

Governance and the 'Karnataka Model of Development'

This paper considers the idea of a 'Karnataka model of development', with its emphasis on technology and governance-led development. It is the introduction to the papers in this issue of EPW on 'Governance and Development in Karnataka'. Based on the papers in the symposium, and on the wider literature, it explores the interpretation and application of the idea. It argues that while some of Karnataka's experience does indeed conform to the model and thus holds out lessons for development, there are significant gaps between reality and the model, and these gaps have lessons for development as well.

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Karnataka embodies the challenges and contradictions that are faced by the rest of India – spectacular technology-led growth in Bangalore tempered with an abiding sense of the city's ungovernability, enduring gender inequity and regional disparities, and a visibly increasing gap between urban and rural areas.¹ Yet, Karnataka is also increasingly being seen a model of development. Bangalore's metamorphosis from a noun to a verb is the archetypical symbol of an India "unbound", and Karnataka's pioneering experiment with panchayati raj reform under the Ramakrishna Hegde government in the 1980s sparked the 73rd amendment and the consequent and continuing wave of devolutions in finance and power to panchayats. This emphasis on technology-led growth coupled with local government reform is, at least in theory, a singularly innovative strategy to address the challenge of generating growth with equity and can be described as the "Karnataka model" of development.

The Karnataka model should more accurately be called the "Mysore model" because the strategy was not arrived at serendipitously. It has century-old roots in policy decisions taken by the princely state of Mysore. As Manu Bhagavan (2003) has shown, the then maharaja of Mysore, Krishnaraja Wadiyar, advised by his diwan-cum-chief engineer M Visvesvaraya, instituted several initiatives to improve the quality of higher education in the state, with a particular emphasis on technology and the sciences. Additionally, in 1905, the government of Mysore persuaded J N Tata to locate the Indian Institute of Science in Bangalore, subsidised by a land grant and an annual government subsidy of Rs 50,000. These initiatives did two things: they produced generations of highly trained engineers and scientists in the state, and they encouraged an atmosphere conducive to scientific and technological innovation.² Both were, arguably, crucial elements in Bangalore's "take-off".³

Similarly, the Mysorean roots of panchayati raj go very deep. The historian Christopher Bayly (2006) has recently stated that the terms panchayat and 'sabha' in the context of village institutions were first articulated by Ram Raz, based on his experience as a "native judge" in Mysore about 200 years ago. These were then adopted by north Indian writers and subsequently absorbed into the nationalist canon via Gandhiji's vigorous advocacy

[Gandhi 1962]. "Modern" panchayati raj institution (PRI) reforms in Karnataka can be traced at least as far back as Krishnaraja Wadiyar's expansion of local self-government in 1902-03, which created 8 district and 77 taluk boards. Natraj and Ananthpur (2004) document the subsequent history of panchayat reforms in Karnataka. In 1918, the Mysore Local Boards and Village Panchayat Act was passed which provided for the election of half of the representatives in district and two-thirds in taluk boards respectively. In 1926 a two-tier scheme with village panchayats and district boards was established, abolishing taluk boards, with both bodies provided with power and independent sources of revenue. In the post-independence period several acts and bills were passed, culminating in the 1983 act under the Hegde government whose provisions were adopted, with a few modifications, by the authors of the 73rd amendment to the Indian Constitution.⁴

Karnataka, of course, is not entirely Mysorean. It was constructed by merging Mysore state with the Kannada speaking parts of Hyderabad, Bombay and Madras in 1956. In particular, the districts that came from old Hyderabad tended to have lower living standards and infrastructure than the rest of Karnataka at the time, and this lag persists to this day, causing a high degree of regional imbalance in the state [Sen 2004]. This regional imbalance perhaps has as much to do with geography and climate as it does with policy, but the fact that it has prevailed for two centuries indicates important path dependencies in government and social action.

In June 2005 we organised an interdisciplinary conference at the Institute for Social and Economic Change in Bangalore that examined various aspects of development in Karnataka. In this issue we have selected a few papers from the conference that focus on the theme of governance, largely demonstrating that it remains a daunting challenge – the theory of the Karnataka model has far surpassed its implementation. Challenges that

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remain, beyond regional inequalities, include the slow, incremental, nature of changes in many parts of the state, continuing gender inequalities, several shortcomings in the implementation of the PRI reforms, and a lack of attention to urban governance. Since these concerns are shared by almost every other state in the country, the papers in this symposium have applicability well beyond the state's borders.

