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Self Governance in Tribal Areas of
South Gujarat

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Abstract

Among the many virtues of decentralisation, the foremost is its role in empowering people. In a democratic state decentralisation is believed to strengthen the governance by engaging people in decision making process. The 73rd Constitutional amendment was enacted with the objective to devolve power to the grass root level. Its applicability was further enhanced by introducing “Provisions of the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996” to meet the requirements of the tribal communities mainly to protect their strong traditional communal way of living. Under this Act, Gram Sabha was empowered to manage the community affairs as per their tradition and culture. This paper is an attempt to examine the functioning of Gram Sabha and participation of tribal communities therein to assess the status of self governance under this act in the selected tribal area of the State of Gujarat. The study revealed that Gram Sabhas are not functioning with their full potential as per devised in the Central Act. The ambiguity in the Central Act regarding the role and functions of different tiers of Panchayats and Gram Sabha and the flexibility accorded to States to make changes as per their situation has led States to be guided by their attitudes and delegated little power to the Gram Sabha. The Gujarat Panchayat (amended) Act 1998, also falls in this category. Thus Gram Sabhas do not function as powerful institutions and attract little attention of the community. Further, participation of the community in the Gram Sabha is generally low and most of the issues of social significance are hardly raised. Such a situation does not augur well for the participatory governance as envisaged in the Act, nor will it lead to the empowerment of the community in matters related to them.

JEL Classification : H11

Key Words : Decentralisation, Gram Panchayat, Gram Sabha, PESA, Panchayat Act

DECENTRALISATION AND ISSUES IN SELF GOVERNANCE IN TRIBAL AREAS OF SOUTH GUJARAT

Ratnawali *

I

Introduction

For orderly functioning of human societies, there has always been some form of governance. With the passage of time, it has undergone changes to suit the requirement of people. From the primitive society to the civilized one, it has evolved from the band organisation to chieftainship to state organisation. With the emergence of the nation states, governance has been categorised into centralised and decentralised with emphasis on concentration of power at various levels. In the centralised governance, decision making is vested with a centralised authority. So people are not involved directly in the decision making process. Decentralisation on the other hand refers to the “transference of authority, legislative, judicial or administrative, from a higher level of government to a lower level” (White 1959). It basically refers to the sharing of decision making authority with lower level bodies and has been accorded high significance for its role in the development of communities. Across the globe, decentralisation has been widely debated and analysed for their inherent qualities and weaknesses.

Depending upon the nature of transference of authority within or outside the system, Rondenelli et al (1984), has classified decentralisation into four types - *deconcentration, delegation, devolution and privatisation*. In deconcentration and delegation, decision making power is conferred upon the subordinate local entity without transfer of real authority. Moreover, the government does not divest itself of the ultimate responsibility of the action of its subordinate legal entity. In privatisation also some amount of government supervision and support continue to exist and at the margin, the distinction between privatisation and delegation is blurred (Meenakshisundaram, S.S, 1994). Devolution on the other hand, refers to the transference of real authority of decision making to formally constituted legal authority. It is therefore identified with the concept of decentralised governance wherein, legally created local bodies are formed and function with the help of locally elected representatives, who are empowered to take decisions on a number of issues of public interest. These local bodies operate at the grass roots level and are the smallest political unit vested with autonomy in organisational task, finance and human resources. Elaborating these autonomies Udai Pareek (1989) relates organisational tasks to policy making, strategy formulation, planning, priority setting and implementation of programme whereas autonomy to financial and human resources are related with controlling and owning them and their utilisation. Thus transference of

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autonomy provides essential leverage in policy making (though specified), implementing them by having control over organisational structure and staff and ability to raise revenues and receive grants from the centre (Grindle 2000; Hadenius 2001). Wolman (1990) summarised three grand values which highlight the benefits of decentralisation. These are political values, governance values, and efficiency values. Political values entail greater local participation, educative role of political processes, leadership development, improved decision making and political awareness. Responsiveness and accountability, political equality, flexibility in decision making and fostering democratic functioning are taken as governance values whereas efficiency values of decentralisation, as stressed by Rondinelli et al. (1989) and Bailey (1999), promote competition and efficiency by involving a large number of local institutions for the provision of some public good and offering citizens options and choices. It also fosters better resource mobilisation, efficient pricing and better delivery of public services (Ebel and Vaillancourt, 2001).

Notwithstanding the virtues of decentralisation, arguments have been made to caution against the possible harm that decentralisation can bring into the unity and integrity of the nation. These are identified as intensification of forces for secession and ethnic identities, political instability, inter regional income disparities, concentration of power in the hands of local elite, fiscal irresponsibility and misappropriation of funds culminating into macro-economic instability (Tuner and Hulme 1997, Prud'homme 1995, Manor 2001b). However, Kulipossa (2004), infers that it is not very clear whether these flaws are inherent in decentralisation or other factors are involved in it. Emphasising the relevance of decentralisation in development, Meenakshisundaram (1994) argues that in pluralistic societies, sharing in decision making strengthens the bond between different ethnic communities and it fosters unity and integrity of the country. Secondly, local people are more aware about their problems and environmental constraints than an outsider posted as an official. Hence, local people are at an advantageous position to plan according to their priorities. Further, it increases the participation by the minority communities in the political process and provides leverage to influence polity. Whereas political exclusion of these diverse groups can have serious polarising effect (Grindle 2000, Hadenius 2001).

There appears a close relationship between decentralisation and democracy. Decentralisation in itself does not contain any democratic connotation but the two are widely assumed to reinforce each other. It raises certain questions as to what is the relationship between decentralisation and democracy. Does decentralisation influence democratic processes or does it have the potentials to enhance people's participation in decision making? Scholars have presented diverse views on their supposed connection. Emphasising the positive relationship between the two, theorists like, Dele Olowu (1997) and Brian Smith (1985) explained the following ways through which decentralisation and democracy reinforce each other:

- Local government can help educate citizens in the art and discipline of responsible government and democracy.

- Local government helps recruit and train new leaders who can also move up to national level.
- Local governments' proximity to public ensures greater participation of population in the democratic and political process.
- Local authorities provide a window of democratic opportunity for the public to assert and extract higher levels of accountability from government officials at this level.
- Participation in such institutions enhances people's awareness and political maturity and they learn to choose between priorities and leaders.
- They help coordinate local and central government services in the communities.

