CHAPTER VIII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

8.1. The Problem

Though the panchayat system is as old as Indian history and culture, a formal system of local governance was introduced mainly after independence in rural areas following the introduction of community development programmes in 1950s. A uniform pattern of local governance was introduced by each state in tribal as well as rural areas. However, dominance of privileged communities, political interference and bureaucratic apathy led to the atrophy of the system throughout the country in general, let alone the tribal areas, though off late limited success was experienced in few states. More particularly, in the tribal areas the Panchayati Raj system was largely under the control of dominant non-tribal communities and the tribals did not have any scope for participation in local development. Keeping in view the drawbacks of the earlier Panchayati Raj system and the failure of developmental programmes in the tribal areas, Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas (PESA) Act was introduced in 1996 consequent upon the 73rd Constitutional Amendment which was followed invariably by all states having scheduled areas.

The main provisions of this Act are:

(e) Panchayats in the Scheduled Areas are given powers to function as institutions of self-Government;

(f) Provision of reservation for Chairpersons and 50% of members for Scheduled Tribes at all levels in Panchayati Raj Institutions;

(g) Panchayat is given power to restore alienated land and exercise control over local plans and resources;

(h) Gram Sabha has been empowered to safeguard the traditions, customs, cultural identity, community resources and also to monitor the implementation of various development programmes.
Though over one and half decades have been passed since PESA Act was introduced, its impact on local governance and the resultant effect on tribal development did not receive due attention. However, the available limited literature subscribes to two different views. While one group of scholars argue that the provisions of PESA Act are likely to generate participation of the tribal communities in the local affairs leading to better development, the other group holds the view that this act may not generate people’s participation in the local decision-making process, as many of its provisions go against the tribal customary socio-economic practices and livelihood pattern. It is found the studies belonging to both the groups were undertaken at the early stage of the implementation of PESA Act and most them were based on experiences of other states. Moreover, rare attempts have been made to analyze the influence of PESA Act on the process of tribal development. Hence, it is imperative to examine how far the introduction PESA Act has generated popular participation among the tribals and its consequent effects on their development in a backward state like Odisha, as it is an issue of major policy concern.

8.2. Trend of Tribal Studies in India

The tribal people have been the subject of sociological and anthropological studies during the colonial period. The colonial administrators encouraged studies on social and cultural life of tribals to collect information which would be helpful for smooth administration in tribal areas. Most of the studies during this period followed the ethnographic-cultural approach. This tradition continued for many years even after independence.

After 1950s when the new policies and programmes were implemented like land reform, community development programme, Panchayati Raj, etc., attempts were made to examine the changes in the tribal society in response to these developmental measures. Largely these studies were influenced by structural-functional approach. The changes in village communities, family and kinship structure, economic practices and the emerging caste-tribe interactions were the major focus of these studies. A number of studies were also undertaken on conceptual issues on tribe.
With the emergence of Marxist approach, in 1960s and 1970s studies were undertaken to examine the process of differentiation, inequality and tension in the tribal society. Many scholars also started analyzing the tribal movements taken place during colonial and post colonial period. The large scale displacement of tribals which took place in many states like Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar attracted the attention of many social scientists and the movements against this displacement emerged as an important area of research. A few studies were undertaken to explain the state and tribal relationship and they highlighted how tribals are being exploited by the state as well as the non-tribals. Some of these studies were also following a kind of mixed approach.

Recently the issue of tribal development has become the core of development research and policy debates. Large numbers of studies have been undertaken by social scientists to examine the socio-economic condition of tribals, the performance of various development schemes and response of tribals to these schemes. These studies more or less were oriented by development analysis approach. The studies belonging to this perspective may be divided into two groups: optimists and pessimists. While the optimistic group views that though the existing developmental approach has not brought the changes as expected, it has brought a slow process of improvement in terms of literacy, land ownership, infrastructural development, etc. the pessimistic group argues that the tribals are increasingly getting alienated from the development process and there is hardly any scope for them to participate in such process.