State and Local Politics, and Governance

Karnataka has a long history of using political and deliberative means to deal with difference and hierarchy. Chamarajendra Wadiyar, Krishnaraja's father, established the Mysore Representative Assembly in 1881 which was designed to give Mysoreans a forum to air their differences [Bhagavan 2003]. While brahmins dominated this body, the assembly helped increase the level of political awareness, particularly among the two other dominant groups – lingayats and vokkaligas. By the first decade of the 20th century these two groups formed associations to better their living conditions and to lobby the state government. In 1919 a committee led by Leslie Miller, the chief judge of the Mysore High Court, defined a category of "backward classes" in the state, recommending affirmative action for non-brahmins in educational institutions and state administrative services, special schools, scholarships, and hostels, to promote living standards among non-brahmin classes. These measures were quickly implemented and, since then, vokkaligas and lingayats have been potent social and political stakeholders in the state.

James Manor's contribution examines the contemporary implications of this by examining the political history of Karnataka since 1972. He finds that while several changes have occurred, they have been gradual. This is because, in his view, politicians in Karnataka tend to be tentative, even conservative. Two competing coalitions have contended for power, what Muzzafar Assadi has called Muslims, OBCs, vokkaligas and dalits (MOVD) and lingayats and brahmins (LIBRA). These group dynamics have made power sharing within rainbow collections a necessary condition for stable government. This has made individual politicians less important than institutions, with no dominant political party. Bureaucrats have, consequently, retained considerable power with greater autonomy compared to their counterparts in other states. This has resulted in better crafted policies and more policy continuity. But it has also directed political competition in a way that has led to a marked increase in corruption because of the need to satisfy different blocks of voters.

While caste has remained an important marker of identity, it has increasingly begun to signify difference rather than hierarchy. The "materiality" of caste has also decreased – caste is no longer as significant in determining an individual's access to tangible opportunities and assets, and high caste status offers fewer material advantages. Panchayats have become increasingly important, and this has brought group-based political competition to the lowest levels of government. Links between low and high levels of government have shown improvement, but, because of changes in the nature of caste and in local governance, village society has become less cohesive, with individuals mattering more than groups.

Tim Besley, Rohini Pande and Vijayendra Rao turn the focus to an econometric examination of various aspects of political behaviour within grama panchayats (GPs). Their data come from a household and village survey covering 500 villages, and spread across all the four southern states, with over a third of the data from Karnataka. The data were collected between September and November 2002 and therefore provide a snapshot of changes in

grama panchayats about 10 years after the 73rd amendment. Most results in the paper are from regressions with GP or village fixed effects, thus controlling for sources of variation across GPs and villages that are unobserved by the econometricians. The paper reports that reservations for dalits and STs work in the sense that households in GPs that have presidencies reserved for SCs/STs are 7 per cent more likely to offer targeted benefits to dalits and STs. On the other hand, the political geography of the GP seems to matter, with the president's own village showing 10 per cent more investment activity than other villages in the GP.

Grama sabhas are supposed to be the lynchpin of the panchayat system, yet in these data it is found that only 77 per cent of villages held at least one grama sabha in the previous year. Holding a grama sabha seems to have an egalitarian influence, with more effective targeting of below the poverty line (BPL) cards to the poor and disadvantaged. Perhaps because of this, landless and illiterate households are more likely to attend, but, on the other hand, women are much less likely to attend. Finally, the authors examine the role of politician selection within grama panchayats, finding that they come from elite groups within the village. Even with reserved categories, elites within those categories are more likely to become politicians. Moreover, politicians are more likely to obtain BPL cards, controlling for their socio-economic status and village level variation, which is evidence of political opportunism.⁵

Kripa Ananthpur's paper complements this econometric work, by conducting a qualitative analysis of village politics in 30 villages in Karnataka. She finds that, despite the increasing prominence of grama panchayats, customary village councils (CVCs) continue to play an important role in village life.⁶ CVCs include various categories of "traditional" panchayats including caste panchayats, street panchayats and nyaya panchayats. They perform a range of useful functions, including the organisation of village festivals, dispute resolution, social services, and informal development activities. Interestingly, they tend to be inter-caste institutions, and serve as deliberative forums with an emphasis on compromise. They interact closely with grama panchayats, in selecting candidates for panchayat elections, encouraging uncontested elections, and selection of beneficiaries. The leadership of CVCs and GPs tend to overlap and villagers tend to view them not as competitors but as complements to each other.⁷ One question this raises is, whether the activities of CVCs translate into activism in parallel formal bodies, such as water user groups, and whether these formal institutions complement or compete with panchayats.

Ramesh Ramanathan focuses on his experience with Janaagraha, an NGO working on urban governance issues, largely in Bangalore. He makes the important point that with all the talk about the 73rd amendment, the 74th amendment, on urban local government, is largely forgotten – an afterthought, ignored in national and state policy. Ramanathan argues that this is a mistake. Participatory planning and increasing citizens' voice is just as important in urban as in rural areas, and more challenging because of the large size of the population.⁸ Janaagraha's work in Bangalore has attempted to do this by a variety of different initiatives which include verifying voter and BPL lists and proposing benefit sharing schemes with communities that are willing to monitor their members in order to increase tax compliance. Ramanathan proposes a framework to adapt the spirit of the 73rd amendment in a manner that will have real impact: (1) institute ward sabhas in a manner similar to grama sabhas, but also have a new tier of government below the ward level that will have a more manageable size; (2) integrate the different tiers of city government with improved systems of accounting, accountability and monitoring; and

(3) have a sequential and well-defined planning process, building from grassroots discussions on priorities and needs.