The political awareness thus transcends the local boundaries and gets echoed at the national level by the collective concerns, strengths, vision and need of the locals to bring about positive changes leading to the empowerment of the people. Contrary to this view Crook and Manor (1998) do not see any causal relationship between decentralisation and democracy. They opine that apart from the decentralised policy, institutional performance and culture of accountability are essential reasons which results in greater participation and set the democratic process in. Relationship between the two in this respect is contingent upon favourable conditions and congruent policies at the national and local level. Kulipossa (2004) holds complementary policies, committed leadership, appropriate institutions and local political, economic and cultural conditions as well as the context in which local policies are implemented, as essential conditions to the success of decentralisation.

Decentralisation in itself is not a means to its end. It is a whole set of conditions which make it functional and viable for better governance through the participation of local people. Its main objective is to involve people in identifying their priorities for development and plan them with the resources at their disposal. Appropriate government policies and their implementation at the local level can be executed through greater participation of locals and their access to information. It further leads to their empowerment and strengthens the democratic process. Thus decentralised governance relocates decision making and implementing authority from bureaucrats into the hands of local bodies wherein the former only act as facilitator. These local bodies are more accountable and accessible to people who can exert pressure and make them work in the interest of people. Thus power from central authority is flown back to the same base from which it was drawn making it more people centric and viable.

The concept of decentralisation has found an echo in "The Directive Principles of the State Policy" in our Constitution. But it could not make much headway for want of adequate political will. However, the ideology was once again attempted through the enactment of "Panchayati Raj Act 1992" wherein provisions have been made to devolve significant powers to local bodies in rural and urban areas. Further, due recognition was accorded to the distinct tradition and culture of its vast tribal population - which is next only to Africa, by passing a separate act "Provisions to the Panchayats (Extension to

Schedule Areas) Act” or PESA in 1996. Under this Act, tribal communities in the schedule area are recognised as the smallest unit that can govern their affairs as per their culture and tradition. In consonance with the central legislation, the state of Gujarat also enacted the “Gujarat Panchayat (Amendment) Act 1998” to cater to the requirement of its large (15%) tribal population. But how far has this act been successful in realising the goal of self governance in the tribal area? Have tribals’ culture and traditions found place in governance? Are people asserting themselves to get their work done as per their requirements? These are pertinent questions that need to be probed in the light of power and privileges given to tribal population under this Act. It is thus timely to review the situation and assess the success of the entire programme of decentralisation in the schedule area of the state.

This paper examines the functioning of Gram Sabhas and participation of people therein to assess the realisation of goal of local governance in the scheduled areas of Gujarat as enshrined in the PESA. It is a study of three villages namely Maypur, Khadki and Motidabas, selected randomly from Surat, Valsad and Dang districts with preponderance of tribal population. Besides these villages, researcher also made frequent visits to some other villages like Panava, Bhendmad and Lahancharya located in the above mentioned districts to observe the conduct of Gram Sabhas and collected relevant information. Data have been collected through interview of elected representatives, villagers and by attending the Gram Sabha meetings. Secondary data have been gathered from village revenue officers’ records. It is obvious from the method of study and yet it is important to remind readers that the study is limited to a small sample and hence does not aim at generalising the entire scene. The paper has been organised into four sections. The second section deals with the evolution of Panchayat Act and need for enactment of PESA while the third section dwells on the field observations and the last section gives an overview of the study.

II

Evolution of Panchayat Act

Decentralised governance is not alien to Indian polity. Existence of village councils has found mention in ancient texts as well as documented by contemporary scholars (Mathai 1915, Malaviya 1956, Dhabar 1957, *Indian Political Science Review* 1996). Sir Charles Metcalf (1835-36), Governor General of India called these village councils “The Little Republic” for their self sufficiency and autonomy in matters relating to them (*Imperial Gazetteer of India*, 1909). However, these were not constitutional bodies during that period and slowly they lost their autonomy under a strong centralised colonial government with most of the administrative and judiciary powers in the statutory boards and courts. Under British rule, initiative in this direction was taken by Lord Rippon in 1882 when he got the resolution passed on local self-government and established local self government institutions as municipal bodies and district boards. But these institutions lacked proper authority and resources and ultimately failed to register popular support. Nonetheless, it succeeded in keeping the issue alive and in 1907; the Royal Commission on Decentralisation recommended the revival of village panchayat (Samant 1957). The

demand for the panchayat got an impetus during the Non-Cooperation Movement of 1920-24 with the boycott of the Government-established courts and increase in a large number of non official panchayats in the village (Sitaramayya 1946). Gandhiji was a strong advocate of the panchayat institutions and he visualised the idea of “Village Swaraj” which in itself would have been a complete republic independent of its neighbours for its own vital needs and yet interdependent where dependency would be necessary.

With the dawn of independence, India took to centralised governance, with a democratically elected government at the centre. Governance at the local level with the involvement of people was not considered proper as they were supposed to have lost their vibrancy and were reduced to serve the narrow interests! (Mathew 1994). Provision to include Panchayat as third tier of governance was met with strong opposition by Ambedkar at the time of discussion on the first draft of the Constitution. He considered local bodies as a “sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalised” that led to the ruination of the country (Malaviya 1956). However, with the persistence of Gandhians in the constituent assembly, it got enshrined in the “The Directive Principles of the State Policy” of Part IV under Article 40 which directs the states to take steps towards establishment of Panchayats, and entrust them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as responsible units of self-governance (Mathew 1995). Though many states enthusiastically adopted the Panchayat (Malaviya 1956), they could not continue with it for long. With the implementation of the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957), the institution of Panchayat got an all India presence, but due to lack of sustained political will the initial enthusiasm waned and Panchayats began losing their relevance. Notwithstanding these hiccups, frequent reviews at central level by committees like Asoka Mehta Committee (1977), G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985) and L.M. Singhvi Committee (1986) improved the status of Panchayats. The golden era, however, began in 1992, when by enacting the 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution, the Government of India gave vast powers with notable features to the local bodies. For the first time it accorded the statutory status to the “Gram Sabha” (local body consisting of all the adult members having their name in the electoral roll of the village) and powers and functions of Gram Panchayat and Gram Sabha were explicitly defined. These amendments to the Constitution were also historic as they recognised the need for a separate legislature for local self-governance in the scheduled areas where the tribal population is in majority. It was for the first time, when enactment of a law was made with restrictions of its application on the schedule area under Article 243 (M). Under this Act the Parliament took up the responsibility to come out with relevant Act after due consideration of socio-economic requirement of tribal society.

Need of Separate Act for Tribal Communities

Tribals constitute around 8 percent of the total population of the country. They are called ‘autochthons’ as they have been recognised as original inhabitant or earliest settler to the land. They remained secluded from the mainstream population owing to their remote

habitats and a different culture with a well knit cohesive social structure and customary tradition of self governance. Their ways of living were simple and they had little interaction with other communities who were more developed and had different culture. With the growth and development of roads and means of communications their habitat became accessible to the outsiders and their contact with these communities increased. Taking advantage of tribals' ignorance about modern concept of law and development, the outsiders managed to have control over their land and gradually deprived them of their resources. States themselves were party to this game. In the name of development and administration tribals were forced to leave their habitat and subjected to exploitative attitude of other communities (Vidyarthi 1981).

