

Globalization from the Grassroots and the Revival of the Local in the New World Order?

A Case Study of the Panchayati Raj in India with Special Reference to Punjab



This comic strip was made by Luni, a women rights activist, in cooperation with Sohard, a grassroots organization focusing on Gender and Dalit Rights in Rajasthan. The comic shows how "the women have found their own place in the village policy-making, despite male oppression." <http://www.worldcomics.fi/indrajluni.html> [last accessed 9 September 2004].

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List of Abbreviations

AIR	All India Law Reporter
BDO	Block Development and Panchayat Officer
BPRA	Bihar Panchayati Raj Act
COI	Constitution of India
CPI-M	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
GOP	Government of Punjab
ILR	Indian Law Reports
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
MP	Member of Parliament
P&H	Punjab and Haryana
PPRA	Punjab Panchayati Raj Act

Abstract

India's integration in the *global* political system is fast and irrevocable. At the same time, *local* governments have been significantly empowered through the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India in 1993. Globalization and localization are happening simultaneously. Yet the relationship of these two concepts remains uncertain.

In the theoretical part, this dissertation argues that globalization and localization can be, against popular perceptions, complementary. *Glocalization* increases civil society at the grassroots. The latter will be able to pursue global governance through communication within the networked structure of local governments.

The established framework will be used to demonstrate that the decentralization project in India does not offset the globalization process. It only offers an alternative approach. Special reference will be made to Punjab, where field research has been done. Interviews and statistical data give a better impression how local governments can work within a global framework and how society is transforming.

It is too early to say that local governments in India are already globalizing, but the main conclusion is that the post-modern structural changes as result of the 73rd Amendment are modifying the structures of government and slowly preparing the gram panchayats and the local for taking an imperative role in global India.

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I. Introduction

On 20 April 1993, the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution of India (COI) came into effect. It can be seen as an attempt of the Government of India to revitalize the *gram panchayats* (village governments) as a form of local governance, which, albeit enshrined in Article 40 COI, had thus far not possessed adequate resources in order to function as an effective political institution. Gram panchayats had had a long tradition in history.

Only two years before, India suffered its worst balance-of-payments crisis and faced bankruptcy. The foreign exchange reserves only covered two weeks of imports, which is considered as the worst possible scenario among economists. Finance Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh negotiated with the International Monetary Fund as the lender of last resort and received a loan against the concession to cease India's decade-long isolation, liberalize the economy, trigger off major structural reforms and integrate the country into the global economy. With this, India gave up the doctrine of *swadeshi* and had to conceptualize a new policy for its economic development. In other words, Dr. Singh had the task to prepare India for the age of *globalization*.

These two developments show us that internally the political system of India is decentralizing, while the state as such is integrating in the global political system. Globalization and decentralization are happening

simultaneously.¹ But which of the two concepts describes the happenings in India appropriately? Is India globalizing or localizing?²

The stated problem will be elaborated in this dissertation. At first, a theoretical framework will be established to show that globalization and localization do not necessarily have to be antagonistic to each other. The world order is in a significant structural transformation, which has an impact on the concept of globalization. This transformation constitutes in some extent that very process. The centers of the states are increasingly sharing political power with supranational and subnational institutions.

The next part will deal with the changes of the Indian political system since the 73rd Amendment. It is intended to demonstrate that a new communication network and a bigger public sphere are developing, which significantly increases the size of a local democratic civil society as a future driving force for India's global governance.

There is no blueprint of how local governments work. Hence, the next analytical section will scrutinize local governments of three selected states. At first, the panchayat system in West Bengal and Bihar is shortly discussed to show two extreme examples of local governance. Then, the panchayat system of Punjab is evaluated with the theoretical framework of Chapter II. Punjab is one of the richer states in India with a well-developed infrastructure. This example excludes many external variables, which would otherwise distort the discussion.

¹ See also Samuel and Jagadananda (2003), p. 65. The book is available online at http://www.socwatch.org.uy/es/informeImpreso/pdfs/book2003_ind.pdf [last accessed 01 September 2004].

² See also Palanithurai (1997), p. 21, who in his essay points out "the contradicting position of the power and economy in India" from the time of the decentralization project onwards.

The approach to answer the question is very mixed. Contemporary secondary literature in political science about globalization is discussed for establishing the theoretical framework. Within the chapter dealing with local governments, reference is taken to case studies about the 'new panchayat system' and to legal documents. For the Punjab section, reports of autonomous research institutes, which could only be found in libraries of Delhi and Chandigarh, are used. Since the amount of literature on local governments in Punjab is quite limited, anthropological field research was necessary to acquire data in the form of interviews. This helps to better understand how local governments work in practice. It was endeavored to make interviews in each tier of the panchayat system to get an impression about how they are networked. Finally, statistical data underlines the arguments.

The results of this case study are limited to the discussed subject. They do not have overall validity. However, if globalization and localization can be, at least in part, compatible in practice, then India could be an interesting precedent for how decentralization can support globalization and consider the local as being imperative within.

II. Globalization from the Grassroots – A Theoretical Framework

“Globalisation is political, technological and cultural, as well as economic”³

When we talk about globalization, we often refer solely to economic globalization. We see the increase of trade between nations, which has caused a higher degree of integration and the creation of an international regulating system under the auspices of the World Trade Organization. Virtually all over the world, people feel the effect of economic globalization. Interaction in the business world is rarely limited to domestic partners. Foreign goods are available in nearly every corner shop for the local consumer. We feel the effects of economic globalization in our daily life. But economic globalization is only one small part of the story, as Giddens’ citation points out.

Political globalization has strong impacts on the current state-society relations and causes major changes of the world order. The Treaty of Westphalia in 1648 was synchronically the beginning of international relations being based on the sovereign equality of states. In the centuries following Westphalia, political power was further concentrated within them.⁴

Political globalization increased after the Second World War. The rise of supranational institutions displays an effort to integrate the world and bind the states to particular policy guidelines. National governments interact increasingly within the international system and are more than ever linked.⁵

³ Giddens (2002), p. 10.

⁴ See Steger (2003), pp. 57-9.

⁵ See Gilpin, as in Beck (2000), p. 36.

One of the central critiques of this dissertation is that the international institutional system may appear as an attempt to enhance political globalization. But actually, it only caused ‘national governments to globalize’. People do not have immediate access to influence the policies around. This ‘global’ centralism does not promote the idea of a grassroots democracy.

But the notion of globalization is subject to gradual change. Globalization is dynamic and correlated to many other external variables. By now, it has attained the power to counterbalance the state-centered world order since Westphalia.⁶ State sovereignty, constituent for international law and international relations, has been severely impaired since the 1970s,⁷ albeit very slowly. Further, it is said that within the process of globalization, the “national state is becoming necessarily superseded by local, regional and transnational forms of governance”⁸. The role of the state will change, since it is surrendering power to alternative institutions.

Analyzing these structural changes, one can see that governance is *slowly* transforming. There is a “reinvigoration of locally grounded community formation”⁹, which has elements of pre-modern times. In addition, new transnational forms of governance with the help of modern communication channels are developing, without completely shunning the concept of the nation-state.¹⁰ Government in the 21st century is thus on the brink of taking a decentralized, *post-modern* form.¹¹

⁶ See Falk (1999), p. 21.

⁷ See Steger (2003), p. 59 and Low (1997), p. 242.

⁸ Low (1997), p. 242.

⁹ Low (1997), p. 247.

¹⁰ See also Beck (2000), p. 50, who says that the resurgence of local communities redefines the role of nation-states in the contemporary world.

¹¹ See Esteva and Prakash (1998), p. 187. See also Steger (2003), p. 64. In the context of this dissertation, we should understand post-modernism as the use of pre-modern concepts in the new global context, along with the revolution within the Information and Technology sector.

Many people see it as a contradiction that on the one hand, globalization is progressing, whereas on the other hand there are examples where power is decentralizing in favor of the local.¹² Is it possible or even necessary to integrate the concept of decentralization into globalization in order to attain a post-modern notion of the latter?

Decentralization of political power means to reallocate the levels of political competence in favor of sub-national, especially local, authorities. Often, it is juxtaposed to the expansion of democracy as a whole,¹³ because locally elected people are often empowered. In this context, we can consider decentralization as being strongly correlated to localization.

Localization appears in the first instance as a concept working against globalization. People, who are adverse to the effects of economic globalization, often resist unfavorable “global forces” in the local sphere.¹⁴ In this case, localization with the reference to local identity can be an obstacle to globalization.

But this is only one side of the coin. It is true that localization is an effective way of resisting globalization *from above*, but on the other side local forces can also be imperative in shaping globalization. Globalization does not necessarily have to be imposed from the authorities above. It can also grow *from below* and be promoted and desired at the grassroots. Under globalization from below, we should understand a concept where the local people at the grassroots has a vital role in influencing the politics around

It is a critique of modernity without rejecting the latter concept as a whole, but rather building on it. Post-modernism implies slow and natural structural transformations rather than abrupt changes.

¹² See Giddens (2002), p. 13 and Karliner (2000), p. 36.

¹³ See Low (1997), p. 246.

¹⁴ See Esteva and Prakash (1998), p. 25.

globalization. This can happen through local governments, which are close to the citizens and indirectly embedded in the system of global governance. Indeed, globalization from below with the help of local forces infuses new energy into the political system.¹⁵

Globalization from below might be on the other side of the coin as globalization from above, nonetheless it is still on the same coin. It challenges the unequal approach of globalization from above. Globalization per se is not questioned, because it has already progressed too far to be seriously jeopardized. Globalization from above is rather modified in a more human manner by globalization from below.¹⁶ We tend to see globalization one-dimensionally, although there is no “either-or” but rather a “both-and” relationship.¹⁷ The latter is relevant for the concept of globalization and decentralization (or localization). It is strongly argued that both are complementary processes.¹⁸ Decentralization is one of the driving forces for a more equitable approach to globalization, in other words for the globalization of the grassroots, of the people. Globalization from above ignores the people and only provides them with given facts. Compared to this, globalization from below is a big opportunity to give democracy a new notion, because it expands immensely.

