INTRODUCTION

GOVERNANCE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND PATTERNS OF PARTICIPATION OF THE MARGINALIZED IN INDIA

It is now almost two decades that the New Economic Policy (1991) introduced liberalization of economy and proposed reduction in the role of the welfare state. Public-private partnerships were encouraged, and the focus since then has shifted from government to governance. People were to be involved as the principal forces of development and it was visualized that given the right incentives and opportunities in the economic as well as the political arena, the initiatives from the citizens, for development, would yield better results. Consequently, state, market and civil society were seen as three critical players working together in facilitating the task of development.

What effect has this change brought in a multicultural society like India where that state had played a pivotal role in development? Have people been participants in the governance processes in a situation where intersecting issues of caste, class, region, language, ethnicity etc. govern the political and social life? Has the concept of ‘right to development’ been imbibed by the rural populace where more than half of it is illiterate? Scholars have tried to find out the socio-political factors that inhibit the involvement of these groups in society and political spheres. However, the involvement of these groups in the governance processes in the presence of network of local actors (such as local bureaucracy, local elected bodies, local and traditional elites and also local NGOs) at the village level has not been extensively covered.

It is in this context that the present study aims to analyze the patterns of participation of marginalized groups (the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Women) in the rural local governance processes across three states (Karnataka, Kerala, and Bihar) with varying degree of decentralization¹ and regional diversity. The hypothesis of the study is that governance processes at the local level have not empowered the rural marginalized groups to participate in the decision making process and access their right to development. Further the study also argues that the degree of participation of these marginalized groups in the governance processes is structured by local

¹ Discussed later in the chapter.
development actors: state (political, administrative), non-state (N.G.Os) and local elites (traditional, non-traditional).

Governance is understood in three dimensions:

- Development: Social and Economic
- Participation: Political and Administrative
- Outcomes.

The study aspires to understand the processes of governance in terms of these three elements and the role played by the state actors, non-state actors, and the local and traditional elites in governance and realization of the rights of the marginalized groups.

However, before such a study and analysis is undertaken, it is important to locate the study in the conceptual context of shift from the concept of government to 'governance', as it provides the analytical frame for understanding of the role of the above mentioned actors in development in Indian situation.

From Government to 'Governance':

Even before the announcement of New Industrial Policy Resolution 1991, role of state was questioned on multiple grounds. Such as fulfillment of the objectives of economic development where fingers were pointed towards over regulated economy, corruption, inefficient management etc. Policies promoting social objectives were questioned where the hint was towards accommodation of multiple roles creating a conflicting situation where public sector was left directionless. As a result its performance suffered. Political leadership was also questioned on its competence to deal with the public enterprises.

The dismal performance of the public sector enterprises, managed entirely by the bureaucrats and politicians led to series of debates where it was proposed that business should be left for the market. Simultaneously it was proposed that since the institutions of civil society are an integral part of democratic constitutional state, their involvement in decision making processes should be initiated.
The announcement of New Industrial Policy Resolution 1991\(^2\) was a step towards the 'rolling back of the state' and greater reliance on the free play of the market forces. The decision to liberalize markets snowballed into other decisions like disinvestments and privatization of various Public Sector Enterprises.\(^3\) The policy options included dereservation of activities of public sector, corporatization, creating institutions which emphasized the commercial element, contracting out of services and withdrawal of discriminatory treatment between public and private sector, dismantling of monopolies by encouraging private sector participation, evolving an industry regulatory framework, minimization of budgetary support and adoption of a disinvestment policy for public enterprises.\(^4\)

The reasons that led to such decision making were both internal and external.\(^5\) Internal reasons came from the poor performance of the enterprises where on one hand the socio-economic goals were found contradicting one another while on the other hand the political and administrative apparatus had proved themselves to be inefficient. Another internal reason was the economic crisis that had led India to take several sweeping measures to bail out the economy from that crisis.

The external reasons of opening up to the global economy coincided with World Bank’s conception of governance. The World Bank’s conception of governance was based on the circumstances prevailing in sub-Saharan Africa and the prescription was made for all the developing countries of Asia and Africa.\(^6\) During the 1980s, the World Bank, in the context of Sub Saharan Africa, defined governance as “the exercise of political power to manage nation affairs”.\(^7\) Three main elements emerged from this conception of governance.\(^8\) First element is an economic role for the state.\(^9\) This can be conceived as including ‘five fundamental tasks’, viz, (i) a legal foundation, (ii) maintaining a non-distortionary policy environment with macro economic stability (iii) investment in basic social services and infrastructure, (iv)


\(^3\) Public Enterprises Survey 200-2001; Government of India, New Delhi; p. 124.

\(^4\) Luther, M.M. "Public Sector Reforms Myths and Realities"; Har-Anand Publications Pvt. Ltd; New Delhi; 1998; p. 53.


\(^6\) Ibid.


\(^8\) S Guhan 'World Bank on Governance A Critique', Economic and Political Weekly, Jan 1998, pp.185.

protecting the vulnerable and (v) protecting the environment. Second element is a set of specific policies (or 'policy reforms') required to move toward such a state as laid out in the ‘Washington Consensus’ such as fiscal consolidation, reduction and redirection of public expenditures, the reform and reduction of taxes, the maintenance of competitive exchange rates, financial, trade and investment liberalization, overall deregulation and, the privatization of the state enterprises. Third, mainly a non-economic aspect of governance, includes electoral democracy, transparency, accountability, participation and responsiveness in the processes of government; the assurance of safety and security to citizens; the non arbitrary rule of law; effective enforcement of contracts; the protection of human rights; and even the reduction of military expenditures. These were external and internal reasons that prompted the political leadership to take a step towards ‘rolling back of the state’.

However, there was a parallel development in the international political sphere towards reduction in the economic role of the state and greater role of market and civil society in the decision making processes.

One of the reasons for the reduction in the role of the state can be traced from the crisis of the post-war Keynesian welfare state in the 1970s and the rise of new right political ideology in the 1980s. In the late 1970s and 1980s, the governments of U.K and U.S.A advocated the ‘rolling back of the state’. They claimed that abundance of the bureaucratic state agencies had diminished individual freedom in order to meet the demands of those involved in group politics. They opined that the collective good (or the good of all the individuals) can be realized properly in most cases only when private individuals act in competitive isolation and pursue their sectoral aims with minimal state interference, thus referring to the classic liberal doctrine.

This commitment to the market as the key mechanism of economic and social regulation has a significant other side in the history of liberalism: a commitment to strong state, to provide a secure basis upon which business, trade and family life will

The beginning of 1980s also saw the rise of neo-liberal economists and policy makers in governments and international aid agencies who theorized about the developmental role of the states in the third world societies. Influenced by the neo-classical economic theory, they criticized the developmental states of the post colonial era for excessive economic intervention and called for a reduction in their role and freeing up of the markets and private enterprise along the neo-liberal lines. It was explicitly stated that greater participation of the citizens meant better policy outcomes, the argument being that active participation would enable groups and individuals to organize themselves, express their opinion freely and to get involved in a more open and inclusive policy making process. So the need was to have such mechanisms, processes, and institutions through which citizens and groups could articulate interests, exercise legal rights, fulfill responsibilities which could only be achieved when the focus would be on governance and not government.

Critique of governance:

The possibility of governance as means of bringing about betterment in the three sectors: government, civil society and corporate sector including transnational corporations, was questioned at large.