Taking cognizance of this situation and realising the need to protect tribal communities from the onslaught of exploitation by the State and non tribals, provisions to safeguard tribal interest were made in the Vth and VIth Schedules under Article 244 of the Constitution of India. The Vth schedule deals with the governance of scheduled areas specified in the states of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Tamilnadu and Himachal Pradesh, whereas the VIth Schedule deals with the tribal region of north eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura. Under the Vth Schedule, Governors were made the custodians of tribal communities by giving them sweeping powers to implement welfare policies with a view to upholding the socio-cultural interests of the community, and protect them from laws that adversely affect them. But protections, that have been guaranteed in this schedule, to tribal communities, have been blatantly defied, leading to continued suffering of tribals due to exploitation by its unscrupulous non-tribal neighbours (Sharma 2001). The abdication of responsibility by the Governor, State and Parliament can be gauged by the fact that not even once Governors had used their powers to invoke the provisions of the Vth Schedule nor had the Parliament initiated a meaningful debate over the report sent by the special officer under Article 338 of the Constitution (writ filed by Dr. B.D. Sharma then special officer in the Supreme Court). In the absence of any change in the existing laws, all the Acts which were applied to general areas were also being applied to the Schedule Area without realising its consequences on tribals' way of life. In the absence of proper implementation of laws regarding land alienation and indebtedness, tribal rights were hardly protected and their miseries were never seriously taken care of. The developmental policies of States cost tribals their land and resources and left them to fend for themselves among the people who were least sensitive to their plight. As official records put it, 8.45 million tribals have been displaced by development projects between 1950 and 1990. In January 1999, there were 465000 cases of land alienation and out of them only 20000 had been disposed of in favour of tribals. Negation of self governance, lack of resources and absence of decent living brought them to the brink of revolt which ushered in an era of reassertion of their rights. State's apathy towards their plight and sufferings angered them and out of desperation they took to the extreme step, which in the eye of law was illegal. Instead of taking steps to resolve undoing, the State unleashed its repressive machinery. Clash with the state led them to ask for their homeland and self-governance. The fact was that they were asking what the founding father had envisaged for them.

Enactment of Extension Act

Realising the inertness of the Governors in exercising their power for the welfare of tribal communities under the Vth Schedule, and tribals' demand for command over their resources, upholding of customary rights and most important control over their traditional system of governance, a committee under the Chairmanship of Mr. Dileep Singh Bhuria was constituted to suggest relevant modifications to meet the aspirations of the tribals and make the law (73rd amendment) applicable to the scheduled areas. The Committee, known as Bhuria Committee submitted its report in January 1995 and recommended various measures so that, the Act may become relevant to tribal needs. Based on the recommendations of the Committee the Parliament extended the Act to Scheduled Areas in 1996. The Act came to be known as "The Provisions of the Panchayat (Extension to the Schedule Areas) Act, 1996", (PESA). All state governments were directed to make special provisions in the Panchayat Acts in consonance with PESA within one year of its enactment.

The Act has far reaching implications on self-rule in tribal areas. Under this Act, Gram Sabha (Village Council) which consists of all persons with voting right has been empowered to

1. Approve the plans for social and economic development before their implementation by the Gram Panchayat.
2. Identify below poverty line families in the village.
3. Manage their own affairs as per their customs and traditions
4. Monitor and certify various development projects undertaken by Gram Panchayat.
5. Should certify the utilisation of fund by Gram Panchayat for development plans.

Panchayats (at appropriate level)/ Gram Sabhas were also given power to

- i. Enforce prohibition or regulate sale and consumption of any intoxicant.
- ii. Ownership of minor forest produces.
- iii. Restoration of unlawfully alienated land of a tribal.
- iv. Control over local plans and resources for such plans including Tribal Sub-Plan.
- v. Manage village market and control over money lending.
- vi. Recommend mining lease for minor minerals in schedule area.
- vii. Consult before acquisition of land for development purpose.

The law thus provided much needed control of community over their resources and upheld their right to manage their affairs in consonance with their custom and tradition. It also made provisions for the reservation of seats to the scheduled tribes in proportion to their population and to avoid manipulation of power by non tribal communities. The seat of Chairperson of Panchayats was also reserved at all levels to empower these communities.

Self-Governance in Gujarat

Gujarat gained statehood in May 1960, but its Panchayat tradition dates back to 1920 with the enactment of the Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1920. Gujarat then was part of Bombay Presidency, but it always favoured strengthening the Panchayat framework in accordance with the recommendations of various review committees constituted from time to time. In 1960, when the state was separated from Maharashtra, it continued with the “Bombay Village Panchayat Act 1958”. In 1961, it enacted “Gujarat Panchayat Act 1961” on the recommendations of the Democratic Decentralised Committee headed by then home minister of Gujarat, Sri Rasiklal Parikh. The Act provided for a three tier system of Panchayats in consonance with the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, which came into force on 1st April 1963. It was followed by various review committees such as Jadavji Modi Committee (1964), Jhinabhai Darji Committee (1972), and Rikhavdas Shah Committee (1978) which made necessary suggestions and recommendations to strengthen its Panchayat. These recommendations were well received by the state government and suitable amendments were made to the existing law. One such amendment made on the recommendation of Jhinabhai Darji Committee, imparted a unique feature to the Gujarat Panchayat by the formation of Social Justice Committee at all levels of Panchayat to take care of weaker section. It is also probably the only state in the country where elections to Panchayats have never been withheld even in times of drought or emergency. In keeping with its tradition, the state also made necessary changes as devised under the 73rd amendment to the Constitution. Sadly enough though the state has a rich tradition of village panchayat, it failed to adequately protect the rights of its tribal communities. Non implementation of provisions of the Vth schedule forced the tribals to languish in desolation. However, keeping pace with enactment of PESA the Government of Gujarat came out with the Gujarat Panchayat (amendment) Act 1998.

