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THE INDIAN INSTITUTE OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

SIXTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

PANCHAYATI RAJ

(New Delhi, October 28, 1962)



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#### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- Sri N.H. Athreya, Director, Modern Management Counsel, Methods and Management Consultants, Bombay.
- Brig. N.V. Bal, Chief Administrative Manager, Indian Airlines Corporation, Rakab Ganj Road, New Delhi-1.
- Sri K.C. Chheda, Zonal Manager, All-India General Insurance Co., Churchgate Mansion, Bombay-1.
- Sri K.S. Desai, Reader in Political Science, M.S. University of Baroda, Baroda.
- Sri R.K. Hooda, I.P.S., Assistant Superintendent of Police, Anti-Corruption Department, Jaipur, Rajasthan.
- Sri V.M. Kulkarni, 26/8 East Patel Nagar, New Delhi-12.
- Prof. M.V. Mathur, Professor & Head of the Department of Economics and Public Administration, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.
- Sri R.G. Nagarajan, 1-20 (S.F.) Moti Bagh II, New Delhi-3.
- Dr. A.D. Pabaney, Director, Central Institute of Training and Research in Panchayati Raj, Kailash Colony, New Delhi-14.
- Sri R.C. Prasad, Senior Research Fellow, Indian School of Public Administration, New Delhi-1.
- Dr. V.P. Varma, Director, Institute of Public Administration, Patna University, Patna-5.

*Chairman:* Sri N.V. Gadgil.

## DISCUSSIONS AT THE CONFERENCE

(October 28, 1962)

### 'PANCHAYATI RAJ'

*Prof. V.K.N. Menon*, Director, Indian Institute of Public Administration, welcomed the members to the Conference. As *Sri N.V. Gadgil*, who was to be the Chairman of the Conference, had just then been called away on some urgent work and was expected a little later, *Prof. Menon* requested *Prof. M.V. Mathur* to take the Chair till the arrival of the Chairman.

*Prof. M.V. Mathur*, who then took the Chair, introduced the major topic for discussion, i.e. Panchayati Raj, which had been divided into four heads in the working paper as under: (please see Appendix)

- (i) The Philosophy of Local Self-Government
- (ii) The Structure of Panchayati Raj Set-up
- (iii) The Pattern of Staffing in Panchayati Raj, and
- (iv) The Relations between the Officials and Non-officials in Panchayati Raj.

He wanted the members to express their views on those topics and on the role of the Panchayati Raj institutions in the present-day national emergency.

*Sri N.H. Athreya*, speaking first, commended the operational term "Decentralised Democracy" to the emotionally-charged term "Panchayati Raj". He pleaded for keeping away from the emotional plane since the problem was essentially administrative in character. He observed that he *believed* that the best from every man could be got if the democratic approach was taken. A suitable organization was fundamental for every worthy human endeavour, for every man to give his best in a democracy. One such organization was Panchayati Raj.

Continuing *Sri Athreya* said that decentralizing of the organization was a *process* and not a one-shot affair and

therefore decentralized democracy could be possible only over a period. If experience in industry could provide a clue, we could say that *a circular did not bring about decentralized democracy*. Since the operation dealt with people, a lot of understanding, thoughtfulness and planning on the part of administrators and an amount of adjustment and preparation on the part of those who would work the Panchayati Raj were called for. Simultaneous with a suitable organization, we had to provide for the right leadership. Nominating a man to a position did not confer leadership qualities on him a principle which industry had learnt to its cost. We took to Panchayati Raj because we thought we would arrive faster that way. We meant business. And more so because of the national emergency. We needed today more than ever before dynamic, results-oriented leadership, not procedure-ridden, right-on-paper headship.

Speaking next, *Sri K.C. Chheda* supported the views of *Sri Athreya* that the emphasis of Panchayati Raj should be on the achievement of results. In order to achieve them he advocated mass education in the concept and philosophy of Panchayati Raj. The subject of Panchayati Raj should be included in the curriculum of the schools and colleges starting from the matriculation level. He was sorry to find that many people in the villages and towns—even government officers and businessmen—lacked understanding of the concept of Panchayati Raj and hence did not feel interested in the subject. *Sri Chheda* asserted that only by a system of mass education could we increase the understanding of the people of the philosophy and problems of Panchayati Raj institutions and create interest in them. He laid emphasis on the responsibility that rested with the educated class of the society who ought to undertake this mission of spreading the concept and philosophy of Panchayati Raj among the rural population.

*Dr. V.P. Varma*, feeling sceptical about introducing too many administrative innovations in our country, pointed out that we were suffering from some kind of psychological

complex and we believed in introducing too many administrative, socio and economic techniques borrowed from the western countries without being aware of the divergencies between our country and the West and the grim illiteracy that prevailed and the remnants of feudalism that still dominated the rural areas here. He sounded a note of warning against the rapidity with which innovations were being tried and said that we had to go slow and allow the people to adjust themselves to the needs and demands of the situation. Speaking about his experience when he conducted a strategic study of some of the blocks in Bihar, he said that the people in the villages reacted sharply to frequent administrative innovations and the paraphernalia of supervisory and subordinate staff. His suggestion was that we should allow the people to adjust to some of these new techniques instead of bothering them with too many administrative devices and economic formulae.

Another point *Dr. Varma* made out was that the Gram Sevaks and the V.L.Ws. who would come in close contact with the villagers should be drawn generally from the backward sections of the society. He found from his experience in the Jabalpur Block (Chapra, Saran, Bihar) that Gram Sevaks and V.L.Ws. were drawn from the higher sections of the population who considered their appointment as means of obtaining power. If these new administrative elements of power were added to the Gram Sevaks and V.L.Ws., who already possessed some power because of their being members of the upper castes, it would not be desirable. *Dr. Varma* stressed that it was necessary to neutralize as much as possible the concentration of power.

*Dr. Varma* drew the attention of the House to the growing rural imbalance whereby some of the villages had profited more from the new administrative and economic devices resulting in the emergence of a strong sense of suppression and resentment in several other villages which felt neglected. He suggested that we should guard against this resentment growing in the neglected villages. We should evolve a more equitable utilization of funds placed at the disposal of the blocks.

Dr. Varma mentioned that he had studied this problem from the point of view of Sarvodaya and remarked that he differed from the suggestion of the Sarvodaya leaders regarding land revenue. He was of the opinion that to reserve the entire village revenue for the purpose of the village was not advisable when the traditional parochialism and localism dominated the village scene. He advised that a certain proportion might be reserved for the village, and if the villages would need more, they could get grants. In other words, Dr. Varma suggested that there should be a sense of financial reciprocity among villages rather than accentuation of economic localism.

Sri R.G. Nagarajan, who took the floor next, was of the view that Panchayati Raj as an instrument of village and district administration was not a new concept as it had been tried in the past 40 years or so with varying degrees of success. He attributed the cause of its failure to the lack of local interest and enthusiasm and the importing of local caste and communal prejudices into the working of the system and perhaps lack of adequate material, financial and technical resources and powers. He said that the isolation of the villages from the rest of the country had been a source of both strength and weakness. While the villages had been able to maintain their own economic institutions and self-sufficiency till recently, they had been imbued with a sense of complacency and fatalism. He held the view that the impact of the central and state administration on the conditions prevailing in the villages was almost nil. He admitted that after Independence, the impact of mass communication media like the radio and the regional language press, had instilled a certain awareness on the part of the villagers to the tasks before them. The object of Panchayati Raj administrators, he emphasized, should therefore be two fold. They should sell the idea of the need for an efficient, clean, and honest administrator to the villagers. The villagers should be enthused to recognize the need for their active and constructive participation in the development of the village and the country as also keeping vigilant watch over the periodic performance of this village executive.

Sri Nagarajan wanted that the Panchayat Samitis which would handle considerable amount of money should spend it carefully and avoid waste. The functions of drawing up a detailed village plan, executing it, compilation of the statistics of human and other resources in the village, maintenance of census figures etc.—all these required the full time service of a suitable qualified and energetic young man aspiring for positions in the subordinate executive posts of the State. He said that the Gram Sevaks who were thoroughly trained to handle the development needs of the village should be appointed as *ex officio* Secretaries of the Gram Panchayats. He wanted the revenue assessment and collection work to be transferred to them. He held the view that there would be financial saving in the abolition of the posts of village Headman and Accountant whose importance and work were rapidly diminishing. It should also be the ultimate aim to transfer the land revenue income to the Panchayats. This could be replaced either by local income-tax or sales tax on the actual production. He, therefore, thought that it was necessary to build up a strong well-knit and dedicated service of Gram Sevaks who could form part of the State cadre of executives.

