Moreover, as Professor Ashwani K. Ray had pointed out in the review of earlier edition of this book (Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol LVIII, No. 1, January–March 2011, p. 140):

The author, Dhaka, appears to be euphorically ambitious about the implications of the RTI. According to him, it would help in democratizing governance, improve public participation, promote accountability, rule of law and, help combat corruption, check misuse of discretionary powers, and enhance administrative efficiency; protecting civil liberty, reducing poverty, achieving millennium development goals, effective implementation of government schemes and reforming administration. One can only hope his optimism on these scores proves to be even incrementally prophetic. As of now, the author’s triumphalism appears to be a little premature, albeit normatively inspiring.

Nevertheless, Dhaka’s work is of immense value for the information-seekers as well as for the information-providers. It is not only useful for the policymakers but also for policy-implementers. It is a sort of a Ready Reckoner on RTI. It would also not be wrong to call it a compendium on the RTI. Hence it deserves a place in all the public libraries. However, its high price could prevent the students, research scholars and the other individuals interested in knowing more about the RTI. Therefore, the reviewers would like to suggest that the publishers should bring out a Paperback Edition of this useful book so that it could be afforded at a reasonable price as well as for the Information Seekers.

Anuja Thapar
Research Associate at HIPA
Gurugram, India
anuthapar23@gmail.com

Suhasini Yadav
Research Associate at HIPA
Gurugram, India
suhasini.yadav15@gmail.com


DOI:10.1177/0019556119863859

This book studies the relations among the union, state and local governments in a federal context in four South Indian states, viz. Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and united Andhra Pradesh. In these states, Kamma, Reddy, Kapu and Velama communities from Andhra Pradesh; Vokkaliga, Lingayat and other backward communities from Karnataka; Nairs and Syrian Christian communities from Kerala; and backward castes from Tamil Nadu and their role in local government are the topics covered. Institutional relations, party politics and political economy play very important roles in the relation between the centre and the states, whereas political
sociology plays an equally important role in the relations between the states and the local governments. The study mainly focuses on how the local government works in these states. This study is based on four approaches, that is, the Gandhian, the liberal–constitutional, the World Bank (or neo-liberal), and policy process. Though it largely relies on the liberal–constitutional approach, the other three approaches are also partially used transiently. The central concern of the book is with the working of the local government. Here, the author studies the functioning of local governments and the role of state governments in strengthening local government, viz. devolution of functions, funds, functionaries and so on.

The author wrote this book by compiling his earlier articles, which were written at different points of time. Some articles were used after revision and the others were published without any revision. Some parts of the book are based on his work for a NGO, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) in the past. The book is thus based on empirical studies. It is based on interdisciplinary approach because it was written by mixing three disciplinary perspectives, viz. political science, economics and sociology, as already mentioned earlier. It studies institutional structures and processes, social structures and politico-economy of devolution of finance to the local government. The book does not make a clear statement about its research methodology, specially the sampling methods. However, it is based on the methods of studying institutional and organisational structures and processes.

Since the author studies relations among the central, state and local governments in a federal context, there is need to explain the concept of ‘federalism’. It is a system of government in which power is divided between a central authority and various constituent units of a country. Usually, federalism refers to only two levels of government, viz. union and states, but in some countries, all three levels of government are part of the federal (not only devolutionary) system, for example, the Swiss and the new constitution of Nepal. These can be understood very well from the quotations presented later in this article. According to the International Encyclopedia of Political Science (Stein; 2011, p. 896), federalism is defined as follows:

The major and defining principle of this new regime form, according to the British constitutional thinker Kenneth C. Wheare in his pioneering study Federal Government (1964), consisted of a division of power and authority between two different political decision-making units—a central one exercising jurisdiction over the entire nation-state and a constituent or regional one having responsibility for a part of that nation-state. These two governmental units would be recognized as having equal status in law, so that neither one could abolish or subordinate the other.

After independence, different state legislatures passed their Panchayati Raj Acts under the new Constitution (1950), which is also known as local government—a three-tier system of government. In 1992, after the 73rd constitutional amendment was passed by the Parliament of India, all the states made their Acts in discretionary conformity with the 73rd constitutional amendment. Therefore, local governments are not strictly a part of the federal structure, but they are a part of the ideal of devolutionary decentralisation under the various Panchayati Raj Acts.
The author makes his tentative hypothesis that Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu were not interested in much decentralisation, whereas Karnataka and Kerala were more interested in decentralisation. This decentralisation process is attached with economic reforms in these four states. The period of economic reforms and decentralisation process was introduced during the 1990s. On the one hand, economic reforms began to roll out from 1991 onwards; on the other hand, decentralisation process began to take off from 1992 onwards. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, about 80 countries of the Third World began to move towards decentralisation in governance in their countries. During the 1990s, the government and policymakers in India realised that during the prolonged rule of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, Indian polity had become too centralised, and there was a need to move towards decentralised governance. That was the reason why Rajiv Gandhi moved towards decentralisation process. The state governments were more interested in economic reforms, but they were less interested in decentralisation process, since economic reforms strengthened state governments’ power and decentralisation of reforms strengthened local governments. How does it so happen that the South Indian states show more interest towards economic reforms and less interest towards decentralisation process? We try to answer these two questions in the following paragraphs.