Some contemporary globalization theorists consider the close relation between globalization and localization. Roland Robertson was among the first to embed both these processes within one theoretical approach. *Glocalization* is the synthesis of globalization and localization. Robertson’s main argument

¹⁵ See also Falk (1999), p. 146.

¹⁶ See Falk (1999), pp. 139-41. It is worth noting that globalization from below keeps political bodies at a smaller and human scale. See also Esteva and Prakash (1998), especially p. 165.

¹⁷ See Beck (2000), p. 26.

¹⁸ See also Giddens (2002), p. 16, Beck (2000), p. 50 and Robertson (1995), pp. 26ff.

is that globalization at the same time also involves a process of localization. Both are not distinct, because the local emerges as “*an aspect of globalization*”.¹⁹ Place and territory remain important attributes for the people, although globalization is progressing. As a result, there is an increased interdependence of localities, also on a translocal basis, which defines globalization with its basis in the local.

As we will see, this approach is circular. *Glocalization* puts the people at the grassroots in the center of globalization. It considers the post-modern relation between the local and the global in our contemporary world.²⁰ The question now is how the people, if integrated in the middle of the process of globalization, can shape the latter. There is the need of a democratic *civil society*, which takes part in globalization.²¹ Only an active civil society can create a *public opinion* and hold a discourse how to globalize from the grassroots. Does globalization from below with its basis in the various localities render the development of a common public sphere as basis for an overall public opinion and a civil society? How can a public opinion develop in a decentralized environment, where the political communities act rather independently, and thus the complexity of society increases?

An opinion is public “when subjectively it has come to prevail as the dominant one”²², not just the sum of all individual or group opinions. Now, how can the dominant public opinion be determined in complex societies? Habermas offers a possible answer to this. He emphasizes the need of communicative acting between the communities in order to create civil

¹⁹ Robertson (1995), p. 30. Emphasis as in original. See also Beck (2000), pp. 45-8.

²⁰ See Robertson (1995), p. 30.

²¹ See also Giddens (2002), pp. 77-8.

²² Habermas (1989), pp. 241-2.

solidarity.²³ He explicitly talks about how communication within the political public sphere enables citizens to take positions on the same topic at the same time, leading to the creation of a public opinion and a civil society, although the society is complex and people are strangers to each other.²⁴ With this, one can see that the creation of a public opinion and hence globalization is possible in a decentralized environment. Interestingly, with the Habermas' approach, communities beyond national borders communicate and form the globalization discourse. In fact, even a world public sphere is about to be created through globalization and communication, which challenges the monopoly of states to regulate world politics.²⁵

In order to create a public opinion about how to globalize, communities need to communicate. This can best happen through the means of *communication networks* between the political communities, regional governments and the central government. Only like this, the local – empowered through decentralization – can exert influence on the center and its global policy. The existence of states still remains a precondition for globalization to work, since they still have strong communication networks to other societies, regional and local parliaments.²⁶ Castells points out that localities have transformed into new knots of the network society,²⁷ and other academics add that political communities at the local level are no longer discrete worlds, because the interconnectedness between states and societies

²³ See Habermas (1996), pp. 442-6, especially pp. 442 and 445.

²⁴ See Habermas, Cronin et al. (1998), p. 160.

²⁵ See also Beck (2000), pp. 51, 65.

²⁶ See Low (1997), p. 243, Beck (2000), p. 36 and especially Falk (1999), p. 150, who emphasizes the role of the state in a global world order.

²⁷ See Low (1997), p. 246.

has increased significantly.²⁸ Democratic local communities, once networked ‘to politics above’, are the arena where face-to-face communication takes place. Without face-to-face communication, no democratic civil society can arise. Local governments are indispensable to link local people to the institutions of government and make the civil society work.²⁹ This is imperative for the integration of the locals into the process of globalization. Without this, globalization cannot develop from the grassroots.³⁰

Political globalization from below requires a new concept of democratic *global governance*. So far, global governance was rather pursued by the states, especially under the banner of international institutions. But in order to make the local to act globally and locally at the same time,³¹ we need to scrutinize whether an alternative approach to global governance is possible, under consideration of the discussed rise of the decentralized network society. Some academics point out that global governance is already performed by smaller entities, side by side with the international institutional system.³² There already exists a network structure, which increases participation in the global governance project. Steger describes the situation as

“an eclectic network of interrelated power centres such as municipal and provincial authorities, regional blocs, international organizations, and national and international private-sector associations”³³

²⁸ See Held, McGrew et al. (1999), pp. 77-80 and also Held (1995), p. 100.

²⁹ See Castells (1989), p. 352.

³⁰ See also Low (1997), pp. 255-6, 262, 264.

³¹ The slogan “think globally, act locally”, which developed in the 1960s, seems rather outdated. In a world, which is supposed to globalize from the grassroots, it is necessary to think and act both globally and locally. See also Karliner (2000), p. 35.

³² See Held, McGrew et al. (1999), p. 50.

³³ Steger (2003), p. 64.

The global network structure, which is slowly but certainly evolving, is the first step to a more equal distribution of global governance, because objectives of the locals are considered, and power is decentralized and hence shared. Globalization at the grassroots cannot turn into reality with a concept of political global centralism with supranational institutions taking over the public policy.³⁴ This would make politics, globalization and democracy even more distant phenomena. Esteva and Prakash in reference to this say that global communication networks are appropriate forms of global democracy³⁵, and thus suitable methods for globalization from below.

Globalization from below and the creation of networks could finally lead to the creation of a transnational civil society³⁶, if the different national networks are linked with each other. This on the one hand happens through the states, but on the other hand alternative connections are available. Held writes about new networks of transnational interaction up to the ideal of a cosmopolitan democracy,³⁷ and Karliner and Low assert that communities and local governments, close to the people, are breaking their isolation and are entering in direct contact with each other and hence creating a network.³⁸ Examples for this are global social movements, information and communication technologies or Diaspora-home relations. Such networks, so Castells, lead to a transnational civil society.³⁹ Extending this argument, it should be underlined that democratic transnational civil society,

³⁴ Political global centralism should be understood as the centralization of political power in 'quasi global-democratic institutions' like the United Nations.

³⁵ See Esteva and Prakash (1998), p. 19 and also Mertes (2003), pp. 144-5.

³⁶ See Beck (2000), p. 26.

³⁷ See Held (1995), p. 101.

³⁸ See Karliner (2000), p. 36 and Low (1997), p. 248. The latter refers in his analysis throughout to Castells (1989).

³⁹ See Low (1997). p. 253.

communicating within a particular network structure, can be the only real force pursuing global governance from below, from the local, from the people.

The above framework intended to show how decentralization can be a part of globalization. With this, the local could acquire a new role within the globalizing world. The discussion now intends to apply this theory to the case of India, exploring whether globalization from the grassroots is possible in a concrete case or whether it is only a utopian ideal.

The case of India is a unique example, as stated in the introduction. A new form of village democracy is evolving out of the grassroots and has to define its position within the globalizing state. The decentralization project in India is characterized as being so revolutionary that the entire political power structure is completely reshuffled.⁴⁰ Consequently, it is not a big surprise that the World Bank is closely observing how the project is proceeding, since it could offer a valuable precedent for future political systems.⁴¹ Does the concept of *glocalization* apply to the case of India or does the localization offset the globalization of the Indian state?

⁴⁰ See Kashyap and Centre for Policy Research (2003), pp. 253-4.

⁴¹ See for instance the report of the organization “Development First” for the World Bank: http://developmentfirst.org/india/planning_commission/special_study_reports/panchayati_raj.pdf [last accessed 01 September 2004]. It is interesting to note that if the decentralization project in India is successful, that means if the Indian state loses power and rather *regulates* than *intervenes* in the autonomy of communities (for this, see the essay of Rudolph and Rudolph (2001)), then the World Bank will actively sponsor decentralization to justify its one-dimensional approach of fostering neo-liberal policies. But it seems that the World Bank does not understand the difference of *self-government* and *no-government*.

III. Local Governments in India – The Panchayati Raj

The legal basis for the revival of local governance in India is the 73rd Amendment to the COI, which came into effect on 20 April 1993. The 73rd Amendment has the character of a tacit revolution and represents a new phase of devolution of power. While in the past India's political destiny mainly lay in the hands of the strong center, the 1990s can be described as the decade of decentralization of political power from top to the grassroots. The *panchayats* and the *gram sabhas* (village assemblies) now have the capability to become *the* important political institution, while democracy is regaining a new momentum. In order to be au fait with the potential the constitutional amendment has as 'glocalizing power', it is necessary to delve into the objectives of the 73rd Amendment and to illustrate how panchayats are supposed to function. Can they create a civil society, which will be a suitable partner for global governance in the future?

A. The Objectives of the 73rd Amendment

“Though the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been in existence for a long time, it has been observed that these institutions have not been able to acquire the status and dignity of viable and responsive people's bodies [...]”⁴²

Government in the form of panchayati raj has existed in India from the “earliest times”⁴³. It is said that there are traces in the Vedic literature referring to panchayat-like institutions,⁴⁴ which shows that the concept is deeply embedded in the tradition of the subcontinent. They have even survived the Mughal periods and were formally enforced during the British colonial administration.⁴⁵ The concept underwent substantial changes during these eventful centuries.