The intention behind the reforms initiated in the name of governance was questioned at first. It was also argued that the term being publicized by multilateral and bilateral aid agencies was actually a part of preconditions for aid or as a process of reform under conditions of aid. So this was not just a policy choice of the state but a demand from the donor agencies to bail the states out of their financial crisis.

The next question raised was on methodological contradiction between ‘universalizing’ and ‘particularizing’ elements of the governance discourse. Based on the idea of cultural relativism it was argued that the non-European states and societies had undergone processes of both universalization and indigentsation largely influenced by cultural factors and ethics of values. As a result differing state forms

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evolved in India, Japan and Africa. However, no two countries are close enough in their political set up or economic conditions to feel secure that 'what might be sauce for the goose could turn out to be the same for the gander'\textsuperscript{19}. So the idea of good governance must address itself to situations and conditions prevailing within the states rather than being introduced from outside. Questions such as, 'what do people consider good? Does the law embody the idea of good? What are the most trusted and effective types of social organization? What is the basis of local ideas of accountability? How should those seeking good governance deal with the pervasive distrust of power and the state?' became very relevant.\textsuperscript{20}

The next point of criticism was based on the conception of the state in the project of 'good governance'. While a scaling down in the size and scope of the state was required, an expansion in state capacity was necessary to give effect to the reforms process. Two contradictions, one internal and the other external were indicated.\textsuperscript{21} The internal contradiction pointed at the paradox between a reduced state, in terms of size as well as scope of intervention, and greater state capacity. The external contradiction was based on the concept of democracy highlighted by the governance thesis. On one hand, the good governance concept explicitly included democratization, respect for human rights, a plural polity, a multiparty system, and accountability and transparency. On the other, the state was required to pull back from the economic arena.

In addition to it, the performance of bureaucracy was also questioned. For e.g., some of the main features of "good governance" such as accountability (both financial and political), transparency, easy access to information, popular participation in decision-making and implementation, responsiveness, efficient delivery system of services and goods, enforcement of rule of law, client/citizen satisfaction and an overall caring and humane ambience promoting an egalitarian and equitous social and economic order, were expected from the bureaucracy. However, the system of bureaucratic

\textsuperscript{21} Jayal, \textit{The Governance Agenda}...Op.Cit., 408;
administration below the state level singularly failed to satisfy most of these criteria.

Involvement of non-governmental organizations in the governance processes was also questioned. In the conception of good governance, an important role had been assigned to the NGOs. Using and idealizing NGOs as having state substitutive capacities has ideological and practical value for the multi-lateral agencies. However, the understanding of the life at periphery from a distance, is quite difficult

In fighting oppression and injustice and exposing misdeeds of authorities, non-governmental organizations have been playing a significant role both in the country and abroad. However, the threat is that governments tend to co-opt them both internally and externally. There are instances of such co-opted organisations, though not many in number, working not only for the national government but also for foreign governments. NGOs are not location specific and may have international, regional and local base. Regarding their ‘larger than life role’ in areas such as health, education, development and women empowerment, Chandhoke says, “the problem is that whereas the state could be held responsible at some point for its acts of commission and omission, NGOs are accountable only to funding agencies which more often than not are located in the west”. Another view is that there is hegemony of developed countries in defining underdevelopment and suggesting that the only solution to this problem is industrialization, growth and pumping in of foreign aid.

Last of all, social inequality in India both retards balanced development and distorts the logic of democracy. It is precisely this distorting logic of democracy in an unequal society that necessitates state welfare for the protection of the vulnerable, for the concerns of distributive justice cannot be fulfilled by governance alone.

It is in light of above discussion that it is argued that, governance, in its very essence, has been a political issue which evolved primarily due to economic reasons. However lopsided it may be towards the vision of international donor agencies, its basic tenets follow the requirements of a liberal democratic state. Some of its much celebrated aspects are democratic polity, participation, consensus oriented, accountability,

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transparency, responsiveness, effectual, efficiency, equitability and inclusiveness and maintenance of the rule of law. It is explained as a process of linking values and interest of citizens, legislative choice, executive and organizational structures and roles, and judicial oversight in a way that would have significant results for performance. The aim is to create processes that are locally relevant, democratic, participative and responsive. In such processes the state, market and the citizens are jointly responsible to mobilize public resources and promote public decision making.

**Role of State, Market and Civil Society in Governance processes: A Case for India**

State, with its institutions and practices, forms a very important aspect of governance in India. There are two kinds of state actors that are involved in the governance processes. First, the political state actors, which include the government, political parties and several interest groups who are the policy-making actors. Second category of state actors include the administrative staff and the bureaucracy. Bureaucracy occupies a very prominent place in governance as it is engaged in formulating as well as implementing policy and delivering services.

With more focus on the market forces, it is important to understand the dynamics of the markets. Markets provide for an efficient allocation of resources where private gains and costs conform closely to social gains and costs. There is consensus over the fact that market promotes competition which in turn provides better choice and increases the bargaining power of the individuals. However, there are variations in market forms, in the extent of competition, in the openness of entry, in the actual scope for manipulability, etc. There are markets that fail (where private cost benefits are significantly different from social cost benefits), markets that are imperfect or incomplete and market that are missing. Multiple instances of such shortcomings of markets can be cited from poor and less developed economies. It is important to understand the market mechanisms with reference to the social dimensions such as health care, education, social security etc. There is major limitation of market

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mechanism in providing equity and rights, especially in the social dimensions mentioned above. The asymmetry of information between users and providers of certain services (such as health) can undermine the efficiency of the market mechanism and may even lead to disappearance of market based arrangements. The aim is not to provide an 'either-or' condition for market and state roles. Instead the focus is on cooperative action between state, market and civil society, which can have major bearing on broader fields of economic and social life where reform is needed.

Before proceeding to the role of civil society in governance processes, one must recall that there exists a vast difference of opinion regarding the state-civil society relationship. Though the two stand uncoupled in the present, the history shows that never has civil society been defined as an alternative to or as independent of state. As Neera Chandoke explains, “For De Tocqueville, civil society limits the state, for Hegel civil society is a necessary stage in the formation of the state, for Marx it is the source of power of the state, for Gramsci civil society is the space where the state constructs its hegemony with the dominant classes. Not only are the state and the civil society a precondition for each other but also the logic of one constitutes the other”.

For some theorists, civil society represents autonomous associations that exist independently of state, for some others the institutions of civil society are very much a part of the democratic constitutional state. With dwindling faith in the institutions of state, civil society has assumed a prominent place in the discourse of governance. Whether seen outside the formal institutional structures of the state or part of democratic constitutional state, civil society is seen as a domain of popular participation. It is seen as a way of empowering the common man, as the ‘take off point for humane governance’ which includes within its realm, an array of contemporary social movements such as human rights movement, ecology movement, women’s movement, peace movement etc, all of which are an effort towards restoring principles of good life. Civil society is associated with people centric institutions (panchayats, voluntary associations, NGOs, etc.) which provide a forum to the people to participate directly and manage their own affairs. However, while

30 Chandoke, The Conceits.... Op, Cit., 11
32 Rajni Kothari, State Against Democracy In Search Of Humane Governance, Delhi, 1988, p3.
33 Ibid., 202
endorsing this participation based conception of associative democracy one should not ignore the implication it might have in the Indian circumstances. This conception poses relatively less problems in the western societies because the changes have already been introduced in the social and public arena. But in India, social ascriptive identities play a very important role in the life of people (as members of different communities). In that case, participation can have a lopsided effect in the processes of governance.