The Act is applicable to a vast tribal community of 74 lakh populations (Census 2001) which constitutes around 15 per cent of the Gujarat’s total population. The state has 29 tribal communities spread over 11 districts located on the eastern border of the State. The largest concentration of tribals is found in South Gujarat which comprises Bharuch, Narmada, Surat, Navsari, Valsad and Dang districts. It is home to more than 53 per cent of all tribal people in the state. Major tribes in Gujarat include Bhil, Vasava, Gamit, Chaudhary, Konkani, Nayakas, Dhodia, Varli, and others (Lal 1998). All these tribes have their own custom, belief and practices that they follow as per their tradition. They are guided by their traditional panchayat and uphold its sway over the community. Most of these tribes reside in the hilly and forested area and are dependent upon resources available at these places. With the degradation of their environment largely by the denudation of forest by outsiders and government policies in restricting their access to forest they are facing the problem of depletion in their resources and livelihood. Displacement from their land for the purpose of dams, mining or other development projects have further compounded their woes and made them vulnerable to exploitation by outsiders (Joshi V., 1998). This has resulted in land alienation, indebtedness, malnutrition and abject poverty, forcing them to migrate in search of livelihood. Their

desperation and anguish over the present situation have led them to demand their right over land, forest and water.

With the enactment of PESA and its subsequent enactment by the State as Gujarat Panchayat (amendment) Act 1998, tribals now have reasonable command over their resources to manage their affairs. It is expected to bring about socio-political dynamism in the community and would empower them to assert their rightful dues. The salient features of this Act are as follows

Power to the Gram Sabha

1. Gram Sabha is competent to safeguard and preserve the traditions and customs of the people, their cultural identity, community resources and the customary mode of dispute resolution.
2. It will approve the plan, programmes and projects before these are taken up for implementation by the Panchayats, to identify beneficiaries under the poverty alleviation and other programmes and issue certificate of utilisation of funds by the Panchayats for these programmes.

Power to the Gram Panchayat

1. Prior recommendation of Gram Panchayat is mandatory in granting of prospecting license or mining lease for minor minerals.
2. Ownership of minor forest produces.
3. Power to regulate money lending to the schedule tribes.
4. To manage village markets (not specified between Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat).

Power to Taluka Panchayat

1. Consultation with Taluka Panchayat is necessary before making the acquisition of land for development purpose and before rehabilitating persons likely to be affected by such project.
2. Planning and management of minor water bodies.
3. To enforce prohibition or to regulate or restrict the sale and consumption of any intoxicant.
4. Exercise control over institutions and functionaries in all social sectors.
5. Control over local plans and resources for such plans including tribal sub plan.

Some of the important features of Central Law that did not find mention in the State Act are:

1. Provision to endow the Gram Sabha or Gram Panchayat with specific power to prevent alienation of land in Scheduled Areas and to take appropriate action to restore any unlawfully alienated land of a Scheduled Tribe.
2. It does not make provision to safeguard the power and authority of Gram Sabha or lower level Panchayat to be taken over by the higher level Panchayat.

- No provisions are made by the State to design administrative arrangements in the district level Panchayat in accordance with the VIth schedule of Constitution.

Thus the law enacted by the State does not seem to implement PESA in letter and spirit. Apart from the variance mentioned above it has also given limited power to Gram Sabha in matters relating to restoration of unlawfully alienated land, acquisition of land for development purpose, minor forest produce, control over social sector functionaries, restriction and sale of intoxicant and planning of development projects. The Gram Sabha has thus been reduced to a body of mute spectators ratifying the plan and project outlined by panchayats rather than being a decision making body, and as such, devolution of power to the people still remains a dream.

III

PESA in Working (Field Observations)

A brief description of socio-economic characteristics of the villages would be helpful in understanding the prevailing situation in the selected villages. Among the three villages Khadki and Motidabas are located on hills whereas Maypur is situated in the plains. Table 1 below gives some general administrative information about the villages.

Table 1 – Administrative Information about the Field Area

S.No.	District	Taluka	Village	Total Area (in acres)
1.	Surat	Vyara	Maypur	352
2.	Dang	Ahwa	Motidabas	204
3.	Valsad	Dharampur	Khadki	1256

Source: Village Revenue Officer's Records (2003)

The demographic indicators are presented in Table 2. It may be noticed that the number of females in Maypur and Motidabas are same or little more than the number of males.¹ Only in Khadki number of females is somewhat lower than the males which may be because of migration or a random occurrence. Nonetheless, it is known that general sex ratio among tribals are better than non-tribals as they do not make discrimination on the basis of the sex of the child. However, preference for the son is slowly gaining ground and is getting reflected in the declining sex ratio over time (Iyengar and Ratnawali 2004). It is clear from Table 2, that Gamits in Maypur, Bhils in Motidabas and Varlis in Khadki constitute major proportion among inhabitants. Although inter-tribe rivalry is absent, there is a definite hierarchy among the inhabitants based on the social and economic status of tribes in general and individuals in particular. Thus Choudharys in Maypur, Konkanis in Khadki and Varlis in Motidabas enjoy dominant position.

Hinduism and Christianity are two main religions that are followed by tribals in the above villages. Tribals in these regions have gradually begun to identify themselves as Hindus. They have started worshipping Hindu Gods along with their deities like Bagh Dev,

¹ Since one cannot estimate sex ratio for less than 24000 persons to be statistically significant we have not dealt with the sex ratio in this table.

Nandaria Dev, Kansari mata, Polo Dev, and Gam Dev. Though the villagers consciously do not make any distinction on the ground of their religious belief especially to outsiders, yet sometimes they vent out their grievances by pointing to the other community as 'They'. Hindus resent Christians, for they have given up their tribal traditions and even do not participate in village festivals; where as Christians look down upon their Hindu counterparts as believers of ghosts and spirits, hence backward. Such differences were more apparent in Maypur where its echo could be heard even in the village panchayat meetings.

Table 2 – Demographic Profile of the Selected Village

S.N.	Demographic Indicators	Name of the Villages		
		Maypur	Motidabad	Khadki
1.	Total Population	1051	301	571
	No. of Males	521	151	297
	No. of Females	530	150	274
2.	Total No. of H.H.	218	97	106
	Tribe wise H.H.(%)	Gamit-92.0 Chaudhary – 8.0	Bhil – 56.9 Varli – 43.0	Konkani -63.0 Varli -16.0 Kolgha – 20.0
	Religionwise H.H.(%)	Hindu – 95.0 Christian – 5.0	Hindu – 76.2 Christian– 23.7	Hindu - 86.7 Christian-13.2
3.	Family Size	4.8	3.8	4.78
4.	Total Literacy (%)	55	10	22.9
	Male Literacy (%)	60	12	24
	Female Literacy (%)	50	08	22

Source: Village Revenue Officer's Records (2003)

Agriculture is the main occupation in all the villages. Khadki and Motidabas are largely rain fed whereas Maypur has good irrigation facility by canal. Information about land type and land holding pattern has been presented in Table 3.

