

Rural Local Governance in Karnataka: Issues and Trends

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ABSTRACT: The paper presents the rural local governance in Karnataka and Issues and trends. India is mainly dependent on agriculture; nearly 65 per cent of the people live in rural areas. The rural people have to be involved in planning, decision making, monitoring and execution of development programmes in order to hasten the process of development. Unfortunately the people are not actively involved in the development process. There are some difficulties in the present system, from top to bottom of rural local bodies. The dawn of 21st century is marked by decentralized governance both as a strategy and a philosophy to bring about reforms and changes in democracies. As in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, Karnataka has a long history of local governance dating right back to the Vedic ages. But over the centuries the region witnessed a gradual decline of village autonomy. This trend got accentuated with the advent of the British rule. The historical background of local self-government in Karnataka can be broadly classified into the following phases i.e., 1978-82, 1983-86 and 1986-1993. Various committees have been constituted for devolution of functions in their respective spheres to the three tiers of panchayats. The decentralization and delegation of powers and functions to panchayats is a continuous and dynamic process. The present system is always open to the idea of delegating even more powers and functions to the rural local bodies especially the Grama Panchayats. As per as financial autonomy is concerned, the panchayats in the State are well placed. Funds are provided according to the recommendations of the SFC. Each GP gets on an average Rs. 1 crore approximately. There are other problems observed in the PRIs. The GPs have joint cheque signing powers.

India is mainly dependent on agriculture; nearly 65 per cent of the people live in rural areas. The rural people have to be involved in planning, decision making, monitoring and execution of development programmes in order to hasten the process of development. Unfortunately the people are not actively involved in the development process. There are some difficulties in the present system, from top to bottom of rural local bodies. The programmes and mechanisms are planned but without much involvement of villages. There is an urgent need to bring some changes in the existing system. The main reason for non achievement of the expected results from any development programmes being implemented by the government in the rural areas has been the lack of strong administrative and development machinery at the village level. Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the best instruments to meet the needs of people as the programmes are a manifestation of the needs of the masses at local level. Active involvement of the PRIs in the planning process will provide a better climate for people's participation in the implementation of the plan.

Keywords: PRIs phases, Governance, functional, Financial.

I. MEANING OF DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE

The dawn of 21st century is marked by decentralized governance both as a strategy and a philosophy to bring about reforms and changes in democracies. This change is expected to lead the transparency, responsiveness and accountability and ensure good governance. Today decentralization is playing an important role in local governments and is the most significant theme in the development discourse. In the present context of rapid social change and development activities, debureaucratization and decentralization have been found to be much more appropriate to deal with contemporary trends of globalization, liberalization and privatization. There are several meanings attributed to decentralized governance. The following meaning is generally accepted by all; Decentralized Governance has been used interchangeably with concepts like 'local governance', 'local self-governance', 'panchayat administration', 'decentralization panchayat governance' all imply the same phenomenon of decentralization as a political reform process aimed at further democratizing of the state.

II. FEATURES OF DECENTRALIZED GOVERNANCE

Decentralization leads to the empowerment of the local people through deconcentration and devolution. Decentralized governance seeks to tap local initiatives and practices by involving grassroots organizations such as self-help groups. Representative democracy and participatory democracy both become possible through decentralized governance. An important feature of decentralized governance is interactive policy making which

leads to decentralized decision making. Interactive policy is a process where government and non-governmental sectors such private sector, non-governmental organizations, communities, grass roots organizations, pressure groups participate in decision-making so as to influence issues and suggest alternatives. Therefore, decentralized governance is an alternative strategy of development, which is people-centered, participatory and bottom-up development mechanism. Decentralized governance is good for the people. The people will have a better understanding of what the government does. It is a concept based on the right of the people to initiate and execute policy decisions in an autonomous manner. It is a more effective way of meeting local needs. It also provides a mechanism which is responsive to the variety of issues encountered from time to time. Decentralized governance enable poor people to take part in politics, which is necessary for successful implementation of anti-poverty programmes.

III. EVOLUTION OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN KARNATAKA (BRIEF)

As in other parts of the Indian subcontinent, Karnataka has a long history of local governance dating right back to the Vedic ages. But over the centuries the region witnessed a gradual decline of village autonomy. This trend got accentuated with the advent of the British rule. During the early years as colonizers, they were primarily interested in consolidating their territorial gains. However, during the later half of the 19th century, for administrative convenience, the concept of self governance was revived by the imperial government through attempts made by Lord Mayo, Lord Ripon and the subsequent Montague-Chelmsford Constitutional reforms of 1919 which closely followed the 1875 report on the Decentralization Commission. All these measures evolved during the pre- and post-independence era, had their impact on the new legislation, the Mysore Village Panchayats and Local Boards Act 1959.

