

CHAPTER-VIII

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR

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3.1 Summary of Findings :

The present study has sought to delineate the nature and problems of the emerging relationship-pattern between the officials and the non-officials at the three levels of Panchayati Raj institutions in the Malda district. Data gathered for this purpose have been made available through interviews of the officials and the non-officials on the basis of a prepared questionnaire and also gathered from documentary sources. This Chapter is concerned initially with highlighting some of the major findings, before offering a few concluding observations and suggestions for improvement.

Situational and contextual factors impinge on the structural and behavioural dimensions of both the officials and the non-officials in the Panchayati Raj administrative system. Considering its importance, an attempt has been made in Chapter Three to study the organisational and structural-functional pattern of

Panchayati Raj before and after the introduction of Panchayat Act, 1973. Such an analysis has provided an important clue to the understanding of the nature of the interacting situations in the present context.

It is observed from the historical survey that the Mughal rulers had introduced a centralised form of administration at the local level and abandoned the idea of 'Village Republic'. Like the Mughals, the British rulers also did not decentralise powers in the hands of the local bodies. Only in the year 1909, an attempt was made, on the basis of the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Decentralisation, to constitute village panchayats with the officials and the non-officials. The non-officials in the village panchayats were elected by the villagers after assembling in a meeting. The village panchayats were entrusted with police and military functions. However, in practice, village panchayats were controlled from the top. So the Panchayats during the British period were characterised as institutions to protect the interests of the British rulers.

After independence, attempts were made to decentralise powers in the hands of the local bodies and consequently, the Balvantray Mehta Committee was set up for this purpose. The recommendations of the Committee were accepted by different States. In West Bengal, the four-tier-Panchayati Raj institutions were set up, consisting of Gram Panchayat, Anchal Panchayat, Anchalik Parishad and the Zilla Parishad. It was observed^{that} the structure of Panchayati Raj

institution had been inadequate to cope with the idea of democratic decentralisation. The officials were powerful to make policies and execute decisions. The non-officials, though nominated, were very few in number and had actually no power for taking decisions. Very few projects and programmes sponsored by the Central and State Governments were carried out by the officials. The officials only received orders from the superior authority and blindly followed the same at the rural level. Thus the officials established a direct contact with the people at the rural level. The policy-making and implementing function without the effective coordination and participation of the rural people in the Panchayat administrative system did not help to develop legitimate political authority. The rural people organised agitation and demonstration for authoritative allocation of values. The long-felt desire for a rural local government with the representatives elected directly by the people has now been established under the new Panchayat system. Now, it is expected that the officials and the non-officials will change their attitudes, orientations and behaviours and establish a relationship of mutual trust and appreciation.

Effective formulation and implementation of development programmes is possible when the relations between the officials and the non-officials are cooperative and harmonious. If the roles are clearly demarcated, the possibility of animosity and interference either by officials or by non-officials will not

arise. If the officials are rule-oriented they will be rigid, officious and conservative in the performance of their duties. If the non-officials try to satisfy the needs of the people of their own area they will be concerned with narrow interest.

Chapter Four presents the activities and performance of the Panchayati Raj institutions. The institutions implemented various activities of rural development during the period from 1934 to 1937. The important achievements of the institutions were, repair, construction, reconstruction and extension of village roads. Moreover, four hundred fifty four culverts were repaired and constructed. In addition to these, five thousand five hundred fifty one kilometers of road were constructed and repaired. The Panchayati Raj institutions achieved the target in some cases, but in many cases they either failed to reach the target or they did not furnish the physical achievement reports. The discussion makes it clear that the Zilla Parishad has failed to take any decision regarding the sub-allotment of funds of rupees eight lakh thirteen thousand and nine hundred eighty two, which it received in the year 1936. On the other hand, the policy relating to repair and restoration of sixty Primary Schools has not been executed so far. Mr. Abdul Alim, Chairman of the Zilla Parishad, held the Secretary responsible for deliberately obstructing the functions of the Parishad. The Zilla Parishad adopted a resolution for the removal of the Secretary. The Secretary in reply to a reporter's question, told that he did not say anything

to stop any work. It is observed that conflict and tension prevail between the Secretary and the Elected Members of the Zilla Parishad. The State Government also admitted that the developmental work of the Zilla Parishad could not be implemented due to the differences between the Secretary and the Elected Members of the Zilla Parishad.

Rural development is a diversified phenomenon. There are several other agencies which also assist and coordinate Panchayati Raj institutions in the performance of rural development works. An attempt has also been made in Chapter Four to analyse the role and performance of the agencies of rural development. It was observed from the analysis that the Small Farmers' Development Agency had failed to cover all the Blocks of the district. The District Rural Development Agency achieved commendable success in its performances and surpassed the target during the years 1933-34 and 1934-35. The Nationalised Banks suggested the setting up of a Purchase Committee for supplying inputs and taking adequate steps to repay loans. Sericulture industry has also generated an employment opportunity of about one lakh sixty thousand persons, including both part time and whole time, in the rural and sub urban areas of Malda district. This industry has also been confronted with certain difficulties. The people have no experience about the latest technical know-how. The industry has no scientific rearing house. The Comprehensive Area Development Corporation has also achieved commendable performances in certain

fields. The important achievements of CADP have been : distribution of crop loans to the farmers, managerial control over four agro-service stations, distribution of loans to poor families belonging to non-agricultural economic occupations, etc.

