

Chapter VI

POLITICAL STRUCTURE : THE VILLAGE ADMINISTRATION AND PANCHAYAT

"No society can exist without a framework of social regulation, to provide an order by which man lives in groups and by which individuals are regulated. Order, as we all know, is the essence of social living and society, the natural habitat of man. Social control in any society is necessary to protect the individual against himself and to save the society from chaos. Social control is the process by which social order is established and maintained".¹ From the very beginning of the society, even at its primary stage when the people lived in by adopting hunting and food gathering as their way of living there was some regulatory institution. They maintained particular norms of behaviour within themselves at the time of hunting and food gathering within their community. These norms of behaviours gradually began to form an organised social behaviour with the development of the society. These social behaviours gradually recognised by the social sanction and maintained by a process of social control. For this maintenance of different social behaviours within a society or community, an organised system of controlling authority is needed. Consequently, different types of controlling authority began to emerge among different

communities within themselves in a systematic way. Gradually, this system of authority recognised as a political system of that society or community which has been called in different names in different times. But this system of community power structure is popularly known as community panchayat is enriched with a headman and its associates to enforce community rules and regulations. The organisation of the panchayat of a particular community had stages of village level panchayat and regional level panchayat in every community including that of tribal and jati panchayat of non-tribal communities.

The term 'panchayat' literally means a group or council of five. But this literal meaning of five does not mean digital five, here it means the rule of a few persons in a community according to the rules and regulations of that community. "In village usage it refers not only to the group that convenes but also to a set processes for resolving conflict, for redressing transgression, and for launching group enterprises. The pattern of panchayat action is triggered by a problem that people feel it must be tackled and that cannot be handled by individuals acting singly. The issue may be one that touches only the families of a lineage or it may be one that concerns all in an alliance, a jati-group, or a jati. The responsible men of the group gather to discuss the issue. Their number, the timing of the meetings, the sanctions that may be imposed, all depend on the nature of the problem rather than on any fixed specifications or schedule. It should be noted at one

that this traditional panchayat pattern is quite a different thing from the recent, legislative use of the term panchayat".² The traditional community panchayat did not act only in a community concern but sometimes different community panchayats jointly settled their disputes within themselves.

This panchayat or the traditional political system in any community has grown in terms of time to regulate the individual's conduct. This regulations are generally enforced by a group of elders or village head with its assistance according to the social system. The code of conduct or regulations in any society for its individuals is generally maintained by the panchayat of a village or a village head according to the norms of the society. The rules and regulations of a tribal village generally were maintained by the village head and next to village there was regional head. In a jati society jati-panchayat existed which was headed by an elderly and influential village headmen.

Separate village headmen appointed for a separate ethnic group in a village and for each of the ethnic groups they have had to organise their own ethnic councils to deal with the matters of concern within their respective ethnic society. The Hindus, the Muslims and the tribals have had to resort from time to time to the use of ethnic councils to deal with matters specifically governed by their respective ethnic traditions and morals within themselves. Moreover, "the ethnic and caste councils are strictly limited in their powers and procedures to

the members of the groups they represent".³ It has been necessary from time to time to call into conference the leaders of the ethnic groups to constitute an inter-ethnic council. "These instrumentalities have no basis in tradition or in governmental regulations, and are therefore forced to resort to improvisations and expedients of various kinds, most of them from one source or another".⁴

Village Organisation During the British Rule :

In the early period of the British administration in India they felt the need of the process of the indigenous law of the village panchayats maintained by different communities in rural India for themselves in administering the new domains. They did not take full control of the process of the social order that the village India maintained. The new administrators of the country tried to establish those community rules and regulations in any matter they confronted in usual rural practice in a village society. "But this effort too, distorted the indigenous practices because British judges interpreted customary law much more rigidly than Maharajas or village councilors ever did".⁵ Naturally, a gradual dissatisfaction began to spread in the village society among different communities. Consequently, in most of the internal disputes of the communities, "the villagers' inclination was to keep the matter out of the courts. Only large expenses and irrelevant judgments would be forthcoming there; most problems were better settled in village council."⁶ The administrators also felt

that in the long run a forthcoming contradiction might have come in the society in this way of internal dissatisfaction within the community people. After a long standing discussion within themselves they recognised the village council to settle primary issues of the problems arising within the village and outside villages either singly or jointly. Any of the party may come to the court if he was dissatisfied or felt a grievance against some one for legal decision. But in practical life court generally gave verdict after a thorough going review of the council's judgement. So, an automatic primacy of the village council was recognized by the administration.

After a long standing controversy between the indigenous village administration and modern British rule in India, the administrators admitted the importance of the indigenous village administration with a slight modification which was introduced after a long survey by various agencies. They appointed various village heads for maintaining village administration with some executive power. They appointed these village heads on the basis of the traditional village rules and regulations with the help of the village people according to their ethnic ^{dominance} ~~eminence~~. In a village of multi-ethnic groups, different ethnic personalities were recruited in the village council to assist the village head as Pradhan selected from the majority ethnic group. These village councils began to maintain all village primary administration relating to social, economic, political and judicial matters of the village concern. They even began to collect land

taxes and other revenue of the villages as an agent of the British administration. This was an ultimate recognition of the village administration by the British administrators in a modernized form as a self sufficient village unit. In this period the ethnic village panchayats were also going on side by side with administrative authorities appointed by the British administrators. In this case the village heads worked as the head of the community panchayat and representatives of the British administrators at once. But in majority cases of tribal panchayats village chiefs were appointed by the British administrative authorities as their representative in a tribal village. They did so, because they did not like to hurt the traditional mentality that might if interfered with, create dissatisfaction among themselves about the new rulers of the country, the instance they faced in the areas of Chhotanagpur in the Santal rebellion. So, the British administrators began to reorganise the village administration with the help of the traditional village panchayat in different areas of different communities in a systematic way. They preferred to appoint their administrative agents from among the village people of the dominant community or section of the village people who were generally the traditional customary administrators in the village community. They also appointed their agents with the consent of the traditional village panchayat when their appointed agents were different from the traditional panchayat officials of those villages. These types of agents were selected on the basis of nominal educational

background with the influence of landownership qualities and possession of higher status in the society.

The British administrators began to reorganise the Indian village administration because they understood that the village was the main unit of Indian production system at that time and if they failed to capture it then their administration would not get going which was deeply studied by one of the founding administrators of the British rule in India, Sir Charles Metcalfe. He said that "the village communities are little republics, having nearly everything that they want within themselves and almost independent of any foreign relations". So, they began to spread their activities in the village areas as their domain in the territory.

Village Offices : The Headman

"The social establishment of a village normally includes an official headman (or headmen) and a keeper of land records, the accountant. Both are agents of external authority, appointed by Government and answerable to it. The headman is a member of the village who has specified duties and received some pay for fulfilling them. He is usually a landowner, or at least one of the most substantial personages in the village. As a permanent resident he is subject to whatever social pressures his fellow villagers can exert on a co-resident. The accountant, however, need not be a member or old resident of the village."⁷

"The headman's office goes by various names; its official functions are much the same throughout India. He is first of all the collector of land taxes. For doing this he receives a commission on the total amount collected or gets some rent-free land for his use. Secondly, he is the local link with the police. He is charged with keeping order in the village, and if some disorder occurs, it is he who must report it forthwith to the nearest police station. If the village employs watchman, he supervises them; if the police require a weekly report, he has to send it in, naming any strangers in the village. Should a fight be in the making, he is supposed to try to break it up, and if ~~the~~ he foresees an outbreak of violence he should call in the police before it occurs. In some places he reports the vital statistics; every where he must look after visiting government officials and should give them the impression that their orders and desires will break quick response. He is expected to act as the representative of the villagers when they want something from the authorities. The position of headman is usually hereditary, though government officials can remove a headman for cause and shift the office to another family. The appointing officials may decide that there should be more than one headman in a village or not, with responsibility of different part of the village".⁸

Besides these official duties, the village headman's official duties also ^{included} ~~incended~~ some non-official functions. As Mandelbaum observes, "a headman may not be one of the actual

leaders of his village or even if his jati-group, but the fact of his connection with police and officials can give him an advantage. In village eyes it endows him with potent influence as it often does in fact. Police and other officials regard a cooperative headman as their man in the village and they are inclined to listen him and to back him. Because of this aura of influence, a headman may be called on to arbitrate disputes. He sits on the traditional village council, and is likely to be its Chairman, in so far as there is a "Chairman".⁹ From this observation it has been found that the official headman used to work in the villages as the traditional village headman, if different community panchayats did not object to his views.

The villages of our universe were organised after a long time of the British administration and this organisation was established under the initiative of the British officials for their own convenience. They at first brought the tribals of Santal origin in the area from the district of Dumka and nearby areas of Chhotanagpur plateau. Naturally, their organisation and panchayat administration was similar to that of the Chhotanagpur areas. Later, Oraons have been migrated themselves with the help of the British administration from the Ranchi areas of Bihar for their settlement who had the experience of different village organisation and panchayat administration within themselves separate from the Santal community. At the time of their settlement in the area no such British administrators' agent was

appointed for the maintenance of their internal regulations. But their own community head somewhat acted as an agent of correspondence between themselves and the British administrators. At the primary stage of their settlement when they first reclaimed land for their own cultivation they did not pay any rent or revenue to the administrators. After a long period when the tribal people settled themselves properly as cultivators and started agricultural production in a systematic way, the British administrators imposed nominal tax for possessing land under people's own cultivation and production in the area.

The British administrators appointed the rent collectors in the area for collection of taxes with the help of the traditional village heads of different communities who had settled in the area. There were organisations of separate type which consisted of several villages in the area of their traditional village heads in separate communities for inter-village administration. The Santal society identified them as 'parganaic' established in a pargana as council. This type of inter-village councils among the Oraon villages was identified as 'Panha Panchayat'. Where other communities identified it with as the 'Anchal Panchayat' of their own community head who was non-existent at the time of our village survey. These anchalic heads had several functions within the community in the matters of inter-village activities of the area. This type of anchalic head was more ~~pre~~ prominent among the Santal community whom they called 'Pargana-Maini' in their own terminology.

This type of anchalic head had the direct relation with the Sub-Divisional authority to administer every type of activities within the area. But this type of community administration by an anchalic head had been gradually diminished since 1920, when the movement for Indian independence gradually was becoming explosive in every area of the country, including the rural areas. In our universe this type of anchalic administration by separate community became loose when a large number of people from different areas began to migrate in the area for improving their lots from different sources. These migrants ultimately began to exceed the normal inhabitants who lost control over the community people. This type of community administration eclipsed after the independence of our country when the newly set administrators of our country decided to establish a separate type of secular government through the lower levels of the people in the villages *under* the structure of Anchal and Block Development agencies. Before discussing in detail about the newly Panchayat Organisation, we would like to throw our attention to the community village administration through their respective community heads side by side the present secular type of Panchayat administration which came to our notice during the survey in the area. The emergence of the new village organisation has gradually decreased the importance of anchalic type of traditional community administration by the programmes of developmental measures for inter-village organisation and function under the nationalist politics.

Modern Panchayat Structure :

Since our independence a nation-wide effort has been made to extend governmental services and democratic participation in government to the rural areas of India. To this end, the sub-divisions of a district have been further sub-divided into several 'anchals' according to the area and population. The area of our study is also included in an 'anchal' and 'block' under the Balurghat sub-division. The anchal headquarter consists of a police station and a Block Development Office. "The Block Development Office serves the anchal through rural development and extension programmes. These programmes are initiated by national authorities but they vary from anchal to anchal to meet specific needs of the area. They generally include agricultural, public health and adult education projects with officers trained at least minimally for each project. The Block Development staff also includes "village level workers" who circulate among the villages and attempt to establish contact with the people with an intent to enlist their interest in the projects of the "block". The officer supervision the anchal programmes is the Block Development officer, or B.D.O."¹⁰

"Within each anchal the villages have been organized into "panchayats". The term "panchayat" refers to patterns of Indian village government of very ancient origin in which five men ("panch" means five) conduct free and open hearings on complaints and claims made by fellow villagers. The traditional panchayat

could be the governing body of an entire village or of a caste segment of the village. In the modern administrative scheme, the panchayat area, or panchayatiraj, has been organised to include a small number of villages or a population of no less than one thousand; the governing committee of this panchayat area is elected by secret ballot with all adults, male and female resident in the area granted the right to vote."¹¹

The system of Panchayati Raj in India owes its proper institutional origin to the findings and recommendations of the Study Team on the working of Community Projects and National Extension Service under the auspices of the Committee of Plan Project, which is popularly known as Balwantraji Mehta Committee. From the point of view of the Mehta Committee the major shortcomings of the Community Projects and National Extension Service lies in its failure in generating necessary enthusiasm among rural people for the programme and its implementation. According to the Committee each development block has an Advisory Committee composed of the official and non-official members but they have no root in the people and have no powers and responsibilities. All planning and execution is done by the block-staff, who are responsible for the proper and timely utilization of the blockfunds. In the opinion of the committee the block administration functions more bureaucratically and has not imbibed the spirit behind the programme. For generating people's enthusiasm for the programme the Committee recommended that all development programmes in the block areas should be entrusted to representative

institutions that can evoke local interest and initiative and the block-staff and other officials should be placed at the disposal of these institutions. The Study Team also recommended for the provision of sufficient funds and resources of revenue for these local institutions to enable them to discharge their new duties and responsibilities. With this view in mind, the Committee suggested the formation of the three-tier system of local Government, i.e., at village, block and district level. The three-tier system consisted directly of elected Panchayats at village level, Panchayat Samity at block and Zilla Parishad at district level. The Panchayat Samiti should have a life of five years, and should possess the power to scrutinize and approve the budgets of village panchayats. Its functions should include the development of agriculture, improvement of cattle, promotion of local industries welfare work, public health, and administration of primary schools etc. As almost the entire rural development work would come within the purview of the Panchayat Samiti, the Study Team suggested the following resources should be assigned to them.

