

INTRODUCTION

Panchayati raj came into existence with a view to decentralizing power and to involve the rural people in the developmental process of their immediate hinterland. In the present context of Panchayati Raj and rural development, the role of leadership has assumed tremendous importance. It is hardly necessary to emphasize the importance of building up basic data about leadership at all levels- especially at the local level. The grass-root leadership is the agency through which development work is carried out. They are also the innovators, carriers of new ideas, norms and values of rural people. In fact, the success and failure of various rural development programmes largely depend on the nature of emerging leadership pattern, especially the elected leadership at the village level. Political development and democratic growth largely depend on the local leadership and its functioning in the panchayati raj institutions.

A study on the leadership pattern in the perspective of panchayati raj is all the more important specially in the context of West Bengal due to some socio-political movements of the state. In fact, the last panchayat election has assumed tremendous importance due to the fact that there are two diametrically opposite views about its relation with the political parties. Some parties are of the opinion that it should be fought from party platform while others feel that this election should be above politics as they think that this political overtone would greatly hamper the real strength of this institution. Again there are others who strongly feel that without ideological commitment there cannot be any real success in development work especially when it is connected with the poorer section of the society. Besides, it has often been said that panchayati raj has created conflict and factionalism in the Indian villages by providing a scope for exercising influence through the emergent alternative leadership pattern. Again a very pertinent question may be asked about the role of this institution in the development process; is it possible to have the desired effect always through this institution in a society having inherent inequalities?

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In the Indian villages, there were traditional, informal, often self-appointed leaders who were generally old-aged, and drawn from high caste and well-to-do sections of the society. If the socio-economic background of the modern formal and elected leaders is studied and compared one can have some idea of the character of the emerging leadership pattern and the nature of change, if any. A critical study on this emerging leadership pattern in the context of the various rural development programmes is very important particularly in West Bengal area where various attempts were proposed particularly for the development of the rural poor. Naturally the socio-economic character and background of the emerging leaders who are supposed to be instrumental in the implementation of these various rural development programmes is very important. It is particularly important and interesting to note if the political commitment and ideology have in any way, influenced the formulation of the various development programmes and their implementation.

The present study on panchayati raj and rural development was conducted with reference to a particular gram panchayat of Anchal 3 under Jamboni Police Station of Jhargram sub-division in the district of Midnapur, West Bengal.

#### Study on Panchayati Raj, Rural

#### Leadership and Rural Development : Review of Literature.

Panchayati raj in its present form, came into being in 1959 when the Balwantraj Mehta Committee submitted its report. The recommendations of the Mehta team were accepted and panchayati raj was established. After the establishment of Panchayati Raj, a number of reports and articles were published by social scientists. Besides, these a number of documents providing factual information, rules and regulations and the organisational set-up of the system were brought out by the state government. The information contained in these publications were mostly of a very general nature, throwing no light on the general impact of the system on village life and social structure. Another category of reports were made by the journalists and administrators containing either factual information or impressionistic views on the functioning of the panchayati raj. In the third category of articles, the importance of Panchayati raj and its role in rural and agricultural development have been emphasized. Here some of the studies related to the present study will be reviewed.

Mehta team suggested a pattern whereby rural development could be accelerated through peoples' participation. According to Day (1962)<sup>2</sup> the panchayati raj should be responsible to bring about economic, political, and social democracy simultaneously. Professor Iqbal Narain (1969)<sup>3</sup> has also supported this view and pointed out that the system should have three dimensions, viz. modernization, democratization and politicization.

There are a number of studies on panchayati raj from sociological and anthropological perspectives : considerable amount of research work has been done on social structure, and panchayati raj and there are studies on social change dealing with the nature, process, and extent of change. Patnaik(1969)<sup>4</sup> has indicated that the panchayati raj institutions are still functioning on traditional lines with a powerful influence of caste and Kinship. Yogendra Singh (1969)<sup>5</sup> suggested the analysis of panchayati raj from class-structural point of view rather than through such analytical categories as caste, leadership, and function.

