FINDINGS,
POLICY PRESCRIPTIONS AND
CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY
CHAPTER 7
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In this chapter a sincere attempt is made to specify the findings, policy prescriptions and conclusions of the study.

Findings:

The Constitution (Seventy-third Amendment) Act, 1992, is a great revolution in the history of rural local-government. It has a noble objective to empower people to have a greater say and role in their own affairs at the grass-root level in order to bring a marginal socio-economic change in rural areas. The establishment of Village Panchayat and particularly recently constituted Zilla Panchayat has created a new atmosphere and a new culture in developmental administration. This has made the development departments to come under popular control, which has resulted in efficiency and effectiveness in their performances. The entire process has not only democratised development administration, but also has made it more receptive to the needs of the people.

Organisationally the system is sound but there are certain weaknesses. True, any system will have its weaknesses. It is necessary to
find out the faults and make all possible efforts to rectify them. One of the major dangers is the gap between the administration and the people. Another defect is inadequate staff at the Village Panchayat level. The role and the financial powers of the Zilla Panchayat are not properly conceived. The micro level planning is very poor and neglected.

Since inception, the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been dominated by the members of the higher castes and of land owning communities in vast disproportion to their respective share in the population. This is true with regard to recently formed South Goa Zilla Panchayat. Though the new leadership is emerging, it is confined to the dominant caste, which goes against the democratic spirit. Women and the backward class communities have been able to mobilise themselves more than the requisite reservations. This is an indication of political development because these categories were most un-organised all these days. A similar trend is seen in Village Panchayats. New leadership, which is educated and younger in age, is emerging. Higher castes have strongly represented while the minor castes have marginal representation. Even the bureaucracy has continuously supported this trend, in order to derive some benefits from it.

One notable feature is that barring a few, most of the officials at the Village Panchayat level and the Block level have a positive orientation
towards the new system since the new system assigns many important powers and responsibilities on them. This is a good sign keeping in view their responsibilities and commitment to development. A few officials still lack the commitment and are averse to popular control. Also people are often found complaining against bureaucracy. This has resulted in some sort of clashes as reported in newspapers and discussed in Village Panchayat and Gram Panchayat meetings. As regards the official and non-official relationship, a sound relationship is emerging. This may be due to the fact that under the new Act, the role of officials and non-officials has been specified with regard to the administration, formulation and implementation of developmental plans. There is a possibility of confrontation in the absence of any role specificity. Normally there exists a sound relationship between the Secretary and the Sarpanch of the Village Panchayat, though there are always differences with regards to specific issues. In such relationship, the personalities of the Secretary and the Sarpanch are very important. If they are objective and accommodative in nature, a harmonious relationship can develop between these two individuals.

The M.L.As. and M.Ps. have taken great interest in this new system. The reason behind this interest is both private as well as public. In Goa, many ministers and legislators have risen through the panchayats. They
consider these institutions as an extra source of power and patronage. Most of the ministers have their regular residence in the villages. This enables them to monitor and control the panchayats even on minor issues. Most of the developmental projects that fall under the panchayat's jurisdiction are directed and controlled by the ministers. There are instances, where the Government has its approval and clearance to private industrial projects, polluting industries and gifted land to multinationals or big industrial houses without the consent of the concerned panchayats. In order to achieve the objective of self-government, interference by the M.L.As. and M.Ps. in the grassroots must be avoided.

The Goa Panchayati Raj Act spells out the powers and responsibilities of the Village Panchayat and the Zilla panchayat. The State Finance Commission has strongly recommended devolution of functions, functionaries and finances to the Village Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat. There is a mismatch between the functions allotted to the village panchayats and the resources at their disposal. The village panchayats have been assigned numerous functions, but their resource base is weak. The crux of the problem lies in good financial management by these institutions. The fact is that village panchayats have been assigned numerous taxation powers, but as such, they are shy to go in for additional taxation or comprehensive
imposts. This is true of local self-government institutions in the country. It is very paradoxical that, on the one hand local self-government institutions have been given wide ranging powers, but on the other hand matching funds are not provided, with the result that there is no relationship between power and responsibility.

