Chapter I

Introduction

One of the most popular state reforms that have opened ‘spaces’ for a wider and deeper participation of citizens at the local level has been the decentralisation process. Democratic decentralisation is a key aspect of the participatory governance agenda, and is associated with the institutionalisation of participation through regular elections, council hearings and, more recently, participatory budgeting (Blair, 2000). Most of the developing countries with more than five million inhabitants have implemented decentralisation, with varying degrees of financial and political power during the 1990s (World Bank 1995). Parallel to these developments, enabling legal frameworks and institutional channels for citizen participation at the local level have been developed in many of these countries. Although decentralisation had always been an important part of the democratic process in India after it gained Independence it had limited impact on the participation of people at the grass root level development programmes. Thus during the 1990s in tune with the global phenomenon important changes were made to increase the role of people in the development process by creating decentralised development bodies at the grass root level.

Democratisation and empowerment of local administration bodies is seen as leading to increasing participation of local communities, particularly the poor people in these bodies. This is particularly true of groups that have been traditionally marginalised by local political and social processes (Blair, 2000;
Studies from Africa, Asia and Latin America have shown that the introduction of elections, systems of transparency and rights of expression and association can empower poor people, enhancing their ability to participate in local decision-making and encouraging them to hold public officials to account (Blair, 2000; Crook and Manor, 1998; Crook and Sverrisson, 2001; Dreze and Sen, 2002; Manor, 1999; Rondinelli et al., 1989).

Democratic Decentralisation is the transfer of resources and power to lower level authorities which are largely or wholly independent of higher levels of government and which are democratic. It may be promoted for a number of reasons - administrative, fiscal, and political or others. However, among the reasons often given is to bring government closer to people and enhance their participation and interaction with local government officers in the affairs of the locality. It entails a new form of relationship between civil society and the local government. For instance, as Blair (1998:16) argues, the signal promise of decentralising government authority is enhancing democratic participation by encouraging more people to get involved in the politics that affect them, and making government more accountable by introducing citizen oversight and control through elections. If democracy lies in rule by the people, the promise of democratic decentralisation is to make that rule more immediate, direct, and productive. While the promise is great, a number of studies point to the gap that exists between the legal and institutional mechanisms for enhancing participation, and what actually occurs on the ground.
In India, certain cases of Democratic decentralisation have achieved both greater participation of marginal groups and social justice like in the left ruled states of West Bengal and Kerala. In both cases, decentralisation has been credited with ensuring the participation of subordinate groups – such as women, landless groups, sharecroppers and small peasants – and being directly linked to the pursuit of redistributive policies that have had pro-poor outcomes (Hariss, 2000: 15; Heller, 2001: 142).

Decentralised natural resources management has assumed importance as a development strategy, because of the claims that it can contribute towards sustainable livelihoods. Almost all the developing countries have initiated the process of decentralisation and India is one such country that was involved in this process for a long time. The introduction of development programmes with people’s participation as the core theme is an indication of the progress of this process. Particularly, in the programmes like Watershed Management, Water Users Associations, and Joint Forest Management this becomes evident.

Generally, the discussions on local self-governance or democratic decentralization and participatory natural resource management do not intersect and take place in somewhat independent domains. Baumann (1998; 2000) had also emphasized the need to bring the two domains together. It is argued that it is essential to discuss democratic decentralization and participatory natural resource management together because one cannot be understood or achieved without the understanding or achievement of the other. At the grass-root level, these issues can be translated into the functioning of various ‘participatory’ development programmes such as...
watershed development, water users associations, and joint forest management. These institutions assume a certain ‘capacity’ or ‘capability’ of people, especially those belonging to the “underprivileged” categories such as women, scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.

It becomes interesting to see what these programmes are doing to conservation of natural resources at the local level and the difference it would make compared to the management of these resources by the bureaucracy. Andhra Pradesh is one of the first states in India to introduce these participatory programmes on a massive scale throughout the state. It also had been in the forefront in the implementation of credit and thrift groups, and 73rd constitutional amendment. While all this appears to be good on paper, one has to look deeply at the empirical level to see how these are functioning and performing in diverse socio-economic and political situations.

1.1. **Statement of the problem**

Our study looks into the processes of Contestation, Negotiation, and Accommodation in the context of programmes for democratic decentralisation and natural resources management while examining the barriers to participation in these bodies. An attempt is made to understand how the changing power relations affect the social fabric of the village communities and its impact on the participation of various communities in the development sector at the local level. We looked at the whole process using the twin concepts of political capital and participation in understanding the dynamics of the decentralisation policy.
Both Democratic Decentralisation and Participatory Natural Resource Management imply empowerment of people to make their own decisions. The focus of the study would be to look into the implications of Democratic Decentralisation and Participatory Management in the implementation of various development programmes at the grass root level, viz., Watershed management, joint forest management, and water users associations.