Panchayati raj, its politics and factionalism have been studied by many. Mathur (1969)<sup>6</sup> has observed that panchayati raj cannot remain free from political stresses and strains. T.K. Oommen (1969)<sup>7</sup> has observed intense factionalism and high degree of politicization. A.H. Somjee (1971)<sup>8</sup> is interaction of the new democratic political institutions and procedures on the traditional political system. Iqbal Narain and Mathur (1967)<sup>9</sup> have showed that power factions are playing an important role in panchayati raj. Singh Harjinder (1968)<sup>10</sup> have noted that setting up of village panchayats has played an important part in providing a sense of responsibility among villages. Dube, D.C. (1961)<sup>11</sup> found that the introduction of panchayati raj is releasing new social forces which has so far remained latent and have brought about a number of changes in the social structure of the villages. Mathur and Iqbal Narain (1969)<sup>12</sup> feels that the panchayati raj bodies cannot remain free from political stresses and strains. Bhambri (1969)<sup>13</sup> advocated a meaningful relationship between political parties and panchayati raj institutions.

The result of politicization of the rural masses has been examined by some scholars. Ramen (1965)<sup>14</sup> has noted that the tensions between various parties are due to the fact that the panchayati raj is emerging as a powerful political force.

Seshadri (1966)<sup>15</sup> has observed as how power, prestige, popularity, monetary gain, and patronage have been the motive force behind people to gain leadership. Weiner (1962)<sup>16</sup> observed that the new institutions would constitute a new political outlet for increasing competitiveness in Indian rural life and political fortunes of the political parties will be affected. Nambudiripad (1962)<sup>17</sup> noted the danger of vested interests being encouraged due to the absence of political parties. Iqbal Narain and Mathur (1967)<sup>18</sup> have noted how power factions were playing an important role in panchayati raj institutions. Callwed (1969)<sup>19</sup> studies the emerging pattern of relationship between officials and non-officials of panchayati raj bodies.

The leadership pattern in the context of panchayati raj has also attracted the attention of a number of scholars. There have been some efforts by anthropologists, sociologists, and political scientists to study the leadership and power structure of Indian villages. Some edited volumes covering this aspect have also been published. Park and Tinker (1959)<sup>20</sup> and Vidyarthi (1968)<sup>21</sup> and also Mathur (1966)<sup>22</sup> have noted that the new panchayats are replacing the old caste panchayat. Kanak Krishna (1969)<sup>23</sup> found that majority of leaders were from high caste, though their socio-economic background was very near the middle class. He also found that illiterate leaders were slowly being eased out. Sachidananda (1972)<sup>24</sup> has noted that the elected leaders do not enjoy peoples' confidence and thus there is a lack of popular enthusiasm for development work. Mukherjee (1967)<sup>25</sup> has noted that essential pre-requisites for traditional and non-traditional leaders are different : for a traditional leader, factors such as caste, education below high school level, and non-agricultural occupation are essential, whereas for the recruitment of emerging leaders, elements and factors such as economic status and membership of a political party had only marginal effect.

In the recent past a number of studies have been made on rural leadership and panchayati raj, rural leadership and rural development. Lokhande and Singh (1978)<sup>26</sup> studied the pattern of leadership and its relation with socio-economic status. They have noted that there has been very poor growth and

development of leadership and socio-economic status was found to have considerably influenced the leadership structure. Dube (1975)<sup>27</sup> noted that in Maharashtra, significant decision makers at the panchayat level tend to be those who own good amount of property, are active in political party, and have connections with and approach to senior politicians in the state. Pant (1976) in his study on Kanpur has noted that the leaders are disproportionately drawn from higher socio-economic status groups. Sharma (1971)<sup>28</sup> has also noted that the elites are the people who have viable economic stability and have understanding of village politics : they have the contacts with the political leaders, workers and administrators. Sivish and others (1976)<sup>29</sup> have noted that the emerging of a politically oriented elite is one of the major results of the panchayati raj system. Bhatnagar (1977)<sup>30</sup> has lucidly brought forth the deficiencies from which the system suffers at present because of the bureaucratic attitude of the higher authorities. The comparative analysis of the leadership pattern by Dev and Agarwal (1974)<sup>31</sup> in the less developed and highly developed villages indicated that while leadership was more dispersed in the former, it was more concentrated in the latter. Bhargava<sup>32</sup> has made a number of studies on panchayati raj and Rao (1965)<sup>33</sup> has analysed panchayats and their role in rural development. Bhat (1977)<sup>34</sup> has studied dominant caste and its relation with the political process. Sivish and others have done (1976)<sup>35</sup> a study on the functioning of panchayati raj. The book Elite and Development edited by Sachidananda and Lal (1980)<sup>36</sup> contains a number of articles on identification of elites and their character. In one of those articles Chaudhuri (1980)<sup>37</sup> has studied the role of elite, particularly the panchayat leaders in the context, and noted that major benefits are really enjoyed by this emerging elite section who have shown considerable adaptability to utilize the various facilities extended by various economic institutions like the Co-operatives.