However, a review of these studies reveals that they have mostly confined themselves to some limited aspect of development and briefly attended the issue of participation of tribals in local development process. Though attempts have been made to analyze the Panchayati Raj system in the tribal areas, studies to assess its impact on the process of economic development, particularly in the wake of PESA Act are limited. Studies undertaken on PESA provide only a broad appraisal of its various provisions, barring a few which looked into the limited aspects of participation of tribals in the local Panchayati Raj bodies. An analysis of the impact of PESA Act on the nature of participation of tribals in the local decision-making process and its consequential impact on their development at the macro as well as micro levels is almost non-existent.
Against this background, the present study makes an attempt to examine PESA Act and its impact on tribal development both at the household and local level with reference to Odisha, keeping in view the following broad objectives:

8.3. Objectives

(e) To analyze the provisions of Panchayati Raj system in the tribal areas of Odisha with special reference to PESA Act.

(f) To study the process of implementation of the major development programmes in the tribal areas.

(g) To examine the nature of participation of tribals in the local decision-making process.

(h) To analyze how far the participation of tribals in local decision-making contributes to their development.

8.4. Theoretical Perspective

The issues on development became the subject of sociological discourse mainly after the Second World War. In the immediate post-war period, the backwardness was largely posed by the economists in terms of vicious circle of poverty and backwardness that seem to affect many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Later in the 1950s and 1960s cultural explanations influenced by modernization paradigm became popular in development discourse. It intends to identify internal cultural defects as the reasons for underdevelopment.

With the failure of the modernization programme in Latin America, the Neo-Marxists Dependency School emerged as the alternative paradigm for understanding development. It argued that the peripheral regions within a nation remain backward because of their dependency on core regions for expertise, technology and capital investment. However, the dependency perspective is criticized for its relatively static and core-centered analysis. It does not give due importance to the regional and local forces while analyzing economic development. Moreover, the dependency perspective focuses
its attention almost exclusively to the economic mechanisms of domination and control and to a lesser extent on the socio-political mechanisms.

Subsequently many alternative perspectives developed to view the process of development and one of such perspectives was developed by Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen and others known as public action perspective. In their series of writings, Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen illustrating a number of case studies from Africa, China, Sri Lanka, India and other parts argued that public participation facilitates the process of economic development. They view that public participation can have powerful positive roles in both collaborative and adversarial ways. While collaboration of public calls for cooperative efforts for the successful implementation Government policy, adversarial pressures from the public are also crucial for demanding better delivery of welfare measures. It is argued by them that both types of public participation- collaborative and adversarial- are important for development. Though this line of argument has generated a kind of debate, the differential effects of these two types of participation have rarely been put to empirical test at the micro level.

The present study intends to apply this model to analyze how does participation contributes to development in the tribal areas and which type of participation is more effective and under what conditions. The study will also ultimately relate itself to the larger theoretical debate among elitists and pluralists on distribution of power and nature of participation. The elitist theorists led by C.W. Mills and others argued that political power always went to those who enjoyed high status and wealth. In other words, they say that the upper classes always rule. On the contrary, the pluralists led by Robert A. Dhal and Nelson W Polsby and others hold that it was too simplistic a view to assume that upper classes enjoy greater power. They argue that the distribution of power in a society was generally determined by the combination of resources and skills enjoyed by people.
8.5. Conceptual Framework

In this study there are two key concepts: tribe and development. In sociological literature there is a long and inconclusive discourse on concept of tribe. However, for the purpose of analysis, the present study confines itself to Scheduled Tribes only, as defined by the Government of India. Though the concept of development is very complex, the analysis in the study focuses on development only at two levels: household and village level. While household level development is measured in terms of changes in income and assets ownership position, development at the village level is viewed in terms of changes in the infrastructure mainly the electricity, road and water, though other aspects are examined in a limited manner.