This brings us to the issue of capture of local governance institutions by the local elites. There are two very important factors that work at the local level: first, awareness of the local elites; second, extent of social closure that keeps those not born to power and privilege from availing of the opportunities. In such a situation it becomes necessary that the civil society expresses explicit recognition of equal rights of citizens, because citizens are the locus of the state, market and civil society trinity.

Decentralisation: Opportunity for the three actors to work together

Several measures were taken by the Indian state to create processes of governance that were locally relevant, democratic, participative and responsive. One such decision was the 73rd amendment in the constitution that gave more powers to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Certain basic and essential features were added through the Act to give the local government institutions the necessary status and dignity. They are mainly about regular elections, representation of weaker and excluded sections like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, women, devolution of powers and financial resources aimed at imparting certainty, continuity and strength to them. The main features are: provision for a gram sabha (village assembly) for each village or a group of villages comprising all the adult members registered as voters; not less than one-third of the total number of seats and posts of chairpersons reserved for women; reservation of seats and offices of the chairpersons for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in proportion to their population (in this one-third should be

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34 Mahajan, Civil Society...Op, Cit., p. 1194.
women); liberty to the state legislatures to provide reservation of seats and offices of chairpersons in favour of backward classes; specific responsibilities to prepare plans for economic development and social justice in respect of the subjects listed in the eleventh schedule\textsuperscript{38}; constitution of state finance commissions and elections commissions to ensure financial devolution and elections respectively. The term of the panchayats was fixed for five years.

The village panchayats were expected to function as a forum and action point where local solutions to local problems would cure lacunae in bureaucratic, top-down schemes. The vision was that, with the strengthening of local democracy, there would be people’s direct participation in the management of local resources and local institutions. People’s action through local governance institutions would in turn help overcome social inequalities based on caste and gender.

As a vision, such a decision had very few detractors. But implementation of those ideas at the empirical level had different outcomes in different states. Functioning of panchayats, participation of citizens, implementation of various programmes by the state agencies, role of civil society institutions, discrimination on caste and gender lines have all been probed into by scholars. The results vary considerably from state to state. The reasons for this variation lie in the socio-economic condition that has existed in the states and the political situation that arose after the formation of these states as well as after the independence of the country. The next section tries to give a picture of the socio-economic and political background of the states and present the complex process of decentralization that forms the institutional backdrop of the study.

\textbf{Introduction to the states:}

The study tries to analyze the participation of the marginalized groups in the governance process across the three states, Karnataka, Kerala and Bihar. The states are geographically and culturally quite distinct from each other. But this is not the only reason why the study was undertaken in these states. Given below is a brief introduction to the states. It would give a brief idea of the socio-economic-political situation of the states and also the way decentralization of local institutions has been implemented in the states.

\textsuperscript{38} See appendix.
**Bihar:**

*Formation of the state:*

Bihar, a land-locked state, is located in the eastern part of the country. It lies mid-way between West Bengal in the east and Uttar Pradesh in the west. It is bounded by Nepal in the north and by Jharkhand in the south. The Bihar plain is divided into two unequal halves by the river Ganga which flows through the middle from west to east. During most of British India, Bihar was a part of the Presidency of Bengal. It was separated from the Bengal Presidency in 1912. Bihar and Orissa included a single province. Later, under the Government of India Act of 1935, Orissa became a separate province; and the Province of Bihar came into being as an administrative unit of British India. At Independence in 1947, the State of Bihar, with the same geographic boundary, formed a part of the Republic of India, until 1956. At that time, an area in the south-east, predominantly the district of Purulia, was separated and incorporated into West Bengal as part of the Linguistic Reorganization of Indian States. On 15 November 2000, Jharkhand state was created by carving out 18 districts of Bihar.

*Geographical and administrative division:*

Bihar is 12th largest state of India in terms of geographical size at 38,202 sq miles (99,200 km). It is third largest state in terms of population. According to Census 2001, total population of Bihar is 82998509 (male: 43243795, Female: 39754714). Scheduled Castes constitute 15.7% of the total population (Persons: 13048608, Male: 6784676, female: 6263932). Scheduled Tribes population counts to 0.9% of the total population (Persons: 758351, Male: 393114, Female: 365237).

The Bihar plain is divided into two parts by the river Ganga which flows through the middle from west to east. The state is divided into 10 administrative divisions (Patna, Tirhut, Saran, Darbhanga, Kosi, Purnia, Bhagalpur, Munger and Magadh) and 38 districts (Banka, Bhagalpur, Begusarai, Darbhanga, Madhubani, Samastipur, Madhepura, Saharsa, Supaul, Arwal, Aurangabad, Gaya, Jehanabad, Nawada, Jamui, Khagaria, Munger, Lakhisarai, Sheikhpura, Bhojpur, Buxar, Kaimur, Patna, Rohtas, Nalanda, Araria, Katihar, Kishanganj, Purnia, Gopalganj, Saran, Siwan, East...
Champaran, Muzaffarpur, Sheohar, Sitamarhi, Vaishali, West Champaran). The districts are further incorporated into sub divisions, micro administrative units like anchals, halkas and villages.\textsuperscript{42} There are many dialects spoken in Bihar, but the main spoken languages are Maithili, Maghi and Bhojpuri. Maithili is the dominant language prevalent in the Gangetic plain. Maghi is the widely spoken dialect in the central part of the state. Bhojpuri is predominantly spoken by the people of eastern Bihar.\textsuperscript{43}

According to the census 2001, literacy rate for Bihar, is 47.53\% as against 37.49\% in 1991 Census. Although the literacy rate in the state has increased by roughly 10 percentage points during 1991-2001, it is still low as compared to the all India average of 65.38 percent. This reflects the low level of educational development in the state. However, literacy rates have shown an upward trend over the decade for both males and females. The male literacy rate has gone up to 60.32\% in 2001 from 51.47\% in 1991 while the female literacy rate has gone up to 33.57\% in 2001 from 21.99\% in 1991.\textsuperscript{44}

\textit{Socio-economic-political situation}

Bihar is called ‘a rich state inhabited by poor people’.\textsuperscript{45} It is primarily an agricultural state. Majority of its population is engaged in agricultural activities. The agriculture in the state is heavily dependent on rainfall.

