Change in Karnataka over the Last Generation: Villages and the Wider Context

by James Manor

I. INTRODUCTION

This paper examines social and political changes that have occurred since 1972 – at the village level where most of Karnataka’s residents live, and at higher levels when they affect villages.¹ Throughout this discussion, we encounter an oddity. Important changes have occurred despite the tendency of nearly all state governments to proceed cautiously, concentrating almost exclusively on incremental change. Six major changes are worth noting.

- In 1972 Chief Minister Devaraj Urs broke the dominance that Lingayats and Vokkaligas had exercised over state-level politics since Independence. Since then, Karnataka’s leaders have constructed broad ‘rainbow’ coalitions in which important cabinet posts were given to leaders from every numerically powerful social group.
- In 1983, the state’s party system changed when the Congress Party lost a state election for the first time. Since then, the alternation of parties at state elections has (with one exception) been the norm.
- After 1985, a Janata government generously empowered and funded panchayati raj institutions.
- Caste (jati) has increasingly come to denote ‘difference’ rather than ‘hierarchy’.
- Society at the village level has become much less cohesive (discussed in see Part V).
- After the late 1980s, a boom in software and out-sourcing occurred in greater Bangalore.

Only the first and the third of these changes were the result of leaders’ decisions to induce dramatic change -- and since 1985, no such decision has occurred.²

So change in Karnataka has mostly been gradual, because politicians there have tended to be tentative, even conservative – a word that they will not like. But to ease their discomfort, it should be added that much of what we have seen has been enlightened conservatism – a tendency to pursue incremental changes which anticipate future problems in order to defuse them before they become acute. That tendency is consistent

¹ The paper largely omits changes that have occurred in the urban sector and in the state’s economy.
² One change which might be included in the list but which has been left out was Devaraj Urs’ land reform during the 1970s. It has been omitted because it was radical neither in its intent nor in its impact. As Urs himself recognised, it failed to address the issue of landlessness. It dealt only with tenancy, and that was a far less serious problem here than in other parts of India because owner-cultivators constituted a much larger proportion of Karnataka’s rural population than in other regions.
with the traditions of government in former princely Mysore (roughly the southern half of contemporary Karnataka) since 1881. So is an accompanying tendency towards caution lest powerful interests become dangerously alienated. And yet incremental change has been pursued persistently enough to have a significant cumulative effect.

One result of politicians’ enlightened conservatism has been that certain actions which might have served the interests of all rural dwellers – or of disadvantaged villagers – have not been taken. That is regrettable. But other actions have been – for the most part – beneficial. Karnataka has thus avoided the extremes of inaction seen in places like Orissa, and of brutish governance seen in states like Bihar and, recently, Gujarat. Anticipatory changes – beginning with the Miller Committee in the 1920s and accelerating with Devaraj Urs’ mobilization of disadvantaged groups – ensured that this state experienced little conflict during the Mandal Commission controversy in 1990. And incremental actions to promote communal accommodation prevented Hindu nationalists from producing the kind of polarization that occurred in many other states after 1990.

We shall see that this enlightened conservatism can be traced to several strong, interrelated tendencies within state governments since 1972. Most governments have tended towards collective leadership in rainbow coalitions -- with leaders from a broad range of social groups exercising substantial influence. Power-sharing at ministerial level has helped make individuals less important than institutions – including the bureaucracy which has suffered less damage than elsewhere. Policies have therefore been comparatively well crafted. And since rival parties have sought support from the same broad social base, policy continuity has been strong despite frequent changes of government.

Because changes have occurred incrementally in Karnataka, they have for the most part endured. They have not produced sufficient dislocation to allow opponents to muster the support needed to restore the status quo ante.

The rest of this paper is divided into four parts. Part II analyses changes at the state level, and Part III considers changes at the village level. Part IV addresses links between villages and higher levels, between which there is greater vertical integration. Part V considers social cohesion in Karnataka.

II. THE STATE LEVEL

Several changes at the state level need to be explored. Those examined below have impinged, at least modestly, upon rural arenas.

*Deteriorating Standards?*

In Karnataka today, people often say – rightly -- that standards in public life have deteriorated. For example, in March 2005, a former Chief Secretary of the state stressed
that when civil servants inform ministers (as they routinely do) that a potential action would be illegal, ministers increasingly disregard this advice.³

But while standards have slipped, we need to compare this state with others – and when we do, things look less discouraging. In many other states, civil servants no longer warn politicians of potentially illegal actions because they have been thoroughly intimidated by their masters, and because they know that such comments would have no effect. In Karnataka, such advice is still conveyed regularly – and sometimes it is heeded. When institutions and the rule of law have suffered under certain leaders there, steps have repeatedly been taken to restore them. Three things help us to understand this comparatively modest slippage in standards. They are discussed in the next three sections.

**Mercifully Few Destructive Chief Ministers**


Gundu Rao became Chief Minister because he offered Indira Gandhi the kind of abject loyalty that, by 1980, she demanded – and because he was a favourite of her son Sanjay. He centralised power in his own hands to an unprecedented degree and imposed ‘civil servant raj’. This had one minor advantage – civil servants tend, for the most part, to maintain certain minimal standards when given their head. But it was outweighed by serious disadvantages. Corruption, which was centralised, soared. Legislators were unable to exercise influence on behalf of their constituents. They were often unable to get appointments even with middle-ranking bureaucrats. Democratic government was thus stifled. And grossly insensitive acts occurred. When farmers were late in repaying government loans, the police seized moveable property – which a sensible Chief Minister would have regarded as politically insane.⁴

Bangarappa did greater damage. He placed unprincipled civil servants in key posts, and exiled the best to obscure postings. Illicit ‘fund-raising’ was a central preoccupation. Bangarappa became the only state-level leader in the last 150 years to encourage parochial conflict – between Kannadigas and Tamils. When this led to rioting in Bangalore, the Chief Minister’s aides rushed to inform him, only to find that he refused to consider their pleas for action until he had completed his badminton game.⁵ It was that sort of government.

