and Vasavi regarding the glossy annual reports brought out by these Societies (2003: 3408). Had the new and posh premises been restricted to the state capital, it would not have called for further comment. But the physical separation of the Society runs, amazingly, all the way down from the state to the district onto the taluk and village. In other words, a parallel bureaucracy has been put in place in which the Society functions in a parallel manner to the parent Department. I was amused to find that in Kolar town, the SSA accounts office is separated from the main accounts office by a row of trunks! This parallel bureaucracy is depicted in Diagram 6.1.

Not only are the offices of the Society and the parent Education Department physically distinct but there has been a division of labour. The old Department, consisting of the DDPI and the BEO, takes care of ‘administration’, which largely involves the mundane task of disbursing salaries to the teachers in the primary and secondary schools of the block. It takes care of the midday meal scheme and disburses free uniforms and textbooks to primary school students. SC and ST students are also provided with free notebooks and school bags. It is also concerned with the personnel problems of the teachers like their transfers and sundry other activities. The SSA, on the other hand, has been assigned the more exciting task of ‘development’, both in infrastructure and in academe, namely the training of teachers.

We may well ask if this is an appropriate division of labour to make regarding primary education. Will not the old bureaucracy feel resentful, not only of the well-heeled SSA Society14 and its mission-mode status, but also robbed of its function of ‘development’? How does one assuage the feelings of the BEO who now has to share his turf with SSA functionaries? These issues were not part of this study. However, it
The Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan became clear to me, in an interview with Padma Sarangapani and Rahul Mukhopadhyay, that the new arrangement has led to confusion. We will now take a look at some of the complexities that have arisen from this method of functioning, that is, parallel bureaucratic structures in which one half is privileged and in mission mode and fast-track, and the other half is the experienced, routinized bureaucracy, anxious to hold on to its old power and pelf.

There has been a tremendous restructuring of the old Education Department. ‘Earlier,’ Sarangapani explained, ‘there was the Education Department up to the Block level which had the Block Education Officer. Below him were structures called School Complexes, consisting of the high schools, middle schools and primary schools in the Block, forming a School Cluster. High school teachers would
provide academic support to primary school teachers and so on.’ It was mainly concerned with the strengthening of academic inputs to schools. These have now been replaced by BRCs and CRCs with the educational reform introduced by the DPEP and later by the SSA. But, says Sarangapani, ‘it is really strange because after so many years, you will still find the BEO talking about the School Complex and the meeting of School Complexes, like it is some old habit which has just not died!’

Sarangapani also pointed out that there are now many Heads, not one, and ‘there is enormous confusion of functioning between the various Heads. Work has not been taken away; everybody is doing the same thing and it is being done two or three times.’ Rahul Mukhopadhyay also pointed out that there is a lot of replication. For instance, data is collected by the SSA Society as well as by the Department’s Commissioner for Public Instruction (CPI). The SSA Society has its BRCs and CRCs to fall back on and the CPI has the office of the BEO to do the work of data collection. Sarangapani added that there is also ‘replication of instructions. The CPI’s office is issuing some instructions to the BRCs and CRCs. SSA is sending them circulars. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) is also sending them circulars; on who you are and what you should be doing.’ She went on, ‘they are not talking to each other about what each is doing. The amount of replication of work which is going on is really something.’ She gave the instance of the appointment of teachers for the BRCs and CRCs.

The SSA cannot send memos on what should be done. Officially, it has to go through the CPI’s office. But what we find is that the SSA actually does hand out circulars to the BRC and CRC people. And so they send off a circular. In the meantime, the CPI’s office says, no, no, these are the criteria on which people will be appointed. Then Vijay Bhaskar (Principal Secretary to the Government of Karnataka, Department of Elementary Education and Literacy) comes in and says, no, no, only a retired teacher will be appointed. So actually, over a period of six months, the same decision is debated and re-debated and re-taken in various forums. Again and again, you are meeting to talk about the same issue and the same discussion, arriving at a new conclusion which can then be overturned, so at no point is the decision closed. It has been kept open endlessly. And, most recently, they even conducted the examination and we still don’t know if the results of that exam will hold for teachers because it can still be overturned by a new insight somebody has, which they will say is the most meaningful thing to be doing.
Sarangapani and Mukhopadhyay portray the frustration and disillusionment of the functionaries of the District Quality Education Project, which is an SSA intervention, with the manner of functioning of the parent Department. This is evident in an article written by Mukhopadhyay, entitled ‘Rules and Practices within the Education Bureaucracy’. He writes, ‘The everyday practices of the Cluster Resource Person (an SSA functionary) show a considerable emphasis on meeting administrative norms as against the academic supervisory work they are supposed to undertake … the CRPs are implicated automatically in the task (of data collection) and that their accountability should primarily lie with the Block Education Officer (BEO) also goes unquestioned.’ Apparently, the parent Department, through its BEO, is asserting its authority and claiming its space, much to the chagrin of the SSA functionaries. Mukhopadhyay depicts the tensions inherent in the parallel bureaucratic structures, given below in Diagram 6.2.

From Diagram 6.2 it is clear that the SSA, of which the District Quality Education Project, also known as Vidyankura, is a part, sees
interference at many levels; at the level of the DDPI (administration or the old parent Department) who is impinging on the role of the DDPI (development or the new SSA) which, to my mind, itself is an artificial division. He also appears to impinge on the role of the SSA Project Coordinators. The BEO, on his part, is viewed as impinging on the role of the BRC of the SSA programme. In other words, the SSA Society has autonomy, but, unhappily, still finds itself enmeshed and embedded in the bureaucracy of the Education Department. Clearly, the relationship of SSA to its parent Department has not been adequately spelt out, leading to a lot of confusion, which undoubtedly would have an impact on its performance.

Where does the ZP come in the matter of primary education? During my perusal of the minutes of the ZP, I found that the General Body of the ZP, in its meetings, takes up routine issues such as the transfer of this or that teacher, textbooks were not supplied in time, etc. However, SSA programmes do not come under the scanner of the ZP General Body meeting, that is, the ‘developmental’ agenda escapes the purview of this body. Hence, there is not a word about the SSA programmes in the minutes.

The SSA programme then cannot be recognized as a decentralized one. For, by making divisions in the governance of primary education into Society and parent Department, developmental and routine tasks, which are answerable to different fora, namely the DIC and the ZP, a skilful sleight of hand has been effected which cannot, by any stretch of the imagination, be called decentralization. The impression is thereby sought to be created that decentralization of primary education has taken place, whereas it has not indeed wholly taken place. A substantial part of it, the SSA, is left out of the purview of political decentralization, though administrative decentralization may have occurred.

This method of functioning causes replication of functions at every level, resulting in a waste of the tax-payer’s money, keeping in mind the fact that he is required to pay an additional cess of 2 per cent for primary education.

Another problem is the sustainability of the UEE programme, once the SSA project is over in 2010. What will happen to the new institutions that have been created and are funded by the SSA, such as the BRC and CRC? Will they vanish into thin air? What will happen to the teachers who have been employed under the SSA scheme? These problems would not have arisen had the PRIs been used to reach the goal of universalization of education, for these institutions are
permanent structures and exist in perpetuity through a Constitutional mandate. At the same time, the PRIs would have gained valuable experience in handling an important issue like universalization of education, strengthening the PRIs in the process. For, unless these institutions are put to use in the areas that are constitutionally ascribed to them, they are likely to become moribund institutions.

(iii) Parallel Fund Flows

The SSA is a centrally-sponsored programme. The centre–state fund-sharing arrangement is on an 85:15 basis in the IX Plan, 75:25 under the X Plan and 50:50 thereafter. Unlike the DPEP which was entirely externally funded,\(^{16}\) the SSA receives its funds largely from the general revenues of the government. In addition, it receives funds from the 2 per cent education cess levied on all taxes by the central government, which amounts to about ₹5000 crore. The government has also availed of external aid to the tune of one billion dollars, consisting of loans from the World Bank and aid from the (UK) Department for International Development (DfID), the European Union etc.\(^{17}\) Clearly, the government is leaving no stone unturned in ensuring that money will not be lacking for the important task of achieving universal elementary education.

The route that the funds take is from the centre to the SSA Society, which is located in the State Project Office in Bangalore and then on to the DIC, the BRC and the CRC and on to the SDMC. Thus, the PRIs are completely bypassed in the transfer of funds at the district and sub-district levels.

The quantum of money spent on SSA is very large. According to Nityanand Aradhya, ‘₹400 crore was spent on the entire DPEP programme in Karnataka whereas for SSA, the annual budget is in that region.’\(^ {18}\) Giving an exact figure, Subbanna, Chief Accounts Officer, State Project Office, said that the total outlay of SSA for 2004–2005 is ₹435.92 crore.\(^ {19}\)

Regarding SSA funds, as with funds delineated for all Societies, there appears to be a problem of accountability. Generally, government expenditure takes place from the Consolidated Fund which has to be passed by the legislature; this is not the case with funds of Societies which bypass the legislature. While this may lead to flexibility in expenditure in the sense that the Society may make its own rules as to how the money should be spent, which are only subject to the
approval of the Director of the Society, it also raises questions of financial accountability.

According to the MoU of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyana Samithi-Karnataka,

The accounts of the Society shall be audited annually by a Chartered Accountant and in accordance with the provisions of the Societies Registration Act, 1860. The audited accounts shall be communicated to the Society, which shall submit a copy of Audit Report along with observations to the State Government and the Central Government wherever appropriate. The accounts of the Society shall also be subject to the provisions of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Duties, powers and conditions of Service) Act, 1971 as amended from time to time.

Further, it adds,

The Annual Report on the working of the Society and the work undertaken by it during the year together with Balance Sheet and Audited Accounts, shall be prepared by the Executive Committee for information of the Central and the State Governments and the members of the Society. A draft of the Annual Report along with the audited accounts and the Auditor’s Report thereon shall be placed before the Society in its annual General meeting.

It is clear from the above that accountability is to the Society alone, in particular to the Development Commissioner, who is Chairman of the Society. There is no accountability to the local elected bodies. However, information regarding the SSA, in the form of its Annual Reports, is made available to the state and central governments. The CAG does go through the accounts of the SSA, but this is a general report and not a state-specific one, therefore the nuances of the Society’s expenditure in the state on the SSA are lost. According to Subhash Chandra Garg,

The central government is transferring large amounts to State level Societies and local bodies directly. These amounts are not reflected in the State budgets and accordingly are not subject to States’ financial control and are not accountable to State legislatures. There are large amounts of unutilized funds lying with these agencies … Administrative ministries/departments do not hold the State agencies and local bodies accountable for proper use of the funds. The CAG system is too centralized to conduct a good audit of these agencies. Audits by chartered accountants appointed by these agencies are usually not qualitatively appropriate. There is a real absence of an accountability mechanism for central funds which bypass the State budgets (2006: 4982).
The accounts of expenditure thus bypass the elected representatives of local bodies and this is a major drawback of the programme. One may well ask in which forum are the questions asked and queries made. Since institutions like the Gram Sabha and GP are not utilized, everything is alright on paper as reported by the chartered accountants but physical verifiability of the work done is lacking. This has been commented on by Rahul Mukhopadhyay. He says,

One former Block Resource Centre noted that audits are relegated only to examination of proper documentation without corresponding physical verification. This leaves ample scope for financial malpractices in utilization of funds earmarked for school maintenance and other provisions. Furthermore, the auditing officers are often hand in glove with the educational functionaries at the district and block level in terms of these financial malpractices, the former BRC further observed (2006: 110).

Since no questions are asked in any of the General Body Meetings of the PRIs, the officials go scot-free!

Thus, as with the parastatal bodies mentioned in Chapter 5, here too, monitoring the work of SSA and the funds spent becomes a difficult exercise. According to a recent report of the CAG, reported in the TOI, ‘Rs. 99.88 crore was diverted to activities/schemes which were beyond SSA’s scope in several States, including Maharashtra, Karnataka, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh’ (TOI 2006a). It also notes, ‘Apart from diversion of funds, the CAG report also points to financial irregularities of Rs.472.51 crore in 14 States and Union territories.’ It continues, ‘The report highlights wasteful expenditure by several States on schools which were closed, and worse, also on those that did not even exist. In two districts of Jharkhand, school grants of Rs. 47.88 lakh was released to 2,369 schools which were non-existent. In Punjab, lakhs of rupees were spent on constructing toilets in schools which were shut down! Funds under the community leaders’ training scheme have also been misused. In Maharashtra, Tripura, Nagaland and West Bengal, Rs. 3.01 crore was spent on the scheme, which aims to train four community leaders per village, but no training was imparted’ (ibid.). In short, funds which bypass the state exchequer and are routed through Societies appear to be vulnerable to misappropriation.

The solution to this problem has been found by the Human Resource Development (HRD) Ministry, not in activating local self-government institutions but in conducting ‘an independent joint review mission
of SSA twice a year, along with external funding agencies’. A report entitled ‘SSA Comes under HRD Ministry Lens’ in the TOI notes,

Following the CAG’s report on diversion of funds from Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, the Union HRD ministry has developed a stringent mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the flagship scheme to achieve universalization of education in all States and Union territories. It will now be mandatory for all States to send monthly progress reports against key indicators and a detailed quarterly progress report to the Centre. In the fresh guidelines issued on Wednesday, the ministry has asked for an independent joint review mission of SSA twice a year, along with external funding agencies … (TOI 2006b).

Thus, the Ministry and the multilateral agencies have not thought of using the institutions of Panchayat Raj which, relying as it does on people’s intimate knowledge of their village’s affairs, is a formidable resource and could well serve as a check on corruption.

Similarly, the NGO sector has, in the last few decades, grown by leaps and bounds. According to Biswas, ‘The voluntary sector tends to function more or less as a vast, unregulated body’ (2006: 4409). She says, ‘Most NGOs are accountable only to themselves and their funders.’ She asks, ‘If today the Right to Information Act can be brought to bear upon government bodies, do we not also require some mechanism to ensure transparency and accountability from NGOs?’ Given that NGOs have been given a crucial role to play in ‘capacity-building’, (as we have seen) abolition of child labour and many other areas in the field of education, there is need for a public policy that clarifies NGO relationship with government and foreign donor agencies. According to Srivastava and Tandon,

A key challenge before the non-profit sector in India would be to seek the enunciation of a consistent public policy that could clarify and normalize its relationship with the government as well as with foreign donor agencies … Simultaneously, the development and enforcement of codes of conduct by members of the NPO (Non-profit organizations) community and their willingness to be accountable are of critical importance for the sector to be viewed as viable by various stake-holders’ (2005: 1951).

It is imperative that NGOs be made accountable to local elected bodies.20

With the universalization of primary education being largely dependant on the Society mode of functioning as well as on NGOs,
the issue of lack of accountability becomes a matter of serious concern, which is likely to impinge, ultimately, on the overall success of the project.

To sum up, Karnataka has chosen the Society mode of implementation of its developmental projects. The SSA is one such Society. It runs parallel to PRIs at the district, taluk and village levels, resulting in a lack of political decentralization. It sidelines the local elected body but strengthens the hands of the CEO of the ZP. It has created new institutions, such as the DIC, the BIC and the SDMC which, while co-opting a few elected representatives, sideline and hence undermine the General Body of the ZP, TP and GP. The latter are expected to, and do indeed, play second fiddle to these new institutions, giving them whatever support they can from their meagre resources.

The Society mode of implementation has also created a parallel bureaucracy which has its own set of problems, resulting in considerable confusion regarding performance of the tasks of the educational bureaucracy. Given that more and more of the development agenda is sought to be taking place through Societies, this has ominous consequences for the future of PRIs in Karnataka.

Thus, the SSA has provided a model for development through Societies. It is an all-encompassing model, covering the entire state vertically from the state (indeed centre) to the district and on to the block and the village. It also covers the state horizontally, and is operational through the entire length and breadth of the state. It has created a number of new institutional structures, such as the DIC, BIC, SDMC, BRC and CRC. It has marginalized the old structures, such as the ZP, TP and GP, as well as bureaucratic structures like the offices of the CPI, DDPI and BEO. A more thoroughgoing attempt to change the institutional structure cannot be visualized.

These new institutions do not acknowledge the presence of the elected representatives of local self-government. Rather, individual GP members have been plucked from the body and made to sit and participate in the committees of the various CBOs and extend all manner of help to them. In this way, the support of the PRIs is enlisted without giving away anything in return! The discussion and debate that should take place in the General Body meetings of the PRIs regarding the scheme is done away with. Political decentralization is not just undermined but completely eschewed.

In course of time, the Society mode of functioning is expected to permeate the whole Department, indeed the entire government
bureaucracy, as we will see in the following chapters. The present scenario is merely a transitory phase to a time when there will be little or no political decentralization and administrative and financial decentralization will occur to parallel bodies.

Notes

1. Vyasaulu roundly criticizes the Society’s predilection for hiring foreign consultants at a high fee (2003: 41, n. 18). Similar apprehensions have been voiced by other scholars as well.

2. In November 1997, with the reorganization of districts, Raichur was bifurcated into Raichur and Koppal, Bijapur into Bijapur and Bagalkot, Mysore into Mysore and Chamarajanagar and Dharwad got trifurcated into Dharwad, Gadag and Haveri.

3. Fieldwork for the study of the SSA was carried out in Chamarajnagar Taluk and Bangalore (Rural) Taluk. I thank Dr A. R. Vasavi and her team in Chamarajnagar for facilitating my fieldwork in Chamarajnagar for three days from 4–7 July 2005. Chamarajnagar District was carved out of Mysore District in 1998. It is in the southernmost part of Karnataka and has five taluks and five educational blocks, namely Chamarajnagar, Gundlupet, Kollegal, Hannur and Yellandur. The fieldwork in Bangalore (Rural) Taluk was carried out from 16–28 March 2006.

4. The notice for the meeting read as follows: ‘Meeting of District Implementation Committee, SSA, Chamarajnagar District, Chamarajnagar will be held on 17–10–2003 at 11 a.m. in ZP hall under the Chairmanship of the ZP President and SSA District Implementing Committee President, Shri K.K. Nataraj’ (translation from the Kannada by V. Raju).

5. Dr Jayadev gave an account of the meeting which he had attended (interview with Dr Jayadev, Secretary, Deenabandhu Institute, Chamarajnagar, 6 July 2005). The institute runs a hostel for poor and orphaned children.


7. Interview with Mr. Chandrakant, Assistant Project Coordinator, SSA, Chamarajnagar, 7 July 2005.

8. Interview with Mr Rajashekhar, Block Education Officer, Chamarajanagar, 7 July 2005.

9. The names of the villages have been changed to protect their identity.

10. Interview with Mr V. Srinivas, Vice-president, Rampura Gram Panchayat, 16 March 2006.

11. The decision to give powers to MLAs was opposed by U. R. Ananthamurthy, Baraguru Ramachandrappa, Sri Veerabhadra Chamamalla Swamiji Manava Dharma Peeta and a few non-governmental organizations. See ‘Panchayats to Form Panels for School Development’, The Hindu, 2006a; see also ‘An Introduction to SDMCs’ by Narayana, Vidyankura, District Quality Education Project: Mid-Project Reflexive Essays. Narayana points out that this has resulted in politicization of the SDMC.
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12. MAYA is a Karnataka-based development and training organization working to address children’s rights, with a specific focus on the eradication of child labour. Prajayatna is the education reform programme of MAYA.

13. Interview with Keshav, a field representative in Prajayatna, 25 May 2005.

14. With regard to the DPEP, the precursor of the SSA, Sarangapani and Vasavi point out that with ‘the new office space, vehicles and computers’ made available to the DPEP, inevitably a feeling of ‘nimma DPEP’ (your DPEP) has crept in on the part of the staff of the parent Education Department who are not a part of the DPEP and who take note of the differential treatment meted out to the DPEP at the district level (2003: 3405).

15. Interview with Padma Sarangapani and Rahul Mukhopadhyay, 12 May 2005.

16. Regarding funding of the DPEP, Krishna Kumar et al. write,

While DPEP is primarily supported by loan from the World Bank, funds for it have been placed in a pool that consists of grant money from other donors such as the European Union, ODA (UK) now DFID, the Government of Netherlands and UNICEF. The World Bank soft loans (to be repaid at 3% interest over a 35-year maturity period) constitute the most important part of the funds for DPEP (2001: 562).

The money is ‘passed on to them (the States) free of interest by the centre’ (ibid.: 563).

17. Jandhyala B. G. Tilak strikes a note of caution regarding the government’s practice of accessing external aid for primary education. He says,

The growing amount of aid seems to be raising several uncomfortable questions, such as (a) will external assistance for education increase donor dependency? (b) will aid lead to external influence on domestic educational policies, and if so, whether it would be desirable and (c) above all, will aid really contribute to long-term development of education in the country? Answers to these questions are disturbing. It is well recognized that aid has created new attitudes … besides inflicting changes on overall policies because of the explicit and implicit conditionalities associated with aid (2004: 4720).

In an article entitled, ‘Aided Programmes or Guided Policies? DPEP in Karnataka’, Sarangapani and Vasavi voice their reservations about external aid. They say,

The acceptance of loans as a source of State funding, particularly for development activity, is a matter of concern to us as citizens. Large loans automatically raise questions of how these funds are being utilized, and how they will be repaid in the future (2003: 3401).


20. A report in the *Deccan Herald* (2009a), points out that NGOs are not free of corruption. It states,

> As many as 833 NGOs and voluntary organizations have been blacklisted by an autonomous body under the Rural Development Ministry after they were found indulging in misappropriation of funds … The Council for Advancement of People’s Action and Rural Technology (CAPART), an autonomous body functioning under Rural Development Ministry blacklisted 833 NGOs and voluntary organizations on September 9.

Of the 833 NGOs and voluntary organizations which were blacklisted, 75 were from Karnataka.
WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT

The Society mode of implementation of development programmes, as we have seen in the previous chapter, has made huge demands on the institutional mechanisms hitherto employed for ‘development’ in various fields. It has necessitated the setting up of autonomous Societies, placed in a mission mode, ostensibly to do away with the bureaucratization and red tape that is seen to have hampered development so far. It is therefore seen as an attempt to increase efficiency in the delivery of social services to the people.

However, does this mode of implementation actually result in greater efficiency and social justice of development programmes in the fields of education, health, watershed development and what-have-you? If that is the case, then perhaps this mode of implementation may well be justified. In order to understand this problem, we will take up three indices to gauge the efficiency and social and economic justice brought to the table by this mode of implementation. These are (i) participation; (ii) sustainability; and (iii) equality.

Participation of the people in their own development became an important criterion of efficiency after the failure of the Community Development Programme in the 1950s, which was perceived, and quite rightly so, as due to the lack of people’s participation in them. Sustainability is an important criterion of efficiency, as its absence results in an undoing of all the work that has gone into the project once the project period is over. It negates all concerns regarding cost, productivity and output, which are important factors of efficiency. Third, the criterion of equality is important from the point of view of social and economic justice, as in a poor country like India, development that leads to greater inequality will lead to a tremendous strain on the body politic, in the process challenging its democratic framework. Article 38 of the Directive Principles of the Constitution bears this in mind when it gives an important role to the State in minimizing inequality. It says, ‘The State shall, in particular, strive to minimize the inequalities in income, and endeavour to eliminate inequalities
in status, facilities and opportunities, not only among individuals but also amongst groups of people residing in different areas or engaged in different vocations.’ Further, Article 39 of the Directive Principles says that the State shall direct its policy towards securing that ‘the operation of the economic system does not result in the concentration of wealth and means of production to the common detriment’.