There is unequal distribution of land on the basis of caste. Agrarian class relations in Bihar have always been firmly “embedded in caste, because whether a person controls land or not is conditioned by that person’s caste status”.\textsuperscript{46}

In other words, the economic position of a particular caste is correlated to its position in the caste hierarchy. As Prasad notes, the Zamindars, the tenant landlords, cultivators and big peasants were mostly upper caste Hindus. The poor peasants were mainly Scheduled Castes and middle castes. The poor-middle peasantry and the middle peasantry were drawn mainly from middle castes. Though quite a large number of them were leasing-in land as sub-tenants (mostly as share-croppers) on

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Government of Bihar . http://gov.bih.nic.in/Profile/default.htm
\item \textsuperscript{43} Paul Brass, \textit{Language, Religion and Politics in North India} . Cambridge, 1979, p.5.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Government of Bihar, http://gov.bih.nic.in/Profile/CensusStats-03.htm
\item \textsuperscript{45} S.R Bose, \textit{Economic Of Bihar} , Calcutta, 1971, p.1.
\item \textsuperscript{46} Anand Chakravarti, “Caste and Agrarian Class: A View from Bihar” in Manoranjan Mohanty ed., \textit{Class, Caste and Gender}, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 47.
\end{itemize}
terms much harsher than those available to the tenants. Tradition had kept them socially backward. Their relative economic situation was also quite precarious, may be a little better than that of the poor peasants.47

The social hierarchical structure in Bihar is dominated by the caste system. The description is provided by Blair48 who categorizes the castes into 5 broad sections. One: those who belong to the twice born categories such as Brahmin, Bhumihar, Rajput and Kayastha. They are the most privileged section of the state in terms of education, agricultural land and even the government jobs49. Two: the upper backward castes also known as the intermediary caste. They consist mainly of the Yadav, Kurmi, Koeri and Bania. They are economically much better off than the lower castes. The political participation of these castes has gradually increased since 1967 and after 1977 they have emerged as major pressure group in the politics of Bihar.

The third group comprises of the lower backward castes, such as Bharti, Dhanuk, Kahar and Lohar. Fourth category is of the Muslims who are well placed socially, educationally and politically but are economically very poor. Fifth category is of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes who lag behind in all aspects – socially, economically, politically and educationally.

The Brahmins, Bhumihars and Rajputs own a major share in the land. There are some traditional cultural norms of these caste groups which have not changed much over the centuries. There is traditional taboo against the upper caste men actually handling the plough or physically working the fields. The Kayasthas are not found as cultivators, farm labourers or industrial workers. They have dominated the academic infrastructure, particularly universities and technical institutions of the state.50

The caste consolidation can be traced at least in two movements in British Rule. Firstly all four castes established their separate caste sabhas in the state. The all India Kayastha Conference was an important association spreading the efforts to spread English education among their caste members. Similarly the Bhumihar Mahasabha ,

the Brahmin Sabha, the Rajput Mahasabha were established in 1889, 1905, 1906 respectively.\textsuperscript{51} By providing scholarship, hostel accommodation, and encouragement to take up English education, the caste associations played an important role in arousing caste sentiments and bringing their members in the forefront of elite formation.

Secondly, all social movements in Bihar, for the consolidation and prosperity of the state, have revolved around the respective castes. Their leaders took active role in them. The separation of Bihar, for e.g. in 1912 was fought in the background of a search for the government jobs for the young generation of the Kayastha and Muslims who were coming up rapidly in the intellectual and professional sphere of their state and had to compete to their disadvantage with Bengalis.\textsuperscript{52} It was for this reason that the movement for the separation of Bengal and Bihar remained throughout anti Bengali rather than anti British.

Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had never been in a condition (social, political or economic) to unite and put themselves in front as a group as against the upper castes. According to the Bihar Scheduled Areas Regulation Act 1969, there are 21 sub-castes of Scheduled Caste in Bihar.\textsuperscript{53} They account for the maximum of the labour force in agriculture in Bihar. The important tribes of Bihar are the Mundas, Hos, Santhals, Oraons, Birhor etc. Their concentration was more in the South Bihar region, now Jharkhand.

The eastern districts of Bihar have Yadav and Muslim landlords along with their upper caste counterparts, whereas in other parts of north Bihar it is usually the upper caste landowners who have defended their socio-economic hegemony over the rural populace. While reviewing a book (Rural Violence in Bihar by Bindeshwar Pathak) Tilak Gupta\textsuperscript{54} writes, “The upper caste powerful landowners—a hangover of the old zamindari system, despite some significant changes in agrarian production relations—by and large maintain their socio-economic hegemony over the villages and are bound to suffer most if a democratization process is to succeed in rural Bihar. Moreover, these affluent landowners enjoy a very close relationship with the bureaucracy, police

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 20
\textsuperscript{53} www.jharkhand.gov.in/DEPTDOCUPLOAD/.../25/D2000925009.pdf
and judiciary, dominated by the upper castes, who often do the dirty job of silencing the protests of rural poor on their behalf”.

An investigation by PUDR, Delhi, on massacres and peasant struggle in central Bihar, notes that in Patna, Gaya and Jehanabad districts only 10 per cent of the population controls the bulk of land. And out of these landowning strata, 72 per cent hail from the upper castes. The PUDR report points out that the status of the repressive forces in this region not only rests on their local overlordism, regulative power on employment, collective caste solidarity and feudal mentality but is also based on their access to the state machinery. According to the report, these forces use a combination of economic, social and muscle power to oppress the toiling people. Out of this combination, the PUDR report argues that social power is most important as it not only helps them to mobilize the people of the same ideology at the village level but also to manipulate the state machinery in their favour.

While studying caste in Bihar politics, Jha observes, “Analyses of Bihar politics treat 'caste' as the hub around which political forces— coalitions and sub-coalitions, alignments and counter-alignments — are organized”. The leaders of the three castes — Kayastha, Bhumihar and Rajput — have been in positions of political power in Bihar. From 1967 onwards the politics has seen the rise of backward castes in Bihar politics.

Since the study is on local governance, it becomes necessary to know how the process of decentralization has actually worked out in the states.

**Decentralization in Bihar:**

Following the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee in 1958, Bihar legislated its Panchayat Samiti (PS) and Zilla Parishad (ZP) Acts in 1961. Before that, Bihar, like many other states, had elected panchayats but only at the village level. However, Bihar’s journey towards greater decentralisation, did not move at a very fast pace. Until 1964, the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions could be observed only in three districts of the State. It took sixteen years to cover the entire state under the three-tier panchayati system. The three tier system came into force

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after 1978 panchayat elections. When the tenure of the elected GPs came to an end in 1983, the Bihar government, instead of holding another election, resorted to promulgate 'ordinance' to renew the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Eventually, the successive governments of Bihar kept extending the tenure of mukhias and pramukhs after every six months, by re-promulgate the same ordinance. "...the state continued with this pattern of decentralization through ordinances for more than 15 years. This period witnessed the mukhias growing old and passing away and in their place a new genre of mukhias being nominated by the directorate of panchayats, Patna. In fact, a deputy director was deputed for this task of nominating mukhias who was otherwise in-charge of the panchayat elections at the directorate".57

Next phase in Bihar's political regime came when Laloo Yadav took charge in the 1990s. During his first term the 73rd constitutional amendment was enacted. To abide by the constitutional requirement for all the states to bring new legislation by April 24, 1994, the Yadav government legislated its Panchayat Act in August 1993. However, no real efforts were made towards actual devolution of functions and powers below the state level. Issues of reservation of seats for the OBCs in panchayati bodies lead to a series of litigation at the level of the appellate courts, delaying the panchayat elections.58

On April 13, 2000, the Patna High Court directed the state government to conduct the panchayat elections. The Bihar government once again knocked the doors of the Supreme Court to obtain stay on the high court orders. On August 29, 2000, the Supreme Court also directed the state government to hold the panchayat elections. The State Election Commission issued a public notice on February 6, 2001,
announcing the commencement of long awaited Panchayati Raj Institutions electoral process. In order to hold free and fair voting, the Commission also decided that the polling would be completed in six phases during April 11-30, 2001.

The next state chosen for the study is Karnataka. Following section is a brief introduction to the state and the process of decentralization.