Two destructive Chief Ministers is too many, but two is a smaller number than is the norm in several other states. And since neither of these leaders served a full five years,

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³ Interview, Bangalore, 6 March 2005.
⁵ Interview with an official who took the news to Bangarappa, Bangalore, 9 March 1999.
they were unable to institutionalize their damaging practices. In both cases, they were ousted – Gungal Rao by the voters, and Bangarappa by a revolt of legislators who rightly feared voters’ wrath. So the system proved self-correcting, and in both cases, politicians’ accountability to a sophisticated electorate provided the explanation. Once out of office, they were thoroughly discredited and their successors restored standards – something that has not always happened in other states.

**Corruption and Criminalisation**

Corruption – in terms of the amounts of money illegally diverted -- has increased markedly since 1972.\(^6\) No accurate measurements are possible, but knowledgeable sources consistently attest to this.\(^7\)

Why? First, politicians believe that ‘fund-raising’ can enhance their influence and their chances of re-election. They have sometimes been right about the first of these ideas. If a leader distributes substantial funds among subordinates or even opposition politicians, he\(^8\) can buy cooperation. If he provides money to potential groups of supporters (or their leaders), he may strengthen their organisational capacity and win their backing. This occurred under Devaraj Urs between 1972 and 1980 when corruption first took off. He used illicit funds to establish and then build up caste associations among disadvantaged groups that had previously been poorly organised or entirely unorganised. He felt compelled to do this to prevent Lingayats and Vokkaligas from re-establishing their former dominance.\(^9\)

But the notion that massive ‘fund-raising’ will help to secure re-election is baseless. Parties in power always have far more opportunities to amass illicit funds than do opposition parties. Ruling parties therefore almost always have more campaign funds than their opponents. And yet at the vast majority of elections in Karnataka and other states since 1983, ruling parties have lost. If money decided elections, this would not happen. Politicians pursue ‘fund-raising’, in the vain hope that it will win them re-election. (Because they know that re-election is unlikely, they tend to maximise personal profiteering while the opportunity exists, which also increases corruption.)

Illicit ‘fund raising’ for parties has also occurred because state-level leaders – especially in the Congress Party -- have been required to provide national-level leaders with substantial sums. This process became well established early -- in Devaraj Urs’ time -- to persuade his party’s national leaders not to intrude unhelpfully in the state’s politics.\(^10\)

There are, however, certain important checks and limitations on corruption in Karnataka which are less evident in many other states. Most politicians know that excessive

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\(^6\) This refers to corruption at higher levels. Corruption at the local level is discussed in Part IV.

\(^7\) Note that a Karnataka IAS officer has produced a useful book on corruption which was surely informed by his work in the state. See S.K. Das, Public Office, Private Interest: Bureaucracy and Corruption in India (Oxford University Press, Delhi, 2001).

\(^8\) Very few senior politicians in Karnataka have been women.

\(^9\) These comments are based on discussions with Devaraj Urs in Bangalore in 1978.

\(^10\) In interviews with this writer in 1978 and 1980, Devaraj Urs stated this explicitly.
corruption damages their hopes of re-election – by undermining their reputations and their capacity to deliver goods and services. The successors of Gundu Rao and Bangarappa sharply curtailed their excesses because they were seen as politically suicidal.

These limitations have, however, been modest. When a well-informed official in an international development agency saw evidence suggesting that the former Andhra Pradesh government received kickbacks of more than $1 million dollars on more than 100 occasions, he replied that Karnataka had not lagged very far behind. But kickbacks do not occur at every opportunity, so the overall picture is ambiguous.

The criminalisation of politics in Karnataka is far less serious than in many other states. Consider the contrasts with two.

15 years ago, 155 Uttar Pradesh legislators (out of a total of 425) had criminal records – and things have not improved since then. Karnataka has seen nothing remotely like this. Why? Voters in UP (and certain other states) turn to criminals because (i) government institutions have become so degraded that criminals are seen to offer at least some of the responsiveness that those institutions do not provide, and (ii) political parties have undergone severe decay. In Karnataka, the formal institutions are patently imperfect, and parties lack great organisational strength, but they have suffered far less erosion than their UP counterparts.