Ironically, the system lost its significance after independence, as India became a state with a strong center. It is well known that Gandhi wanted the village republic to be the foundation of independent India.⁴⁶ His ambition should not be seen as a return to the past. Although he valued tradition, he was not a traditionalist.⁴⁷ Thus, his version of the village republic comprised a more modern version of panchayats. This especially included the lessons learned from the Indian anti-colonial struggle, namely that India now was a

⁴² “Statement of Objects and Reasons” from the Government of India for the 73rd Amendment to the COI: <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend73.htm> [last accessed 29 June 2004].

⁴³ Mathew and Mathew (2003), p. 14.

⁴⁴ See Kamal (1998), pp. 19-20.

⁴⁵ See Mathew and Mathew (2003), pp. 14-5.

⁴⁶ See for instance Mitra (2001), p. 105

⁴⁷ See Parekh (1999), p. 23.

nation and not merely an accumulation of fragmented communities like in pre-colonial times.⁴⁸

Gandhi's views did not find any serious consideration in the COI. Indeed, Nehru and Ambedkar strongly opposed any future reliance on panchayats. But it has to be noted that panchayats continued to exist, ever since protected through Article 40 COI. However, this article was rather symbolic than operational, as the biggest share of power was concentrated within the Union government. By law, it is a Directive Principle of State Policy rather than a Fundamental Right.⁴⁹

A serious effort to enhance panchayats institutions was undertaken under the Rajiv Gandhi Administration in 1989. The draft for the 64th Amendment to the COI however failed to be passed by the Rajha Sabha, because it was perceived as an attempt to deprive the states of their power.⁵⁰ Only four years later, a modified version, known as the 73rd Amendment, came into effect under the Government of PV Narashima Rao. The included Articles 243 – 243 O define the new provisions of the panchayats⁵¹ and

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note the similarities between the way Indian nationalism was created and the way decentralized India has to define its position within the globalizing world, as discussed here. See for instance the essay of Kaviraj (1997). He talks about how communities got connected and how the Indian nationalism could rise on the public sphere, created by the British in order to justify their hegemony of power. A similar phenomenon is happening with the connection of panchayats and their possible role as agents of global governance.

⁴⁹ Article 40 is in Part IV of the COI: "Directive Principles of State Policy". The Punjab & Haryana High Court has interpreted Article 40 in the new context of the 73rd Amendment in *Punjab Panchayati Union v. State of Punjab*, AIR 2002 P&H 356, 359, para. 8. The judges point out the responsibility of the union states to implement the new panchayat system in accordance with the "Statement of Objectives" to the 73rd Amendment.

⁵⁰ See Mathew and Mathew (2003), p. 17 and Mathew (2003), p. 276.

⁵¹ The COI has almost 400 articles, with many sub-clauses. The reason for this is that Center-State relations and the entire 'quasi-federal system' of India are very complicated. Compared to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Germany with just 146 Articles, the COI has to be seen as one of the most complex in the world.

redefine the meaning of Article 40.⁵² The states in India are required to pass the necessary bills in order to implement the 73rd Amendment.

A village must have at least 200 villagers to have its own gram panchayat. It has, dependant on the size of the village, a minimum of six members, whereby the head is called *sarpanch*, and the other members are called *panches*. Under the 11th Schedule, which is an integral part of the 73rd Amendment, 29 subjects *may* be passed under the competence of the panchayats,⁵³ such as rural development planning, rural transport and rural education. The states are, among other things, required to monitor panchayat elections with their Election Commission. They have to allocate adequate funds and set up a District Planning Committee, which should consolidate the planning efforts of the panchayats in order to promote rural development. To assist the panchayats, the states have to provide them not only with the necessary autonomy and functions, but also with adequate funds and functionaries.

Panchayats are enforced by the democratic mandate they receive through regular local elections every five years. With this, Indian democracy has expanded tremendously. Without the panchayat elections, the cumulative number of all elected representatives (Lok Sabha and State Assemblies) was just 4,963. Now, since regular panchayat elections are compulsory in

⁵² Although Article 40 has always been a part of the COI, it could never empower the village panchayats to be effective units of government. See also Seervai (1999), p. 215, para 17.157. The real changes only came about with the 73rd Amendment and the corresponding induction of Articles 243 – 243 O into the COI.

⁵³ See Mathew (2003), p. 280. Article 243G COI uses the word *may* and not *must*: “Subject to the provisions of this Constitution, the Legislature of a State may, by law, endow the panchayats with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government [...]” This implies on the one side, that it is free for the states to decide whether or not the panchayats are empowered with the provisions of the 11th Schedule. But on the other side, the article also clarifies that the states have to ensure that the panchayats will be effective institutions of self-government. Only empirical case studies can find out about how serious this article is implemented by the states.

accordance with the COI, the number of elected representatives has augmented to more than 3 million, including very many women and members of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes.⁵⁴ These numbers display the revolutionary character of the constitutional reform. Decentralization of power has been successfully executed, at least with the legal system-analysis approach. Mitra summarizes that the “judicious use of local government has infused new political resources into the political system of India.”⁵⁵

The 73rd Amendment gives the states the requirement to organize the panchayat system in three tiers: the *village panchayat*, the *block panchayat* and the *district panchayat*⁵⁶. While the village panchayat acts on the village level and the district panchayat on the district level, the block panchayat has been set up as an institution at an intermediate level in order to facilitate the coordination of local bodies among themselves and within the horizontal and vertical structure of India’s political system. Since the block panchayat is the next approachable institution in the quasi-horizontal structure of the three-tier system, it is only logical that the core share of interaction between panchayat members and servants of the central government takes place there. Indeed, the constitutionalization of the block level panchayat has to be regarded as a very innovative step to enhance the communication between the smallest and higher units of governance and as a profound bridge within the network. The communication links have become smaller.

⁵⁴ See Mathew and Mathew (2003), pp. 19-20, and also Kashyap and Centre for Policy Research (2003), p. 254.

⁵⁵ Mitra (2001), p. 103.

⁵⁶ There are 231,630 gram panchayats, 5,912 block panchayats and 532 district panchayats in India. See Mathew (2000), p. 11. His figures are based on: Institute of Social Sciences, Panchayati Raj Research. These institutions are named differently in the states.

Apart from the aforementioned institutions, one institution, rather seen as symbolic by many, although it has the aptitude to change the political landscape in India tremendously, is the *gram sabha*. Every eligible voter is automatically a member of the gram sabha and consequently a member of a ‘grassroots parliament’. This is unique and makes it a real grassroots institution. In the gram sabha, the villagers have the chance to take part more actively in politics. As pointed out in the theoretical framework, face-to-face communication is an important denominator of public opinion and civil society. With the 73rd Amendment, the gram sabha received constitutional status.

State law decides how often the gram sabhas have to be called together, but no law permits meetings less than twice a year. Gram sabha meetings secure that sarpanch and panches are controlled by the voters and force them to interact with the villagers and to keep the processes transparently. In the last instance, gram sabhas connect the people to the multi-level federal system in India.

Although each of the three tiers of the panchayats receives administrative functionaries from the state government, direct democracy is the most important feature within the block and district level bodies. Article 243 C (2) COI requires all of their members to be elected directly. The entire structure is networked and interconnected, and the people have influence on the composition of each level of the Indian governmental system.

In theory, democracy has expanded and is more easily accessible. The decentralization of power has caused smaller entities to be significantly enforced. Peoples’ prime concerns are not any more subject to central

development planning. Related matters, like education, public health and others, are now supposed to be decided within the panchayat structure. Participation has been made easier, also for marginalized groups. It is not only limited to the gram sabha, but also happens increasingly in the executive sphere. There is a minimum reservation for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes in accordance to their proportion in the village, and 1/3rd for women.⁵⁷ This brings the members of the marginalized groups at the grassroots closer to the government, which can be seen as a significant increase of civil society.⁵⁸

According to the Institute of Social Sciences, the number of women elected representatives is one million, while scheduled castes and scheduled tribes hold 660,000 positions out of the total of more than three million.⁵⁹ This regulation is therefore a step towards the empowerment of the underprivileged.⁶⁰ Constitutionally, *some* members of marginalized groups now have the right to participate in politics within the panchayats. Additionally, the gram sabha has a very important role within the panchayat system, because it supports the participation of people and thus strengthens grassroots democracy and civil society in India, which is, as shown above, a precondition for globalization from below. It should ensure the active political participation of these marginalized groups. It assists the village panchayat in outlining the development schemes for the villages and gives support to gather the necessary resources, for instance voluntary labor. Furthermore, it should ensure that the gram panchayat acts transparently and in accordance with the

⁵⁷ There is a double-reservation for women scheduled castes or women scheduled tribes members.

⁵⁸ See also Samuel and Jagadananda (2003), p. 74.

⁵⁹ Figures available in Mathew (2000), p. 11 and are based on: Institute of Social Sciences, Panchayati Raj Research.

⁶⁰ See Gehlot (1998), p. 47.

development agenda.⁶¹ Gram sabha meetings are a platform where current issues are discussed together with the panchayat. They are the institution of interaction of the people with the governmental system of India.