#### History and structure of Panchayati Raj.

The village panchayats have existed since time immemorial in India. Malaviya (1956)<sup>38</sup> while studying the evolution of panchayati raj in India, has noted that the institution has been in existence ever since the vedic period, though the present panchayati raj is of recent origin. There are references and description

of a village assembly, which however, was known by different names in different parts of the country. There was a sabha or council in many villages, supervised by a headman which used to discuss the problem and welfare of the village.

Aiyar (1929)<sup>39</sup> has noted that the British Government has altered the traditional form of village organization so as to make it suitable to fit in with the changes. The British Government with a view to stabilizing its political control gradually took various measures and reorganized village panchayats. A special commission was appointed in 1909 on "democratic decentralization" which suggested the need for revitalizing village panchayats handling local affairs. Subsequently, a number of Acts were passed like the Bengal village Self Government Act of 1919, Madras, Bombay and United Province Village Panchayat Act of 1920, Bihar and Orissa Village Administration Act, Assam rural Self Government Act of 1926, Punjab Village Panchayat Act of 1935 etc., to look after the village affairs including rural development and were even empowered to try minor cases. However, this does not cover all the states or all the areas of a particular state.

Independence brought in its wake the establishment of democracy in the country. Panchayati Raj came to make democracy a reality in village India. As per Directive Principles of the Constitution (Article 40) the state is expected to take steps to organize village panchayats. This was the first step, to democratic rural local government and thereby to reshape it in consonance with the needs of the people. The two main considerations that led to the historic step of establishing panchayati raj throughout the country were the strengthening of democracy at the grass root level and providing suitable machinery for the socio-economic development of the countryside. But just after independence, hardly any attention was given to the local bodies and they continued to function, by and large, in the same fashion as they used to during the British period. However, the introduction of community development projects in 1952 gave a new dimension to village administration. The Panchayati Raj in the present form came to be on the basis of report submitted by the Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report (1957). The recommendations of the Mehta Team were accepted and panchayati raj at different levels of administration and gradually extended to different states. The committee also recommended a three-tier system of local government within districts at the village, block and district levels.

The main objectives of Panchayati Raj as laid down in 3rd Five year Plan are as follows :-

- a) Increasing agricultural production.
- b) Development of rural industries.
- c) Fostering co-operative institutions.
- d) Full utilization of local manpower and other resources.
- e) Assisting the weaker sections of the Community.
- f) Progressive dispersal of authority and initiative with emphasis on the role of voluntary organization, and,
- g) Fostering cohesion and encouraging the spirit of self-help within the village community.

The structure of the panchayati raj, however, varied from state to state. Thus in some states there was a three-tier system and in some a four-tier system. In some states it was empowered with legal power whereas in some states, it did not enjoy any such power.

In West Bengal, the first attempt to extend local-self Government to villages was made in 1870 and under the Bengal Village Chawkidari Act 1870, the villages were divided and most of them were comprising about 10-12 square miles, and placed under panchayats. They had, however, only formal existence and actual governing network of rural local bodies consisting of a district board and a local board was established as per resolution of Lord Ripon in 1882, (Tinker : 1954). The Panchayati Raj was established in West Bengal in 1958 on an experimental basis and the structure of the system was as follows :

Zilla Parishad or District Council at District Level; Ancholik Parishad or Block Level Council at Block Level; Anchol Panchayat or Anchol Council at Anchol Level; and Gram Panchayat or village Council at the village level.

The members of the Gram Panchayat were elected directly and the members of the other higher bodies were elected indirectly. The Panchayati Raj Act was amended from time to time in all states including West Bengal. In West Bengal, the last amendment was made in 1973, and a three-tier organization of the following type was suggested :

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Name	Area of operation	Name of the head
Zilla Parishad	District Council	Chairman of Sabhapati
Panchayat Samiti	Block Level Council	Sabhapati
Gram Panchayat	Anchal Level Council	Pradhan

Thus at present, instead of previous anchal and gram panchayat, we have just gram panchayat at the anchal level. Naturally, now lesser number of members were elected indirectly and most of the members at different levels were elected directly and more power and responsibility were given to them.