The Congress party dominated at both the centre and the states for a long time. In South India, the Brahmins and other landowning castes dominated the political scene in the phase of Congress dominance. There were some factors which paved the way towards the decline of this dominance. One of them was the emergence of strong regional party regimes with support of the Other Backward Classes (OBCs). These regional parties played a very important role in coalition politics at the central level. These regional parties pressured national ruling parties such as the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) for economic reforms and to take loans from individual country donors and multilateral donors as these were dependent on the central government for allowing Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and in dealing with multilateral agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. These were the reasons why state governments became increasingly powerful. As a result, state governments took an increasing interest towards economic reforms and less interest towards decentralisation process.

These new state governments did not want to share political power with local governments or panchayats and social groups—such as women, most backward sections of the OBCs, Dalits and adivasis. These social groups entered the political institutions for the first time after the 73rd constitutional amendment in 1992. Newly emerged regional party regimes were not willing to share power with the local governments. As a result, the state governments did not devolve much powers and finances to the local governments.

In 1993, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) came to power in Andhra Pradesh, which governed from 1993 to 2004. The TDP government introduced economic reforms and became a ‘model state’ in this sphere. Numerous organisations and groups were created by the government in rural areas, such as Water Users’ Associations (WUAs), Water Shed Associations (WSA), Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Parents and Teachers’ Associations (P&TA), Vana Sanrakshana Samitis—VSS (Forest
Protection Committees) and Chief Minister’s Empowerment of Youth (CMEY). All these organisations were under Jannabhoomi programme of the state government, which was launched in January 1997. These organisations under Jannabhoomi programme followed advice of donors such as World Bank, Department for International Development (DFID), the UK, and international consulting firms Mc Kinsey & Co., which prepared a document called the AP Vision-2020 document. As a result, all the issues of the local government institutions were taken up by the Jannabhoomi programme organisations. They became parallel and substitute institutions to the local government institutions. The state Panchayati Raj (PR) Act had given 17 items out of 29 which are listed in the 11th Schedule of the Indian Constitution, but in reality, the local government only dealt with drinking water, sanitation and village streetlights; the other items out of the 17 were used by the parallel committees created by the state government external to Panchayats.

In Tamil Nadu, elected representatives of local self-governing institutions were dominated by bureaucracy and higher-level political representatives. Not a single item out of the 29 items was given to the local government by the Tamil Nadu government. This can be understood from the given quotation in this regard from the book under review:

> While all the enactments were passed with the objective of creating Self Governing Local Institutions, in practice, they did not or could not function as Self-Governing Institutions, but function mainly as agencies of State and Central Government. The 29 items indicated in the 11th Schedule to the Constitution have not been entrusted to Panchayats. Similar is the case in respect of Urban Local Bodies. (quoted from The Tamil Nadu Development Report (TNDR), 2005, pp. 40–41 in Vaddiraju, 2017, p. 101)

To some extent, development came up in 2007 when the M. K. Stalin Committee was constituted on Panchayati Raj Institutions. A further development in the local government was the implementation of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) by the union and state governments associating Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the process.

Tables 1 and 2 in the book, on page numbers 112 to 113, give clear picture of the economic performance in all the four states. Tables 1 and 2 show FDI in the four South Indian states. In Table 1, we see that Tamil Nadu and Karnataka gave more importance to economic reforms compared to Andhra Pradesh and Kerala. On economic reforms, as the table shows, Tamil Nadu ranks the first, Karnataka second, Andhra Pradesh third and Kerala fourth. On approved investment in FDI, Tamil Nadu ranks first with figures of ₹2,32,360 million, contributing ₹3,741 in FDI per capita, then comes Karnataka at ₹2,15,865 million contributing ₹4,093 in FDI per capita, followed by Andhra Pradesh at ₹1,30,686 million contributing ₹1,725 in FDI per capita and Kerala at ₹15,268 million contributing ₹480 in FDI per capita. The investment approved by Kerala government is very low compared to all the three states. Table 2 shows FDI inflow in the four states percentage wise. Tamil Nadu stands at the top with a figure of ₹22,872.18, which is 9.94 per cent; followed sequentially by Karnataka at ₹19,202.55, which is 7.6 per cent; Andhra Pradesh at ₹11,658.71, which is 4.61 per cent; and Kerala at ₹1,812.45, which is 0.72 per cent.
The author has given a detailed description regarding a number of economic reforms, which occurred in various areas of Andhra Pradesh. But in other three states, he has given less details regarding economic reforms. In the second chapter, through seven tabular data, he has discussed various aspects of economic reforms, including FDI in the three states.