The officials' norms and role-perceptions have been examined in Chapter Five. The findings of the study suggest that the officials are prone to administrative rules and regulations. Almost forty five percent of the officials at the three levels have strictly observed rules causing delay in the implementation of development programmes. This is also confirmed by the fact that the Panchayati Raj institutions have failed to reach the target in implementing the schemes of National Rural Employment Programme (both big and normal), Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme, North Bengal Development Programme, Rural Water Supply Programme etc. Again, the Panchayat officials at the district level have failed to execute the policies made in regard to the construction of Primary School buildings. Majority of the officials told that there was no scope for personal initiative. Initiative is considered an important dimension for the officials in order to perform developmental work. The officials at the three levels are men on the spot and situations may arise which need immediate solution. An organisation which does not provide enough scope for personal initiative of the officials, imposes restrictions on the independent activities of the officials as well as immediate dealings with situational factors.

The reason for this low degree of initiative may be that the officials consider rules and regulations as a general guide for administrative behaviour. The officials believe that there are no incentives for any good work. But there are risks of failure for which career may be spoiled. Moreover, major developmental activities of the Panchayati Raj institutions are carried out with the help of the financial grants provided by the Central and State Governments. Funds are allotted for different schemes, NREP (BIG & NORMAL), IRDP, RLEGP etc., to the Panchayati Raj institutions. The Panchayat officials have no authority to divert the funds from one scheme to another.

Officials' responses relating to normative referents and role-perceptions also point out that they try to safeguard their own position and status. This is confirmed by the fact that more than ninety percent of officials agree to take steps against unreasonable demands of leaders. Moreover, thirty seven percent of officials agree that they turn down the demands of non-officials when these are against Government policy even if these are in the interest of the district.

The examination of non-officials' norms and role-perceptions indicates that the non-officials' orientation towards democratic ideals is not strong enough. This is also confirmed by the fact that the non-officials have failed to make policies regarding the allocation of funds amounting to Rs. 91,000/- and Rs. 4,55,000/-

received under G.O.Nos. S481/p/1F-9/35, 3529/p/1F/36 and dated 21.1.36 and 5.10.36 under the North Bengal Development Programme.

Another factor which also weakens the democratic values of the non-officials is the concern of the role of their representatives. To protect the position of the representatives, the non-officials not only put restraints on the freedom of action of the people but also go to the extent of applying pressures on them in order to mould their opinion towards their action or programmes.

The non-officials are not intensely partisan though they belong to a party and are elected on the party basis. They want to make distinction between what is good and what is bad for the local community. They do not take any action programme to further the interest of their party in any unfair manner. They are sincere, obliged on obeying the sanctity of the rule of game. They want to play cooperative role with the officials.

The non-officials have explained their role in terms of coastructive intervention in order to remove the administrative ills of the system. Finally, they have played an agitational -interventionist role against unjust and improper action of the officials.

Turning to reciprocal role-perception and images of both the officials and the non-officials, it has been observed that there is no agreement between the officials and the non

-officials on the images and role-perceptions of each of them. The non-officials agree that the officials are interested in improving their own prospects and in working accordingly to their own wishes. The non-officials also disagreed with the fairness and impartiality of the officials. Again, a large number of non-officials also believe that the officials work in the interest of ruling groups. So in regard to personal and professional attributes, the non-officials have a poor image of the officials. Moreover, the non-officials hold the opinion that the officials are not responsive and receptive to the needs, problems and difficulties of the non-officials. Large number of non-officials state that the officials remain indifferent to people's difficulties. Almost forty percent of non-officials point out that the officials are helpful in redressing the grievances of the people. On this issue responses are comparatively high at the village-level as against the district and block levels. A great number of the non-officials agree that the officials do not appreciate their difficulties and distrust them. All these facts indicate that the non-officials have a poor image of the officials.

The officials, on the other hand, also hold a very poor image of the non-officials. Officials feel that the non-officials are more in favour of protecting parochial and narrow interests. They distrust officials, create troubles for the administration and do not appreciate the difficulties of the officials.

The foregoing discussion points out that the officials and the non-officials hold an adverse view of each other. When one holds poor image of the others it is assumed that the behavioural consequences of such an adverse evaluation will result in disharmonious relationship between the officials and the non-officials. The non-officials who are concerned, on some occasions, with narrow and parochial interest will approach the officials for getting certain things done. The officials will also see whether these things are in conformity with established rules, regulations and procedures. The officials may interpret the rules in an ambivalent manner, refuse compliance with the proposals of the non-officials which will help him to take such a decision and on the other hand, reinforce his position.