Table 3 - Land types and Land Holdings in the Selected Villages

Sr. No	Name of villages	Distribution of Land (Acre)			No. of landholders as per their landholdings				No. of Agriculture Labourers
		Cultivable	Forest	Waste / Pasture	< 2 acres	>2 to 5 acres	>5 acres	Total Land Holders	
1.	Maypur	300 (85.2)	-	52 (14.8)	34	65	71	170	45
2.	Motidabas	04 (2.0)	25 (12.2)	175 (87.8)	07	09	06	22	09
3.	Khadki	228 (18.1)	612 (48.6)	416 (33.2)	NA	NA	NA	NA	61

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

NA – Not Available

Source: Village Revenue Officer's Records (2003)

It is apparent from the table that a small proportion of land is cultivable in Khadki and Motidabas, therefore the number of land holders and especially those having big land holding are fewer. Though we could not get the exact figure for the Khadki it was reported to have few land holders having more than five acres of land. Since these villages are located in forest area, unauthorised tilling of forest land as well as dependency on other occupation is common. Cultivating forest lands invariably land them in trouble whenever they are caught by the forest officials. Coupled with this, absence of irrigation facility lead people to migrate after harvesting the monsoon crop and survive on some other work. Paddy, Jowar, and lentils are the only crops that are raised during monsoon. At Maypur well provided irrigation facilities keep people engaged in raising various crops like paddy, sugarcane, jowar, lentils, vegetables, fruits, cotton and groundnut through out the year.

Seasonal migration of people from Khadki and Motidabas is common to make a living. Normally, they migrate in the month of March to the districts of Surat, Valsad, Ankleshwar and other places as agricultural labourers or as daily wage labourers in the factories, construction sites etc. Restriction on the use of forest land for cultivation has made them depend upon other means of livelihood, which compels them to migrate to cities mentioned above and suffer hardship.

In terms of civic amenities every village has a primary school and an anganwadi which provides mid day meal to the children. All the villages have been provided with hand pump or a well but it is still inadequate for Khadki and Motidabas as they are situated in the hilly region where wells dry up fast and hand pumps seldom remain functional through out the year. In these areas small check dams have been constructed to meet the demand for water. PHC in these areas are absent and visit of ANM too was irregular. However, at Maypur these facilities are well provided.

Each community has its own '*panch*' that follows a traditional and informal way while dealing with conflicts that are social and familial and at times economic in nature. It handles marriages, divorce, religious affairs and property conflicts. People respect and abide by its judgements. Formal legal recourse is hardly sought. Domination of numerically and economically strong tribes is evident in all the three villages. Thus in Khadki Konkani, Varli in Motidabas and Chaudhary in Maypur are dominant tribes and wield considerable clout over the village affairs. However, it was reported that now a days party politics have begun influencing the village affairs.

The Village Panchayat

People's perception and activities of village Panchayat may throw some light into power dynamics and political awareness among the elected members and villagers. Table 4 gives some information about these elected representatives. Among the three villages Maypur is a single Panchayat village whereas other two are Group Gram Panchayats. Motidabas comes under Lahancharya Group Panchayat comprising of nine villages with one member from each village. Similarly Khadki belongs to Khadki Group Panchayat

and it consists of seven villages. Though formally elections are not fought along the party lines but all these members are said to have affiliation with one or other political parties.

Table 4 – Profile of Elected Representatives

Sr. No	Name of the village	Total elected representative	Tribe wise representative	Sex		Literacy	
				Male	Female	Illiterate	Literate
1.	Maypur	08	Chaudhari -1 Gamit - 7	6	2	1	7
2.	Modidabas	09*	Konkani - 5 Bhil - 4	7	2	2	7
3.	Khadki	08*	Konkani - 4 Varli - 1 Kolcha - 3	4	4	3	5

Note- * figures are for total group gram panchayat members

Source: Field Data

Division on the lines of party and religion is more pronounced in Maypur than in Khadki and Motidabas probably because the latter two belong to Group Gram Panchayats and only one member is elected from each of these villages for Panchayat. Maypur being an independent Panchayat has 8 members who have aligned themselves upon party and religious lines. It was learnt that the post of the Deputy Sarpanch was given to a Christian mainly to redress their grievance that the Panchayat chose to ignore Christian's interest and failed to mitigate their suspicions that elected members had misappropriated Panchayat funds. The previous Sarpanch from this village was a Christian who people alleged was involved in misappropriation of funds too. The counter attack is now going on as the present Sarpanch is a Hindu. It was found that none of the Panchayat members were aware of the Extension Act 1998 neither were they fully aware of functions and responsibilities of the Panchayat. Women representatives (except the one from Maypur, who was educated and held the post of deputy sarpanch) were more ignorant. The Panchayat was merely seen as a tool for implementation of government development work for the village and also to collect taxes like land revenue and house tax. Inadequacy of fund was also cited as a constraint in taking up development work by the Panchayat. Similar views were expressed at Motidabas and Khadki where panchayat representatives as well as people questioned the sincerity of government in formulating development schemes and expressed their inability in taking such initiative on their own with inadequate fund at their disposal.

At Khadki people find it difficult to go to Panchayat office to discuss their problem and seek redressal as it is located quite far. Besides, this being a group gram panchayat of villages, they do not have an influential voice in the Panchayat. As mentioned earlier Khadki has only one member and as decisions are taken by majority, it was reported that its problem seldom draws the desired attention. Therefore, informal and traditional panchs are more relied upon and their help is sought in settling disputes and conflicts of

socio-economic nature. An NGO,² who is based in Khadki for a long time, has helped in solving some of their problems. Special mention was made about the drinking water problem which was solved by conserving water through check dams and has benefited people immensely. Villagers were of the opinion that the irregular visit of Talati (Village revenue officer) and Sarpanch is also a deterrent in voicing their concerns to the appropriate authority.

At Motidabas also people were not satisfied with their Panchayat. The lone member from the village was unable to cite the reason for delay in implementing development work like laying of proper roads and providing electricity. Villagers alleged that lack of initiatives and motivation of Panchayat members is the main reason for the present chaos.

Gram Sabha: An Interface between People and Government

The Gram Sabha is the forum where decision making power is bestowed upon the villagers. It is a statutory body and comprises of all adult members of the village. It is the highest body of democracy where people are directly involved in decision making rather than by their representatives. As Mathew (2003) has put it the Gram Sabha is an institutionised forum to make democracy direct, more vibrant, and participatory. In order to understand the role of Gram Sabha in the light of devolution of power and governance at the grass roots level, the researcher attended Gram Sabha meetings in these three villages. As stated earlier, few other Gram Sabhas that fall within our Group Gram Panchayat villages were also attended. Some general information about these Gram Sabha meetings is given in Table 5.