Gender and Governance

Poor governance can have a particularly adverse impact on women by enhancing conditions of patriarchy. Gita Sen, Aditi Iyer and Asha George demonstrate this in their study of gender inequity in health in Koppal district, which was part of old Hyderabad state and therefore historically underdeveloped. Sen, Iyer and George find women's health is affected by systemic failures in both public and private health facilities. Government facilities, despite increasing funding, lack specialists and supplies, while private providers are dominated by informal medical practitioners. In an emergency, women are forced to constantly shuttle between inadequate government facilities and poor quality private providers which are, respectively, plagued by poor accountability and lack of regulation. The adverse effects of this "forced pluralism" are compounded by disjunctions in diagnoses due to discriminatory attitudes. Women tend to have quite high levels of health seeking behaviours, but preventable maternal mortality rates remain high because they are much less likely to be treated for their illnesses than men. Women's complaints are more likely to be listed as "not serious" by medical practitioners, reflecting a lower recognition of their needs. A combination of discrimination within the home, poor access to health services, and discriminatory attitudes results a systematic disenfranchising of women in the health system.

Devaki Jain further explores the problem of how to best engender public policy, based upon her experiences as a Karnataka-based scholar activist. She argues that the inherited knowledge base of public policy is inherently gender biased because it is constructed within a patriarchal system. Moreover, women continue to lack a voice in policy decisions that affect them despite several years of effort. To break this deadlock, women need to create a strategic "space of their own" but should have a say in all issues of relevance and not just those related to "women's issues". The knowledge base should be engendered by mapping the social and economic location of women both within the household and outside. Participation in leadership and political life, perhaps via reservations, can provide the turning point in changing the gendered nature of decision-making.⁹ Women need to become economic and political agents instead of passive recipients of special ladders and safety nets. This she calls a "bubbling up" model as opposed to a "trickle-down" theory of development.

Jain illustrates these points with examples from her work in Karnataka. To demonstrate the gender bias in information she uses the examples of poverty and sericulture programmes in Karnataka. Poverty programmes were based on data that did not adequately capture the extent of women's work or the double burden they faced in working at home and outside. Therefore special studies and surveys were conducted to map gender inequalities within the home, and the extent of women's work outside. This led to a change in policy where programmes were modified to allow for the direct targeting of women. Sericulture projects, assisted by the World Bank, were found to systematically deny the possibility that women were significantly involved in silk rearing and farming activities. A targeted study done to examine this found that they were, in fact, deeply involved – largely within the home – in tending mulberry plants, feeding silkworms, and removing waste. Consequently the projects were modified to improve facilities for

women to receive training in sericulture. Finally, Karnataka's pioneering efforts in reserving seats for women in panchayats, supplemented with training, have strengthened their hand in village decision-making.

Some Implications

Governance has become the new buzzword of development [Kaufman et al 2002]. But it does not matter any more now than it did before. Karnataka has attempted to tackle the problem of good governance, albeit under different labels, for at least a century with distinctly mixed results. However, it is clear that path dependencies generated by these efforts have made a difference – at least in the world of ideas.

However, the papers in this symposium highlight a common theme of a gap between ideas and implementation, between *de jure* and *de facto* governance. Politics matters. Manor argues that the strong caste-based nature of political coalitions in the state has had the negative effect of politicising caste in the state in a manner that is perhaps more acute than in the other south Indian states. At the same time caste politics has also resulted in more cautious politicians who have, generally, avoided the excesses of some other states. Coalition politics has led to more stable policies because bureaucrats have retained relatively more power in the state. But this argument should also be supplemented by examining this continuity within the context of the policies of the Wadiyar regime.

With increasing devolution to panchayats, Besley, Pande and Rao show political considerations have also begun to matter at the village level, with village politicians acting in ways that protect their electoral base. PRIs are not yet working in the manner envisaged by the 73rd amendment, as evidenced particularly in the irregularities in holding grama sabhas. Corruption is to some extent being localised, with evidence of political opportunism by village politicians. On the other hand caste reservations seem to have the desired effect of improving the lot of disadvantaged groups. Several concrete recommendations can be drawn from these results, including instituting a system to monitor effective and regularly held grama sabhas, and limiting the number of villages within each panchayat to reduce the extent to which political competition can influence intra village disparities in panchayat investments, and instituting incentives – such as increasing the salaries of panchayat committee members – to reduce corruption within the PRI system.