**Karnataka**

*Formation of the state:*

Karnataka is located in the western half of the Deccan plateau surrounded by Andhra Pradesh in the east, Maharashtra in the north and Tamil Nadu and Kerala to the south. The State has four distinct regions: Northern Karnataka Plateau, Central Karnataka Plateau, Southern Karnataka Plateau and Karnataka Coastal Region. The word Karnataka has been derived from two words i.e. karu and nadu meaning elevated land. The state of Karnataka, constituted as Mysore under the States Reorganization Act, 1956, brought together the Kannada-speaking community distributed in five states and consisted of the territories of the old states of Mysore and Coorg, the Bijapur Kanara district and Kollegal taluk of the Coimbatore district in Madras. Earlier known as Mysore, the state was renamed as Karnataka on November 1, 1973.

*Geographical and administrative division:*

Karnataka is the eighth largest state in India, with a geographical area of 1,92,000 sq km. For administrative purposes, it is divided into four revenue divisions, namely, Bangalore, Mysore, Belgaum and Gulbarga. Of these, Bangalore and Mysore are in south Karnataka and Belgaum and Gulbarga are in north Karnataka. The state has 27 districts, of which 15 are in south Karnataka and 12 in the north. Karnataka’s population was 53 million in 2001. It is a predominantly rural state with 66% of the population living in rural areas. According to the 2001 census, the literacy rate in Karnataka is 67.04 per cent with male literacy being 76.29% and female literacy 57.45%.

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Socio-economic and political structure:

The traditional rural social structure of Karnataka was defined by landholding. All the castes engaged in agriculture, some of them had other occupations too. The traditional features of agrarian relations between landlord and labourer were often bonded labour system, tied labour for the agricultural season, indebtedness etc. Bonded labour system was legally abolished in Karnataka in 1976, while under the 20-point programme relief to the rural indebted was provided. Vokkaligas and Lingayats have been the politically, economically and socially dominant caste. They own the bulk of agricultural land, while the incidence of landlessness was relatively high among the other castes.

The other castes are shown in the able below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste/ Community</th>
<th>Percentage of state’s population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brahmin</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vokkaliga</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lingayat</td>
<td>14.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuruba</td>
<td>6.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beda</td>
<td>5.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arasu (Urs)</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Castes</td>
<td>13.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduled Tribes</td>
<td>0.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idiga</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>10.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since the decade of 1970s, agriculture has gradually declined in importance in economic as well as social terms. The reasons being, increasing shift towards non-farm incomes and erosion of interdependence and hierarchical bonds existing in old patterns of agricultural production.\(^{65}\) This incremental but persistent change has substantially disintegrated the old social order. A number of factors have provided a background to such a change. These factors are decline in the number of larger landholdings, increase in the number of medium, small and marginal holdings, goods for consumption of by rural populace come increasingly from urban industries, payments made for agricultural labour are in cash thus there is loosening of the the old, hierarchical social ties, especially the ‘jajmani system’ etc.\(^{66}\). Given these changes, caste (jati) has diminished in importance, especially in one crucial respect. It has increasingly come to denote ‘difference’ rather than ‘hierarchy’. Manor states that, ‘M N Srinivas stressed the importance of the decline of the jajmani system that provided the material underpinnings of caste hierarchy……… Political mobilization on caste lines tended to strengthen caste consciousness and at times reinforced hierarchies. But the post-1972 mobilization of disadvantaged castes in Karnataka and the egalitarian logic of ‘one person one vote’ undermined it.’\(^{67}\)

A villager’s caste status and connections played a major role in determining whether she/he could gain access to tangible opportunities and assets.\(^{68}\) Today, this remains true to some extent. But high caste status doesn’t provide much advantage, and low status entails at least somewhat fewer disadvantages than before. Several other factors also matter in providing or denying opportunities to villagers. The electronic media (especially satellite television, but also telephones) mainly provide villagers with more information than they could obtain 30 years ago. Thus, social institutions and groups matter less, and individuals matter more than before.\(^{69}\)

Caste played an important role in the politics of Karnataka since the time of the 'old' Mysore state that is, pre-1956. Reservation in government employment and service

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\(^{67}\) Manor, *Changes in Karnataka*… Op, Cit., p. 656


\(^{69}\) Manor, *Changes in Karnataka*… Op, Cit., p. 657
can be said to be a century old (for old Mysore area) and caste alignments in politics have been existing for long. It has been noted that, “The 1930s and the 1940s witnessed an articulate non-Brahmin movement; and the keen struggle in the 1950s and the 1960s between the two numerically largest caste groups in the state — the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats — for political spoils has an important bearing on the politics of Karnataka”.

The people who supported and benefited from the Congress system at all levels were drawn predominantly from the two so-called dominant 'castes' of the state, the Vokkaligas and the Lingayats. It has also been pointed out that, “Before states reorganization in 1956, most of rural Mysore was dominated by Vokkaligas and as a result that group had a slight preeminence over Lingayats in both the party and the government. The enlargement of the state in 1956 to include the heavily Lingayat districts of Bombay Karnataka allowed Lingayats to achieve ascendancy in the politics of the expanded state”.

**Decentralization in Karnataka:**

Acknowledging the suggestions of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee, the Mysore village Panchayats and Local Boards Act, 1959 was passed providing for village panchayats at the bottom, Taluk Development Boards at the middle and the District Development Councils at the apex level. The panchayati raj institutions as described by 1959 Act provided for a workable political and administrative structure which was

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71 Letters to editor, *Deccan Herald*, October 1, 1977
73 Aziz, Abdul (2000) ‘Democratic Decentralisation Experience of Karnataka’. Economic and Political Weekly, September 23, pp 3521-22, “The idea of local self-governance emerged in the erstwhile Mysore (now part of the larger Karnataka state). In 1874 there was an establishment of “local fund committees” in each district for taking up construction of roads and subsidiary works. Then came the Mysore Local boards Act of 1902 which aimed at providing for a three-tier local self-government consisting of village panchayat with nominated chairman, taluk board with Sub-division Officer as president and district board with Deputy Commissioner as president. However, these measures did not reduce the powers of bureaucracy. The Mysore Local Boards and Village Panchayat Act was enacted in 1918 to provide for elected members and elected vice-presidents at these levels. In 1926, the Government enacted another legislation, the Mysore District and Mysore Village Panchayat Act that provided them with adequate powers, finances and resources, and eliminated taluk boards from the system. All these measures were taken to reduce the hold of bureaucrats and to initiate people's representatives into the local governance system. After independence a committee, the Local Boards Enquiry committee, was set up which submitted its report in August 1954. It suggested several measures to make the panchayat more participative”.

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not there until now. The Act provided for access of weaker sections like women and SC-ST population to the elected bodies like village panchayats through reservation. But it did not give sufficient attention on the financial autonomy question\(^{74}\). However, there were some shortcomings in the Act as well as few flaws of the PR structure that called for a re-evaluation. The need to have such review at the PR structure also arose out the demands of decentralised planning strategy which emphasised on the bottom up approach to planning as a means of resolving local level problems and promoting local level development more efficiently.