The first panchayat elections were held in West Bengal between 1958 and 1965 and panchayat bodies were formed for 15 Zilla Parishads, 325 Ancholik parishads, 2,926 Anchal Panchayats and 19,662 Gram Panchayats all over West Bengal covering a population of over 3 crore 23 lakhs. The first panchayat elections were held on the basis of two Acts, West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 and West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act, 1963 and there was a provision of election after every four years. All the adult members irrespective of caste, class, and sex were supposed to elect members at different levels for the panchayat bodies. However, no further elections were held after that. Later on, to fulfil the needs of the rural society the Acts were modified and a new West Bengal Panchayat Act was passed in 1973.

After the left Front Government came to power in West Bengal, it was decided to hold elections immediately. According to the new set up instead of earlier four-tier system a new three-tier system was formed. On an average, for every eight thousand villagers, there is a Gram Panchayat, to look after the interest of the village and the villagers, which is the smallest administrative structure and the lowest tier of the three-tier system. At the Block Level, there is a panchayat samiti which can prepare development programmes and put them into action with the help of the gram panchayat, if required. At the district level, there is the Zilla Parishad looking after the interest of the district as a whole.

At the gram panchayat level, a Pradhan(Head) and an Up-Pradhan(Assistant Head) are elected to guide its activities, and the paid staffs like the Secretary and office assistants are also employed.

For the panchayat samiti members are elected directly and the pradhans of gram panchayats become its ex-officio members. The MP and MLA of the area except the Ministers also become its members. Sabhapati and Sahakari Sabhapati (Head and Assistant Head) are elected from the members to look after the activities of the panchayat samiti. It was decided to organize the activities of the Panchayat Samiti through the following eight permanent bodies.

(a) Finance, (b) Public Health, (c) Public Works (d) Agriculture, irrigation and co-operative (e) Educations, (f) Small industry, Social Welfare and Public Welfare (g) Development, Planning and Land Reform (h) Fishery and Animal Husbandry.

According to the Act, the Local BDO is the Chairman and the panchayat development officer is the Secretary of the Panchayat Samiti.

The members of the Zilla Parishad are also elected directly, two members are elected from each panchayat samiti, and all the MPs and MLAs of the District except the Ministers become members of the Zilla Parishad. The Sabhapati of each panchayat samiti is also ex-officio members of the Zilla Parishad. The members elect Sabhapati, the Head and the Sahakari Sabhapati, Assistant Head, to look after the activities of the Zilla Parishad. Similar to the panchayat samiti, the activities of the Zilla Parishad are also organized through above mentioned eight permanent bodies. The District Magistrate by virtue of his position is the Chairman of the Zilla Parishad and a Senior WBCS of the District Acts as its Secretary.

After the Left Front came into power, decision was taken to hold panchayat elections at an early date. Accordingly 4 June, 1978 was fixed for the election. There were two diametrically opposite views about the involvement of political parties in panchayat elections. Some parties notably the Janata Party suggested to keep political parties away from village panchayats and some parties, notably the Left Front suggested that the different political parties should participate and involve in panchayat elections directly. They felt that it was essential from the ideological point of view that only this involvement can protect and ensure the interest of the real poor of the villages. In fact, the committee headed by Shri Ashok Mehta to re-organize the structure of the panchayat also suggested the direct involvement of the different political parties.

In the panchayat elections held on 4 June 1978, about 2.5 crore population participated in 30 thousand constituencies to select 56 thousand candidates at various levels of panchayati raj and on the basis of these elections in West Bengal, 15 Zilla Parishads, 324 Panchayat samities and 3,242 Gram Panchayats have been formed.

Development efforts in rural India before Independence were largely discrete and wanting in an integrated approach. The different rural development efforts may be discussed here in this context.

#### Martandum Experiment

Dr. Spencer Hatch initiated the Martandum experiment in 1921 where an attempt was made to bring about a complete upward development towards a more abundant life for rural people, spiritually, mentally, physically, socially and economically.

#### Sriniketan Experiment

The Sriniketan Institute for Rural Reconstruction was established by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921 under the leadership of Mr. Elmhirst. The aim of the Institute was to make rural people self-reliant and self-respectful of the cultural tradition~~s~~ of their own community. Besides, an attempt was also made to make an efficient use of modern resources for the improvement of their physical, intellectual and economic conditions. A number of development programmes were also initiated as a part of rural reconstruction.

#### Gurgaon Experiment

Mr. F.L. Brayne evolved the Gurgaon Project of rural welfare. Rural reconstruction, according to Mr. Brayne is, "nothing more or less than the revival of the old-fashioned virtues of hard-work self-respect, self-control, self-help, mutual help and mutual respect." The four important elements were, (1) panchayat (2) mass-education, (3) example and leadership by the elite and (4) spirit of service.