In order to look at participation, sustainability and equality in a development project, we have chosen the Watershed Development Society for examination. The reason for taking up watershed activities is that this field, by its very nature, demands collective action as many aspects of watershed development require co-ordination between neighbours and among communities. In other words, ‘participation’ is the sine qua non for success in the field of watershed development.

**Watershed Development**

A watershed is a contiguous area draining into a single water body or a water course. In other words, it is a topographical area having a common drainage. This means that the rainwater falling on an area coming within a ridgeline can be harvested and will flow out of this area through a single point. It is also referred to as a catchment area or a river basin (Government of Karnataka 2003a: 96). According to C. H. Hanumantha Rao, an expert in the field of watershed development, it ‘has been conceived basically as a strategy for protecting the livelihoods of the people inhabiting the fragile ecosystems experiencing soil erosion and moisture stress’ (Government of Karnataka 2003a: 97; see also Rao 2000).

Thus, watershed development was an attempt to shift the focus from irrigated agriculture to rainfed agriculture which was now seen to have tremendous potential for development. Moreover, in attempting to take care of livelihoods and fragile ecosystems, it was seen as a means of ‘poverty alleviation’. Therefore, it is an ideal sphere of enquiry into equality concerns. The test of sustainability is met when the physical structures built during the project period continue to be maintained beyond that period, implying that there are associations of people who have inculcated in themselves a sense of responsibility in maintaining those physical structures. In Karnataka, 75 per cent of the cultivated area depends on low and uncertain rainfall and the state depends on dry land for more than half of its food production. This makes Karnataka eminently suitable for watershed development.
In 1984, the Government of Karnataka created four Dry Land Development Boards under four Divisional Commissioners with a jurisdiction over 19 districts. Each district had a multidisciplinary team comprising of line departments under Project Directors. Thus, schemes were designed and implemented entirely by the government bureaucracy.

On 1 January 2001, the Government of Karnataka abolished the Dry Land Development Boards and established the Watershed Development Department. The Department takes care of projects such as the Drought-Prone Areas Programme (DPAP) and the Desert Development Programme (DDP). At the district level, District Watershed Development Officers have been appointed by the Department to implement these projects under the overall supervision of the ZP.

What is interesting from our point of view is that the matter does not end there. Two Societies have also been set up in Karnataka in the field of watershed development. These are the British government-assisted Karnataka Watershed Development Programme (KAWAD) and the World Bank-assisted Sujala Watershed Development Project (SUJALA). Thus, the Government of Karnataka now has two modes of implementation of watershed development projects being implemented side by side: (i) through the ZP and line departments, as with the DPAP and DDP; and (ii) through Societies and their corresponding NGOs, as with KAWAD and SUJALA.

As with primary education, so with watershed development, this has resulted in a parallel bureaucratic structure from the state level downwards. For example, the SUJALA Project Office occupies the 8th floor in the Watershed Development Department located in Cauvery Bhavan in Bangalore while the government-implemented projects are located on the 7th floor.

If this was the only difference, it would be an insignificant one. The greater difference is that the Society mode of implementation is, of course, through the Society at the district and taluk level and the CBOs set up by it at the village level while the government implements its programmes through its line department and the PRIs. Both involve different forms of ‘participation’. The government-implemented programmes are answerable to the PRIs while the Society-implemented programmes, being in mission mode and fast track, are not!

That participation of people in their own development is the key to the success of the numerous government programmes in the social
The importance of participation of the people was realized way back in the 1950s, when the CDP initiated by the government failed to take off due to the peoples’ lack of participation or involvement in them. It was then suggested by Balwantrai Mehta that ‘public participation in community works should be organized through statutory representative bodies’. Thus came into being PRIs which received a Constitutional mandate in 1993 with the 73rd and 74th Amendments.

However, as we have seen in Chapters 5 and 6, since the early 1990s, the central government, in collaboration with bilateral and multilateral agencies, now holds a different connotation of ‘participation’ altogether. That implementation through the PRIs fell out of favour with the government and the CBO was ushered in, became clear when the report of the Hanumantha Rao Committee attributed failure of the Ministry of Rural Development’s (MoRD) DPAP programme to lack of ‘community participation’ (Kolavalli and Kerr 2002: 225). On the basis of the recommendations of this Committee, the MoRD issued common guidelines requiring ‘community participation’. District administrations were encouraged to use NGOs to implement the projects (ibid.). In fact, this was a condition imposed by bilateral and multilateral donor agencies in programmes funded by them. More significantly, the funds were placed under the control of Watershed Organizations (read CBOs) and not with PRIs under whose functional jurisdiction watershed development fell. As Kolavalli and Kerr admit, ‘this is a major departure from the way the government usually works’ (ibid.). The Society-mode of implementation was firmly put in place in the sphere of watershed development.

In a situation reminiscent of the SSA, which was preceded by experiments such as the World Bank-sponsored DPEP in Karnataka, in Watershed Development too, participatory methods through NGOs and CBOs were first employed in a project supported by the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC) and implemented by MYRADA in Karnataka in the 1980s (Kolavalli and Kerr 2002: 228). These methods included gathering information rapidly from communities in Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) exercises by NGOs and subsequently setting up of Watershed Development Committees or...
CBOs. Since then, PRIs have been increasingly sidelined in watershed development programmes.

The problem with this kind of development is that there is a complete de-politicization of development. As a consequence, the government of the day loses touch with the people, and their needs and aspirations do not find expression. Second, the democratic project of local government, which has a Constitutional mandate, receives a setback. These, in themselves, are serious matters. But what is the score of NGOs and CBOs with regard to efficiency and social and economic justice? Have they been able to deliver better by employing an apolitical stance, by keeping PRIs at bay? Have they brought about more equality in an inherently inegalitarian society? What is their score on matters of participation, equality and sustainability? We will now take a look at these issues.

What is the nature and extent of participation of the members of the CBOs in watershed development? In order to answer this question, I have looked at the literature on the subject.

**Participation**

Two studies by Karnataka scholars have been referred to here in some detail. One of them is a study done by D. Rajasekhar, D. V. Gopalappa and Madhushree Sekher conducted under the aegis of the Institute for Social and Economic Change, Bangalore (2004). The study was carried out in Bijapur, Bellary and Chitradurga districts of Karnataka. It covered 10 villages in Bellary District, nine in Chitradurga and six in Bijapur. In all, 25 project villages, covered by KAWAD, a UK DfID-sponsored project and six non-project villages, covered by the government’s line departments, were studied. According to the authors, ‘the most commonly found organizations were those formed by KAWAD in the project villages’ (read CBOs) (2004: 12). In the non-project villages, which were fewer in number, the line department programmes — DDP and DDAP — were being implemented through PRIs (ibid.).

As the authors state, the ‘KAWAD project was implemented by a Society at the State level, different types of implementing agencies at the district level, NGOs at the sub-watershed level and watershed committees at the micro-watershed level (Rajasekhar et al. 2004:111). Thus, the study was well suited to cast light on the Society-implemented KAWAD project.
Another study referred to is that done by Vijaylakshmi and Vyasulu (2002). They conducted a study, in 1999–2000, of watershed development in Bellary district of Karnataka. They point out that watershed development was given high priority in Bellary district, and since 1995, various watershed development programmes funded by government and bilateral and multilateral agencies were implemented or are at different stages of implementation. Projects in Bellary include the Government of India DDP, KAWAD, Integrated Watershed Development Programme (IWDP) and National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas (NWDPR) (2002: 12, n. 23). According to the authors, ‘the priority given to community, user and NGO participation is high in watershed development programmes funded by the donor agencies’ (ibid.: 13). In addition, ‘NGOs are involved as implementing and/or facilitating agencies in mobilizing the community to participate in government-initiated programmes and co-ordinating between the government agencies and user associations (CBOs)’ (ibid.). Thus, generally, NGOs were responsible for mobilizing the people both in donor-aided and in government-initiated watershed programmes. In other words, NGOs were responsible for mobilizing community support or ‘participation’. How effective have they been in this mobilization? Four watersheds were selected as the sample for their study.

Both studies show that participation levels were low. Rajasekher et al. point out that the ‘percentage of members attending the organization meetings was generally low’ (2004: 57). Vijaylakshmi and Vyasulu say that ‘low levels of participation were evident in all the stages of the watershed project development process — formation of the association, electing the committees, planning, implementation and maintenance’ (2002: 24). Regarding participation in decision-making, Rajasekher finds that ‘the NGO staff generally took key decisions relating to watershed works such as hiring of capital intensive machinery in the village. The farmers did not consider this to be wrong as the funds were perceived to have been provided by the NGO. The committee members, according to the villagers, simply gave their consent’ (ibid.: 58, N. 26). He concludes, ‘Thus, the support staff (Line Department/NGO staff) was the dominant actor in the participatory watershed development strategy in Karnataka’ (ibid.: 59). Clearly, the farmers did not consider it their own programme where they had a say in the decisions taken.
Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu reiterate this point. They say that there was only a ‘semblance of community involvement as the NGOs discussed the plan with the users and other community members to seek their opinion … The planning and implementation was administered from above and there was no resistance from the watershed community in accepting it’ (2002: 17). They go on to state that ‘the only advantage in the present system over the State-centred approach was that the community and users had a formal presence in the watershed development, and there was scope for participation’ (ibid.: 18).

Pointing out the drawbacks of the participatory method as it is employed now, Kolavalli and Kerr say that ‘the routine application of participatory methods seems to give many projects the sense of having involved communities without there being participation … many of the projects treat the outcomes of one or two day exercises with 10 to 20 people as legitimate community priorities’ (2002: 228). Clearly, the extent of participation leaves much to be desired.

Second, the nature of participation was found to be purely utilitarian. People joined the CBO solely with the expectation of gaining something out of it. If this was not immediately forthcoming, they lost all interest in it. Thus, the participation was only when there was a flow of benefit from the watershed and when this ceased, there was no longer any interest in maintaining the watershed activities (Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu 2002: 25). This had implications for the sustainability of the enterprise once the project period was over. The members also flouted norms of sharing water and the crops to be cultivated. This is in strong contrast to the type of participation engendered by Anna Hazare and other social workers, which we will see later, where the participants upheld the norms even if it went against their own interests.

One reason for this lackadaisical form of participation may be ascribed to the fact that it was contribution-driven. While this may be part of the Western ethos, whereby by virtue of making a monetary contribution, such as by paying a membership fee, one feels motivated to uphold the norms and goals of the organization and wholly participate in it, the same does not hold true in the Indian context. Here, payment of a fee per se does not motivate one to uphold the goals of an organization. Rather, it is the sacrifice of the leaders who, by their very acts of sacrifice, win the people’s confidence and loyalty and their complete identification with and participation in the goals of the association. This is seen again and again in leaders from Mahatma Gandhi to Anna Hazare who were able to capture the imagination.
of the people and achieve goals that would have otherwise been very difficult to achieve.

Symbolism has an important role to play in this form of leadership. Almost every act of Gandhi was symbolic and he constantly drew from the beliefs and values of the people of the Indian subcontinent to hone his movement for freedom from British rule. Once he had captured the imagination of the Indian people, he went on to question those aspects of its culture which were not in keeping with modern times, such as ‘untouchability’. Thus, not only did he draw from culture but he attempted to change it too.

Anna Hazare was a staunch Gandhian who transformed the ecology and economy of Ralegaon Siddhi, a village in Maharashtra, marked by poverty, unemployment and ecological degradation, to a prosperous, green village. He used symbolism in large measure to gain the love and confidence of the village folk and they in turn gave to him their unstinting support. One of his first acts was to renovate a dilapidated temple in the village with the sum of ₹20,000 obtained from his Provident Fund. This act of sacrifice from a retired army driver endeared him to the villagers and convinced them of the sincerity of his purpose. He inculcated in them not just the notion of sacrifice, but of the voluntary spirit, sharing and self-reliance.

Soon, the villagers volunteered to build nullah bunds and check dams, repair the embankments of tanks, plant trees around the village tank and even work voluntarily on each others’ lands! Anna’s word was law and he had a complete hold over them. The co-operative spirit engendered in them by Anna became a huge, positive force for change. At the same time, he developed institutions like the Tarun Mandal, a youth group, and enhanced the role of the Gram Sabha to carry on the developmental task.

Decisions were taken in the Gram Sabha whereby farmers who had excess grain voluntarily donated it to the ‘grain bank’. The grain from the grain bank was given as a loan to needy farmers and was monitored by the local youth group, Tarun Mandal. But this was not all. Anna Hazare and his youth group took up the issue of alcoholism, a serious problem in the village. Over 30 liquor shops were closed down by their owners voluntarily. Further, the people of Ralegaon Siddhi have largely been able to integrate the Dalits into the social and economic life of the village. The villagers have built houses for the Dalits and helped them repay their loans.
Anna Hazare is only one of a growing band of leaders working in the rural countryside who have been able to capture the imagination of the villagers and effect great changes in their lives. There are many others, such as P. K. Mishra of Sukhomajri village in Haryana, Rajendra Singh, Popat Pawar, Pandit Punyadhar, etc. The point is that these leaders have been able to inspire and instil very high levels of participation in the people.

In contrast, the CBOs, with their utilitarian approach, have not been able to capture the imagination of the people. The extent of participation was not only low; it was spread unevenly among the people. While the participation of landowners was found to be high, the landless wage labourers and artisans were found to be uninterested in watershed development and were disconnected from it (Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu 2002: 25). These latter sections of the population were expected to be content with entry-point activities like building a community hall or with starting SHGs, neither of which they could relate to watershed development. The stakeholder approach of the projects favoured the landowners and left the others dissatisfied and alienated from watershed development. This was in spite of the fact that the NGOs had been expressly told to involve the poorer sections of the people in the watershed development programme which, we may recall, was a ‘poverty-alleviation’ exercise to begin with. Similar low and uneven levels of participation have been described in my study of Hosahalli village in Chapter 3.

Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu raise questions about the nature of involvement of the NGOs. According to them, the NGOs were biased in their involvement.

They were not immune to the power politics in the village and tended to take sides. Although they were involved in activities that were related to empowerment of the poor and disadvantaged, they were more responsive to the needs and preferences of the land-owning group with regard to the use of watershed resources. They were also anxious about a backlash if they took an overtly pro-poor position, thereby antagonizing the rural elite. For similar reasons, they were not willing to lobby with the department during the planning phase, on behalf of the landless and disadvantaged sections of the community … The watershed committees that were formed were not inclusive, with minimal representation of disadvantaged groups (2002: 20).
Clearly, the NGOs were not willing to walk the extra mile for poverty alleviation. Their methods had not earned them the moral authority by which they could effect changes in the social structure, as with Anna Hazare and his band of social workers. This had serious implications for the equality issue, as we will see later.

Another reason for poor participation, according to Kolavalli and Kerr, was a lack of communication between the implementing agency, that is, the NGO or the line department on the one hand and the farmers on the other. They point out that ‘most projects prefer to begin watershed development with soil conservation measures in the uplands to minimize soil movement at its source. Farmers, on the other hand, would like to begin in the valleys where benefits to them are likely to be immediate’ (2002: 234). When talking to a farmer in the rural countryside, one is struck by his knowledge of the local setting and the strong opinions he holds regarding what should or should not be done. Very often, his suggestions are durable and cost-effective, making use of easily available local material. If, as often happens, his knowledge is not recognized and appreciated, he feels peeved and humiliated, and is instantly alienated from the programme. Thus, the NGOs and the line department did not accord the farmer the respect for his viewpoint which he expected and deserved.

There should be a dialogue between the farmer and the technocrat, so that the farmer is convinced that his opinion is taken into account. Anything short of this, that is, mere compliance with the implementing agency, and that, too, reluctantly on the part of the farmer, will be counter-productive. Only then will the farmer consider it worth his while to take care of the watershed works once the project is over. From the point of view of sustainability of the watershed enterprise, a wholehearted acceptance of the technology by the farmer is most important.

Thus, the participatory approach adopted by the NGOs and CBOs was deficient in many respects. At the same time, it was a costly approach. One may point out here that in the pre-participation approach, when the government took all the decisions and also implemented the programme, obviously no money was spent on participation per se. But now that ‘participation of the community’ is the new mantra of development, a great deal of money is being spent on engendering that participation. Huge amounts of money are being spent on social engineering of a questionable nature. Thus, the participatory approach adopted by the NGOs and CBOs in watershed
development comes at a high price. This is particularly so in a country like India, where a large section of the population is poor and resources should not be wasted. The cost of treatment is hiked by 1.5 to 2 times that of State-supported programmes.

Participation through charismatic leaders like Anna Hazare is very good but hard to come by. Participation through CBOs has not proved to be effective, perhaps due to the fact that it is done with a utilitarian intent and fizzles out once the money stops flowing into the project. Participation through PRIs is an institutionalized and democratic way of engendering participation. After all, India has chosen a representative form of government and elected bodies have to be involved in development.

To involve PRIs once the project is over by invoking Section 61A of the Panchayat Raj Act is to do a singular injustice to PRIs. Here, elected bodies of representatives are called in at the very end of the project to perform fire-fighting exercises. They have to be involved from the very inception of the project, indeed from the decision-making period to the implementation and subsequent follow-up of the project. NGOs and CBOs are welcome provided they are made accountable to the elected bodies in the district.

Sustainability

This is yet another issue which is plaguing watershed development. With low levels of participation and a contribution-driven, utilitarian approach, sustainability after the project is over is a major problem. There is literally a washing away of the work done in the project period, be it check dams, bunds or what-have-you. This is a terrible waste of money which the country can ill afford.

Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu point out that even among the stakeholders, there was no consensus on maintenance of the works once they were completed. On the contrary, the stakeholders themselves were fragmented into those whose land was in the command area and the others. The extreme selfishness of the landowners is brought out by the authors who say that ‘even those who, at some point of time, benefited from the watershed (development activities) were not forthcoming in renovating the watershed when it was damaged’ (2002: 23).

That sustainability is a major issue in watershed development is recognized in the mid-term appraisal of the IX Plan programme by
the Planning Commission. It states that for watersheds surveyed in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, ‘increase in agricultural production did not last for more than two years. Structures were abandoned because of lack of maintenance and there was no mechanism for looking after common lands’ (Soussan and Reddy 2003: 26). According to Soussan and Reddy, ‘this picture is verified by other studies, with the root cause of poor sustainability seen as the failure to effectively engage local people in the process’ (2003: 26). In a study of transition from project to post-project phase of a joint forest management programme in the Shiwalik Hills in Haryana, it was found that only eight earthen dams of a total of 45 that were constructed in Mornipinjore forest division of Haryana were functioning when data for this study was collected in June 2000. A large number of dams had silted up or had been washed away much before they had achieved their expected shelf life of about 10 – 15 years (Kurian et al. 2003).

This indicates a colossal loss of money due to poor post-project maintenance of the watershed programme.

Thus, sustainability is closely related to the level of participation. Unless the community identifies with the watershed development activities, they are unlikely to maintain the works once the project period is over.

The implementing agencies (NGOs/line departments) seem to have been content with merely setting up the Watershed Committees. They did not build up the Committees to take on roles such as resolving disputes or laying down norms for sharing water, or maintenance of structures, which would have contributed to sustainability, once the project was over. Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu say, ‘The role of watershed committees was minimal in resolving the differences among the stakeholders … the watershed committees also did not take measures to establish norms on the sharing of water’ (2002: 23). ‘They also did not take any steps to ensure that the watershed structures, once constructed, are well maintained’ (ibid.). Even during the project period, maintenance of structures was not taken seriously. They point out that ‘one of the watersheds was in a dilapidated condition and the committee did not take measures to rehabilitate it’ (Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu: 24). Thus, it is hard to see what, in fact, the Watershed Committees accomplished. These Committees do not seem to have set up norms and precedents which would contribute towards sustainability of the watershed enterprise, once the project is over, the external funding has dried up and the NGOs have left the scene.
PRIs would go a long way in facilitating both participation and sustainability. People will have a keen interest in seeing their area develop which they will voice through their Panchayats. The officials and implementing agencies would be relentlessly queried in the Panchayat meetings. The elected representatives of PRIs would be held responsible and accountable for the success of the programme, failing which they would lose their deposits at the next election. Panchayat members have not only the Constitutional but also the moral authority to resolve disputes, which Watershed Committee members do not possess. Panchayats would also facilitate scaling up of watershed development programmes, leading not just to basic development but to all-round or holistic development. Thus, Panchayat Raj should provide the institutional framework for watershed development. This would also ensure sustainability of the enterprise once the project period is over, since these institutions exist in perpetuity. Moreover, it would go a long way in building up PRIs and hence fostering representative democracy.

Equality

In a highly inegalitarian society like that encountered in India, it is important that development be oriented towards bringing about greater equality. The Constitution is clear on the role of the State in bringing about equality. Watershed development, if properly planned and implemented, provides just such an opportunity to bring about equality in society. We have seen that one of the main aims of watershed development is the alleviation of poverty in ecologically fragile areas. The DFID-supported KAWAD programme seeks to ‘reduce poverty of watershed communities on a sustainable basis’. However, ironically, it seems to have resulted in the very opposite. Rajasekhar points out that it has, in fact, led to ‘elite capture’.

Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu note that aberrations had crept in at the inception of the programme itself, that is, in the selection of the watersheds and in developing the programme design. Considerations of equality were often flouted in these two areas. They say,

Although the guidelines make reference to the priority to be given to areas that have large sections of disadvantaged caste groups, in practice these criteria were not adopted. There was pressure to consider the preferences of prominent individuals in political circles … Similar indifference was evident during the planning and implementation stage. The composition of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the landless was not given due
consideration while designing the project programmes. Contrary to the assumptions in watershed development programme, it does not always imply that the benefits will percolate to the disadvantaged sections of the community. To make the programmes more inclusive and participatory, social indicators should be used while selecting the watersheds and developing the programme design (2002: 15).

According to Rajasekhar, the policy of taking contributions from farmers influenced selection of some of the villages. He says, ‘The project design emphasizing the participation in terms of beneficiary contributions favoured the villages where such participation was “possible” ’ (2004: 76). Accordingly, ‘in KAWAD, the methodology suggested to include the socially and economically vulnerable groups was not followed due to … the program design incorporating mandatory farmers’ contributions” (ibid.). This suggests that there was a conflict of interest in the project design between the inclusion of vulnerable groups on the one hand and farmers’ contributions on the other; the latter won.

Rajasekhar points out that the contribution-driven policy of the watershed development programme affected the participation of the poorer farmers. He states, ‘In several villages supported by KAWAD programme, the poorer farmers noted that they could not obtain much benefit from the programme as they found it difficult to make the contributions … The upward revision in the contributions in 2002 infuriated even the prosperous farmers’ (2004: 109). Rajasekhar categorically states that ‘it was the wealthy farmers who benefited the most from the activities which were implemented on the basis of contributions’ (ibid.).