" (i) a percentage of land revenue collected within the block, which should not be less than 40 per cent of the States net land revenue, (ii) cess on land revenue, etc. (iii) tax on profession, (iv) surcharge of duty on transfer of immovable property, (v) rent and profit accruing from property, (vi) net proceeds of tools and leases, (vii) pilgrim tax, tax on

entertainment, primary education cess, proceeds from fairs and markets, (viii) share of motor vehicle tax, (ix) voluntary public contributions and (x) Government Grants."

Further : "to ensure the necessary coordination between the Panchayat Samitis, a Zila Parishad should be established consisting of the Presidents of Panchayat Samitis, members of the State Legislature and of the Parliament, representing the area and the district level officers. The Chairman of this parishad would be the Collector. The Parishad would have the power to examine and approve the budgets of the Panchayat Samities. It would also generally supervise the activities of the Panchayat Samiti but it would not be invested with any executive functions".¹²

According to the Study Team's recommendation almost all the States adopted Panchayati Raj system to establish a progressive democracy from below the village level people with an intent on bringing democratic decentralization and development in the proper sense of the term. From this system the State of West Bengal was not excluded. The area of our survey is included within the purview of unit of Village panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad.

When the newly established system of panchayati raj was established according to the recommendation of the Mehta Committee, it posed a threat to the traditional system of community panchayats of the various communities. This type of traditional panchayat generally did not look up the matter of developmental goal of

the community people. They only engaged themselves in the village matters that come within the purview of the present panchayat system, including the community matters, which the traditional people, mainly tribal people, consider a threat to their established system in many ways. They thought it that the matters pertaining to jural and legal rights were of mutual concern to the panchayats and the community village councils; "for the panchayats to assume control of such rights is in direct violation of the rights which the villagers claimed to exercise their own control over social behaviour and their lands."¹³ In addition to that, "under the system of election in the panchayats, it is possible for small villagers or units of the population to have no representatives in the council, while other villages may have several elected members; this is because candidates are elected by the entire jurisdiction of the Panchayat, the Panchayati Raj, with a majority vote given to the largest group leaving minority groups without representation. The election system may be appropriate to a population of homogenous society and uniform status, but where large differences of ethnicity and culture divide the population eliminate representation from minority groups."¹⁴ George E. Somers again considered the matter in this way that "the representative body of the panchayat holds office for a limited period of time, a condition alien to Santal traditions, as well as other community traditions which accord life-tenure to council representatives and officers, and provide appropriate compensating mechanisms to prevent abuse of power;

life-tenure has meant security and strong personal responsibility which seems to be absent in the new order."¹⁵

So, the community village panchayats did not go wither away on side by side with that of the newly elected representatives of the panchayats for solving the problems of community matters, including that of the jural and legal rights which are of mutual nature of the community concerned. The newly adopted panchayati system though began to function in the village areas of West Bengal, it did not maintain its systematic way of approach to the village society as per Mehta Committee's recommendation. It also did not hold its timely elections for the change of representatives of the society for the lack of the proper initiative of the State and Central Government so far. The system was going on in an undemocratic way because the initial ~~enthusiasm~~ enthusiasm of the introduction of the system died down shortly and the system became more or less stereotype and defunct. The Panchayati Raj system of West Bengal gained its new impetus just after the second time victory of the Left Front Government of West Bengal who tried to examine the system in a proper way and took initiative to use panchayat in a democratic manner for the implementation of the rural development programmes. As a result a fresh election to West Bengal Panchayat in West Bengal occurred in 1978, in a proper democratic way first time in West Bengal which continues through timely elections in every five year since then.

An experiment of the systematic use of the panchayati raj is going on in rural areas of West Bengal on the perspective of economic-political development of our society by elected representatives from the rural people with a view to massive development of the society as a whole on the basis of the distribution of administrative powers. And a large mass of the village people are taking initiative through the panchayati raj for their all side development, even at that time they did not leave their traditional system of community panchayat for solving social problems relating to their own community. In this portion we would like to discuss the main issues of the traditional community panchayat which is going on in its own way in the people of various communities when a democratic panchayat is going on in full swing. So, we will throw our attention here what type of community panchayat is going on in the rural people of different communities for solving their own community matters in a systematic way, what we may call the system of traditional panchayat.

Traditional Practices within the Modern Framework :

The system of Panchayati Raj is a new phenomenon in our rural India which has been introduced after the independence of our country. The movement of the system did not get its real value before the Seventies when it was on the movement of experiment and had gained its real objectivity in our universe and in a broader sense in West Bengal after the emergence of the second time victory of Left Front Government in 1977. Previously, under the four-tier system there was an election to the Gram Sabhas

and Anchal Panchayats which became just a ^{moozilband} moozilband institution. As a result the system of traditional village panchayat on the basis of castes and community continued their functions in the villages. Its continuity we found even at the time of our field survey. Among the traditional community panchayats, tribal panchayats were more powerful. Among the tribals panchayats the two tribal community panchayats were prominent and maintained their continuity. The other community panchayats were also found at the time of our field survey, viz. Hindu caste panchayats mostly among the Rajbanshi and Kshatriya inhabitants as well as of the other castes Hindus. Though in other areas these caste Hindus had different panchayats for their own social administration which differs from the Rajbanshi and Kshatriya panchayats. But for them being small in number they formed their panchayat jointly with the other Hindus, i.e., with the Rajbanshis and Kshatriyas. This caste panchayat have separate origin and existence which is different from that of the tribal panchayats. But in intercommunity problems, they generally met together for a solution. The system of the community panchayat we found at the time of our field survey is the remnant of the traditional system of panchayat. The modern system of the panchayat has its roots in that traditional panchayat and has appeared in our present day rural society in a modified way. Though the community panchayat has its own verdict on breaking of community rules but the verdict is sometimes and in most cases violated, by the community members because of the lack of the proper administrative power

and for the existence of the modern panchayat system which is secular in character. This type of inability is found in every community panchayat, including the tribal panchayats whose power is somewhat stronger than that of the other community panchayats of the Hindus and Muslims.

The community panchayat of the case^t Hindus in the villages we have studied are based on the elderly male members of the village or villages they constitute according to their own conveniences with five to seven members according to the strength of the community. The panchayat is headed by a male member who is wise and influential in the society is called Mondal or Moral in village terminology and is assisted by other elderly male members of five to seven according to the capacity of number of the village households and castes differentiation, i.e. of the number of castes and sub-castes living in the villages. In our universe we found two such types of caste Hindu panchayats in separate villages. Both of them consisted of members from several villages but the functioning body is located, in the village where the majority of Hindu castes people live. One head of the communities is from the Rajbanshi sections of the society and the other is from kayastha Ghosh. In both cases the Mondal is assisted by other elderly and influential person from among the villagers. In both the cases the panchayats formed after the independence when the caste Hindus migrated in the area. Before the independence the area was fully covered by the tribal

people and only tribal panchayats were there.

According to the traditional system the post of the Mondal i.e. the head of the community panchayat of the Hindus was hereditary one and the post generally passed through fathers to elder sons in normal cases. "The office is hereditary, passing from father to son. But if the son has not attained maturity at the time of the death of his father, and is consequently not in a position to take over the responsibility, one of the brothers of the deceased may exercise the authority on behalf of the minor. In some cases even after attaining maturity the son remains only the nominal head, while his uncle continues to be the de facto chief".¹⁶ He also says that "the panchayat or village council consists of the headman of all the major communities living within the village and in addition other rich and influential persons".¹⁷ This type of community panchayat exercises power in the interest of their own community and decides cases of minor disputes within the society or in connection with other societies where their community personnel are involved. Their main function is related to the community as a whole. The community panchayat generally meet when any person breaks community rule in his daily life, in a word, we may say, in cases of discrepancy of community continuity and hamony. Besides these continuity and hamony "the panchayat performs several important functions. It hears and decides disputes which do not ordinarily go to the courts of law, criminal or civil. It fixes the details of the ceremonies to be organised

by the village community as a whole.¹⁸ One thing we would like to refer here that the community panchayat is not abolished from the village society but is made purely social, not political. The existence of community panchayat is still there because the village people cannot completely free themselves from their traditional mentality. Community panchayat is found in more or less in every village side by side with the democratic panchayat. It has also been found in our study that the instances of judgement by the community panchayat and obedience to the community judgement persists in the village society, though casually. It has also been found that the incidence of breaking community rule occurs, sometimes the panchayat is indifferent to it, for it cannot take any action against the violator for the lack of its original base in the society. This type of disobedience to the community rule occurs in the case of financially powerful people who are steadily aligning themselves in the political configuration of the newly established democratic panchayats.

This type of community panchayat's judgement against a Tili family was pronounced in vain. When a girl of that family eloped and married a cobbler boy of a distant village, the village panchayat went for the social boycott and isolation, if the girl returned to her parents. But after few months that girl came to her parents home and stayed there but the community people did not dare to take any further action against them for the fear of economic hazards. Most of the village people, either of the

same caste or of other communities were directly or indirectly dependent upon the family's assistance to their needs in the village economy. Though a verdict was shaped and pronounced upon them, when the family violated it hhatantly they did not have the strength to go for the kill. This type of disobedience occurred because the community panchayat lost its original power that it possessed in the past. After independence this type of discrimination was serious offence to the society as a whole that became oath-bound to the principle of equality and secularism. So, the democratic constitution also weakens the traditional community panchayat's dictate.

Like the community panchayat of the caste Hindus, Muslims of our universe also have their own community panchayat. But the power and function of that community panchayat has also been eroded like that of the Hindu community panchayat. Here the panchayat only deals with nominal business of minor community discrepancies and decides minor disputes among the community people in different families or between persons of the same family, if the disputant family or persons come to the panchayat for a decision. It has also been found that the disputant family or person may not abide by the panchayat's decision. In this case of disobedience the panchayat has nothing to enforce its decision. The panchayat body only tries to decide the case by convincing both the party or related parties. At our survey time we found a case which went to the panchayat for a decision where the contestants were son-in-law and father-in-law in case

of candidature for a village panchayat in 1983 panchayat election. In this case the father-in-law submitted his candidature for the village panchayat as a C.P.I. affiliated candidate and latter, the son-in-law, also submitted his candidature from the same village constituency as a Congress(I) supported independent candidate. The son-in-law at that time sent message to his father-in-law to withdraw his candidature from the constituency otherwise the son-in-law will divorce (Talak) his wife. At that time the father-in-law brought the matter to the village community panchayat to decide the problem. Then the village community panchayat met together and tried to convince the son-in-law to abstain from his decision but when they failed to convince him then they convinced the father-in-law to withdraw his candidature for the post to avoid an unpleasant situation. The father-in-law ultimately withdrew his candidature for avoiding a greater threat to peace in the family. This type of conciliation has become the changed role of community panchayat because of lost its enforceable capacity in the society. Now every type of dispute is coming to the democratic panchayat for a decision and the importance of community panchayats ~~for a decision and the importance of community panchayat~~ is decreasing day by day. But the community panchayats are still existing and taking decision also if the matter comes before the panchayat. It is generally represented by the elderly male members of that society.

The two tribal communities of our universe maintain two

separate community panchayats for themselves which are more or less somewhat systematic than the other two community panchayats of caste Hindus and Muslims. Traditional tribal panchayats were more strict in their rules and regulations in the society but in modern time those tribal panchayats have also lost their power with the appearance of the democratic panchayat. But the tribal panchayats till now follow some systematic rules which the normal members generally do not disobey like the arrangement of village ceremonial functions and its procedures, religious practices and others. In case of disregard to community rule it has also lost its power to adjudicate any matter according to its own norm against the violator. The panchayat body now tries to decide any case according to its own law and inform the decision but if anyone violates the norm or decision then it has nothing to do against him for the lack of legal power it possessed traditionally.

