

# **50 Years of Panchayati Raj in Goa: Retrospect and Prospects**

Edited by

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## CHAPTER - 1

### Introduction

*Rahul Tripathi*

Goa, as one of the smallest states in the Indian union, has had some unique characteristics, bestowed upon it by circumstances of history, geography, politics and society. Its encounter with the Portuguese colonial rule led to imbibing of rules, regulations and governance systems at the local level which were not seen in other parts of colonial India. It adapted and modified some of these systems which continue to shape Goa's engagement at the grassroots level politics. Being a coastal state surrounded by Western Ghats, the state has an ecosystem which naturally seeks a sustainable model of development amidst pressures of urbanization and growth. In a short span of time, it saw evolution and transformation from a colonial territory to a 'Liberated' Union Territory in the Indian Union and finally becoming a full -fledged state. Its social and cultural fabric is shaped by customs and traditions that reflect cohesion and fusion across the religious and caste based identities alongside an urge to protect and preserve their traditional moorings.

The Department of Political Science, at Goa University has been conscious of this uniqueness of Goa and has attempted in its small way to understand the complexities and possibilities that Goa has had within the 'political' context. There are three broad levels at which we have made an intervention in the public space in understanding the 'political' in Goa over the recent years. First attempt has been to look at Electoral Politics in Goa, particularly with respect to people's motivation to be part of the electoral process and the factors that would influence the same. An interesting trend that we figured, in tune with the national trend has been that people associate themselves more with their immediate local issues and therefore voter turnout has a direct correspondence with the level of electoral exercise being undertaken and therefore Panchayat elections see maximum participation, followed by State Assembly and then Parliamentary Elections.<sup>1</sup>

Second attempt has been made in the area of Public Policy and Administration particularly in how it shapes the development at the grassroots level including the Panchayats. In the late 1990s, even as the discourse in the country on 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and its implications was maturing, the department had begun efforts by directly engaging with the stakeholders by way of training of Panchayat level officials through a satellite link programme. The Doctoral and the Masters programme saw an increasing interest of students in taking up themes relating to Panchayati Raj in Goa both at the state as well as village level. The studies reflected the fact that issues and problems facing these institutions may be unique and therefore a 'bottom up' approach would be all the more necessary. This body of work complimented the related work that the department encouraged on 'Citizen's Perceptions on Good Governance' by focussing on a Citizen's Report Card on Government Departments in Goa.<sup>2</sup>

The Third intervention has been made more at the level of studying popular mobilization whereby we attempted to look at the factors that shaped popular perceptions and their outcomes. Understanding grassroots democracy both in its structures and processes in Goa and using it as a prism to see how convergent or divergent it was in the national context has been of much interest to us for last several years. Goa has had a very active citizenry particularly when it comes to its volatile gramshabhas, or the powerful civil society led movements against environmental degradation and Regional Plan.<sup>3</sup> The department maintained a connect with the civil society actors by involving them as guest faculty, organizing workshops which had a direct bearing on issues of local relevance and taking up projects which looked at popular opinions on the developmental projects in Goa.

It was against this backdrop, the department felt it appropriate to celebrate the diverse elements of grassroots democracy in Goa in the form of a Conference marking '50 years of Panchayati Raj in Goa' during March 2013. The very fact that Goa was able to embark on the Panchayati Raj experiment within two years of its liberation showed a strong mooring in the state for active people's participation, rooted in its earlier traditions. At the same time during the conception of this exercise, we were aware that an over exuberant celebration of 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary might mask the very severe limitations that the system still faces by way of devolution of powers and fragility of the gram sabhas as harbingers of consensus and change. It was therefore decided that an attempt would be made to bring multiple stakeholders together as part of the conference, who could deliberate on the theory, practice, potential as well as the challenges that Panchayati Raj Institutions face in Goa. The Directorate of Panchayats, Government of Goa very enthusiastically accepted the proposal to be part of this exercise, keen on a dialogue with multiple stakeholders where all may not necessarily agree and was open to the idea of taking some concrete suggestions from the conference.

The thematic of the conference was designed to reflect a wide range of issues relating to Panchayati Raj experience in Goa which could help us in comprehending the challenges and opportunities that the system faced in Goa during the last 50 years. At one level, we felt it necessary to look at both theoretical as well as historical perspective on the idea of grassroots democracy and how it took roots in Goa, providing a template for the years to come. Comparing and contrasting the Comunidade system and Panchayats and the inherent tensions was part of this larger thematic. It was also felt important to include the Constitutional Legal dimension to discuss whether enough powers have been entrusted to these bodies to function effectively and if not what are the structural constraints that exist. Besides attention was also given to the actual working of some Panchayats by taking up some as a case study and looking at the role of multiple stakeholders including women. Finally it was felt appropriate to also include some of the recent issues that had a bearing on functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Goa to bring a more contemporary flair to the event.

The papers presented at the conference and the works of the scholars working in the area are included as part of this volume after due updating and revision reflect the broad thematic as listed above. Prakash Desai in *Perspectives on Self-Governance or local-Governance in India: From Gandhi to New Social Movements* adds a new insight into the grassroots democracy discourse by

looking at the ideas in modern Indian political thinking. He initially looks at the contrast between the Gandhian-village centric model of self governance and the Ambedkar-individual centric discourse and then maps the transition seen through the emerging social movement in recent years. Shilpa Singh in *Philosophy and Politics of Democratic decentralisation in India: Chasing a Mirage of Common Goals of Inclusive Development*, while taking a critical look at the developmental philosophy of the modern Indian state, argues that with the adoption of innovative approach towards participatory planning we can improve the rural governance by making the Panchayati Raj institutions a reference point.

