

# I N T R O D U C T I O N

## Purpose of the Study.

The importance of the study of Panchayati Raj system lies in the fact that local self-government institutions are the seedplots upon and around which the highest traditions of the nation are built. There is no denying the fact that these institutions, besides politically educating the people serves as an instrument of development from below. The study of Panchayati Raj Institutions thus provides an insight into the roots of democracy and development of this tiny state.

The institution of local self-government includes urban and rural local bodies. However the present study is concerned only with the rural local institutions i.e. Panchayati Raj Institutions. The reason is not far seek. In a polychromatic society like Sikkim, consisting of three distinct communities, i.e. Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali which had different traditional self-government systems, the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1960 sought to bring unity out of diversity with regard to rural local institutions. The Bazar Committees which were established on the same footing with the block panchayats under the Bazar Committees Act, 1969, failed to function properly and powers and functions of government relating to these Bazars have become centralised. The Gangtok Municipal Corporation which was brought into existence by the Gangtok Municipal Corporation Act 1975, had all the nominated

members and at present it stands superseded. Hence the study had to be limited within the rural local institution.

Methodology:

For the purpose of data collection, both primary and secondary sources were tapped. Field investigation included all ~~the~~ four districts of Sikkim, North, South, East and West. In all 33 block panchayats (15%) were selected through random sampling in order to collect first hand knowledge regarding the working of block panchayats. Although initially, method of random sampling was adopted for the selection of respondents but during field investigation, it was realized that such an approach was impractical mainly due to the unavailability of the respondents. Hence, in order to represent the respondents proportionately as well as to conduct an intensive study of the working of block panchayats it was decided to administer questionnaire to two of the three office bearers and one of the members; thus interviewing three out of the five panchayat members.

Extensive field investigations were done intermittently during 1980-83. Informations regarding the structure and functions and other informations relating to the earlier and present block panchayats were gathered from official records and files and by meeting the various panchayat officials.

After the formulation of questionnaire, a pilot study

was undertaken to test the questionnaire. During the pilot study, 12 respondents belonging to three block panchayats around Gangtok, were administered the questionnaire. The questions were then revised and modified accordingly and a final questionnaire was prepared. Besides administering the questionnaire extensive informal interviews were conducted with other members of the block panchayats whose names were not included in the sample, and with the officials engaged in rural development. The officials interviewed, included Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Under Secretary of the Panchayat and Rural Works Department, Deputy Development officers, Panchayat Inspectors and Supervisors and various other officials whose focus of interest was rural development. During the field investigation various allegations and complaints were reported by a number of respondents but they were checked and scrutinized before using in the study.

The respondents and officials interviewed were cooperative and eager to discuss their problem, except a few who were either reluctant to discuss the matter with an outsider or felt annoyed to be disturbed at their work and the researcher was not spared bitter scolding.

Besides the interviews (both formal and informal), data and informations were collected from official records and notifications. The Panchayat and Rural Works Department in Gangtok

and District Development Office in all ~~the~~ four districts were visited by the researcher. Besides old notifications were procured from personal collection of various persons. However, many informations were not available partially due to the haphazardous maintenance of office files, and partly, as most of the officiable conceded, due to the 1973 upheaval when mob did not spare even official documents from destroying.

A number of libraries were visited for the purpose of collecting secondary datas. The National Library, Calcutta, Library of Indian Institute of Public Administration, New Delhi, Library of Sikkim Research Institute of Tibetology, Gangtok, Community Hall Library, Gangtok, Library of Sikkim Legislative Assembly, Gangtok were consulted by the researcher besides the Central Library of University of North Bengal.

Datas were analysed by tabulating them to note the frequency. Pearsonian method have been adopted to establish the co-relation between the various variables. Only those datas which are successful in the chi square test are included in the study. The Chi square test was done by computer.

The block panchayats established under the Sikkim Panchayat Act 1968 have been replaced by the panchayat bodies established under the Sikkim Panchayat Act, 1982. Since the datas regarding the working of new panchayat were not available and also initially, this was not included within the purview of our study, a brief discussion on the 1982 Act, the election result have been included in the appendix.