The historical background of local self-government in Karnataka can be broadly classified into the following phases.

I. 1978-82

The first phase began in 1978 by building up the most important elements of district planning. To begin with, at the district level, two development planning committees were created, that is 'District Planning Committee' (DPC) and District Development Councils (DDC). DPC comprises professionals, planners, district heads of departments and other technical experts in this subject, with the Deputy Commissioner of District as its chairman. This committee prepared the draft district plans for the districts. DDC were reconstituted with people's representatives like, MLAs, MLCs MPs and people's representatives at grassroots level, with a number around 100 people in a district. Deputy Commissioner of the district is the chairman of the Council.

II. 1983-86

The second phase of district planning starts from 1983 to 1986. In this period, more control and devolution of funds and schemes were brought according to the well wishes of state level heads and planning machinery. The district plans presented to the state government in the first phase underwent drastic changes at the heads of state planning department. This phase was major change, instead of releasing lump-sum allocation for all sectors for the district, minor-headwise outlays under each sector were provided.

III. 1986-1993

The third phase of District Planning in Karnataka starts with the implementation of the Act of 1985. The Act of 1985 received Presidential assent on 10th July, 1985 and was gazetted on 2nd August 1985. The necessary rules and orders under the relevant provisions of the Act were issued from 1985 onwards for the implementation of the Act. And finally the Act was implemented on 1st April 1987. When the Act of 1985 was implemented, there were 19 ZPs, 2525 Mandal Panchayats and 27024 Grama Sabhas covering a population of 264 lakhs by which 71 per cent of the rural population of the State came under the purview of the Act. This Act gives institutional arrangements for decision making with people's participation, administrative arrangements for delegation of power and financial arrangements for devolution of funds and schemes to the lower levels from the state for decentralized planning in Karnataka. The set-up for the district planning was changed altogether along with the change in Panchayati Raj system.

In the Karnataka Zilla Panchayats, Taluk Panchayats, Mandal Panchayats, the Nyaya Panchayats Act 1983 was brought into operation from 1st April 1987. It was modeled on the Ashok Mehta Committee. It was an ex-officio body of elected bodies at the village and district levels and ex-officio body at the taluk level. Elections to these bodies were held in January 1987 establishing 2,489 Mandal Panchayats for a cluster of villages having a population between 8,000 and 12,000. A body of village elected and called the 'Grama Sabha' was intended to be a body to oversee the functioning of Mandal Panchayats was also legally established as a novel feature.

One of the major responsibilities of the Department is in the realm of implementing the provisions of the Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act 1993 to achieve democratic decentralization in the governance of the state's rural areas. The Department coordinates the process of the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions under

the above legislation and monitors their functioning in order to ensure that Panchayati Raj Institutions in the State function as viable and vibrant institutions of Local Self-Government.

Karnataka has the distinction of enacting a comprehensive Panchayati Raj Act which incorporates all the essential features of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. The Act came into force from May 10, 1993, within a few days of 73rd Constitution amendment was adopted. The Karnataka Panchayati Raj Act 1993 provided for a elected three-tier system at the village (Gram Panchayat), taluk (Taluk Panchayati Samiti) and district (Zilla Panchayat) levels (KPR Act 1993).

Panchayati Raj system in Karnataka has mainly a three tier structure, spatially speaking panchayat at village/group of villages level, Taluk Panchayati Samiti (TPS) at the taluk level and Zilla Panchayat (ZP) at the district level. At present, there are 5,628 panchayats, 175 taluk panchayati Samitis and 30 Zilla Panchayats in the state.