8.6. Method and Construction of the Study

The analysis in the thesis is made both at the macro and micro levels. The macro level analysis covers the state as a whole with a special focus on the districts declared fully as Scheduled Areas. It is based on information collected from secondary sources like Statistical Abstracts of Odisha, Various Census reports, District Statistical Handbooks, Economic Survey of Odisha, etc. Besides, data were also collected from various Government offices like Ministry of Panchayati Raj, SC & ST Development Department and SC & ST Research and Training Institute, Government of Odisha.

For micro level analysis Mayurbhanj district of Odisha has been selected, as it is one of the districts declared entirely as Scheduled Area with high concentration of tribal population (56.60 percent, as per 2011 Census). It has as many as 26 scheduled blocks and 382 Gram Panchayats which is highest in the state of Odisha. Keeping in mind the differential pattern of development in the district, two tribal dominated blocks are chosen for a comparative study, one representing the relatively advanced areas and the other relatively backward part, based on indicators like irrigation, electrification, literacy, distance from urban pockets, etc. While Baripada block was identified as the advanced block, Bijatala represented the backward part of the district. Two panchayats were selected, one from each block, based on same criteria adopted for the selection of blocks.
The households of these two panchayats were divided into two categories, viz. Above Poverty Line (APL) and Below Poverty Line (BPL) households based on Government classification. The list of villages and the list of households in each panchayat were obtained from the respective panchayat office. In a study of this kind usually selection of 10% of universe as sample is appropriate for scientific analysis. However, 10% of the universe in advance panchayat and backward panchayat constitutes 210 and 180 households respectively. In order to have an appropriate comparative analysis 200 households have been taken from each panchayat, 100 each representing the BPL and APL groups based on random sampling method covering all the villages in proportion to number of households. A structured interview schedule was administered to collect primary information. The head of each household was interviewed and in few cases, where heads are absent next senior person was interviewed. Besides the sampled households, information was also collected separately from the elected representatives and local level Government officials. Few cases were selected for more qualitative analysis. Collected data were tabulated and some simple statistical tools were used for interpretation.

8.7. Major Findings

The summary of the major findings of both macro and micro level analysis are presented below:

8.7.1. Macro Level Analysis

The analysis at the macro level was constrained by paucity of information on many aspects of provisions of PESA Act and nature of people’s participation and its impact on their development. The analysis of the available data indicates that after the introduction of PESA Act the number of tribal elected representatives increased noticeably in the scheduled areas, as compared to that of the on non-scheduled areas. Similarly, data on implementation of various development schemes reveal that the numbers of scheduled tribe beneficiaries of various development schemes have increased noticeably.
Though comparatively some kind of development is noticed in the scheduled areas in terms of electrification, construction of panchayat roads, supply of drinking water, etc. it is difficult to conclude that these developments can be attributed to PESA Act, as adequate data are not available to establish this linkage. Hence, a detailed analysis is required at the micro level.

8.7.2 Micro Level Analysis

The summary of the micro level findings are as follows:

8.7.2.1. Area and People Studied

The profile of the selected households of both the panchayats reveals significant differences in terms of literacy, land ownership, occupational structure and sources of income. While the advanced panchayat indicates high rate of literacy, better land ownership position and income level for both APL and BPL households, as compared to their counterparts in relatively backward Panchayat. In both the panchayats the difference between BPL and APL households in terms of economic position is not significant in many cases. There are many APL households in both the panchayats who have BPL-like characteristics.

8.7.2.2. Awareness

A majority of the households in both the panchayats are not well aware of or having low level of awareness about PESA Act and the aspects of local governance such as functioning of Gram-Panchayat and the operations of various Governmental development schemes. Nevertheless, relatively higher level of awareness is found among significant number of households, particularly in the advanced panchayat. Contrary to the popular perception, BPL households have better awareness than their APL counterparts.