The NGOs, who were under pressure of motivating the community to make contributions, found a way out of the impasse. They worked out a system whereby the poorer farmers could obtain loans from SHGs, which were then used towards making the contributions. According to Rajasekhar, while this was not in itself a bad thing, it came in the way of the money being used by the landless in other income-generating activities for which the loans were meant and also, the small landowners investing in improved agricultural productivity (2004: 110).

Thus, while ostensibly watershed development programmes aimed at alleviating poverty, in practice, these programmes set in place certain best practices like ensuring monetary contributions as well as contributions in kind of the people (the ‘pay and use’ syndrome)
which favour the better-off sections of the population who can afford to pay.

Another point made by Rajasekhar is that ‘Most of the LOs (Local Organizations or CBOs) belonging to KAWAD programme in Karnataka spent donor funds on private activities’ (2004: 77). This was another travesty of the ‘poverty alleviation’ programme. At the same time, Rajasekhar points out that ‘while activities carried out on private lands provided good outcomes, the common activities were not very successful’ (ibid.: 75). Thus, while watershed activities on private lands benefited the well-off farmers, common lands used largely by vulnerable groups did not benefit to the same extent. Rajasekhar notes, ‘Access to fodder and fuelwood did not improve … as the resources spent on these activities were meagre. This implies that the LOs (CBOs) formed under all the programmes did not take the concerns of the poor into account’ (ibid.: 78). Thus, the opportunity for poverty alleviation was lost. This is a sad commentary on the watershed development programme.

Thus, Rajasekhar strongly critiques the watershed development programme when he says that

the activities carried out in the sample villages were not watershed in the strict sense of the term … the bulk of the amount was spent on private activities of bunding, land development and silt application on private lands and very little amount on common activities in the KAWAD villages (2004: 112).

The focus of the watershed development programme is seen in the expenditure pattern. Again, Rajasekhar points out, ‘Nearly 80 percent of the expenditure in KAWAD groups was on bunding, land leveling and silt application … This resulted in the neglect of the watershed activities on common lands, which formed only a small proportion of the total expenditure’ (ibid.).

That the farmers were aware of this lacuna in the programme and resented it is evident in Rajasekher’s study. He says, ‘Farmers in focus group discussions resented the lack of emphasis on the development of commons. In several villages, the farmers noted that they were more in need of activities on common lands. They preferred holistic watershed development approach to secure the livelihoods of a cross-section of the villagers’ (2004: 108). That the voices and opinions of the farmers were not heeded is clear from the above statement. It highlights the
dire need for local elected bodies to function in a manner that brings out the collective wisdom of the Indian farmer.

Given the overarching importance given to contributions in the implementation of the watershed development programmes, Rajasekher points out that some relatively poor farmers, who had their lands in the catchment area and would have stood to gain by the watershed activities but were unable to make the contribution, stalled the watershed approach. Giving the example of Thayakkanahalli in Chitradurga district, he says,

The plan was to undertake the activities in a phased manner starting from the catchment area. This could not be done as some of the farmers in the catchment area were not in a position to undertake the activities owing to their inability to make contributions. Subsequently, (they) were prepared to contribute, but by then the funds allocated for the year (were) exhausted (2004: 107).

Thus, it appears that setting a precedent for a contribution-driven approach rather than poverty–alleviation was the raison d’etre of the watershed programme.

Summing up, Rajasekhar says,

The activity preference across the LOs (CBOs) was, to a large extent, influenced by the contributions. The well-off farmers needed certain type of activities to be undertaken. Under the framework of beneficiary contribution having important say in the activity, the well-off farmers contributed more and also obtained more from the groups. This was, thus, a case of ‘elite capture’, which had a negative impact on the processes that the LOs had to engage in (2004: 78).

The contribution-driven approach influenced the selection of the leader of the CBO. Rajasekhar points out that

the intervening agencies (NGOs and line Departments) were uncertain that they would ever be able to mobilize the required contributions from the farmers. The strategy that they adopted was to entrust the leadership to the wealthy farmer in a village or in the watershed area so that contributions would become easy (2004: 107).

Since the well-off farmers generally come from the dominant caste or castes, it resulted in greater dominance of these castes in the village, a point that was made in my study of Hosahalli, described in Chapter 3.
According to Rajasekhar, the prosperous farmers were ‘lured by the opportunity in rent seeking’ and hence ‘attracted towards watershed activities’. He points out that ‘more than fifty percent of the office-bearers (of CBOs) in Karnataka owned more than 10 acres of land, and one of them owned as much as 90 acres of land’ (2004: 107).

Rajasekhar points out that the office-bearers of the CBOs, prosperous farmers of the area, cornered most of the benefits accruing from the watershed programme. He cites the case of Hadalasangha village in Karnataka where the watershed programme covered a total of 70 acres of land owned by the office-bearer! He says, ‘The other farmers did complain about this, but a few stated that this was alright since he could afford to make the required contributions’ (2004: 107). This is an example of a central government programme, funded by the World Bank through loans, being used to augment the resources of a prosperous farmer! It is a travesty of justice and of the so-called poverty-alleviation programme.

Thus, there seems to have been a nexus between the NGOs and the wealthy farmers of the area. The NGOs, whose brief was to set up the CBOs, got their work done without too much of a bother, while the well-off farmer became wealthier as a result of the not inconsiderable cash resources of the watershed programme accruing to him as chief executive of the CBO in his area. And let us remember, his organization was not accountable to the local Panchayat.

Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu reiterate the findings of Rajasekhar’s exhaustive study. They also point out that the poor of the village were left out of the watershed programme. The poor were engaged in ‘entry-point activities’ such as building a community hall or temple, but these were not related in any way to the watershed programme. According to them,

watershed development was seen as a disjointed process where the landless and wage workers were associated with the entry-point programmes and the land-owning group with the watershed. Such a perception alienated a large section of the watershed community from participating in watershed development (2002: 22).

To truly be a poverty-alleviation programme, watershed development should have concentrated on the small, dry-land holdings of the labouring and artisan castes.

Second, Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu say that the watershed development programme engendered high expectations among the villagers
regarding employment opportunities, but these were also belied. They say,

The officials and the NGOs contributed to these high expectations, as they emphasized employment opportunities that the watershed programme will generate, to motivate the community to become members of the watershed associations. Contrary to expectations, the watershed project … did not augment work opportunities for the local wage labourers even when there was opportunity to do so. The labour for undertaking water conservation and watershed work was often hired from outside the village, as it was left to the preference of the contractor (2002: 22).

Consequently, they point out, there was no increase in the number of days of wage work available in the village and the out-migration of the villagers did not come down.

Vijaylakshmi and Vyasulu question the very definition of watershed development, which was in terms of stakeholders. Those owning land were perceived as stakeholders by the community and slowly the others (landless wage workers, artisans, service providers such as washermen) withdrew their claims over the watershed resources and became alienated from the watershed development process. ‘Watershed maintenance and development was perceived as something which concerned the land owning group in general and those in the command area or the command village in particular’ (2002: 23).

Coming down heavily on the watershed development programme due to its ‘lack of social inclusiveness’, Vijaylakshmi and Vyasulu point out that ‘the disadvantaged groups such as Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, landless labourers, marginal farmers and women were not adequately represented in the decision-making bodies of the watershed association’ (2002: 27). It was the dominant caste group, which also had a large share of land in the command, (which) played a significant role in the watershed activities… Although the guidelines make references to target the marginalized and poor sections of the community, there are no provisions made for their representation. While implementing the project, priority was not given to Scheduled Castes and landless sections of the watershed community. There is a wide gap between the rhetoric of poverty alleviation and inclusion of disadvantaged sections of the community (2002: 27).

Lack of transparency is another serious issue that Rajasekhar takes note of. He says that there was ‘the absence of strong formal mechanisms for regular and reliable flow of information to the
community members though some information was exhibited on the walls of the public buildings in the villages’ (2004: 61). Thus,

A little more than two-thirds of the total households covered by all the programmes stated that they were unaware of their organization’s financial details — the funds available, the specified unit cost of different watershed works, the plan to use the group finances and the expenditure details (ibid.: 62).

He points out, “One implication of the poor transparency in financial matters was the possibility of misappropriation/misutilization of the organization’s funds in the absence of proper monitoring’ (ibid.).

Here, it may be pointed out that institutions like the GP and Gram Sabha best ensure the transparency and accountability of a developmental programme. The village and even the area of a GP which comprises about 10–12 villages are places where everyone knows everyone else and little can be hidden from the people, leave alone a villager’s sudden and unexplained prosperity! Moreover, the representative nature of the GP ensures that a corrupt person will not be re-elected, if the people so wish. These institutions are close to the people and should be used extensively to bring about the right kind of development in a village or a group of villages.

Reservation for disadvantaged groups and categories in the PRIs ensures that these groups are represented in the local elected body. Karnataka was one of the first states to reserve seats for these sections of the population. In the 1983 Act, seats were reserved for SCs and STs as well as 25 per cent of the seats for women. The 73rd Amendment Act reserved one-third of the total seats for women and for SCs and STs in proportion to their population. One-third of the seats are also reserved for the OBCs. Another distinctive feature of the Act is that one-third of the seats are reserved for the executive positions as well, that is, for the posts of President and Vice-president. The policy of reservation in Karnataka ensures that all sections of the population are represented in the PRIs. Thus, strengthening of these institutions and allowing them to perform their functions uninterruptedly will result in a more equitable society.

That problematic equality issues are not unique to Karnataka is seen in the study of watershed development in some other states. In their study of watershed development in Andhra Pradesh, Soussan and Reddy point out the limitations of the Andhra Pradesh approach to watershed development in terms of equality issues. They say,
equity is seen as a major policy issue, with past watershed programmes often failing to reach the poorest households and disproportionately benefitting the better-off sections of the community. This is reflected above all in the pattern of expenditure on different activities in watershed programmes, with an estimated 70 percent of funds used for land and water management interventions that predominantly benefit larger farmers and only 7.5 percent being used to support the livelihoods of poor and landless families (2003: 26).

Since watershed development programmes have failed in their ostensible goal of poverty alleviation and in engendering participation, sustainability and equality, it will be pertinent to look elsewhere for the real goals of these programmes. The real goal, it seems to me, lies in establishing some of the best practices in post-liberalization governance, such as farmers’ contributions, monetary or otherwise. The notion that the government is also one’s ma–baap or benefactor is sought to be done away with and in its place, a ‘pay and use’ credo is sought to be established. The problem with this approach is that the poor, who are unable to cope with such a demand, ultimately fall by the wayside, and become even more poor and vulnerable to indebtedness and to the wealthy or dominant individuals in their area, thus increasing inequality rather than diminishing it. This is reflected in the rapidly increasing suicide rate among the poor and marginal farmers in the country. According to a study done by the Madras Institute of Development Studies, one farmer’s suicide takes place every 30 minutes and Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh are high on the list of the rate of suicides (The Hindu 2007b; see also The Hindu 2007a).

A recent editorial in the Deccan Herald entitled ‘Poor Performance’ (2009b) states that

The extent of poverty in Karnataka as revealed by the Planning Commission figures is a damning indictment of the policies being adopted and the implementation of poverty alleviation programmes by successive governments in the state. There is much trumpeting regarding the achievements of the state in science and software, its growing numbers of malls and millionaires. However, these achievements mask a terrible truth. A large section of the state’s population is living in conditions of biting poverty. Karnataka’s poverty is akin to that in Rajasthan or Assam.

This is indeed a sad commentary on the poverty-alleviation programmes in the state of which the watershed development programme is a major one. They need to be thoroughly re-oriented and refurbished.
Next, we will briefly view the links, if any, of watershed associations (CBOs) with PRIs.

**Links with PRIs**

Article 243G of the Constitution lists watershed development, soil conservation, land improvement, minor irrigation, fisheries, social and farm forestry etc., under the purview of PRIs. Though constitutionally mandated to carry out all the above watershed development related activities, PRIs were not found to be involved in such activities, and if they were, they spent negligible amounts on such activities, according to Rajasekhar’s study (2004: 112). However, the PRIs contributed all help possible to the Watershed Committees or CBOs, as we will see below. As with the SSA, so with watershed development, the relationship between the Watershed Committees and the Panchayats was one-sided in Karnataka. While the PRIs rendered all possible help to the Watershed Committees, there was no accountability of the Committee to the Panchayat. Rajasekhar points out that most of the watershed committees received different types of assistance and intervention from local elected bodies. The most important of them was participation of elected representatives in the committee meetings as members or invitees. This helped the committees in conflict resolution, obtaining assistance from the line department, obtaining pensions and other such help from local elected bodies. The next important form of assistance was allowing them to use the building of local elected body to conduct the meetings. The third form of assistance was information sharing (2004: 97).

Thus, the PRI members did whatever they could, in their individual and collective capacities, to help the Watershed Committees. However, the Watershed Committees did not acknowledge the importance or even the presence of the local elected body by placing either its performance report or its finances before the body. Rather, as with the SSA, GP members were plucked from the local elected body to attend Watershed Committee meetings. Thus, while individual Panchayat members were taken advantage of, scant respect was shown to the local elected body as a whole.

That institutional linkages were affected by the NGO’s stance in occupying the moral high ground by being apolitical is pointed out by Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu (2002). They say, ‘Members of the
NGOs considered themselves apolitical and professed a negative attitude towards elected local government. The apolitical stance was projected as being distinct from the elected bodies, and morally high, making it difficult for better institutional coordination (ibid.: 20). It is surprising, then, that they included the individual GP member in their committees. Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu’s comment on this apolitical stance was that ‘an anti-local government attitude does not make the NGOs apolitical, but would weaken their commitment to a more symmetrical sharing of power in society’ (ibid.).

On the question of accountability, Rajasekhar et al. point out that in none of the Watershed Committees was there any response indicating that the groups were accountable to the GPs (2004: 63). According to the office-bearers of these Committees, their own accountability was towards the people in general or to the support organization, that is, either the NGO or the line department, as the case may be (ibid.: 64).

In an interview, Rajasekhar said that the NGOs and line departments which constitute the support organizations of the CBOs should be made accountable to the GPs. He suggested that one of the mechanisms to ensure such accountability could be signing of the salary letter of the staff of these support organizations by the GP. To my mind, accountability of the performance of the works and the finances incurred to the elected bodies of the PRIs is constitutionally mandated, since watershed development falls under the PRIs. Therefore, lack of accountability should be reprimanded and severely dealt with.

Regarding the functions of the different local organizations operating in the village, Rajasekhar suggested that the NGOs should restrict themselves to social mobilization, a task that they perform well. He said that the PRIs should undertake the functions of implementation, financing and monitoring of watershed development programmes as well as conflict resolution. The higher tiers of the PRIs would obviously have these functions over a wider area, perhaps a sub-watershed or even a watershed. They would be able to monitor the watershed development programme once the project is over, that is, in the post-project phase, making the whole programme a sustainable and cost-effective one.

Rajasekhar’s study shows that where there are institutional linkages between the CBOs and the PRIs, the results of the watershed development programme are better. Similarly, Vijayalakshmi and
Vyasulu also emphasize the importance of institutional linkages. They say, ‘At the policy level it is important to establish institutional linkages and make it essential that all programmes with financial support from or through the government agencies be implemented through the panchayats’ (2002: 29). They go on to make a few suggestions. According to them,

(a) The parallel bodies created for Natural Resource Management (NRM) should be functionally linked to the panchayats through necessary amendments. (b) The watershed committee should be made a sub-committee of the Land Management Committee (of the village panchayat). Such provisions would not only give NRM Committees legitimacy but also enable transferring ownership rights to the assets created to the panchayats ... (c) Appropriate measures should be taken to increase the finances of the panchayats for greater financial independence to carry out community based resource management initiatives ... (d) Panchayats should be entrusted with the responsibility of developing information base of the watershed projects about the natural environment and socioeconomic potential ... Resource mapping (physical, social, human) is essential for effective planning and developing strategies.

Problems of sustainability and equality that have plagued the watershed development programme will be resolved if these suggestions are followed and Panchayats undertake the function of watershed development, either directly or indirectly, through a sub-committee. For, in the final analysis, it is the local self-government that has an interest in and that has to take the responsibility for the development taking place in its area, a government which can be recalled if it fails to deliver. Thus, the biggest stakeholder of rural development is, indeed, the institutions of Panchayat Raj. Also, as Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu say,

Empowering PRIs with NRM functions has the advantage of greater sustainability of the programme after the project period. In the present situation, the watershed development programmes and the institutions created have the problems of asset management after the project gets over. This can be minimized if the watershed committee is linked to the panchayat. The electoral accountability of the representatives would mean that they are more responsive to the people’s needs, and ensure post-project management.

Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu have an interesting suggestion to make to bring about greater equality through watershed development.
They say that the farmers who benefit directly from the watershed development activities may be taxed, the proceeds of which can be used to take up activities where the entire community benefits. In their words,

Equitable share of resources, which is a push factor in fostering community participation, can be effected through the panchayats. One of the ways by which this can be enabled is through levying taxes or collecting user charges from the landowning users who are directly benefited. A portion of it will be diverted for taking up activities where the entire community will benefit (2002: 32).

PRIs are the only body which have the Constitutional authority to impose taxes on the populace; this cannot be appropriated by CBOs in the name of ‘user charges’.

In conclusion, Vijayalakshmi and Vyasulu say, ‘Making a distinction between community participation at the watershed level and political and democratic participation also seems unrealistic. Rather than fragmenting and compartmentalizing people’s participation under different descriptions, it would be more appropriate to strengthen linkages with panchayats for a more beneficial outcome’ (2002: 32).

Thus, we find that the links of Watershed Associations or CBOs with PRIs present a similar pattern to those found in primary education under the SSA programme.

Now, we will take a look at new trends which seek to open out watershed development, and indeed natural resource management, to the NGO sector.

### Altering the Structure of the Watershed Development Department (WDD)

The structure of the WDD has been altered to facilitate involvement of NGOs in watershed development.

According to Pradeep Kumar, who recently retired as Assistant Director in the Department of Agriculture, the World Bank first made its presence felt in the Department of Agriculture, Government of Karnataka in 1978 when it funded the Agricultural Extension Project, a five-year project in which the World Bank contributed 90 per cent of the loan, that is, ₹20.5 crore and the state government contributed the remaining 10 per cent. Training centres were strengthened, the Agricultural University was also involved, Ambassador cars and
matador vans were bought and the help of the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) was taken. The scheme, which involved advising farmers on the use of fertilizers and pesticides and giving them training, was regarded as a successful one and became a model for agriculture extension in the rest of the country under the National Agricultural Extension Project. This was the first foray of the World Bank in agriculture in Karnataka and it did not include the setting up of NGOs.

Subsequently, the World Bank pointed out that, in fact, the scheme had not been implemented properly. Agriculture in irrigated lands was given priority and soil conservation was neglected. It insisted that a separate Department of Watershed Development should be created. It also pointed out that funds had been misappropriated in the earlier scheme and hence NGOs should be involved in any new scheme as well as the local people of the area. Resorting to a little arm-twisting, it said that only if these two conditions were fulfilled was it willing to finance another scheme. The third condition was that 10 per cent of the contribution in the form of labour or materials was to come from the farmers themselves. On this basis, an MoU was signed between the state government and the World Bank.

Herein, we find all the key elements of the centre’s strategy for development on the advice of the multilateral agency. First, a new concern for poverty alleviation led to an interest in soil conservation of ecologically fragile areas as against agriculture in irrigated lands. Second, the notion that NGOs and CBOs should be involved was born. Third, the idea of ‘pay and use’ was firmly put in place. Fourth, the ‘community’ was now vested with the responsibility of providing men and materials for the watershed development project.

With this, the bifurcation of the Department of Agriculture into two separate Departments of Agriculture and Watershed Development took place on 1 January 2001. The World Bank Sujala Watershed Project commenced in September 2001 for a period of 5½ years (Government of Karnataka, Operation Manual: Sujala Watershed Project, 2003). The total cost of the project is ₹599.12 crore. This has been shared by a World Bank loan, the state government and the local community’s contributions. The Sujala Project operates in five districts, namely Chitradurga, Kolar, Tumkur, Dharwad and Haveri. Thus, NGOs, CBOs, the ‘pay and use’ syndrome and ‘community contributions’ were firmly put in place in the field of watershed development.

At the state level, the WDD of the government is the key Project Implementing Agency (PIA) and the MYRADA is the partner NGO.
While the WDD oversees the entire project, the MYRADA is charged with training the NGOs at the district level, known as Lead NGOs (LNGOs) to perform their roles. At the district level, the District Watershed Development Officer (DWDO) is a representative of the government WDD whose task is to monitor and coordinate the project at the district level and to extend technical support to the NGOs (Sujala Operation Manual 2003: 12). The Lead NGOs, on their part, have to facilitate the Field NGOs (FNGOs) in their task of social mobilization. They have to train the FNGOs to set up and conduct trainings of the CBOs. At the sub-watershed level, the FNGOs have to form appropriate CBOs at the village/micro-shed level and to build the capacities of these institutions to plan, implement and manage the programme. The CBOs then come into being; they consist of two types of bodies, the AGs (Area Groups), consisting of farmers, and the SHGs, consisting of ‘the economically poorer sections of the community … landless families, small or marginal farmers, artisans, SC or ST’ (Sujala Operation Manual 2003: 25). One of the tasks that the FNGOs and CBOs are charged with is to mobilize community contributions. We have seen these AGs and SHGs in our study of Hosahalli, a village in Kolar district.

Thus, in the Sujala Watershed Project, we have an elaborate network of NGOs and CBOs to implement the project from the state level downwards and raise farmers’ contributions towards the same.

The point I am trying to make is that, at present, while the implementation of the Project is completely in the hands of NGOs and CBOs with the supervision of the government WDD, there is absolutely no accountability, either financially or performance-wise, of these NGOs and CBOs to the PRIs. This was put across to me by Assistant Director Pradeep Kumar who said that while the work of government officers like himself, working in non-Society-implemented projects, that is, in government-implemented projects, was scrutinized in all the three tiers of the PRIs, the NGOs went absolutely scot-free. While the government officials were subjected to all kinds of queries by the local elected members, so that one of his lady colleagues was virtually on the verge of a nervous breakdown before every Panchayat meeting, the NGO and CBO members did not even have to present themselves at these meetings, let alone participate in them and be answerable to any of the local elected members. As Kumar put it, ‘this has led to a “don’t care” attitude on the part of the NGO and CBO members’.
This is not different from the SSA in primary education that was discussed in the last chapter.

It is not the case that there should be no NGOs. Certainly, the dedication and expertise of the NGOs should be made use of. But it should always be under the direction and watchful eyes of the government and at all times, with the government in control, through both its executive and legislative wings. This includes its local elected bodies. After all, the final responsibility for the watershed development programmes and its poverty alleviation agenda rests squarely on the shoulders of the central and state governments, and more so on the local government, to which this function has been devolved.