Sri Nagarajan also stressed the need for entrusting the tasks of administration of justice to the village panchayat courts. He expressed the view that in the interests of improving the maintenance of law and order and securing the active co-operation of the villagers in the administration of justice, panchayat courts should be established with well-defined powers to judge and investigate minor crimes, deciding civil suits where the parties would agree to their jurisdiction in their contracts and draw up the first information reports and the list of witnesses in other cases. The courts should be independent of both the executive and the deliberative body. He was of the view that they should also be entrusted with certain semi-judicial functions like the registration of documents, issue of birth and death certificates and maintenance of the village records and history, etc. Persons with a known bent of judicial reasoning and impartiality and with the requisite maturity of mind, should

only be eligible for election. He wanted the Gram Sabha to have powers to elect and remove the Judges in case they were corrupt, inefficient or incapable. The office of the Panchayat Court should be made statutory and severe punishment should be given to those who misbehaved and deliberately co-operated in the miscarriage of justice.

He was also of the view that the Gram Panchayats should be strengthened by the addition of some outside element in the form of well-educated and technically qualified persons, who, although belonging to the village, might have settled either permanently or temporarily outside the village. This he advocated because of the fact that the task before the villages was one in which the intellectuals, technicians and administrators should take active part. The ultimate powers of decision should rest with the popular body but they should be assisted with all the available talent.

Continuing, Sri Nagarajan expressed the view that the task of harnessing the idle and unemployed or under-employed resources of the village, particularly manpower resources, should be entrusted to the village labour banks. Certain works of the villages like building and repairing of houses, laying of roads and maintaining them, locust and pest control, prevention of spread of diseases, keeping the villages clean, maintaining the canals and minor irrigation works, cultivation of lands obtained on long- or short-term lease etc., could all be undertaken by the idle manpower available by constituting labour banks within the villages which would undertake government and panchayat work. The labour banks should be encouraged to pay their taxes through their labour and also to contribute their labour for the benefit of the village. Idle labour should be utilized by payment of subsistence or nominal wages in the form of foodgrains, clothing and medical aid. When the banks were stabilized with sufficient internal resources, they should also be encouraged to insure their members against risks of premature deaths, accidents, illness and unemployment, as would be required in the foreseeable future, by the concept of Welfare State. Sri Nagarajan emphasized that this

should be a voluntary movement with the active participation of government and panchayati Raj institutions.

The speaker also felt that it was essential for the panchayats to form positive plans for the building up of the health of the villagers and sports promotion. Modern health building and cheap games like the football, volley ball and swimming should be taken to the villages. Sports competition should be held by the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads during the time of local festivals when people from different villages assembled. He concluded by saying that active health habits should be encouraged so that the idle energies of the villagers which were being now spent in petty quarrels were diverted into useful channels by Panchayati Raj institutions.

Speaking on the first topic for discussion, viz. "The Philosophy of Local Self-Government", Prof. Mathur mentioned that Dr. Appleby's article on "Some Thoughts on Decentralised Democracy" printed in the Special Issue of the Journal was a very helpful one. Dr. Appleby regarded the nation as supreme by which he meant that the administration at the national level was the primary objective in the sense that all those functions which had got to be governed from the Centre should not in any way be disturbed on account of this idea of decentralized democracy. Prof. Mathur felt that a certain type of conflict existed between this concept and the concept advocated by Sri Jayaprakash Narayan. Sri Jayaprakash Narayan, believed that the functions, which could not be performed by the panchayats, should be given to the higher levels of administration, say the Panchayat Samiti; those which could not be performed by the Panchayat Samiti should be given to the Zila Parishad, those which could not be performed by the Zila Parishad should be performed at the State Level, and those which could not be performed even at the State level should be given to the Centre. Prof. Mathur considered this scheme of things as very logical and consistent with the type of political philosophy advocated with it. He, however observed that the scheme that was being propounded officially was not consistent with the above philosophy. The official concept of Panchayati Raj was

merely the creation of units of Government for implementation of certain policies decided at higher levels, without giving liberty to such units to decide policies for themselves. He warned that, in advocating this philosophy of Panchayati Raj, we should not create false expectations in the minds of people, false expectations with reference to the power that was being delegated to them.

Prof. Mathur drew attention to the delegation of certain powers to the Panchayati Raj bodies for carrying out the plans that had been formulated and finalized at the Union level and the only authority that was being delegated to them was for their execution. He expressed the view that the fullest possible co-operation of the people could be secured only when within their limited field of activity they were able to take all relevant decisions. If that was not so, it might just be possible that, at the levels of Panchayats or Panchayat Samitis or Zila Parishads, there would be a distinct and definite area of conflict.

Prof. Mathur said that as our districts were fairly large, they could be units of full-fledged administration. If at that level the elected representatives of the people in the Panchayati Raj institutions were told about certain policy issues which could not be challenged, certain difficulties were likely to crop up. He was, however, against these Panchayati Raj institutions becoming small republics of their own. He warned that if that situation developed, it would create difficulties for the nation as a whole.

*Sri N.V. Gadgil*, who took over the Chair at this stage, suggested the following four questions for useful discussion:

1. Is there any difference between the philosophy of Local Self-Government and the concept of Panchayati Raj?
2. In view of the fact that the villages are no longer self-contained units, can Gram Panchayats function effectively?
3. Among the cherished social values of the rural society are respect for age, authority and tradition. Will the introduction of Panchayati Raj

change these values, and what would be its effect on the rural society?

4. What should be the Role of Panchayati Raj in National Emergency?

The next speaker, *Sri V.M. Kulkarni*, felt that the welfare programmes had not been properly defined or provided for in the Panchayati Raj institutions as in the case of national programmes. He observed that there was need to consolidate and strengthen the welfare programmes initiated by the Central Social Welfare Board and the Community Development programmes and other voluntary agencies. He was of the view that the welfare services and social services were no longer non-productive or un-productive as they had been described by the orthodox economists. These welfare programmes would release more voluntary resources in both men and money, reduce the burden on the families and contribute to economic development. He was sorry to find that there was not enough appreciation of welfare programmes and welfare services in relation to their contribution to the development of the economy.

He pointed out that the evaluation reports on the programmes of Community Development also indicated that the benefits of new development had not reached the under-privileged classes. He was of the opinion that one of the ways in which benefits could be made to reach the less privileged sections of the community was to provide social services and social welfare services free of cost or at moderate cost. He expressed concern over the fact that Panchayati Raj institutions had been given some functions as 'musts', while some other functions, particularly welfare functions, were made optional. It was his contention that all functions should be made 'must', the only difference that could be made was in their implementation. The participant said that while a part of the programme might be implemented and supported by taxes, the remaining programmes could be pushed forward through the people's agencies or the voluntary agencies. For that he made two suggestions: (i) There should be something like

the District Welfare Council in which there should be representatives of Panchayati Raj institutions at the district level and representatives of the voluntary agencies. (ii) A welfare programme for the district might be prepared—a part of which could be implemented by the District Welfare Department and the rest under the direction of the District Welfare Council by the voluntary agencies.

Sri Kulkarni felt that it was not advisable to await indefinitely for economic affluence to dawn in order to launch and follow up welfare programmes. He also felt that it was not proper for the Panchayati Raj institutions directly to undertake all the programmes for it would amount to nationalization of social and welfare services. In a democratic set-up, the government should use its position of vantage and the resources at its disposal in helping and strengthening the voluntary effort rather than in its undertaking all the programmes itself.

He pointed out that although on political and ideological grounds, the rural communities might be divided, the welfare programmes should be able to bring them on a common footing and on a common platform and thus contribute to strengthen national solidarity. This should also provide relief in the family and promote a sense of satisfaction in the people. Welfare programmes so planned would be a plus factor in the current situation and not a burden on our plans and resources earmarked for economic development. He concluded by saying that Panchayati Raj without vigorous welfare programmes would be incomplete, inadequate and might not meet the needs and expectations of the people.

*Brig. N.V. Bal*, who spoke next, attempted to look at the Panchayati Raj from the 'common man' point of view. He said that the popular concept about the 'common man' of today was that he was an uneducated, illiterate, poverty-ridden, quarrelsome and communal-minded person. He wondered whether Panchayati Raj would be able to cure that common man of all his ills.

Discussing the question of the difference between the philosophy of Local Self-Government and the concept of

Panchayati Raj, Sri Bal expressed the view that the common man thought of the government only as an institution imposing on him restrictive measures and processes which were in fact a legacy of the British Raj. Now when we thought of developing this common man through Panchayati Raj institutions, one of the approaches should be to remove the restrictive and regulating agencies of government. He pointed out that too many development officers went round in the villages with authority in their hands and the common man was not interested in them, or their programmes, these being in the nature of impositions coming from the ruling power. So he wondered, whether merely by calling it either as local self-government or as Panchayati Raj, it was possible to change the outlook of the 'common man'.

Brig. Bal defined Panchayati Raj as a system which would ensure to the common man a certain degree of protection from extraneous forces which might be working against his interests and might destroy him. Security of our country against foreign aggression was one aspect, economic security was another, and freedom to acquire knowledge was yet another requirement which the common man expected the government to provide for him; and finally security which would facilitate his achieving the goal towards self-development unhampered. What was wanted in Panchayati Raj was the emergence of self-government from within and not imposed from without. Moreover, it should lead to self-development and not merely act as a system of restrictive measures and processes. What we should do in Panchayati Raj, Brig. Bal said, was to provide protection to the common man and to give him the freedom of development. Then only Panchayati Raj would enable to create a society imbued with vitality and necessary ingredients for growth.