A significant issue, which has arisen, is whether the State of Goa requires a three-tier system or a two-tier system. There are divergent views on this issue. Article 243B(2) of the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992, provides an option as regards the intermediate level, i.e. the Panchayat Samiti, in the state having a population not exceeding 20 lakhs. This implies that the states have no choice with regard to two-tier system. The top level politicians who were in favour of three-tier system, to give effect to this, passed the Goa Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 1999. However, by and large, the people are not inclined towards three tier system in view of the financial burden that is created on the State Exchequer. It is also not advisable for a small state with a population of 12 lakhs. There is another group, which opines that, Goa does not require even the two-tier system, but should continue with the existing single tier system only. The fact is that, the politicians and the bureaucrats do not want to part with the powers they have enjoyed all these years under a single tier system. Besides,
Goa may not get a special concession from the mandatory requirement of Zilla Panchayat. In the view of the above facts, the present Government has dropped completely the idea of three-tier system and has constituted two-tier system, i.e., the Village Panchayats and the Zilla Panchayats, in February 2000, in accordance with the Goa Panchayati Raj Act, 1994.

Planning at the grass-root level is very weak. Not much effort has been made by the state government to empower the panchayats with the authority necessary to carry out the responsibility of preparing plans for economic development and social justice and implementing the plans. All the villages in the state are brought under Town Planning Act with the intention to undertake planning at the grassroot level. Also the Town and Country Planning Department has been assigned with the task of preparing Zonal Plans and Outline Development Plans in the light of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in order to empower the local bodies to prepare the plans. However no effort has been made in this direction. Planning at the village level is mainly confined to allocation of schemes and targets. Planning is not undertaken as an independent exercise. This is due to heavy reliance for funding on government and inadequate staff. Hence planning from below is neither realistic, nor scientific in its manifestation.
The development work of the village panchayats is fairly satisfactory, but there is still much scope for improvement in desired directions. Our study reveals that, the available finances and resources have not been fully utilised by the village panchayats. This is evident from the opening balance shown in the account sheet that is carried over from one year to the next. The failure to use fully the earmarked funds is a bad reflection on the working of the village panchayats.

Till the formation of Zilla Panchayats, the Block Development Officer played a mediator role between the Village Panchayats and Government. The officer only directed and supervised the functioning of the Village Panchayats. Now, since the Zilla Panchayat has been constituted the Block Development Officer’s position and role has to be properly conceived. The Officer’s services need to be utilised effectively, so as to strengthen local self-government units.

Gramsabha is an institutional approach to popular participation. It is regarded as the grass-root organisation of democracy. Gramsabhas in the initial stages proved very effective and villagers were very enthusiastic in participating in them. Gradually the rural population has lost interest due to non-fulfillment of the promises by the village panchayats. The general notion prevalent among them is that, the members are corrupt. In order to
strengthen the Gramsabha and get their fuller participation, the Government has issued circular emphasising the need to have regular and frequent meetings of these bodies. The Zilla Panchayat shall make all possible efforts to energise them in a functional manner.

The political parties are expected to keep themselves away from the grassroot institutions. But indirectly, the parties influence and control the local issues. This has resulted in some kind of bias in the working of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Most of the members are inclined towards one or the other political party. Many issues in the village panchayat meetings are discussed on political lines, there is greater threat to the survival of these institutions if the village panchayats and the gramsabhas get divided politically. Then everything done by one side would be opposed by the other and vice versa. It is suggested that, conventions or norms should be established, which can guide the operational dimension of the village panchayats and the zilla panchayats. Gramsabha, which is a primary body of people’s democracy, has to be an active body, meeting regularly, discussing common problems and evolving co-operative and collective forms of action to manage their affairs. Hence the Gramsabha must be free from all social evils and it must have a spiritual fibre, which will unite all forces at the grassroot level.
No sincere effort has been made either by the State Government or by the village panchayat to constitute the various committees as provided by the new Act. The committees facilitate to carry out effectively the diverse functions and responsibilities of the panchayats. This shows that, either the leaders are not ready to part away with their powers or they are not interested in developmental activities. The rural institutions are handicapped without the committees.