From the traditional time, a systematic village council is organised within the Santal community for maintaining various activities within the village or outside village in their community or within their own community in relation to the other communities. The existence of that community panchayat is till now found even after the emergence of the modern panchayati raj system in the village society. The functions of the Santal community panchayats are maintained by a council systematically even today. The council normally is consisted of elderly persons of the tribe succeeding hereditarily in action. "The village

council is not only convened at the call of the headman, its proceedings are conducted under his guidance for he is its presiding officer. The enforcement and execution of its decisions are the headman's responsibility. This makes him in reality the chief administrator in the village. For his varied and numerous responsibilities there is provision for assistance in a form peculiarly suited to the Santal concept of egalitarianism. There are seven designated administrative elders who are given authority for the conduct of village affairs. They are (1) the Manjhi, the headman himself; (2) the paranic, the first assistance who assists in matters related to the use of land; (3) the Jog paranic, or second assistant of the headman; (4) the Jog Manjhi, or assistant in charge of the morals of youth and adults; (5) the Naike, the village priest or ritualist; (6) the Kudan Naike, the assistant priest, and (7) the Godet, the village messenger. Not all villages make use of all seven officers; the number actually working in a village depends partly on the size of the village, and partly on the members of calls upon their services. Ultimately, the number of elders is decided upon by the headman in consultation with the village council."¹⁹

Each of these officers is responsible to the village people. "Village elders hold their position throughout their life-time, unless the council adjudges an individual to be morally corrupt or physically unable to continue his duties. Because the duties of each of these administrative elders are

rather clearly understood in the traditions of the Santals, each man tends to perform his duties independently. The assistants are not underlings or tools in the power of the headman; however, they are responsible to both the headman and the village council".²⁰

The traditional panchayat of the Santal society was very powerful in community matters. At present the panchayat has its body like that of the traditional one but has lost its original power after the independence when a democratic panchayat has taken over the political and economic functions. Moreover, the community panchayat has been losing its power for the appearance of the interdependency in the village economy in which every community is interdependent for its proper development in the modern society. As a result the strict community rules are losing importance day by day, and the posts of the village community panchayat is losing its importance and sometimes decreasing in number which actually the traditional panchayat maintained. An important post of the 'Parganait', an official head of the inter-village council in the areas has been abolished in our universe. "His job was to arbitrate various social questions and matters of tribe in consultation with the different Manjhis. He was assisted by a deputy known as a Desh-Manjhi. These officials are now not found among the tribals; even when MacAlpin conducted his survey he could not find all these officials in every district".²¹

But one thing, which we can not ignore even in modern

panchayati raj system, is that every village of Santal inhabitants look with reverence to their traditional community panchayat. Now a minor community problem is confined to the village community panchayat of Santal society in our universe, other cases are in the purview of the democratic panchayat. Sometimes inter-community problems are coming to the community panchayats of related community for preliminary discussion and solution but these inter-community problems basically remained undecided in the community panchayat where the interference of democratic panchayat becomes necessary for a proper judgement. Because the modern village panchayat owes legal power in every matters relating to village society. But we cannot ignore the role of community panchayat in any decision relating to that community which we found at the time of our survey in the Santal society.

At the time of our survey we found a case which was referred to the community panchayat of Santal society in the village Berakuthi where one of the disputant parties was an inhabitent of that village. The case was that a girl of the village Berakuthi married a boy of her own community of a distant village and when the dispute occurred the girl became a mother. One day the woman came to her parents' house without her child and informed her father that her husband had beaten and driven her away from the house after a familial quarrel, which the villagemen informed me, that the woman disagreed to obey her husband's word frequently when the husband became

irritated and beaten her inhumanely and driven her away. The husband did not allow to accompany her child naturally the woman became more anxious and said all things to her parent. After listening to all the matters, the father of that woman went to the village headmen of their community, i.e., to the village Manjhi, and told him the matter in detail. The village Manjhi decided to convene a meeting of the panchayat and sent message to the village Gorait to inform the other village officials and other village elders of the agenda. In the meeting they summoned the woman to tell the matter in detail and listening to all the matters the council decided a joint meeting of that village council under whose jurisdiction the husband resided and sent message accordingly. The Manjhi of that village discussed the matter with his council colleagues and arranged a joint meeting in his village and informed the Manjhi and his council of woman's village accordingly.

The village Manjhi and other council members appeared in the boy's village with the woman and her father. The village situated at a distance of 6 to 7 kilometres from the village Berakuthi and out of my survey area. Both the village Manjhis with their village council decided the matter in presence of the husband and wife along with their father. In a joint meeting, both the community panchayats decided the matter after discussion among themselves and the village people present and held that the husband had done wrong in driving away his wife on the basis of their familial quarrel when a breast feeding baby was lying with

them. The community Panchayat also held unanimously that both of them would live together in a family, if this type of incidence recurred again, the village panchayat would drive them away from the village or would boycott them.

Besides, the decision of the panchayats imposed fine of the husband for beating her wife and having driven her away from his home. The amount of the fine was realized on that day by arranging a feast for the panchayat officials and other elders of the village and those of the wife's village who came to decide the matter. They also decided that in the feast both the husband and wife would take part in distributing foods. The couple did so according to the panchayats' judgement. So we find that in present day though the importance of the community panchayat is declining day by day, the activity of the community panchayat is not abolished totally from the village society. Minor disputes relating to the community members, as under reference, are till now decided by the community panchayat. So we cannot completely ignore the importance of the community panchayat even today when the democratic panchayats are functioning in the rural society. But one thing is that the community panchayat has lost its legal power with the appearance of the democratic panchayat.

Like the Santal community the community of Oraon tribe maintains a separate community panchayat for governing the community customs amongst ^{themselves} ~~enselves~~ in the universe whose importance has also decreased to their community people like those of the other community panchayats with the appearance of the democratic

panchayats and other activities relating to the secular and democratic constitution established for the society as a whole after the independence. The aim of this type of democratic panchayat is to establish a society for all the human beings living and interacting in the village society as a whole. The main function of this type of democratic panchayat is the overall development of the rural society as a whole, irrespective of any separate provision for a separate community, except in basic community rites and rituals pertaining to folkways. This type of distinction is made on the basis of the economic development of the society but not on consideration of their being a separate social entity. So the traditional established norms in the society is dwindling day by day but in the way of erosion the system maintains its traditional norms for a little while which we find in our survey. This type of traditional system is now present in the society to maintain a moral force in the community. ~~in its~~ So the decision of the traditional institution of the community panchayat depends on its members' personal will and morality and if anybody violates its decision, it has nothing to do against the deviator by adopting traditional norms, some of which are banned by our modern constitution through legal action in severe cases. So the traditional community panchayat that we find in present day society is without its proper utility but exists as a traditional usage of folkways. The community panchayat of the Oraon is no more an exception.

Traditionally, the Oraon tribe had two types of village

council, one for intra-village and other for inter-village councils what they called Gram Panchayat (village council) and Parha-Panchayat (inter-village council). "But now a days the Parha Panchayat is almost non-existent, and the village Panchayat nominally exists in the form of an elders' council. The Gram Panchayat deals with minor socio-religious disputes etc., within the particular village and the Parha-Panchayat, whose jurisdiction extended over a number of villages, used to deal with the disputes in between two or more villages."²² As the concept behind the formation of these organisations, Roy says, "the pressure of common danger and a consciousness of the common good appeared to have suggested most of the institutions... The prime care of the people, the dominant idea directing and controlling the tribal soul, has been how to live and multiply, how to maintain an independent tribal existence and solidarity, how to secure good luck and avoid ill-luck in so far as tribal security, health, cattle and agricultural interests are concerned."

The existence of Parha Panchayat is no more in existence in our universe, on the Gram Panchayat (village Council) among Gram village is there. The Gram Panchayat generally consists of a headman, an assistance of the headman, elderly persons of the village and a messenger. The composition of the Gram Panchayat varies in number of elderly persons, it depends upon the total population of a village, Christian population are not including themselves in the Gram Panchayat or village council. The fixed number is the village headman, is generally called Mondal,

assistance village headman is called by second Mondal and the messenger is called by Chowkidar. In some villages they call them as Rajmoral, Mantri and Chowkidar respectively. In our study we find that the body of village council i.e. the Gram Panchayat consists of influential persons in the villages. This Gram Panchayat mainly deals with the minor socio-religious, cultural and socio-political affairs. But this type of community panchayat like other community panchayats is losing its importance day by day for the appearance of the democratic panchayats because of the appearance of the modern means of production and distribution system and other influences like urbanization and westernization in the village cultural life with that of the modern means of transformation like education and economic division of the society as a whole. Besides that the Christian population of the community are not including themselves as members of the traditional village council. So the traditional village council has no such influence in the society to maintain solidarity of the tribal society they belong. Traditionally the village panchayat used to play an important role in settling disputes in all matters of public as well as private life of the community. "But at present the Panchayat has practically lost its hold over the people, and many of them even dare to go against the decision of the vestigial rudiment of the village political unit and approach law courts or police, generally when the judgement of the village council goes against them."²³

The office of the village headman is usually hereditary.

i.e., after the death or retirement of a village headman his eldest son succeeds to the office of his father. But in present day Orson village this hereditary leadership is overthrown in many of the villages by the personal efficiency and influence. This village headman naturally selects his assistance or advisor considering the activity, experience, efficiency and socio-economic status and influence over the village people. Other elderly members of the village office are generally selected by the village headman in consultation with his assistant on the basis of their personal efficiency, activity, influence and experience over the village people. The village Chowkidar or messenger of the village Panchayat is usually selected by the political Panchayat. The Panchayat of a Orson village generally confine its activities to the boundaries of the village. If any dispute arises among the inhabitants of the two villages then the Panchayats of both the villages take part separately and jointly for deciding the disputes.

The Orson village Panchayat usually decides disputes of a village that arises among the Orson inhabitants relating to their community concerned, e.g., "disputes between persons of either sex involved in assault; disputes on the occasion of marriage; cases of love between tribal boys and girls; breach of social rules, norms etc."²⁴ Traditionally disputes relating to possession of land - between the two Orson families in a village or two villages, were normally decided by the community panchayats of the concerned villages. If any dispute crops within

the Oraon family or with that of a family of other communities in the village or adjacent villages then the disputes are normally decided by the panchayats of the respective communities jointly. In present day village society any dispute relating to land is generally decided by the members of the democratic Panchayat whether it may be in the same community or in inter-community. Besides the minor problems of the community affairs, all other important cases are generally referred to the formal body of the present day democratic Panchayat. Naturally the importance of the Community panchayats are decreasing day by day. Moreover, the traditional community panchayats were more rigorous over community matters and the rule of domination of upper castes over the lower castes was there and in tribal panchayat domination of influential over the non-influential was present. The present panchayats are no more in exception to the point of domination of the upper economic class over the lower economic class but in a different way.

Though the community panchayat is existing side by side with the panchayati raj system, a democratic institution of the rural areas, but the importance of the community panchayat is decreasing for the lack of having any economic power to confer any special benefit upon the community members of the rural society as a whole which is specially owned by the members of the panchayati raj. The representatives of the panchayati raj institution are elected on the basis of the majority votes by democratic means and majority members are coming from a political party supporters who

are actively operating as a prime media of rural development where the individual beneficiary schemes are lying in the hand of the panchayat members and on the recommendation of a panchayat member an individual can get economic benefit for the development of his family. Any member of the panchayat generally recommends the name of an individual for economic benefit on the basis of the petitioner being a supporter or active worker of his party. So, the people are more interested in the party politics for their benefit in modern rural society than adhering to community folkways and customs. A few members have the tacit support for his community but never unfold it for the benefit of the party and panchayat as a whole. So for that reason the community matters and feelings are evaporating day by day with the introduction of the panchayati raj in the rural society which has added a new dimension to rural development as a whole without differentiating a particular community for development, except the constitutionally ^{emphatic} unmarked classes in the society.

So the introduction of the Panchayati Raj has induced a new phenomena in the village people by which they are becoming more democratic day by day. Now, the zeal of the village people is not in their own community matter only but in the matter of the village people as a whole. So, the introduction of the newly established system of the Panchayati Raj is not only for the rural self-administration and development of the national integration and secularism as a whole. Though the special emphasis

has been given upon the development of the tribal and backward communities, the emphasis is not for creating a separate entity in the rural society but the intention is to make them developed at par with the other people in the society as a whole.

The community people in the contemporary rural society are thinking that when democratic panchayat is doing all types of works in the village society then there is no need for the continuity of the separate community panchayat for maintaining a separate village authority over the separate communities. Besides, the modern young people never agree with their elders in community matters in consequence of the impact of urbanization and westernization. They are more interested in the present day democratic panchayat than that of their separate traditional community panchayat. ~~than that of their separate traditional community panchayat.~~ But we cannot ignore the existence of the community panchayat in the village society among the older members of the community, who sometimes decide minor cases of disputes within the community, though in cases of inter-community matters or disputes between an influential person and a less influential member of the society the community panchayat personnel remain mostly silent. A case study in this matter strengthens our proposition which happened at the time of our field survey.