Until the early 1990s, the only urban centre in South India with a well-developed criminal underworld was Vijayawada in Andhra Pradesh. During the late 1990s, those criminal organisations extended their influence from the coast across the region extending to Hyderabad -- because the economic boom in Hyderabad created opportunities, and because the ruling party there forged ties to them since it considered them useful allies. The economic boom in Bangalore has no doubt attracted the attention of some criminals. But recent interviews with knowledgeable Karnataka

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11 Interview, New Delhi, 9 September 2004.
12 For example, in the mid-1990s, private companies seeking a contract to build a sizeable utility sent representatives to Bangalore to make final presentations before those who would make the decision. After one company’s spokesman had finished, he was told by a senior bureaucrat that to secure the contract, he would need to pass Rs. 600,000 through the bureaucrat to the authorities. The businessman made no response and immediately contacted an analyst of the state’s politics to ask whether this sounded like a genuine overture. The analyst quickly checked with reliable contacts close to the government, and was advised that it was probably not a genuine demand, for two reasons. The figure of Rs. 600,000 seemed too low for such a substantial project. And this specific bureaucrat was probably not in a position to affect the decision. This looked more like a free-lance attempt by that bureaucrat to make some money for himself. The analyst was advised to tell the businessman to telephone the Chief Minister’s office and explain what had happened. The businessman did this and his company then secured the contract without paying a bribe.
13 This emerged from this writer’s discussions with Paul R. Brass, an authority on Uttar Pradesh politics.
15 These comments are based on a detailed, confidential and unpublished study of governance in AP undertaken by this writer in 2001, with the assistance of three of the best informed analysts in that state – whose evidence on this point was highly credible.
officials, policemen and journalists indicate that criminal activities still fall far short of levels found in Andhra Pradesh, and that Karnataka’s politicians have done far less to develop links with criminals. Karnataka politics has experienced very little criminalisation.

**Institutions Still Matter More than Individuals**

In many Indian states, political institutions have taken a battering from powerful, self-aggrandising politicians since 1972. Personalised patronage networks predominate over impersonal processes. Bureaucrats have been so thoroughly browbeaten that they and the institutions which they inhabit retain little substance or autonomy. Supposedly independent institutions beyond the bureaucracy have been subordinated to the whims of potent leaders. We have seen far less of this in Karnataka than in many other states. And when such excesses have occurred there, they have usually been followed by efforts to regenerate institutions.\(^{16}\)

This is mainly explained by three features of Karnataka’s politics. First, the preference for rainbow coalitions at the state level has ensured that collective leadership has usually predominated. This has prevented excesses by individual leaders, and limited damage to institutions.

Second, most senior politicians there have risen through the ranks of their parties, so that individuals do not loom larger than parties. It is thus unusual to find a party in Karnataka utterly dominated by one leader. We saw signs of this in the Congress Party under Gundu Rao and Bangarappa (but they were soon ousted), and recently in the Janata Dal (S). But the norm is collective leadership -- which is institution-friendly.

Third, the alternation of parties in power has meant that no leader has been so successful at the polls that s/he becomes more important than the party and can do whatever s/he pleases. This again has spared institutions the kind of damage which untrammelled leaders can do.

Karnataka has also experienced less brutish government than several other states. It has seen nothing remotely like the excesses witnessed under the present Gujarat government, in Haryana under Bansi Lal, in Maharashtra under the BJP-Shiv Sena government, or the surge in deaths in police custody under Naidu in Andhra Pradesh.\(^ {17}\) No Karnataka leader has gone that far.

It is also exceedingly unusual in Karnataka for senior politicians to browbeat civil servants – a common occurrence in some North Indian states and an occasional occurrence in Gujarat, Maharasthra, and Tamil Nadu. As a result, the bureaucracy in

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\(^{17}\) Senior civil servants in Karnataka express astonishment at the “brutal” actions against alleged ‘naxalites’ under the Naidu government.
Karnataka has maintained greater autonomy, institutional substance, and potential for constructive action than in most other states. That has enabled successive Karnataka governments to develop more intelligently crafted policies than most other governments—including policies that affect the rural sector.  

**Policy Continuity amid the Alternation of Ruling Parties**

Since 1983, the alternation of ruling parties at state elections has been the norm in Karnataka. In some states—most notably Uttar Pradesh since the early 1990s—when governments alternate, huge changes ensue. The policies of previous governments are uprooted and contemptuously discarded, and key administrative posts are systematically purged of civil servants who served the previous government. We have seen very little of this in Karnataka.

This is partly explained by the preference for incremental policy changes. This offers a striking contrast to Uttar Pradesh where dramatic policy shifts by one government,

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18 The importance of this institutional capacity can be illustrated by a brief account not of policy affecting the rural sector, but of the interactions between Karnataka governments and major international development agencies. In 2002, a World Bank official in Delhi told this writer that Karnataka was the only state government in India that with an impressive capacity to develop its own detailed negotiating positions in its dealings with the Bank. This required the government to generate complex socio-economic analyses and proposals on its own, without help from the Bank which routinely provided such assistance to other state governments—a process that compromised their autonomy. Karnataka could achieve this not because it had more good economists among its senior bureaucrats, but because it managed its bureaucracy in ways that enabled its economists to make crucial contributions to policy making. (The state government also sought advice from formidable analysts available within the state—not least at ISEC.)

By giving bureaucrats greater autonomy, and by providing them with an enabling environment, successive governments have enhanced their own autonomy in their dealings with major international development agencies. This has ensured that the state’s finances have been prudently managed, so that Karnataka does not share the desperate need of some other states for donor funds—something which can lead state governments into agreements which undermine their autonomy. Thus when the World Bank offered the J.H. Patel government substantial funds, he was able to take advice from sophisticated advisors and—when they and he found the attendant conditionalities unpalatable—he refused the offer.