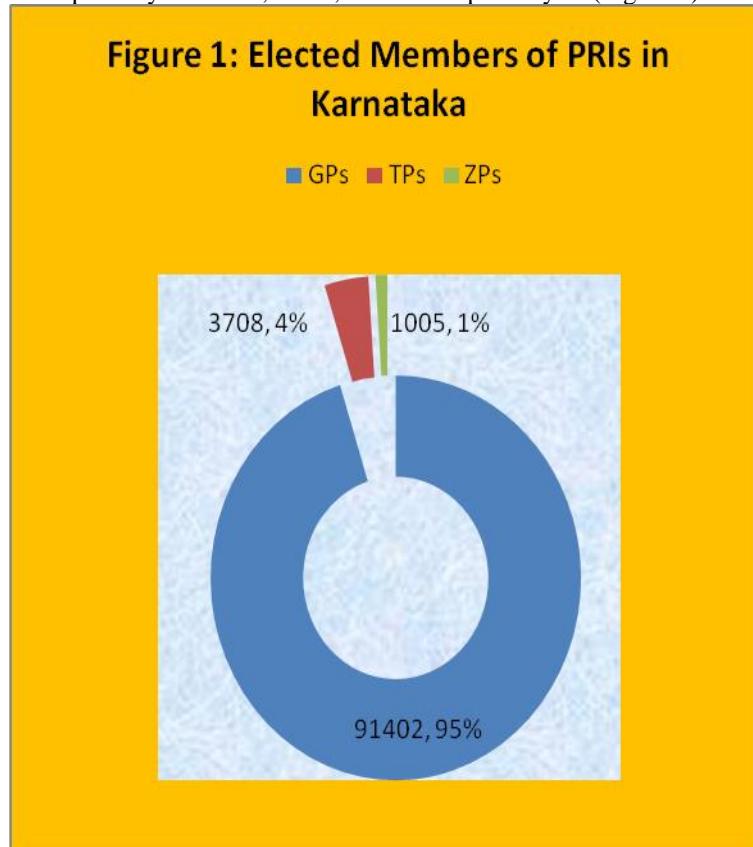
Institutional Representation:

The system of local self-governance in the state had remained stagnant for quite some time following irregular elections to the local bodies and their supercession by bureaucratic control. Member of all the three tiers i.e., Grama panchayats, Taluk Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Panchayat were directly elected. But the Adhyaksha and Upadhyaksha (President and Vice president) of the Grama panchayats, Taluk panchayat samiti and Zilla Panchayats were elected indirectly from among the elected members.

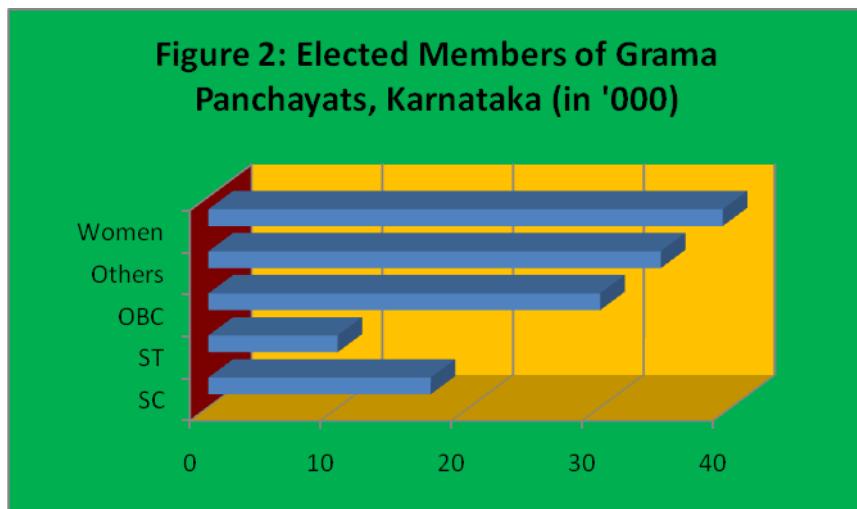
It is worthwhile to mention here that, compared to earlier PRIs in the state, the 1993 Act provide reservation of seats for SC and ST according to their population and for women.