The debates and discussions on the functions and the finances of the Panchayati Raj have been often conducted, while the crucial subject of their operational autonomy has received hardly any attention. Panchayat bodies are involved in the vital task of socio-economic reconstruction of rural India. Confidence in their performance is a part of national commitment to democratic institutions. Administrative autonomy is the essence of self-governance and hence control should be essentially exceptional. It is true that, the government officials and local politicians exercise most of the controls. With all these restrictions and controls exercised from the above, Panchayat bodies are reduced to the status of agents of State Governments. Hence excessive control or interference in local affairs will defeat the very purpose of democratic decentralisation.
The Panchayat Raj Act provides for an independent State Election Commission and State Finance Commission. But in fact these institutions have been sidelined and deliberately left ad-hoc and useless. The State Finance Commission must expedite recommendations which shall be immediately implemented to strengthen the finances of Panchayati Raj Institutions which will enable them to take up the task of rural development by their own processes. The State Election Commission continues to function on an ad-hoc basis. It consists of bureaucrats, who are responsible and answerable to the State Government. Thus the rural institutions are under pressure from the bureaucracy, who do not want to return the power that they have grabbed. These should immediately become autonomous bodies, which could prevent the misuse of power by the bureaucracy and local politicians, who may be projecting state or central politician's interests, which often run contrary to the needs of the village community.

The way the developments are taking place and the directions in which the things are moving are not healthy indications to these rural institutions. The Amendment was not brought in as a genuine effort to decentralise power to the villages. In fact, while drafting the Constitution, 50 years ago, it was dismissed by merely adding it to the Directive Principles of State Policy. Today, the Amendment has been brought in as a political
expediency of the politicians at the Center. The intention is to by-pass State Government and bring Panchayati Raj Institutions directly under the control of Central Government. In order to prevent this, the Gramsabhas, Gram Panchayats, Taluka Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Panchayats should come together and through meetings and other peaceful methods should pressurise the State and Central Governments to implement the Amendment in letter and spirit.

Recommendations (Policy Prescriptions):

The above discussion has shown that the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been confronted with number of problems in administration, development, finance and other aspects. In order to strengthen the Panchayati Raj Institutions in South Goa District, the following steps may be initiated:

1. On the basis of review of the historical evolution of rural institutions in Goa, the present condition in the State and the prevailing general opinion, undoubtedly it can be said that a single tier system is preferable in the state. However the state can sustain two-tiers due to mandatory requirement by the Amendment, but a three-tier system is not at all recommendable in the State.
2. It is necessary to strengthen the administrative setup at the village and district levels, since the staff is inadequate particularly at the Village Panchayat level. Immediate measures should be undertaken to increase the number of staff. A new technical post has to be created at the Village Panchayat level to look after planning and development works.

3. In order to develop effective linkages and means of communication between the Village Panchayats and between the Village Panchayat and Zilla Panchayat, either the Adhyaskha or Upadhyaksha or Chairman of Standing Committees of the Zilla Panchayat should be designated as a contact person.

4. To make these self-government institutions work in a desired direction, the State government should make compulsory for the formation of various Committees at the village and district levels.

5. The post of Block Development Officer should be upgraded to Class 1 and should be given more powers.

6. Government officials must develop a sense of commitment to the cause of the upliftment of the rural population. This calls for a great deal of tolerance, patience and understanding of the rural problems in terms of public interest.
7. The Government should take punitive steps against those elected representatives who take decisions contrary to the established procedures, rules and regulations. Due to ignorance or lack of training in legal matters, the elected representative may take wrong decisions. In this connection, a job-training course could be provided and that is based upon problem solving and illustrated by simple case studies. The Government should also devise ways and means to check undue pressures brought by non-officials and political parties by making suitable provisions in the Act.

8. The members of Legislative Assembly and Council should evince keen interest and participation in the Zilla Panchayat deliberations so that the traditions of parliamentary democracy take roots gradually.

9. In order to make the Panchayati Raj Institutions autonomous units, they must be encouraged to raise their own resources instead of depending on the Government grants particularly the Village Panchayats. The Zilla Panchayats should be given funds in accordance to the recommendations of the State Finance Commission, so that the planned schemes and developmental programmes are undertaken effectively. It is also suggested that steps should be taken to ensure proper utilisation of the available finances and resources.
10. The planning process should be strengthened at the Zilla Panchayat level through the establishment of District Planning Committee. The planning staff must be well equipped with the latest tools of planning management. The staff must be provided in-service training to upgrade their skills. Further, the infrastructure of the planning wing should also be upgraded by providing better equipment and skilled human resources.