Mathew describes the rise of the panchayat system as a move from two-level to a de-facto multi-level federalism.⁶² The panchayat system is integrated in the federalized structure of India. The governmental network is increasing to the bottom of the society and enhancing communication to take place across the channels. Adding to this, the three-tier organization of the panchayat system is definitely a good step to tie the knots of the network denser. The entire federal system in India is becoming interconnected and increases in interdependency. Politics and democracy are finally reaching the grassroots. Since globalization is already proceeding in a tremendous pace around the globe, politics at the grassroots will more and more consist of global issues. The empowered local will be enabled to take part in supralocal and in global issues, which, as indicated in the theoretical framework, can be local at the same time. The *structural changes* in consequence of the 73rd Amendment are very favorable for this.

This description and assessment of the new panchayat system was very general so far. It is not possible to explain overall how panchayats work in practice, because there is simply no general blueprint for this,⁶³ for numerous reasons. Every community has its own traditions, which influence its identity and way of governance. With this, the diverse people of India can be easier accommodated into the political system. This, in the end, is one of the particularities of the panchayat system. Further, state law, passed in

⁶¹ See Goel and Rajneesh (2003), pp. 70-2.

⁶² Mathew (2003), pp. 278, 283.

⁶³ See Mitra (2001), p. 104.

conformity with the 73rd Amendment, differs significantly, since Articles 243 – 243 O and Article 40 COI leave considerable scope of interpretation. Hence, the success depends strongly on how serious the state governments take the 73rd Amendment.⁶⁴ States, taking the 73rd Amendment seriously, have to be ready to surrender much of its competence to the local bodies.

A *deep* analysis about what role the new panchayat system has obtained in India *as a whole* is still not possible, because only eleven years have elapsed since the constitutional reform. States have to pass the necessary laws and make the necessary arrangements for implementing the new panchayat system. It is therefore no wonder that most of the literature either deals with *case studies* of states or even of certain villages. It is virtually impossible to generalize the panchayat system as a whole. Rather it makes sense to study experiences of panchayats on the micro-level and to find out whether some conclusions can serve as practical experience for improving the working of panchayats in other areas.

Thus, the next part discusses the panchayat system in selected states. It is focused on the questions whether panchayats can be seen as an effective institution of government and whether it brings politics closer to the people in the end. Is the rise of a civil society followed by the implementation of the new system? Is the new panchayat system networked to other policy instruments in India? Can the gram panchayats and the people in the future effectively join the networked institutions of global governance lead the globalization discourse?

⁶⁴ See also Prasad (2003), p. 93.

B. Panchayats Acting in Practice

The dissertation will briefly introduce the examples of West Bengal and Bihar, which both have been subject to controversial discussions in academia, before turning in more detail to the Punjab. With this, we can examine how the 73rd Amendment has been implemented in the different states, and last but not least, its effect on the people at the grassroots.

1. The Two Extremes: West Bengal and Bihar⁶⁵

West Bengal is described in some literature to be a very positive example for the new panchayat system.⁶⁶ This success has its roots in the rise of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M) in 1977. From that time onwards, panchayat elections in all three tiers have been held without interruption. Rural Development and land reforms were executed through the decentralization of power to the panchayats.⁶⁷ These steps point towards the creation of a more egalitarian society and the empowerment of people at the grassroots. It is therefore no wonder that these initiatives helped the CPI-M to increase its support base with the people.

Panchayat elections are supposed to be held without party symbols. Still, the CPI-M was able to intertwine itself into the structure of local

⁶⁵ It is beyond the realm of this dissertation to discuss these two examples in extent but necessary to set the discussion for the next part. For a *comparative* study of both states among others see Mitra (2001). For some detailed studies on West Bengal, refer for instance to Bhattacharya (2002), Ghosh (2000), Datta and Datta (2002) and Datta (2001). For Bihar, refer for instance to Sinha (2000), Ghosh and Kumar (2003), Sharma (2001), Kumar (2001) and Gupta (2002).

⁶⁶ See for instance Mitra (2001), p. 111, and Ghosh (2000), p. 317.

⁶⁷ See Ghosh (2000), p. 311.

governments and “pursued the strategy of establishing hegemonic control over all political and civil society institutions”⁶⁸. Thus, the CPI-M actively supports the functioning of panchayati raj governments and uses them more or less as their agencies. They also profit from the devolution of funds. As Bhattacharya puts it, panchayat bodies administer about 50 % of public funds *in the end*.⁶⁹

This all leads to the conclusion that the people in Bengal are cross-linked to the political system of India. While they interact with the Communist Part of India (Marxist) on the gram panchayat level, the party is supposed to act on their behalf on the state and national level and beyond. We can detect a network structure evolving, which covers West Bengal, while the CPI-M raises its voice in the national political sphere in New Delhi.

Panchayat institutions in this state enjoy a significant level of trust with the citizens, as Mitra displays with empirical data.⁷⁰ The various groups are well represented within the system. The villagers see panchayats as a good reference point for their matters.⁷¹ This is good evidence for the rise of a civil society in general. In Ghosh’s words, “the panchayats of West Bengal are today lively centres of activity”⁷². This is, of course, an indicator for stronger growing democracy. But admittedly, the strong involvement of the CPI-M is an obstacle to globalization from below, because the party imposes policy from above. On the other hand, it has to be said that the panchayat system in West Bengal at least enables the effective functioning of local bodies and the participation of citizens. This system has prevented the participation on the

⁶⁸ See Ghosh and Kumar (2003), p. 188. See also Mitra (2001), p. 117, who shows how the panchayat institutions play an important role in the strategy of the CPI-M.

⁶⁹ Bhattacharya, as in Mitra (2001), p. 109.

⁷⁰ See Mitra (2001), p. 120.

⁷¹ See Mitra (2001), pp. 116-7.

⁷² Ghosh (2000), p. 318.

local level to be solely performed by a small elite or not at all, as the example of Bihar will show us now.

In spite of the 73rd Amendment, panchayat elections in Bihar were only held in 2001, after a gap of 23 years. This is a severe breach of the COI. Panchayat bodies were prevented execute local governance. How can a civil society be created under these premises, how can it communicate, network and perform governance if the state could not even ensure the holding of panchayat elections?

Mitra summarizes that “*panchayats* and local politics have become the scene of sporadic violence and caste conflict”⁷³. Gram panchayats have become the battlefields for local power. This stands in clear contradiction to the rise of a civil society, which is necessary for effective governance from below. It was intended to decentralize power to the grassroots in accordance to the 73rd Amendment, but it seems that conflict and violence time have been decentralized at the same time. Under these circumstances grassroots governance is not possible, not to mention global governance. Khanna adds to this by saying that the gram sabhas in Bihar are a “defunct body”⁷⁴, although meetings have to take place even every three months in accordance to the *Bihar Panchayati Raj Act (BPRA)* of 1993.⁷⁵ Hence, they are no ‘power-free zones’, because especially caste conflicts distort their functioning. Grassroots democracy in the sense of the theoretical framework has not been successfully performed in Bihar thus far.

It is said that the *BPRA* does not adequately differentiate the legislative and functionary competence between the different panchayat tiers and the state

⁷³ Mitra (2001), p. 113. Emphasis as in original.

⁷⁴ Khanna (1994), as in Mitra (2001), p. 114.

⁷⁵ See also Sinha (2000), p. 82.

government. The panchayat bodies are strongly controlled by the latter, which encumbers the grassroots to perform real power.⁷⁶ All these illustrations are sufficient to show that the state of Bihar could not provide its panchayat bodies with the constitutional guarantee of being an effective institution of governance. Basically, just the opposite happened as the theoretical framework of Chapter II suggests.

These two examples intended to show us how different panchayati raj institutions in India do or do not function. It is impossible at this point to talk about a uniform network of local governments and other institutions in India *per se* to be evolving, because each state has its own provisions and experiences. The uncompromising implementation of the 73rd Amendment in all states of India and the empowerment of local governmental bodies is the precondition for globalization in India *as a whole* to work.

However, it is endeavored to show through the example of the State of Punjab that the application of the theoretical framework can be possible in one of India's states, where the implementation of the 73rd Amendment is occurring quite reasonably, and show that *the structures* of panchayat governments can develop favorably for 'governing the global project from the grassroots'.

⁷⁶ See Sinha (2000), p. 83.

2. Punjab

Not a lot has been written about panchayats in Punjab. But discussing Punjab has its merits, because India's 'granary' is one of the better-developed states. Hence, one can examine how a panchayat system works in an environment with a comparatively well-developed infrastructure.

Table III.B.2.1: Citizens per Gram Panchayat and per Elected Representative of Selected States in India (2003)

State	population	urban population (%)	gram panchayats	elected representatives	citizens per gram panchayat ¹	citizens per elected representative ²
Andhra Pradesh	75,727,541	27.08	21,943	277,027	2,517	199
Arunachal Pradesh	1,091,117	20.41	2,012	5,733 ³	432	151
Assam	26,638,407	12.72	2,486	23,471	9,352	991
Bihar	82,878,796	10.47	8,452	156,582	8,779	474
Goa	1,343,998	49.77	183	1,439	3,689	469
Gujarat	50,596,992	37.35	13,330	152,303	2,378	208
Haryana	21,082,989	29.00	5,958	73,002	2,512	205
Himachal Pradesh	6,077,248	9.79	2,921	25,371	1,877	216
Karnataka	52,733,958	33.98	5,640	89,343	6,173	390
Kerala	31,838,619	25.97	991	13,259	23,784	1,778
Madhya Pradesh	60,385,118	26.67	30,992	314,847	1,429	141
Maharashtra	96,752,247	42.40	28,000	255,194	1,990	218
Manipur	2,388,634	23.88	166	1,722	10,953	1,056
Orissa	36,706,920	14.97	5,263	118,961	5,930	262
Punjab	24,289,296	33.95	12,369	75,968 ⁴	1,297	211
Rajasthan	56,473,122	23.38	9,185	153,732	4,711	281
Sikkim	540,493	11.10	148	1,195	3,247	402
Tamil Nadu	62,110,839	43.86	12,787	97,458	2,727	358
Tripura	3,191,168	17.02	525	5,685	5,044	466
Uttar Pradesh	166,052,859	20.78	52,484	608,338	2,506	216
West Bengal	80,221,171	28.03	3,314	51,200	17,422	1,128
India	1,027,015,247 ⁵	27.78 ⁵	219,149 ⁶	2,576,875 ⁶	3,247 ⁷ / 5,655 ⁸ / 5,602 ⁹	281 ⁷ / 468 ⁸ / 413 ⁹

Note: Only the states, where reliable data of gram panchayats was available, have been selected!