The strength of these institutions within the Government of Karnataka has not always endeared it to international donor agencies. In recent years, Chief Ministers of Uttar Pradesh (Kalyan Singh) and Andhra Pradesh (Chandrababu Naidu) have gone to extraordinary lengths to cultivate major donors at a personal level. When teams from donor agencies arrived in their state capitals, they had extensive access to these Chief Ministers who played the dominant role in negotiations. By contrast, when such teams reached Bangalore, they dealt mainly with Chief Secretaries, Finance Secretaries and their teams of economic advisors. At best, they might be given a meal with Chief Ministers. (The use of the plural is crucial, since it indicates that these practices were followed under successive governments.)

This caused some dismay in donor agencies. Egos were not massaged so assiduously in Bangalore, and it inspired suspicions about whether the real leaders there were serious about development. At one point in the late 1990s, an analyst stressed to a major donor agency that when they negotiated with governments in places like Andhra Pradesh they were dealing with individuals, while in Karnataka they were dealing with institutions. This should have made Karnataka more attractive since it indicated that policy continuity when governments changed was more likely, but that message was not fully absorbed.

This account focuses on high politics and on events that do not bear intimately upon the rural sector, but the same processes—creating conditions in which civil servants can contribute constructively to policy making—have had positive benefits for rural development too. [Interviews since 1998 with senior officials of the state government and at the World Bank in Delhi.]
introduced with extravagant histrionics, are shredded when a new government takes over and introduces radically different policies with still more histrionics. It is also explained by Karnataka’s parties’ tendency to appeal to the same social base (see the section just below).

When a new government assumes power in Bangalore, it tends to sustain most of its predecessor’s policies – with some adjustments but little uprooting. This has produced broad policy continuity which has enabled the incremental changes that nearly all governments have introduced to have – over time – a considerable cumulative effect that has often been felt at the village level.

**Continuity in Social Coalitions Underpinning Ruling Parties**

Nearly all state governments in Karnataka since 1972 have sought to construct a broadly inclusive rainbow coalition of all numerically powerful social groups. Again Uttar Pradesh differs radically, with contending parties seeking votes from more limited and largely distinct sections of society. Those parties magnify the differences between social groups and encourage antipathy between them. Hence the dramatic changes in policy there. The politics of division and spite that have predominated in Uttar Pradesh for over a decade have almost never been pursued in Karnataka.

These comments about ‘rainbow coalitions’ refer to more than the representation of different social groups within the state cabinet. It is possible to have relatively fair representation while leaders from certain social groups receive only tokenism – unimportant posts, or inadequate influence over the ministries that they supposedly control. But governments in Karnataka since 1972 have provided leaders from a diverse social groups with genuine influence over reasonably important ministries. Indeed, governments have tended to construct state-level cabinets which are even more broadly representative than the coalitions which voted them into power.19

It has, however, become increasingly difficult to build and sustain extremely broad coalitions because tensions between various social groups have grown more acute. Consider Muzaffar Assadi’s stimulating arguments that two competing social coalitions have contended for power in the state: MOVD (Muslims, OBCs, Vokkaligas and Dalits) and LIBRA (Lingayats and Brahmins).20

If those two coalitions held together coherently, MOVD would always defeat LIBRA. The former contains far more voters than the latter. In practice, most governments since

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19 This has become especially apparent in the period since the mid-1990s when data from the National Election Study have shown that the social coalitions which elect governments have sometimes been less broad than the array of groups represented in cabinets. But it appears to have been true in earlier periods as well. On the 2004 election, see Shastri and Ramaswamy, “Karnataka: Simultaneous Polls, Different Results, Economic and Political Weekly (18 December 2004) p. 5487.

the alternation of parties began in 1983 have tended to appeal mainly to the MOVD groups. But we have often seen variations in this trend.

Governments have reached out to Lingayats and Brahmins as well as to MOVD groups. One was headed by a Brahmin (Ramakrishna Hegde) and two were headed, for a time, by Lingayats (S.R. Bommai and Veerendra Patil). And those Lingayats came from both major parties – Bommai from Janata, and Veerendra Patil from Congress. Since 1983, both parties have given significant representation to all numerically powerful groups. All cabinets have been broadly representative. Both parties have had Vokkaliga Chief Ministers, and though only Congress has had OBC Chief Ministers, Janata has also given them prominence. All Chief Ministers have also sought to include leaders from the two numerically powerful groups that have not provided Chief Ministers – Dalits and Muslims (although there has often been a shortage of Muslim legislators).21

The BJP, however, which is no longer a marginal party, has focused mainly upon the LIBRA bloc. This became apparent after Hegde aligned his version of the Janata Dal with the BJP. He was a Brahmin, and Lingayats and Brahmins have loomed large in the leadership of the state unit of the BJP. But he and the BJP recognised that they needed support from other groups. The BJP has sought to mobilize MOVD elements around communal issues – with only limited success. And the BJP and Hegde, until the latter’s death, appealed to regional resentments in northern Karnataka. So here again, the dichotomy between MOVD and LIBRA blurs at the edges.

Growing tensions between social groups may end the tradition of ‘rainbow coalitions’ by making it impossible for politicians to sustain the broadly accommodative approach that has long prevailed. But that has not happened yet. It is also possible that the BJP will gain power after the next state election – because they are the only alternative to the coalition between the Congress and the Janata Dal (S). But if that occurs, it will not be because the LIBRA bloc brought the BJP to power – it lacks the numerical strength to do so. It will be because many MOVD voters turned to the BJP out of frustration with the coalition government. And that will impel a new BJP government to reach out to those people once it takes power – to pursue yet another broad coalition.

III. THE VILLAGE LEVEL

Karnataka’s villages have experienced diverse social and political changes in the last three decades. Most of these have occurred gradually, but over time, many have had considerable cumulative effects.