Case Study :

One Kayastha boy and an Oraon girl were related. I would not like to mention their name in this place for personal hazards. The

Kayastha boy belonged to the economically powerful family of the village we have studied and the Oraon girl belonged to the family of lower economic class of the wage labour family. At the time of the incidence under reference the Oraon girl was engaged as a day labourer by the family for threshing harvested crop and the Kayastha boy supervised the work. One day at noon when no one was there the Oraon girl and the Kayastha boy had sex between themselves in the outer courtyard of the Kayastha family where the harvested crops were piled up. An Oraon boy of that village marked the incident when he was passing by the side and communicated the matter to the village and promptly the village people came to catch them red handed. The girl and the boy fled away from the spot apprehending violence by the village people. The village people caught the girl after chasing a mile but could not trace the boy who fled away from the village and stayed outside the village for a month. But the Oraon girl was beaten by her brother and warned her that if she indulged in matter in future then they would kill her. After that the village people came to the boy's father but the boy's father said to them that what he would do in this situation when the boy was not present in the village. Then the village Oraon people of Bhalkadaha arranged a community panchayat meeting with other elder members of the village but did not come to any conclusion or judgement against the incidence. They only warned the father of the girl that if his daughter again caused this type of incidence then

community people would take action against him. But they were not able to convey that type of judgement to the boy's father who too was an economically influential person in the village and a political leader of the Congress Party. He had also command over the village panchayat body. So the village people of Oraon community and other persons of the other communities were not able to do anything against the family in the community panchayat. This is nothing but an erosion in the power of the community panchayat against the violation of the community rule.

Case Study No.2

Through neighbourhood inter-connection an Oraon girl and a Kshatriya boy fell in love and decided to marry. But the marriage was not possible in accordance with social rites and approval of the guardians. One day at night they eloped and married themselves at a distant place in the nearby urban town, Balurghat and lived together in a hotel for four to five days and afterwards returned home. The Oraon girl began to live with the Kshetriya boy in his family. In this case no community panchayat was arranged by the village people because if they did something against the couple or of their family it would be a serious offence to the present law and any type of legal action might come, if the couple or the families took legal measures against the community judgement. Only a dissatisfaction and alarm haunted elderly family members of both the sides but the matter got absorbed gradually. And no community restrictions

were imposed upon the two families from their two respective communities and the interaction with other community personnel and families were going on in normal way in the matters of social and economic affairs of the village as usual.

This also is an instance of dwindling community panchayat's power upon the community people with the appearance of the democratic rules and regulations in the village society as elsewhere in the country as a whole. In the present day village society people care little about their community matters, rather they are more prone to their economic-political affairs of the society which normally shows the generalised form of social behaviour and interaction in the society as a whole. This is also helpful to a unified society as a whole. Consequently, the village people are tending to the nature of democratic panchayat for the total welfare of the society which wields more power for the development of the society as a whole. The question of total development was not possible in the system of community panchayat. Though the community panchayat showed the way to the modern democratic panchayat in the formation of a nation state.

Panchayati System in the Post-Independence Period :

It has been clear from our discussion that the system of panchayat which we find in the present day rural society is not new in the dictionary of rural sociology. But the procedural system and its administration differed from the past panchayati system. In the earlier period panchayat was basically formed by

the elderly persons of a village on the basis of their castes or community background. Even tribal communities of ancient society had the provision of panchayat which decided the problems of community. But the traditional panchayat was basically engaged in the problems of societal matters. The economic-political problems were far ahead of the past panchayati system. Panchayats of a few tribal communities had the provisions for dealing with economic matters. In the British period the colonial administrators gave some power to the panchayat heads i.e., Mondal for collection of taxes on various properties, like land etc. and gained an economic importance in the village. But in traditional period the post of Mondalship, i.e. headman of the panchayat, was hereditary which we have found in the two tribal communities of our universe. The post of Mondalship in other communities was also hereditary but the tribal people ~~was~~ strictly followed that rule, except the cases of inability, i.e., physical or mental.

So, we may say that the panchayat system is nothing new in our country. It existed in British and pre-British period but the functions and features were somewhat different at different stages. But the system of panchayat, i.e. the village administration was self-sufficient in traditional period. Keeping this idea in mind our framers of the constitution made provision of the system of panchayat for village administration and development i.e. local self-government as a unit of a state in miniature. Different politicians made different type of ideas about the system among whom Mahatma Gandhi was prominent. He advocated

for the system from the very beginning of our independence. "He had envisioned a system of rural self-government in which each unit was to be a self-sufficient republic, without being in any way dependent on its neighbouring unit or village. On such a nucleus was to evolve the State administration, going concentrically in its realm of activities. When Gandhi learnt that the constitution has not accorded villages the importance he desired for them he said, "I must confess I have not understood the ways of the Constituent Assembly... This is undoubtedly a deviation... the more power the panchayats have the better it is for the people."²⁵

Ambedkar and Nehru were, on the other hand, assertive in their criticism of the panchayat system in the Constituent Assembly. Ambedkar remarked, "I am happy that the individual instead of the village has been treated as the unit in the Draft Constitution."²⁶ On the recommendation of the Constituent Assembly, the system of panchayat was included in the Constitution as a means of rural local self-government. "Accordingly almost all the States have enacted different legislations for providing requisite legal framework for the establishment of a village panchayat"²⁷ to which the State of West Bengal is no exception.

Accordingly, "the First Five Year Plan recommended that legislation should confer on the Panchayats specific functions relating to village production programmes and the development of village lands. The Second Plan further amplified this proposal, by classifying the functions as administrative and judicial. The

functions in administrative sphere are defined as (1) civic, (2) development, (3) land management and (4) land reforms. The second plan also emphasised the need for creating a well organised democratic organisation at the district level and suggested that the Village Panchayat should be organically linked with popular organization at a higher level."²⁸

Panchayati Raj in India owes its origin to the findings and recommendations of the Study Team on the Working of Community Projects and National Extension Service under the auspices of the Committee on Plan Project, which is popularly known as Balwantrao Mehta Committee. From the point of view of the Mehta Committee the major shortcomings of the Community Project and National Extension Service lies in its failure in generating the necessary enthusiasm among the rural people for the programme and its implementation. According to the Committee, each development block has an Advisory Committee comprised of the official and non-official representatives but they have no roots amongst the people and have no powers and responsibilities. All planning and execution is done by the block-staff, who are responsible for the proper and timely utilization of block funds. In the opinion of the Committee the block administration functions more bureaucratically and has not imbibed the spirit behind the programme. For generating people's enthusiasm for the programme the Committee recommended that all development programmes in the block areas should be entrusted to representative institutions that can evoke local interest and initiative and the block staff and other

officials should be placed at the disposal of these institutions. The study Team also recommended for the "provision of sufficient funds and sources of revenue for these local institutions to enable them to discharge their new duties."²⁹

"The institution of Panchayat was given a wider range of variation in accordance with the working principles of federalistic democracy of the country. It was made an approved rural institution of democratic decentralization in 1959. Now it covers almost the whole territory of the country. Structurally the rural local self-governmental organization is three-tier institution, Panchayat the lowest level, Panchayat Samities (Block level councils) and the Zilla Parishad (District level councils), elected by the villagers on adult franchise. It comes under the State List in the Scheme of distribution of powers of the Constitution of the country. The State government can vary the organizational pattern to suit their objectives. There are different provisions for accommodating the representation of the backward communities and the women on the otherwise elected bodies for decentralized powers in the rural areas of the country. The organizational patterns present an organic unity in the structural set up. The functional responsibility of the panchayats (rural councils) spreads to agricultural production, rural industries, medical relief, maternity and child welfare, common grazing grounds, villageroads, tanks, wells and maintenance of sanitation. In some states they look after primary education,

maintenance of village records and collection of land revenue. The government of the country considers, the panchayat, the cooperative and the school are the basic institutions at the village level for carrying out the programmes of rural development. The elected panchayat is in-charge of all developmental programmes in the area. The cooperative endeavours to supply cheap credit to the people. The village school, which is also a community centre, looks after educational, recreational needs of the people. Associate bodies such as women and youth organizations, farmers' and artisans' associations functioning in their respective spheres, are linked up with the panchayat in its development activities and are supported in turn by the panchayat in their works."³⁰

According to the Mehta Committee report and its recommendations "the government of India accepted the proposal and initiative was taken to introduce it throughout the country."³¹ To introduce the system of Panchayati Raj the country-wide elections were held in 1959 and 1961 for the implementation of various developmental programmes through the elected bodies. "Since then, during successive plan periods increasing emphasis was laid on rural development programme. As a result, apart from CDP other programmes like CADP, MEAL, SFDA, IEDP, IRDP, DPAP were gain in favour of the economically backward section of the population. Along with it, the importance of the Panchayati Raj was also decreased."³²

At the initial stage of the implementation of the Panchayati Raj brought the vigorous enthusiasm to the people but they gradually became depressed by its working in different field of activities in the society. They also found it that the elected representatives of the body is enriched with those people of traditional landlord and the so-called bhadraloks in the rural society. The lower class people did not think of any progress or development for themselves by those representatives who are generally engaged in activities for themselves in the society. So the system of "Panchayati Raj has not brought relief to the weaker section of the community. There has been no perceptible increase in the flow of benefits of development to the economically and socially weaker section of village community."³³ Besides, the institution lacked more financial and administrative power to mobilize of local resources and programmes. So the programmes of development were mainly on the hands of the bureaucrats, i.e. of the block and district officials who did not dispose of sufficient financial grants for its implementation in the rural society. They only worked to attain target of financial allocation and its implementation. So, the programmes did not achieve its proper success. So the initial enthusiasm of the rural poor died down shortly after its implementation.

This type of inconsistencies and loopholes were first objected to by the United Front Government of West Bengal and they tried to contemplate changes in the laws of the Panchayati Raj system in the state for effective changes in the society.

But the government was dismissed shortly before the implementation of the programmes of changes for the institution. "The Congress came back to power in 1972 and drew up a comprehensive law called the West Bengal Panchayat Act, but strangely that the Government did nothing in its five-year term to hold Panchayat elections. The Left Front trounced the Congress in 1977, and began consolidating its power. One of the first thing it did was to hold elections to Panchayats all over West Bengal."³⁴

Accordingly, the Left Front Government of West Bengal went ahead to establish the three-tier panchayat bodies through direct elections in June 1978, after being in power for one year, to fulfil their election pledge. "This was in recognition of the recommendation made by the Ashoke Mehta Committee that the elections to the Panchayats should be fought on political party lines. In addition to providing infrastructure facilities like construction and repair of village roads, culverts and primary schools, water supply, housing, nutrition and maternal-child health care programmes, mahila sanities, employment opportunities and 'Food for Work' programmes, management of ferries, huts and markets, tanks and ponds for pisciculture—the most significant effort are to bring about basic institutional reforms like distribution of vested lands to the landless agricultural workers and recording sharecroppers under the programme, 'Operation Barga', and providing them with institutional finance."³⁵

This reformation of the Panchayat systems took place under the financial assistance to its activities which depended on Government grants only. Besides, the scope of the panchayats to mobilise their own resources is indeed very limited. Because the Panchayat Act of 1959, had gave no scope for raising their own resources, nor they were empowered to levy taxes, the main source of the Panahcyats' income. Accordingly, the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1978 was implemented by the Left Front Government whose main emphasis was on "made provision to enable the Panchayats to raise 40 per cent of their revenue through taxes, surcharges and duties on them. But as no proper rules were framed for imposing such taxes on land and houses, the Panchayats' income from this source has remained negligible."³⁶ Zilla Parishads weild some powers to levy taxes on some areas simultaneously with the village Panchayats, according to the Panchayat Act of 1973. But these resources were too limited to the attainment of self-sufficiency in the financial areas. So, "with such financial handicaps the Panchayats are left with no option but to look for Central and State help, a predicament which defeats the very purpose of the panchayat system."³⁷ With these limited scope of activities and financial resources the Left Front Government of West Bengal came to power and reorganised the system by implementing a state wide election of the Panchayats on the basis of the establishment of local self-government in action and achieved major victory on the basis of their election manifesto.