¹ The ratio of rural population and gram panchayats:

$$\text{population} \times \frac{100 - \text{urban population (\%)}}{100 \times \text{gram panchayat}}$$

² The ratio of rural population and elected representatives:

$$\text{population} \times \frac{100 - \text{urban population (\%)}}{100 \times \text{elected representatives}}$$

³ Elected representatives data for Arunachal Pradesh is from 2000

⁴ For the 2003 elections, the number of elected representatives was reduced from 87,842 to 75,968 (Institute of Social Sciences (2003e), p. 5).

⁵ All-India data

⁶ Only the sum of here presented data

⁷ Median of here presented data (comes closer to the number one obtains if one uses the sum of the population presented here and the average/median of the urban population presented here, as opposed to the all-India population and all-India urban population average)

⁸ Average of here presented data

⁹ Average, weighted to the population

Sources: Census of India 2001, Chandrashekar (2000), pp. 264-5, Institute of Social Sciences (2003e), p. 5. Own computation of data.

Punjab, with a population of 24 million in 2001, has 12,369 villages and gram panchayats.⁷⁷ Apart from that, there are 140 block panchayats and 17 district panchayats.⁷⁸ Village panchayats in Punjab have a human size. *Table III.B.2.1* compares the number of citizens per gram panchayat and the number of citizens per elected representative of selected Indian states. Punjab takes position 2 and 6, respectively. Civil society can more easily develop under these conditions, because people are closer to the political institutions and can easier involve in politics.

Punjab was among the first states to give the panchayats some legal recognition with the *Punjab Gram Panchayat Act*, passed as early as 1952, and to reorganize the panchayat system into three tiers after independence with the *Punjab Panchayat Samiti Act* and the *Punjab Zilla Parishad Act* of 1961⁷⁹. Jain describes their objectives as following:

“The Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads were to be *organically linked* with the Panchayats as units of local government and rural development. The Samitis were made operative units to look after the functions with their respective jurisdiction, a function previously performed by the district boards and community development department.”⁸⁰

Thus, Punjab had already had some considerable experience with the three-tier system after it was formally introduced in Article 243B (1) COI in 1993. However, it is worth noting that the intermediate and the district level

⁷⁷ Numbers vary according to source.

⁷⁸ See Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (2002), p. 25.

⁷⁹ See Jain (1970), p. 1 and Khanna (2000), pp. 237-9.

⁸⁰ Jain (1977), p. 225. Emphasis added.

elections were suspended after 1978,⁸¹ probably due to the beginning unrest in the state. In 1983, even the village panchayat elections were suspended and not held until 1993, because these small units of governance came between the fronts during the Khalistan movement.⁸² It happened that the 1993 elections were held *before* the 73rd Amendment came into effect. On the one side, it can be used as evidence that the Government of Punjab (GOP) wanted to restore normality as quickly as possible. But it rather looks like the GOP was aware of the revolutionary character of the 73rd Amendment and wanted to defer the elections until 1998 in order to bypass or delay the full implementation of the 73rd Amendment.⁸³ Notwithstanding, the Punjab Assembly replaced the existing three Panchayat Acts with the *Punjab Panchayati Raj Act (PPRA)* in 1994 and gave the 73rd Amendment legal expression.

In 1977, Jain gave a negative appraisal of the panchayat system. He said that community factionalism and group isolation had intensified and that the communication and coordination within the three-tier panchayat system was technically non-existent.⁸⁴ Hence, he saw neither a civil society nor a well-working governing network existing. We should now look whether any crucial changes in the new panchayat system have taken place after the 73rd Amendment was passed.

Interestingly, one of Punjab's newest experiments with decentralization started years ahead of the 73rd Amendment. During 1988-1991 – the time the 64th Amendment was discussed in the Lok Sabha and

⁸¹ See Srivastava and George (1995), p. 212.

⁸² See Kumar (1992), p. 113.

⁸³ Interview with Amarbir Singh (2004a), BDO and Panchayat Samiti Officer in the Panchayat Samiti of the Kharar Block of the Rupnagar District, on 13 April 2004. Apart from that, see also Verma (1998), p. 157.

⁸⁴ See Jain (1977), p. 239.

paradoxically at the same the time of President's role in Punjab – the allocation of funds for panchayat governments rose significantly. They were seen as capable for undertaking development planning more flexibly due to their proximity to the localities. Although sarpanches were the only elected members in the panchayat bodies, the state government de facto enforced the institution of village panchayats. So it decided among other things that work up to RS. 100,000 (ca. \$ 2,200) was solely to be coordinated by them.⁸⁵ Village panchayat governments in Punjab therefore did already have considerable force before the 73rd Amendment was passed.

It should be understood that political empowerment has to go along with fiscal devolution. In 1998, Punjab was on the top of the states in supporting the local governments with the necessary funds. As much as 45.57 % of State Revenue was passed to them. Compared with only 21.26 % in the pre-73rd Amendment phase, this is a significant improvement.⁸⁶ Apart from that, panchayats can levy taxes in certain areas in order to raise income. This offsets a little that Punjab was yet to decentralize functionaries and funds for all 29 departments and functions for 22 departments in 2002.⁸⁷ But apparently, the decentralization of the remaining 22 departments has now been speeded up.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ See the Annexure V: "Punjab's Experiment with Decentralisation", in Mukerjee and Bandopadhyay (1994), p. 268-72.

⁸⁶ See Samuel and Jagadananda (2003), pp. 71-2.

⁸⁷ As on 30 April 2002, according to the Union Ministry of Rural Development. State-wise data can be found in Institute of Social Sciences (2002), p. 5. But this data should be interpreted carefully. Fiscal devolution is necessary, but panchayats receive funds also through other channels, as taxes. The data for functionaries and functions should be treated with similar care. Full devolution is favourable but does not automatically mean that the small governments are working effectively.

⁸⁸ See Institute of Social Sciences (2003a), p. 4 and Institute of Social Sciences (2004a), p. 4. A BDO confirmed in a personal interview that the devolution of funds, functionaries and functions is expected to be speeded up significantly in the next years (Interview with Amarbir

The last gram panchayat elections were held in 2003, with a voting turnout of about 80 %, among them many women.⁸⁹ Interesting to note is that in the 1993 elections, 82 % exercised their franchise, which is to be seen as considerably high, especially if we keep in mind the low participation of Punjab in the 1991 Lok Sabha elections and in the 1992 Punjab Legislative Assembly and Municipal assemblies elections.⁹⁰ The grassroots did not boycott the panchayat elections, rather are they “a colorful, festive affair and are contested with extreme keenness”⁹¹. This is a very good indicator for the trust and interest in local government and politics. It shows the rise of civil society, which is ready to indirectly participate in local politics.

Table III.B.2.2: Women, Scheduled Castes and Backward Castes Sarpanches in Punjab (1993-2003)

	Women (incl. Scheduled Castes ¹)	Scheduled Castes ¹ (male)	Backward Castes
1993	158 (1.3)	870 (7)	*
1998	4,114 (33.3)	2,499 (20.2)	7 (<0.1)
2003	*	2,598 (21) ³	*

Note: Number in brackets denote the percentage of the total number of sarpanches (12,369)

* Numbers not available

¹ Scheduled Caste Population in Punjab: 28.31 %

² The number of all scheduled Caste members (incl. female) is 3,759 (30.4) and meets the required reservation

³ As for now, hardly any official data is available for the 2003 elections. This number has been obtained through direct communication with the Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development. The number of all Scheduled caste members (incl. female) is 3,900 (31.5) and meets the required reservation.

Sources: *Institute of Social Sciences (1998a), p. 4, Department of Rural Development and Panchayats, Punjab Government, Chandigarh (Reproduced in Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (2002), p. 25).*

The participation of marginalized groups has been rising gradually over the years. This is an essential precondition for the rise of civil society

Singh (2004a), BDO and Panchayat Samiti Officer in the Panchayat Samiti of the Kharar Block of the Rupnagar District, on 13 April 2004).

⁸⁹ See for instance Institute of Social Sciences (2003b), p. 3.

⁹⁰ See also Khanna (2000), p. 245.

⁹¹ Editorial of “The Tribune” (1998), 25 June 1998.

overall. *Table III.B.2.2* displays the increase of women and scheduled caste sarpanches for the last elections before and the first elections after the 73rd Amendment, and additionally for the scheduled castes in the most recent elections. The number of posts for women and scheduled castes has increased significantly. This is a proof that these groups have been empowered as effect of the 73rd Amendment. However, it has to be noted with big regret that the backward castes, being the largest part of the population, are absolutely underrepresented. Apparently, their empowerment requires a reservation, too.