Social and Economic Change in the Villages

In the years since 1972, agriculture has gradually declined in importance – both economically (as people turn increasingly to non-farm incomes), and socially (as the

21 The main reason for this is that Muslim voters are spread unusually evenly and thus thinly across the state. They form a very substantial bloc in only three of the 224 assembly constituencies (interview with E. Raghavan and Imran Qureshi, Bangalore, 9 March 2005).
inter-dependence and hierarchical bonds anchored in old patterns of agricultural production have been eroded). Change in this sector has been incremental but persistent, so that in many areas, the old social order has substantially crumbled. This is apparent from studies by G.K. Karanth, V. Ramaswamy and others. These indicate that there is much less order in village society, and that old rituals – and the collective arrangements for the management of resources linked to them – have withered.22

G.S. Aurora has explained the background to these changes.23 He notes a decline in the number of larger land holdings and an increase in the number of medium, small and marginal holdings. The numbers of marginal farmers and landless labourers have increased. Many artisans have been “forced to join the ranks of the rural proletariat” as goods used by rural dwellers have come increasingly from urban industries.

The proportion of lands put to non-agricultural uses has risen from 4.2% in 1956-57 to 6.7% in 1997-98. The commercialisation of agricultural household economies has become a “dominant pattern”. In former times, farmers concentrated on growing cereals, partly for payments in kind under the old jajmani system. Now, as that system has disintegrated, they cultivate other crops for the market and pay workers in cash -- loosening the old, hierarchical social ties which also implied interdependence. As it has diminished, dependence on external market forces – which carries serious risks -- has grown. The use of high yielding varieties has increased, and with it the need for costly inputs. To obtain these, farmers must take sizeable loans, and when crops fail, this has led to farmers’ suicides. (Far fewer of these have occurred in Karnataka than in neighbouring Andhra Pradesh, but the total in the former – over 400 – is still alarming.)

Four themes from Aurora’s analysis are immensely important.

- The potency of hierarchy and interdependence within villages has declined.
- Links to and dependence upon external forces have increased.
- Individuals now count for more than collectivities within villages – which increases both the liberty and the vulnerability of individuals.
- The result is a society that is more open and democratic, but in which people face greater risks -- since the old hierarchical order entailed not only injustices but certain collective protections against uncertainties.

**Changes in the Role, the Importance and the Materiality of Caste**

Given these changes, caste (jati) has diminished in importance, especially in one crucial respect. It has increasingly come to denote ‘difference’ rather than ‘hierarchy’. This has

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23 G.S. Aurora, “Core Issues in the Agrarian Economy and Society of Karnataka” in ibid., pp. 247-64. His focus was on Kolar District of Karnataka, but his comment apply to nearly off of the state.
caused certain invidious practices to decline, but it has also inspired greater tensions and conflicts between caste groups. We see this in other states too.24

This monumental change has occurred gradually. When a visitor mentioned it to Krishna Raj, the late editor of the Economic and Political Weekly, the latter stressed that what surprised him was that “it took so long”.25 At present, we lack a full understanding both of why the change occurred and why “it took so long”. M.N. Srinivas stressed the importance of the decline of the *jajmani* system that provided the material underpinnings of caste hierarchy26, and he was probably correct. The role of politics was ambiguous. Political mobilization on caste lines tended to strengthen caste consciousness and at times reinforced hierarchies. But the post-1972 mobilization of disadvantaged castes in Karnataka, and the egalitarian logic of one-person-one-vote undermined it.

Government policies also had an ambiguous impact. On the one hand, policies after 1972 favouring disadvantaged groups contributed to the decline of hierarchy. On the other, one reason that “it took so long” has been the cautious, incremental nature of economic liberalization in India. Its leaders have carefully avoided radical changes common in China and much of Southeast Asia – because in a democratic polity, they are unwilling to risk massive social dislocation. In China, around 200 million peasants have been induced or forced off the land. Many of them live precariously round major cities, seeking work. This poses serious risks of political disorder. The Chinese leaders, with their formidable coercive power, are prepared to countenance this. Nothing remotely like that, or like the “social change in fast forward” seen in Indonesia,27 has happened in India.

But despite the gradualism, immense changes have occurred. One key example is a decline in the material utility of caste. Two decades ago, this writer argued that caste (*jati*) in Karnataka existed not just at the level of ideas, sentiments or identifications, but that it possessed materiality. A villager’s caste status and connections played a major role in determining whether s/he could gain access to tangible opportunities and assets.28 Today, this remains true to some extent. But high caste status offers fewer material advantages, and low status offers at least somewhat fewer disadvantages than before. And other things have gained in importance in providing or denying opportunities to villagers (see below).

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27 This phrase belongs to Anne Booth, an Indonesia specialist at the University of London.
The Proliferation of New Channels Linking Local and Higher Levels

This topic is discussed more fully in Part IV, but it is important to note it here, since it alters dynamics within villages. Far more channels now exist to link individuals within villages to higher levels in the system. Some of these – the electronic media (especially satellite television, but also telephones) mainly provide villagers with more information than they could obtain 30 years ago. But others – improved roads, transport, *panchayati raj* institutions, other government structures, and civil society organisations – enable individuals to develop links to the wider world, which they can sometimes use to access new opportunities.