He pointed out that in every process of growth we had to shed off the dead wood. He did not want the dead wood in the form of regulative restrictive processes to follow us. Brig. Bal concluded by saying that the concept of Panchayati Raj was good but its application as was being practised

today, was sure to give adverse results. He cautioned therefore against the possibility of this happening and desired that the present policies and programmes should be re-oriented accordingly.

Speaking next, *Sri K. S. Desai*, said that the question whether there was a difference between the philosophy of local self-government and the concept of Panchayati Raj had to be raised because some people seemed to think and believed that Panchayati Raj was something new. He felt strongly that Panchayati Raj was something which had arisen out of the existing situation and not something which had emerged out of a vacuum. 'Panchayati Raj' had arisen because of the need for giving more powers to local bodies and because the administrative machinery was finding it difficult to get the co-operation from the people in the implementation of the plan and community development programmes. The name 'Panchayati Raj' was given simply for the reason that there were panchayats in the past and we wanted a name which would catch the imagination of the people, bringing to their notice that this was what we were trying to create. The expression 'Democratic Decentralisation', he said, would not strike the imagination of the ordinary villager. Therefore, the word 'Panchayati' had to be brought in and the word 'Raj' was also added because we wanted government by panchayats. Thus, there was no separate philosophy of local self-government or Panchayati Raj excepting that Panchayati Raj suggested the giving of new names to the already existing local bodies and where they did not exist, to establish them. Besides, Panchayati Raj conferred more powers on the local bodies while giving them more developmental responsibilities too. In the States where Panchayati Raj had not been established, local bodies did exist but with only municipal functions and not developmental functions. So the idea in coining the new expression 'Panchayati Raj' was to put life and energy into the existing local bodies and also to strike the imagination of the average villager by giving a new name.

Giving another reason for the emergence of the concept of Panchayati Raj, *Sri Desai* pointed out that although the

work of government had increased at the lower levels—the taluka and the village levels—the government had not got down to those levels and the people felt very much frustrated at the administration. So it was thought that something should be done about it and the only way of getting out of this difficulty arising out of the increasing work of the government was to give more powers to the local democratic bodies. Another reason was that Panchayati Raj institutions would take over the developmental functions of the community development blocks. In order to undertake development functions in the rural areas, more funds were required and people would not be willing to be taxed unless they were associated with the administration. In order to be able to find funds for the development programmes, more and more powers had to be given to local bodies established in Panchayati Raj areas.

Discussing the question whether the Gram Panchayats could function effectively in view of the fact that the villages were not self-contained and self-reliant, *Sri Desai* expressed the hope that the time when the Gram Panchayats were required to be wound up would not come and should not come because Panchayati Raj would be lifeless if it ceased to exist in the villages as units. He strongly felt that the villagers would never agree to be deprived of Gram Panchayats which they would like to develop as efficient and effective units. We had to allow time for the economic and social development of the villagers through Panchayati Raj institutions.

Dealing with the question of the effect of the introduction of Panchayati Raj institutions in the rural society, *Sri Desai* discounted the fears of the rural elite that the power would pass into the hands of the uneducated and ignorant people in the rural areas. He gave instances of the people in Gujarat, going and telling the Election Officer that the way, the constituencies had been formed and delimited, was faulty and that the power would pass into the hands of the illiterate, ignorant, backward and unworthy people—a thing which was not desired or wished for in the Panchayati Raj set-up. This probably was the view

of the persons in the higher social strata who did not want the weaker sections of the community to get more power and dominance in Panchayati Raj set-up. Sri Desai observed that it was probable that things might set in for the worse and they might be at the mercy of the illiterate and the ignorant villagers. But that was the only way one could bring about the betterment of the weaker sections of the society.

Sri Desai drew attention to the fact that the community development programmes had benefited the rich more than the poor, and therefore the only way of turning the tables against the favoured people was to give power in to the poor and the backward people who were in a majority in the rural areas, so that they were able not only to taste power but also to undertake some ameliorating measures which would bring about the improvement of their backward lot.

It was true, the speaker admitted, that with the introduction of Panchayati Raj the values were changing—for example the importance attached to age and status was being questioned. Things like—a son cannot argue with his father or a Bariya can never question the things presented by a Patidar—were going. But these old values were bound to change with the introduction of Panchayati Raj because those people who were hitherto dominated would be in a majority and would be able to decide things at the village level, if not at the higher levels, as for instance in places like the Surat District in Gujarat where the Adivasis were in a majority.

Sri Desai expressed the confidence that the people in general would be better off economically and socially with the introduction of Panchayati Raj which stood for the principle of political and social equality. They would be in a better position to counter the established authority and the established structure of power.

Sri Athreya, speaking for a second time, took the last among the four topics suggested by the Chairman, namely, the Role of Panchayati Raj in an emergency and observed: "Ever since we won freedom, there has been an emergency in the country. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty,

it has been said and many of us behaved as if *eternal complacency is the privilege of liberty*. We forgot that time is the essence. We forgot that we either make time our friend or it turns our enemy. Added to the internal emergency, we have today an external emergency."

According to Sri Athreya, two things were important in an emergency: One was communication; people should know what was happening; and the other was mobilization of resources available—human and material. The most effective communication was face to face communication and this could be effected best by the Panchayati Raj scheme. Morale building was essentially the job of local leadership.

Sri Athreya further observed that the local unit—Panchayati Raj—could mobilize resources best. The steps taken and the slant given should be such as to capitalize on resources available in that area. Instead of vague phrases like "Give all that you can for the defence of the Motherland", the Panchayati Raj agency could make concrete appeals to relevant sections of the population—the farmer and the teacher, the housewife and the factory worker. Besides providing concrete direction, Panchayati Raj could also provide practical organization to mobilize local resources. Continuing, he said that in a national emergency when we hanged together or hanged separately, if energies were not to be dissipated, it was the Panchayati Raj that could bring home to us what was at stake and get the best response from us.

Continuing further Sri Athreya said: "Whatever the name, decentralized action has to go into play at this time of emergency. Who are the men who will be deputed to the job? How are we orienting them to the job? How are we making possible directed and dynamic action? We should perhaps think of 'camps' where bands of such men are trained on an accelerated basis. Pulling together in the same direction will be possible only when there is common conditioning."

Sri Athreya concluded by saying that today's challenge was an opportunity for India because we had never before

given aggressive thought to mobilizing the human and material resources in such a unified way. Panchayati Raj was a promising medium for getting high quality action in a short time.

The next speaker, *Sri R. K. Hooda*, thought that there was no difference at all between the philosophy of local self-government and Panchayati Raj. To him the objective of local government or Panchayati Raj was to enable the people to contribute their best to the life of the community by giving them an intimate and active participation in such administration. It was true, he said, that democracy might be working fairly well without local self-government but in such a case, the centres of administration were rather remote with the result that the people living in small communities, villages and elsewhere, did not feel intimately that they were active participants in the administration. He emphasized that it was with a view to giving these people a feeling of intimate and active participation in the administration, to enable them to contribute their best, local government or Panchayati Raj was envisaged. Looked at from this point of view, he observed, there was no difference between the concepts of Panchayati Raj and the philosophy of local self-government. Although Panchayati Raj had been existing for a long time, the present revival was mainly in the context of economic development. He thought it would be proper to give Panchayati Raj institutions not merely functions relating to economic development but also other functions, viz. revenue collection and administration of criminal justice. In this context, he drew attention to a minor problem arising particularly in Rajasthan, viz. that certain offences could be taken cognisance of both by the police and the nyaya panchayats. He wondered what should be done in cases where panchayats took cognisance first and they were also reported to the police later.

*Sri Hooda* then discussed the question of how to make all Panchayati Raj institutions effective in their functioning. He was of the view that Panchayati Raj institutions were not restrictive and regulative in the content of the

programme. He suggested that the persons who worked in these institutions, the executive machinery, the village level workers, the block development officers, etc. should be selected from among the people having a rural background so that they could appreciate their problems and the rural people had confidence in them. Another important point that he stressed was that, in order to secure the participation of the people in the government, the officials should have an important voice, for which they should know the local areas very well and had a rural background.

Discussing the problem of relations between the officials and the non-officials, *Sri Hooda* felt that there had to be some re-orientation in the attitude of the officials. They should try to work with the non-officials in a cordial manner.

*Sri Hooda* drew the attention of the House to the need for a continuous research study of the various problems that might arise in the functioning of Panchayati Raj institutions. He was of the opinion that the Evaluation Organization of the Government of India and similar machinery in the States should be closely associated with the universities and other centres of thinking so that these problems could be studied in a more detached fashion.

*Sri R.C. Prasad*, the next speaker, making some observations on the first question mentioned in the working paper, said that three different approaches to 'Panchayati Raj' had been made. There was, first, the approach of the theoreticians of communitarian society. According to them, Panchayati Raj was a completely different system from the system of local self-government. In Panchayati Raj there should be more emphasis on co-operation, conciliation, arbitration, and consensus in arriving at decisions.