11. The entire structure of the panchayat system is meant to be rooted in the Gramsabha. With the introduction of new Act, the Village Panchayats have been prompt in convening the Gramsabha meetings. The attendance at these meetings is generally poor since the villagers are apathetic towards the panchayats. The reason is that the commitments made by the village panchayat are more often not honoured. The members do not enjoy good reputation since they are regarded as incompetent, inconsequential and good for nothing opportunists. Hence the villagers lose interest and keep away from the Gramsabha meetings. Therefore the Village Panchayats and the Zilla Panchayats must keep the villagers informed about the progress of development works carried out in their jurisdiction and make serious and sincere efforts to successfully complete the works on hand. This is how they can win the
confidence and support of the rural masses. Similarly to make the administration transparent, a kind of ‘bottom-up’ approach to development planning will ensure accountability of local administration to the people.

12. Most of the funds of village panchayat are made by the Government grants only. The reluctance to impose and collect taxes is almost universal. Inadequate attention to development programmes and shyness to enforce direct taxation and consequent dependence on government for funds are all inter related maladies. The members of the selected village panchayats should not be hesitant, on the contrary they must enthuse the local people to promptly pay their taxes. Those taxpayers that are regular in payment must be given some concession and incentives to boost up the tax collection programmes.

13. Though it is widely felt that certain degree of State control of Panchayat Raj bodies is imperative for obvious reasons, however excessive control or interference in local affairs would defeat the very purpose of democratic decentralisation. What is desired and also justified is broad supervision followed by guidance. Intervention should be in the form of advise and control should be exercised in unavoidable circumstances.
14. It is widely felt that, the operation of caste and class forces at the village level together with the party politics paralyses the Gramsabhas. There is always a vicious circle. Unless the development workers find a non-violent way to break out of this vicious circle, Gramsabha cannot become active and unless it becomes active, forces cannot be broken.

CONCLUSION:

The introduction of the new system of Panchayat Raj through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment gives Constitutional status to local bodies has brought about considerable change in the rural areas of the South Goa District. The changes are observed mainly in four directions. Firstly, changes have been brought in developmental administration by way of new system, new principles and a new way of working. Secondly, changes have been observed due to the emerging awareness among the villagers and their active involvement in the decision-making processes. Thirdly, changes have been inevitable due to the constitution of an independent State Finance Commission and State Election Commission. Lastly, changes have been seen in rural life due to the consensus veering round the view that, the elections to the village panchayats should be held on non-party basis.

Changes in development administration have resulted in enhancing the
efficiency and effectiveness of government departments in providing services to the rural masses. This is evident from the perception of officials as well as members. Similarly the new mode of working of these rural bodies has generated hopes and aspirations among the villagers about economic development. The new Panchayati Raj system is expected to lead to an open and cleaner administration at the district and lower levels. The operation of the village panchayats has shown positive success in the field of rural development. In the selected village panchayats, their performance in the field of rural water supply, electricity, medical and public health, allocation of houses, education, promotion of fisheries and horticulture and providing financial assistance to the rural unemployed youth, the progress has been very impressive. The Amendment recognises Gramsabha as basic institution, which can bring all the people including the weaker sections into common programmes to be carried out with the assistance of administration.

The Act envisages egalitarian society by providing reservation for women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes. Participation of women and all other marginalised sections of society in Panchayat Raj institutions will change the roots of the Indian democracy. Thus the village would emerge as an organised unit to look after its internal administration, development and economy.
The two institutions that can make the Constitutional Amendment meaningful are the State Finance Commission and State Election Commission. Tracks have been set for strengthening the Panchayats by making them administratively and financially viable units. State Finance Commission shall make recommendations on the powers and responsibilities to be assigned to the Panchayats and provide for devolution of funds from the State to the Panchayats and sharing of state revenue between the State and the Panchayats. These recommendations should be immediately implemented to strengthen the finances of the Panchayat Raj Institutions, which will enable them to take up the task of rural development, by their own processes. Likewise the State Election Commission is constituted to supervise, direct and control the preparation of electoral rolls for and the conduct of all elections to the Panchayats. The commission shall avoid delays in holding elections and provide for conduct of free and fair elections.

