CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1. The Problem

Though Panchayati Raj system was existent in some form during pre-colonial and colonial period a formal system of local governance was introduced after independence in India following the introduction of Community Development Programme (CDP) in 1957 based on Gandhian philosophy of village as the nerve centre of people’s development. A uniform pattern of local governance was introduced in each state in tribal as well as rural areas. The early phase of studies on power structure in rural areas indicated the inequality in the distribution of power and dominance of privileged groups. While one group of scholars viewed that the higher castes dominate the power structure due to high ritual status, greater control over land and relatively higher levels of education (Mayer 1958; Srinivas 1959; Berreman 1972), the other group argued that a class of rich peasants has taken control over the village level institutions like panchayats and co-operatives following modernization of agriculture and associated developments (Frankel 1971; Carter 1974; Das Gupta 1977). It is also argued by many that power structure in rural India has deviated from the caste and class model and it depends upon a plurality of factors (Beteille 1971; Oommen 1970; Baviskar 1980). The views expressed by these three groups of scholars were based on studies undertaken mainly at the initial stage of the Panchayati Raj system when there were no provision for the participation of hitherto excluded groups like Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes. However, though the initial phase of Panchayati Raj system was launched with great fanfare, it gradually became moribund due to the dominance of privileged communities, political interference and bureaucratic apathy throughout the country in general let alone the tribal areas. More particularly in the tribal areas the Panchayati Raj system was largely under the control of the dominant non-tribal communities and tribals did not have any scope for participation in local development. It was commented by Barrington Moore (1966: 408),

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1 These traditional panchayats dealt with disputes of various kinds, law and order problem, the general problem of the village etc. Besides caste specific panchayats were there across the villages which gained authority and respect they reflected the dominance of upper caste, male members and were not representatives of all sections of village society. The introduction of formal local council began under the British rule in the early 20th century. Major changes in local governance came only after independence.
"…democracy does not yet exist in the Indian countryside…The panchayats ‘revival’…is mainly romantic…rhetoric”". The second phase of experimentation began with the implementation of the recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee (1978). It was enthusiastically implemented in states like West Bengal, Karnataka, Kerala and Maharashtra which experienced a limited success. But the momentum was soon lost and another phase of stagnation followed.

From 1980s the persistence of poverty in the rural and the tribal areas despite decades of Government-led development schemes generated a renewed demand for reexamining the basic premises for effective local governance. The absence of meaningful participation at the local level was realized as a key for the failure of development programmes. Added to this decentralization was promoted as an end in itself as a political instrument for democratizing local governance. Many international donors and funding agencies such as the World Bank extended support to this policy shift, reflecting a general disappointment and frustration with the performance of centralized state authorities and bureaucracies in the years leading to the fall of the Soviet Socialist Block. It was thus argued that democratic decentralization in local governance was the *sine quanon* for the deepening of democracy as well as advancing development (Robinson 2005: 13). The Indian Government began to consider this issue in the late 1980s and it took more than a decade to pass the historic 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution for reviving and restructuring the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Keeping in view the drawbacks of the earlier Panchayati Raj system, 73rd amendment was introduced to generate participatory grassroots democracy which is rightly called a silent revolution. It provided for periodic election in every five years, constitution of Gram Sabha, reservation of seats for the women and to excluded groups like Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes in proportion to their population, constitution of state finance commission, etc. A total of 7.5 percent panchayat seats were reserved for the Scheduled Tribes in the country as a whole based on the guidelines of 73rd constitutional amendment. To govern the districts with a high proportion of Scheduled Tribes population in the nine states of central India where the scheduled areas of the constitution applies who largely depend upon forest economy for their livelihood, the PESA Act was
enacted in 1996 which mandates a minimum of 50 percent of tribal representation along with some special powers and facilities.\(^2\)

The main provisions of the PESA Act are given below:

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

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

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

(d) 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 one and half decades have been passed since PESA Act was introduced, whose impact on local governance did not receive due attention. Of course in the literature on Panchayati Raj system there is a paucity of studies on tribal areas from the beginning.\(^3\) However, the available limited literature subscribe to two different views. While one group holds the view that the provisions of PESA Act are likely to generate participation of the tribal communities in the local affairs leading to better development (Baviskar 2009; Mohanty 2001; Roy 2011) the other group argues that this Act may not generate tribal participation in the local decision making process as many of its provisions go against the tribal customary socio-economic practices, livelihood pattern and also the dominance of non-tribal population in the tribal areas (Sharma 2001; Mathew 2003; Mukul 1997; Menon 2007). It is found that the studies belonging to both the groups were undertaken at the early phase of PESA Act and most of them were based on experiences of few states which may not fit neatly in to the situation in states like Odisha where the initial condition of local governance, the socio-economic and historical feature of the tribal population are different. Hence it is imperative to examine how far the introduction of PESA Act has generated popular participation among the tribals and

\(^2\) The remaining districts in these nine of fifth schedule states are governed by the Panchayati Raj system under the 73rd amendments as in other states.

\(^3\) The literatures on tribal studies are largely focusing on their socio-cultural life neglecting many core developmental issues. The Panchayati Raj system did not generate interest among the anthropologists who were mostly engaged in tribal studies (Majumdar 1962; Furer-Haimendorf 1946; Ghurye 1963; Dubey, 1951; Elwin 1954; Bose 1941 and others).
its consequent effects on tribal development in backward states like Odisha, as it is an issue of major policy concern and debate.

1.2. Theoretical Insights

The issues on development became the subject of sociological discourse mainly after the Second World War. In the immediate post-war period the backwardness in countries like India was largely posed by the economists in terms of vicious circles of poverty and backwardness that seems to affect many parts of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Later subsequently the discourse on development was dominated by two different perspectives viz; the modernization and dependency perspectives. These two schools rose up under different historical contexts and were influenced by different theoretical traditions.

The modernization perspective emerged in the 1950s when the United States became the super power in the world. It intends to identify internal cultural defects as the reason for underdevelopment. The modernization theorists often view traditions as obstacles to economic development. Moreover, the basic assumptions of modernization theory are (a) it is a total social process associated with economic development in terms of the pre-conditions, concomitants and the consequence of the later (b) this process constitutes a universal pattern.

Among the social scientists who contributed much to this theory are Rostow (1960), Lipset (1959), McClelland (1967) Inkless (1974) and others. While Rostow (1960) analysed the stages of development and concentrated on factors needed to reach the path to modernization, Lipset (1959) argued that development sets off a series of profound social change that together tend to produce democracy. McClelland (1967) lays stress on motivations arguing that modernization cannot take place unless a given society strives for improvement, innovation and entrepreneurship. Similarly Inkels (1974) emphasizes on a model of modern personality which needs to be independent, active and open for new experiences, rationality etc. However, this modernization perspective is severely criticized on the ground of tradition-modern dichotomy, ethnocentrism and reductionism (Huntington 1976; Nisbet 1969; Bendix 1967).
Responding to the failure of modernization programme in Latin America, the neo-Marxists dependency perspective emerged as a popular alternative paradigm in the 1960s and 1970s for understanding development (Frank 1972; Amin 1971). It provided an explanation for the economic development in terms of the external influences, political, economic and cultural issues and development policies (Sunkel 1996: 23). The historical dimension of dependency relationship is highlighted in this explanation. The theorists belonging to this perspective argued that the peripheral regions within a nation remain backward because of their dependency on core regions for expertise, technology and capital investment. Most dependency theorists regard international capitalism as the motive force behind dependency relationships. Frank (1972:3) views that underdevelopment is in large part a historical product of continuing economic and other relations between the satellite underdeveloped and now developed metropolitan countries. He also argues that these relations are an essential part of the capitalism system on a world scale as a whole. In short, the dependency theorists view underdevelopment as a situation in which resources are being used in a way which benefit dominant regions and not the poorer pockets in which resources are found. The pattern of regional or national economic incorporation into the world economy depends not only upon the investment decisions of the national or international capital but also upon local class relations and economic interest of local elites (Tomaskovic-Devey and Roscigno 1997). Moreover, the dependency perspective focuses its attention almost exclusively to the economic mechanisms of domination and control to a lesser extent on the socio-political mechanisms (Tucker 1999). While dependency theory provides a useful starting point for analyzing the structural changes, particularly the changing class structure created within an underdeveloping regions (Amin 1971) its difficulties becomes apparent once it moves beyond these historically observable consequences of the dependency relations within individual satellites or dependencies (Fried Mann and Wayne, 1977). Besides, 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 (Attwood, 1992).