Unfortunately, the central government is considering the option of whittling down government control, as we will see in the following report.

**The Parthasarathy Committee Report**

The trend of whittling down government control and opening up of the office of CEO at the top to selection from the market became apparent to me when I read the Report of the Technical Committee on Watershed Programmes in India, also known as the Parthasarathy Committee Report (http://dolr.nic.in) which emanates from the central government. This Report was brought out by the MoRD in January 2006.

The report establishes the centrality of the Watershed Committee vis a vis the PRIs. Unduly solicitous of the Panchayats, Parthasarathy says, ‘The impression that I got was that Gram Panchayats are overburdened with budgetary allocations, their hands are full, and that watershed implementation is best handled through watershed committees on which the Gram Panchayat could well be represented.’ Here again, we find a reiteration of the centrality of the Watershed Committee in which the GP member is represented, instead of the other way around.

The report also belittles and bypasses the elected body of representatives or GP for the deliberative body consisting of the adult villagers called the Gram Sabha. It forgets that India has a system of representative democracy and not direct democracy. Thus, rather than accountability to the GP, the Report recommends that there should be accountability to the Gram Sabha. The Report says,
Accountability in the village is best enforced in and through the Gram Sabha as it has a grandstand view of all that happens in a village … Gram Panchayats are best equipped to handle fiscal, regulatory and enforcing functions and programmes like watersheds involving the entire community are best left to the so-called “General Assembly” of the village (that is, the Gram Sabha) and its elected committees.

The point is that this arrangement bypasses the elected body or GP which is accountable to the people and whose members can be removed at the next election. The GP is charged with executive functions, unlike the Gram Sabha which is a deliberative body, having no such accountability and no executive functions either. Giving these executive functions to ‘elected committees’ that spring out of the Gram Sabha is unconstitutional and undemocratic.

Having experimented with new structures at the district and state levels which incorporate NGOs, the Report goes on to recommend an umbrella organization, that is, a Society to take care of watershed development at the national level, much in the nature of the SSA. It does this in the following manner.

It recommends that a National Authority for Sustainable Development of Rainfed Areas (NASDORA) be set up ‘as a quasi-independent authority to manage the entire primarily Central Government funded Watershed programme’.7 With this, watershed development will be placed outside the purview of the central and state legislatures. Sure enough, we again come across terms like ‘mission-mode’ being used and the Society mode of implementation being recommended. It says, ‘To ensure freedom and flexibility in its functioning, the Authority will be registered as a Society under the Societies Registration Act, 1860.’ This is very much like the umbrella organization SSA that was discussed in the last chapter. And like the DPEP that preceeded the SSA, KAWAD and SUJALA may be the experiments that precede just such an apex body. But it goes farther in its governance reform than the SSA, as becomes evident when we continue reading the recommendations made in the Report.

For, the Report does away with the presence of government officers in charge at the top, and opens the door to the ‘expert’ who will be selected from the open market. It says,

NASDORA will be managed by an Apex Governing Board consisting of a competitively selected professional as CEO, one representative each from the Ministry of Rural Development, Ministry of Agriculture and Ministry
of Environment and Forests, Government of India, three competitively selected full-time professionals representing the functions of operations, finance and human and institutional development, two eminent experts in the field of watershed management and two eminent members from civil society (my emphasis).

This structure is replicated all the way down to the village level. The Report says, the ‘State government will set up boards with a structure similar to the one at the apex level. Each State Board will have a CEO and professionals on the basis of recommendations of appropriate search committees.’

At the district level, there will be a District Watershed Development Agency (DWDA), headed by a full-time CEO ‘who will be competitively selected from the open market’. Throwing open the office to a wider audience, the Report states that the ‘CEO, DWDA could be a serving government officer on deputation, a person from the NGO or corporate sector or an independent professional’.

The CEO, DWDA will in turn constitute a District Watershed Management Team, again comprising of ‘professionals competitively selected from the open market … They could again be serving government officers on deputation, persons from the NGO sector or independent professionals.’

Here, it may be pointed out that the hiring of all these officers will be for a five-year period on a contractual basis. This will, in effect, put an end to the concept of a career bureaucrat as we now know it.

At the milli-watershed level will be a Milli-Watershed Committee headed by a Project Manager, again competitively selected from the open market. These again could be ‘serving government officers on deputation, persons from the NGO sector or independent professionals’.

The Report states, ‘In case the Project Manager belongs to an NGO, the latter will be at liberty to either earmark its own staff exclusively for this work, or engage fresh candidates through open market competitive selection’ (2006: 117). This paves the way for the full-fledged entry of the NGO into the watershed sector.

At the village level, there will be the Village Watershed Committee (VWC), a CBO which will implement the watershed project in the village. Interestingly, the Report states, ‘The VWC will be answerable to and work under the control of the Gram Sabha.’ There is no mention of the elected body of GP here either. It appears as if such a body does not exist!
Regarding funds, the Report says, ‘All funds meant for the watershed programme will be converged in the NASDORA. These funds will flow to the State Boards and from there to each DWDA. From each DWDA they will move to the MWC and VWC.’ In a classic case of parallel funding, there is no mention of PRIs here. The funds to be spent on watershed development are not a small amount. The Report recommends ₹1,50,000 crore to be spent in rainfed areas over the next 15 years (₹10,000 crore per year!).

Thus, as the Report now envisages it, the top jobs will be thrown open to the market, and government officials will be expected to compete with NGOs for these jobs. No longer will the government be in command, at the helm of affairs, so to speak, with policy making, monitoring and supervisory functions and holding the purse strings. These will be in the hands of CEOs selected from the open market. Watershed development will be open to NGOs, from top to bottom. Will this not lead to a conflict of interest? The government bureaucrat will be just one member of the development team, on par with NGOs. He will lose his position of control, particularly in relation to the protection and use of the natural resources of the country.

A National Rainfed Area Authority was indeed set up in November 2006, but this author does not know how much of the Parthasarathy Report was, in fact, incorporated in it. The point is that enormous restructuring of departments is taking place with the formation of Authorities and Societies and Agencies and Corporations which, as parallel bodies, are all contributing in their own way to the placing of government administration outside legislative control and even to the rather quick dwindling of government itself.

That the Society mode of implementation of watershed development is working its way towards encompassing the whole state as with the SSA became evident from a newspaper report in The Hindu (2007c). It states that the Sujala Watershed Programme ‘which has been appreciated the world over’ will be extended to six more districts, namely Belgaum, Hassan, Chikmagalur, Kodagu, Shimoga and Chitradurga. It says, ‘In six districts, the Government would promote the participatory watershed development programme. The Government would finance social mobilization and institution-building endeavours to facilitate planning and investment activities by local communities.’

Thus, in watershed development, we get a hint of future trends in natural resource management and indeed in ‘development’ as a
whole. Not only will all elected bodies including the Constitutionally-mandated Panchayats be bypassed but the government bureaucracy itself will be expected to step aside and make way for NGOs, corporate houses and ‘experts’, if the Parthasarathy Report is an indication of future trends.

To sum up, great changes are taking place in the administration of watershed Development. The ‘reforms’ in governance are being put forward ostensibly to further the goals of participation, equality and sustainability. But we find that none of these goals are in fact being achieved. On the contrary, the opposite is taking place. The newly constituted Watershed Committees consider themselves to be apolitical and profess a negative attitude towards the local elected body, though this did not prevent them from taking the help of the elected body whenever required. Simultaneously, the government is sought to be whittled down to the extent that the bureaucrat now shares his turf with experts and NGOs who are on the same Board or Committee as he is. Local elected bodies, under whose purview watershed development falls, are completely sidelined. And all this is taking place without any discussion or public debate. In fact, the changes taking place are unconstitutional. Article 39 of the Directive Principles of the Constitution directs the State to ensure that ‘the ownership and control of the material resources of the community are so distributed as best as to subserve the common good’.

Thus, the Parthasarathy Report points to some worrisome aspects of the present trends in administration. To my mind, the government should always be in charge and at the helm of affairs. NGOs and experts can offer their services and expertise but they cannot be considered to be on par with government officials and they cannot be at the helm of affairs. Stiglitz maintains that the government must have an important role to play, particularly in the developing countries, and it is on this issue that he parted ways with the ‘market fundamentalism’ of the IMF and the World Bank (2006). Recent events have proved him right since, in the final analysis, it is the US government that had to use stimulus packages in order to bail out the private companies which had made huge losses, leading to the economic meltdown. The harrowing experience of the USA in the housing bubble of 2008 should not be lost on the Indian government and people. Thus, in the Indian context, in every public–private partnership between the government and the private sector, the government should ensure that it is in decisive and firm control and has the upper hand.
While harnessing the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector, at no time should the balance of power be tilted in favour of that sector vis-à-vis the government. Sidelining local self-governments and whittling down government administration will lead to just such a scenario, in which issues of equality, participation and sustainability will be thrown to the winds and private profit and personal gain will be the driving force of development. This country, with such a large population and a high degree of poverty, is particularly vulnerable to the pitfalls of such a model of development.

Notes

1. I was told that, in fact, the farmers often refused to make the payment and a certain adjustment was made in the books by the implementing agencies, or else the funds were not forthcoming. In a study of local organizations in the water supply and sanitation sector in Karnataka, Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa point out that only in seven of the 30 villages studied by them did the community make monetary contribution. In the remaining villages, ‘the actual contribution was made by the politicians and contractors’ (2004: 48).


3. In their study of local organizations in the water supply and sanitation sector, Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa point out that there was lack of participation of the people in choosing the technology to be used. They say,

   The people were not in general consulted on the choice of technology in Karnataka; there was an assumption that the villagers were in need of piped water supply and that this was the best technology. The people however, were apprehensive of the dependence on borewells to supply water. For instance, the people of Hiroli village in Gulbarga district stated that no water supply scheme would work if it depended on groundwater. Although the Engineering Survey Report acknowledged that all the seven out of nine borewells with handpumps were not working, it still recommended the same to be connected to the groundwater (2004: 102).

4. Interview with Professor D. Rajasekhar, 7 December 2005.

5. Interview with Pradeep Kumar, Assistant Director, Department of Agriculture, Government of Karnataka (Retd), 18 April 2007.

6. There was a series of articles in the Economic and Political Weekly on the Parthasarathy Committee Report, championing the cause of the NGOisation of Watershed Development recommended by it. See Ambasta (2006), Joshi (2006), Shah (2006a) and Vaidyanathan (2006)

7. See also Shah (2006b). Mihir Shah served as honorary advisor to the Parthasarathy Committee.
8

SOCIETIES GALORE!

We have seen in the last two chapters that autonomous Societies have been set up in the primary education and watershed development sectors. These run parallel to government bureaucracies. Not only that, they are not accountable to elected bodies at the local level, as are the government departments, although their subjects have been devolved to PRIs according to Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment.

Had this development been restricted to primary education and watershed development, it could have been dismissed as isolated examples which do not have much bearing on governance as a whole. But this is not the case, as we will see in this chapter. According to the erstwhile Principal Secretary in the Department of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj to the Government of Karnataka, T.R. Raghunandan, ‘almost all Departments have taken external funding and formed Societies which are parallel bodies to Panchayat Raj’.

Table 5.1 lists the parastatal and parallel bodies in Karnataka. Parastatal bodies have been discussed in the same chapter. These are the various Area Development Boards, Backward Classes, Minorities Development Corporations, etc. Here, it may be reiterated that these parastatal bodies entailed the setting up of Boards and Corporations but they did not bring about a major structural change in the Departments. Set up as single-purpose agencies with a view to increasing efficiency, they were merely an extended arm of the parent Department. Most importantly, they did not entail the setting up of Societies, DICs and TICs at the ZP and TP levels, as we saw with the SSA and Watershed Societies, nor did they set up CBOs at the village level.

The Society-mode of implementation, on the other hand, involves a major departmental restructuring in the setting up of Missions and Societies at the national and state levels, DICs at the district level, TICs at the taluk level and CBOs at the village level. These relatively new bodies of governance, set up from the early 1990s onwards, or even earlier, from the mid-1980s onwards, include the numerous VFCs, JSYS, Rajiv Gandhi Rural Housing Corporation, Karnataka Rural
Water Supply and Sanitation Agency and Rural Health Mission, to mention only a few. The structural innovations in governance introduced by these Societies will be discussed in this chapter. All these bodies are parallel to the state government departmental bureaucracies and the elected local bodies. As Societies, they enjoy autonomy, so that they are not accountable to the PRIs. They do not even come within the purview of these bodies.

As we will see below, all these departments are at different stages of re-structuring into Societies, DICs, TICs and CBOs. Some, like the SSA, have completed the restructuring process, with an apex body like the SSA at the national level and down the line to the SDMC at the local level. Not only is the project of restructuring from top to bottom complete but also the entire extent of the state has been covered. Now, what remains to be done by the ‘reform’ agenda is to mainstream the restructuring achieved in the experimental Society of the SSA, so that the entire Department of Elementary Education and Literacy is covered by the new administrative reforms.

In watershed development, the entire state has not yet been covered, since SUJALA and KAWAD, which operate under the Society-mode of functioning, are operational only in a few districts. Recently, six more districts were added to the SUJALA kitty, as mentioned in the last chapter. SUJALA was preceded by KAWAD, which was an experiment in the new mode of governance, initiated by the British-sponsored DfID. That the ‘reforms’ are a work in progress is evident in the fact that, side by side, the state government is implementing its own watershed development projects such as the DPAP and the DDP. The apex body, the National Watershed Authority, was set up in December 2006. Clearly, watershed development is in a transitory phase, where governance reforms are concerned.

What does all this restructuring imply in terms of the administration of ‘development’ in the various sectors of government? When a programme goes from a staid government department to an autonomous Society, it enjoys a great deal of freedom in conducting its activities. New rules can be made and new institutions are set up at the state, district and village levels which include nominated members, NGOs, experts, etc. like the DIC in the SSA. These bodies now become the decision-making bodies rather than the body of local elected members like the ZP, TP or GP. While government programmes are critically reviewed by local elected bodies like the ZP and TP, these programmes escape the scrutiny of the local elected bodies.
Also, money can be quickly sourced without going through the normal time-consuming government channels. Accountability is to a bureaucrat, namely the Development Commissioner, and to the Board of Directors of the Society and not to the PRIs. In short, accountability is to a small group of people and not to the general public through their elected bodies. There is freedom to hire consultants, often at an enormous fee. NGOs can be inducted into the implementation of the programmes on the ground, thus wresting implementation from government control. However, if we go by the Parthasarathy Committee Report, the NGOs will soon scale the peaks of the administrative hierarchy and become CEOs of the apex body itself. This will undoubtedly create a serious conflict of interest. While implementing these programmes, the NGOs are simultaneously mandated to set up CBOs at the local level, which give short shrift to the GPs. ‘Capacity-building’ or training is done by the NGOs, but these training exercises place the CBO at the centre of local development and train all other local bodies including the PRIs to cater to the needs and demands of the CBO. The PRIs are inexorably sidelined.

Thus, the various departments are at different stages of being restructured and bringing into being ‘good governance’. The restructuring is justified as bringing about not only efficiency but also equality, participation and sustainability. In Chapter 7, we have seen that these goals have not been met. We will now take a look at the restructuring that has taken place in some of the departments.

The Health Sector

This sector is not new to the phenomenon of Societies. In fact, it was one of the first sectors where Societies made their presence. Numerous vertical Societies had been set up by the Union Ministry of Health and Family Planning as early as 1979. According to Banerji, the rich nations prevailed upon the developing nations that they were too poor to undertake what they called ‘comprehensive primary health care’. They persuaded these countries to adopt an alternative approach of dealing with a few diseases at a time (2005: 3255). Thus came into being vertical, centrally-sponsored Societies for the eradication of TB, malaria, polio, leprosy, blindness, filaria and, more recently, AIDS. A visit to any taluk will bring the Blindness Society, etc. to one’s notice. In recent times, the AIDS Society has been receiving a large amount of funds from philanthropists like Bill Gates.
There has been a great deal of criticism of these Societies as being ineffective in the control and eradication of these diseases, due to their ‘campaign’ approach of focusing on the problem for a short duration, followed by unsuccessful maintenance phases, as seen in the resurgence of malaria after it was almost eradicated. In addition, this approach has not been a cost-effective one, to say the least. Also, it has resulted in the lack of a focus on public health and generally, on a holistic approach to the health of the community. However, the ‘campaign’ approach has made it easier for pharmaceutical companies to access the large Indian market.

In Kolar district, where this author conducted fieldwork, there were the following Societies and Implementation Committees:

(i) District Aids Control and Programme Implementation Committee;
(ii) District Blindness Control Society;
(iii) District TB Control Programme Society;
(iv) District Leprosy Control Programme Society;
(v) District Communicable Diseases Control Committee; and
(vi) District Pulse Polio Implementation Committee

All these programmes were under the direct control of the Deputy Commissioner. Neither the programmes nor the funds allocated for them came to the ZP. According to Dr M. V. Hiremath, Reproductive Child Health Officer, ‘these health programmes are directly administered by the DC and there is no involvement of the elected representatives in them. The funds for the programmes go to the DC and not to the Zilla Panchayat.’\(^1\) However, he added that ‘we are under the Zilla Panchayat CEO since April 1987. Thus, we have to answer to DC as well as to the ZP CEO. This leads to a confusing situation.’ There is no mention of accountability to the President of the ZP or the elected body here.

However, in spite of setting up these vertical Societies or parallel bodies rather early on, the Health and Family Welfare Department has been rather tardy in the matter of instituting CBOs, compared to the other departments in Karnataka. At the time of my fieldwork in 2004, there were no CBOs in health set up by the Department of Health and Family Welfare in the villages.\(^2\)

The National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) document released in April 2005 by the Government of India seeks to change this. The
‘mission approach’ once again makes its appearance in the NRHM document. This is a cue that the Society is about to make its appearance. And sure enough, the inevitable Society is strongly recommended in the NRHM Report. While the new institutions are slowly but surely being put in place, we take a look at the NRHM document itself.

At the village level, it seeks to set up Village Health and Sanitation Samitis (VHSS), consisting of Panchayat representatives, Auxiliary Nurse and Midwife (ANM), anganwadi workers, teachers, Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHA) and community health volunteers, that is, NGOs in the field of health. This, then, will be a body akin to the SDMC or any of the other CBOs one finds in the villages nowadays (Government of India 2005a).

The Mission document does not specify the relationship of the VHSS with PRIs. Thus, the Mission Statement does not make the VHSS accountable or answerable in any way to the PRIs. It is simply outside the purview of the local elected bodies. It is a parallel body in the making.

We find that the NRHM endows the health sector with a plethora of Committees. There is not just the Health Mission at the national and state levels but also the Society at the national and state levels (Government of India 2005b). The National Mission is headed by the Union Minister of Health and Family Welfare and the State Mission is headed by the Chief Minister. There is also the Union Secretary for Health and Family Welfare in the National Mission and the Principal Secretary of Health and Family Welfare is Convener of the State Mission. Clearly, the powers-that-be are not taking any chances with the reform agenda. The Mission ensures that there is enough political and bureaucratic clout to carry through the ‘reforms’ in the health sector.

The Mission is charged with ‘consideration of policy matters related with health sector’ as well as a ‘review of progress in implementation of NRHM’. As if this was not enough, in addition to the State Mission, there is also a State Health Society! The NRHM states that ‘the functions under the Mission would be carried out by the State Health and Welfare Society’.

The State Health Society is a bureaucratic body, with a Governing Body headed by the Chief Secretary/Development Commissioner. The Vice-Chairman is the Principal Secretary of Health and Family Welfare. The members consist of an array of bureaucrats from related departments such as Women and Child Development, etc. and four–six
‘nominated non-official members’ such as public health professionals, NGO representatives and representatives of Medical Associations. Its business is the ‘approval of Annual State Action Plans for the NRHM’ and ‘consideration of proposals for institutional reforms in the Health and Family Welfare sector’.

The State Health Society also has an Executive Committee with the Principal Secretary as Chairperson and the Executive Director/Mission Director (also an IAS officer) as Convenor. Clearly, it is a top-heavy body in order to ensure that the reforms are indeed carried out. The Executive Committee may further constitute Programme Committees ‘for a more focused planning and review of each activity’.

In addition to these august bodies, there is also the State Programme Management Support Unit (SPMSU) and a Secretariat. The SPMSU will have ‘experts recruited from the open market’ and will provide technical support with its pool of skilled professionals. The existing ‘vertical’ Societies will all be merged in the State Health Society.

At the district level, there will again be a District Health Mission and a District Health Society. These are analogous to the DIC of the SSA. Though ‘health’ is one of the 29 subjects devolved to the PRIs, the ZP local body of elected members will not be the decision-making body at the district level. The NRHM states that ‘the District Health Society (DHS) will be responsible for planning and managing all health and family welfare programmes in the district, both in the rural as well as urban areas’. In the next sentence, in an apparent bid to placate the local elected bodies, it says,

however, the DHS is not meant to take over the executive functions of the Zilla Panchayat/Urban Local Bodies (ULB) and/or the district health administration. On the contrary, DHS is meant to provide the platform where the three arms of governance — ZP, ULBs and district health administration and district programme managers of NRHM sectors get together to decide on health issues of the district and delineate their mutual roles and responsibilities.

The Chairman of the District Health Mission is the Chairman, ZP. In this way, the local bodies are placated! Interestingly, the Co-Chairman is the District Collector and the Vice Chairman is the CEO, ZP. Thus, the ZP President and District Collector are expected to jointly take care of the health matters in the district. The Convener is the Chief Medical Officer. The members consist of MPs, MLAs, MLCs from the district, Chairpersons of the Standing Committees of the ZP, Chairpersons of the TPs, representatives of NGOs, etc.
This, then, is an important, decision-making body regarding health matters in the district. The Chairman of the ZP has been given an exalted position as Chairman of the District Health Mission. Similarly, a few other ZP and TP members have been co-opted into the Mission, such as the Chairpersons of the Standing Committee of the ZP as well as Chairpersons of the TPs. Apart from this, there are state-level elected members, NGOs and officials on the Committee.

This is the decision-making, supervisory and monitoring body at the district level. The General Body of the ZP and that of the TP have been left out in the cold. In fact, the General Body of elected representatives at the district, taluk and village levels are not likely to know what is going on in the health sector in their district. They have been inexorably sidelined.

At the district level, there will also be a District Health Society as well as a Secretariat to ensure that the tasks of the Mission are carried out in right earnest. By putting all these new institutions in place, the central government is clearly taking no chances that the agenda of reform in the health sector is not carried through. In the process, local democratic institutions are being sidelined and undermined in a way that the people’s hopes and aspirations are not likely to find expression.

Even now, the ZP deals with only a few health issues such as immunization, given that most of the ‘diseases’ are under the purview of ‘vertical’ Societies. With the coming into force of the NRHM, PRIs are likely to have even less under their belt than they have now. If all the matters relating to health are to be dealt with by the Mission and Societies at the state and district levels and by the Village and Sanitation Committees at the village level, it stands to reason that both the Department of Health and Family Welfare and the elected bodies will become redundant, or at the very least, be subjugated to the Mission and its Societies, instead of the other way around.