From our study, it becomes evident that, one ‘cause’ does not produce the same effect everywhere. Different regions and villages have their own peculiarities and respond differently. Similarly, the position of different stakeholders varies. Thus we felt that it is not adequate to do the study in one village. For this reason we selected three villages whose caste composition varies significantly. This would allow one to see variations and diversity in terms of participation, awareness and the manner of contestation, negotiation, and accommodation of the existing power structure.

1.2. Objectives

- What is the impact of decentralisation on participation in the context of local governance and natural resources management?
- What are the changes brought about in the governance scenario at the village level due to the emergence of new leaders in place of the traditional elite?
- Whether decentralised natural resources management bodies and social capital are promoting sustainability?
- What is the affect of changing power relations on the social fabric of the village – how far is it leading to the empowerment of marginal sections?
1.3. Methodology:
Amangal mandal of Mahabubnagar district has been chosen as the study area.

There are 18 villages in the mandal spread over a radius of 55 Kms. Three villages\(^1\) were selected for intensive study but, otherwise, all the villages in the mandal were covered in the study. The study villages were selected after brief visits to all the villages in the mandal. Three specific criteria were followed for selection of the villages-

1. The presence of decentralised NRM bodies like Vana Samrakshana Samiti, Watershed Committee and Water Users Association.
2. The nature of dominance and control over the positions of power in the village.
3. The caste composition and associated land distribution of population\(^2\).

Importance was given to the presence of the households of Reddy caste which is the dominant one in the study area. Migration of rich peasants and members of educated upper caste households resulted in small number of Reddy households in the mandal. Other Backward Castes (OBCs\(^3\)) form the majority at the mandal level comprising 46% of the population. In the three study villages they form the majority of the population.

1.3.1. Reddypalle\(^4\): 
Reddypalle was selected as it had a substantial Reddy population and the village was under the control of one Reddy family for a very long period. The caste

\(^1\) See Map in Appendix III  
\(^2\) Initially the 2001 census figures were used to satisfy this criterion in the selection of study villages. Later a household survey was carried out in each of the study villages.  
\(^3\) These are generally referred to as BCs in Andhra Pradesh.  
\(^4\) For a detailed list of households see Appendix 2.
composition of the village was OC \(^5\) (24.3%), OBC (49.7%), SC (22%), ST (2%), Muslim (2%).

### 1.3.2. Pahadipur:

Pahadipur was selected as the village was controlled by various categories, starting from the *inamdari*\(^6\) Muslims followed by the money lending Vysyas and Reddys. Presently, the power base is slowly shifting towards the OBCs. This is unique as no other village had such diverse elements of dominance. Pahadipur comprises OC (7%), OBC (52.40%) ST (24%), SC (15%), Muslim (1.60%).

### 1.3.3. Edigapalle:

Edigapalle was a new panchayat as it got the status in 1988 and from the beginning the OBCs controlled the panchayat affairs. This is also a unique case in the mandal. Edigapalle comprises of OC (11%), OBC (71%), SC (11%), ST (5%), Muslim (2%).

The idea was to look at the process of contestation and negotiation between various communities with regard to power and the consequent developments which had their impact on participation and development.

### 1.3.4. Preliminary Study:

Preliminary study was carried out for two months during May-June 2001. Janmabhoomi\(^7\) programme was being carried out at that point of time so it was

---

\(^5\) Other Castes (OC); OBC was used here although in AP they were referred to as BCs as it means SCs and STs also. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) were the other categories of population in the study villages.

\(^6\) Pahadipur was an inamdari village, which means it was given as an *inam* (gift for offering a service) to maintain a shelter and provide for the Nizam and his entourage during his hunting trips. Most of the Muslim families started migrating to Hyderabad after police action, culminating in late 1980s. Now very few families remain.

\(^7\) Janmabhoomi was a campaign based program of TDP government that took place during 1997-2004.
much easier to interact with various leaders, officials and people as gramsabhas were being conducted as part of the programme in each and every village. During this period, I gathered information about villages in the mandal. Finally we selected the three villages, keeping various requirements of the study in view.

1.3.5. Data Collection:
Fieldwork was carried out by using participant observation method by staying in the villages. Basic information was gathered through a structured questionnaire (for household survey) followed by informal in depth interviews, and group discussions during a period of fourteen months stretched over three years during 2001 to 2004. Brief trips were made to the field again during 2006. After spending an initial time of four months in the field, specific trips were made to attend meetings of the gram panchayat and general body meetings of the NRM bodies. I did not try to collect data from day one of my field work. Instead I tried to cultivate relationships with people from various communities, leaders, and bureaucrats which proved immensely helpful when I started my data collection.