Elected Members of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Karnataka

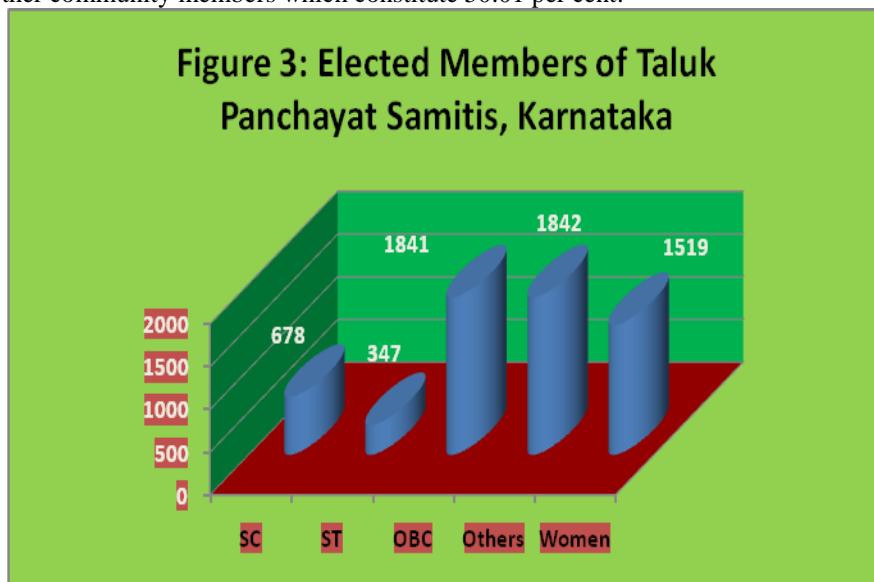
Table1, reveals that the distribution of elected panchayat members in the three-tier system of Panchayats, namely, gram panchayats, taluk panchayat samitis and zilla panchayats. There are in all 5,628 village panchayats, 176 taluk panchayat samitis and 30 zilla panchayats, a total of 5,833 panchayati raj institutions. In them, in position, are 96,090 elected members in the three different tiers: 91,402 in gram panchayats, 3,708 in taluk panchayat samitis, and 1,005 in zilla panchayats (Figure 1).



There are 91,402 elected GP members in the state. Out 91,402 GP members 16,999 are belong to scheduled caste members which constitute 18.61 per cent of total members, 9,880 members are scheduled tribe which constitute 10.80 per cent, 29,944 members are belong to other backward community which constitute of 32.76 per cent, and 34,581 are belong to other communities which constitute 37.83 per cent. Women elected members to the GPs number 39,318, which is about 43 per cent of the total elected members in the State (Figure 2).



As for elected TPSs in the state of Karnataka, there is a total of 3,708 members, of whom 1,519 or 41.24 per cent are women (Figure 3). The community-based elected members in place are: 678 members belong to scheduled caste which constitute 18.40 per cent, 347 members belong to scheduled tribe which constitute 9.42 per cent, 841 members belong to other backward community which accounting for 20.83 per cent, and 1,842 members are other community members which constitute 50.01 per cent.

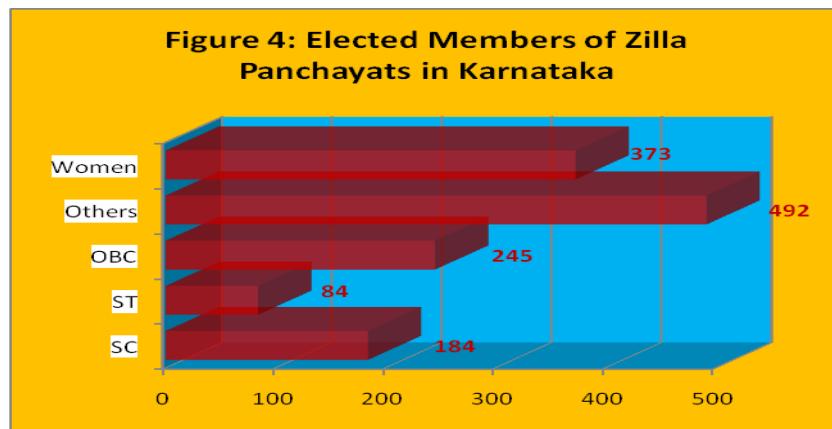


A total of 1,005 elected ZP members are in position, with 373 women (37.1 per cent), out 1,005 ZP members, 184 members belong to scheduled caste which constitute 18.30 per cent, 84 members are scheduled tribe which accounting for 8.35 per cent, 245 members from other backward communities which constitute 24.37 per cent and 492 members belong to other communities which accounting for 48.95 per cent (Figure 4). The membership of the panchayat raj institutions is on the basis of caste communities and every broad community category gets its own share of elected membership in the institutions. There is also representation for women in these institutions.

Table 1: Distribution of Elected 3-Tier Panchayat Members in Karnataka

Panchayat Level	No. of Panchayats	SC	ST	OBC	Others	Total	Women members
Village Panchayats	5,628	16,997	9,880	29,944	34,581	91,402	39,318
Taluk Panchayat Samitis	176	678	347	841	1,842	3,708	1,519
Zilla Panchayats	30	184	84	245	492	1,005	373
Total	5,833	17,859	10,311	32,030	36,915	96,090	41,210

Source: Rural Development and Panchayat Raj Department, Bangalore and RDPR website:
www.rdpr.kar.nic.in



Functions of PRIs

This section mainly highlights the organization and administration of rural local government in Karnataka. In 1992, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution was enacted and it brought about a number of changes in the rural local bodies. Consequently the Karnataka Panchayat Raj Act 1993 came into force with effect from 13th April 1993. Some of the important characteristics brought about by the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution and the Karnataka Panchayats Act 1993 are listed below.