The political scientists' approach was different from this. They regarded Panchayati Raj as only a new system of local self-government, a school of democracy, a bulwark of democracy, and was there in order to make democracy broad-based.

The administrators, viewed Panchayati Raj still differently—and that was the dominant approach at the moment—as an instrument of rural development.

In actual operation, however, these three approaches did not differ very much, in that the methods of conciliation and arbitration were still utilized as devices of bringing about settlement of disputes in the villages. At the same time, the Panchayat Courts had to follow the practices of the regular courts of law as enjoined by the statute. He, therefore, felt that there was not much difference between local self-government and the system of Panchayati Raj as was being practised in the country.

Sri Parasad then dealing with the second question said that it was very difficult to give a categorical answer to it. First of all it should be ascertained as to what was meant by self-sufficient unit in the case of the village panchayat. A village should not be considered as an isolated unit. It must be considered as part of the total arrangement of the country. Therefore, the talk of village self-sufficiency was very vague and misleading. It should be decided what was meant by village self-sufficiency, what was meant by a self-contained village. A related problem was the question of smaller versus larger panchayats. It was a very important question. To come, however, to any conclusion in this regard also was very difficult. Here also there were two different approaches. There were some who felt that one village (with of course its satellite hamlets) should form the area of a panchayat. There were others who felt that one village could not be an adequate area for a panchayat and therefore a few villages should be grouped together under one panchayat. A small panchayat could not even maintain its existence not to talk of undertaking development works. It was indeed a difficult question, and perhaps, therefore, each case should be considered on its merits.

Dealing with the third question, Sri Prasad said that it was true, that respect for age, authority and tradition was to some extent diminishing in the rural areas. But, that was a national phenomenon; it was not limited to the

village. Just as no one questioned parliamentary democracy on account of that diminutions so should the case for Panchayati Raj be not questioned on account of these diminutions. He thought the difficulty of the panchayat was, basically, the difficulty of democracy also. There was little difference between the problems of democracy and the problems of panchayat.

About the fourth question, the role of panchayats in the national emergency, Sri Prasad said that in Bihar there was in operation a system of Village Volunteer Force. Similar arrangements existed in some other States too. That was a very significant arrangement of rural police. The Village Volunteer Force, he felt, could be very well utilized in moments of emergencies. In the Village Volunteer Force, the country had, a ready-made arrangement, and, with appropriate adjustments, it could be utilized for civil defence and similar other purposes at the time of emergency created by the war.

The next speaker, *Dr. A.D. Pabaney*, discussing the question whether there was any difference between the concept of Panchayati Raj and the philosophy of local self-government, emphasized the necessity for clarity of our objectives in dealing with the question. He wondered whether we were interested in allowing the people to run and develop their own lives which were theirs to live. He defined local self-government as being concerned with delegation of powers to the local units, and Panchayati Raj as decentralization, where the Government divested itself completely of certain duties and responsibilities. More positively, it provided all kinds of opportunities for planning and growth at the local level and as a local responsibility.

Dealing with the question whether Gram Panchayats could function effectively as self-contained units, *Dr. Pabaney* looked at the problem from a different focus. He was of the opinion that it was a secondary matter; the primary question was whether the people should be allowed to make their own decisions about their own development. He further said that even Gram Swaraj, which was a Gandhian

concept, could be more fruitfully looked upon, as a question of self-determination by the village community. It was a question of who made the decision.

As regards the effect of the introduction of Panchayati Raj on the values of rural society, Dr. Pabaney observed that all societies would change and values might also change. He felt that the fundamental question regarding values was: who were the policy-makers that decide, and therefore whose values should prevail. It was possible that the bureaucrats and other intelligentsia with a westernized outlook might have a tendency to look upon the rural people through coloured glasses.

Pointing to one of the main findings of the Balwantray Mehta Study Team Report, namely that the Community Development Programmes had failed to evoke the participation of the people, Dr. Pabaney observed that the programmes were 'outside' programmes thought out by the westernized intelligentsia which did not coincide with the value system or aspirations of the people living in the rural areas. He agreed with the views expressed by Brig. Bal about the common man not liking the value system imposed by somebody from above. He warned that to the extent that we imposed our value system and programmes that were really not a part and parcel of the rural people's aspirations and values, there would be absence of a sense of belonging to the programmes by the rural population. So the major question was how people could come into their own and learn how to govern themselves.

Dr. Pabaney then cited some valuable experiences as a member of the Study Team (AVARD) that visited Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh to study Panchayati Raj. Referring to a point made by a previous speaker, namely, that the administrative innovations in the rural areas tended to confuse or even 'terrorise' the people, he mentioned that his experience in Rajasthan was that certain panchayats had actually showed a regression in their collection of taxes with the introduction of Panchayati Raj. In one village the budget of the panchayat fell from Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 200. He indicated that the people had accepted the

new legislation at the expense of the spirit of raising their own resources.

Narrating another example from Rajasthan, the speaker said that the people in a particular village had repaired an irrigation bund with their own efforts, but there was no mention of it in the Panchayat records. The villagers said that the repair of the bund was regularly done by them and was their work. When questioned, whether it was not the job of the Panchayat, they said, "No, what the Panchayat does is 'development work'." The unfortunate part of the situation was that such efforts of the people did not get recognition, while what was defined from outside as 'development' usually was recognized. Dr. Pabaney felt that it was necessary to look at the whole problem from the angle of the people themselves. There were a lot of activities in the rural areas which the villagers carried on but failed to get recognition because of the structure and framework within which they had to function. It seemed necessary therefore that we gave more and more recognition to what the people did, even though they might not fall within our schemes. Not to give such recognition, he said, might further demoralize the people, especially when the outside plans were now-a-days poured down with so much money and technical know-how that they might tend to weaken the strength of the people down below. The process needed to be reversed, he said.

Speaking about the growth of the community, Dr. Pabaney emphasized that it was to the extent that the community was able to raise itself and its resources, be able to make its own decisions and to demand from the administration the necessary aid in carrying out its decisions and plans that it would help to develop and strengthen the communities from below. Such was the spirit of Panchayati Raj.

Speaking for the second time, Sri K.C. Chheda discussed the question that was raised in the working paper viz.: What should be the nature of training to help officials and non-officials to understand other's mind? He discussed the nature of training under two aspects; regular training

and emergency training. As regards the former, he reiterated the views expressed earlier that the subject of Panchayati Raj should be introduced in the Schools and in the S.S.L.C. examinations so that it became the business of each and everybody to know about it and to make suggestions for its improvement.

As regards emergency training he grouped it under two categories—one for the officials and the other for the non-officials. As regards emergency training of officials, he emphasized that it should be the duty of the Collector and his immediate assistants to bring about the meetings of Sarpanchs and inform them not only what their rights were but also the importance of their rights. The Sarpanchs should be trained to give proper information to the revenue officials of income-tax and estate duty instead of merely signing the paper—which they might do merely out of a sense of importance. The Collectors and other officials should give proper information to the non-officials as well as to the officials of other departments. The Collector should make frequent tours and get acquainted with all aspects of village life, particularly so if he hails from some other state. It was necessary that the Collector and other officials had a thorough understanding of the philosophy of the Panchayati Raj institutions and their problems before they could make the concept of Panchayati Raj understood by the people.

Dealing with the training of officials, Sri Chheda pointed out that the officials who got elected and became officials like Sarpanchs should not fall a victim to party politics but should forget their party affiliation after they were elected and discharged their duties impartially.

*Sri N.V. Gadgil*, winding up the discussions, said that the real object of Panchayati Raj was to make as many citizens of this country as possible realize their sense of responsibility under a democratic set-up. In a democracy the citizens must be associated with the formulation of policies as well as with the execution of the same. It was in connection with the latter that Panchayati Raj had been established and through the working of Panchayat, the object of associating the people with the execution of nationally accepted

policy was assured. The main thing was that this had to be done in the right spirit of democratic procedure and democratic outlook.

Sri Gadgil observed that since 1870 more or less people had come to look upon election as an instrument of popular education. It was not that the entire rural side was absolutely ignorant of democratic values or procedure but during these 80 or 90 years, apart from the last three general elections under the new Constitution, there had been elections for the Councils, for the Assemblies, for the local boards or the municipalities and corporations. In a way, some sort of democracy was functioning but it was given full scope by the Constitution adopted in 1950. During the last 15 years, at any rate, the villagers were not what they were 20 years ago. There was change in their diet, change in the dress, change in the form of cultural affinity and change in the manner in which the language was spoken. The common man for whom some sympathy was shown here was no longer in existence. The fact was that the villagers now did not talk about the season or about their agricultural activities, but about what was happening in China. They knew more about international politics than their forefathers did or even they themselves did know about 20 years ago. In a sense, the rural peasant or the rural citizen was politically much wiser than what he was 25 years ago, thanks to All India Radio and newspapers and the motor transport reaching the farthest corner of the Taluka or the village in the valley. The life had undergone a tremendous change which could even be termed as a revolutionary change.