8.7.2.3. Participation

In both the panchayats signs of changes are visible among tribals like participating in election process, attending meetings, expressing view points, criticizing
local representatives and their decisions, monitoring development schemes, providing information about various schemes, etc. following the introduction of PESA Act. The rate of participation is relatively more in advanced panchayat both at the formal as well as informal level. While attending Palli Sabha, Gram Sabha and panchayat meetings and expressing viewpoints in these meetings are treated as formal participation, informal participation includes acts like providing information about schemes and programmes, mobilising people for or against some panchayat decisions, giving oral complaints to local authorities, etc. In both the panchayats the BPL households participate better than that of APL households. Though the individuals in many cases participate without proper awareness at various levels, it is found that better awareness makes their participation more effective.

Two types of participation are noticed: (a) Collaborative (b) Adversarial. Collaborative participation takes place in terms of supporting the elected representatives in various meetings, extending cooperation in monitoring development schemes, mobilising people in favour of decision taken in Palli Sabha, Gram Sabha and panchayat meetings, etc. Adversarial participation takes the form of criticizing the elected representatives, opposing their decisions in the meetings, mobilising people against decisions taken in Palli Sabha, Gram Sabha, giving complaints to the local authorities, etc. In both the panchayats participation largely takes collaborative form among BPL as well APL households. Though adversarial participation is low in both the panchayats it is relatively higher in advanced panchayat among all categories of households.

8.7.2.4. Participation and Development

Participation leads to development both at the individual and local level. Comparatively speaking, though adversarial participation is less in both the panchayats, it leads to better development in advanced panchayat at individual level (in terms of positive changes in household asset ownership position and income) and at the local level (in terms of infrastructural changes). On the contrary, the adversarial participation does not result in positive changes in backward panchayat; rather it affects the concerned households and villages adversely. The villages having both adversarial and collaborative
participants experienced noticeable development compared to the villages where participants belong to either type only.

8.7.2.5. Background of the Elected Representatives

The profile of the Sarpanch and other elected representatives of both the panchayats reveal that they are mostly literates and relatively have higher educational attainment, land ownership position, better sources of income, contact with bureaucracy, knowledge about provisions of PESA Act, etc. The same could be said about the tribals who actively participate both at the informal or formal level, either collaboratively or adversarialy.

8.8. Conclusions

Participation of the tribals in local governance and development which was unheard in tribal Odisha is gradually being experienced following the introduction of PESA act. A significant number of tribals have shown interest in participating election process, attending various meetings, expressing viewpoints, criticizing public policies and mobilizing fellow tribals for or against of decisions at local levels concerning their development. It may not be entirely appropriate to argue that all these changes are due to the introduction of PESA act. It could be due to other supplementary factors like enhancement of literacy, improvement in infrastructure and communication facilities, etc. But whatever may be the reason, both the qualitative and quantitative information provide firm evidences establishing the fact that the provisions of PESA act has generated public participation of the tribals in local affairs.

To sum up, PESA Act has initiated a process of awareness about various aspects local governance and development programmes in the tribal areas and generated participation at various levels significantly. Dreze and Sen’s thesis that public participation leads to better development holds true in the context of tribal Odisha. The level of participation largely corresponds to the level economic development both at the household and local level excepting minor variations here and there.
The poor participate relatively more than the better off households. However, though collaborative participation is characteristic feature of tribals in both the panchayats the adversarial participation is also quite significant in the advanced panchayat more particularly among the APL households. Interestingly, adversarial participants have experienced higher rate of improvement than their collaborative counterparts in terms of availing the benefits of various development schemes and their asset ownership position as well as overall development at the village level. The villages which have both collaborative and adversarial participants have gained more from the development process. On the contrary, the adversarial participation which is limited to few handfuls of households in backward panchayat did not yield any positive result. Rather it has affected them adversely. The study also supports the pluralist’s argument that power and capacity to participate in decision making associated with a variety of attributes like regular sources of income, better land ownership position, literacy and education, knowledge about the various schemes and programmes, contact with local bureaucracy, etc.