Individuals Matter More, and Social Institutions and Groups Less…

As caste (*jati*) -- a social institution -- has gone into decline, villagers seeking opportunities have increasingly turned to individuals who can (in G.K. Karanth’s words) “get things done”. And those doing the seeking have also often operated as individuals rather than on behalf of the social groups from which they come. Thus, social institutions and groups matter less, and individuals matter more than before.

…but One Political Institution Matters More – Panchayati Raj

At the same time, however, the comparatively generous empowerment and funding of *panchayats* in Karnataka have given – the *gram* (village) *panchayat* – a political institution -- considerable importance in most villages. This has had ambiguous implications on two fronts.

First, the growing importance of this democratic political institution has acted as a counterweight to what might be termed a tendency towards anarchy within villages -- which might follow from the decline of a substantially undemocratic social institutionism caste (*jati*). But since people interact with *gram panchayats* not just collectively but also as individuals, it has in part enhanced the growing importance of individuals.

Second, the empowerment of *panchayats* has sometimes enabled villagers to solve problems on their own. But since *gram panchayats* often need administrative assistance from higher up to implement some decisions – like construction projects – villagers must still reach out to higher levels. When that happens, individuals’ connections higher levels are important. So here again, the results have been ambiguous. (*Panchayats* are discussed further in the section just below, and again in Part IV.)

Corruption At and Near the Village Level

Corruption at lower levels presents a mixed, but somewhat less grim picture than at the state level. Here as at the state level, our evidence is limited. But the following,

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30 Interview, Bangalore, 9 April 2005.
sometimes unproven, points are probably accurate. Corruption occurs at lower levels for
diverse reasons. Even candidates seeking lowly offices feel compelled to spend
substantial funds – and to take out loans that must be repaid out of money illicitly raised.
The market in transfers impels low-level bureaucrats to find similarly large sums, with
the same result. And when a nexus develops at the sub-district level among a small
number of government employees and elected politicians, development funds may be
diverted into their pockets. We have, however, seen the emergence in recent years of
significant correctives to this last type of malfeasance – as the result of the empowerment
of panchayats.

In Karnataka, as a consequence of democratic decentralisation, the number of people
involved in corrupt activities has increased. That was inevitable when the number of
elected offices increased in 1987 from 224 (assembly seats) to over 50,000 (seats on
panchayats). But the key question is whether the overall amount of money stolen has
deprecated. Evidence from Karnataka clearly indicates that it has.

Before 1987, when development funds reached the sub-district (taluk) level, four or five
persons (the Block Development Officer, the Assistant Engineer and influential non-
officials) often met behind closed doors, stole a substantial portion of that money –
around 40%, say people involved – and presented the remainder to ordinary people as
100% of the development budget. After 1987, when the system became so transparent
that hundreds of people in every taluk knew what 100% of the budget actually was, such
grand theft became impossible. Estimates in 1993 placed the overall amount of funds
stolen under the new system at around 5%. That figure may have increased in the
ensuing years, but even if it has, the picture is still substantially brighter than before the
empowerment of panchayats.

IV. LINKS BETWEEN VILLAGES AND HIGHER LEVELS

The number of channels that provide potential links between villages and higher levels
has multiplied over the last 30 years. This is the result of the emergence or growing
importance of four institutions/actors discussed below. Before we examine them, it is
worth noting that two institutions do not qualify for inclusion here. First, the role of the
police -- who have become more responsive in urban Karnataka -- has scarcely changed

31 This is discussed in more detail in Crook and Manor, Democracy and Decentralisation in South Asia
and West Africa: Participation, Accountability and Performance (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge,
1998) chapter two.

32 It is worth adding that the computerised Bhoomi programme, providing land certificates -- by-passing
village accountants who took bribes for this service -- is said to have reduced petty corruption by an
estimated Rs.895 million annually. Public Affairs Centre, A Report Card on Bhoomi Kiosks (Public
Affairs Centre, Bangalore, 2004). Some readers may suspect that that figure is an exaggeration – and
Narayana Gatty have found evidence to indicate that in northern Karnataka, villagers prefer to pay the
traditional bribes rather than incur the inconvenience of travelling to computer kiosks within their taluks.
But even if the actual figure were only half of that amount, it still represents a significant decline in
corruption.

33 A fifth, market forces, might be added to this list. But that is best left to economists to analyse.

34 Independent surveys by the Public Affairs Centre found public satisfaction levels with the city’s police
rose from almost zero in 1994 to 17% in 1999, and then to 83% in 2003. See, Development Outreach
in rural areas. Second, the capacity of political parties to penetrate into rural arenas has declined over the last three decades. But let us consider four more encouraging changes.

**The Proliferation of Government Programmes and ‘User Committees’**

National and state governments currently implement a vastly greater number of programmes in rural Karnataka than in 1972 -- providing new channels between villages and higher levels. And since many of these programmes create ‘user committees’ to consult villagers or their representatives (on health, education, forestry, etc) -- and since in this state (unlike many others) panchayats influence those committees – fresh opportunities exist for local preferences to flow upward into the policy process.\(^{35}\) It should be stressed, however, that rural Karnataka has not witnessed the dramatic increases in government responsiveness that occurred in Bangalore under S.M. Krishna during the late 1990s.\(^{36}\)

**Panchayati Raj Institutions**

Panchayats were substantially empowered and funded in 1987, and since then – despite a decline in their powers – they have remained reasonably strong by Indian and international standards. This system has proved more successful that most others across the world, partly because its accountability mechanisms are unusually reliable.\(^{37}\)