Though the operation of political parties at the grassroot level helps mobilisation and greater participation of rural people, it is widely felt that party politics contribute to a great extent to the downfall of the Panchayat Raj system. It is presumed that party-based elections give way to political conflicts at the local level. The candidates better known in the local area can better understand and attend to local problems than a party sponsored
candidate who mainly concentrates on promotion of party interests. Though the Act does not mention anything about this, the scholars are arriving at the consensus to keep the political parties away from the local issues.

Inspite of these achievements, the noble experiment is plagued with number of problems, complexities, weaknesses and inadequacies which have been already discussed in the course of study. The structural inadequacies like absence of Zilla Panchayat till recently have paralised the working of rural institutions to a great extent. Lack of adequate and technical staff particularly at the village panchayat level is a persistent reality. The status and role of the Block Development Officer has to be enhanced under the new system. There is no planning department for the rural areas. As a result of this micro level planning is very poor. The existing planning personnel lacks proper training and requisite skills. The existing bureaucracy is ill-suited to meet the momentous challenges of this bold and noble experiment. The bureaucrats, answerable to the Government do not want to part with the power that they have grabbed. They are continuously engaged in protecting and projecting the politician’s interests who run contrary to the needs of village community. Inadequate financial resources are a major problem of the village Panchayats. The fact is that the problem is not only inadequate finances, but also centralisation of finances thereby reducing the
status of these institutions as mere agents of State Government. The Panchayats have not effectively used their powers to mobilise resources to their maximum extent. All these negative factors go against the spirit of decentralisation and local self-government.

A remarkable development under the new system is that the emerging leadership in the Panchayati Raj Institutions is young and educated. This may eventually lead to a kind of rational leadership. However leadership is dominated by the dominant castes of rural society which violates the true spirit of democracy. Leadership must be representative of the rural masses. The poor and marginalised sections of the rural society have not been able to capture the leadership in the Zilla Panchayat. However women and weaker sections have been able to represent in the village panchayats as per the reservations provided by the Amendment. Whatever the nature of leadership, it must strive to bring about socio-economic development as early as possible.

Gramsabha is a basic institution of the new direct democracy. It is based on direct participation by the people. It functioned successfully in the initial stages. Of late, this institution is declining, because of lack of interest of the rural masses.
Political parties have played a major role in mobilising the rural people. But they have also created new problems like factions, groups, clashes and violence. Elections fought on party basis have given a way for rampant misuse of muscle power, money power, casteism and communalism in the panchayat elections. The fact is that groupism among the rural folk has become order of the day, resulting in political violence. Hence, the researcher strongly feels that the Panchayati Raj system needs to be encouraged without party politics particularly at the village level. Though in reality, parliamentary democratic system can not be de-linked from the party politics, it should be the moral responsibility of every party person to keep away from the village politics.

The success of the Panchayati Raj Institutions depends upon three important factors. One is commitment, the second is independent finance and the third is active participation by the Gramsabha. Commitment on the part of elected leaders to serve the people in a spirit of dedication is necessary. This is a basic requirement without which no system can flourish. Similarly, commitment on the part of development functionaries, the State Government and the state leaders is another important requirement. Adequate funding is a crucial ingredient in making these institutions self-reliant and independent. Hence, these bodies should be provided with independent finance, so that they can function and plan as genuine decentralised units of government. The success of decentralisation directly
depends upon the active participation of the rural masses. For this, the Gramsabha should develop into a strong and active organisation, making the entire system answerable and accountable to the people at large. This is the primary objective of democratic decentralisation.

To conclude, this study has consistently taken the stand that rural socio-economic revitalisation is sine-qua-non of the noble experiment of democratic decentralisation. The rural local self-government institution like the Zilla Panchayat has a vital role to play in creating new ethos and new political culture at the grass-root level. The rural institutions can prove to be the backbone of Indian democracy.

This study, based on empirical research, has made a thorough study of the various dimensions of the functioning of the South Goa Zilla Panchayat and the selected village panchayats of Nuvem, Paroda, Sancoale and Verna.

Hopefully, this study, based on empirical research, has made an indepth study of official and non-official relations and fiscal administration, with regard to selected village panchayats. Meaningful interaction between the officials and non-officials coupled with sound fiscal practices can go a long way in bringing about socio-economic regeneration of the rural masses. People's participation through self-help and financial autonomy of the local Government Institutions, are the two most important requirements at this juncture in the existing situation.