1.3.6. Specific Research Questions
Although I had already set some preliminary questions to start the dialogue, I need a set of questions, which would be more ‘topical’ or ‘specific’ so as to enable generation of information at the field level (Stake, 1995). I would then link them to the main research questions in the form of ‘theoretical abstraction’ while interpreting and evaluating the findings against theories I set in the conceptual framework. With the paradigmatic position of this inquiry, it was not possible to develop such specific research questions outside the social setting because I needed
to be context-specific. The paradigmatic understanding only gave me a picture of whatever the data might be, in order to develop some strategic questions (Strauss and Corbin 1998).

1.3.7. Framework of specific research questions
Methodologically, I concentrated on understanding people’s perception about participation and I applied similar questions to the traditionally dominant groups. This enabled me to compare the perceptions of both the people and the dominant sections regarding their idea on participation and the negotiation processes involved.
It was based on these specific questions that the relevant research methods were selected and used to generate data.

1.3.8. Interviewing:
We cannot rely on what people say without exploring what they are not directly saying, but which we know exists in their framework of understanding. We have to actively seek for both sides of the contrast during our conversation with them so as to get to their understanding, as it exists in their minds. We will otherwise jump to conclusions of what we think people mean, especially where something sounds familiar to us. It is this active seeking for meanings as they exist in people’s mental framework without impeding the flow of the conversations that makes this kind of interviewing different from the other types of open-ended interviews.

1.3.9. Focus group interviews:
The first step was to interview some selected people individually. Upon analysis of the data, a number of perceptual issues were noted as common to most of the new
leaders in the village. These were mostly those that had to come to power after the introduction of DNRM bodies and reservations in panchayats. In this case, I gained more clarity on their perceptions in focus group discussions, as people were asking questions to each other and also encouraging one another.

1.3.10. Observations:
There were several ways of doing this. For instance, I observed the interactions during meetings which was a more direct type of observation, the ‘participant as observer’ approach (Alder and Alder, 1994). Another way of observing was during interviews, where I observed the interviewees conduct in both individual and focus groups discussion aspect, for conceptualizing the perceptions of both people and leaders about participation and sustainability because as Collins rightly argues. ….

Interviews are social interactions in which meaning is necessarily negotiated between a numbers of selves (and in which power may be more or less shared) (Collins, 1998, section 1.6).

Ethical issues arise when the researcher deliberately conceals his or her position while living among people who are being studied, in order to get into their personal lives without their consent (Bulmer, 1982). Although I did not deceive them about the purpose of my study I also did not tell them what exactly I was studying because study of power relations is a complex topic which requires a lot of patience from the researcher.

Central Government Ministerial Reports, Andhra Pradesh Government Orders, Statistical Reports of the government of Andhra Pradesh, Census of India Reports and also information from various books, periodicals, journals, unpublished
doctoral theses, daily newspapers and pamphlets were used to collect secondary data.

1.4. Scheme of Chapters:
This thesis consists of eight chapters including the introduction and conclusion.

The first chapter provides a brief introduction to the process of decentralisation followed by methodology.

Second chapter provides a discussion on the conceptual framework of Democratic Decentralisation. In this chapter important concepts like various forms of decentralisation was traced out which was followed by the important concept of participation and its importance in the decentralised governance. An attempt has been made to explore the applicability of the concept of social capital which was followed by the concept of political capital.

The third chapter provides a background to the study as the formation of the state of Andhra Pradesh is discussed followed by a small section on Telangana movement and political developments in the state and the reform process in the regimes of Chandrababu Naidu and YS Rajasekhar Reddy (YSR). A brief history of Panchayat Raj in Andhra Pradesh is given followed by a glance at the Janmabhoomi programme of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) government and a list of welfare schemes introduced by YSR. This section is followed by the institutional structure of the Panchayat Raj and the NRM bodies where in the manner of election to Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRIs) and the formation of
committees in Joint Forest Management (JFM), Watershed and Water Users Associations (WUAs) has been outlined.

The fourth chapter describes the field setting. A profile of the district, mandal and the study villages is given in this chapter including an introduction to various coalitions and power groups in the study villages. The following three chapters deal with analysis of field data.

The fifth chapter focuses on the explanation of the interplay of power relations between the existing elite and the newly emergent political class belonging to backward communities. Applying the concept of ‘spaces for participation’ of Cornwall and effort had been made to look into the effect of this on the participation of newly elected members in the Panchayats and the pressure and control exerted by existing elite.

The sixth chapter looked into the functioning of various NRM bodies like JFM, WS and WUAs. This chapter looks into the actual functioning of the new leaders within the constraints imposed by the existing elite. We tried to see what was happening to the chief objective of these programmes – that of participatory development and sustainability and how various stakeholders perceived it.

The seventh is a mini chapter in which we looked at the concept of power as the elected representatives of local bodies both old and new cling on to some position of power once they got elected. We tried to explain this phenomenon by using the concepts of Patronage, Co-option and Accommodation.
The eighth chapter concludes the thesis. In this chapter a brief summary of the findings of the study was given followed by the observations and suggestions for future study.