- Introduction of a three-tier system i.e., at Village level-Grama Panchayat, at block level-Taluk Panchayati Samiti and at district level-Zilla Panchayat.
- Mandatory conduct of local body election every five years.
- Introduction of reservation of seats and offices for SC/STs in proportion to their population in every local body with provision for rotation of the reserved seats and offices.
- Introduction of reservation of for women.
- Constitution of State Election Commission as an independent body to conduct elections to both rural and urban local bodies periodically.
- Establishment of State Finance Commission to recommend devolution of resources from the State Government to the rural and urban local bodies.
- Constitution of a District Planning Committee to consolidate the plans prepared by the rural local bodies in the district with a view to preparing a comprehensive development plan for the district.
- Introduction of the concept of Grama Sabha comprising all registered voters in a Grama Panchayat.

Structure of Rural Local Bodies

Grama Sabha means a body consisting of persons registered in the voters list of Grama Panchayat. The Grama Sabha shall meet at least once in six months. Grams sabha is the grass root level democratic institution in each village. A vibrant Grama sabha is essential for the effective functioning of grama panchayats by promoting transparency and accountability in administration, enhancing public participation in the planning and implementation of schemes and paving the way for social audit.

Provided that a Special meeting of the Grama Sabha shall be convened if a request is made by not less than ten percent of the members of the Grama Sabha with items of agenda specified in such request and there shall be a minimum three months period between two special meetings of the Grama Sabha.

The quorum for the meeting of a Grama Sabha shall be not less than one tenth of the total number of members of the Grama Sabha, or hundred members, whichever is less. As far as may be, at least ten members from each Ward Sabha within the Panchayat area shall attend the meeting and not less than thirty percent of the members attending the Grama Sabha shall be women. As far as may be the persons belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes shall be represented in proportion to their population in the Grama Sabha.

Functional Devolution

Various committees have been constituted for devolution of functions in their respective spheres to the three tiers of panchayats. The decentralization and delegation of powers and functions to panchayats is a continuous and dynamic process. The present system is always open to the idea of delegating even more powers and functions to the rural local bodies especially the Grama Panchayats.

Grama Panchayats

There are 5638 GPs in the state spread across the 30 districts and the 176 TPSs.

Powers and Functions of the GPs:

Some of the important functions of GPs are:

- providing sanitary latrines to not less than ten per cent of the households every year and achieve full coverage as early as possible;

- b) constructing adequate number of community latrines for the use of men and women and maintaining them;
- c) maintaining water supply works either on its own or by annual contract by generating adequate resources;
- d) revising and collecting taxes, rates and fees periodically which are leviable under the Act;
- e) ensuring universal enrollment of children in primary school;
- f) achieving universal immunization of children;
- g) ensuring prompt registration and reporting of births and deaths;
- h) providing sanitation and proper drainage;
- i) construction, repair and maintenance of public streets;
- j) removing encroachments on public streets or public places;
- k) providing adequate number of street lights and paying electricity charges regularly;
- l) filling-up insanitary depressions and reclaiming unhealthy localities;
- m) destruction of rabid and ownerless dogs;
- n) maintenance of all community assets vested in it;
- o) maintenance of records relating to population census crop census, cattle census, census of unemployed persons and persons below poverty line;
- p) earmarking places away from the dwelling houses for dumping refuse and manure.

Powers

Grama Panchayat shall have powers to do all acts necessary for or incidental to the carrying out of the functions entrusted, assigned or delegated to it and in particular and without prejudice to the forgoing powers, to exercise all powers specified under this Act. Cheques for payment have to be signed jointly by the President and Panchayat Development Officer. Where the relationship between the two is not cordial, the Deputy Commissioner (DC), in his capacity as Inspector of Panchayats can designate any other member of the GPs as joint cheque signing authority along with the President. The GPs do not need external approval for taking up works upto Rs. 5.00 lakh from their general fund. The GPs have been given necessary delegation of powers to enable them to attend to repairs and maintenance of hand pumps, power pumps and street lights promptly. They can buy street light materials meeting the prescribed quality norms on their own.