Their role in providing links between villages and higher levels is ambiguous. In certain respects, it is limited. Panchayats exist at village, taluk and district levels, but this has not resulted in sustained interactions between elected members at different levels -- partly because panchayats at the intermediate taluk level are comparatively weak. But information flows have increased massively, both upward and downward. Governments find it far easier to transmit information downward because elected panchayat members can interpret policies to villagers in ways that the latter comprehend. And officials at higher levels have experienced a massive increase in information flows from below – so they feel better able to perform their tasks.\(^{38}\)

**Political ‘Fixers’**

Comments above on the increasing importance in villages of people who can “get things done” refer to the large number of local-level ‘fixers’ who seek to arrange things with persons in authority at higher levels. Two recent studies of ‘fixers’ in Karnataka\(^{39}\) found


\(^{36}\) See again, the Public Affairs Centre surveys and Manor, “Successful Governance Reforms…”.

\(^{37}\) Crook and Manor, Democracy and Decentralisation…

\(^{38}\) Ibid., chapter two.

\(^{39}\) J. Manor, “‘Towel over Armpit’: Small-time Political ‘Fixers’ in India’s States” – published in a shorter version in Asian Survey (September-October 2000) pp. 816-35, and in a longer version in A. Varshney
that many of them do not come from the traditionally dominant landowning groups, and that those who do are usually not involved in cultivating patrimonial ties to clients. They develop different types of relationships from those associated with the old village hierarchies and with Lingayat/Vokkaliga dominance. They have tended to erode those hierarchies. Most ‘fixers’ are more accessible than dominant caste leaders in the old hierarchies. And they help the democratic process to work more effectively, and government institutions and actors to become more responsive.

Civil Society Organisations

Civil society organisations also provide villagers with more links to higher levels than three decades ago. Today, they can be found in most rural arenas. Local-level associations tend not to connect villagers with higher levels, but many which originate at higher levels seek to forge links to the grassroots. We must not, however, overstate the coverage of the latter. It is unlikely that more than a minority of villagers are reached by such organisations. So most important links between villages and higher levels are provided by the other three institutions and actors discussed above.

V. HOW ‘COHESIVE’ IS SOCIETY IN KARNATAKA?

To conclude, let us consider the answers to this question that emerge at the village and higher levels. In 1984, this writer argued that Karnataka was a ‘cohesive society’ – not as cohesive as more homogeneous societies, but more cohesive than the societies found elsewhere in South Asia. This was true despite invidious hierarchies and injustices within it. The key to the explanation was the exceedingly low incidence of landlessness in former princely Mysore.

This had two important implications. First, hierarchies and inequalities there were not as extreme as in other regions of South Asia – so that we encountered less of the harsh exploitation found elsewhere, and less severe alienation among the exploited. Second, since old Mysore set the political tone for the enlarged state after 1956, accommodative politics which offered at least something even to disadvantaged groups took firmer root there than in other Indian states.

Is society in Karnataka today still as ‘cohesive’? The simple answer is ‘no’, but the details are complicated. At the village level, caste hierarchies have eroded. Since those

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40 Inbanathan and Gopalappa, ibid., p. 18.
41 In Bangladesh, where national-level civil society organisations are more formidable than state-level equivalents in Karnataka, they estimate that they reach only around 20% of the rural population. Interview with the head of one of the two most formidable organisations, Dhaka, 7 March 1993.
42 Manor, “Karnataka: Caste, Class…
hierarchies entailed objectionable practices, this change that can be seen as ‘progressive’. But it has also undermined the limited sense of interdependence and mutuality, which offered certain protections against uncertainties. The old hierarchies proved remarkably durable because they adapted incrementally as conditions changed.43 They bent without breaking – until recently.

Over recent decades, ‘caste’ has come to denote difference more than hierarchy. The bonds linking higher and lower status groups have become more tenuous. Villagers look for help less to neighbours who have high ascriptive status than to people who “can get things done”. And those people are often not of high caste status.44 Thus at the village level, Karnataka has become a much less “cohesive” society.

People who can “get things done” usually achieve this by using connections and channels to higher levels in the system. Such channels have proliferated over the last three decades. This has made villagers less inclined to try to solve problems through their own collective efforts and more inclined to look beyond the village for assistance.45

This proliferation of channels does not mean that society in Karnataka has become more “cohesive” in another way – in terms of vertical ties between villages and higher levels. Society is more vertically integrated. But the bonds that connect the villages with higher levels are too impersonal, impermanent and unpredictable to yield anything like “cohesion”. We have seen a decline in social cohesion at the village level, and an increase in mostly political and economic integration between the local and higher levels. But the latter does not suffice to compensate for the loosening of social bonds at the grassroots.

There are greater tensions between castes – although some analysts argue that this is substantially explained by better reporting of such matters. There is evidence of at least a modest increase in suspicion between Hindus and religious minorities – despite the failure of Hindu nationalists to elicit much popular response through campaigns about Ayodhya or in Hubli and Chikmagalur.46 Retreats by recent state governments on the issue of land reform have inspired some popular anger over concessions to globalization and private companies. Policy changes on common property resources have inspired some ‘naxalite’ activity.