Table III.B.2.3: Sarpanch and Panch Members in Punjab, according to Gender and Caste (1998)

<i>a) Breakdown according to gender and caste</i>							
	Male			Female			Total
	General Castes	Backward Castes	Scheduled Castes ¹	General Castes	Backward Castes	Scheduled Castes ¹	
Sarpanches	5,749 (46.5)	7 (<0.1)	2,499 (20.2)	2,854 (23.1)	0	1,260 (10.2)	12,369
Panches	30,026 (39.8)	3,014 (4)	15,494 (20.5)	18,499 (24.4)	120 (<0.2)	8,320 (11)	75,473
Total	35,775 (40.7)	3,021 (3.4)	17,993 (20.5)	21,353 (24.3)	120 (0.1)	9,580 (10.9)	87,842
<i>b) Breakdown according to gender</i>							
	Male		Female		Total		
All elected members	56,789 (64.6)		31,053 (35.4)		87,842		
<i>c) Breakdown according to caste</i>							
	General Castes	Backward Castes	Scheduled Castes ¹	Total			
All elected members	57,128 (65)	3,141 (3.6)	27,573 (31.4)	87,842			

Note: The list only displays the members within the "real" grassroots institutions, the gram panchayats, without the panchayat samiti and the zilla parishad. Numbers in brackets denote the percentage of the total in the respective row.

¹ Scheduled Caste Population in Punjab: 28.31 %

Source: Department of Rural Development and Panchayats, Punjab Government, Chandigarh (Reproduced in Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (2002), p. 25).

. In accordance with Article 243 D (6) COI, Section 11(4) PPRA has a *conditional* reservation of one seat for the backward castes for the position of

a panch, should their population in the concerned area exceed 20 %.⁹² Table III.B.2.3 gives a more comprehensive picture of the representation of backward castes within the gram panchayats.

Their number remains deplorably low. The same table presents the data of males, females scheduled castes and general castes as comparison. Without any doubt, it shows that the panchayat system remains dominated by male members of general castes, as the more distinguished breakdown shows.

Graph III.B.2.4 visualizes the results.

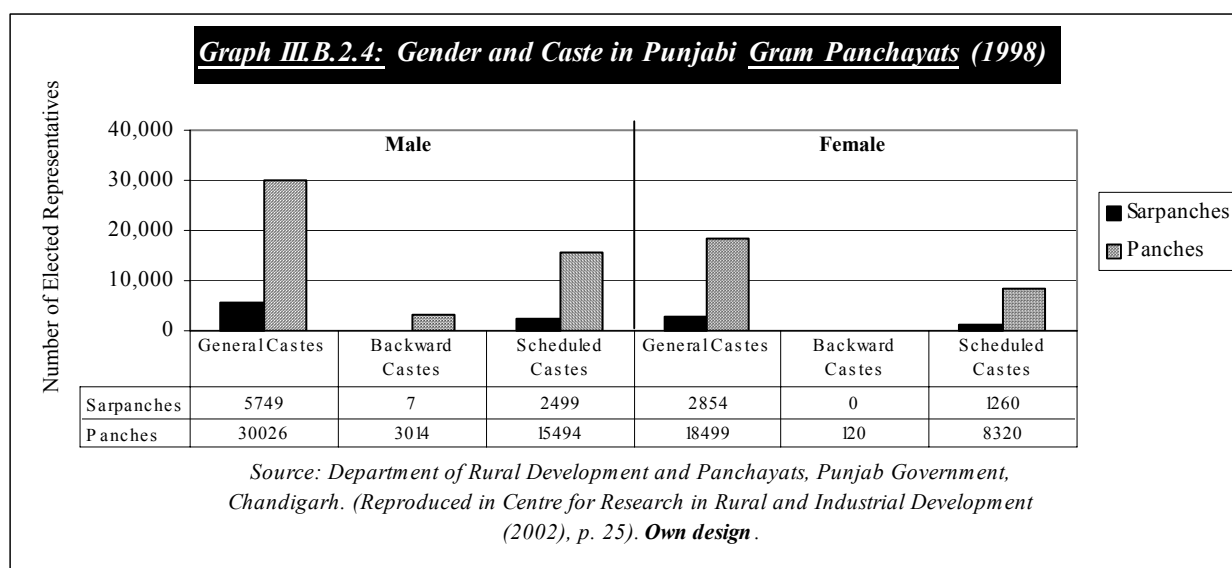


Table III.B.2.5 compares the representation of women and scheduled castes in all different tiers of the panchayat system in 1998 and 2003. It shows that the presence of these groups in all tiers is becoming more common. Of course, it should not be excused that the quota of women and scheduled castes in the panchayat samiti missed the constitutional required minimum significantly in 1998.

⁹² Article 243D(6) COI does not require the states to do this but encourages them. 12 other states have included provisions in their respective panchayat acts. See Institute of Social Sciences (2003d), p. 5, for details. Bizarrely, Punjab has not been added to the list in spite of the provision of Section 11(2) PPRA.

Table III.B.2.5: Elected Representatives of Women and Scheduled Castes in Different Tiers of the Panchayati Raj System (1998/2003)

	Women			Scheduled Castes ¹		
	Gram Panchayat	Panchayat Samiti	Zilla Parishad	Gram panchayat	Panchayat Samiti	Zilla Parishad
1998	31,053 (35.4)	326 (13.4)	89 (32.48)	27,573 (31.4)	338 (13.85)	84 (30.7)
2003	27,108 (35.7)	813 (32.8)	89 (31.9)	27,360 (36)	*	*
Total 1998 /2003	87,842	2,441	274	75,968	2,480	279

Note: Numbers in brackets denote the percentage of the total number of elected representatives for the respective year

* Number not available

¹ Scheduled Caste Population in Punjab: 28.31 %

Sources: Institute of Social Sciences (1998a), p. 4, (1998b), p. 7, (2003e), p. 5 and Department of Rural Development and Panchayats, Punjab Government, Chandigarh (Reproduced in Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (2002), p. 25).

These figures give a mixed picture about the representation of weaker groups in the panchayats. Women and scheduled caste participation is slowly increasing, while the representation of backward castes remains poor, which is of course very dispiriting. However, it is encouraging to see democracy and civil society partly increasing, because women and scheduled castes are better absorbed in the political system. This enhances indirectly the participation of the groups as a whole, because they now have contact persons within the government itself and consequently a kind of group leadership. The question is whether their participation goes beyond the elections as consequence of the new panchayat system. In order to find this out, we should have a look at the gram sabhas in Punjab and see whether they deserve their reputation as 'real grassroots parliaments'.

Judging from the available literature, the role of the gram sabha is not highly credited. But it seems the power of these institutions is often

undervalued.⁹³ A sarpanch in Punjab automatically loses his office, if he fails to hold the two obligatory meetings a year. Then, the gram sabha has the authority to approve the annual budget and development plan and review the last year's statements of accounts of the gram panchayat and can consequently take appropriate actions, if necessary.⁹⁴ It controls the gram panchayat and thus "is made the soul of the Panchayat Raj System in the State"⁹⁵. It is the public sphere, where the people can develop their public opinion and where civil society is increasing. It is building an own knot in the network society. It helps democracy to expand overall, which is a precondition for globalization from below.

Jarnail Singh, District Development and Panchayat Officer in the Jalandhar District since 1995, talks about the role of the gram sabha. He describes the changes after the 73rd Amendment as strong diversification of power between the center, the state, the districts, the local governments *and* the people, because there is

"no question that all groups are included in panchayats. [...] There is no more discrimination. [...] We all human beings are equal. Still there is discrimination all over the world. In the USA and any other country, we are also called black. In India, we create this distinction with caste. The 73rd Amendment is a step to stop the discrimination or caste-created color. No higher caste is permitted to marry in the lower caste. But in the public, people are coming close to close. [...] They discuss politics in the gram sabha actively. In the gram sabha, people of all castes and religions

⁹³ See for instance the section on Gram Sabhas in Goel and Rajneesh (2003), pp. 69-87. In the context of the Punjab, Sections 3-9 PPRA define the functions of the gram sabhas in Punjab.

⁹⁴ See Khanna (2000), pp. 242-3.

⁹⁵ Pal and Institute of Social Sciences (1994), p. 5.

cooperate without prejudice. There is a structural transformation of society, because people realize that they are same, they are all human beings”⁹⁶

Referring this to the theoretical framework, one can see that he sees the gram sabhas as instrumental for the rise of an active civil society. But he is definitely too enthusiastic about the status of gram sabhas. The people do not have the power lawmakers have. Nevertheless, it is worth pointing out that the gram sabhas are institutions, which have the potential to unite villagers and to play an important role when the panchayat system as such improves with the full implementation of the 73rd Amendment. People do interact with the panchayat within and can execute pressure to act on their behalf and to communicate their needs to the higher authorities.

Correspondingly, it is useful to show that the institution of the gram sabha puts considerable influence on sarpanches and panches. In the past, they have been put under serious pressure, in case the people’s expectations were not met. In some cases the sarpanch and the panches are carefully being scrutinized by the gram sabha:

“The sarpanch has to act tactfully and politically to make confidence at the grassroots level. [...] The people want to know what happens with the funds they are entitled to. Otherwise, the sarpanch will not be reelected. And he will be isolated in the future and has to face the anger of the people in the village.”⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Interview with Jarnail Singh (2004b), District Development and Panchayat Officer in the Zilla Parishad of the Jalandhar District, on 02 April 2004. He explicitly pointed out that he has been a Development and Panchayat Officer for the GOP since 1984 in almost all of Punjab and thus has a comprehensive image.

⁹⁷ Interview with Jarnail Singh (2004b), District Development and Panchayat Officer in the Zilla Parishad of the Jalandhar District, on 02 April 2004.