Elaborating his observations he said that during 15 years after Independence the number of newspapers in Maharashtra had gone up from 425 to 1270. That was the return for the last year and out of a population of 5 crores and a few lakhs, about 70 lakhs was educated in the sense that they could read and write. The number of readers of these newspapers was calculated at 37 lakhs. Five dailies with a total circulation of 4 lakhs were being read practically through every village. Most of the important villages had libraries. Library movement had also got considerable

impetus during the last 15 years. Therefore, in a sense, the old ignorance and prejudices and general resistance to new things had been more or less liquidated. This was not to say that they were completely modernized as the sophisticated man from Bombay or Poona or any other industrial town but it would not be wrong to say that the old mentality to resist new things had considerably diminished.

There were certain areas which hitherto were backward but even there things were improving. To give an example of some areas from Punjab, in Hissar, in 1952-53 the income of the area which had come under irrigation was about a crore and 90 lakhs of rupees. Last year it was 11 crores and 67 lakhs. Everything had changed. The climate had changed. The old camel was being replaced. Everything had changed except the peculiar tone of the *Jat* while he spoke Haryana or Punjabi. They listened the radio. They would not bring wheat to the market; they would discuss after having heard the daily news. Then they also calculated. They were not as clever as the speculator on the exchange, but in another 10 years, they would be as clever as anybody else. In a sense, the man in the village was exactly like a man in an industrial town basically. He was craving for the same things as much. He had taken to modern ways and so far as villages near a big town were concerned, half the population within the big village at least had contacts with the life in the nearby town for 3 days in a week, if not more. The villager was thus not so much interested in the administration of the village itself as he was interested in a bigger participation in a bigger area like the district or the State or even a little more interested in the international affairs. However when we considered the rural population for whom really the Panchayati Raj was conceived, in putting the Panchayati Raj acts throughout the country, this factor had not been given sufficient recognition.

Sri Gadgil continuing his observations further said that the old traditions and values had already gone. The landless labour which was not mobile in old days, was now very much mobile. Transport system had improved. The big landlords

were more or less liquidated and the dignity with which they moved above in their respective jurisdiction was also gone. It was the peasants who grew cash crops, sugarcane, cotton or oilseeds who were dominating these panchayats. That was a role which one might call in good old terms bourgeois. It was different. It was not hereditary. But it was a ruling class that was coming up in India and this was true of the whole country. If one watched the party in power continuously for the last 15 years, one would find that all places of advantage were filled either by the members of the party or their relatives or brothers-in-law. In a limited sense a ruling class had come into existence.

Sri Gadgil therefore expressed the opinion that if we wanted democracy to function, we had to consider what kind of Panchayati Raj would be actually in operation. Today the development of Government at the village level had come to be linked up with the Centre through the States. There was no activity specially for any Panchayati Raj which could be related to any activity at the State level. Further industrialization was going abreast. The factory owner in the Panchayat jurisdiction would not allow the product to be taxed and if it was not taxed, there would be no resources for financing any developmental schemes. The new Zila Parishad in Maharashtra would see that the Chairman got Rs. 700 a month and the Chairman of the Finance, Education, Health Committees got Rs. 300 to 500 each besides travelling and dearness allowances. They were asked for still more. So far as legislation with regard to Panchayati Raj in Maharashtra were concerned, the net result was that there was less sense of responsibility in the minds of the Ministers in the Government. Because when anybody approached them for more funds, they asked them to manage within the resources given to them. That was one aspect of this. In Punjab the Ministers openly said: "This amount has been given to you, rightly or wrongly, you should manage with it." This aspect had to be considered by those who were anxious to make Panchayati Raj experiment a successful affair.

Sri Gadgil further observed that there was no self-contained village because the world economy had become

one. Indian economy was one economy. In the good old days it used to be said that a village was self-contained and peaceful. This old isolation had completely disappeared and the village life had come into the main current. The motivation was the same impulse. Our village outlook was in complete accord with the national outlook. So in the light of the new data, the conception of Panchayati Raj should be revived. Moreover, landless labourers were there and the old aristocrats had been wiped out. Those people who believed in pure economic outlook had come into prominence and the Panchayati Raj legislation should take into account their ideals and aspirations.

Expressing his views about training of official and non-officials, Sri Gadgil said that it had to be given and he was glad to find that many States had made provision for it. In Punjab there were two centres in which continual refresher courses were given. These things should be done in a manner in which the sense of responsibility of the individual citizen would grow without detriment to the sense of responsibility of the Minister in the State or in the Centre. The main objective must be to equip the citizen for adequately discharging his responsibility as a citizen of the entire nation; and in emergency, such as today, the village panchayat could do quite a lot; it could act as an agent of the national policy of taking over surplus as well as distribution to the last unit of necessities and other things. It could at the same time prevent waste; unnecessary surplus labour could be released for work in national concerns or in defence production or where the material was suitable for joining the fighting ranks. Another thing was that if in a city there was a difficulty, it could be controlled because we had police arrangement, radio and wireless, but in the far off villages, it took time, while in the meantime the anti-social element tried to take advantage of the crisis. Therefore, if the village panchayats were well directed and worked with a certain plan, the law and order problem could also be easier than what it was today. Sri Gadgil said that we had the division and the brigade and the regiment and the platoon and the squad. The village was the squad which must function in accordance

with the national policy in respect of purchase, distribution and gearing up our entire industrial organization to the production of war material without which we cannot succeed in the present war.

Prof. Menon thanked Sri N.V. Gadgil both on his behalf and on behalf of the Institute for having kindly agreed to preside over the Conference deliberations and for the valuable remarks he made.

WORKING PAPER

## PANCHAYATI RAJ

A. P. BARNABAS

It is suggested in the following paper that the Conference may, perhaps, give priority for the consideration of four important aspects of Panchayati Raj. They are:

- (1) The Philosophy of Local Self-Government
- (2) The Structure of the Panchayati Raj set-up
- (3) The Pattern of Staffing in Panchayati Raj, and
- (4) The Relations Between Officials and Non-officials in Panchayati Raj

### *The Philosophy of Local Self-Government:*

It is admitted by all who believe in democracy that a democratic form of government in a country must be sustained by a system of vigorous local self-governing institutions. Lord Bryce in his *Modern Democracies* laid it down that "the best school of democracy and the best guarantee for its success is the practice of local self-government". If democracy has to function vigorously, as many citizens as possible must be encouraged and provided with opportunities to take a continuing interest in its activities and problems. J.S. Mill supported local self-government because it was a readier method of public education than taking part in national affairs in a very limited way. Lord Ripon's Resolution on Local Self-Government of 18th May, 1882, which laid the foundations of local self-government in India said:

"It is not primarily with a view to improvement in administration that this measure is put forward and supported. It is chiefly designed as an instrument of political and popular education."

Besides, the existence of a local self-government system prevents undue increase in the powers of the bureaucracy over the community. In the absence of a local self-government, the business of the Government is left very much in the hands of appointed officers and *between* them and the people the gap is widened. The existence of local self-government provides for

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a dispersal of power. The need for administrative efficiency too demands in some cases a decentralised system of administration.

For our present purposes, it is not necessary to trace the growth of the idea of local government in India. It is sufficient to say that Panchayats are as old as Indian history and have always exercised a significant influence in the life of the village. However, here we must take note of a very basic change. In the past, government was a local concept for almost the entire affairs of life. Village communities were self-sufficient units. The objectives of community life were simpler and within the resources available to the majority of villages. In this situation, the village organisation was not only an ideal but also a practical governmental unit. Today, however, technological developments have made the viability of very small units of government an impossibility.

The significance of Panchayati Raj is to be seen not only in that it seeks to build up a system of local government, however well organised and decentralised it may be, but in that it seeks to tackle the problem, at the grass-root level, of building up democracy, and of mobilising the entire potential manpower resources of our country for purposes of economic and social progress. Panchayati Raj has introduced a new concept of local government which will provide the much needed strong impulse to democracy and people's development by being allied with the processes of Community Development. The present programme of Panchayati Raj in fact owes its origin to the report of the Balwantray Mehta Study Team on Community Projects and the N.E.S. The Team ascribed the comparative absence of public enthusiasm in C.D. to the non-association of the people and their representatives in the planning and execution of development schemes. Every development Block had indeed an advisory committee, but this had no roots amongst the people and no powers and responsibilities. All planning was done by the Block staff, who were responsible for the proper and timely utilisation of the Block funds. The advisory committees merely assented to the proposals placed before them. Such a situation was not conducive to the creation of a sense of responsibility amongst the people and, according to the Team, this was the main reason for the wearing away of the enthusiasm which was initially displayed when the Community Projects Administration was first started. It therefore recommended that all development in a Block area should be entrusted to representative institutions capable of evoking local interest and initiative and the Block staff should be placed at the disposal of these institutions. The Team also recommended that these representative institutions should be provided with sufficient funds and sources of revenue to enable them to discharge their new duties.