Karnataka government set up School Development and Monitoring Committees (SDMC), covering all primary schools. The Committee consisted of a chairman, vice chairmans and nine members. Among these members, seats were reserved, one each, for Scheduled Castes (SCs), Scheduled Tribes (STs), minority communities and one-third seats for women. The task of the Committee was to monitor school development (construction of additional classrooms, drinking water facility, toilets, etc.) and various aspects of functioning of the schools (student attendance, retention, teacher attendance, mid-day meal programme, etc.). The SDMC was accountable to MLAs and education department officials, and not to the Gram Panchayats. There was no connection between SDMC and Gram Panchayat. This study regarding primary education is based on fieldwork in two districts of Karnataka, viz. Bidar and Chamarajanagar. In terms of work, the committee programme advice was provided by the World Bank which was the funding agency.

In Andhra Pradesh, the government set up School Education Committees (SECs). The SEC also attended to the developmental works as the SDMC did in Karnataka. Here also, to work in the SEC programme, the World Bank was the source of funding. Field study area was the Mahbubnagar district of Andhra Pradesh. The SEC had parents of school children, Gram Panchayat Sarpanch, teachers and so on as its members. According to the author, the Sarpanch was a member without any authority. There was no connection between SEC and Gram Panchayat. All powers regarding primary education were shifted to the District Education Officer (DEO) of the Education Department from the Zilla Parishad.

The above two cases about primary education in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka show that diversion of power from Gram Panchayat to the organisation set up by the Education Department is taking place. All the three tiers of panchayats—Gram Panchayat at village level, Block Panchayat at block level and District Panchayat at district level—were denied or deprived of the powers vested via primary education. Activities such as recruitment, posting of teachers, transfers, disciplinary action, salary disbursement and training of teachers were being handled by the school education committee at the village level, mandal education officer at the Mandal level and district education officer at the district level. Due to this, real developmental role of local government was not seen.

In the fifth chapter, the author discusses about how local governments can be made accountable. According to the author, accountability of political institutions of local governments should be both upwards and downwards. The institutions can be made accountable by tremendous amount of social and political mobilisation; by political leaders being conscientious; by providing power from state government to local governments; by increasing political education; by removing caste, class, and gender hierarchies; and by increasing the frequency of panchayat meetings so
that Gram Sabha meetings can be organised more regularly. This can be understood from the quotation below. According to Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen:

> The practice of local democracy is also a form of wider political education. In this context of village politics, people are learning (if only at varying speed) to organize, to question established patterns of authority, to demand their rights, to resist corruption, and so on. This learning process enhances their preparedness not only for local democracy alone, but for political participation in general. (quoted from Dreze & Sen, 2002 in Vaddiraju, 2017, p. 179)

Besides, the local government can be made accountable by making Ward Sabhas. Most of the states have a Gram Sabha at every village. The author emphasises that in every village, there should be Ward Sabhas, and over all the Ward Sabhas of a village, there should be Gram Sabha. He gives example of Karnataka where the lowest political body is Ward Sabha and then the Gram Sabha at the larger village level. Furthermore, by appointing ombudsman for panchayats, by increasing budget for local government, civic decentralisation and so on, the local government can be made accountable.

The sixth chapter deals with administrative decentralisation and development in a complex democracy. The chapter focuses on rural decentralisation. There are different aspects of administrative decentralisation, and these are devolution of functions, functionaries, funds, freedom and so on. According to the 73rd constitutional amendment, functions, functionaries, funds and freedom are devolved to local governments through devolution process in the 11th Schedule. Altogether, it is a state subject. Therefore, the state has power to devolve or not to devolve powers listed in the 11th Schedule. Then, the question arises—how can administrative development at local level be done? This can be done in many ways, and NGOs or civil society public action is one option. Besides, education, participation and accountability, by providing powers to local government by the state, administrative decentralisation can also be done.

The author ideally sees federalism as a three-tier system of government, not two-tier. The third tier of federal system of government is the local government. The author says that the hypothesis that economic reforms impacted the development of local government is correct. He writes about devolution of powers from state level to panchayats or local governments, and he adds that Kerala is number one, Karnataka is number two, Tamil Nadu number three and Andhra Pradesh number four in rank. After critical study, the author provides useful suggestions. Local governments can be made more effective by state governments compared to the central government. One of the main reasons behind it is that the constitution privileges the state government in this regard as the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in the Constitution as prescriptive rather than mandatory. The state Acts virtually prevail over the prescriptive ideals of the constitutional amendment.
References


Moti Lal

*Faculty of History*

*School of Social Sciences*

*Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU)*

*New Delhi, India*

motilal587@gmail.com