The non-officials will try to find out the reasons for refusal and consider officials' indifference to people's needs and difficulties and non-sympathetic attitude to non-officials as the important factors for disregarding the proposals. So the interaction between the officials and the non-officials arises because the two sets of actors want to give priority to their own role performance. This tendency prevents the officials and the non-officials from establishing functional relationship between them and hinders the systemic goal-gratification and consequently, conflict and tension emerge.

An attempt has been made in Chapter Seven to answer the

research queries relating to frequency of the non-officials creating pressures upon the officials for furthering parochial and general interest; frequency of the officials submitting to the pressures created by the non-officials; whether the bureaucrats behave with a sense of injured pride, loss of power, prestige and status on account of the increasing participation and domination of political leaders in the decision making process, etc. The findings of the study relating to the interrelationship between the officials and the non-officials emphatically indicate that the non-officials find it very important to consult officials. On the other hand, very few officials consider that it is important to consult non-officials and a majority of them are unwilling to be guided by the non-officials' advice. This incongruous relationship between the officials and the non-officials regarding the respective spheres and boundary of their activities and authority lies in their perception of role at the three levels of Panchayati Raj institutions. It is interesting to note that the encroachment is perceived by both the officials and the non-officials at the three levels regarding the broad policy formulation and administration. It transpires from the data that there is a fair amount of agreement of sharing responsibility even in regard to exclusive jurisdiction of either officials and non-officials. For example, in regard to the actual making of broad policies and distribution of loans both of them prefer joint responsibility. It is evident from the fact that there exists role-ambiguity regarding the location of primary responsibility in the decisional

areas stated above. The prevalence of role ambiguity creates, on the other hand, the growth of transgression. The non-officials emphatically state that they prefer to recruit, transfer, evaluate, award, dismiss and write confidential reports of the district, block and village staff which are generally within the exclusive domain of officials. Therefore, it is observed that the conventional notion of clear cut demarcation of powers between the officials and the non-officials does not actually operate at the three levels of Panchayati Raj institutions and both of them tend to violate the role boundaries in the process of encroaching legitimate jurisdiction of one another.

It was further observed that so far as the non-officials are concerned, a majority of them bring several kinds of problems and demands before the officials. The officials are of the view that the non-officials bring to them mostly the problems relating to the questions about technical matters, sanction and approval for loans, administrative delays.

Again, a majority of the officials at the three levels emphatically state that the non-officials contact the officials for personal benefit or concerning the interest of their relatives or friends. They are in favour of protecting the interest of the people of the area. However, the non-officials refuse to accept this allegation. They state that they come to officials not only with the problems of his own relatives or friends or political party but also with the problems of the people of the area as a

whole. So the non-officials state that they are concerned with general rather than narrow interest.

The non-officials admit that they exert pressure on officials for getting certain things done in favour of their supporters or groups. The officials when confronted with such pressures rely on administrative rules and regulations. Non-officials also think that the officials seek the political support.

3.2 Concluding Observations and Suggestions :

The discussion of major findings derived from historical survey, official-reports on the activities of Panchayati Raj institutions, the analysis of the statements made by the Secretary, Chairman and the State Government, published in the leading daily newspapers, case studies and the analysis of data gathered through interviews, have made it clear that the relation between the officials and the non-officials are conflicting. Again, the conflicting relationship occur frequently at the district and block level as compared to the village level. The officials are concerned with their own position-specific role and treat rules and regulations and procedures as protective devices for maintaining the same. They avoid taking any risk or initiative even when confronted with the question of the welfare of the people because the officials believe that there are risks of failure in taking initiative and for this their career may be spoiled. Moreover, they also think that there is no incentive for any good

work. The officials have an adverse image-perception about the non-officials and these hinder the realisation of systemic goals.

The non-officials, on the other hand, try to protect their position of representative-role either by limiting actions of the people or by applying pressure on them in order to mould their opinion in favour of the actions or programmes. They are concerned with general interest but on some occasion, they try to satisfy the needs of the people of their own areas in order to protect their position in future and in dealing with these they are concerned with narrow interest. So the relationship between the officials and the non-officials can be characterised by position-specific considerations.

Both the officials and the non-officials hold a very poor image about one another. The two opposite sets of actors consider to give priority to their own role performance and this tendency leads to friction and conflict between them. Moreover, the willingness on the part of both of them to exercise their authority on the same issues relating to policy-making, recruitment, transfer, promotion etc. help develop interference on either side and conflict and tension emerge. The non-officials bring several kinds of issues and put pressure on the officials for getting things done. The officials in order to cope with these pressures take recourse to rules and regulations and as a result, conflict and tension emerge. The cumulative effect of all these indicate a tendency towards role transgression and role

aggrandizement which in turn, result into conflict and tension and clash between officials and non-officials.

It is assumed that there should be a clear boundaries between the officials and the non-officials. The two groups of actors will try to maintain the role boundaries and it is considered that this will help to remove tension. Moreover, the officials as managerial group and non-officials as peoples' representative shall consider themselves as the same partners of the Panchayat system in order to realise systemic-goals.