Panchayati Raj was thus introduced to involve people in increasing measure in developmental activities and to ensure their maximum participation in the process of democracy. The Third Five Year Plan also reiterates this in the following words: "The Primary object of Panchayati Raj is to enable the people of each area to achieve intensive and continuous development in the interest of the entire population. The elected representatives should be encouraged to value the development of the Panchayati Raj as offering new avenues of service to the people rather than opportunities for the exercise of authority."

In addition to associating the people with the programmes and enriching it with non-official common sense and detailed local knowledge, the Panchayati Raj system will also extend the scope for developing additional leadership in the country. It will provide an opportunity for local men of acumen, integrity and experience to give social service and eventually lead the area. This can therefore be a most valuable training ground for the State and the Union legislatures.

Most of the States in India have already introduced the Panchayati Raj system of administration and development and the remaining States will do so shortly. This is a vital step in the building up of the right relations between the individual and his community through introduction of self-management of problems of his community, a sense of participation in his society and the political education of the villager in the citizenship of his country. It is also conceived as a method for establishment of local self-governing agencies for the governments above, in order to vitalise and expand the machinery of public administration for the purpose of the enormously expanded tasks of a welfare government in working out a planned economy.

Some questions that could be discussed are:

- (1) Is there a difference between the philosophy of local self-government and the concept of Panchayati Raj?
- (2) In view of the facts that the villages are no longer self-contained and self-sufficient units, can Gram Panchayats function effectively?
- (3) Among the cherished social values of the rural society are respect for age, authority and tradition. Will the introduction of Panchayati Raj change these values? If so, what would be the effects on the rural society?

## II

### *The Structure:*

The Panchayati Raj scheme has now been implemented in full in nine States, and the others will do so shortly. All of

them have generally followed the idea of a three-tier structure of local self-governing bodies from the village to the district, the bodies being organically linked up, as was suggested by Balwantray Mehta Committee. While the broad pattern could be said to be uniform, there are variations in different States. This was to be expected in a country with such vast diversities.

The basic unit in Panchayati Raj is the village. There are two organisations at the village level—The Gram Sabha and the Gram Panchayat. The Gram Sabha consists of all voters to the Panchayat in some States and in others of all the adult residents. The major function of the Gram Sabha is to elect the Panchayat. In some States it considers or sanctions the Panchayat budget and in others it draws the programmes and reviews the progress.

There has been some concern over the difficulties experienced in getting any audience at all to these meetings. A committee has been set up under the chairmanship of Sri R.R. Diwakar to study the working of the Gram Sabhas.

The Village Panchayat is organised on the basis of population in most States. The number of members, except in Bihar<sup>1</sup>, is generally dependant on the population. The variation is from a minimum of four in Delhi to a maximum of 31 in U.P. In most States the number varies between 5-15. Except in Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, the elections are by secret ballot.

The functions to be discharged by the Gram Panchayat are manifold. Sanitation, maintenance of public works, primary education, promotion of agriculture, cottage industries, co-operation, watch and ward, registration of births and deaths are some of the duties assigned to the Panchayats in different States. Community development in all States is the responsibility of the Gram Panchayat. The share of land revenue in some States, grants from the government, local taxes which it can levy and income from fisheries, forests, ferries etc. are the sources from which the income of the Panchayat accrues. Paid full-time secretaries are functioning in almost all the States.

The next tier in most States is known as the Panchayat Samiti<sup>2</sup>, which functions at the level of the Block. In Gujarat and Mysore, the area covered is that of a taluk. In some States (A.P., Bihar, Orissa, Gujarat, U.P., Rajasthan) the presidents of the Gram Panchayats lying within the jurisdiction of the Panchayat are *ex officio* members of the said Panchayat. In M.P. and Punjab, the panchas elect a fixed number of members

1. The number of members in Bihar is fixed.

2. The nomenclature differs in some states (e.g. Khestra Samiti in U.P., Taluka Development Board in Mysore, Anchalik Panchayat in Assam etc.).

to the Panchayat Samiti. In Maharashtra also the 'panchas' elect the members to the Panchayat Samitis, but only the 'sar-panchas' are eligible to be elected. In Mysore and Assam the elections are direct. In most States the members of the legislative bodies and Parliament residing within the area are either associate or full members. There is provision for co-option of representatives of co-operative societies, scheduled castes, tribes and women. The B.D.O. is the executive secretary in almost all the States.

The main sphere of activity of the Panchayat Samiti is community development. That is to assist the Gram Panchayats working within its jurisdiction. There is need for a clearer definition of the functions to be performed by the Panchayat Samiti. The Block budget is the main financial resource of the Panchayat Samiti. In some States they are empowered to levy taxes. In Maharashtra the Panchayat Samiti depends on the Zila Parishad concerned for its finances. In view of the fact that the Panchayat Samiti is the unit through which major aspects of the Community Development Programme are carried out, the Panchayat Samiti could be said to be the most important unit in the Panchayati Raj scheme.

The Statutory body working at the District level is the Zila Parishad<sup>3</sup>. In all States, except in Maharashtra, the Zila Parishad is formed of the chairmen of the Panchayat Samitis. At present the electoral system usually is built around an interlocking membership of the tier structure of Panchayati Raj, and thus is based upon indirect elections for higher levels. In Maharashtra the members are elected directly. M.L.As., M.L.Cs., and M.Ps. are either associate or full members in all States except Maharashtra. There is provision for co-option of various categories of members in most States (Scheduled Castes, Tribes, women, co-operative society representatives, Education and Social workers etc.). By and large the function of the Zila Parishad is supervisory in nature. They are also to co-ordinate the work of the Blocks in the district. In Maharashtra and Gujarat the Zila Parishad has greater powers, functions, and is more important than the Block in the execution of the programmes. Except in these two States, the Zila Parishads have limited financial resources. Generally they are to utilise the Central and State Government funds and grants. In a few States, they levy taxes.

It is too early to evaluate the different types of structures that have been evolved in the different States. However, some questions which may be discussed are:

(1) How can the Gram Sabha be activated so that the public

3. Here too the nomenclature differs in different States.

could participate effectively in the Panchayati Raj affairs?

- (2) What are the merits and demerits of inter-locking of the tiers by indirect elections?
- (3) If functions are to be allocated to the different tiers on the basis of the resources available, what would be a rational distribution of functions among the three tiers?
- (4) Should supervision be by one tier of the Panchayati Raj system of the next subordinate or should the general supervision be by an independent organisation?

### III

#### *The Staffing Pattern:*

The structure and pattern of staffing of Panchayati Raj institutions so far evolved falls into two broad categories. The first category embraces States like Assam, Madras, Madhya Pradesh, Mysore, Orissa and Punjab. In all these States the staff working under these bodies belong to State cadres, but their services have been placed at the disposal of Panchayati Raj bodies who have only day-to-day administrative control over them, ultimate powers of disciplinary control, recruitment, promotion, transfer etc. remaining with the State Government. In the second category fall States like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan. In Gujarat, a State Panchayat Service distinct from the State Service has been created and the State Government allocates a certain number of gazetted and non-gazetted officers of the State to the State Panchayat Service. The Maharashtra Government has decided to constitute a District Service Class III and a District Service Class IV. For other posts like Chief Executive Officer and Deputy Chief Executive Officer of Panchayat Samiti, officers of the State cadres will be deputed. In Andhra Pradesh, posts under the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samiti are classified into three cadres: State cadre, District cadre and Block cadre. The Secretary to Zila Parishad, the B.D.O. and Extension Officers belong to the State cadre. The office staff of the Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samitis, V.L.Ws. etc. belong to the District cadre, and Class IV staff to the Block cadre. In Rajasthan also, a Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Service for V.L.Ws, Gram Sevaks, primary school teachers etc. has been created. As for Bihar, the State Government is still in the process of evolving the structure of services for Panchayati Raj.

Regarding the method of recruitment of personnel, the old system of Public Service Commissions and Departmental

Committees etc., continues in the States falling in the first category. Their employees are sent on deputation to Panchayati Raj bodies. In the case of second category of States, different systems prevail. Recruitment to posts like the Chief Executive Officer of Zila Parishad and Panchayat Samitis, Extension Officers etc., which are borne on the State cadre, is made through the Public Service Commission. The rest of the staff, Class III and Class IV, is usually recruited through Selection Committee at the district level with which the Chairman of the Zila Parishad and the Collector is associated. In Maharashtra, there is a District Selection Board for each District and a Divisional Selection Board for each Division. The former consists of the Collector, the non-official member of the Divisional Selection Board and a Government Officer. The latter is composed of the Commissioner of the Division, the Head of the Department in the Division and a non-official. The appointing authority for Class III and IV officers and servants is the Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad but appointments have to be made out of the lists of the candidates selected by the District Selection Board. In Rajasthan, recruitment to Class III posts included in the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Service is done by a State level Selection Committee consisting of ten members appointed by the State Government and the Pramukh of the district concerned.