Table 5 – Gram Sabha meetings at selected Villages

Sr. No	Name of the villages	Date on which Gram Sabha was held	Participation of people			Duration (hours) of Gram Sabha
			Male	Female	Total	
1.	Maypur	29 /11 / 03	33	10	43	1.5
2.	Motidabas	28 /11 / 03	29	10	39	1.0
3.	Khadki	24 /11 / 03	80	16	96	3.5

Source: Field Data

Gram Sabha meetings are generally being held once in three months for the last 2-3 years. The date and agenda are fixed by the government. In the meeting, the agenda is slowly read out and discussed. According to the village sarpanch, information about date and time of meeting is circulated in the village either personally by the gram sevak or announced over beating of drums and conveying them loudly. Such information also gets displayed at Gram Panchayat office. It was reported by many people that they did not have prior information about the meeting but were actually conveyed to them by their

² Sarvodaya Trust is working there for more than 20 years.

neighbour. It appeared that above mentioned method of informing people were generally not adhered to.

At Khadki attendance and participation of people were impressive. Interactions with them revealed that villagers were not satisfied with their Group Gram Panchayat status as very little work had been done by the panchayat. In their opinion the under performance was due to the disinterest of Sarpanch who happened to be from another village and favoured his village over theirs. The Gram Sabha was attended by one government officer, ANM (Auxillary Nurse Midwife), Anganwadi worker (AWW), Gram Sevak and Talati(village revenue officer) along with Sarpanch and the elected panchayat member of the same village. The meeting commenced with the reading of the agenda and a reference to earlier resolutions. The agenda for the meeting was sent by the State Secretariat. Information about development schemes related to agriculture and health was given by Sarpanch. People complained about non compliance of the earlier resolutions. The factionalism within the community came to the fore when one villager complained about irregularity in providing mid day meals to children. He categorically spoke that looking into the state of affairs he was compelled to raise the issue otherwise he would have kept quiet as his complaints would have been unpleasant to some people leading to strained relationships. A complaint against the gram sevak was sarcastically made by another person. He asked, "Sir, we are illiterate but could you please cite a rule as to why the gram sevak should visit only the wealthy cultivators and explain various schemes to them and give quality seeds"? Though the gram sevak denied the allegation, he was accused by many villagers. Yet another person raised the issue of bad conditions of roads and demanded why despite all the taxes they paid, they were not getting good roads like people who were living down the hill in plains? He also explained the problems they faced during monsoon when they could not go down to buy necessities. Lacklustre functioning of the anganwadi was also questioned. It was asked whether anganwadi was meant for giving meals to children for 2-3 days or was supposed to teach and involve children in other activities also. The Anganwadi worker apologised for her lapses. Demands were raised to regularise the bus service, functioning of Anganwadi and Primary school. Frequent absence of school teacher was also questioned. But by and large, most of the people remained passive spectators. Women did not raise any issue despite facing problems relating to drinking water, non availability of ANM and poor state of education. They felt shy in asking questions as they thought that they did not know much about the issues that need to be raised.

The aggressive attitude of the people put the concerned government officers on the defensive. People's awareness was the result of the NGO's working in the village. It was learnt that earlier, few people used to attend Gram Sabha but now they had realised the importance of their role and decided to attend them in good strength. However, such assertion was not found everywhere. At Dandward attendance was so low that it could not start in time for the lack of quorum. Later messages were sent to them requesting their attendance. Villagers confided that at least the Sarpanch and talati should have consulted them for convenient date and time or should have informed them prior to the date of

meeting. Sometimes to complete the quorum false thumb impressions were taken. Though every time claims were made to redress the problems of village hardly any substantial work had been done to that end. People still did not have proper road and bus service to send their children to school.

At Panava also people were disillusioned. One of the villagers asked, "If it is not going to be implemented why should we waste our time and who should we complain to? Such questions caused embarrassment to the officials who attended one Gram Sabha but failed to turn up in the subsequent one. Thus complaint made to the officer attending previous Gram Sabha could not be answered by the officer in the succeeding Sabha as he did not have information about them. People complained that little work had been done by panchayat. Slow pace of government work was also acknowledged by the officer in private who expressed his helplessness in solving them. Insufficient funds and inefficiency at taluka level to disburse the funds in time were also mentioned as the reason for delays.

In Motidabas details of various government welfare schemes were given by the talati and the attending government officers. Gram Sabha was informed about mandatory registration of each birth and death with the talati at the earliest. They asked for people's contribution to Swajaldhara scheme in which the government was to provide 90 per cent of required fund while people's contribution was pegged at 10 per cent. But people had serious doubt over the implementation of the scheme. The talati mentioned some of the work done by the panchayat but did not read out all the resolutions made in the previous Gram Sabha. When he invited people to discuss the agenda of the Gram Sabha he was asked to discuss first the fate of the earlier resolutions. They demanded a copy of the resolution that had been passed in the previous Sabha. It was suggested by an NGO worker³ that there should be a record book registering the visits made by the talati, ANM, gram sevak or other officers. This itself revealed irregular visit of these functionaries in the village. Apart from demanding basic amenities like hand pump, continuous power supply and good road, demand was also raised for transparency by Sarpanch in letting people know about plans to be undertaken by him and also about amount of sanctioned fund for the same. However, most people and women in particular remained silent. At Motidabas discrimination in naming beneficiaries of BPL was observed in the Gram Sabha as the requests of the poor Bhils were ignored by villagers attending the meeting. They preferred to name Varli tribals over Bhil. Later it was on the request of a social worker that two of the Bhils were also included in the list of beneficiaries. . In Lahancharya Gram Sabha of the same Group Panchayat, demands for bore well, check dam, school and other facilities were made. It was also brought to the notice of the officers attending the Sabha at Lahancharya that at the Free Legal Aid Centre money was demanded for services. Such awareness in Dang is the result of their long drawn out fights with government over deprivation of their resources. They are conscious of their rights and are still fighting for their land and forest. Help of social activists have lent them

³ Working for the NGO 'World Vision'

voice and they are claiming their rightful dues. Gram Sabha in these places provide them the opportunity where they can ask concerned authorities for the implementation of development work and put forth their problems for redressal. This view was expressed by vocal participants who also asserted that whatever would be the status of implementation of development programme this forum should be continued. Even the passive participants also acknowledged the relevance of Gram Sabha at least in bringing to their notice various development schemes.