Keeping the Ashok Mehta Committee recommendations in view, the Government of Karnataka passed the Karnataka Zilla Parishads, Taluk Panchayat Samithis, Mandal Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats Act in 1985 and after holding elections to these bodies established a new PR structure consisting of Mandal Panchayats, Taluk Panchayat Samithis and Zilla Parishads. The Government also provided for a Gram Sabha (Village Council) which comprised of all eligible voters of a given village; it was to meet not less than twice a year to Discuss and review all development problems and programmes of the village, select beneficiaries for the beneficiary-oriented programmes and plan for the development of the village economy and its people which included minimum needs, welfare and production-oriented programmes.

The Gram Sabha was conceived as a mechanism that provided an opportunity to the people to register their needs and aspirations; it was also to act as a platform where the elected representatives and the bureaucrats were made accountable to the people for their action. The Mandal Panchayat (MP) was the first elected tier of the Panchayati raj system The Taluk Panchayat Samithi was a purely nominated body comprising ex-officio members such as all the Pradhans of Mandal Panchayats in the Taluk, all MLAs, MLCs and ZP members representing the taluk, and five members belonging to SCs and STs, backward classes and women by caption with the approval of ZPs. Zilla Parishad (ZP) was the district level government consisting of ex-officio members such as the district members of Parliament, legislature and council and elected members. At the apex of the PR system was the State Development Council which met once a quarter and provided a forum for continuous review and direction of

\(^{74}\) Ibid., 3522
the Panchayati Raj System. The decentralized system evolved under the 1985 Act was quite radical in the sense that more powers were given to people to govern themselves and to promote local level development.

Following the Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, Karnataka, passed new P.R. Acts. The Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 provided for establishing a three-tier system of fully elected decentralized governance at the village, taluk and district levels each of which would carry out defined functions in its area of jurisdiction. The Gram Sabha, would continue to service the purpose of identifying beneficiaries and as a means of administrative transparency, and of ensuring accountability of the functionaries to the people, should meet once in six months and the conduct of the meeting would be mandatory. The first tier of the decentralized Government would be the Gram Panchayat covering a population of five to seven thousand with one member for 400 persons. The Taluk Panchayat would have one member for every 10,000 population and the Zilla Panchayat would have one member for 40,000 population. These bodies would not only function as local self-government units performing the civic functions but would also work as development initiating agents. They would have finances devolved for these purposes by the state. The main features under the 1993 Act which distinguish it from the previous one are: a fully elected three-tier PR system is provided for, enhanced scale of reservation for women and reservation for backward classes in the membership, reservation principle extended to the office of the chairpersons of all the three-tier governments, holding of Gram Sabha a year made mandatory, a State Election Commission to conduct elections, elections to be held on non-party basis for Gram Panchayats, the Administrative head of ZP re-designated as the Chief Executive Officer and would not be senior in rank to the Deputy Commissioner as before.

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75 Abdul Aziz, 'Democratic Decentralisation Experience of Karnataka', Economic and Political Weekly, 23, September, 2000, pp 3521-22
Kerala

Formation of state:76

Kerala, located on the south-western edge of the Indian peninsula, takes its name from the word kerum, which means coconut in Malayalam. The state was formed on 1 November 1956 as a result of the reorganization of India’s states on a linguistic basis. Before the formation of Kerala state in 1956, the region came under three distinct administrative systems. The northern region constituted the Malabar district of Madras Presidency. The central and southern Kerala constituted the two princely states, the states of Cochin and the states of Travencore, respectively. It was only in 1956 that the modern state of Kerala came into existence and in 1960 a uniform system of local body administration came into being throughout the three regions following the enactment of the Kerala Panchayat Act and the Kerala Municipality Act.

It accounts for 1.3% of India’s land area. According to the Census 2001, the population of Kerala was 32 million, of which 15.5 million were males and 16.4 million were females. It has the highest literacy rate in India, Even at the time of the formation of the state, nearly half the population was literate. For the population aged seven years and above, the literacy in the 2001 census is 90.92% as against 89.81% in 1991. The male literacy rate is 94.2% in 2001 as against 93.62% in 1991 and the female literacy rate is 87.86% as against 86.17% in 1991. On the other hand, the male and female literacy rates for India are 75.85 and 54.16 per cent respectively according to census 2001.

The population of Scheduled Castes is 28.87 lakh and that of Scheduled Tribes 3.21 lakh. They constitute 3.92 per cent and 1.1 per cent of the total population respectively.77

Geographical and administrative division:

Kerala has 14 districts. The districts are the revenue divisions of the State which are further divided into taluks and villages. The state has 63 taluks. Each district has a head quarter where the administrative offices function. On the basis of geographical,

77 Census of India, 2001
historical and cultural similarities, the districts are generally grouped into North Kerala (Kasaragod, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikkod, Malappuram), Central Kerala (Palakkad, Thrissur, Eranakulam, Idukki) and South Kerala (Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Alappuzha, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam).  

Socio-economic-political structure

Social:

The population of Kerala is divided among three major religions: Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Each of these religions is divided and sub-divided into innumerable groups. The Hindus are divided into castes and sub-castes. In the social hierarchy Brahmins, called 'Namboodiris', are at the top and the Nayars (or Nairs) second. The two castes together form the landowning class in the State. Then there are the Ezhavas (or the Tiyyas, as they are called in North Kerala). Below the Ezhavas are the Scheduled Castes who are, as in other parts of India, the most depressed section of the population.

“Caste ranking is more elaborate in Kerala than in any other region of the subcontinent... The caste ranking hierarchy of Kerala most closely resembled sociological ideal type conception of the Hindu caste hierarchy in that almost every caste group is said to occupy a unique and practically unquestioned rank, either higher or lower than the rank of each local caste group.” Various castes are arranged in the following descending order: Brahmins; Kshatriyas; Antaralajatis; Sudras; Kammalas; Patita Jatis; Nicha Jatis; Extra Jatis. All the castes from Kammalas downwards are polluting, and the Nicha Jatis and Extra Jatis are the bottom rung.

The caste system defined the society of Kerala for centuries. The polluting castes (or the out-castes) or the scheduled castes suffered for centuries under the most severe forms of discrimination. The Scheduled Castes especially the Pulayas used to be the slaves of higher castes. With the abolition of slavery, they became bond-serfs with little economic independence. It has been observed that, ‘As a low caste, they were subject to many social and legal restrictions and disabilities. They were prohibited

81 Menon, M Sankara, Census of India (1901), Vol XX, Cochin, pp 181-82
from covering the upper portion of their body and their women had to appear with bare breasts. They were forbidden even to approach members of higher status castes and had to keep a minimum distance from various higher castes: 64 feet away from Brahmans and Nairs, 40 feet from Kammalas and 30 feet from Ezhavas. Because of this, there were restrictions on the Pulayas using public roads, etc. They were not allowed to enter public temples visited by the higher castes.82

Another significant feature of the caste discrimination was exclusion from the ownership of land83. Till 1950, there was land-caste relationship in the social structure. According to which, the brahmans were the legal owners of land, janmon right, that is they had absolute, tax-free proprietorship. But they did not cultivate the land they owned instead they entrusted their land to the Nair who assumed kanom rights, absolute proprietorship with a small tax. They had the right to sublet the land to others. Thus, the Nair in turn let out the land to the tenants or karalar who were mostly Ezavas, Syrian Christians, and Muslims. These tenants and their slaves, the scheduled castes, actually cultivated land. "It was, in fact, the scheduled caste population who provided the main workforce in agriculture and thus fed the entire upper castes under the traditional caste system".84

Reasons for change in society:

The change in the society was due to several factors. Sen identifies three factors: the relative autonomy of Cochin and Thiruvananthapuram during the colonial period which allowed the native rulers to spend on health and education, the matrimonial and matrilocal family organization, and, in the third place, the surge of the social and religious reform movement during the latter part of the 19th and the early part of the 20th century.85 The activities of Christian missionaries played very important role in the abolition of slavery in the 19th century and in spreading education.