**Social Welfare**

The welfare of the weaker and vulnerable sections of society, such as the SCs, STs and women is one of the functions that the PRIs are charged with, according to the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, Schedule 11. However, T. R. Raghunandan, Principal Secretary in the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, GoK, said ruefully that almost the whole Department of Social Welfare in Karnataka is parallel to the PRIs! A perusal of the contents page of the
Annual Report of the Social Welfare Department confirmed that this indeed was true. The Karnataka SC/ST Development Corporation, the Karnataka Backward Classes Development Corporation and the Karnataka Minorities Development Corporation have been carved out of the Social Welfare Department as parastatal bodies and we have discussed them in Chapter 5. According to L. S. Srinivas, officer in the Social Welfare Department, the old Department of Social Welfare had Women and Children, Disabled and Backward Classes and Minorities, all in one Department. ‘Women and Children’ was the first to go out and form the Women and Child Development Department in the ‘70s followed by the others. The Social Welfare Department had very little left on its plate, namely the hostels, scholarships and housing schemes.3

Raghunandan pointed out that even the residential schools of the Social Welfare Department had formed an autonomous Society called the Karnataka Residential Education Institutions Society, which was parallel to PRIs. However, what is interesting is that ‘social welfare’ has not attracted the gaze of the multilateral funding agencies. Hence, we find no Missions or Societies set up in this area. The kind of parallel bodies set up here are largely parastatal bodies, such as Boards and Corporations and, as we mentioned earlier, these do not engender a restructuring of the system.

**Department of Women and Children Development (DWCD)**

This department has two important schemes, one for children called the Integrated Child Development Service (ICDS) and the other for women called Stree Shakti. According to Savitri, officer in the DWCD ‘the ICDS scheme is a Centrally-sponsored Scheme which was transferred to the ZPs five years ago. We do only the monitoring of the programme. But, in the case of Stree Shakti, it is directly administered by the Department.’ As Savitri put it, ‘Stree Shakti is not administered through the Zilla Panchayat but it is community-based.’ Now, we will consider the ‘communities’ or SHGs in Karnataka and their links, if any, to PRIs.

SHGs are micro-finance or savings groups. These are small, informal and homogenous groups of women with poor risk-taking capacity,
which consist of not more than 20 members. After its formation, the group regularly meets and collects a fixed amount of thrift from each member. With this amount, it starts lending to its members for petty consumption needs. Subsequently, it borrows money from a bank, which is lent out to its members. As the whole group is liable for the amount borrowed from the bank, its responsibility in monitoring the members increases (Kamal Vatta 2003: 432).

SHGs, particularly Stree Shakti, have been a success in Karnataka in the field of women and micro-finance. A study by Rajasekhar and Vani on women’s SHGs in Karnataka points out that there are three important programmes in the area of women’s micro-finance in the country (2004). They are (i) the Stree Shakti programme which has been initiated and implemented by the DWCD in Karnataka state. It was launched in 2000 in Karnataka and is the single largest programme of micro-finance in the state; (ii) Rural Women Development and Empowerment Project (RWDEP) which has been initiated by the DWCD and the World Bank and implemented by the Women’s Development Corporation and NGOs in seven states. This is known as the Swashakti programme in Karnataka. It commenced in 1999 and is operational in seven districts in the state; (iii) SGSY programme which has been initiated by the Department of Rural Development and implemented through PRIs all over the country (Rajasekhar and Vani 2004: 1). Rajasekhar and Vani discuss only the first two kinds of SHGs as their study did not find SGSY groups in the sample villages (2004: 14). We will consider the Stree Shakti programme as it is the single most popular programme in Karnataka.

Here, it is important to note that though ‘women and child development’ is one of the 29 subjects devolved to PRIs in the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution, Schedule 11, the Stree Shakti programme is firmly ensconced in the state sector in Karnataka and has not been devolved to the district sector consisting of PRIs. Thus, Stree Shakti is directly administered by the DWCD through its line departments in the districts headed by the Office Superintendent in the CDPO in the taluks.

That Stree Shakti is a successful programme is seen in that ‘at the end of March 2005, 1 lakh groups have been formed in the State’ according to the Annual Report of the Women and Child Development Department, 2005 (2005: 4). Rajasekhar and Vani’s study points out that the SHG–bank linkage has been well developed in Karnataka. ‘The cumulative amount of bank loans was Rs. 367.65 million
in Karnataka while the same was only Rs. 101.26 million in Madhya Pradesh (including Chhattisgarh) (2004: 12). The pride that the members took in their SHG and the enthusiasm it engendered in them was palpable to this author when she visited one of the meetings of women members in Hosahalli, which took place at 8 p.m. when all their household chores were over. One reason for the success of the SHG phenomenon could be that it is similar to the ‘chit-fund’ type of savings that the rural population in Karnataka was accustomed to in the 1970s and 1980s.

According to Sumitra, the DWCD Office Superintendent who implements the Stree Shakti programme in Kolar district, there are 6,500 SHGs in the 11 taluks of the district.6 The members get training in maintaining loan records and in social issues such as dowry, health issues such as AIDS, etc. According to Lakshmidevamma, CDPO in Mulbagal taluk of Kolar district, there are 431 Stree Shakti groups in Mulbagal.7 Swa-shakti, on the other hand, is a time-bound (five years) World Bank programme which is implemented through NGOs.

In Hosahalli, there were two SHGs, one of which was a Stree Shakti group and the other a Swa-shakti group. Of the two, the Stree Shakti group was more effective. The leader of the Stree Shakti group, Sita Devi, had been trained by the CDPO to be a Resource Person for Mulbagal taluk.

Sita Devi said that she had started the Stree Shakti SHG two years ago in Hosahalli.8 She received training from the MYRADA and IDF. Group members had obtained loans for buying sheep, cows and buffaloes and for sericulture. With the revolving fund of `1,000 given by the DWCD and the group’s savings of `4,000, they had bought two baskets for breeding silkworm (chandranki) and given them on rent. The Department of Animal Husbandry had given them chickens for `33 per chicken which they later sold for `35. The group had contributed their labour for the watershed project SUJALA, such as construction of ponds, bunds, etc. for which they had been paid. The profits of all these activities were added to the SHG fund and shared among the members. Sita Devi also conducted various awareness programmes regarding health issues such as AIDS and immunization.

When asked what links they had with the GP in Hosahalli, Sita Devi replied categorically, ‘We have no connection.’

On the other hand, it emerged during the conversation that Sita Devi regarded the GP as a rival of her Stree Shakti group. She said,
A Government Order has come for Stree Shakti to handle the PDS (Public Distribution System) ration shop in the village (instead of the Gram Panchayat) but this has not yet been done. Also Karnataka Power Transmission Corporation Limited (KPTCL) has given us the facility to collect electricity charges in the village through Stree Shakti, with 20% commission (also currently done by the Gram Panchayat) but this has also not been implemented in Kolar.

Clarifying the issue regarding the various functions of the CBOs and PRIs according to her perception, she said, ‘Water tax is to be collected by the Village Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) and electricity charges are to be collected by Stree Shakti. Only house tax is to be collected by the Gram Panchayat.’

A newspaper report states, ‘To empower women economically, all fair price shops under the Public Distribution System (PDS) will henceforth be given to Stree Shakti groups’ (TOI 2003). Hence, it is not surprising that Sita Devi was peeved that the village ration shop had not been handed over to the SHG members. Regarding the water tax, it may be noted that, even in the matter of collecting taxes, which is the prerogative of the GP, there are parallel bodies which have been encouraged by the state to perform this role.

On the matter of linkages of women’s SHGs with PRIs, Rajasekhar and Vani point out that women’s SHGs ‘cutting across all types in both the States (Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh) did not make any attempt to establish linkages with the GPs nor did they seek to represent the interests of members in the Gram Sabhas’ (2004: 29). According to them, it is due to this lack of linkage that only basic functions of the SHGs (building the capacity of members in regular savings and utilization of loans) were undertaken and developmental functions (of coordination and establishing linkages and accountability with other local organizations) were not undertaken (2004: 29). The latter ‘relate to broader objectives of building the capacity of members in securing benefits from the local decentralized government and line departments on their own for livelihood security’ (2004: 38). Thus, say Rajasekhar and Vani, lack of linkages of SHGs with GPs hampers women’s overall empowerment and this has had an impact on ‘poverty alleviation’ of the people. On the other hand, as we saw in Chapter 4, the SHGs in Kerala have gone beyond the basic function of inculcating the habit of regular savings and have helped the members to start small business enterprises on their own, thus building their capacity for livelihood security.
Again, Rajasekhar and Vani state,

Support organizations (the line Department in the case of Stree Shakti and NGOs in the case of Swa-shakti) in the case of all Local Organization (CBO) types in Karnataka did not undertake the function of building the capacity of members in establishing linkages with local decentralized government. This was only to be expected as the officials belonging to all organizations from the State to the block level did not have much confidence in the outcome of linkages with the decentralized government. One senior official at the State level termed decentralized governments as the ‘governments of decentralized corruption’ and took the position that ‘I will not allow my groups to have anything to do with Gram Panchayats although the mandate is that my groups should work with them’ (2004: 32).

Rajasekhar and Vani summarize their findings and provide suggestions for activity mapping as follows:

The entire responsibility of the implementation of the SHG programme at the district level should be assigned to the ZP. The coordination function should be assigned to the ZP and not to the highest level district official. The information sharing function should be assigned to the ZP. A data base on the number of Local Organizations (CBOs), their spatial location etc. should be built at the ZP level. A special agency appointed by the ZP should constantly monitor the progress of the groups (2004: iv–v).

Further, they suggest that, ‘the Gram Panchayats should implement and coordinate the women development and empowerment programs at the village level. For this, a trained woman staff paid by and accountable to the GP has to be appointed.’

Spelling out the functions of the various village organizations, Rajasekhar and Vani say that:

Gram Panchayats are most suited to undertake monitoring function to improve equity, sustainability and accountability in the groups. They perform reasonably well in providing material assets and other resources to local organizations.

The line department is most suited to provide technical services. NGOs are most suitable to form homogeneous groups and strengthen them. NGOs can be assigned with this function and they should be made accountable to the local elected bodies.

The support organizations (NGOs and the line department) should coordinate and mobilize the resources from the government and the banks under the overall supervision of the local elected bodies’ (2004: iv–v).
Interestingly, in the field of ‘women and child development’ it is the state which is the aggrandizer (since it has retained Stree Shakti in the state sector and not devolved it to the Panchayats) and not the centre and multilateral funding agencies. In fact, no Mission or Society has been set up at the state or national level, at least not till the time of this book going to print. Could it be that, being merely micro-savings groups, with no potential for developing either infrastructure or natural resources or buying materials, like pharma products and equipment, the central government and multilateral funding agencies are less inclined to organize them into Missions and Societies at the state and district levels which have inducted NGOs into their midst? Hence, they tend to remain largely CBOs (read SHGs) at the village level under the CDPO of the DWCD.

Thus, the state’s Stree Shakti groups run parallel to the PRIs and do not acknowledge any links to the PRIs, leave alone accountability to them. On the contrary, they have a holier-than-thou attitude and consider themselves as higher up in the village hierarchy of institutions, to whom various functions have been promised and allocated, but which have so far not been implemented.

The Forest Sector

Karnataka has a forest area of 36,449 sq. km, which is 19 per cent of the total geographical area of the state. Dense forests cover the Western Ghats of North and South Kanara and Coorg. The malnad (hilly) districts of Shimoga and Chikmagalur also have significant forest cover as has the district of Chamarajnagar. The maidan (plains) districts are relatively less wooded than the rest of the State (*Deccan Herald* 2005d; see also *Government of Karnataka* 2004c: 61, Table 8.2).

Interestingly, here again, the forest sector has parallel bodies only at the village level. There are no Missions and Societies at the national and state levels, at least not so far. Instead, forests are firmly under the control of the state sector, through its Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF). This is similar to the situation in the ‘women and children’ sector described above, where Stree Shakti is directly administered by the state. The important point is that, though ‘forests and minor forest produce’ have been devolved to the PRIs under Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment, the PRIs are not involved in the forest sector at all.

The World Bank made its foray into Karnataka as early as 1983 with the setting up of the Social Forestry programme in the state under the
Social Forestry Development Project. The State Forest Department had received ₹552 crore as loan from the World Bank from 1983–88 for social forestry development. ‘Social forestry’, a quaint term, ‘envisages promotion of Farm Forestry by raising and distribution of seedlings to farmers and afforestation in non-forest Government lands, institutional lands, community lands and road sides’ (Government of Karnataka 2004c: 15).

According to Purushottam Rao, First Division Clerk in the Department of Environment and Forests (Social Forestry), Kolar,

Social forestry took into account gomal lands (government lands), revenue land, and village community lands. From 84 to '97, plantations came up in these lands. In Hosahalli, ten hectares of acacia plantation came up in 1984. In '95-96, ten hectares of arkali plantation came up in Hosahalli in the tank bed area.9

Simultaneously, parallel bodies in the form of VFCs were put in place. A beginning was made in 1988 at the national level under the National Forest Policy. This Policy Statement issued by the Government of India called for people's involvement in the development and protection of forests. It was felt, and rightly so, that forest produce such as firewood, fodder, timber and other Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFP) should be made available to the villagers preferentially, apart from a share in the proceeds, so that village communities would be motivated to engage in forest protection and development. On 1 June 1990, the Ministry of Environment and Forests issued guidelines for setting up of a Joint Forest Management (JFM) programme for the protection and development of forests with community participation.

The only problem was that this community participation was envisaged not through the PRIs, but through separate VFCs set up at the village level which, as we will see later, are not accountable to the PRIs. This was in spite of the fact that Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution expressly devolves ‘social forestry and farm forestry’ as well as ‘minor forest produce’ to PRIs.

Participatory forest management through PRIs, which are elected bodies of local people, would have ensured that discussions of local problems of forest use and protection take place in the Gram Sabha, followed by executive action by the GP with supervision from the TP and ZP. The people living near the forests would have ensured from their Panchayats, adequate provision of firewood, fodder and
timber, for which there is a great demand. Local wisdom or indigenous knowledge would have been pressed into service in solving many of the problems of conservation and rejuvenation of forests. It is not that village people are ignoramuses, as is often made out. In addition, they could have tapped the technical knowledge and expertise of the Forest Department. Had they not succeeded in their endeavours to deliver, the members of the PRIs would feel the flak at the next election.

This potential situation has been rendered unattainable due to the setting up of VFCs under the JFM programme issued by the MoEF on 1 June 1990. This was duly followed by a Government Order issued by the Government of Karnataka on 12 April 1993, for ‘people’s participation in planning, protection, development and management of degraded forests and other Government waste lands’ (Government of Karnataka 2002a: 2).

Simultaneously with the Government of Karnataka’s Order came huge funds from external bilateral and multilateral lending agencies. The Care and Share booklet of the Forest Department (Social Forestry) notes, ‘Initially, the JFPM scheme was implemented under DFID-assisted Western Ghats Forestry and Environment Project from 1992–93 to 1999–2000’ (Government of Karnataka 2002a: 2). This scheme was for an amount of ₹1,124 crore.

No sooner was the above scheme over than another scheme was launched, this time by the Japan Bank for International Co-operation (JBIC). This scheme was implemented from 1997–98 to 2001–2002 at a total cost of ₹598.280 crore, out of which ₹472.35 crore is from the JBIC Project and ₹125.93 crore is borne by the state (Government of Karnataka 2004e: 21). Noting the strong emphasis placed on JFM by the JBIC, Care and Share reports, ‘The JBIC authorities assisting Eastern Plains Project have emphasized repeatedly for strengthening JFPM activities during the implementation of JBIC-assisted Forestry and Environment Project for Eastern Plains of Karnataka’ (Government of Karnataka 2002a: 2).

Regarding the JFM programme, M. Muni Reddy, Chief Conservator of Forests, Social Forestry, told this author in an interview, ‘We raise plantations through JFM. After establishing them, they are handed over to the VFC. The VFC gets 75 per cent of the produce from sale and 25% goes to the government.’ C. Srinivas, Forest Range Officer, Mulbagal Taluk, said, ‘Every VFC has attached to it, a plantation. It may be raised on tank foreshore land or gomal land (village commons) or on ‘c’ and ‘d’ class lands (not used for agricultural purposes).’
M. N. Raju, Manager, Social Forestry Division, Kolar, said that 221 plantations had been entrusted to VFCs for maintenance. He candidly admitted that ‘maintenance by us (Forest Department) is difficult due to insufficient staff. About 4,915 hectares has been handed over to them (VFCs) for maintenance.’

VFCs came into existence in Karnataka in 1997 with the JBIC-assisted programme. In Hosahalli, 10 hectares of plantations were raised in the tank foreshore area for which a VFC was formed. It was registered on 6 January 2001. Purushottam Rao reiterated, ‘VFCs came into existence only under the JBIC-assisted programme. The VFC had to look after only the JBIC Scheme plantation.’

Not to be outdone, the Government of India also placed, at the service of JFM, a number of centrally–sponsored schemes such as the SGRY. With all this effort going into the JFM programme, Care and Share states, ‘So far, about 3,000 VFCs have been established throughout the State covering an area of about 2 lakh ha of degraded forests and other Government wastelands’ (Government of Karnataka 2002a: 2).

According to Purushottam Rao, there are 221 VFCs in Kolar in the Social Forestry Division. There was a VFC in Hosahalli but it was not functioning well. According to C. Srinivas, there are 28 VFCs in the Mulbagal Range but only two are functioning well.

Srinivas said that the VFC consists of a General Body consisting of one adult from every family in the village. The membership fee is ₹2. The EC consists of the President and 10 Directors. They are elected or unanimously selected by the village community. Of these, 10 members of the EC, two are SC/ST, two are women members and two are landless labourers. The Forest Range Officer convenes the meeting. The local schoolmaster and village accountant are nominated members of the VFC.

Interestingly, he did not mention any NGOs as being represented as nominated members on the VFC as we have seen with watershed development and primary school committees. According to Manu Kulkarni, during his forays into villages, he came across numerous NGOs in the field of watershed development and tank rehabilitation, but absolutely none in the area of forest protection and development. ‘If they had been there earlier, they have died with the cessation of the externally-aided projects and the funds that come with them,’ he said. So much for sustainability! This author also did not come across any NGOs in the forest sector during her fieldwork. Perhaps due to the
lack of propping up (capacity building) of VFCs by NGOs, the VFC as an institution was found to be weak and shaky.

Srinivas pointed out that each VFC receives a cheque of ₹5,000 as seed money which is placed in the joint account of the Forest Secretary and the VFC President. Either they can merely keep the money or use it for income-generating purposes. Only two VFCs in the Mulbagal Range had used the money for income-generating purposes and Hosahalli was not one of them. When asked what work was done by the two VFCs, he said that they had purchased fingerlings, raised them and sold them at a profit.

M. N. Raju, Manager, Social Forestry Division, pointed out that in each division, one village is selected every year and a substantial amount given to its VFC. We have given Rs. 65,000 to Koragondanahalli in Kolar Taluk for additional activities such as running a revolving fund to uplift the rural poor or the SC/ST. The VFCs select the beneficiaries and issue funds as loans. After recovery of the amount, they issue loans to another batch.

These activities are all very well. They are similar to the ‘poverty-alleviation’ activities carried out by SHGs. But what about activities related to forests, such as ensuring the availability of minor forest produce to the villagers? Is this function being performed by the VFC? If so, it was not mentioned by any of the people interviewed by this author.

There is a dire need for ‘minor forest produce’ on the part of the villagers as any visitor to a rural area will testify. Anthropologist Hugh Brody told Chandrika Mago in an interview to The Times of India,

I was startled when I came to know how difficult life is for villagers hugely dependant on harvesting forest products, both for subsistence and the market. They aren’t allowed to harvest freely, there are restrictions on their right to wood for fuel or building homes; they are not allowed to cut bamboo for homes though I was told bamboo is being cut commercially. (TOI 2005d).

With the growing success of the dairy industry in Karnataka, there is a great need for fodder for the cattle. Especially during periods of drought, freshly cut grass which serves as fodder is extremely hard to come by. Firewood used for cooking purposes is also in great demand. Women walk long distances every day to gather dried twigs for their cooking hearth. But these needs are not being met by the VFC.
The Care and Share booklet notes that regarding disposal of NTPF/fruits, firewood, poles, timber and final harvest, the requirements of the local villagers should be treated as a first charge on such produce. The surplus, after meeting the demands of the concerned villages, shall be disposed off by the VFC through open public auction. The traditional rights and customs enjoyed by the concerned villagers should be duly protected while assigning the rights of collection of produce' (Government of Karnataka 2002a: 21).

This appears to be so much rhetoric in the face of the stark reality of the hardships faced by the rural folk in procuring firewood and fodder, leave alone other NTFP. Thus, the VFC is not fulfilling its main function of taking care of the needs of the villagers regarding minor forest produce. On the other hand, it seems to be preoccupied with maintaining plantations, as every VFC has been assigned a plantation to take care of. No doubt, afforestation is an important function of the Forest Department. But had the PRIs been utilized, there would not have been a neglect of other, equally important functions, such as the provision of firewood for fuel and fodder for cattle. Sensitivity to people’s requirements can only come through institutions of local self-government.

Even in the field of afforestation, the eucalyptus plantations and acacia plantations which came up under the World Bank Social Forestry programme in Karnataka have met with widespread criticism. The eucalyptus groves lowered the water table and the acacia trees were ornamental with no tangible benefits for the population. A dialogue with the PRIs, as to what to plant, when and where, may have had better consequences for all concerned.

The VFC maintains no relationship with the PRIs. Muni Reddy said, ‘We have no connection with Gram Panchayats. We are a non-political body.’ The funds for ‘entry-point activities’ of ₹35,000 and ‘seed money’ of ₹5,000 come directly from the Forest Department. Hence, the VFC does not feel the need for engaging with the Panchayats.

As mentioned earlier, only two of the 28 VFCs in Mulbagal Range were active and that too in ‘income-generating’ activities, similar to the SHGs. The VFC, without support from NGOs, is a shaky institution which has not been established in a sustainable manner. The period of the JBIC loan had just expired when the fieldwork was conducted but another one was in the offing.
The new loan of ₹745 crore is again by the JBIC under the project entitled Karnataka Sustainable Forest Management and Biodiversity Conservation Project. It will be implemented for a period of eight years from the year 2005–2006 onwards. (TOI 2005c).

The interesting point is that parallel bodies in the forest sector have only come up at the village level, e.g., the VFC. There are no parallel bodies in the form of autonomous Societies at the state and district levels as we encountered in the SSA and watershed development sector. Thus, the list of parallel bodies in Table 5.1, brought out by the PRIA for the Roundtable Conference convened by the Ministry of Panchayat Raj, Government of India in 2004, does not include the forest sector.