Taluk Panchayati Samiti

The next higher tier is the Taluk Panchayat Samiti (TPS), constituted for each taluk and consists of members directly elected through ballot by all the residents in the non-urban areas of the taluk. The strength of the TPS varies depending on the population, taluks, with population of less than one hundred thousand can have 15 members and these, having one hundred thousand and above, can elect 19 members. Seats are reserved for scheduled castes on the basis of their population and for women, the number being not more than two. Members of Legislative Assembly (MLA) whose constituencies lie within the taluk and members of the Legislative Council (MLCs) are entitled to take part in the proceedings and also vote in the meetings. The presidents and vice-presidents of TPSs would be elected from among members only. The term of all directly elected members is five years. The MLAs and MLCs hold office till the end of their tenure in the state legislature. There are 176 TPS in the State.

Powers and Functions

Some of the important functions of TPS are:

- (i) Construction and augmentation of water supply works to the level of not less than 40 litres per capita for day;
- (ii) filing half-yearly report regarding the activities of Grama Panchayats within the taluk regarding:
 - (a) holding of Grama Sabha;
 - (b) maintenance of water supply works;
 - (c) construction of individual and community latrine;
 - (d) collection and revision of taxes, rates and fees;
 - (e) payment of electricity charges;
 - (f) enrollment in schools; and
 - (g) progress of immunisation.
- (iii) Providing adequate number of classrooms and maintaining primary school buildings in proper condition, including water supply and sanitation;
- (iv) acquiring land for locating the manure pits away from the dwelling houses in the villages.

Zilla Panchayat

There are 30 ZP in the State. It is an advisory body. The functions are as follows:

- i) establishment of health centres including maternity centres so as to cover the entire population within five years, as per the norms laid down by the Government;
- ii) construction of underground water recharge structures to ensure availability of water in the drinking water wells;
- iii) prevention of drilling of irrigation bore wells in the vicinity of drinking water wells to ensure adequate drinking water, especially in lean season; and
- iv) drawing up a plan for social forestry development in each taluk and spending not less than such percentage of the District Plan allocation every year as may be specified by the Government from time to time.

Issues in PRIs

An understanding of the new system of elective local body administration in the state has been attempted here under two main headings, functional and financial.

Functional

Functional autonomy to PRIs has been provided to only the lower tier i.e., GPs. The GPs are kept away from the purview of the TPSs as it was in the earlier system. At present GPs are independent to the extent of implementing all the schemes. They have been strengthened with staff for the maintenance of the panchayats. However, the psychological dependency of the presidents of GPs has not disappeared and they still look for the assistance and guidance of the TPS officials. 29 subjects as per the State Planning Commission recommendation, the presidents of the GPs are still unaware of the recent development. Another reason for dependency of the president is that after assuming power they have not been provided any training programme to enhance their capabilities. Even PDO of the GPs in the State have not been given any orientation regarding their new assignments. The TPS and ZP are only monitoring and supervising the developmental works. Therefore, the GPs as independent democratic units have been allowed to function without any capacity building thereby leading to less efficient productivity.

Financial

As far as financial autonomy is concerned, the panchayats in the State are well placed. Funds are provided according to the recommendations of the SFC. Each GP gets on an average Rs. 1 crore approximately. There are other problems observed in the PRIs. The GPs have joint cheque signing powers. Generally all the units of local bodies run their business through the accounts in the bank. Accordingly, GP funds are kept in favour of joint account. The president and the PDO are the persons empowered to operate the accounts. According to some of the presidents this system of joint power is a great obstacle and they feel that this may be withdrawn from the PDO and given to the panchayat assistant. The Presidents, Vice-Presidents and Ward Members felt that their allowances and sitting fees are very meager. Another important problem is that women members are not free and frank in the meeting. The demands of the women members are different than those of the male members.

IV. CONCLUSION

It is well recognized that the success of democratic decentralization depends on adequate power devolution, sufficient financial resource devolution, efficient administrative capacity of the decentralized institutions and effective accountability mechanisms. But a major problem encountered in effecting decentralized governance is the tendency of power holders to not give up power and authority to lower level institutions. The PRIs in Karnataka suffer from certain colonial hangovers. For example the ZPs have been given only administrative roles. The hangover thus continues even today. A strong decentralized authority is needed at district level, in order to strengthen panchayat administration in the state. Karnataka government has undoubtedly taken a number of steps to grant greater responsibilities, powers and financial resources to the PRIs. Thus, the needs of decentralized governance in the state have now begun to germinate. But the present pattern and process of governance in the State is still at crossroads and has a long way to go before it attains maturity.

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