Ramanathan demonstrates the utter lack of attention paid to governance in urban areas with the lacklustre implementation of the 74th amendment. Civil society groups can play a valuable role in changing this by highlighting the problem and by initiating collective action to solve it. Civil society groups, as Ananthpur demonstrates, are active also in rural governance – in the form of customary village councils, though, unlike urban NGOs, these have long historical roots. They do, however, interact closely with grama panchayats in selecting candidates, influencing village decisions and conducting important activities like dispute resolution that are outside the mandate of grama panchayats. Ramanathan and Ananthpur, therefore, identify the singular importance of civil society in improving governance. While the theory of democracy emphasises the central role of electoral accountability, Ramanathan and Ananthpur point towards another type of accountability that the political scientist Lily Tsai (2007) calls "social accountability". Organisations and movements outside government can hold the government to account and cooperate with it to generate better governance. This is true both at the local level, as shown in Kerala [Isaac and Heller 2003], but

also, more generally Fung and Wright (2003), to correct what can be described as “civil society failure” [Devarajan and Kanbur 2005].

Sen, Iyer and George highlight two important limitations in the Karnataka model: first, that the large portions of Karnataka that come from the former Nizam’s territories (old Hyderabad) face challenges that are particularly daunting; second, that systemic challenges in governance have particularly adverse consequences for women – who face neglect within the home and exclusion outside, which have adverse consequences for their health. Jain fleshes out where and how gender bias occurs within systems of governance and points out two factors in the gender biased nature of how the state “sees”: (1) in the kinds of data it collects and the analyses it conducts; (2) in the fact that women are systematically excluded from decision-making processes, a point that is also demonstrated by Besley, Pande and Rao, who show that women are much less likely to participate in grama sabhas. It is also implicitly brought out in Manor’s political history, which shows that a woman has never risen to prominence in the higher reaches of Karnataka politics.

What lessons can we draw from this?¹⁰ What can other states within India, and countries outside, learn from Karnataka’s experience? First, that good ideas do not always translate into good practices. Second, that deliberative democracy can be nurtured by the state by actively instituting forums for deliberative interaction as in the case of the Mysore Representative Assembly and in grama sabhas and village panchayats. Third, that in order for civil society groups to play useful roles as agents of social accountability, states have to be supportive and responsive to such groups. Fourth, that despite good intentions pervasive forms of discrimination, particularly against women, can persist. Tackling this requires supplementing a gender-specific approach in data collection with mechanisms that will broaden political participation. Fifth, that deepening democracy is a very slow process with lots of ups and downs, and fits and starts, constant innovation, an active public sphere, and resistance from active social movements. Good governance cannot be achieved overnight, but with persistent efforts it will bear some fruit. Hopefully, as time goes by, Karnataka’s model of development will better reflect its reality. **EPW**

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Notes

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- 1 See Narayana (2004) and Sen (2004) for an analysis of the factors behind Bangalore’s hi-tech growth and the challenges of extending high growth rates to the rest of the state.
- 2 It is interesting to note another Wadiyar initiative that has had an international impact. The Maharaja of Mysore instituted excellent Sanskrit schools and a university that, along with instruction in texts, taught the theory and practice of yoga. B K S Iyengar and K Pattabhi Jois were both students at the yoga school and Jois continued his studies at the Sanskrit University. They, of course, went on to spearhead the international yoga movement via the Iyengar and Ashtanga schools that they, respectively, founded.
- 3 See Kadekodi (2004a) for more on Visvesvaraya’s vision.
- 4 Crook and Manor (1998) study the impact of Hedge’s panchayat reforms.
- 5 Also see Vijayalakshmi (2006) for a detailed analysis of corruption in Karnataka panchayats.
- 6 This echoes Krishna’s (2003) findings in Rajasthan.
- 7 Note that aside from panchayat officials and CVCs, there is a third category of people who wield power within the panchayat system – “fixers” – whose job it is to assist in the manipulation of the system [Inbanathan and Gopalappa 2002].
- 8 There is evidence from Delhi that shows that squatter settlements spontaneously tend to form democratically elected panchayat like governance structures even in the absence of any state-led initiatives

[Jha et al 2007], indicating that the potential for deepening democracy in urban areas has been unrealised.

- 9 Studies of the impact of this have been mixed but provide an optimistic picture. Chattopadhyaya and Duflo (2004) find strong positive effects in West Bengal and Rajasthan, but Ban and Rao (2006) find that in the south Indian states the impact is tempered by institutional issues such as whether the village is upper caste dominated, whether the woman president has served a previous term, and whether the state has a history of supporting panchayats.
- 10 See Kadekodi (2004a and 2004b) for concrete policy recommendations for Karnataka.

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