At Maypur, Gram Sabha was attended by Medical Officer, principal of Primary school, Anganwadi worker, District planning officer, Talati, Sarpanch and all the members of Gram Panchayat. Though attendance of people was comparatively high in the beginning, it gradually thinned down to barely ten people. Most disappointing aspect was the negligible participation of the people. Information about development schemes neither raised interest nor was any question asked. An officer from planning department was explaining that people should not bother about the development work. They should only pass the resolutions and the government would do the rest depending on the priority of their area. It was then that the researcher intervened and asked who would decide the priorities of the needs of people – the government or the people themselves? The reply of the official was quite astounding – “people do not know what actually their requirements are? We need to educate them. They are keeping quiet because they do not know what to ask. It is not the forum where they can ask “anything”. Such a view explains the bureaucratic approach that seems reluctant to play the role of a facilitator and assumes the role of provider. It damages the spirit of Gram Sabha by letting people doubt their capability in recognising their need, subsequently losing their interest in attending such forum. If people do not realise that Gram Sabha belongs to them then their participation would be less than substantial to make it a vibrant forum. However, his assertion that 60 per cent development work that were taken up have been completed, met with murmuring and finally one elder spoke that it was a false claim. He emphasised that, hardly 5 per cent work had been done. Later he was joined by others also. It revealed that people needed support to express their view and question the claims boasted by authority about the status of work even in their own village. Thus despite having different opinion they preferred not to counter the statement of the officer. It was later opined by the same official that researcher’s intervention emboldened the local folk and they contested his assertion without knowing much about the work. The expression itself defeats the purpose of the Gram Sabha where domineering attitude of some persons block free expression of people which can adversely affect the institution of local governance. Later people explained that resolutions hardly make difference to their life as they were rarely met with. Hence it was useless to attend such meetings. Low participation of women was again evident. They opined that these meetings are useless and consume their time which otherwise would have been attributed to their household chores. They even expressed that most of them fear displeasure of their spouses in attending these meetings though they do not face similar restraints in attending the traditional panchayat. People in general believed that these meetings could at best be called as ceremonial gatherings. Such disinterest does not speak well for the institution of the Gram Sabha and need serious consideration.

Most welcoming steps had been taken by the Bhendmad group gram panchayat. They asked the government to recognise the resolutions passed by the Gram Sabha irrespective of agenda fixed by the government. Date and time of the meeting had to be fixed by the Gram Sabha. It also asked the government to recognise the right of those forest land cultivators who had been cultivating their lands since 1980, if Gram Sabha endorsed their names. Such resolution has been passed by the Maharashtra government in October 2000 and they wanted it to be implemented in their Panchayat also.

The discussions in the above Gram Sabhas reflects people's attitude and expectation from this forum and how it is serving its purpose in enabling people to get involved with the local governance. Some of the observations in this regard are as follows

1. Gram sabha serves as a forum where information about government schemes is disseminated. Though few Gram Sabhas (for ex. Khadki) take real interest in their deliberations, their importance was gradually being recognised as some villagers admitted that now they were able to know about the schemes and to avail of them.
2. Time and agenda of the Gram Sabha are fixed by the state. Thus people are not involved in making development plans as per their requirements. It is said that agenda were prepared on the basis of resolution passed by Gram Sabha, but in most of the cases resolution of previous Sabha are again taken into next Sabha. If this is the case then how come the agenda get decided?
3. Low attendance and lack of participation is a cause for concern. Most of the times attendance hardly exceeded 30 persons and it hardly qualify to be called a village meeting. At times it was reported to begin with 7-10 members. This reveals disinterest of people towards the purpose of Gram Sabha. One of the reasons was lack of proper information about the meeting by the panchayat officers. It could be deliberate or just the casual approach of the panchayat officer. Time convened for meeting was also reported to be one of the reasons which people found inconvenient. In most of the villages it was found to be convened between 2 and 4 p.m. Daily wage earners and even cultivators find it difficult to attend the meeting.
4. Attendance of women was very low and their participation in the discussion was lacking. Thus non involvement of an important section of the society left many problems unasked hence remain unresolved. Women felt shy in raising issues relating to them and they are also discouraged by their spouses to attend these meetings.
5. Senior government officers attending Gram Sabha as government representative keep changing with each Gram Sabha. Hence complaint made to one officer could not be followed up with the officer in the next meeting. This frustrated people as they were unable to find out whether their complaint had reached the concerned officer or not and what steps were being taken to redress the said complaint.
6. Awareness among people and representative of Panchayat regarding their right were very low. They did not know what they could have asked for and what they could get. Discussion about forest produce, taxes and employment seldom took place. Even

the entire government functionaries like ANM, gram sevak and talati were rarely questioned (except where they had backing of NGOs) for fear of inviting their wrath.

7. People belonging to Group Gram Panchayat village found it difficult to draw attention to their problem. As these Panchayats have to look into demands of a number of villages they do not pay attention to some of the genuine problems of individual villages. It is also believed that dominance of some of the member influence Panchayat decision in the favour of their respective village.
8. One of the significant features of this Act i.e. Social Audit was conspicuously absent. Transparency in the expenditure of allotted fund does not seem to be followed in the Gram Sabhas. Fund used and spent in development work is not recorded in detail nor are there any queries raised by the people. Gram panchayats also complained about inadequate fund at their disposal which restricts their capacity to undertake even minor work independent of states grants sent under specific heads.
9. Discussions upon customary law, dispute resolution were not taken up at Gram Sabha. In fact, these were preferred to be redressed by traditional village panch. Even frequently faced social problems like alcoholism, means to increase panchayat fund, minor forest produce and regularisation of forest land did not find mention in the Gram Sabha though they affect tribal life to a great extent.
10. Despite less than expected outcome of the Gram Sabha people felt that it was an important platform where they could air their grievances and ask the authority to look into their problems. They acknowledged that some development work had taken place subsequent to their demands. Government was responding and in a positive way. These were very positive notes that bring hopes for tomorrow. They reported that earlier Sarpanch used to implement government schemes as per his whims and wishes and also favoured people. It has now changed at least people could now question him and other officers.

IV

As we have discussed earlier the whole edifice of decentralisation is based upon devolution of power and resources to local bodies to chalk out their course of development by themselves. Enactment of PESA was a step further to safeguard the interest of tribal population by acknowledging their right to live as per their customary law and practices. It however, appears that the law has not significantly benefited the tribal population as much as it was expected to. People were quite ignorant about their rights and were least interested in the deliberations of Gram Sabhas. Thus the scope of decentralisation through the law has remained underutilised and it still has to dilute the influence of the bureaucracy to attain the objective of self governance. Some of the issues in local governance that has emerged out of field observations are discussed below.