“Many people think that the gram sabhas are more symbolic, what is true to some extent. But in the gram sabhas, many issues are discussed [...] People do ask in the gram sabhas how much funding you [sarpanch and panches] get and what you made out of it. [...] It happens that gram sabha meetings do escalate.”⁹⁸

Analyzing these comments, one can say that this institution has the potential to transform a village into a political society, even though people only have a *constitutional mandate*, which should not be neglected. The gram sabha, when working properly, can be literally seen as a real democratic institution, which politicizes the society and links it stronger to the system of governance. It is the forum where the creation of public opinion is enforced. Communication between the system of governance and the people takes place within the gram sabha. This is particularly important, because only through communication can the gram panchayat adjust its politics for the benefit of the people. Now one can imagine that many well-connected political societies communicate within the network system and could transform the population into a civil society, capable of taking part in national and international politics, and that from the very roots of the grass. This would be the network society, as described in the theoretical framework, in which the village panchayats with its basis in the people practice communicative action, create public opinion and civil society, with the capacity of pursuing global governance. If this happens, we have an example for real *glocalization*.

⁹⁸ Interview with Amarbir Singh (2004a), BDO and Panchayat Samiti Officer in the Panchayat Samiti of the Kharar Block of the Rupnagar District, on 13 April 2004.

Emphasizing this, Lakhbir Singh, a sarpanch in the village Pandory Waraich (District Amritsar) takes reference to the question of communication and dependence of the governmental system in India as a whole and compares it with the image of a tree. He says that

“the earth the tree is growing on is the entire panchayat system [inclusive panchayat samiti and zilla parishad]. The earth is built of a diverse organic consistence and symbolizes the different people of India. The tree and the earth are India. The Punjab State Government is the stem of the tree with the roots in the earth. The branches of the tree, the leaves of the tree and the fruits of the tree represent the government in Delhi. The whole tree is India.”⁹⁹

On the one side we can see that the systems of the tree are very interdependent. But on the other side, he probably means more by his statement. He sees the people and their panchayats as constituent for India’s political system. This image shows is the close connectedness of the system. The lowest level, the earth, gives the energy to the tree, which produces air and spreads it beyond the territory. The last can be associated with globalization. It displays the network system of the theoretical framework, with the civil society at the bottom, which communicates within and hence governs the system and gives the tree its power. This metaphor is an idealistic but appropriate image how the new panchayat system is supposed to work.

We should now give some more examples how the system communicates. There are many schemes available for village development.

⁹⁹ Interview with Lakhbir Singh (2004c), Sarpanch of the Pandory Waraich Village in the Amritsar District, on 10 April 2004.

Every panchayat receives a percentage of collected taxes for its own administration. Additionally, they can raise funds on their own by leasing out common land on a yearly basis. But for special development projects, panchayats have the possibility to apply for reserved funds out of one of the hundreds of schemes with the GOP. Applications for funds are not filed directly in Chandigarh. Rather the process takes place within the block. The administrative envoys of the center, especially the Block Development and Panchayat Officers (BDOs), communicate very closely with the panchayats from the villages in related matters. Sukhdev Singh, a panch in a village in the Amritsar District, distinguishes between taxes and need-based money and refers to the latter by saying that very often there is a need for special funds. So, the village panchayat has to communicate very closely with the BDO. He continues that sometimes they seek assistance from the Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA) or even the Member of Parliament.¹⁰⁰ Overall, he says that the village panchayats do work closely together with the central authorities.¹⁰¹ As we can see, communicative action is essential for the system to function.

Amarbir Singh from the GOP confirms the latter point of Sukhdev Singh. He points out a number of interesting assessments and facts, which are of central interest. He claims to know every sarpanch and most of the panches very well and to interact closely with them. Then, he mentions that he expects the panchayats to have much more interaction with the villagers *in future*:

“Since March 2004, the gram panchayats are responsible to pay out the old people’s pensions [about RS. 200 per month]. People will have more contact with the panchayats, because they receive material value from them.

¹⁰⁰ Every MLA has a specific budget for rural development projects, which they allocate to the panchayats in accordance to their rural development plans.

¹⁰¹ Interview with Sukhdev Singh (2004e), Panch in the Bhanigilla Village in the Amritsar District, on 11 April 2004.

They will receive more demands, but also more feedback. On some cases, sarpanches have directly addressed me with issues of the old people. [...] These wishes are not only the wishes of the old people but of the entire family. Sometimes then, I realize that many of these issues seem to be a common issue in villages. Now, people know more clearly whom to address.”¹⁰²

We can see that along with the empowerment of the panchayat institution goes an increased amount of interaction between the local governments and the villagers. As the officer said, panchayats more often confront him with the wishes of villagers. BDOs are part of the network structure and indirectly linked to the people of the villages. Since the panchayat is the determined contact for the people, they increasingly take part in policy related issues like development, which one can equalize with the rise of civil society. The system as such communicates through the channels. Public opinion develops at the lowest level and is transferred within the network to the appropriate knot. If this happens at a large scale in India, the pressure from below will be strong enough for the Union Government to arrange its global policy accordingly. Globalization would take the form of glocalization with this example. This would be a good starting point for post-modern global governance from below.

But then the officer points out another interesting issue, which raises doubts whether local governments interact inter se and constitute a network. He says that although the surrounding sarpanches meet regularly within the block, their actions are rather limited in regard to their own village:

¹⁰² Interview with Amarbir Singh (2004a), BDO and Panchayat Samiti Officer in the Panchayat Samiti of the Kharar Block of the Rupnagar District, on 13 April 2004. The decision of delivering the pensions “at their doorsteps” can also be found in Institute of Social Sciences (2004b), p. 5.

“The panchayats do not have a really close link among each other. [...] They are rather autonomous. They are not really meeting within the panchayat samiti and the zilla parishad, but sometimes they cross their ways. If there are issues, which go beyond one gram panchayat, I mostly mediate [...]. But one panchayat does not really communicate with the other panchayat.”¹⁰³

In other words, the communication between different village panchayats is very rare. Hence, according to his assessment, there rather seems to be communication between two parties only, namely the panchayats and the BDOs, but no communication between different panchayats, even within a block, and no communication with other governmental levels. These statements show the discrepancy between the ideal and the actual and rather raise doubts whether or not panchayat governments are networked. But the BDO says that he talks about current issues to every panchayat he meets and communicates collective issues to his superiors at the district and state level, which relaxes this a little. Here, we can rediscover Habermas and the creation of public opinion, despite the missing *direct* communication and interaction. Civil society, through a complex network structure, is enhancing.

Another last example should add to these comments. Malkiat Singh, one sarpanch on a village in the Ruparnagar District, had the following problem. His village Fategarh Sabh was supposed to be connected through a small road with the village Bhatari, only 2 KM distant from his village. Government funding was required for this. This project had been considered,

¹⁰³ Interview with Amarbir Singh (2004a), BDO and Panchayat Samiti Officer in the Panchayat Samiti of the Kharar Block of the Ruparnagar District, on 13 April 2004.

as he says, from the time after independence, but the process got stuck in the bureaucracy machine of the GOP. The main problem was that the other village belonged to another district, Nawanshar. Previously, when the GOP was responsible for road construction, the main problem was who to address in the bureaucracy. He describes this problem now to be transferred into a communication problem. Although he knows the sarpanch in the Bhatari village well, they could not communicate within the supposed network structure but had to take other channels. He says that the BDOs, the MLA and the Sub-Divisional Officer of the GOP had to mediate between the two district panchayats, which was a very complicated process, especially in view of the allocation of funds. He complained about his dependence on the GOP within the central development schemes.¹⁰⁴ This example shows that panchayats are still caught in the riddle of higher institutions.

On the other hand, as opposed to the assessment of Amarbir Singh, Malkiat Singh points out that within the block he works well together with the other sarpanches. They prepare mutual issues and hand them in to the BDO. His cooperation with the panchayat samiti is very close, as he says, because he can approach his representative, too.¹⁰⁵ Then, he personally knows his zilla parishad and MLA representatives very well, which, as he says, facilitates his

¹⁰⁴ Interview with Malkiat Singh (2004d), Sarpanch of the Fathepur Theri Village in the Ruparnagar District, on 14 April 2004.

¹⁰⁵ Since 2002, the representatives of the people in the panchayat samiti are all directly elected from the people in Punjab. Before, the ratio of nominates of the panchayats to the elected members in panchayat samitis and zilla parishads was 60 % to 40 %. Only on 6 June 2000, the Punjab and Haryana High Court ruled that the attempt of GOP to amend Section 99 PPRA and even increase the proportion of nominated members to 70 % was a breach of Article 243C (2) COI. Article 243C (2) clearly states that “all the seats in a Panchayat shall be filled by persons chosen by direct election from the territorial constituencies in the Panchayat area [...]”. The court argues in “the spirit of the constitution” that there is “absolutely no reason whatsoever as to why the State Legislature has taken a volte-face and returned to a situation where only 30 % members are to be elected directly and 70 % through indirect election”. Consequently, the number of elected members has risen from 40 % to 100 %. See *Jagjit Singh & others v. The State of Punjab & others*, *ILR 2000 P&H 457, 461-2, paras. 12-3*.

work. But he agrees that his main communication with other elected members or envoys of the government rather takes place with the block. Regarding the gram sabha, he says that he personally initiated the gram sabha meetings to take place even as often as once a month. He claims attendance to be around 80 % each time and says proudly that females as well as members of scheduled castes do not feel intimidated in attending the meetings and in raising their voice. He endeavors to give the peoples' voices adequate impression while doing his job, also within the meetings with the panchayat samiti.¹⁰⁶

This example shows how the governmental system is networked and how communication takes place within. It stands for the transformation of the civil society and public opinion at the grassroots. The network so far is very small, but it creates a basis for its further development and for the execution of global governance within the network, once the connection to the State Assembly and the Union Government is better established. When the panchayat system finds its appropriate place within the Indian political landscape and is able to influence the Center's and the States' policies, it could be a real *glocal* institution.