In view of the weaknesses of both modernization and dependency perspectives, alternative perspectives on development emerged in course of 1980s to explain the process
of development. One such perspective was developed by Jean Deeze and Amartya Sen (1989), (1990), (2002) and others (Curie 1999 and Ravalion 1992) known as “Public Action” perspective. In their series of writings Deeze and Sen (1989, 1890), illustrating a number of case studies from Africa, China, Sri Lanka, India and other parts, argued that public action facilitates the process of economic development. To quote them (1989: 258),

“public support played a major part in combating economic deprivation not only in economics that are commonly seen as ‘interventionist’ (e.g. Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea) …indeed the contrast between what was called ‘growth-mediated security’ (as in say, Brazil) relates closely to the extensive and well-planned use of public support in the former cases, in contrast with the latter…when it comes to enhancing basic human capabilities and in particular, beating persistence hunger and deprivation, the role played by public support including public delivery of health care and basic education is hard to replace”.

Stated precisely, they argue that public action and participation brings positive social transformations. They observe “…the public not merely as ‘the patient’ whose well-being commands attention but also as ‘the agent’ whose actions can transform society. Taking note that dual role is central to understanding the challenge of public action against hunger” (1989:279).

Public action as viewed by Dreze and Sen (1989: 259) is not just a question of public delivery and state initiative; it is a matter of participation by the public in the process of social change. It is difficult to neglect public needs within a liberal electoral democracy by the ruling class for the fear of exposure by press and political opposition and ultimately for the fear of electoral defeat (Currie 1998: 87). While writing in the context of India both Dreze and Sen (2002) notes the importance of public participation in a practice of local democracy in the context of 73rd Constitutional Amendment. They argue that participation in local democracy make people to learn to organize, to question established pattern of authority, to demand their rights, to resist corruption and so on. This learning process enhances the preparedness of the people not only for local democracy but also for political participation in general. Dreze and Sen also view that public participation have powerful positive role in both collaborative and adversarial ways (1989: 259). While collaboration of public calls for co-operative efforts for
successful implementation of Government policy, adversarial pressures from the public are also crucial for demanding better delivery of welfare measures (Dreze ans Sen, 1989: 259). Though this line of argument was widely accepted, the nuances of this types of participation was not clearly emphasized. Moreover, the differential efforts 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 participation contributes to development in the tribal areas and which types of participation are more effective and under what conditions. It also tries to access the collective effects of both types of participation in local development.

In the literature on inequality in the discrimination of power one finds two schools of thought debating during the 1950s and 1960s. They could be identified as “elite theorists” and “pluralist”. The elite theorists such as Mills (1956) and others argued that political power always went to those who enjoyed a high status and wealth. In other words, upper class always rules. As against this view, the pluralists led by Dahl (1961), Polsby (1962) and others argued that it was too simplistic a view to assume that upper classes always have greater power. According to them the distribution of power in a society was generally determined by the combination of resources and skills enjoyed by the people. There are many resources other than the status and wealth which enable people to acquire power. Besides, the skills for using one resources are not evenly distributed nor are they necessarily acquired by ones status and wealth. Thus, it is not just status and wealth but a plurality of factors that enable people to acquire power. This is the view held by the pluralists.

The present study tries to relate itself to this larger theoretical debate among elitists and pluralists on distribution of power in the context implementation of 73rd Constitutional Amendment and PESA Act in the tribal areas.