This was "the prospects of decentralisation of power and execution of village uplift schemes through Panchayats held out new hopes among the peasantry".³⁸

"The Left Front Government of West Bengal has not innovated any institution of its own to further its political action of Marxian origin. It has adopted the age-old institution of rural local self-government for making the democracy look what it stands for the bed rock of participation of the people in the total affairs of the society. As we have seen earlier that the institution of Panchayat, the historical council of five restyled as an elected body of the people of rural areas, was inaugurated in the formative years of our independent life. But it could not reach the people in any genuine manner. It became the centres of the vested interests of rural areas of the country West Bengal did not remain outside the operational zone."³⁹ Though some structural-functional difficulties are there in the institutional system but the Marxist rulers are elated. They have endowed the Panchayats with the "responsibilities of implementation of the Food-for work programme and Rural Works Programme. These programmes, meant for creation of employment potentialities for the poorer sections as well as for creation of durable assets, have since been consolidated into one programme entitled National Rural Employment Programme since November, 1980."⁴⁰

The Left Front Government started their functioning in the rural areas through the newly formed panchayats in an

attitudinal gain of power and development in the states. Though they started their function through the previous institution, they have been able to change its functional procedure in the society which inclines to the representation of the interest of the rural poor. At its initial stage of reformation they had no alternative to change the previous system but they had an intention of reorganisation of the system by replacing the representatives of the patronised section of the society. But at its first hand implementation they have decided that the panchayat would be given increasing responsibility in the decision-making process with its proper function in a moderated way step-by-step. So, in future the Panchayats are supposed to work in cooperation with its relevant government officials for different programmes and its implementation for rural development in the society.

Now, we would like to focus on the working of the Panchayats in the rural areas and people's participation in the institution by going through the data collected in our universe.

Our discussion in this portion deals with the economic position of the elected members of the Panchayat in our universe which shows the majority members of Panchayats are elected from the large land owning class of the society for the second and third term of the Panchayat under the Left Front Government of West Bengal.

Table No. 30

Distribution of landholdings of Gram Panchayat Members in
our Universe

	Total No.	Non-owner of Land	Upto 2.5 acres of land	From 2.5 to 5 acres of land	More than 5 acres of land
1983	13	X	X	3	10
1988	14	X	1	5	8

In 1983 Gram Panchayat Body, there were thirteen members in total among whom no member was elected from the non-owners of land and the owner cultivator of upto 2.5 acres of land, the marginal peasant group. Only three members among the thirteen were elected from the landholding group of 2.5 to 5 acres of land, the small peasant class. The rest 10 men elected from the rich peasants' class whose landholding was more than 5 acres in the universe. In the later panchayat election the scenerio was more or less similar to that of the previous panchayat. One seat of the panchayat was increased on the basis of population. In this body of the Gram Panchayat only one member was elected from the marginal peasant family whose landholding stands 2 acres of cultivable land with an occupation of cultivator. Among others 5 were from the small peasants class and the rest 8 members were from the rich peasants class and in every case the members have the maximum land in their possession, i.e., more than 10 acres. So, the table shows that poor section of the society generally

send a meagre per cent of the representatives to the body for the protection of their interests in the society. So, the situation we find in our analysis militates against the point which the Left Front Chairman Promode Dasgupta ^{boastfully} boasted pointed out in 1978 Panchayat Election, "a struggle for establishing the rights of the poor peasants, agricultural labourers, village craftsmen etc. against the vested interests and exploiting classes in the villeges".⁴¹ But our data of the two panchayats in 1983 and 1988 show that the exploiting classes of the villages are sending maximum number of representatives to the body of the Gran Panchayat. So the members are constrained to do something against their own interest, and cannot fulfil the actual interest of the larger society for which the Left Front Government takes pride in politics.

Table No.31

Distribution of Gram Panchayat Members according to Occupation Groups in our universe.

S1. No.	Occupation	1983 Number	1988 Number
1.	Owner-Cultivators cum Landowner	10	12
2.	Landowner cum Service	3	2
3.	Landless Agricultural Labourers	x	x
4.	Sharecropper	x	x
5.	Village Artisan	x	x
		13	14

This table shows that the majority members of the panchayat have come from the owner class of cultivating occupational group

of the society. Only a few, 3 in 1983, Panchayat and 2 in 1988 Panchayat are from the occupational group of the landowner cum service of the society and no member is from the Landless agricultural labourer, sharecropper or village artisan sections of the society. They are the identified interest groups of the society for whom the Left Front Government is set to renovating the Panchayat system. So, from the point of basic criteria, the present panchayat does not fulfill the actual condition of the system which the Left Front first desired. This is more or less the overall situation of the Panchayat in West Bengal with a slight variation in other areas.

Besides, the Panchayat body which formed in 1983 and the body which is continuing has no female member representing this section of the society. In addition to that the 1983 body of the Panchayat represented 3 members from tribal communities which continues in the 1988 panchayat. But from the view point of population they are the major sections of the area. The picture will be clear from our table of the distribution of caste and communities in the Panchayat body of our universe. In the

Table No.32

Distribution of Castes/Communities in the Elected Representatives of the Gram Panchayat in 1981 and 1988

Year	Scheduled Castes	Scheduled Tribes	Muslim Community	Others
1983	6	3	3	1
1988	3	3	6	2

1983 people from Scheduled Castes group represented maximum number of representatives and the people from Muslim communities represented 3 members not really disproportionate to their actual population in the area and the people of the rest groups represented only one member which is not negligible according to the population distribution in the society.

In the next village panchayat which is continuing in the universe comprises the 3 tribal representatives, 3 representatives from Scheduled Castes, 6 representatives from Muslim community and the 2 from other communities of the society. The tribal people maintain their position in the body, scheduled castes people are not able to maintain their continuity, on the contrary Muslim communities have the highest number of representatives who are far above their actual population strength in the society. The rest we may say maintain reasonable number in favour of their strength in the society. One thing we would like to refer in this context that the body of the panchayat is enriched with the land-owning groups of the society. In our universe the economically dominant people generally come from the Scheduled castes and Muslim communities or sections of the society. So, the actual context for sending representatives to the panchayat is on the basis of economic dominance in the particular area they represent. So the election is generally fought with the economic superiority in the particular area or jurisdiction of the villages. The vague conception of equal representation of every poor section adorns the theoretical pledges. So we find that different

programmes of rural development and the laws for the protection of the interests of the poorer sections is mooted by this upper economic groups of the society who have no experience in the poverty situation for which they wield power. The proper implementation of the the policy for rural poor can not gain the momentum.

The Programmes of Rural Development :

"Rural development is a recent phenomenon of the Third World countries which have gained its momentum after the II World War. In India the emphasis has been given upon the rural development after the Independence. The most of the economists have defined development as the growth of the per capita gross national product but sociologically it has been vehemently criticised due to its inefficient definition. Here we mean development by an overall progress of a nation. The gross national product is generally measured by the overall income of a nation and the people's ratio. But the increasing income of a nation may come from a particular group of people from every sector which raises total Gross National Product (GNP) but the rest of the people's income may not raise and it may be decreased but the total amount determines a definite scale of development. We find in Indian case where the statistics show the progress of total GNP but the yawning gap in economic conditions generating inequalities, specially in rural areas. So sociologically we would mean by development in overall progress of all the people of all communities and strata of our country."⁴²

According to Food and Agricultural Organization development is "as an overall process of transforming men and societies leading to a social order in which every human being can achieve moral and material well being."⁴³ It is also stated in the Study Guide on development that "the ultimate purpose of development is to provide everyone with ever increasing opportunities for better life. It, therefore, acquires an equitable distribution of income and other social resources in order to promote justice and efficient production..."⁴⁴

"In the Third World Countries like India where agriculture is the main basis of production because of the maximum percentage of people (70 per cent) live in rural areas depend upon agriculture. The perspective of development can assume sociological significance only on the improvement of the lot of the lower strata of the society. And agricultural development will automatically lead to the development of other sectors. But the rural areas of our country are mostly backward in nature and most of the country's majority poor are living in rural areas where general statistical data show that nearly half (A.R.Prasad Planning for Poverty Alleviation, Yojana, Vol.29, No.20, p.25, Nov. 1985) of our rural population has been living below poverty line. The population of our universe generally shows more than that. The poor among the rural people are the landless agricultural labourers, small and marginal peasants of backward castes and communities. They are mostly unskilled labourer and not have regular full time jobs."⁴⁵

The concept of rural development was first introduced by the British officials but its proper implementation and utilization started after the independence of our country. The programmes of rural development was introduced for ameliorating the conditions of rural poor in view of transforming social and economic life of the Indian villages. Accordingly, "a massive Community Development Programmes, covering all aspects of rural life, was inaugurated by Jawharlal Nehru on October 2, 1952. Therefore, on recommendation of Grow More Food Committee (1952), National Extension Service was introduced on October 2, 1953 throughout India for assisting the process of development planning. These programmes took steps to ensure people's participation by organizing non-statutory committees at the village and block levels."⁴⁶ But the programme achieved its momentum after the recommendation of the Balwantraj Mehta Committee in 1959, that suggested "unless the people and their democratic institutions take full responsibility in the planning and supervision of the community development programme, the movement would never be a success."⁴⁷ Accordingly three-tier system of panchayati raj was introduced. The programmes of rural development with the assistance of community development programmes in cooperation with the panchayat representatives began to work in rural areas. But the programmes did not gain its actual success and remains only the manifestation of ideology of the rulers of the country.

In the mid-sixties various evaluation committees raised severe criticism against the community development programme's

achievement. They needed reorientation and redefinition of the objectives because of the failure in attaining the promised goal. Prof. Dubey explains in his book *India's Changing Village*, "the community development activities went basically to the elite and to the more affluent and influential agriculturists." So the administrators and planners began to think anew and launched Intensive Agricultural District Programme in a few selected districts, from which our universe was excluded, "it was a reorientation of the former developmental programme through a massive concentration of modern agricultural inputs and technology."⁴⁸ Again, the programme expanded its area of action under the Intensive Agricultural Area Programme. In 1965, the planners again introduced the High Yielding varieties of seeds. But all these programmes were concentrated only in a few selected areas. These programmes did not even touch the development of small and marginal peasants. "The net result of these efforts was an enhancement of agrarian tension and social unrest in such rural areas where new experiments have been conducted."⁴⁹ It led to the increasing disparities between rural rich and the poor. To alleviate the agrarian tension and unrest some steps were taken in the Fourth and Fifth Five Year Plans when a number of programmes were introduced for the disadvantaged group of the rural poor belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. The important programmes introduced were the Small and Marginal Farmers Development Agencies and the Integrated Tribal Development Programmes were intended to hasten rural development but in actual field we find the programme did not reach the rural poor peasants.

According to the report of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, "only 17.20 per cent of the people got benefit by the programme of SFDA among them none was the tribal peasant."⁵⁰ Though some tribal people of the universe got the assistance from the Integrated Tribal Development Programme but the net result shows that they were not able to repay the debt beyond their subsidy margin. The panchayat which takes special initiative along with the other officials of programme implementation in introducing and identifying the target group for assistance proved susceptible to individual corruption and a part of the assistance to the poor was drained out through the corrupt panchayats. Besides the subsidy, they are bound to repay the loan with interest and the principal amount they repay with interest becomes more than the actual amount they received. If any one cannot repay his debt once availed of any programme he cannot get further loans from the money disbursing institutions like Bank. Actually, it comes to the borrower through various official procedures and when they get it after overcoming all types of official red tape he feels fatigued. So they prefer to borrow money directly from the money lenders. The programme implementation, selection, sanction and disbursal all create a complex position to the loanee because of their illiteracy and other backwardness, they become sceptic about official procedures. Sometimes, they are bound to pay a definite amount of money or service as commission to the dealing authorities from the very beginning to the end. So, the programmes are not getting

priority of the programme of ameliorating rural poverty is falling and actually the disparities of inequalities are raising and specially the poor are becoming poorer day by day.