The village-level committee or VFC itself appears to be on shaky ground. According to Manish Tiwary,

These committees are essentially non-statutory bodies and invested with little real budgetary or executive power. They are not registered under society or co-operative acts that could allow them to function as autonomous bodies. Moreover, the JFM agreement between the forest department and the village community is a ‘resolution’ by the State governments which, in essence, is a statement of intention and not legally binding for the State or the forest department (2005: 2000).

Upadhyay points out that ‘the entire programme seems to be built upon orders issued by the executive branches of the government’. He notes the asymmetrical relationship between the Forest Department and the VFC. He says that the MoUs signed between the Forest Department and the user communities are worded in a language that favours the state and retains its unequivocal power to regulate the activities of any such committee that is being constituted for implementing the JFM programme. The MOUs raise several critical legal concerns. Provisions concerning benefit sharing accrue to the user community only on ‘satisfactory performance of the duties and functions by the committee’. The duties and responsibilities list seems to be heavily loaded towards the community, but correlating duties and responsibilities of States and the consequence of their non-performance hardly finds mention in these agreements. In most cases, the power of termination of JFM agreements lies with the divisional forest officer who may supersede a joint forest management committee for ‘sufficient reasons’ after the approval of the district forest committee, whose constitution is totally tilted towards government officials’ (2003: 3629–3630).
Undermining Local Democracy

Clearly, the VFC is on shaky ground and cannot hold its own in the absence of the Society and its corresponding institutions at the district and taluk levels. Thus, the VFCs have not been found to be sustainable in spite of the concerted efforts of the central government and the multilateral and bilateral funding agencies since the 1990s.

In an article entitled ‘It is Time to Reorient Social Forestry’, Manu Kulkarni writes,

A silent spectator to all this is the local panchayat. Ironically, the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 gives the institution the responsibility of developing social forestry with the funds allocated for the purpose … Now it is time for local panchayats and the forest department to act before any claims are made over the forest lands. The authorities must repurpose the land into afforestation under the Joint Forest Management. Otherwise, the situation may go out of control (Deccan Herald 2005e).

Thus, in the forest sector, we do not come across any grandiose Missions or Societies. This is not due to a lack of effort by the central government and the multilateral agencies. Rather, the State Forest Department appears to have protected its turf against any inroads and conditionalities imposed by the multilateral agencies. There are only VFCs at the local level and they are not functioning well. There were also no NGOs in this sector at the time of this researcher’s fieldwork. It was found that the VFCs, such as there were, were engaged in setting up plantations under the Social Forestry programme of the Forest Department. They had not taken care of the villagers’ great need for fresh grass and twigs and brambles from the forest.

Drinking Water Supply

The provision of drinking water is an essential function of local government and accordingly, Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment has devolved it to local bodies. We will now examine if there are any parallel bodies in this area of governance.

According to Hamid Ahmed, Social Development Specialist, Karnataka Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency, ‘prior to the externally aided schemes, drinking water schemes were implemented by the Mandal Panchayat in Karnataka with help from the Public Health Engineering Department’. Here, he is referring to the golden age of Panchayat Raj under the chief ministership of Ramakrishna Hegde. He continues,
However, with the onset of three externally-aided projects in the field of drinking water supply, namely a Dutch project, a Danish project and a World Bank project, changes were made in the implementation of the Schemes. The Government of Karnataka now created a Project Planning and Monitoring Unit (PPMU) as one of the directorates of the Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, headed by an IAS officer to implement the externally-aided projects. The PPMU was created in 1992–93.

This is the beginning of ‘reforms’ in the water sector.

The Danish project was extant in Hosahalli, Kolar district, when this author was doing her fieldwork. According to Hemlata Patil, DANIDA official, Kolar district, DANIDA has been in the field of water supply, agriculture (watershed development), women’s development and the dairy industry since the last 25 years. If we now see the heavy Holstein cow in the rural areas of Karnataka and the near extinction of the indigenous variety, we have to applaud DANIDA for its good work. (That the imported variety is not suited to local conditions, is heavy on medical bills and difficult to maintain is a different matter altogether.) According to Patil,

in the field of water supply, DANIDA covers three districts — Kolar, Chitradurga and Bijapur. In Kolar district, it began with a pilot project in Bagepalli taluk in 1990. As it was successful, it was extended to three taluks in Kolar district, namely Bangarpet, Mulbagal and Gudibande. In all the three taluks, the project is demand-driven, that is, the members of the community have to come forward and agree to contribute 10 per cent of the expenditure. Phase 1 was from 1996–2002 and covered Hosahalli. 30 Gram Panchayats were taken up in the three taluks. Phase 2 was from 2002–2005. It covered only 15 Gram Panchayats. The project will take care of the water supply requirements for 15 years. The community should participate in all stages of the implementation, that is, in the pre-planning, planning, implementation and post-implementation stages. Now, DANIDA is in the process of phasing out. DANIDA’s assistance is in the form of grants whereas the World Bank assistance is in the form of loans.\textsuperscript{15}

Having initiated the reforms, DANIDA is now phasing out and making way for a follow-up by the World Bank.

According to Hamid Ahmed,

when the first phase of the World Bank project was completed, a second phase was mooted. However, the World Bank now posed a condition. They said that the PPMU will not suffice; it must be converted to Karnataka
Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (KRWSSA) as an autonomous body, a Society under the Registration of Societies Act 1960. The Agency came into being on 1 April 2003.

Ahmed continued,

When the Rajiv Gandhi Drinking Water Mission of the central government came up with a project to supply drinking water to rural areas, the states were asked to formulate an Agency. In Karnataka, this Agency was already there, thanks to the World Bank, ready and willing to take on the projects. Thus, the Swajaldhara Scheme, the Total Sanitation Campaign and the DANIDA-assisted sanitation programmes in a few selected districts are handled by the Agency. It also monitors the School Sanitation Programme through which about 2,000 schools have got toilets, especially in Mysore district. Thus, the Department of Rural Water Supply now works through the Karnataka Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency.

As expected, a Mission at the national level and a Society at the state level have been put in place. What remains to be done from the point of view of institutional ‘reform’ in the drinking water sector is to bring the entire state under the Mission and Society mode of implementation. At present, the World Bank’s Jal Nirmal Project covers only 11 districts.

Sure enough, the District Project Implementing Committee and Taluk Project Implementing Committee make their appearance in the Jal Nirmal Project, consisting of a motley crowd of individuals, such as experts and NGOs, thus bypassing the General Bodies of the ZP and TP.

Regarding the formation of CBOs in the area of drinking water supply, L. K. Atheeq, Director said, ‘We formulated Village Water Supply Committees (VWSC) in 1993.’ This was no doubt under the externally-aided projects. He continued,

These were user groups with no statutory backing. The formation of these user groups, in which was vested the development of crucial infrastructure, led to problems with Panchayat Raj Institutions. Differences between these two bodies led to the malfunctioning of these water-user groups. Moreover, the user groups became defunct after the implementation of the programmes. The user groups expected that the Panchayat Raj Institutions would take over, after the project period was over. But the Panchayat Raj Institutions refused to take over the maintenance of the projects. They said that these projects have been done without our knowledge; hence we will not take over their maintenance. Thus, there was
conflict between the village sarpanch (Gram Panchayat President) and
the community leader (VWSC President).

The Government of India resolved the issue by constituting the Village
Water and Sanitation Committee (VWSC) as a sub-committee of the Gram
Panchayat. In Karnataka we have given a statutory basis to the VWSC by
bringing it under Section 61A of the Panchayat Raj Act 1993. Under this
Section, the Gram Panchayat has the power to appoint a sub-committee of
its own for specific subjects. The VWSC has members from all the villages
in the Gram Panchayat. A member of the Gram Panchayat has to be the
President of the VWSC. Thus the committee functions under the overall
guidance and control of the Gram Panchayat.

Mr Atheeq concluded,

It is three years since the VWSC became a sub-committee of the Gram
Panchayat. The relationship between the two bodies is now better than it
was earlier. However, it is too early to say anything about the sustainability
of the drinking water programmes. But, in this field too, we expect better
results.

Thus, the provision of drinking water in the rural areas has led to
a piquant situation. The institutional landscape is different here from
the other subjects which have been devolved to Panchayats. From
the national level down to the taluk level, new institutions have been
created which have sidelined PRIs. However, at the village level,
the Water User Associations (CBOs) have been constituted as sub-
committees of the GP.

At the national level there is the Rajiv Gandhi Drinking Water
Mission and at the state level there is an autonomous Society, namely
the KRWSSA. The Agency has a modern, well-equipped office in
Cauvery Bhavan, Bangalore.

The KRWSSA is the autonomous Society formed under the
Registration of Societies Act, 1860, like so many other Societies set up
since the 1990s. The Memorandum of Association (MoA) of the
KRWSSA gives us an idea of the Society-mode of implementation
used in the governance of drinking water supply.

The Preamble to the MoA states that the implementation of the
World Bank-assisted Karnataka Integrated Rural Water Supply and
Environmental Sanitation Project — I has set an encouraging trend of
reforms in the sector of rural water supply and sanitation in the state.
Now, a follow-on project is proposed, called the Jal Nirmal Project.
This is the second phase of the World Bank project as mentioned by Mr. Atheeq above. This phase ushered in the Society mode of implementation in drinking water projects. As mentioned above, the departmental PPMU was done away with and an autonomous Society took its place.

According to the Preamble, 'the Government will set up a Karnataka Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agency (KRWSSA) with adequate autonomy at State level for Project Planning and Monitoring'. As with the SSA, so with KRWSSA, the Agency is ambitious and the MoA states that 'the area of operation will extend throughout the territorial limits of the State of Karnataka'. Regarding 'scope of work', the MoA states, 'Eventualy, the Agency shall become responsible for the management of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation sector in Karnataka.'

The legal status of the Agency is described as follows: 'The Agency shall be a juristic person, shall have perpetual succession and can sue or be sued in its own name through its Member-Secretary.'

What kind of institutional set-up does the Agency envisage throughout the length and breadth of the state? According to the MoA, there are:

(i) founding members;
(ii) General Body;
(iii) Governing Council;
(iv) the Director or Chief Executive.

The founding members are eight in number and it is they who constitute the Society. According to the MoA, these ‘eight members, associating themselves for the purpose described in this MOA and desirous of forming themselves into a society are the founding members of the society. The founder members are full members of the society by designation and their successors shall be treated as founder members in their place.’ Topping the list of founder members is the Additional Chief Secretary and Development Commissioner to the GoK. Next is the Principal Secretary to the GoK, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department. The remaining six members are Secretaries and Directors of various concerned departments. It is a wholly bureaucratic body.

The General Body consists of full members, including the founding members, and private members of the Agency. The full members consist of 15 individuals, all bureaucrats from one or another department of the government. The Minister of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj is the President and the Development Commissioner is the Vice-president.

The General Body also consists of ‘private members’. The MoA states that ‘in addition, persons, not below the age of 21 years, who are in agreement with the aims and objectives of the Agency as set
out in the MoA will be eligible to become members of the Agency.' It also states that ‘the total number of such private members shall not exceed one-third of the number of full members of the Agency at any time’. Specifying the categories to which these private members should belong, the MoA states:

(i) technical experts from the field of water supply and sanitation;
(ii) experts from the fields of rural development, Panchayat Raj, sanitation and hygiene promotion, training and capacity building, institutional development, ground water recharge, women development programmes, social welfare, etc.;
(iii) members of NGOs; and
(iv) representatives of PRIs, that is, members of ZPs, TPs and GPs.

In this manner, experts and NGOs have been given a berth in the General Body. In other words, the General Body consists of full members who are bureaucrats and ‘private members’ who are experts and NGOs. It is the last category of ‘private members’ which is intriguing. It is indeed difficult to comprehend how Panchayat Raj members can be pegged along with the first three categories and described as ‘private members’. It is almost as if this category was added on as an afterthought on the part of the drafters of the MoA.

The Governing Council has a maximum of eight members, of whom five are from among the founder members. The Development Commissioner is the Chairperson of the Governing Council and the Principal Secretary is the Vice-chairman. This again is an entirely bureaucratic body. However, the Governing Council may co-opt a maximum of three members who are eminent persons in the fields of activity related to the objectives of the Agency. This again gives an opportunity for experts and NGOs to be a part of this important body. However, they do not enjoy voting rights.

The Governing Council has wide powers. It has all advisory, executive and financial powers to conduct the affairs of the Agency through its Director. According to the MoA, some of the powers are as follows: It can

(i) make, amend or repeal any by-laws relating to administration and management of the affairs of the Agency and lay down
business rules and service rules to regulate the transaction of business and working conditions of employees of the Agency;

(ii) consider and approve the annual budget and the annual action plan, placed before it by the Director from time to time and pass it with such modification as the Governing Council may think fit;

(iii) accept grants, donations and endowment or give grants upon such terms and conditions as it may think fit, subject to the overall control of the government.

(iv) appoint committees, sub-committees, expert panels, task-forces, working or study groups and boards etc. for such purpose and on such terms as it may deem fit, and to remove any of them;

(v) create posts of various cadres required for the running of the Agency … it shall have full powers to procure services of consulting agencies, advisors and individual consultants required for the implementation of various Projects;

(vi) monitor the financial position of the Agency in order to ensure smooth income flow and to review annual audited accounts.

In short, the Governing Council has the freedom to amend the rules relating to the administration of water supply and sanitation, appoint various expert panels and sub-committees and procure the services of consulting agencies, etc. Also, there are three 'private members' or experts/NGOs in the Governing Council who are privy to the proceedings of both the Governing Council and the General Body. At the same time, there are no PRI members on the Governing Council.

The Director is the Chief Executive of the Agency. He is the Member-Secretary of the Governing Council and the General Body.

The Annual Report and Annual Accounts prepared by the Director are approved by the Governing Council and subsequently placed before the Annual General Meeting of the General Body before the 30 September every year. A copy may be forwarded to the government within 30 days. It shall also be filed with the Registrar of Societies, Karnataka. There is no mention of tabling this report in the State Assembly or Parliament, or in the General Body Meetings of the PRIs. All these elected bodies are sidelined.
At the district level, there is a DPIC, similar to the DIC of the SSA. The DPIC consists of a motley crowd of co-opted ZP members and NGOs. It is the decision-making body and not the ZP. At the taluk level, there is a committee headed by the Assistant Commissioner. However, at the GP level, drinking water schemes are firmly yoked to the GP as sub-committees!

There is no doubt that the government is resorting more and more to governance through Societies. However, in the case of water supply and Sanitation, while the Society-mode of implementation operates at the state level, the Village Water Supply Committee (VWSC) is linked to the GP as a sub-committee. We will now examine the linkages between the VWSC and the GP.

**VWSC — Panchayat Linkage**

The VWSC is different from all the other CBOs in that this is one body which has aligned itself to the GP as a sub-committee, taking advantage of Section 61A of the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993. This means that a GP member is the President of the VWSC and other GP members are also members of the VWSC. The remaining members are selected through the Gram Sabha. Thus, the VWSC functions under the overall guidance and control of the GP. Do these links contribute towards the effectiveness of the drinking water schemes in the rural areas of Karnataka?

Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa have conducted a study of local organizations in the water supply and sanitation sector in Karnataka and Uttaranchal (2004). The principal sources of water supply in Karnataka were borewells with handpumps (BWH), mini-water supply schemes (MWS) and piped water supply. Regarding the linkage between the VWSC and the GP in Karnataka, Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa say,

The VWSCs in Karnataka were required to have linkages with local elected bodies. The chairperson and the secretary of local elected bodies were the ex-officio president and secretary of VWSCs respectively. The Gram Sabha was required to approve the plans of VWSC on water supply sources, list of households selected for individual sanitation, etc. Further, the local elected body was mandated to take over the assets created by the VWSC for long-term maintenance (2004: 83).
According to Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa, ‘The former (VWSC) had been integrated into the decentralized government structure with the latter providing the leadership, helping in preparing plans and getting them approved from the people, providing its own building for conducting meetings etc. (2004: 30). Evaluating the performance of the local elected bodies, they write, ‘the households benefiting from the mini-water scheme (MWS) in Karnataka stated that the local elected bodies performed well in “providing community assets”, “monitoring the LO (read VWSC) activities”, “providing financial assistance”, “instructing the line department staff to provide technical support to members” and “coordination with line departments in reaching the benefits to the members”’ (2004: 37). This should put to rest qualms raised by the World Bank and others regarding the capabilities of the PRIs.

Elaborating on the links with elected bodies in this sector, Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa write,

All the organizations providing water supply services in Karnataka had some linkage or the other with local elected bodies. The line department taking care of Borewell with Handpump (BWH) had linkages with local elected bodies in ensuring accountability and staffing. The engineering department at the taluk level was entrusted with the mandate of maintaining the borewells. Since the department did not have the staff at the village level, it was the local elected body, which often sent the information on non-functioning sources to the line department. Some help (such as showing the problem source, etc.) to the line department staff was also provided whenever they visited the village to carry out the maintenance activities. The line department was also supposed to obtain a certificate from the local elected body that the source was repaired and functioning. (2004: 83).

The consequences of the links of the VWSC with the other bodies is seen in the followings statement, ‘The quality of linkages between the LOs (Local Organization or VWSC), on the one hand, and Gram Panchayat, line department and other community–based–organizations, on the other, positively contributed to the development outcomes’ (Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa 2004: viii). Accordingly, Rajasekhar and Veerashekharappa suggest, in their ‘Executive Summary’: ‘Entrust the sole responsibility of providing drinking water and sanitation services to local elected bodies as they have performed well in undertaking the functions, functional performance and development outcomes’ (2004: vi). In an attempt at activity–mapping, they say,
the local elected body at the taluk or higher levels should be entrusted with the function of providing the organizational assets, contracting the NGOs and other service providers, coordination with the line departments. The village level elected body should also be entrusted with the responsibility of investing on augmentation of groundwater resources and protecting the natural streams and springs. The required resources should be made available. The local elected body at the district level should undertake the overall responsibility of coordination and arriving at priorities on the basis of inputs from the technical staff (ibid.: vii).

Thus, the water supply and sanitation sector in Karnataka has a curious mix of Mission and Society-mode of implementation at the top and middle and links with PRIs at the bottom. To recapitulate, the founding members of the Society, eight in number, are all bureaucrats. The General Body again has a membership of 15 bureaucrats and the Development Commissioner. The Minister for Rural Development and Panchayat Raj is the lone elected member, a state-level elected representative. The General Body also consists of ‘private members’, who may constitute one-third of the membership of the General Body. There is merely an age stipulation, 21 years, for membership of this group. It consists primarily of experts and NGOs. One fails to understand how elected PRI members are included in this group. The Governing Council again is an entirely bureaucratic body. In this way, PRIs have been given short shrift in the new institutions of the water supply and sanitation sector.

At the district level, the DPIC, like the DIC of the SSA, is a new institution which, consisting as it does of NGOs and co-opted PRI members, sidelines the ZP. At the taluk level, the Committee is headed, without much ado, by a bureaucrat, the Assistant Commissioner.

However, at the village level, links with PRIs are better, compared to the other sectors. The fact that there is greater efficiency and productivity at the grassroots level in this sector than in the other sectors should not be lost on the reader. It is a pointer to the importance of involving democratic grassroots processes and institutions in the planning and implementation of developmental schemes.

The Housing Sector

Housing was taken care of by the Housing and Urban Development Department in Karnataka. One recalls the Janata Housing Scheme of erstwhile Chief Minister Devaraj Urs for the poorer sections of the
population, which was perhaps the first attempt to provide houses for the poor by the government. Subsequently, the Ambedkar and Ashraya housing schemes came into being to cater to the housing needs of the poorer sections of the population.

In 1990, there was a restructuring of the Housing Department. First, the parastatal Karnataka Housing Board (KHB) came out of the parent body, the Housing Department, as an autonomous institution. It operates throughout the state but only in the urban areas. According to Gopal, an officer in the KHB, ‘we have provided houses to the Economically Weaker Sections (EWS), Middle Income Group (MIG) and Higher Income Group (HIG). We have also built the National Games Housing Village in Koramangala, Bangalore. But we are not confined to Bangalore. We operate throughout the state but only in urban areas.’

In 1999, the Rajiv Gandhi Rural Housing Corporation (RGRHCL) came out of the parent KHB. It is a case of a parastatal emerging out of another parastatal. It takes care of housing for the poorer sections in the rural areas. Under the Ashraya scheme, ₹10,000 is given as subsidy and ₹10,000 as loan. Under the Ambedkar scheme, the entire ₹20,000 is given as subsidy. The Ashraya Scheme is for Below Poverty Line (BPL) recipients and the Ambedkar Scheme is for SCs and STs.

The RGRHCL is located in the same complex as the KHB and has in fact taken the office space on rent from the KHB. According to the Company Secretary, Anil Shedbal,

the Corporation came into existence on 30 April 2000. In four years, we have constructed 7 lakh houses for the weaker sections, scattered all over the state. How do we manage this? Well, we do not engage in construction. We leave it to the beneficiary. The work order is given to the beneficiary. He executes the foundation. He provides us with a picture of him standing in front of it. He is then reimbursed. Further payments on receipt of photographs take place at the lintel level and finally when the roof is fixed. Thus, we ensure that the physical structure is indeed there. Money for the house goes from our Corporation to the Zilla Panchayat, then to the Taluk Panchayat and lastly to the Gram Panchayat.

This is all very well. But although ‘rural housing’ is one of the subjects devolved to Panchayats according Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment, the PRIs are used merely as a conduit for the money. Shedbal pointed out that the beneficiaries are selected by a committee headed by the MLA and not by the Gram Sabha, as is required.
Moreover, as we have seen, two parastatal bodies, a Housing Board and a Rural Housing Corporation, have been created in the housing sector in recent years in the process of restructuring the Housing Department.

The selection of beneficiaries by a committee headed by the MLA has snowballed into a major controversy in recent times. For both Houses of the state legislature passed a bill in 2007, whereby the government is empowered ‘to authorize any officer of authority, to be constituted under the Chairmanship of MLAs to select beneficiaries for housing schemes or programmes, if the grama panchayats fail to identify the eligible persons’ (Deccan Herald 2007a). This Bill was sent back by the Governor, T. N. Chaturvedi, who took strong objection to it.22 He wondered ‘on what basis the State legislature could arrive at the conclusion that due to non-functioning of the Gram Panchayat the selection of beneficiaries was affected’. He added, ‘The sweeping indictment of these local bodies in these circumstances does not carry any conviction. Amendment in the existing statute on the basis of personal impressions will not be fair to the panchayats, which form the bedrock of the democratic system’ (ibid.).

Governor Chaturvedi did not give his assent to the bill and returned it to the Legislature with the following submission:

… while going through the present Karnataka Panchayat Raj (Amendment) Bill 2007, it evidently seems to undermine the Constitutional mechanism for rural development governance as enshrined in Part IX of the Constitution of India and the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 which are intended to implement the 73rd amendment with the twin objectives of broader democratic representation (Article 243C-243F) and direct empowerment through conferment of decision-making powers to Panchayats. The 73rd amendment does not envisage that parallel institutions be invented to discharge functions even in the guise of a default power, where and when duties are alleged to be not discharged effectively by Panchayats. The correct approach must be to devise ways and means to enable the Panchayats to function effectively, rather than to bring in higher legislators/officials into the system. It will obviously be considered as a regressive step in the march towards strengthening local democracy and striking at the root of the 73rd amendment. It may not be out of order also to mention that the reinstatement of legislators and officials in the set up in this manner and vesting them with authority on the plea that Gram Sabhas and Gram Panchayats have not worked satisfactorily may even be misconstrued as conflict of interests between the former and the Panchayats.
In protest against the Amendment, the Panchayat Raj Hakkottaya Andolana, (Panchayati Raj Rights Movement), led by a few NGOs with a number of PRIs as members, has led demonstrations to protect the rights of local self-government in the state.