#### Rural Reconstruction in Baroda

Mr. V.T. Krishnamachari initiated a comprehensive programme of rural reconstruction which included the following - (1) better communication (2) drinking water facilities (3) development of collage crafts (4) establishment of panchayat and co-operatives (5) development of village schools.

#### Rural Development Programme of Gandhiji

At Salgaon, Gandhiji initiated a number of rural development programmes covering (1) promotion of village industry (2) removal of untouchability (3) education (4) village cleanliness (5) communal harmony (6) prohibition (7) education in health (8) women's upliftment.

Gandhiji laid great stress on self-sufficiency particularly in food and cloth and left behind a number of organisations of rural constructive work.

A real beginning of an approach towards integrated rural development has been made with the launching of the community Development and the National Extension Service Blocks in 1950.

In these programmes stress was given on, participation of people and local leadership in both planning and implementation of programmes and on alround development of the condition of the rural people. In these programmes, emphasis was given not only on agricultural development, but also in the context of village sanitation, health, education, cooperation, housing etc. Nehru noted, "it seeks to build up the community and the individual and to make the latter a builder of his own village centre and of India in the larger sense."

Community Development Projects emerged out of a number of earlier experiments. Some of the notable experiments may be discussed here.

#### The Kizka Development Scheme in Madras

The Government of Madras launched the Intensive Rural Reconstruction Scheme more popularly known as Kizka Development Scheme in 1946. The short-term objective of the scheme was to develop basic amenities and an institutional frame-work for developing communication water supply and sanitation projects and formation of panchayats and co-operatives. The long-term objectives were to attain self-sufficiency in the context of basic needs like food, clothing, shelter etc. When the community Development Project was initiated in the state in 1953-54, this programme was merged with it.

#### The Nilokheri Experiment

This experiment greatly influenced the Community Development Project. Mr. S.K.Dey was the moving spirit behind the project. Its main objective was to attain self-sufficiency in the essential requirement for the township and surrounding villages. The colony had its own dairy, poultry, piggery, engineering workship, tannery etc. run on a co-operative basis. The idea of agro-industrial township as the centre of rural development emerged out of this experiment.

#### The Etawah Project

Mr. Mayer, with the support of the state and Central Governments initiated this programme in U.P. a few years before the Community Development Project. The goal of this project was "to see what degree of productivity and social improvement as well as initiative, self-confidence and co-operation can be developed." The project sought to combine emphasis on spiritual quality and method with emphasis on results obtained by regorous targeting.

There is no other socio-political programme launched by the Government of India which generated as much enthusiasm and participation of people, as the Panchayati Raj Institutions. It developed as a part of the wider Community Development Project. When

Gandhiji spoke of Gram Swaraj, few people could understand its real strength. After independence, Nehru gave a new thrust to the concept of local self-government and a new programme called "democratic decentralisation", was initiated, though in most states its implementation was half-hearted Hegde noted, "The new leadership that emerged mostly from rural areas having tasted the power at the state level was reluctant to share the new found power with the institutions at district and village levels. Naturally the attempt to introduce radical changes in the local self government system proved abortive in many cases.

The contribution of panchayati raj to economic development of region cannot be viewed in isolation. Development and politics seem to be intertwined in the experiment of panchayati raj particularly in the context of West Bengal. In this context, Sengupta noted, "The panchayats in Bengal promise to blaze the trail of future Marxist Social engineering in India. The panchayats combine grass roots participation in economic development (long promised by the Congress but never delivered)." (1980). It was realized during the 4th Plan that the fruits of development failed to reach the weaker sections and the concept of social justice was discussed to devise ways and means for giving it a concrete shape in terms of introducing various agencies and target group oriented development programmes. It was also felt that all the models of political system have to develop grass root political institutions for associating people with the development process. Power and responsibility will be given to the panchayats as and when required. Panchayati raj aimed at (1) proper utilization of the available manpower and other rural resources (2) developing a sense of community feeling (3) creating future leadership (4) ensuring quick acceptance of the new ideas (5) providing a broad base to democracy (6) planning an overall balanced development.

The critical elements rural development is improvement of living standards of the poor through opportunities for better utilization of their physical and human resources. The important elements of rural development are (1) improvement in levels of living (2) decreasing inequality in the distribution of rural incomes and (3) The capacity of rural sector to sustain and accelerate the pace of these improvements.

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