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84 S. Pallikadavath and Wilson, C. 'A Paradox within a Paradox Scheduled Caste Fertility in Kerala', Economic and Political Weekly July 9, 2005, p 3087.
During the second half of the 20th century three factors played a vital role in bringing about change in the society. They were land reform, international migration, and the democratization of education. \(^{86}\) The Kerala Land Reform Act came into effect on January 1, 1970. By the early 1980s almost all rural households in Kerala had become owners of some land. The land reforms benefited the scheduled caste tenants, or *kudikidappukar*. Migration did not not directly benefit the Scheduled Castes, however, the wider economic boom it generated provided them with ample opportunities to improve their social and economic position. Education played the most important role in changing the situation. According to the 2001 Census, literacy rate in the state was 91%. However, till quite recently members of the lower-castes were largely excluded from these long-standing educational benefits. \(^{87}\) For example, in 1931 literacy rate of the Pulayas (scheduled caste) was less than 6 per cent, while the Brahmins had a literacy rate of more than 50 per cent. Substantial improvements in scheduled caste literacy took place only after Independence in 1947, and especially after the push to literacy promoted by successive left wing state governments of the 1960s and 1970s. \(^{88}\)

Another factor of change has been public action. The remarkable changes in society including achievements in land reform, literacy and health have been attributed to public action by scholars \(^{89}\). Nearly a third of Kerala’s adult population is affiliated to mass organizations such as trade unions, peasant associations and student, youth and women’s organisations. These are supplemented by a wide variety of sports clubs, theatre and art groups, science movements and voluntary organizations. \(^{90}\). The People’s Campaign in Kerala can be cited as an example of determined political process, where voters have alternately elected Leftist (CPI and CPM-led) governments and coalitions led by the Congress, regularly voting the existing government out. The state’s achievements in literacy and the heightened awareness of and sensitivity to public issues among the people and political leaders place it in a unique position to make village planning a reality. The feudal relations that threaten

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\(^{86}\) S. Pallikadavath and Wilson, C. 'A Paradox .....Op, Cit., p.3087.

\(^{87}\) R. Jeffrey, The Decline of Nair Dominance: Society and Politics in Travancore 1847-1908, New Delhi, 1994, p 73.


\(^{89}\) See Dreze and Sen 1996; Franke 1992.

\(^{90}\) T. M. Thomas Isaac, 'Campaign For Democratic Decentralisation in Kerala An Assessment from the Perspective of Empowered Deliberative Democracy', Centre for Development Studies and Kerala State Planning Board, 12 January, 2000
and vitiate grass roots democracy in other parts of the country are no longer a serious force in Kerala and much of the credit for the change is attributed to the public action.91

Economic condition:

During the first half of the 1970s, Kerala presented a paradoxical picture on the topic of development. On the one hand Kerala had achieved remarkable progress in such human development indicators as education and health, but on the other hand, it remained one of the poorest states as measured by household consumption expenditure. It is by now well known that the achievements in social development were the result of directed state intervention over a long period of time. Such intervention was in turn the result of pressures generated within Kerala society through organized movements. This anomaly between high social development and high incidence of poverty seems to have been overcome in the 1980s with a sharp reduction in the incidence of poverty despite a slower rate of growth of the economy.

Kerala ranked first among the major states in India in the Human Development Index92 in 2001. It ranked ninth in terms of per capita net state domestic product. It has been noted that, “This paradoxical development has come to be known as the ‘Kerala model’, which illustrated the capability of a society with relatively low income to achieve high physical quality of life indicators like high literacy, high life expectancy and low infant mortality”.93 What is typical of ‘Kerala model’ is that even without registering high per capita income, industrialization and urbanization, the state has reached the third stage of demographic transition and people get better medical care and education. The most important factors make such high standard of living possible in the state are, “(1) welfare-oriented policies followed in the state, even before the formation of the state, (2) higher government spending for education and health care and (3) large amounts of remittances received from Keralites working in other parts of India and abroad, especially in Arabian countries”.94

The agricultural sector in Kerala is dominated by commercial crops like coconut, rubber, tea, coffee and spices. The state has a considerable share in the export of

91 Ibid.
94 Ibid., 1598.
cashew, spices, coir and coir products and marine products in the country. Traditionally, the state has been a major exporter of commodities such as pepper, cardamom, ginger, cashew kernels, marine products, coir and coir products, tea and coffee. However, it is also said that, “Proverbially, Kerala is an industrially backward state in the country, with low manufacturing activity”. However, the state is famous for traditional industries like handloom, coir, cashew, handicrafts and beedi which provide large-scale employment, especially to women. These traditional industries mostly work on a cooperative basis with state support.

**Political situation:**

The territorial readjustments of November 1956 as part of the reorganization of States had two important political consequences: first, the position of the Communists in the new State of Kerala was strengthened both by the inclusion of Malabar, where they had a decisive influence, and by the exclusion of South Travancore, where they had practically no influence. Second, the Muslim League entered Kerala's politics in a big way as it had a strong base in Malabar.

Prior to 1967 the result of every election in the State had been determined largely by the manipulation of block votes by the leaders of the State's four major caste/religious groups—the Nairs, the Ezhavas, the Christians and the Muslims. There had always been a great deal of economic and social differentiation within these four communities. But this did not prevent them from achieving a high degree of political solidarity. Till then the politics of Kerala revolved around four communities, Nairs, Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims, and their alignments.

In 1957 in the first general elections after the formation of Kerala, the Communists emerged as the single biggest party winning 60 seats out of a total of 125. They also had the support of 5 Independents. The Congress could win only 43 seats. The State CPI leader EMS Namboodiripad formed a Communist Ministry. This was a historic event since it was the first time in the whole world that Communists had come to power through the ballot box.

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95 Ibid., p. 1588.
97 Ibid.
It may be appropriate now to attempt to understand the voters' political choice. There are three categories of motivating elements which influence the voters' decision, namely (1) non-political (2) political and (3) communal and caste. Though it is beside the scope of this study to analyze the reasons for voting behaviour in detail, a broad review of the motivation-pattern should be indicative. 

In Kerala, as elsewhere in India, the economic difficulties and disappointments of the people were real enough for the anti-Congress alliance to have found its most powerful weapon in them. The people of Kerala attributed their hardships on account of high prices and shortage of food to the failure of the Congress at the Centre and were prepared to vote any party to power which promised to better their condition.

Emotional issues did not play any significant role in the election campaign and rarely influenced the voters' choice. But there is enough evidence that the 'common man' was not interested in issues which seemed to be irrelevant to his own situation, even considering that the thirst for information about politics is relatively high among the people of Kerala.

Large sections of the people in Kerala felt that any improvement of their economic and social condition could be secured only by political stability. The State had had in the past a quick succession of Ministries and President's rule. The people since then have looked for a stable Government which could settle down and solve their problems.