Thus, the housing sector is better off than other sectors in the sense that there are no Societies and DICs in this sector. However, this does not mean that the housing sector is free of parallel bodies. The sector has parastatal bodies such as the Housing Board and the RGRHC. The MLA is the Chairman of the Housing Committee that selects the beneficiaries for the houses under the various schemes.

**Tank Rehabilitation Scheme**

Perhaps nowhere does the sidelining of elected representatives stand out as clearly as it does in the JSY, a tank rehabilitation scheme of the GoK. It is a parallel body par excellence!

Tanks in Karnataka are not mere water bodies. They are an integral part of the social and cultural life of the people. The erstwhile Mysore state had about 25,000 tanks. An elaborate system of tanks prevailed and formed a catchment area for water used for irrigation purposes. Till the 1970s, tanks performed a central role in village life. Boys could be seen bathing in the tank and it was the focus of many village rituals and ceremonies. All the tanks had names given to them by the people, which connected them to the flora and fauna of the region or some historical incident.

With the arrival of borewells in the 1970s, tanks lost their position of importance in the daily lives of the people. They fell into disuse and disrepair, giving rise to problems such as the accumulation of silt in the tanks and clogging of the channels with weeds.

In Karnataka, tanks below 4 ha are taken care of by the TP, tanks between 4–40 ha are looked after by the ZP and those above 40 ha but below 2,000 ha is the responsibility of the Department of Water Resources (Minor Irrigation). The ‘reforms’ seek to change all that and place the tanks in the hands of the ‘community’, which, in truth, is a parallel body which will have no truck with the PRIs.

The JSY or the Karnataka Community-based Tank Management Project is a centrally-sponsored, World Bank-aided scheme which came into operation in 2002 for a period of six years. The scheme seeks to repair and rehabilitate 2,000 tanks in nine districts, namely Bellary, Chitradurga, Tumkur, Kolar, Bagalkote, Koppal, Raichur, Haveri and Bidar.
Of these, 1,600 are less than 40 ha and would normally be taken care of by the PRI. The remaining 400 are above 40 ha and would have been taken care of by the Department of Minor Irrigation. Thus, the JSY effectively bypasses and sidelines both the Panchayats and the state government department.

If the Panchayats and the department are not in the picture any more regarding these 2,000 tanks, then we may well enquire as to who has been given this responsibility. The Project Implementation Plan of the JSY states,

As an evolving strategy of initiating a process of reforms in tank management, Government of Karnataka has taken a bold decision to transfer management of all tanks to communities in a phased manner. To facilitate the process, GoK created Jala Samvardhane Yojana Sangha (JSYS) as an autonomous and independent society … (my emphasis) (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 4).

Thus, under the JSYS, the ephemeral ‘community’ takes the place of both the PRIs and the state department and CBOs are given the responsibility of tank management.

The project is not a cheap one, by any reckoning. The cost of the project is `670 crore, of which the World Bank lends 80 per cent, the GoK’s share is 16 per cent and the ‘community’ contributes 4 per cent of the cost (The Hindu 2002b).

The project plan was candid about its vetoing of PRIs in its tank rehabilitation programme. Under a sub-heading entitled ‘Stakeholder Consultation’, the Project Implementation Plan (PIP) reports,

In most of the meetings, the stakeholders were of the strong opinion that GP and ZP should not be involved in rehabilitation activity as that brings in politics. To keep away politics it was suggested that the entire process has to be in consultation with GS (Gram Sabha)” (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 346).

This is an instance of bypassing the elected body of representatives in favour of the Gram Sabha or general body of the people. We see this occurring again and again in the JSYS project and indeed in other projects as well. For instance, in the chart on the ‘tank level’ institutions to be newly created in the wake of reforms, the Gram Sabha is mentioned, along with other institutions. These are the Tank User Group (TUG) consisting of one adult male and female from each household, the Tank User Committee (TUC), sometimes also called the Tank
Executive Committee (TEC) in the PIP, comprising the executive body of members selected by the TUG, and lastly the Cluster Facilitation Team (CFT). The CFT consists of a group of specialists such as the agriculture specialist, ‘social safeguard’ specialist, two engineers, an accountant, etc., employed by the NGO working in the area. There are eight NGOs working in JSYS in Mulbagal taluk of Kolar district alone. There is no mention of any of the elected bodies of the Panchayat such as the GP, TP or ZP. These are conspicuous by their absence (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 421).

The functions accorded to the Gram Sabha in this chart are (i) formation and recognition of the TUG; and (ii) approving Integrated Tank Development Plan and other TUG proposals (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 422). In other words, the TUG, which springs out of the Gram Sabha, has been given the function of approving the tank rehabilitation plan, a function which should be undertaken by the GP. Here, the Gram Sabha has been used to give a measure of legitimacy to the whole operation while at the same time leaving out the elected representatives of the people.

It needs to be reiterated that the Gram Sabha is an assembly of the people in the area of the Panchayat. It is a deliberative body where the people give expression to their needs and wishes and also select the beneficiaries of the various schemes. Other than this, it has no responsibility. The responsibility, in fact, lies with the elected representatives of the PRIs who are the executive wing of the Panchayat. In fact, an elaborate three-tier body of elected representatives has been created by the Constitution to take executive action on behalf of the people of the district. They have been expressly chosen by the people to represent them in PRI fora and will be ousted in the next election if they do not deliver. Hence, substituting the Gram Sabha for the GP is incorrect and undemocratic and should not be permitted. It amounts to a ruse on the part of the JSYS that it is consulting the PRIs when, in fact, it is bypassing them.

According to Srinivas, Team Leader of an NGO, the ‘JSYS is a demand-driven programme. The community has to come to us with an application. Then we sit with the key leaders and inform them about the guidelines.’ He pointed out that all the factions in the village have to come together to get the Scheme in their area. This makes it an inclusive process. If only one faction approaches the JSYS, the village is not selected. Since in Hosahalli only one leader had approached them, namely H. Gopal, it was not selected for the JSYS scheme.
In the process of handing over the tanks to ‘communities’, the JSYS, like all the other centrally-sponsored, World Bank-aided projects, studiously goes about creating new institutions at the village, district and state levels which bypass and completely ignore the PRIs. Let us take a look at some of these institutions.

**State-level Institutions**

At the outset, we may point out that Karnataka has about 36,000 tanks which are being taken care of by the ZP and the Minor Irrigation Department, according to the size of the tank. However, the 2,000 tanks under the JSYS have been singled out, no doubt as an experiment in tank management by ‘communities’, to be replicated for the whole state at a later date. This would inevitably create a parallel administration for tank management until the time, it is hoped by the powers-that-be, that the Society mode of functioning replaces the government department and local bodies in tank management and becomes the norm, NGOs, experts and all.

At the state level, we find that the JSYS office, as with all the other centrally-sponsored and externally-aided projects, is housed separately from the Department of Minor Irrigation, and enjoys a rented office space in the posh, upmarket, residential locality of Sadashivnagar in Bangalore City.

As with the projects described earlier, here too, a few persons, specifically 11 in number, all bureaucrats, headed by the Development Commissioner, have come together to form a Society under the Registration of Societies Act, 1860 (Government of Karnataka 2002c: 379). There is a Governing Council with the Chief Minister of Karnataka as President and the Minister of State for Minor Irrigation as Vice-president. There are a number of Principal Secretaries and Directors of the various Departments on the Governing Council. In addition, there are four nominated persons representing NGOs in the field of rural development in the state, of whom two are women. Also, ‘the Governing Council shall have the right to co-opt eminent personalities in the fields of activity related to the objects of the Sangha, provided such co-opted member shall not have right to vote’ (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 387). Thus, NGOs and experts find room at the top in the new dispensation.

The Governing Council exercises supervision and control over the affairs of the Sangha through its Executive Director. Surprisingly,
the Governing Council is also the General Body of the Sangha. It holds an Annual General Body Meeting once a year. The business of the General Body is to review the Report of the Governing Council (the same body) on the affairs of the Sangha and also the audited accounts of the Sangha (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 388).

The Executive Committee consists of a number of bureaucrats, a few ‘eminent persons’ and two representatives of voluntary agencies. This body has ‘under its control the management of all affairs and funds of the Sangha’ (Government of Karnataka 2002: 392). With these changes, the state-level institutions of tank management have shed their wholly government constitution and have been opened up to NGOs and experts.

District-level Institutions

The institutions created by the JSYS at the district level are interesting. Whereas ‘minor irrigation’ including tank rehabilitation and management has been devolved to the statutory Panchayats by the 73rd Amendment, Schedule 11, so that it should be the concern of the PRIs, this is not the case. Instead, a Zilla Sangha headed by the Deputy Commissioner has been created. According to the PIP,

a) the Zilla Sangha at the District level will plan and review the progress of the work of the Sangha (JSYS) and widen involvement of participating agencies. It will be headed by Deputy Commissioner of the District with representation from the interested agencies and persons directly involved in the implementation of the Yojana and objects of the Sangha.
b) Nominations to Zilla Sanghas shall be made by Deputy Commissioner subject to approval by Executive Director. c) The Zilla Sangha will be the Executive Body at the District level, to whom well-defined powers will be delegated, which shall include powers necessary to implement the Yojana. The Deputy Commissioner shall be the Chairman of the Zilla Sangha and the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishath (ZP) shall be the Vice Chairman. d) Membership of the Executive Committee of the Zilla Sangha shall include the district level officials and representatives of interested agencies involved in the implementation of the Yojana (read NGOs). e) Total membership of the Zilla Sangha shall not exceed fifteen. f) The Deputy Commissioner shall be the District Programme Director and shall have same powers and responsibilities in relation to the Sangha at the District level as the Executive Director has at the State level … (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 395–96) (my emphasis).
Srinivas, Team Leader of a CFT (NGO) in Kolar, referred to the Zilla Sangha as the District-level Appraisal Committee. He said, there

is a District Level Appraisal Committee of which the Deputy Commissioner is the head and the various Departmental officers are members. There are two NGO representatives on the Committee as well as two members nominated from all the Tank Users Groups in the District. The Zilla Panchayat CEO is also a member of this committee.

This, then, is the district-level committee equivalent to the DIC of the SSA and similar such committees in the various externally-aided projects. Thus, the District-level Appraisal Committee of the JSYS or Zilla Sangha is a parallel body to the ZP. It is the decision-making body at the district level, leaving the ZP out in the cold.

However, one may recall that the SSA had placed the ZP President as the head of the DIC and had also co-opted the members of the Education and Health Standing Committee into its DIC. The JSYS has not given in to such niceties. Neither the ZP President nor any of the members of the ZP find a place on the District-level Appraisal Committee or Zilla Sangha of the JSYS. The ZP CEO is the sole representative of the ZP on the committee. Thus, elected members of the ZP have been completely left out of the committee which takes care of the tanks in the district.

Thus, one is not surprised at K. Manjunath’s (Research Associate, JSYS) comment that ‘Zilla Panchayat members feel left out of the project, so also do Minor Irrigation officials. They say, “If you give us the money, we will do the job.”’24 But, he adds, in defence of his project,

It does not just involve filling the tank with water. It is not just irrigation but poverty alleviation. It is integrated development. We introduce fish in tanks, improved methods of agriculture, soil conservation; the landless are trained in small-scale industries, they are given financial assistance for setting up bee-keeping units, horticulture etc.

**Village-level Institutions**

Institutions of JSYS at this level are interesting because they exhibit a weak attempt to bring in GP institutions, only to almost instantly marginalize them! Let us see how this happens.
The JSYS loftily offers four options to the villagers to select the village-level institution they would prefer to do the tank rehabilitation job. According to Veeresh, District Social Specialist, CFT of the anchor NGO of the JSYS in Kolar, at the inception of the programme, a suggestion was made in the Gram Sabha that the GP should implement the project. However, this suggestion was shot down and the reason cited was the corruption in the GP. After a few months, a suggestion was made that the programme be implemented by the Gram Sabha itself. This option met with the same fate as the previous one. It reportedly did not get the assent of the villagers as people just don’t turn up for the meetings and Gram Sabha attendance is very poor.

Next, a TUG was suggested in which one adult male and female from each household would be a member. The villagers reportedly agreed to this suggestion. The fourth option was that the village-level institution be a sub-committee of the GP. Said Veeresh, ‘now, only the third and fourth options are in operation’.25

However, the third option, that is, the TUG, a CBO newly created by the JSYS, is the one which is being overwhelmingly used in the JSYS project. In this manner, the members of the Gram Sabha were slowly but surely nudged into accepting the TUG in preference to the other options.

The TUG is a new institution created by the JSYS. It consists of one male and one female from each household in the village. This General Body of adults then selects the members of the TUC, also known as the TEC another recent institution, which is the executive body of the JSYS at the village level. The TUC prepares the plan for the project, receives funds and implements it. Here, it is clearly stepping on the toes of the PRIs. Third, there is a CFT belonging to an NGO, which provides ‘technical, financial and professional support to the TUC’ (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 421).

Regarding links to PRIs of the above CBO, there are none. We have already mentioned that, according to the PIP, the stakeholders of the JSYS were of the strong opinion that the PRIs should not be involved in tank rehabilitation activity as that brings in politics. In other words, these institutions ought to be shunned. The PIP candidly reports that in the case of the TUC option, there is ‘no organizational linkage’ (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 356).

However, the JSYS is not averse to co-opting individual GP members into its newly-established committees. The PIP states that ‘individual linkage (with GP) through membership in TUC of
either (a) elected representative/s from the Tank community or (b) elected representative from tank area plus person nominated by the Panchayat’ (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 356) may occur, as in the other externally-aided projects, where individual members have been plucked out of the PRIs and placed on the committees set up by the project.

**Fund Flow**

The fund flow in JSYS is depicted in Figure 8.3. It is evident from the diagram that the funds go in an entirely parallel direction to PRIs. Thus, both funds and functions completely bypass the PRIs. The JSYS is completely self-sufficient with regard to funds.

**Diagram 8.3: Fund Channelization**

Source: GoK, Project Implementation Report, Figure 4.4:111, 2002.
As with the other Societies, so too with the JSYS, the funds are audited by a chartered accountant and placed before the Governing Council. There is no accountability to the people through their local elected bodies. This lack of accountability to elected bodies is one of the main drawbacks of the Society mode of functioning. According to the PIP,

if the TEC (Tank Executive Committee) receives funds as the executive body of a registered society (as indeed it does), the obligation is on the part of the TEC to get a statement of audit from a chartered accountant. In that situation, there has to be an audit from a chartered accountant and (which is) duly discussed and approved by GS (Gram Sabha). (Government of Karnataka 2002 b: 354).

This reiterates the point made earlier that the Gram Sabha is being used as a legitimizing body for JSYS activities while the elected bodies of the PRIs are given short shrift.

The three salient points regarding JSYS are (i) it is directly controlled by the Deputy Commissioner; (ii) it uses the Gram Sabha in lieu of the other PRIs consisting of elected representatives for legitimizing its functions; and (iii) it has a District-level Appraisal Committee akin to the DIC of the SSA, with one difference. There is no Panchayat member on the District-level Appraisal Committee of the JSYS unlike the SSA which has the ZP President as Chairman of the DIC and the Standing Committee members of the ZP as members. Thus, the JSYS has not made an attempt to co-opt or placate the elected representatives and has completely sidelined them, not incorporating them even in a symbolic manner. It is an extraordinary example of a parallel body.

Significantly, in the JSYS, the District Project Unit (DPU), which is the government arm of the project, is physically swamped by the NGO and its CFT, that is, the DPU and the NGO/CFT work in the same office. This is not the case with SUJALA, for instance, where the government office is distinct from the NGO office. In a heading entitled ‘Outline of the Tasks to be Carried Out’, the PIP exhorts the anchor NGO to ‘facilitate establishing of District Project Units’ (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 375). It sets out the following tasks for the anchor NGO:

(a) facilitate establishing of the offices of the DPU and make them functional (b) work closely with the DPU by locating itself in the office of the DPU (c) build capacity of the DPU in all aspects of tank improvement
and management including Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), gender awareness, operational and technical skills to ensure the community-based approach in the planning and implementation and (d) imbibe and inculcate the vision of the JSYS in all the personnel/functionaries of DPU (Government of Karnataka 2002b: 375).

These are amazing statements, exhorting the NGO to engulf the DPU, which is the government arm of the JSYS project. It portends a frightening future when the government will be overrun by the NGO.

As mentioned earlier, the JSYS is an expensive project, costing ₹670 crore to be spent over a period of six years. Tank building and maintenance is an age-old art in Karnataka, regarding which there are numerous indigenous practices which could well have been put to use at a fraction of the cost. Indeed, it could have been left entirely in the hands of the local people through their Panchayat, who have all the expertise and know-how required to maintain a tank. In fact, they could have taught a thing or two to the technicians of the project. In times gone by, tanks were de-silted often and the villagers who took care of the tank were rewarded appropriately. They would be given tax exemptions. There is mention of the same in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra*.

On the other hand, the JSYS is a centrally-sponsored project, coming all the way down from the centre to the village. It has commissioned a consultant to conceive the project, and the consultant has done an excellent job of coming out with a Project Implementation Report consisting of 500 pages! It suggests an elaborate schedule of pre-planning, planning, implementation and post-implementation. The first eight months consisting of the pre-planning and planning stages are spent in setting up the CBOs (TUGs and TUCs) which, it would appear, are the raison d’etre of the project.

The post-implementation stage is beset with problems, as the recently created TUGs and TUCs are not sturdy enough to take on the responsibility and tend to melt away at this stage, especially since the money is over by then. At this point, this project, as with the other externally-aided projects, turns wistfully to the PRIs to take up the task. According to Kulkarni, since the PRIs were not included in the first instance, they should not be dumped with the task at the end of the exercise. He says,

It is unfortunate that despite the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Schedule 11, and the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993, Section 58 (viii) which
specifically entrusts the construction, repairs and maintenance of drinking water wells, tanks and ponds to panchayats, JSY excluded village panchayats right from the beginning by forming TUGs and TUCs. Even the NGOs think that the panchayats are corrupt and politicized. There is no use asking these local bodies to maintain these tanks after the project period since they were never involved in the planning stage (Kulkarni 2003: 54).

Thus, sustainability is a crucial factor which is eluding this project as with all the other externally-aided projects, since a genuine leadership and participation of the people is not accomplished. Therefore, while initially the tanks may look clean and refurbished, this appearance is not likely to last. The government will have washed its hands off the tanks, so that even the little they did in the pre-reform days will not now be done. The PRIs, under whose care the village tank should have been entrusted, have been sidelined. At the same time, the CBOs are likely to disintegrate once the project is over. This will result in yet another example of a great waste of public money. While the interest rate of the World Bank may be low it is, after all, a loan and the money has to be repaid.

One may well enquire as to what could be the interest of the distant central government and the even more distant World Bank in reviving our tanks. Having wrested the responsibility for the tanks from both the state government as well as the local bodies and placed them in the care of the invisible ‘community’, could they then be ripe for private interests to take over? In an article entitled, ‘Secrecy Shrouds the Hebbal Lake’, the well-known environmentalist Zafar Futehally voices his fears that the Hebbal lake in Bangalore, 150 acres in extent, will be used as ‘a centre of entertainment for the urban rich’ following the signing of an agreement between the Lake Development Authority (a parastatal body) with the Oberois on 19 May 2006 which has been shrouded in secrecy (Deccan Herald 2007c). These are questions that we need to ponder over.

To sum up, the centre has been instrumental in setting up numerous parallel bodies in almost all areas of governance in Karnataka. For this, the route of centrally-sponsored schemes has been utilized. The Societies which have been set up engender a restructuring of state government departments from top to bottom, in which NGOs and experts sit on top-level decision-making committees. A tenuous link is now being maintained between the two (government and NGOs/corporate groups) but there is a possibility that, in the near future, the
Societies Galore!

The latter may overwhelm the former. This is a dangerous trend which requires urgent public debate.

Under the pretext of autonomy, the Societies also sideline the elected representatives, particularly the PRIs. They have introduced new decision-making bodies at the state, district and village levels, in lieu of the ZP, TP and GP. The latter institutions have become practically redundant with respect to centrally-sponsored schemes so that the members of these bodies are not even aware of the various central schemes and programmes which actually fall within their jurisdiction. An attempt is being made to substitute the Gram Sabha for the elected bodies of representatives. Another way which is being used to subvert the elected bodies of Panchayat Raj is to pluck individuals from among them and invite them to sit on the various committees of the CBOs/TICs/DICs. The various Societies and their corresponding institutions at the district, taluk and village levels are found in the SSA, watershed development sector and health sector under the National Rural Health Mission, drinking water supply sector and tank rehabilitation sector.

In a few sectors, the ‘reform’ agenda in the form of Societies and DICs has not yet been put in place. These are the women and children development, social welfare, forest (except at the village level) and housing sectors. One may expect that these sectors may undergo the ‘reforms’ in due course of time.

However, even in the latter sectors, though Societies have not yet been put in place, there are other parallel and parastatal bodies functioning and devolution to Panchayats has not taken place. In the social welfare sector, there are innumerable parastatals consisting of Boards and Corporations functioning; in the women and children development sector, the micro-finance programme of Stree Shakti is wholly controlled and administered by the state; in the forest sector, the Department of Environment and Forests has complete control of the programmes; and the housing sector is characterized by the parastatal RGRHC. In addition, the selection of the beneficiaries is done by a committee headed by the MLA and not by the Gram Sabha.

This leaves very little on the plate of the PRIs. Sidelining PRIs is particularly worrying since with the 73rd Amendment, a large number of subjects, 29 in all, have been devolved to these bodies. Theoretically, PRIs are in charge of a large slice of the developmental cake, which is what makes them so important. But in practice, decentralization is taking place not to the PRIs but to the parallel institutions of Societies, DICs, TICs and village CBOs. At the same time, the general impression
being created is that these 29 subjects have been devolved to the Panchayats and that decentralization is indeed occurring in the state. There is a certain amount of deception in the whole set-up and operation of parallel bodies in the state.

One may add that this new age of governance reform is a work in progress. In course of time, these parallel bodies are expected to move centre-stage and be mainstreamed, and the old way of government departmental functioning will, once and for all, have come to an end. Similarly, political decentralization envisaged in the PRIs would have had a quiet burial.

The so-called ‘reforms’ involve a complete sidelining of local representative institutions and a drastic whittling down of government control. This does not augur well for a country like India which is characterized by wide disparities and inequalities.