43 For evidence of this durability, consider for example a survey of social attitudes conducted in the early 1980s by K.C. Alexander. He questioned village respondents in Alleppey District of Kerala, Thanjavur District of Tamil Nadu and Mandya District of Karnataka. In the first two of those places, the old hierarchies had been so extremely unjust that they had broken down. In Mandya District, however, the old hierarchies were far less inequitable – so he found that the hierarchies lived on. K.C. Alexander, “Caste Mobilization and Class Consciousness: The Emergence of Agrarian Movements in Kerala and Tamil Nadu” in Frankel and Rao, ibid., volume one, pp. 392-400.
44 Interview with G.K. Karanth, Bangalore, 5 March 2005.
45 See for example, the arguments of G.K. Karanth, V. Ramaswamy and others in chapters 11 to 14 of Baumgartner and Hogger (eds.) In Search of…
We see more resentment in rural areas about state governments’ urban bias than three decades ago, and greater exasperation in northern Karnataka over regional disparities. State governments are more preoccupied with ensuring that benefits flow to Kannadigas rather than to linguistic minorities. On each of these fronts, we see growing impatience within a specific group -- rural dwellers, northerners and Kannadigas -- with the grand political settlement that has emerged from state governments’ pursuit of incremental change and broad accommodations embracing a large diversity of social groups. These three groups are vastly powerful. Rural dwellers and Kannadigas constitute huge majorities, and one perceptive analyst of Karnataka’s politics argues that northerners often decide state election outcomes.47

Frustrations within such formidable groups raise serious concerns about the sustainability of two important themes in Karnataka over recent decades. The first is accommodative politics at the state-level, the tendency of leaders to construct broadly inclusive cabinets since 1972. The second is the ‘enlightened conservative’ tendency to undertake change in anticipation of potential conflicts – to defuse them before they become acute, in order to sustain accommodative politics.

Will the increasing frustrations and social tensions at lower levels undermine accommodation at the state level? Perhaps not, unless much greater antipathy develops between social groups than we have seen thus far – and maybe even if it does. State-level politicians are likely to cling to the view that their ambitions are best served by developing broadly inclusive accommodations. That persuaded leading Lingayats and Vokkaligas not to seek a restoration of state-level dominance after Devaraj Urs had changed politics in 1972. That persuaded successive Chief Ministers to include in their cabinets leaders even from groups that had given them little electoral support – because this maximised their appeal. Even if social tensions grow more acute, that logic may still apply. The main potential exception to this is the BJP, which might pursue communal polarization if it came to power. But some leading analysts have long expected them to conform to the accommodative tradition if they take office.

In 2006, they finally managed to do so – in coalition with elements of the Janata Dal (S). The compulsions of coalition government have thus far prevented dramatic actions by BJP leaders that might prove polarizing. Indeed, confusion and occasional conflicts within that government have prevented it from achieving much of anything during its first few months in power.

Whatever happens in the future, it should by now be apparent that certain important changes have occurred – mostly incrementally – over the period since 1972. Village society in Karnataka is less cohesive, but more integrated with higher levels, as a result of the proliferation of channels linking the villages to those levels. It is less self-regulating (as a result of the decline of the old social hierarchies), but (as a result of panchayati raj) somewhat more self-governing.

47 This is E. Raghavan, editor of the Economic Times, Bangalore. His view is not shared by this writer.
It is a less quiescent and orderly society, characterised by greater (caste, regional, linguistic, urban/rural and perhaps communal) tensions and, at times, conflicts. And the loosening of hierarchical social bonds has made it possible, for the first time, that class conflict may become important in rural Karnataka. State-level politicians’ preference for broadly inclusive accommodations, and the incremental changes that flow from them, have provided inadequate responses to interest groups caught up in these tensions.

And yet despite that, government has become more responsive. That is partly the result of the reasonably generous empowerment of *panchayati raj* institutions. But it is also explained by the introduction of participatory mechanisms (mainly ‘user committees’ and self help groups) that promote at least some consultation in various developmental sectors. These have been introduced both by governments and by some civil society organisations.

These things are patent realities, but they and politicians’ accommodative habits may not suffice to prevent greater tension and turbulence in the society and politics of the state. Karnataka has become more democratic – thanks in part to the decline of the old hierarchies – but it has become more difficult to govern. The instruments available to those doing the governing -- mainly formal institutions, agencies and programmes, since party organisations lack strength -- have not suffered the sort of damage seen in some other Indian states, and have increased in number and penetrative capacity. But this has not eased the long-standing difficulty of ruling parties at getting re-elected, and if tensions continue to intensify, they could eventually bring an end to the accommodative tradition in state politics.
The goal of this study was to identify the pattern of distribution in the transfer of federal resources to state-run Research Support Foundations (RSFs), between 2004 and 2012, within the context of the implementation of the national Science, Technology and Innovation (STI) policy. Hence a lasting interest towards reforms in management and public governance. The core of the ideology of governance was the view that systemic clarity and rhythmic order are inherent to the nature of governance. And the mechanism of governance was structured in such a way as to bring the system into accord with a level of integrity and balance in relation to the wider environment. Photo: lite7days.ru Viktor Sergeev: The Unbalanced Globalization. However, it became clear by the end of the 20th century that systems are characterized by more complicated parameters and greater uncertainty in their According to the scientist, people from all over the world can be divided into 3 clear categories, based not on nationality or religion but on behaviour. He named this typologies as linear-active, multi-active and reactive. Here below I will show a picture, where features of every group are represented. In addition, when I travelled to Finland, I saw some villages and small towns that looks dead even during the weekends - there are no people on the street, everything is closed. Here in Turku people don't hurry anywhere, their temp of life is haste-less and I can't understand it.