No statistical jugglery would show the original rural development and raising rural poor from below the poverty line as per expectation rather than it is showing the growing economic disparities between the rich peasants and the poor and landless agricultural labourers. Moreover, with the expectation of further unrest and tension the policy makers of the country adopted a new programme of Integrated Rural Development in 1978-79. It is only a terminological change of the former programmes. But the policy makers explain about the aims of the programme they adopt. In West Bengal the Left Front Government took the programme in a new spirit and decided to implement through their newly formed panchayat bodies in the rural areas. They received an extra impetus for implementing the programmes of rural development in their election manifesto to fight for rural poverty. The people's choice will be the force for rural development. But in actual practice things do not appear as promising as it sounds in the pledge of the rulers. The policy makers explain about the aims of the programme. "The disadvantaged and weaker sections that received minimal attention under the community development programme and were practically ignored during the intensive agricultural development phase now become the focus of rural development activities. Thus the second

dimension of integration now introduced was to give adequate attention to all sections of the community, with special care of those who needed and deserved it the most. The earlier beneficiaries were not to be left out, but under the dispensation they were certainly not to be allowed a disproportionate share of the outlays for rural development. The new targets for the weaker sections were to be set not only in economic terms but also in social and cultural terms."⁵¹ The programme is primarily three dimensional : (i) individual beneficiary schemes; (ii) Schemes for social benefit of infra-structure; (iii) and support to institutions. Although the programme is aimed at the twin objectives of generating additional employment and raising the income of identified target group, emphasis is laid on the individual beneficiary schemes. The programme clearly defined four categories of beneficiaries; (i) small farmers with less than or just 5 acres of land holding; (ii) marginal farmers, with 2.5 acres or lower land holding; (iii) agricultural labours with an income from wages not exceeding Rs.200/- per month. It provides for phased emphasis on the different target group in accordance with the severity of poverty. Such families are categorised into following three groups; (i) with annual income of Rs.00 to Rs.1,500/-; (ii) with Rs.1,501/- to 2,500/-; (iii) with Rs.2,501/- to 3,500/-. Families falling in the first group should be covered first for providing assistance under the programme."⁵² The integrated rural development programmes got much attention to the new approach of implementation of the nation

wide 20 point programmes with an emphasis on 'Garibi Hatao' in 1980. In 1980, all the countries 5011 blocks came under it. The programme is now being implemented through a network of District Rural Development Agencies in all the states, headed by District Collector or Chairman or Project Director or Deputy Commissioner of the District assisted by a team of Assistant Project Officers in various fields. "To implement the package of IRDP the Primary Agricultural Credit Cooperative Societies (PACCS), Commercial banks and Regional Rural Banks (RRB) are providing loans. ... Important among the schemes are provision of minor irrigation, bullock carts, plough bullocks, milch animals, sheep, goats, piggery, poultry, fish, forestry, biogas, TRYSEM etc."⁵³

The procedure and aims of the programme is somewhat different from the earlier programmes adopted by the programmes implementation committee. But the procedural stages are the same. The panchayats make a list of beneficiaries and through the Block Development Officers the beneficiaries come to the Bank for final payment. In every stage, if the officials are satisfied on the panchayats recommendation and after final inspection by the other officials the beneficiaries avail themselves of the opportunity. But after the implementation of the programme, a few years have passed when surveyed the field, there is no such trace of uplift of the rural poor people, at least the families who are living below the poverty line of a five-member

family whose annual income is below Rs. 3,500/- per annum, we follow a separate model. According to our study we have classified three income groups upto Rs. 3,000/-; from Rs. 3,000/- to Rs. 5,000/- and Rs. 5,000/- and above per annum. The table of the Household and Different Income Group per annum shows the picture of the universe.

Table 33

House and Different Income Groups

Sl. No.	Name of the Communities	Total No. of House-hold	No. of families whose income is below Rs. 3,000/-	No. of Families whose income is from Rs. 3,000/- to 5,000/-	No. of Families whose income is above Rs. 5,000/-
1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Santal	193	135	40	18
2.	Oraon	158	93	38	27
3.	Rajbanshi	40	18	10	12
4.	Kshatriya	24	12	10	2
5.	Kayastha Ghosh	7	4	2	1
6.	Bhumali	4	4	x	x
7.	Ghatoal	1	1	x	x
8.	Tili	1	x	x	1
9.	Brahmin	1	1	x	x
10.	Muslim	73	20	22	31
		502	288 57.37%	122 24.30%	92 18.33%

The table shows that 57.37 per cent of the total population are living below the poverty line though we defined poverty line

as the measure of Rs. 3, 000/- per annum per family. But according to programmes' original measurement the percentage will somewhat rise but only 24.30 per cent of the families are occupying Middle position in the ~~xi~~ income strata. They are the mediocre income group like small and marginal peasants. But the percentage of the people of this group are decreasing because of the deterioration in their family income. Only 18.33 per cent of the total households are living with high family income whom we call the big or rich peasants/landlords etc. If we are able to take correct statistics which is very difficult we will find it that their annual income is rising day by day.

Various studies show that during the period of (1970-71 to 1983-84) the percentage of people below poverty has decreased in the State level because of giving special priority to poor, there had been a reduction in poverty, which was raised upto 16.6 per cent but in the period of 1960-61 to 1970-71 the percentage of poverty increased by 29.7 per cent when main concern of our rural development policy was grown'. (Yojana, Vol.33, No.23, Dec.16-31, 1989). The figure shows the picture of whole state but in our universe the programme achieved little success because of the lack of equidistribution of attention to the implementation of the schemes of rural development or poverty alleviation programme.

"The panchayats were next given the responsibility of implementation of Food for Work Programme and the Rural Works

Programme. These programmes, meant for the provision of employment for creation of infra-structures, such as roads, minor irrigation facilities, soil conservation, etc. have been maintained partly by the State Government through the provision of cash and partly by the Centre through the allotment of foodgrains. Recently, these programmes have been consolidated into one programme renamed as the National Rural Employment Programme."⁵⁴ The implementation of these programmes have been vested in the panchayats in a decentralised manner. Though the various Survey reports that the programme generally have covered more than three months in a year extra-mandays for employment, in our universe we find a little more than one month mandays of work. The actual data could not be adduced for the lack of proper records in the panchayats. The panchayat officials supply us with a readymade data which, we believe, are far from realities in the rural societies.

"Another important information about the implementation of these programmes at the State level has been brought out by the survey of Economic Planning Section of the Development and Planning Department. This relates to the labour-intensity and the much lower unit of contraction (compared to the conventional norms) of the projects undertaken. One of the reasons for this lowering of costs, the survey points out, is that the supervision of these schemes was not, in general, given to the contractors, but about 73 per cent of this work was carried out by the local people and the Panchayat members who did the job voluntarily."⁵⁵

The programme describes its implementation on the basis of voluntary service by the panchayat members and other local people but actually major works are conducted by the contractors in the name of the panchayat members and other local people which receive double side commission for conducting those works. So, the actual expenditure generally rises and they show it by putting more names in the document of total employment per mandays they actually utilise. So the programme generally loses its actual significance and the planners know it very well. The administrators also introduce new programmes one by one as election charm to the people for catching their votes by alternating the names of the programme and scope of its work which give less importance to the previous programme they implemented. In this way another programme was introduced in 1988 in the new name of Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme to generate additional employment in rural areas particularly for the rural landless workers. "The programme has three objectives : (i) to improve and expand employment opportunities particularly for the rural landless; (ii) to create productive and durable assets for strengthening rural infra-structure which will lead to rapid growth of rural economy and steady rise in the employment opportunities for the rural poor, and (iii) to improve the overall quality of life in rural areas."⁵⁶ But these programmes are not implemented for a permanent solution of the rural development works. Besides being the improvement of the infra-structural development of the people by a massive land reform programme, no programmes will be succeeded.

In addition, the varieties of programmes and its nature of implementation will have no importance in practical life, if the programme is not implemented properly. These varieties of dimensions and works ultimately are perplexing the illiterate rural people and the panchayat officials who are at the base level of implementing these programmes in practice. These not only create a haphazard situation but also induce negligence to the implementation and preservation of actual records that ultimately proves vague data on improvement and implementation. So, the community oriented programmes of rural development is getting partial importance in lieu of individual beneficiary scheme like IRDP. The Community oriented programmes are gaining momentum in the society but these are unable to fulfil the actual expectation of the planners. Sometimes the programmes find prime importance in some areas and in other areas the programmes cannot fulfil the expectation. But the planners are boosts of its success broadly which is vague in the proper perspectives of the programmes.

On the other hand, the individual beneficiary schemes for the rural poor like Integrated Rural Development Programmes cannot be successful the way the rulers or policy makers wish it. Only a few original beneficiaries will be benefited because of the favouratism and nepotism at the administrative level. The selector of the beneficiaries and other related officials are taking advantage. If their personal benefit to which our table adduces the data.

The data collected in our table on the basis of our field survey conducted five years after the implementation of Integrated Rural Development Programmes. The table (No.34) shows the total number of beneficiaries of the programmes of Integrated Rural Development Programme and Integrated Tribal Development Programme. Both the programmes have been implemented for the upliftment of the rural poor within the concerned sections of the society, the families living below the poverty line. Both the programmes have achieved success in the field by granting loans to the poor villagers for various schemes. The total number of beneficiaries among the villagers are 28.29 per cent. Among them non-owners of land have received only 2.11 per cent of the total beneficiaries who are the most downtrodden section of the society targeted for the benefit by these two programmes. The next category of the beneficiaries are marginal peasants whose percentage according to the table is 50 per cent of the total beneficiaries. The importance of getting benefit from the two programmes is no less negligible for this category also according to the function of the programmes. The percentage of small peasants that has received benefit is 30.28 per cent of the total beneficiaries. Among the beneficiaries majority are from the income group of more than Rs.3500/- per annum which is beyond the identification and coverage level of the poor or granting benefit of the programmes. A few of the beneficiaries from the rich peasants are in our table which constitute 17.61 per cent of the total beneficiaries. These beneficiaries are practically standing in the position which is beyond the coverage level of the programmes. They have

Table No. 34

Families Received Assistancess from Individual Beneficiary Scheme like, IRDP, ITDP etc. in the Villages

Sl. No.	Name of the Communities	Total No. of House-hold	Non-Owner of Land	Upto 2.5 Acs. of Land	From 2.5 to 5 Acs. of Land	More than 5 acs. of land.	Total
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.	Santal	193	* 3	20	8	4	35
2.	Oraon	158	x	29	22	9	60
3.	Rajbanshi	40	x	8	2	3	13
4.	Kshatriya	24	x	x	* 2	x	2
5.	Kayastha Ghosh	7	x	x	x	x	x
6.	Bhumali	4	x	x	x	x	x
7.	Ghatoal	1	x	x	x	x	x
8.	Tili	1	x	x	x	x	x
9.	Brahmin	1	x	x	x	x	x
10.	Muslim	73	x	14	9	9	32
		502	3	71	43	25	142
		100	2.11%	50.00%	30.28%	17.61%	28.29%

have received undue privileges according to the programmes' content.

The table shows that 18.13 per cent of the total Santal families and 37.97 per cent of the total Oraon families have been benefited from the programmes. Among the beneficiaries majority have been benefited from the programme of Integrated Tribal Development programme. We did not identify the actual number of the beneficiaries in our table because of the lack of the knowledge of the villagers about the programme. They did

not properly say from which programme they have benefited or have received loan. Among the beneficiaries of IRDP Muslims constitute the largest majority, though comparatively they are less poorer in our universe, because they are politically more advanced than other communities in the villages. The panchayat head, the Pradhan is also elected and selected from the community for two consecutive terms. The terms favouritism and nepotism we have mentioned earlier either from community feeling or from political party feeling are tacitly included here. "The strategy for IRDP during the Seventh Plan ^{until} ~~upto~~ now has been two fold. First, to consolidate the gains made during the Sixth Plan and to provide supplementary dose of assistance to those beneficiaries who were not able to cross the poverty line for no fault of theirs. The next part of the strategy has been to provide a package of assistance to the new beneficiaries in such a way that they cross the poverty line with one dose of assistance."⁵⁷

At the Central level, in the Department of Rural Development, there is a Central Committee on IRDP and allied programmes of Training of Rural youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) and Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas, headed by the Secretary. Its main functions include framing and revision of the guidelines and ensuring their effective implementation."⁵⁷ Besides, IRDP we did not get other beneficiaries of the programmes of TRYSEM and INCRA at the time of our survey because the programmes were in the process of its implementation. So, the programmes of Integrated Rural Development and Integrated Tribal

Development will be the main aspects in our discussion.

Tribal Development Programme :

"From historical point of view, the tribal communities were approached in a number of ways by the Government. Initially, the Scheduled District Act of 1874 introduced by the British Administrators had kept most of the tribal areas administratively separate. The same situation was allowed to continue under the Government of India Acts of 1919 and 1935. However after independence this policy was abandoned and a new policy of tribal development was initiated. For instance, the special multipurpose tribal blocks and tribal development blocks were started during the Second and Third Five Year Plan respectively."⁵⁹ The programme was initiated according to late Pandit Jawharlal Nehru's intention. He wanted "to develop the tribal communities without disturbing their traditional and cultural institutions, the strategy for their development was changed during various Five Year Plans. Upto the end of the Fourth Five Year Plan, the tribal development strategy concentrated on community development and tribal development blocks. But during the Fifth Plan, the tribal development approach was confined to : (i) development of tribals living in concentration, and (ii) development of dispersed tribal population."⁶⁰

"During the Sixth Plan period, the approach was revised with 4 main objectives : (a) family oriented programmes; (b) elimination of exploitation of tribals in the sphere of

alienation of land, money lending debt bondage, forest etc.; (c) human resource development through education and Training programmes; and (d) infra-structure development. During the Seventh Plan all the above mentioned four objectives were retained and consolidated and in addition to these, one more strategy was adopted for the development of vulnerable tribal groups like forest villagers, shifting cultivators, displaced and migrant tribals including tribal women. Besides that, the tribal Sub-Plan Programme is being implemented through resources drawn from; (a) State Plan, (b) Special Central Assistance provided by the Ministry of Welfare; (c) Central Plan and Centrally Sponsored programmes; and (d) institutional finance."⁶¹ Under this Tribal Sub-Plan programme the individual benefit Scheme for rural tribal development programme below the poverty level has been implemented under the name of Integrated Tribal Development Programme. But various survey reports and our survey also show that nearly a decade of the programme has been initiated and the quality of the tribal life and their socio-economic condition, have not improved so far to the desired extent.