1. Devolution of Power

The Central Act has given much flexibility to the States to assign role of Gram Sabha and Panchayats to suit their situation within the framework devised in the Act. However, few states have devolved power as envisaged in the Act. The provisions made under Gujarat Amended Act also seems to be short of expectation as devolution of power to the Gram

Sabha and Gram Panchayat are not enough to allow them to function as independent bodies. As stated earlier autonomy to spend fund on development work in accordance with the requirement of village have not been divested with the village bodies. Taluka Panchayats have been given precedence over Gram Panchayat/Gram Sabha to decide over matters like acquisition of land, prohibition and regulation of liquor, sale and management of minor water bodies which should be invested with village Panchayat/Gram Sabha for their better management. Agenda for the discussion are prepared by the state and not by the people themselves. The resources at the Gram Panchayat are meagre as very little is earned through taxes looking into the low paying capacities of the tribal people. Thus it cannot take up development activities on its own and have to depend on State's grants which are given under specific heads. The overbearing presence of State in planning and execution of work reduces Gram Sabha to a vegetative organisation with no real autonomy.

2. Accountability

It is observed that accountability for the delay in completion of development work is not clearly defined. People do not understand who should be held responsible for the delay in completion of work, as the officer attending the Gram Sabha was unaware of earlier resolutions and the status of whatsoever work taken up under those resolutions. As usual, his response was that he would convey people's grievances to the concerned department for redressal. But follow up is hardly done. The officials pass on their responsibility and the departments that are entrusted with particular work are under no obligation to be answerable to the Gram Sabha. Similarly Gram Panchayat members also show their helplessness as the government employees responsible for the execution of these works were not under their control. Thus even though the resolutions have been passed, there was no sincerity towards its implementation. Non completion of the various development projects disillusioned villagers so much so that the credibility of local bodies was at stake. To avoid the confusion on account of overlapping responsibility the village bodies need to have autonomy in management of social sectors, working within their jurisdiction.

3. Low Significance of the Gram Sabha against the traditional panchayat

The Gram Sabha is given lower priority as against the traditional panch in matters relating to their customs and minor disputes. People do not identify Gram Sabha as their own forum where they can discuss any thing which affects their lives. Hence customary laws or problems and minor disputes among the people were preferred not to be discussed before outsiders (attending officers). It was further strengthened by the attitude of some of the officials who conveyed it in clear terms that Gram Sabhas are not the forum where people could discuss anything related to them. The impression gained is that these forums are set up only to disseminate information about development work which are planned and undertaken by the States. The role of people in planning these activities according to their requirement and discuss their concern about their life and livelihood is neither encouraged nor appeared to take place. People and even females were found more

comfortable with traditional panchayat in discussing their problem rather than in the formal Gram Sabha which is considered as something alien imposed upon them from outside. Inability of these local bodies to get their work done also reduces its significance.

4. Low Participation of People

Key to the success of decentralisation lies in actual participation of people in the process of governance. The Gram Sabha as envisaged in the law was to ensure greater participation of people in deciding matters related to them thereby, empowering them to take decision on their own for development of their lot. This on the one hand expected to promote democratic process and on the other hand would have brought them in the process of planning and execution of work undertaken therein. The urge for development thus would have come from within the community and had sustained and accelerated because of peoples' involvement. The situation in the study area does not seem to comply with this objective. As deliberations of Gram Sabha never touch upon the core issue of life and livelihood in tribal community, it fails to let people identify themselves with the forum. Lack of effective outcome of the passed resolution further alienates people and they prefer to devote their time to daily chores rather than attending the Gram Sabha meeting. Low participation in some places where they were not backed by any organisation was case in point. Lack of adequate transparency in expenditure incurred upon development work and other schemes by the Gram Panchayat, lowers their credibility in spending funds judiciously. Complain and confusion over spent fund in the Gram Sabha is likely to erode people's faith in local bodies, especially when Gram Sabha has not been given enough say in taking decision in this regard. People need to be made aware of their right and empowered to exercise it.

Participation of women in this forum was negligible. Even elected women member did not bother to attend such meeting regularly. The attitude of male spouses further discouraged women from getting involved in this village assembly. Thus participation of a large part of the population is outside the arena of local governance and their views about their problems remain unresolved at large. Being the axis of the family women need to be encouraged to take active role and express their views. Their greater exposure may bring out various social issues like health, education, use and management of community resources to the fore, which can impact community positively and also lead to behavioural changes in the traditional mindset.

5. Role of NGOs

Involvement of NGOs in the village has paid rich dividends. Their role in mobilising people to attend Gram Sabha is impressive. Looking into the low awareness level among tribal community about their right and constitutional safeguards to protect their interests, involvement of NGOs can greatly change the situation. The greater would be participation the more would be vibrancy in the Gram Sabha meeting. It will also put concerning official and people's representatives on their toes and accountable to their responsibilities.

6. Gram Sabha as peoples' forum

Though tribal people do not identify themselves with Gram Sabhas as much as with their traditional one, they want it to continue despite dissatisfaction from its outcome. Slowly there has been a realisation that at least it is a forum where they can ask for their betterment and air their grievances against non implementation of development activities. They believe that at least they are now able to know about some of the government schemes for them and can avail of these facilities if properly implemented. It is more pronounced in the villages where voluntary organisations have lent their support to the people. Such awareness can usher in greater participation of people in the governance and may change their status from suffering lots to asserting lots with greater control over their life.

The local self government institutions in the above villages that are located in the schedule area do not differ much in terms of their performance with the Panchayat in non-scheduled areas. It clearly falls short of the objective of the Act in empowering the tribal communities by giving them autonomy in planning for their development. Reluctance of state in devolving power and resources renders these institutions toothless. By Act also it is not obligatory on part of Panchayat to act as per the advice of Gram Sabha. People too need to be educated and made aware of their roles. They need to have a feeling of oneness and Gram Sabha as their own informal meeting place where any one can express his view.

Factionalism within village would defeat the goal of self rule. It is also obligatory on part of the elected village representatives to ensure greater participation of villagers especially women. The effort of NGO in this direction is laudable. Wherever they are working they are helping people to recognise the importance of the forum. It enthuses the communities but government also needs to respond in order to retain people's confidence in these institutions. Though some of the works have been completed under Panchayats these are not enough to address people's requirement. Elected members at all the level of Panchayat, also need to be trained to understand their roles and responsibility. Orientation of officers is necessary to give impetus to the objective of self-governance by carefully attending to the grievances and encouraging people to air their problem.

Thus the vital role of community in governance in Scheduled areas, which is granted by the Act, has still to come up to the expectation of the people. It needs greater participation, awareness and determination. The situation thus seems to justify the view of Crook and Manor that apart from decentralised policy, institutional performance and culture of accountability are essential reasons which results in greater participation and sets the democratic process in. Though the progress in this direction may appear tardy in tribal areas, it is certainly a small beginning towards a greater participation by the people in shaping their destiny.

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