A paper by Tomazinho Cardozo, *Panchayati Raj in Goa: An Overview from Past to the Present* provides an insight into to the functioning of Panchayats in Goa in the past and a glimpses of its changing nature in the present. The paper points out both the members of Panchayat as well as people in the villages equally to be blamed for the present condition at the Panchayat. Ketan Govekar in *Gauncari-Comunidade System and Panchayat System in Goa Convergence and Divergence*, while emphasising on the similarities in these institutions with regard to grassroots democracy and participation also looks at the differences in the social-cultural-legal context within which the two institutions operate thus necessitating a deeper understanding of the two in a comparative perspective. Aditi Rane in *Peoples' Participation And PRIs In Goa: Post 73rd Amendment Era*, takes a holistic view of the Panchayati Raj experience in Goa after the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment and argues that Goa has had a dismal record with the functioning of such institutions with limited devolution of powers and critiques the role played by political parties. Seema Fernandes in *People's Participation and Panchayat Raj Institutions: A Case of Goa*, while highlighting the need for an active involvement of people actually looks at some of the success stories where Panchayats have collectively voiced their opinion on Projects/Plans that had an adverse fallout on the local habitat. It underscores the need for greater training and capacity building for the functionaries as critical to a better functioning of the system.

Seema Salgaonkar in *Women in Panchayati Raj – A Goan Perspective*, explores whether Women have been able to become an active player in the Panchayati System by looking at a series of interlinked questions addressed to Women Panchas across various Talukas in Goa and contends that while there has been both qualitative and quantitative change in participation of women, their ability to bring in drastic positive development in villages have been limited. Sarala Katageri, *Women Leaders in Local Self-Governments in*

*Goa: Challenges and Opportunities*, brings out elaborately the fact that women leadership though supported by reservations is not free from constraints. The paper discusses the perception of people about women members and their role in the Panchayat as well as the views of women members about their role and responsibilities.

Suhas Belekar, in *Panchayati Raj Act and its Implementation: A Study of Goa*, looks at the important provisions of the act and underscores the importance of Gram Sabha decisions as binding on the Gram Panchyats. He highlights the fact that the supervisory committees of the Gram Sabha to oversee and monitor the Panchayats have been hardly functional. Soter D'Souza and Kumar Kalanand Mani in their paper *Conflicts in Participatory Village Planning: A Study* have analysed contradictions between the various acts and multiple agencies entrusted with independent planning power over the same resources, which consequently makes the Panchayat Act helpless.

Nelli Rodrigues in her paper entitled *Panchayats: A Bridge to Link Accelerated Growth with Inclusive Growth* brings out a real picture of functioning of PRIs in general and Zilla Panchayats specifically. It brings out the factual details of functioning of Zilla Panchayats in Goa. The paper discusses in detail the structure and composition of Zilla Parishad. The paper provides new insights regarding further empowering of Zilla Panchayats. Balaji Shenvy in *Critical Analyses of Zilla Panchayats in Goa* takes a look at the other tier of PRI in Goa and argues that Zila Panchayats are gradually losing their relevance in Goa as full devolution of powers to them has not taken place. It was due to intervention by the courts that Zila Panchayats in Goa were constituted, underlying the irony of the situation, he asserts.

Ravaji Gauncar and Swapnil Naik in *Challenges in Dharbandora Taluka: Role of the Village Panchayat* look at one of the newly carved out talukas in Goa and through a field survey across five panchyats in the area underscore the need for people to actively take part in Gram Sabhas as a key to initiate developmental change. Angela Dias e Rodrigues, , taking up the *Case Studies of Batim and Santa Cruz Village Panchayats*, points out that despite regular elections and meetings of the village representatives, the Panchayats have failed to evolve as a community which could become the agency of transformation for the villages. She also contends that the local M.L.A and political party play a major role in functioning of Panchyats.

Sidhi Naik in *Challenges before the Working of Panchayats*, looks at the administrative and infrastructural constraints faced by the Panchayats and

recommends a number of vital steps to empower and improve the efficiency of the Panchayat functionaries as a way out to address structural constraints. Alaknanda Shringare in her paper, *Challenges to Decentralised Governance in Goa*, discusses administrative and functional challenges to decentralised governance in Goa.

The present volume therefore presents a mosaic of opinions which are intended to initiate a wider debate. It is certainly not be the final word on a theme that has caught popular imagination among scholars of decentralization and participatory democracy in Goa, but we see it as opening a new debate and looking forward to the next fifty years. We do hope that it contributes in its own small way to deepening and revitalizing the discourse on grassroots democracy in Goa.

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<sup>1</sup>'Knowledge Attitude, Belief, Behaviour and Perceptions Survey of Electors in Goa' conducted by the Department of Political Science, Goa University on behalf of Office of Chief Electoral Officer, Goa and Election Commission of India in 2012.

<sup>2</sup>Some of such works include i) Tanaji Harlankar (1990), *Gram Panchayats Raj in Goa : A Critical Study*, Panaji:Rajhauns, Peter de Souza, *Democratic Decentralization of Power in India* in D.D . Khanna and Gert Kueck (1999)*Principles Power and Politics* , New Delhi: Mac Millan and Aureliano Fernandes (2009) *Panchayatantra: Empowering Local Governance through Role Definition*, Jaipur: University Book House (Pvt.) Ltd.

<sup>3</sup> ICSSR Sponsored project on Popular responsiveness to Developmental projects in Goa, coordinated by Alaknanda Shringare, 2010. The department also has an ongoing project on Panchayati Raj and Rural Development in Goa being coordinated by Dr Shringare.