Integrated Rural Development Programme: an Appraisal

"The main aim of the IRDP is to raise the level of living of the poorest families in the rural areas above the poverty line of a lasting basis by giving them income generating assets and access to credit and other inputs. At present, about 40 per cent of the rural population is below the poverty line."⁶² The

level below the poverty line in our universe shows more than 50% per cent in total average. The number is not negligible from the view point of rural development and the main drawbacks we find in the proper implementation of the policy is that the beneficiary households of IRDP is not properly selected. "As observation of the process of implementation of IRDP in most of the districts would, however, reveal that the programme has only partially achieved the objectives with which it was launched. A major reason for the failure is the deviation which the programme has suffered from the basic spirit envisioned by the planners. There has been no sincere effort to link the programme with the requirements of a particular village community, the skills available in the village for various activities, and the economic viability of various schemes with regard to the potential available in the village."⁶³ Besides, "the failure in this aspect gives rise to the emergence of middlemen between the beneficiaries and development administration who made substantial inroads into the resources flowing into the hands of the beneficiaries. Local political influence, graft and collusion among dealing vested interests have generally proved to be major obstacles in the way of achieving the goal of lifting the beneficiary households above the poverty line."⁶⁴

"No doubt banks are now-a-days giving loans to small farmers to start dairies, poultries, digging of wells, etc. But a large number of small dairies started by the rural population with financial aid from commercial banks are not able to make

profits. This mainly due to lack of scientific approach in rearing milch animals or running poultries. The fact that the country depends on rural population for its food requirements and for raw materials required by its industries need no emphasis. It is, therefore, necessary to rally to support them. There is need for rapid shift from the traditional farming, still prevalent in the large areas of the country, to science and technology based farming. One serious impediment to improve production and productivity has been that farmers are not getting the necessary extension education and instruction in adequate measure uniformly. Many small and marginal farmers are willing to change the age old practices and many do not know where to go and how to get it. In spite of all the efforts made by the state and Central Governments, the extension effort has not touched several areas of rural hinterlands."⁶⁵ In spite of all these the beneficiaries are not properly indentified and in many cases the relatively well-off families managed to get subsidies and cheap loans intended for the poor by managing the block and panchayat officials of the society.

Another point we like to mention here for the lack of the proper implementation of the policy and it is the "distance of the administrator and the professional the rural poor. As Robert Chambers has pointed out, the rich, the powerful and the urban based professional are at the core, the poor, the weak and the rural people are at the peripheries leading to a

systematic bias in terms of rural poverty unperceived or misperceived. There is the phenomena of brief visits, the road sides and tannac visits, the meeting with the more influential people in rural areas, asking the predetermined questions etc."⁶⁶ This picture is found in all the areas which entail the non-targeted families into the programme that eats into the vitals of the development programmes for the poor.

In this respect many policy planners are vehemently attacking the role of the banks in this perspective of rural development because banks are the main disbursing authority to every programmes. In response with the attack the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India Mr. R.N.Malhotra said that "Poverty alleviation programmes are handled by several agencies at village and district levels. It is not the special expertise of bankers to identify the poorest of the poor even when the guidelines are clearly laid down by national authorities. Local village officials, development authorities and the body of villagers have a more important role in the identification process. Similarly, the scheme for self-employment for unemployed educated youth involves specialised agencies like District Industries Centres which identify the prospective beneficiaries and send recommendations to bank managers. Due to multiplicity of agencies, the role of bankers some time becomes vague and imprecise. Sometimes bankers do not get sufficient time to appraise proposals before sanctioning loans. As poverty alleviation programmes are very broad based and cover large numbers, it is important that their design and

implementation are kept under constant review."

Due to faulty identification of the beneficiaries by various agencies, which are ^{sent} such to the banks for disbursement many complications crop up. The banking authorities sanction and disburse these loans through meticulous appraisal but lack of time and staff stand in the way of speedy disposal. Besides, the bank have to disburse the cases according to the target mentioned by the Development Authority. So, within a short time banks generally disburse those cases after an overview. In case of rejection, if it involves higher number, various types of pressures generally come from various authorities like Development Authorities, panchayats, political leaders etc., which moves through the so-called democratic channels. Again, "due to this faulty identification, the cases of bank overdues are mounting. Inadequate recovery of loans not only inhibits the ability of the system to recycle the funds lent also denies the benefits of borrowing to the other needy people."⁶⁷

R Jawahar Rojgar Yojana :

Recently a new programme of Jawahar Rojgar Yojana has been added to the programmes of rural development in April, 1989 which is now being implemented and administered by the village panchayats all over the country. "Over 440 lakh families, which are below the poverty line, are intended to benefit from this scheme."⁶⁸

"The goal of poverty-alleviation was sought to be achieved by using two main instruments : (i) a set of self-employment schemes

for the poor, i.e. IRDP and its two sub-programmes; (a) Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment (TRYSEM) and (b) Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) launched in 1982-83; (1) Wage employment programme (NREP) introduced in 1980 and Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme (RLEGP) launched in 1983. These have now been merged into Jawahar Rojgar Yojana."⁶⁹

Broadly, the following are the objectives of Jawahar Rojgar Yojana :

"1. Primary objectives : Generation of additional gainful employment for the unemployed and underemployed persons both men and women in the rural areas.

2. Secondary objectives : Creation of productive community assets for direct and continuing benefits to the poverty groups and for strengthening rural, economic and social infrastructure that will lead to rapid growth of the rural economy along with a steady rise in the income levels of the rural poor. The other secondary objective is to bring about improvement in the overall quality of life in the rural areas."⁷⁰

The aims of the programme again state that (1) it is relevant here to say that the division of resources from one district to another will not be allowed. Likewise, diversion of funds from a village panchayat to another village panchayat will also not be permissible."⁷¹ The programme also aims at

strengthening the village planning process at the village level by using village panchayats in the planning and implementation of the projects. The allocation of funds is distributed for different aspects of expenditure but the freedom of the panchayats have, however, to change the sectoral allocations. Expenditure under the scheme is shared between the Centre and the State on 80:20 basis.

"On the selection of projects, an important aspect is that there will not be any state intervention. The DRDAs Zilla Parishads will prepare annual action plans for the JRY and they will be approved by their own council. A committee of the gram panchayat will be appointed to oversee, supervise and monitor implementation of the projects undertaken. Physical and financial audit of the works implemented by gram panchayats have been made compulsory. At the same time, the State Government can also monitor the projects through its rural development department. Even voluntary organisations can be involved in the implementation of programmes at the district and gram panchayat levels. Thus it is found that the JRY attempts at doing better in a number of crucial matters. Its outstanding feature is that it strengthens decentralised planning at the district and the village levels by involving village panchayats as well as the masses in the planning and implementation of the scheme."⁷²

Criticism of Jawahar Rojgar Yojana :

The programme of Jawahar Rojgar Yojana has been recently

implemented as a process of rural development which has merged several programmes into a new one and the work is going on. A proper criticism of its implementation is not possible at this very moment with statistical data. So the criticism we would like to mention here is on the basis of the structural perspectives. As Prof. S.P.Ranga Rao in his article, 'Give Panchayats operational freedom under JRY' in Kurukshetra, Jan., 1990 states :

There is bitter criticism of the programme on the ground that it is an encroachment on the jurisdiction of the states. The Jojana was described as 'political gimmick' on the eve of general elections. It is said that the Scheme was only a new banner under which NREP and RLEGP will merge and operate. Even the bottles have not been changed. Only a new label has been pasted for unsuspecting voters. Unfortunately, the criticism ignores several points of difference between the old and the new schemes mentioned earlier. It may further be noted that it is not the first time that the existing rural development schemes are merged into new ones. Earlier, the SFDA which itself was MEDA merged into SFDA which itself was made a part of IRDP. The Food for Works Programme later became ^NNREP. It was contended by the Government that after gaining experience in the working of rural development schemes, new programmes were undertaken as a measure of improvement. The merger of NREP and RLEGP would perhaps have not been noticed if it were not effected on the eve of general elections.

It is rightly contended by many that JRY is riddled with too many operational problems and difficulties. The elaborate guidelines issued by the Central Government may, in fact, act as constraints on the efficient implementation of works. "The criteria for allocation of resources is too stiff and complicated which may stand to lose the benefit of full gain and in any short-fall in a quarter would result in proportionate reduction in the release of next instalment."⁷³ The measure ultimately will deprive a large mass of the village people who are innocent in this point because of negligence to duties and performances of the panchayat officials and others who are related in this concern. It is new in an operational area of rural development. The conditions of the programme shows that the implementer of the programme did not actually implement it on the basis of the need of rural development but to create pressure on the local panchayat body and others related institutions against which a criticism raised at first from various corners about the implementation of the programme.

Besides, the aim of the programme is not an infra-structural development of the society but the development for a particular period. Moreover, leakages of fund were quite substantial in the programme because of the engagement of contractors for various construction purpose which led to the diversion of fund as a form of profit where exploitation of labour will also come by giving lower amount of wages than the actually fixed by the government. So, no programme will be successful in future unless the infra-structural development of the society taken

up at first which will be assisted later on by this type of surface development programme.

No programme can succeed permanently without a proper land reform policy for the benefit of the small and marginal peasants and landless agricultural labourer. "Despite the much trusted policy of the government to change the lot of the rural poor, the impact of these reform has been small."⁷⁴ By the enactment of West Bengal Land Reform Act of 1956 the Government sought solutions for a little while to improve the conditions of the rural poor by distributing cultivable land. Left Front Government of West Bengal forcefully applied the Act for acquisition of the ceiling surplus and the expectation was that "the quantum of land available after the implementation of the land ceiling laws would be enough to distribute a small fragment to each landless family"⁷⁵ but actually it was not possible under a bourgeois type of bureaucratic administration that always favour the rich land owning class. Again we find that the acquired land by the government is distributed to the landless agricultural labourer, but the distribution system does not operate in an unbiased manner because of the tie-up of bourgeois element in the administration. In some cases we find the actual landless agricultural labourers did not receive any portion of land but some peasants of the landowning class though they are not included in rich peasants, have received vested land. Though the Government has decided to implement the second stage of land reform acts for acquiring more land for distribution to the agricultural

landless labourer, the distribution of holdings is still now uneven with a large mass of landless people at one extreme and a small section of medium to large owners at the other.

"It is felt at the State level, however, that there is scope of further vesting of land if the existing deficiencies in the law could be removed and the participation of the common people maintained. The major legal deficiencies relate, among others, to the permissiveness given to the benami holding of land and inadequate inclusion of different types of land in the allied agricultural activities for the purpose of defining the ceiling."⁷⁶ If this amendment comes in the forefront then a large portion of excess land will come for further distribution to the landless for promotion of rural development on infra-structural perspectives of the programme. Mr. Das Gupta further added that, "in this execution, involvement of the common people of the potential beneficiaries, is considered to be very important. For instance, the evidence of recorded bargadars, among others, can play a crucial role in detecting the ceiling surplus land. For this reason, and also for the basic reason related to the security and the productive efficiency of bargadars, the recording of names of bargadars has been given a special attention in the land reforms measures pursued in the State. In this recording of bargadars, a new style of operation was introduced in 1978, under the name of "Operation Barga". This 'Operation had an important additional step of organising intensive group

meeting near the places of residence of bargadars, involving the Panchayat Sanities, peasants' organisation, the bargadars and the concerned officials with a view to convincing the bargadars about the benefits of recording."⁷⁷

The 'Operation Barga' has also been implemented by the Left Front Government of West Bengal as a part of the land reform Act. Though the statistical data show the the total number of bargadars recorded is not negligible but most of the bargadars in the village areas did not record their names for fear of future difficulties. Again they have replied to my question, that they did not record their name as bargadar because of the good existing relationship. But actually there is no such relationship, only a creditor and debtor. They did not record the land as per their name in the fear of being deprived of the benefits they receive. Besides, most of the bargadars are living in land-owner's land as they have no household site. It also acts as a constant threat of eviction.

The table of Beneficiaries and Non-beneficiaries of Land distribution shows the actual number of the beneficiaries in the universe. Though the land distribution system has been implemented, a large portion of the landless agricultural labourers are existing in the vast areas of rural Bengal and the number of rich peasants are also remarkable. The picture of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is explicit in the following table.