Notes

1. Interview with Dr M.V. Hiremath, Reproductive Child Health Officer, Department of Health and Family Welfare, Kolar district, 22 December 2004.
2. This is not to say that there have been no ‘reforms’ in the health sector in Karnataka prior to 2005 but they have been largely restricted to the district hospitals. A beginning was made with the World Bank-sponsored, ₹650 crore Karnataka Health Systems Development Project which aimed at renovating and upgrading district hospitals. Its duration was from 1996–97 to 2002 which was extended by two years. Under it, 204 secondary hospitals were upgraded in the state; this included construction of buildings, upgradation of equipment, provision of ambulances, appointment of doctors and reformation of the sector (interview with Dr M. B. Rudrappa, Director (Planning), Department of Health and Family Welfare, Bangalore, 20 July 2004). Once the hospitals were upgraded, ‘reforms’ were set in place. The department came out with a neat little pink booklet in 2003 listing the ‘user charges’ for various treatments in the hospital (Government of Karnataka 2003d). Other reforms were the starting of insurance schemes, privatization or contracting out non-clinical services and waste management in hospitals and entrusting the running of 30 Public Health Centres (PHCs) to NGOs and private medical colleges (see ‘Government Plans to Entrust PHCs to NGOs’, The Hindu 2002c; also see ‘Healthcare Improves in State’, The Hindu 2004c). An important institutional reform was put in place, namely the Arogya Raksha Samiti. This was modelled on the Rogi Kalyan Samitis (RKS) of Madhya Pradesh. According to Dr M. C. Shantharaj, Joint Director, Medical-in-Charge, ‘our officers went to that state and developed a slightly modified version of the RKS which came into being with the Government Order dated 21 February 2004’ (interview with Dr M. C. Shantharaj, 20 July 2004). The RKS was an exercise in public–private
partnership in hospital administration by inducting donors, leading citizens of the area, charitable organizations, people's elected representatives as well as hospital staff into the running of the hospital. 'It seeks direct involvement of the users (people) and service providers (doctors, para medicos) in running the public hospitals' (Kumar 2001). According to Dr M. V. Hiremath, 'we have received orders from government regarding the formation of Arogya Raksha Samitis (ARS) but it has not been implemented in Kolar so far'. He added, 'If it is implemented, the ARS will have the power to purchase drugs, linen, equipment, etc. which was earlier supplied by the Government of Karnataka.'

5. SHGs have been lauded internationally as empowering poor women financially and the originator of the SHG concept, the Bangladeshi, Mohammad Yunus, received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2006. However, recently, there has been a growing criticism of the concept as involving an exorbitantly high rate of interest. In an article entitled 'Loan Sharking: Exploiting the Poor', Devinder Sharma points out that the members of the SHGs pay 'an exorbitantly high interest rate of 24 per cent to get empowered … poverty has literally become a big and organized business … There can be no better business opportunity than starting a micro-finance institution with assured returns and 100 per cent loan recovery' (Deccan Herald, 9 December 2009).

12. Interview with M. N. Raju, Manager, Social Forestry Division, Kolar, 4 January 2005.
13. A study of the NTFP consumed by the population in West Bengal points out the people's dependence on produce from the forest primarily for their own use and also for sale. It says,

NTFP for own use is far greater than what is sold. Within the first category, fuel and fodder values are much greater than the value of food items whilst the latter is much greater than the other remaining items. The medicinal or ornamental items, in particular, have very low values … these calculations indicate that the greatest benefits that the people have got from the forests are from NTFP, with own–use values nearly five times the returns from the sale of NTFP (Dutta et al. 2004: 589).
A Gram Panchayat may appoint one or more Committees consisting of such members as it may decide for any purpose other than those specified in Section 61 and may invest the Committee so appointed with such powers and functions as may be necessary or expedient for the fulfillment of the purpose for which it is appointed.


CONCLUSION

Karnataka was one of the premier states of the country in Panchayat Raj. The 1983 Act of the Panchayat Raj ushered in a golden age in Karnataka. For one brief shining moment there was Camelot. District government became a reality. The President of the ZP had a high status and enjoyed considerable power. He was the executive head of the ZP. People came to him with their problems. Political decentralization was accomplished to a large extent in the state. The lowest tier of Panchayat Raj was the Mandal Panchayat which incorporated about 20 villages. As such, it was a financially viable entity and a lot of infrastructure came into the village during this period. Planning assumed a grassroots upwards approach and there was an integrated development of the village. The period of five years, from 1987–92, when the Act was in effect, was a decisive moment for local government in Karnataka and indeed, in the country as a whole.

However, the gains for local government were shortlived. Since 1992, there has been a downward spiral for the institution of Panchayat Raj in Karnataka. The 1993 Act took away many of the powers of the PRIs. Bureaucrats got the upper hand; the CEO of the ZP became the executive head. The term of the ZP President was cut down from five years to 20 months. The MLA’s position was enhanced so that he and the Deputy Commissioner became power centres in the district. The people no longer approached the ZP President for their problems.

These were major problems facing Panchayat Raj but they were not insurmountable. However, developments since the early 1990s have made the problem more complex and hence more difficult to resolve. The complexity has arisen from a new direction given by the centre in collaboration with the World Bank and other multilateral institutions. For, under the aegis of the Government of India and the World Bank, numerous parallel bodies have been set up in almost all areas of governance, which have put paid to the concept of local self-government as we know it.

In this study, I have dwelt mainly on the new institutions, namely the Societies and their corresponding institutions at the district,
taluk and village levels, which have been created as a result of the governance reforms put in place since 1991. I have only touched on the parastatal institutions in Chapter 5. I have pointed out that the problems of Panchayat Raj in Karnataka have been exacerbated by the Society-mode of implementation of development projects which has been introduced since the early 1990s and indeed since the late 1980s. This model does not encourage the kind of political decentralization that went along with the Mandal Panchayats. Rather, it has set up parallel bodies which, as Hariss points out, have ‘de-politicized’ development (2001).

Parastatal bodies include the numerous Boards, Corporations and Agencies. They have an older history as they were set up in the early 20th century, during the latter part of British rule. The Societies are a more recent phenomenon, having been set up largely since the early 1990s. Parastatal bodies are single-purpose agencies dealing with water supply and sanitation, electricity, transport etc. Societies handle centrally-sponsored schemes, be it in primary education, watershed management, tank rehabilitation etc.

Both parastatal bodies and Societies are parallel bodies. They ought to have been dismantled, particularly with the passing of the 73rd and 74th Amendment, but this has not in fact taken place. Rather, they have gone from strength to strength, so that a large number of developmental schemes, particularly the centrally-sponsored ones, are being processed through them.

However, there is a difference in the structure of the two bodies. The parastatal bodies are merely an extension of the arms of the government department whereas the Society involves a restructuring of the department from within. Both types of bodies undermine local government. But in this study, I have concentrated on the Society, and have merely alluded to the Boards and Corporations in Chapter 5. This is not to say that the parastatal bodies are any less detrimental to local government; however, it requires a separate and more detailed study to go into the problem.

The phenomenon of Societies is interesting because it involves a restructuring of the government department. This restructuring has occurred in the Department of Primary Education and Literacy in order to incorporate the SSA. The department is split from within, with the old line department on the one hand and the new Society, called the SSA, created under the Registration of Societies Act, 1860, on the other. The old line department deals with routine matters such as
payment of salaries, transfer of personnel, etc., while the new Society deals with developmental issues such as the development of infrastructure, new training programmes imparted to the teachers, etc.

The Society is set up with help from external funding. It emanates from a Mission Statement at the centre and is set in fast-track to achieve its goals. The stated goal of the SSA is universalization of elementary education. But its real agenda seems to be to put in place a number of new institutions from the district to the village level which includes NGOs and experts. In this, the SSA Society enjoys a great deal of freedom and autonomy to give shape to its new experiments in institution building in elementary education. It also gets a large amount of funds to implement its programmes, largely from the centre but also from the state. NGOs are the main implementers of the SSA programmes.

These new institutions completely bypass PRIs. Not only do they bypass them but they occupy centre-stage and substitute for them. Thus, at the district level, there is the newly created SSA DIC. This committee consists of a motley crowd of bureaucrats, NGOs, MLAs and ZP members. Decisions regarding the programmes of the SSA in the district are taken in this body and do not go before the ZP General Body. The latter is completely in the dark regarding the programmes of the SSA. The ZP General Body, when it meets, is concerned only with the routine matters that are in the charge of the old line department. Thus, the ZP General Body spends its time deliberating on why a particular teacher is absent or why the students have not received their supply of books or uniforms in time. The issues of infrastructure development and the kind of training the teachers are receiving, does not come up in the ZP General Body meeting. While the officials of the old line department are grilled regarding various issues, there is no corresponding accountability of the SSA in the ZP General Body meeting.

The fund flow for the SSA is also through the DIC. The committee is chaired by the ZP President, and the Standing Committee of Education and Health of the ZP are members of this Committee. Thus, these ZP members are co-opted into the DIC while the ZP General Body is not informed regarding the programmes of the SSA, leave alone deliberating on them. At the same time, an impression is created in the minds of the general public that the SSA programme is indeed decentralized, since decision-making is taking place at the district level.
A similar bypassing of PRIs and substituting with parallel committees takes place at the taluk and village levels. Thus, at the taluk level, there is the BIC of the SSA and at the village level, there is the SDMC. All these parallel committees maintain a distance from the PRIs. They have no use for them since the funds flow to them directly from the Society and its DIC. However, they do co-opt a member of two from the TP and GP into their committees and turn to them for help when they come up against obstacles in the implementation of their programmes. Again, there is no accountability, in financial terms or performance-wise, to the TP or the GP of the SSA programme. Accountability is to the Board of Directors of the Society and in particular, to the Director of the Society, who is the Development Commissioner of the state.

This model of parallel bodies or Societies is replicated in a large number of departments and we have considered a few departments in this study. Whereas the SSA covers the whole state and may be regarded as a model of the new governance reforms being introduced in the state and indeed in the country as a whole, the other departments are at various stages of incorporation of the new model. Once the new governance reforms have been ‘successfully’ implemented, the intention is to mainstream them. The old line department will then fade away and the new Society–mode of implementation will take effect in government. What this means, of course, is that government itself will be whittled down and NGOs and other private players will be incorporated at the top levels in the new structure of governance.

Watershed development has been conceived as a strategy for protecting the livelihoods of people in fragile ecosystems. Hence, it is an ideal field for enquiry into matters of participation, equality and sustainability and to examine if these concerns are being taken care of by the new forms of governance introduced through the Society. Two Societies were found to be operating in watershed development in Karnataka — the British government-assisted KAWAD project and the World Bank-assisted SUJALA project.

Studies conducted on these two projects by well-known academicians have not been encouraging. They point out that participation in the CBOs or watershed committees set up under the aegis of these Societies has been poor. The nature of the participation was found to be utilitarian. The villagers had been alienated by the contribution-driven approach of these projects. Moreover, there was ‘elite capture’ of these projects by the bigger farmers and landowners. This was
in contradistinction from the stated objectives of the watershed development projects which was to improve the livelihood of the poor in the ecologically fragile zones and to bring about greater equality. Sustainability of the projects was also not achieved once the project period was over. There was literally a washing away of the work done in the project period, be it bunds, ponds or check dams. This is unfortunate since Karnataka is the second most drought-prone state in the country, after Rajasthan.

Though watershed development is one of the subjects devolved to the PRIs, these institutions were not found to be involved in the activities of the Societies. Rather, they were kept at arm’s length. An elaborate system of NGOs and CBOs (watershed committees) was put in place to implement these projects. Individual Panchayat members were plucked from the PRIs and seated on these watershed committees, while the General Body of the PRIs was not taken into confidence regarding the activities of the watershed committees. Thus, while the PRIs rendered all help possible to these Committees, there was no accountability of the committees to the PRIs. While the officials in the non-Society or government-implemented projects were scrutinized in the PRIs, the NGOs and CBOs went scot-free.

Unlike the SSA, the governance reforms of the watershed department are a work in progress. In Karnataka, the externally-funded KAWAD and SUJALA projects are extant only in a few districts and even here they work side by side with government projects like the DPAP. The Parthasarathy Committee of the Government of India recommends an umbrella organization at the national level to take care of watershed development. But it purports to go further than the SSA. It suggests that the apex body be headed by a professional, competitively selected from the market. And so it is down the line, where competitively selected professionals from the market will be selected to head the various Missions and Societies in watershed development. No doubt, sooner or later, the entire state will come under the Society model for watershed development. And, in course of time, the Society mode of implementation will transfuse through the thin membrane of the department and engulf it entirely, bringing to a culmination the reforms in governance. This model of development will give direct access to private players to exploit the natural resources of the state.

The Society model of governance has been incorporated in many departments in Karnataka which have started time-bound projects with external funding. In the health sector, Societies were started as
early as 1979. A few of these are the Blindness Control Society, the TB Control Society, the Leprosy Control Society and, more recently, the AIDS Control Society. This involves a piecemeal approach to health issues rather than a comprehensive healthcare system. These Societies, particularly the AIDS Control Society, receive a large amount of funds which are not accountable to the local elected bodies. All these bodies are under the direct control of the Deputy Commissioner of the district. Perhaps they are doing good work but their performance and accounts do not come before the PRIs. This is in spite of the fact that ‘health’ is one of the subjects devolved to local bodies under Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment.

The National Rural Health Mission document, which was released in 2005, seeks to put in place a number of new institutions in the form of Missions and Societies at the state and district levels. At the village level, there will be the Village Health and Sanitation Society. Again, the ZP will not be the decision-making body regarding health issues in the district. This function will rest with the District Health Mission consisting of a motley crowd of MPs, MLAs and MLCs from the district as well as representatives of NGOs and bureaucrats. The ZP President has been co-opted into this body as Chairman. This body is analogous to the DIC of the SA in the primary education sector though there are a few minor differences. The entire ZP Standing Committee of Health and Education has not been included as with SSA but merely the Chairman of the Standing Committee is a member. The Chairman of the TP has also been added to the list of members for good measure. Health issues of the district will not come up in the ZP General Body meeting and the members will remain ignorant of these issues in their district. At the same time, the general impression will be created that decentralization of health has indeed taken place. But it will be a case of decentralization to parallel bodies and not to the august General Bodies of ZP, TP and GP. The latter will be completely sidelined regarding the important matter of health in their district.

Interestingly, the Social Welfare Department has no Societies except perhaps the Morarji Desai Residential Schools Society; it has gone the parastatal way. There are a number of Boards and Corporations here such as the KSCSTDC, KBCDC, KMDC, etc.

The successful women’s micro-finance Stree Shakti programme is entirely handled by the Women and Child Development Department and is in the state sector. It has not been devolved to the district sector, though ‘women and child development’ is one of the subjects
enunciated in Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment. Hence, here we find neither the Society-mode of implementation nor implementation through PRIs but rather implementation directly by the state. Moreover, linkages of Stree Shakti with the PRIs are poor, if not non-existent. It was found that the Stree Shakti programme maintains no linkages with the GPs in its area. On the contrary, it regards the GP as its rival. This attitude of mild hostility has been encouraged by certain pronouncements by the state whereby the handling of the PDS and the collection of electricity charges with a 20 per cent commission have been given to Stree Shakti, though it is currently being done by the GP.

In the forest sector, CBOs called VFCs were set up under the JFM Programme of the Government of India with external funding in 1990. This is in spite of the fact that ‘minor forest produce’ is one of the subjects devolved to PRIs. However, the VFCs have been found to lack sustainability.

Interestingly, parallel bodies have come up only at the village level in the forest sector. There are no grandiose Missions and Societies at the district and state levels here. Thus, there is no attempt to reorganize the department on these lines. Perhaps the Forest Department has closely guarded its field of forest protection and rejuvenation and hence permitted parallel bodies only at the village level.

The drinking water and sanitation sector has another variant of governance reforms, which we will recapitulate below. An autonomous Society called the KRWSSA was created in 2003. This fits in neatly with the Rajiv Gandhi Drinking Water Mission of the central government. Together, the Mission and Society have gone about creating the by now familiar parallel bodies under the World Bank-assisted Jal Nirmal Project. A DPIC has been set up consisting of bureaucrats, experts, NGOs and MLAs, bypassing the ZP and TP.

At the village level however, the Mission has followed a variant path. It has linked up with the GP by constituting the CBO called the VWSC as a sub-committee of the GP. Thus, the provision of drinking water and sanitation has led to a situation where there is a Society at the state level and a DPIC at the district level whereas at the village level, it is firmly yoked to the GP, with the GP President serving as President for the VWSC as well.

The upshot of this method of functioning is that, in the water supply and sanitation sector, the ZP and TP have been unceremoniously bypassed while the GP has not. And all the while, the general
The public is of the opinion that the provision of drinking water and sanitation has been decentralized to PRIs.

The 'housing sector' has been characterized by a parastatal called the RGRHC Limited. Funds for the houses constructed under the various schemes such as the Ashraya and Ambedkar schemes go from the Corporation to the ZP and thenceforth to the TP and GP. Thus, the PRIs are used merely as a conduit for the funds. In another scheme called the GP Housing Scheme, the funds go directly to the GP. However, the beneficiaries of all these housing schemes are selected by a committee headed by the MLA and not by the Gram Sabha.

Tanks as water bodies are an integral part of the social and cultural life of the people of Karnataka. Moreover, they come under 'minor irrigation' which has been devolved to PRIs under Schedule 11. Yet, the rehabilitation of tanks under the JSYS has completely bypassed PRIs. In fact, it is a parallel body par excellence!

The JSYS is a centrally-sponsored World Bank-assisted scheme which came into existence in 2002 for a period of six years. It seeks to repair and rehabilitate 2,000 tanks in nine districts. These tanks would normally have been taken care of by the PRI (tanks under 40 ha) and by the Minor Irrigation Department (tanks over 40 ha). Having wrested these tanks from the purview of the PRIs and the Minor Irrigation Department, the tanks have now been ostensibly bequeathed for repair and rehabilitation to the 'community' which for all purposes is an ephemeral entity, much like the emperor’s new clothes. The JSYS has set up a Society at the state level, a Zilla Sangha or district-level Appraisal Committee at the district level and CBOs at the village level.

The head of the Society is the Development Commissioner of the state. The newly created institutions at the state level, such as the Governing Council and its Executive Committee, have been opened up to NGOs and experts.

At the district level is the Zilla Sangha, also called the District-level Appraisal Committee, which is analogous to the DIC of the SSA and the DPIC of the water supply and sanitation sector. The Deputy Commissioner of the district is the head of this committee. Hence, the niceties of having the ZP President as head of the committee, as with the DIC of the SSA, have been done away with. In fact, there are no elected members of the PRIs on the committee. There are two NGO representatives and two members nominated from all the village-level CBOs, called TUG, on the committee. The CEO of the ZP is a member of this committee.
This, then, is the decision-making body of the JSYS regarding the tanks in the district. It leaves the ZP elected members completely out of its membership. The sole member of the ZP on the Committee is the CEO, a bureaucrat. Not only is the ZP General Body completely bypassed but its individual members are also not co-opted into the District-level Appraisal Committee!

However, at the village level, GP members have been individually co-opted into the CBO called the TUC. Apart from this tenuous link with the GP, the CBOs set up by the JSYS do not maintain any links with the GP. The JSYS is completely self-sufficient in funds, all of which come down from the central government and the World Bank to the GoK and the JSYS Society, the DPU and the TUC. There is no accountability regarding either funds or performance to the PRIs.

Thus, the centre, the World Bank and the state have been instrumental in setting up numerous parallel bodies in almost all areas of governance in Karnataka. For this, the route of centrally-sponsored schemes has been utilized. The Societies which have been set up engender a restructuring of government departments from top to bottom, as NGOs and experts sit on top-level decision-making committees. The raison d’être of this restructuring is ostensibly to increase efficiency, participation, equality and sustainability. But none of these goals have been achieved.

The Societies sideline the elected representatives of the PRIs. New decision-making bodies at the state, district and village levels have been introduced in lieu of the ZP, TP and GP. The latter institutions have become practically redundant so that the members of these bodies are not even aware of the Societies and their various schemes and programmes which should come within their own jurisdiction. An attempt is also being made to substitute the Gram Sabha for the elected bodies of representatives. Another way which is being used to subvert the elected bodies of Panchayat Raj is to pluck individuals from them and invite them to sit on the various committees of the CBOs/TICs/DICs.

Sidelining PRIs is particularly worrisome since, with the 73rd Amendment, a large number of subjects, 29 in all, have been devolved to these bodies. Theoretically, PRIs are in charge of a large slice of the developmental cake. But in practice, decentralization is taking place in parallel fora. At the same time, the general impression being created is that these 29 subjects have been devolved to the district sector. There is a certain amount of deception in the current set-up.
One may add that this new slew of parallel bodies is a work in progress. In course of time, these parallel bodies are expected to move to centre-stage and be mainstreamed. The old way of government departmental functioning will, once and for all, have come to an end. Similarly, political decentralization in PRIs would have got a quiet burial.

These trends, which have been set in motion since the early 1990s, have to be reversed. Parallel bodies should not have the assent of the centre or the state. The Mission approach has been used to restructure government departments. This approach projectivizes and fragments ‘development’ into centrally-sponsored schemes which bear down on the district from the centre. The freedom in administration enjoyed by the Mission and its Society should be done away with. These bodies should be made accountable to PRIs as with the rest of the department. Individual elected members of the PRIs should not be seated on the parallel committees. In fact, these committees, such as the DICs and TICs of the various Societies, should be done away with. The NGOs and CBOs should place their accounts and performance reports before the PRIs and be made accountable to them. Again, individual members of GPs should not be plucked from their GP committees and seated in CBOs. ‘Capacity-building’ exercises have to be reoriented so as to place the GP at the centre of development and not the CBO. The Gram Sabha should not be used as a substitute for the elected body of representatives. The 29 subjects under Schedule 11 should come before the ZP, TP and GP in their General Body Meetings. The people, through their elected representatives, should have a voice in the development taking place in their district.

Elected representatives have been put in place by the people at all levels, from parliament to local government. It is they who should take the decisions regarding the development of this country. Regarding the 29 subjects enunciated in Schedule 11 of the 73rd Amendment, the institutions of Panchayat Raj are already there, waiting to be utilized. They need to be activated and given their rightful place. Development issues have to be discussed in forums of elected representatives, ranging from the parliament and state legislatures to the ZP, TP and GP. The people have to be taken into confidence. Karnataka already has a successful blueprint of Panchayat Raj achieved during the Mandal period, which it has to go back to. A genuine decentralization, including, especially, political decentralization, should occur.
Though the study was conducted in Karnataka, it has implications for the model of development sought to be introduced in the entire country through the governance reforms of the post-1991 period. This model bypasses PRIs, resulting in a majority of the population being left outside the purview of development. In the post-liberalization period, governance through institutions which eschew political decentralization is fraught with hazards. Not only will avenues for the expression of the people’s wishes be lacking but there will be increasing inequality, resulting in a skewed development. The inclusiveness which the present government seeks will elude them unless they restore and strengthen PRIs.


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