In States where Panchayati Raj Service has been established, disciplinary control vests in the elected head of the relevant Panchayati Raj institution but there is a provision in the rules for appeal against his orders. In Maharashtra, the Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad exercises disciplinary control over the members of the District Service Class III and Class IV. In States where staffing of Panchayati Raj institutions is done by deputing officers of the State services, the disciplinary control of the Chief Executive Officer or of the elected head extends only to day-to-day administrative control and minor punishments like warning, withholding of increments etc. The most potent way in which the elected head of the Panchayat Samiti and the Zila Parishad exercises ultimate control is their authority to write the confidentials of the Chief Executive Officer. The confidentials of the other members of the Panchayati Raj Service under both the systems are, however, recorded by the Chief Executive Officer.

It is thus clear that there is no one staffing pattern and the matter is in an experimental stage. The position at the Village Panchayat level is more confused. In some States, the Panchayat Secretary is a Government servant; in others he is paid by the Panchayat or the Panchayats he serves. In a few States his salary is shared between the Panchayat and the

State Government. There is also no definite insistence on proper qualifications, quality and training. Apart from the Panchayat Secretary, there are other Government functionaries like the V.L.W., the Patwari, the Chowkidar etc., operating at the village level. Most of them, except the V.L.W., often operate independently of the Panchayat. The relationship of all these Government functionaries with the Panchayat has to be clearly laid down and enforced. There is thus a need for a rationalization of the various posts and for establishing the control of the Panchayat over them. Sooner or later, the various Government functionaries at the Panchayat level and employees of the Panchayat itself will have to be fitted into either the Block or District cadre or a separate cadre will have to be created for them.

The question of control over the technical personnel also needs consideration as at present there is a divided loyalty between heads of the technical departments and the local Panchayati Raj body. The advice of the technical Head of the Department, whether at the district level or at the State level, should preferably be given to the Panchayati Raj institutions rather than be directed to a particular officer working under that institution.

As the Panchayati Raj bodies need sympathetic and purposeful guidance in many matters, the question of supervision and guidance also requires careful consideration. Punjab has constituted a Directorate of Supervision and Guidance with twelve teams of experts to go round the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads to advise them on the spot and to solve their difficulties and doubts. In Andhra Pradesh, the Collector is likely to be taken out of the Zila Parishad and vested with the duties and powers of a Deputy Development Commissioner in terms of supervision, inspection etc. of Panchayati Raj bodies. Similarly in Maharashtra, the Commissioner, the Collector, the S.D.O. and the Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad are all being made responsible for inspection and supervision of Panchayati Raj bodies. It is therefore necessary that the higher technical and administrative services be built into a coherent, integrated and effective machinery at the various levels providing effective guidance and advice to Panchayati Raj bodies. Care has also to be taken to provide adequate avenues of promotion for the various services not only within the Panchayati Raj system but also to higher State and all-India cadres. Some of the reports of the P.E.O. have stressed that there are technical officers who, on appointment as B.D.O. or extension officer, regard their chances of promotion within the Department as being adversely affected. These officers generally feel that period of deputation is an extremely unpleasant experience outside their career pattern and one which must be got over

as quickly as possible. Moreover, in some States there are B.D.Os. from the revenue department who, to be promoted, must return to their parent department. Consequently, all their training and experience on this job is lost to Panchayati Raj. While the creation of the Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad services may solve most of these problems, the career prospects of such a service will have to be made sufficient to attract entrants of calibre.

The questions that may be discussed are:

- (1) Does the collector have sufficient functions to justify his continuance with the establishment of the Panchayati Raj?
- (2) What are the advantages and disadvantages of the two types of systems of staffing pattern that are being followed in different States (deputation by State vs. control by Zila Parishad or Panchayat Samiti) with reference to: (a) Security, (b) Promotion, (c) Facilities (Medical, Retirement, Housing) etc.
- (3) Would it be advisable to develop a new all-India service cadre for all staff working in Panchayati Raj institutions?

#### IV

##### *Relations between Officials and Non-officials:*

One of the major or the novel features thrown up by the establishment of the Panchayati Raj is the new type of relations between the officials and the non-officials. The officials are coming into contact with the non-officials not as rulers and patrons but as persons responsible for executing the wishes of the people. This drastic change has naturally created a situation in which many adjustments are necessary.

Before the emergence of Panchayati Raj a feeling seemed to prevail among the B.D.Os. that the role that they would have to play would be small once the Panchayat Samitis were established. There was an element of anxiety, fear and insecurity. (One B.D.O. took a month's leave during the general elections as the President of his Panchayat Samiti was a contestant for the legislative assembly. He was afraid that the President might accompany him on his tours in the jeep and use the opportunity for the election campaign.) As the Panchayat Samitis are beginning to emerge and function, the feeling among the B.D.O.'s seems to be one of reassurance in the definite role that they have to play. One B.D.O. said, "I can get more things done. On the basis of the Panchayat Samiti resolutions I can now write to my superior officials to explain delays or non-performance of some functions". However, Panchayati Raj is

still in an emerging situation. One gets the feeling that a clear picture has yet to emerge with regard to the relations between the officials and non-officials. The policy among the officials seems to be one of "watch and wait". It might be of interest to note that the earliest States to introduce Panchayati Raj legislation (Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan) have had different types of experiences. In Rajasthan the adjustments seem to have been satisfactory but not in Andhra Pradesh.

In discussing the relations between officials and non-officials, it may be useful to concentrate on the following relationships:

- (a) The Panchayat Secretary and the Sarpanchas.
- (b) The B.D.O. and the Panchayat Samiti President.
- (c) The Secretary of Zila Parishad, the Collector, the District Officers and the President of the Zila Parishad.

What should be the relationship?

"Ideally the relationship should be one of popular leadership and the interpretation of the popular will by the elected or co-opted representatives advising and counselling the officials with whom must rest the execution of the policy formally decided" (Mussoorie Seminar, p. 57). The suggestion indicates a water-tight division in which the officials advise and the non-officials execute. The report itself recognises that this is not very practical in the day-to-day working of the system. The report itself indicates two possible extremes, the role the officials might play. There are those who do not have the courage or the sense of responsibility to tell the elected body that what they are doing is wrong. The other type is the one who imposes his views on every matter and might even use dubious means to achieve his end.

On the other hand the non-officials might wield power for helping themselves or a particular group (area, caste, relatives or friends). At times the non-officials have tried to supervise and control the administrative and executive machinery. There are also cases where the non-officials are satisfied to be elected as Presidents and let the officials carry on.

The areas in which the possibilities of misunderstanding and conflict might arise are the following:

- (1) Interference by the non-officials in the day-to-day functioning of the administrative machinery.
- (2) When disciplinary action is to be taken against subordinates.<sup>4</sup> (Do the non-officials sometimes

<sup>4</sup> One subordinate who was transferred for some fault resigned and later became President of the Panchayat Samiti of the Block from which he was transferred.

support the subordinates even when the facts are not clearly known to them?

- (3) Transport. Do the non-officials requisition the jeep so often as to hinder effective touring of the officials?
- (4) Are discretionary powers so clearly defined that areas of operation are clearly demarcated between officials and non-officials?
- (5) There is always a problem of temperamental adjustments between two individuals, whatever the relationship in which they might come together.

The present situation would indicate that there is need for the following:

- (1) Development of an atmosphere of mutual respect for each other. The wide gap that might exist between educational levels of the officials and non-officials should be borne in mind. (While the Panchayat Secretary is a matriculate, the Sarpanch might be illiterate.)
- (2) A clear-cut demarcation of duties between officials and non-officials. At present the responsibilities cannot be assigned with regard to performance or non-performance of various functions. It may not be possible to legislate on this aspect. Some attempt must be made to develop conventions by which the functions get demarcated.
- (3) A training programme in which both officials and non-officials are brought together and given an understanding of the new set-up and their respective roles.

Some of the questions that could be discussed are:

- (1) How can a sense of responsibility be built up among officials and non-officials?
- (2) To what extent should staff disciplinary powers be accorded to local authorities?
- (3) How is the working of the Panchayati Raj affected by giving 'salaries' to the Presidents of the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads?
- (4) What should be the nature of training to help the officials and non-officials to understand each other's role?

## PANCHAYATI RAJ AND TREE PLANTATIONS

C. A. R. BHADRAN

### Introductory

Mahatma Gandhi had occasion to observe that an ideal Indian village would be so conditioned that the villagers could procure all their daily needs and requirements of materials like thatch, bamboos, fuel-wood, grazing etc., from within a radius of five miles. But it is well known that over vast tracts of our country, for example the Gangetic plains, such facilities do not exist. In fact, only a comparatively small proportion of our villages are located close to sources of such products viz., our forests. And the latter are far from evenly distributed over the land. Even otherwise, the more productive of our constituted forests are very inadequate in extent and very far from rich in content, compared to the needs of our commerce and industry based on timber and other forest products. In other words, the rural needs of forest produce can be secured to the people in an adequate measure only if tree and shrub plantations of suitable species are raised in rural areas themselves in a manner wholly complementary to agricultural production.