~~In the table we find the 33.07 per cent of the people have~~

In the table we find the 33.07 per cent of the people have been benefited from the vested land distribution to the landless but the total beneficiaries are not landless who got land. There are landless agricultural labourers who have not received any land. The machinery and the persons who are related

Table No.35

Beneficiaries & Non-beneficiaries of Land Distribution

Sl. No.	Name of the Communities	Total No. of House-hold.	Owners of Vested land	Non-owners of Vested land
1	2	3	4	5
1.	Santal	193	75	118
2.	Oraon	158	49	109
3.	Rajbanshi	40	11	29
4.	Kshatriya	24	13	11
5.	Kayastha Ghosh	7	1	6
6.	Bhumali	4	x	4
7.	Ghatoal	1	x	1
8.	Tili	1	x	1
9.	Brahmin	1	1	x
10.	Muslim	73	16	57
		502	166	336
		100	33.07%	66.93%

to the work of detecting excess land and distributive system are the person from this group of excess landholders. It stands in the way of unbiased distribution works.

Because of the absence of any strong peasant organisation the peasants of our universe are exploited at every point of their life in rural economy. For example, though the Governmental programmes of Food for Work and National Rural Employment are in force in the rural areas for the benefit of the landless agricultural labourer but they did not even receive at that time increased wages as per governmental rate. The average daily wage they received in the year 1979-80 in the District of West Dinajpur at per Rs.4.95 (Source : Socio-Economic Evaluation Branch, Deptt. of Agriculture, Govt. of West Bengal) which was lower than the actual average of the governmental rate they fixed for daily wage. This type of low rate is generally possible for the absence of strong labour organisation in the society. Consequently, the economic strength and position of the peasants are also decreasing and disparities and inequality among the peasants of small and no land holding groups in relation to the rich peasants group increases. A trend is visible in the table that marks the decline in ownership even after a series of programmes are implemented for them in safeguarding their interests in the society.

The table (No.36) shows the increase and decrease in personal land of a family to their previous position of land holding. 51.79 per cent of the people belong to the group of marginal peasants among whom 5.77 per cent have been able to increase their possession of land but 27.69 lost their original

Table No.36

Decline in Ownership

Sl. No.	Name of the Communities	Total No. of House-holds.	Upto 2.5 Acres of Land	Increa-sing	Decrea-sing	Stag-2.5 to 5 acs. of land	In-crea-sing	De-crea-sing	Stag-nant	More 5 acs. of Land	In-crea-sing	De-crea-sing	Stag-nant	
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1.	Santal	193	103	5	17	81	26	5	5	16	9	1	x	8
2.	Oran	158	82	6	22	54	37	5	13	19	22	5	1	16
3.	Rajbanshi	40	24	1	10	13	6	1	1	4	9	6	1	2
4.	Kshatriya	24	18	1	8	9	5	1	4	x	1	x	x	1
5.	Kayastha Ghosh	7	4	x	4	x	3	x	1	2	x	x	x	x
6.	Bhumali	4	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
7.	Ghatoal	1	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
8.	Tili	1	x	x	x	x	1	x	1	x	1	x	x	1
9.	Brahmin	1	x	x	x	x	1	x	1	x	x	x	x	x
10.	Muslim	73	29	2	11	16	20	2	8	10	23	11	1	11
		502	260	15	72	173	98	14	33	51	65	23	3	39
		100	51.79%	5.77%	27.69%	66.54%	19.52%	14.29%	33.67%	52.04%	12.95%	35.36%	4.62%	60.00%

holding they had possessed. In the small peasant group of ^{19.52} 2 9.52 per cent of the total household, 14.29 per cent only increased their original possession and 33.67 per cent lost their original possession, the rest are as usual. The latter group of rich peasants of 12.95 per cent of the total village people who are able to increase their land holding consists of 35.38 per cent of the total groups; and only 4.62 per cent of the group lost their previous possession not by economic conditions but also for fear of further land reform policy implementation. The peasants of different groups who have increased their possession and the peasants of different groups who lost their position show the trend of poverty. The table also shows that the condition of small and marginal farmers are decreasing day by day instead of being able to increase their possession by the programmes of upliftment of the rural poor peasants. Without change in the structural relations of the total rural society no programme will be able to change the existing conditions of the rural poor and will not be able to check the conditions deteriorating in social and economic positions.

The programmes of rural development which are being implemented in rural areas for benefiting various sections of rural poor are not implemented properly for some administrative loopholes in the society. Very often funds are divested to other functions. But we may say that some benefits reach the rural poor, though small in proportionate number, because of the direct involvement of interest groups of the society served by the

programme. "Improvement in wage rate of the landless agricultural workers, for example, will certainly go against the interest of the money lenders and the big farmers. Similarly, any success with the social control of trading of essential commodities by the Panchayats will go against the interests of the middlemen and the big traders. There is opposition and will be opposition from these interest groups in the rural areas and their related groups in the urban areas."⁷⁸ But we hope that these programmes will succeed in future in West Bengal through the proper implementation of the policy under the local self-government which is now working in a systematic way in rural areas.

The concrete reality of these rural reforms has been the fact that they have strengthened the rural rich without altogether ignoring the interests of the small and middle peasants. The economic buoyancy enjoyed by the upper sections have also rubbed up the farm labourers and poor peasants, who now get more jobs in a year, thus minimising the intensity of rural poverty. "This brand of peasant politics has, undoubtedly, made all sections of rural society happy and enthusiastic about the panchayat system."⁷⁹ The people are more interested in the panchayat system because of the scope of their direct participation in the panchayati matters about various schemes and policies relating to distribution of excess land to the landless and poor peasants attract them more for some benefit at least.

Though some of the distributed land has been subsequently leased out to rich peasants by the poor peasants because of their inability to procure farm inputs, the rural economy has improved, creating not only more employment for the landless labourers but is raising their daily wages also. "But the fact that a large number of landless peasants still exist despite the land reforms is admitted by the present Left Front Government of West Bengal."⁸⁰

The modern panchayat system has changed the traditional system of panchayat where a separate community holds separate panchayat for its own had no such political and economic powers, save the religio-social matters of purely inter-human and communal dimension. So, the people's participation and their persuasion in that system was meagre for which the people did not show their actual interests in performing matters pertaining to economic welfare.

Leadership in the Existing System :

The present pattern of the rural leadership, as it exists today in our universe" reflects a transition from the hereditary to the elective, and from the ascriptive to the functional type of leadership."⁸¹ The leadership quality in every society is generally transitory with its pattern and function in the society. "Any political system is inseparable from leadership as the leaders are the means to attain the objectives of a political system."⁸² The author also added that, "leadership is a process of mutual stimulation and is based on relations

between an individual and a group built around some common interest and behaves in a manner directed or determined by the leader himself."⁸³ So, the leadership in different strata of society differ according to its pattern of operation and selection procedure which stands for the society's ideas, values and its institutional pattern. In our study we find two types of political system, traditional and modern.

In the traditional period leadership generally depended on the hereditary quality that was of the ascribed type in nature. The leadership pattern was more or less similar in tribal and non-tribal societies. In that society few posts were important in maintaining that society's institutional functions where in every case there were separate type of institutional heads in the society in maintaining that society's social structure. These institutional heads were generally the leaders of that society. These leadership positions in the traditional society as various authors state came from their economic position. In tribal society tribal chiefs maintained a separate position for his economic possession and social authority of higher class of that society. In non-tribal society, this leadership normally came from the higher caste group of that society as a whole along with the dominant position in holding higher economic possession that helped them maintain a better quality of leadership.

After independence a separate type of leadership emerged in the rural society in consequence of democratic secular and

socialist system based on the main principle of political and social equality which opened the prospect of the village people to select their leader in a democratic manner. In rural areas the actual democratic decentralisation came in the forefront after the Balwantrai Mehta committee report and an overall system of democratic decentralisation emerged on the basis of the participation of general mass of legally adult people of the rural society. Though the system of free choice of leadership came into the forefront, actually the leaders came from the higher economic possessional sections of the society and in majority places higher castes or like that qualities predominated. The position did not change the traditional aspects of a social leader in the society. So many of the development programmes introduced for the development of the rural society did not succeed and basically went into the hands of the well-off sections of the society who were generally the higher the landholding class in that society. This system of unified leadership was first struck-down in West Bengal as well as in our universe by the first United Front Regime of West Bengal, who realised that without changing any infra-structural basis of the society no change in leadership will actually emerge in the rural sector of the society. But this intention was finally fulfilled in the wake of the Left Front Government of West Bengal's success in seizing the political power, when the "Left Front Government in West Bengal spelt out its clear intention to use panchayat as a platform for fighting out rural

vested interests. Promode Dasgupta, the then Chairman of the Left Front, unambiguously pointed out that the 1978 Panchayat Election "is a struggle for establishing the rights of the poor peasants, agricultural labourers, village craftsmen etc. against interests and exploiting classes in the villages."⁸⁴ This was the first declaration made for changing structural qualities of leadership in the rural society.

Though the system of universally accepted leadership was introduced in the process of selecting rural leadership on the democratic way, the overlapping nature continue unabated we will examine what actually happened in our universe with introduction of the new system, following the last two panchayats election and the characteristic of the elected leaders of the panchayat.

In 1983 Panchayat Election, the elected leaders in our universe were basically elected from the landowning group, among them no one represented the class of non-owner of land and marginal peasants where the majority leaders came from the rich peasant's class, i.e., 10 representatives among the total 13 members and the rest 3 came from the small peasant's class whose landholding stands between the 2.5 to 5 acres of landholding. Among the total elected representatives 3 were from service group category, i.e., from primary teacher in addition to that of the landholding quality where one of them was from small peasant and the rest two were from rich peasants' category, which generally

show the upper economic group dominance in the field of rural leadership.

In 1988 Panchayat Election, the universe had 14 representative who had only one representing marginal peasants' group, 5 representing small peasant group, 8 representing rich peasant's group and no one from non-owner of land. Among them 2 were from service category in addition to landholding characteristic, one from small peasant's class and other from rich peasant's class.

If we examine those representatives from the view point of community orientation, then it can not be concluded that a majority community people represent majority of members. The majority in the universe are tribals but their representatives do not make the tribals constitute the majority of the representative bodies. Basically, we find people from three communities like tribal, Hindus and Muslim. In 1983 Panchayat tribals represented only three(3) members what was proportionately lower. But all the representatives came from the landowning category and mainly from small and rich peasant's class, among them majority i.e. 10 were from rich peasant class. In 1988 Panchayat tribals represent the same number of their members, the Hindus represent 5 members and the Muslim have the largest 6 members in overall position of the Panchayat. In 1988 panchayat Muslims represent more than their previous number of 1983 panchayat, i.e. 3 only. The rest three candidates come

from the rich peasant category. So, the predominance of members of the rich peasant class is explicit. In the 1988 Panchayat a candidate from marginal peasant has also come in the forefront which we may say the gradual emergence of the leaders in the majority of the rural peasants, the landless agricultural labourers and marginal peasants in the panchayat as a whole. So the future expectation of good result of participatory leadership gradually be moving to fulfilment in the society to generate in the majority the spirit that will ultimately confirm declaration that "the panchayat system is a struggle for establishing the rights of the poor peasants, agricultural labourer, village craftsmen etc., against the vested interests and exploiting classes in the villages.

But in the present context if we call the panchayat a system where the majority of the village people represent themselves through the candidates it is not true to the real meaning of the term. We find similar findings in other studies that hold "the landlord representatives in panchayats and the government officials who share the same socio-economic and educational background reinforce the traditional authority in the rural economy and manipulate the benefit of rural development."⁸⁵ "Structural characteristics of panchayats, according to several studies, suffer from serious handicaps due to lack of complementary social change."⁸⁶ "It has, so far, been instrumental in activating a process of social change only through alteration in the civic responsibilities and

expectations of the villagers rather than changes in their class status and economic position."⁸⁷

The most fundamental question, in this context, has been raised by A.R. Desai, "The control of Panchayats by rich landholding groups which also come from upper or upper-intermediate castes raises some fundamental issues. Can an administrative machine though be elected on universal franchise, really become an instrument of the poorer sections, if the fundamental framework of socio-economic formation is perpetuated on exploitative class lines wherein a section of the rich landowning class lines wherein a section of the rich landowning class dominates and controls the economic life of the people? In the context of class relationship prevailing in rural society, will not the Panchayati Raj administrative organs, become tools to subserve the interests of the rich?"⁸⁸ Or as Uday Mehta has posed the question, "Can Panchayati Raj successfully resolve our agrarian problem within the matrix of the present social structure of rural society? Is any 'democratic decentralization' possible in the hierarchical graded society?"⁸⁹ So it has been revealed from various studies and also from our study that "the economic position of the panchayat leaders differs sharply from its publicized character. So, there exists the possibility that the most influential section of the rural economy who used to appropriate the major share of the rural economy would again strengthen their position through panchayats which was proposed to be made all the more powerful. The poorest people will remain

in the same old position."⁹⁰

So we may say here that though the present panchayat system has brought about a sense of change in the village society through democratic decentralization and participation which was absent in the traditional society. This new sense at least has been able to brought the notion that the people have the right to elect their own leaders by themselves. But in actual practice they have not been able to do it properly that ultimately leads them to divert their interest from the system. The existing system can only be changed properly if there happens a structural change in the society.

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