In other words, even as caste and religion continue to remain dominant factors in private life, and society is in general riddled with caste feelings, religiosity and revivalism of all hues have failed to bring political dividends.

*Decentralisation in Kerala:*

At the time of formation of Kerala state, there were 495 panchayats of the Travancore-Cochin area (that functioned on a single tier arrangement) and 399 panchayats in Malabar area (that had a two tier system). In 1957, when the communist party won the first elections a number of reforms were initiated. An Administrative Reforms Committee (ARC) headed by E.M.S. Namboodiripad, 

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98 Ibid., p. 175
suggested measures for decentralization of powers at various levels and methods for
democratization of the organs of government at various levels with a view to effective
participation of local self-governing institutions in the administration.  

The Panchayat Raj system recommended by the ARC was in effect a two-tier system:
village panchayats at the bottom and district councils at the district level, both directly
elected. Another notable feature of the recommendations was the emphasis given to
integration of revenue and development functions. Local bodies were not merely
agents of development but also self-governing units. Village panchayats would be
empowered to collect land revenue to be remitted by them to government. The
revenue taluks and development blocks were to be made coterminous. The
recommendations of the ARC laid the basis of the Kerala Panchayat Bill and Kerala
District Council Bill of 1958. However, the bills could not be enacted, as the
legislative assembly was dissolved consequent upon a violent anti-communist
liberation struggle.  

The new government that came to power through the mid-term
election, largely ignored most of the recommendations of ARC, while passing the
actual experience turned out to be very different. The local bodies could discharge
only the traditional civic functions defined by the Act as the compulsory functions. As
per the Act, the government had to authorize the panchayats to exercise any of the
numerous optional development duties that were listed; but no government ever
exercised these provisions. Another major defect of the 1961 Act was that there was
no intermediate tier between the State Government and the grassroots-level local
bodies. The absence of an intermediate tier at the district or at the block levels was a
major hindrance to integrating development activities with the Panchayat Raj
system.

An attempt was made by the Congress ministry in 1964 to pass a new legislation on
the model recommended by Balwantrai Mehta Committee. Before the bill could be
enacted, this ministry also fell.

100 Government of Kerala. 1958. Administrative Reforms Committee Report, Headed by EMS
Namboodiripad.
101 Charvak. 'From Decentralisation of Planning....Op. Cit., p. 18
102 Rashmi Sharma, 'Kerala's Decentralisation Idea in Practice', Economic and Political Weekly, 6,
September, 2003, pp 3833.
103 T M Thomas Isaac with Richard W Frank, Local Democracy and Development: People's
Campaign for Decentralised Planning in Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram, 2000
The new Left Front Government that came to power in 1967, after more than two years of President's rule, introduced a new Kerala Panchayat Raj Bill. The approach was that of the 1957 Bill. But even this bill lapsed with the fall of the Leftist ministry and dissolution of the Assembly. It was later reintroduced, with certain changes, as the Kerala District Administration Bill, 1971. This Bill also was allowed to lapse. In 1978, the Kerala District Administration Bill was once again introduced and was passed in 1979 with some changes. The Kerala District Administration Act 1979 was modified subsequently by various governments that came to power. Only three general elections to local bodies were conducted between 1956 and 1991.

Nothing much happened till the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act was passed in 1993. Since the laws on Municipal and Panchayat Administration were not in compliance with the provisions in the Constitutional Amendment, instead of going for amendment of the then existing Acts, Government of Kerala enacted the Kerala Municipality Act, 1994, applicable uniformly to the Municipal Councils and the Corporation Councils and Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 for three-tier Panchayats. The new Acts came into force on 30.05.1994 and 23.04.1994 respectively. It provides for constitution of three types of Municipalities and three-tier panchayats. Major development of Kerala's Decentralization since 1994 are:

- October 1995: Transfer of powers and functions to local governments; along with institutions, offices and functionaries.
- August 1996: Launching of People's Plan Campaign for decentralized planning and announcement of earmarking of about 35% plan resources to local governments.
- March 2000: Amendments to 35 Acts having relevance to local government functioning.

105 Service Delivery Project, MGP, Government of Kerala – Local Self Governments, Administrative Staff College of India, Hyderabad, p.7
• July 2000: Transfer of district level offices and staff to District Panchayat.
• January 2002: Decision to redeploy surplus staff especially engineers to local governments.
• January 2002: Decision to fix share of untied plan grants as one-third of the total plan size of the State.
• 2003: Redeployment of surplus clerical staff to local governments completed. Redeployment of engineering staff under way.
• 2004: Focus on Service Delivery

Conclusion:

Though the panchayats existed in India since ancient times, its powers and functions varied from time to time. The evolution of panchayats as units of self governance, after independence has also varied from state to state. The three states (Karnataka, Kerala and Bihar) selected for the study have greatly differed in their experiment of decentralization of power to the local level.

The chapter aimed to draw a picture of how the internal and external reason led to the primacy of the citizens in the decision making process of the country. Poor performance of the state in economic and social development led to the demand of ‘rolling back of the state’. This meant that state should make way for the non-state actors, i.e., the civil society and the market forces. In keeping with the neo-liberal agenda, this decision was advocated by the multi-lateral agencies. The step was in accordance with the diagnosis of state controlled economy which suggested that there had been unnecessary state intervention with dangers of market failure over estimated and those of state failure underestimated.

However, synthesis of these three forces i.e. State, Market and Civil Society, can be achieved only if all of them have equal competencies to perform their assigned roles. If the civil society is weak, the state is inefficient then the market may dominate the development process distorting the distribution of development benefits. The overbearing state or the adoption of populist programs by the state may stifle the efficiency of markets to deliver the goods the sharp cleavages in the society may
result in a violently divided civil society hindering the developmental role of the markets and the state.\textsuperscript{106}

How was this broad decision of enabling citizens to participate in the decision making process implemented in the Indian context? How do the decisions at the international level affect the rural set up and the participation of rural populace in the decision making of the government? How has the concept of participation been realized by the state and civil society? Given below is the scheme of chapter through which a progression towards realization of the ideas of liberty equality, justice, recognition, participation etc in the Indian state and its efforts to tackle marginalization of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes is depicted.

Chapter-1 provides a detailed account of the field of the study. Since the study comprises of field data of 36 villages it is necessary to understand the locale of investigation.

Chapter-2 tries to contextualize marginalization within the liberal framework of equality, liberty and justice. There is also an effort to elaborate on the concepts of participation and marginalization and situate Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes within that framework.

This leads to Chapter 3 where the attempt is made to trace the state intervention through policy measures. The framers of the constitution visualized the situation where it was necessary to take into account the special claims of certain communities which had been excluded from position of equality and respect for centuries. They were aware of the inequality of treatment based on caste and tradition. So departing fundamentally from the individualist premise of the equality principle it was proposed to have rights as legal entitlements that would also be obligations on the members of civil society. As a result within the constitution, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had a set of rights and the state a set of duties, to eradicate discriminatory practices. The chapter provides an account of the rights specially for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes as enshrined in the constitution and also the tries to explain the schemes selected for the study with a right base approach.

Chapter 4 discusses the implementation of the schemes in field from the input of the beneficiaries and officials involved in the service delivery.

Chapter 5 similarly addresses the issue of participation of marginalized groups in the Grama Panchayats as members of the Grama Sabha as well as Grama Panchayats. It is followed by the conclusion of the study.