

Foreword

Dr Ambedkar in his writings and speeches before Independence vehemently argued against the decentralised system of governance reaching up to the village level. In his view, the caste identities will continue to dominate in the decentralised governance leaving the depressed castes at the mercy of the dominant groups. Amendments to the Constitution during 1993, brought forth decentralisation as the major force in governance and that has been implemented in most of the states. The constitution provided three-tier system with statutory requirements of reserved seats for deprived castes in the Panchayats both as members as well as Presidents and Vice-Presidents. It is quite interesting to question whether the constitutional provisions have been able to transcend the caste barrier in rural India, especially focusing on rural governance. Sociological theorists have always argued on the platform of dominant castes and legitimacy but at the micro level, these theories fail to explain the existing complexity. The experience at different locations can only enrich our understanding of the process of decentralisation and empowerment of weaker sections.

This study by Dr Anand Inbanathan and Prof N Sivanna focuses on understanding the affirmative action at micro level along with examining the socio-economic compulsions. The study covers Karnataka and Tamil Nadu as states which have a long and intensive experience of decentralised governance in India. Quite painstakingly the authors have utilised empirical data as well as indepth understanding from the field to bring out various issues in providing legitimacy and empowerment for the weaker sections. The resistance and grudging acceptance of the changed circumstances is quite visible from their field study; however, the silver lining is that our society is taking this change positively though very slowly and grudgingly. One can only question, if this process can be hastened and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes are provided their legitimate positions to govern wherever they are handed over the PRI governance. I am quite happy that the authors have been able to understand the situation in depth and therefore, I have the honour to recommend this study to readers from research field as well as policy makers.

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*R S Deshpande
Director, ISEC*