There are many different opinions about the effectiveness of communication between the panchayats as such, and between panchayats and other spheres of government. But in one point, all interview partners had the same opinion. Decentralization as outlined in the 73rd Amendment greatly improved the status of the gram panchayat. They see a great scope for the further development of the latter institutions and are of the opinion that with

¹⁰⁶ Interview with Malkiat Singh (2004d), Sarpanch of the Fathepur Theri Village in the Rupnagar District, on 14 April 2004.

the full implementation of the 73rd Amendment, the political landscape in India will change significantly. The development of democracy in India is strongly affected, as about 75 % of Indians live in villages.¹⁰⁷ It is therefore no surprise that even the Punjab and Haryana High Court stated that “the panchayats are the symbol of democracy at the grassroots level”.¹⁰⁸ The people at the grassroots are brought closer to the institutions and have the mandate to actively engage in politics within the gram sabha. The 73rd Amendment is a milestone for the expansion of democracy and the basis for global governance from below.

But we should note very clearly that only a *structure* is *beginning* to evolve, which enables the panchayats to play a great role in the future of India. Since the panchayats are very close to the citizens, it should be no surprise to see a civil society with a public opinion gradually evolving as a side consequence to a dense institutional network, which can play a crucial part in issues beyond the village *in the future*. At the moment, the ties of the network with higher levels of government are not very strong. But there is hope that the local governments in India will seamlessly be a part of this network in future, in communication with each other and with other local governments in the world, through communicative action, enabling global governance from the grassroots. It will take some time, but post-modern structural changes never happen abruptly. They are a result of a changing environment.

¹⁰⁷ Census of India, 1991. The 2001 data is not published yet. It is unlikely that the number has changed more than 2 percentage points.

¹⁰⁸ *Punjab Panchayati Union v. State of Punjab*, AIR 2002 P&H 356, 364, para. 41. The Court continues the judgement by saying: “These [the panchayats] are to democracy what primary schools are to education. A weak baby seldom grows into a healthy youth. A child who makes a bad beginning shall never grow up into a good and responsible adult. The tradition that we establish at the level of village panchayats shall be the index for the elections to the state legislative assemblies and the Parliament.”

The new panchayat system is starting to increase in effectiveness, and it is worth observing its progress over the next decades. Globalization is hence not only a possible but also a desirable concept, because the local will be able to take part in the 'global project' and counterbalance any attempt of one-sided corporate globalism into a real version of grassroots globalization. For that, the Union and State Governments have to further devolute power to panchayat institutions to ensure their effectiveness. It has to improve the communication means between all layers of governance and ensure that gram sabhas are power-free zones, where all citizens can participate without prejudice. Then, civil society will increase, and the local can have an imperative role for the future governance of India and will be able to crucially shape the policies around globalization. We can also rephrase this train of thought in the words of G.K. Sabhrawal:

“The village is the basic unit of all government, no matter if local, national or global. The village is the lowest level and is constituted by the people. The people will be global India in future.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Interview with G.K. Sabhrawal (2004), Additional Deputy Commissioner Development in the Zilla Parishad of the Amritsar District on 12 April 2004.

IV. Conclusion

The global and the local are not as distant as it is often presumed. The modern nation-states are surrendering power in favor of global institutions, and in some cases also in favor of local forms of governance. Theoretically, the local and the global can be, as shown, embedded within one framework. Robertson has done this explicitly with the concept of glocalization.

It was intended to explore at the example of the Indian decentralization project whether glocalization can be a valid and possible concept for the future. The 73rd Amendment to the COI is the legal basis for the creation of a network society with strong local knots. It requires the states to create new spheres of governance with the three-tier panchayat system and connects the people to the system with the gram sabhas. The Indian society is transforming into a network society and connects with the global sphere through various channels. India is becoming more democratic in the sense that the integrated panchayats with the people as its basis create a multi-level federal network structure, which is supposed to be very well interconnected, inter se.

West and Bengal and Bihar as extremes were introduced to show how different local governments in India are, one rather successful and the other everything but successful. The example of the State of Punjab showed that the different layers of governance do interact in a considerable extent, and that people have a part in this, albeit limited, through the gram sabhas. Democracy as precondition for globalization from the grassroots is gaining a new impetus. The entire panchayat system as such is connected to the GOP, which acts through its functionaries on the panchayat level. The state government is

connected to the central government, which conducts most of the global policy. The network society is being created, with decentralized knots, which is the foundation for post-modern global governance of the 21st Century. Communication happens within the network, not necessarily directly, but in the Habermas' sense through various channels.

The main objective of this dissertation was to show *at the example of one case* that the local can be the foundation for the globalization process. Glocalization as a leading concept and the sharing of political power would definitely be a desirable form of post-modern governance. At the same time, it has to be pointed out that the Indian political system might be in the process of *glocal transformation*, but at present it is too early to allege that the local in India is globalizing. The most important issues are village development, the fight against poverty and the redefinition of the hegemonic power structure in the society, meaning the creation of a more egalitarian society without discrimination of gender, religion, caste and other determinants. The promising numbers of women and scheduled caste members do not necessarily show how the situation is in reality. There have been many cases reported where leaders of marginalized groups have been subject to discrimination by upper-caste male members, within the government and among the population.¹¹⁰ Then, disadvantaged groups without reservation, like the backward castes, have not found the necessary access to the new system yet. A

¹¹⁰ See for instance the article of Pal (2004), who displays at some examples in Haryana how the power structures remain to exist despite the changes of the 73rd Amendment. Women and scheduled caste sarpanches often remain powerless, regardless of their electoral mandate, because they are either not accepted by the government officials in the higher layers of government or even dethroned by their own husbands. Similar complaints have been registered in the Punjab. See Institute of Social Sciences (2000), p. 5. At the same time, it should be pointed out that negative media reports are not fully representative. It is normal that unpromising examples are more newsworthy than the success stories, which exist in a considerable amount. See also Samuel and Jagadananda (2003), p. 74.

concept of global citizenship for Indian villagers is very far-fetched at the moment. But we should note the *slow* post-modern structural change, which is the very first step for glocalization in India. The 73rd Amendment has only been in effect for a little more than ten years now, and it is idealistic to believe the power-structure of the society to transform immediately. We will have to observe whether and how the progress continues.

The main conclusion of this dissertation is that glocalization is in its roots in India and indeed a possible concept. Decentralization is no obstacle to globalization. The discussion of the 73rd Amendment showed that post-modern governmental structures are slowly starting to develop, which prepares for globalization from the grassroots in the future. As long the 73rd Amendment has not sincerely been implemented in whole of India, one cannot say that global governance is already happening at the grassroots. At the moment, the local people are empowered to influence their development within their own place. The 73rd Amendment is a good starting point and gradually showing its effects in practice and developing a potential of transforming the Indian society from below in some extent, as shows the example of some districts in the Punjab.¹¹¹ Real democracy is being deeper embedded in India. The changes of the structures have to continue in order to enable democratic global governance from the grassroots. The decentralization of power and the corresponding democratization at the grassroots slowly creates a civil society. The society as such is being networked with higher levels of governance through the panchayats. Now, the process of globalization from below is yet to

¹¹¹ The following newspaper article gives support to the overall conclusion in stating that the empowerment of gram panchayats is slowly showing its effects in practice. At the example of some villages in Punjab, focusing on education in rural areas as a means of development, it is shown that effective pressure on the state government can be exerted from below, in this case from the sarpanches. See Garg (2004), in *The Times of India*, on 23 August 2004.

follow. The entire system must be linked much closer to higher institutions in India, so that the voices of the local find more consideration. Then, a public opinion for the globalization from below can be created, and global governance can take place at the grassroots. Other channels, like transnational movements, information and communication technology¹¹² and Diaspora relations will be very helpful to speed up the process.¹¹³

There is hope that the 73rd Amendment will be rigorously implemented in practice and that real democracy as precondition for glocalization rises as consequence. Ideally, other Indian states will have similar developments and give the 73rd Amendment full expression so that the ‘glocal project’ can be endeavored by the grassroots. The last statement in this paper, which does not need to be further commented, belongs to the panchayats, who underline the need for the suggested decentralized globalization framework in the new age:

“Globalisation based on the handing over of centralized power by centralized state structures to corporate monopolies violates the principles of grassroots democracy, defeats the very objective of Panchayati Raj and becomes a major threat to the survival of village communities. Grassroots democracy embodied in the Panchayati Raj requires that even the processes of globalisation and liberalization should be based on recognition of the primary ownership of village communities over their natural resources, and on their decision-making power to determine their utilization.”¹¹⁴

¹¹² ‘Village online projects’ are being increasingly implemented. They have a great capability of linking panchayats ‘to the rest of the world’. The webpage of the Indian Ministry for Rural Development keeps track of some projects: <http://rural.nic.in> [last accessed 09 September 2004]. This topic will be an interesting future research field.

¹¹³ Indeed very interesting in this respect is the decision of the GOP to appoint a honorary Non-resident Indian Sarpanch in villages if 20 of the families have relatives abroad. This is an additional global link. See Institute of Social Sciences (2003c), p. 5.

¹¹⁴ Final Statement of the Conference “Grassroots Democracy and the Threat to Survival: Agenda for Voluntary Associations and Panchayati Raj Institutions”, in Institute of Social Sciences (1995), p. 7.

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