

CONCLUDING REMARKS

CHAPTER-VII

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7.1. In the foregoing chapters the group has recapitulated history of democratic decentralisation from 1854 to till date (Chapter II), laid the Approach to be adopted by the Group (Chapter III), analysed the status of 29 development activities in the state with the areas and functions needed to be entrusted to 3 tiers of rural local bodies (Chapter IV); outlined the linkages these institutions will have in so far as the schemes and institutions are concerned (Chapter V), and went on to highlight the operational frame work to institutionalise democratic decentralised set up in Tamil Nadu (Chapter VI). This report will be the foundation of operationalising the democratic decentralisation in Tamil Nadu.

7.2 The phased entrustment of powers is suggested by the group. In the first instance group has suggested in Chapter IV powers, functions and responsibilities to be transferred; in Chapter V schematic and institutional linkages for rural local bodies, and in Chapter VI operationalisation of these entrustments.

7.3. A new institutional structure below the State level for delivering service, responding to the needs of people and development of the local area has been created with constitutional and statutory backing. These institutions, viz., Village Panchayats, Panchayat Unions and District Panchayats are expected to play a crucial role in the development administration. The devolution package envisaged in the State Act concerning panchayats has aroused considerable interest among the people in general, and those elected to manage these institutions in particular. The performance of the Panchayat Raj system will be judged by its contribution to democratic governance, efficiency in resource use and effectiveness in discharging the wide ranging functions for which they have been made responsible. There is a feeling that effective devolution of powers, responsibilities and financial resources would take place only in a slow pace. State Government should remove any such apprehensions and demonstrate their willingness to part with responsibilities and resources to the Panchayat Raj Institutions.

7.4. Admittedly, we are not writing on a clean slate. There are enormous established arrangements, procedures, attitudes and authorities who are now being required to make a room for and relate to a completely new set of institutions, which are democratically elected and derive their authority from the bottom i.e. the people around them. Whereas, the existing arrangements run mainly by the administrators are subject to hierarchical control at the apex. Under the best of circumstances their coming together will be an arduous process.

7.5 Thus, the transfer of powers and functions even where accepted in principle, will pose hundreds of day-to-day problem of adjustments, accommodation and understanding. The only perspective in which all concerned can bear these problems, rise above them and ease the pains is to be constantly aware that as against every one problem there will be ten new possibilities of moving our country forward on the path of progress and overcoming the backlog of services and satisfaction accumulated over the past 50 years.

7.6. The Group report would facilitate hastening process of devolution of powers to the local bodies. The State Government has already accepted some of the recommendations of the Group's First Report. State Finance Commission has given its recommendations on devolution of financial resources. Government have accepted some of their major recommendations. An early decision on the devolution of powers would strengthen the Panchayat Raj Institutions and place them on a sound foundation. The State Government has also set in motion a vital and welcome process of periodic consultation with Chairpersons of District Panchayats and Panchayat Union Council and Village Panchayat representatives at State level Conference chaired by the Chief Minister where Ministers and Senior Officers also participated in the dialogue and deliberations.

7.7. The Chief Minister's assurances given in the 1997-98 Budget speech about the respective role of elected representatives and officials viz., **"I hereby state categorically that the local bodies would take decisions regarding the responsibilities entrusted to them and that the officials would only have the responsibilities of implementing those decisions"**. These are evidence of continued political commitment of the Government to make democratic decentralisation a success. The Group hopes that this report will be of some help in providing a concrete and practical basis for the march of democratic decentralisation in Tamil Nadu.