### Need for tree plantations

It has to be recognised clearly, as observed by the Madras Government<sup>1</sup> that "Tree plantation is a multi-purpose facility designed to supply fuel, fodder, green leaf manure, timber and many other domestic and agricultural requirements of village people. It is a means of ensuring that all incultivable land is put to best use without any waste. It is a means of building up capital assets for the village". It is also a means of soil and moisture conservation and site improvement.

### Lessons from 'Vanamahotsava'

Thanks to the popularisation of the idea of tree planting through a decade and more of the *Vanamahotsava* campaign, it is hardly necessary any longer to stress the need for raising tree plantations in all parts of the country. But *Vanamahotsava* has also pointed out that without systematic organisation, planned action and necessary provision of fund, all the propaganda and enthusiasm alone will not lead to sustained efforts or

1. Government of Madras compilation for the first meeting of its Panchayat Development Consultative Committee on Production Programmes.

satisfactory results,—in this essentially long term endeavour. This is clearly seen from the annual statistics of numbers of seedlings planted and number survived at the end of the year,—from 1950. The survivals were as low as 30% and scarcely more than 60% in any year. And it is more than likely that many of these survivals did perish in subsequent years.

Thus, *Vanamahotsava* has shown the way; but improved methods are necessary to build usefully on it. It would be pertinent to quote here Dr. Ram Subhag Singh, Union Minister for Agriculture<sup>2</sup>. "There is vast scope for undertaking tree plantations on road sides, canal banks, bunds of tanks, *Ahars* and *Pynes*, boundaries of large fields, along railway lines etc. It will be worthwhile undertaking a special drive for tree plantations in all such places utilising the available facilities to the maximum possible extent. For instance, in areas covered by the Intensive Agricultural District Programme (Package Programme) it should be possible to organise such a drive without much difficulty. In the areas covered by Community Development Blocks, the Gram Sewaks and other functionaries could be asked to set the pace by undertaking tree plantations themselves and arranging to look after the plants with care until they attain maturity. In all places, the programme can succeed only through the active co-operation of the villagers. Panchayats, as guardians of the welfare of the villagers, could play a vital rôle in furthering the campaign in their areas by giving wide publicity to the usefulness of trees and actively promoting tree plantations wherever possible". The Madras Government has given more positive direction to these ideas by issuing various Government Orders under the Panchayat Act, thus enabling the Panchayats to take to tree plantations actively on all vested lands.

### THE THIRD FIVE YEAR PLAN AND VILLAGE TREE PLANTATIONS

#### (a) Agricultural Grant activities of Panchayats

The Third Five Year Plan provides a two-pronged approach to this objective. Various categories of village common and waste lands now vest in the village Panchayats and Panchayat Unions: further, these bodies are also permitted to manage and regulate the use of certain other village lands. Among lands so vested in them are all unreserved forests, grazing grounds, burning and burial ghats, cattle and cart stands, village commons and all other classes of unoccupied land in the village. Also vested in the Panchayats may be all public water courses, springs, reservoirs, tanks, wells and other water works with their

2. Government of India booklet on vanamahotsava, July, 1-7-1962.

adjoining lands (not otherwise controlled by Government). In other words, extensive sites and all the local water resources are now available to the Panchayats, besides funds for undertaking tree planting as a major item of constructive work. It would be the duty of the Panchayat executive authority to ensure proper utilisation of these vested or entrusted properties and resources for the common benefit of the village. There should be a positive approach to this welfare activity, availing themselves of the free hand given to them to raise fuel and other useful trees and shrubs. Panchayats could also plant trees on bunds and foreshores of minor irrigation tanks etc., which for purposes of management might, however, be vested in Panchayat Unions. To provide for systematic work, the Village Agricultural Production Plans should specifically include programmes for tree and shrub planting and the agricultural grant (whether on a matching or on a non-matching basis) should include provision of funds for the purpose. For instance the model Agricultural Grant Allocation Plan in the Madras State sets apart Rs. 27,000 to each Panchayat Union for a five-year period, requiring that the amount should be matched by a Panchayat contribution of Rs. 13,500. From this amount the Panchayat may incur two-thirds expenditure on initial (non-recurring) works like purchase of seedlings, preparation of site etc., and the rest on recurring items like watering, watching etc. In distributing the grant among the constituent Panchayats, the Panchayat Unions may adopt such equitable principles as will ensure economy in expenditure and at the same time encourage Panchayats which are active in raising tree plantations.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Forest Department Scheme of Farm Forestry*

The second line of Plan activity in this respect would refer to the Forest Department scheme of "Farm Forestry". It is significant that in the country's forest development plan, the largest single allocation is for this scheme. The objective is the establishment of tree crops in contiguous or large blocks of village lands not put to any other specific use, so as to meet the fuel, fodder, etc. needs of the villages. The costs are met, wholly or partly, from the provision under the State Forest Plan. In some States (as in Madras), the Forest Department has been entrusted with full responsibility for forming the plantations, establishing them (in the first two years) and then transferring them to the Panchayats for further maintenance, management and utilisation. The Forest Department tackles blocks of 50 acres or more in extent, and leaves smaller areas and all other sites to the Panchayat for planting trees under its own programme. The

3. Government of Madras, *op. cit.*

work done by the Forest Department, Madras, in the first two years of the Third Plan has proved very promising and some of the District Development Councils have advocated its extended implementation in the State and on a larger scale. In some other States, the Forest Department has undertaken to raise nursery seedlings and planting stock for supplying to the Panchayats; but the actual raising of plantations and their after-care is left entirely to the Panchayats.

#### *Tree Planting on private holdings*

A line of action which Panchayats could actively encourage involves systematic tree planting by individual families on every possible site in their private holdings. It has been computed that if every household in Tanjavur (a Package Plan district) planted two bamboo clumps in its back-yard (a readily practicable suggestion), the district could support its own (economically viable) paper plant! Here the Panchayats can assist the individual by having regular plans drawn up, by ensuring that they are adhered to, by supplying planting material and by affording technical guidance. It is even suggested by some District Development Councils that a small subsidy should be given to the ryot for every tree successfully planted by him.

#### *Role of Panchayats in Tree planting*

Among the schemes suggested under "Agricultural Grants", first place is rightly accorded "to raising Panchayat plantations for fuel, fodder, manures, fruit and shade trees".<sup>4</sup> The necessity for "initial preparation before money can be spent" on the planting programme is also stressed. It is also remarked that "there is a tendency for majority of the Panchayats to go in for fruit plants. This would no doubt give economic benefits to the Panchayats. But development of local manurial, etc. resources has also got to be provided for". . . . "The Panchayats are being advised to reserve 20 to 25 per cent of waste lands, not quite suitable for fruit trees, for raising fuel and green leaf yielding trees". Some District Development Councils have also recognised that fruit plantations cannot be raised without watering facilities. In other words, the plantation effort must be diversified, so that the varied crops will (in due course) yield all varieties of forest and tree products which are all essential for the well-being of the village community. This would also ensure a rational allocation of the available lands.

#### *Choice of Species for planting*

The selection of species will also be a matter of considerable import. While in many localities the locally known species

4. Government of Madras, *op. cit.*

might prove to be the most dependable there is the fact that many exotics establish themselves readily grow fast and yield large returns of produce. For instance, on sites where only an indigenous scrub of no particular value persisted for decades, *Eucalyptus* hybrid or cashewnut has been found very promising. In fact, the introduction of suitable species of *Eucalyptus* on an extensive scale all over the country is strongly indicated, for its value as fuel, industrial wood and for its medicinal essential oil. Again, *Casuarina* has become a common fuel species for the villager to plant in the barren coastal sands and even inland in the South. *Poinciana alata* put out as live fence posts or *Glyricidia maculata* planted along hedges yield valuable green leaf manure.

#### Tree Planting Techniques

It may be easily assumed that anyone can plant trees and no special skill is needed for this work. But improved planting techniques are of great practical importance as also timely attention to details of work (which will be possible only under separate expert supervision and responsibility). It must be appreciated clearly that the result achieved in the formation (first) year will mean so much for the success (or otherwise) of the plantation ultimately. For instance, *Babul* (*Acacia arabica*) can put up with some water logging; and so, is well suited for afforesting tank beds liable to short periods of inundation during the rainy season. But if the small seedlings are given a better start by planting them on small mounds (formed by heaping the soil at each planting site), an impressive and healthy plantation, quite 4' tall, would catch the eye at the end of the first year itself. But were this little care not given, the plants would remain stunted and scarcely noticeable and might even wither away before the next growing season. Further, particularly in arid areas (which constitute more than two-thirds of our land) two factors inhibit tree growth seriously—one, the (waste land) sites relegated to tree planting are usually of very poor quality soils only; and two, these sites are also badly lacking in moisture content. Their improvement by application (suitably) of manures and of water would often prove obligatory to raising a satisfactory tree crop. For instance, it is claimed that in planting *Eucalyptus* in dry areas, even a single application of water immediately after planting will make a significant difference in the subsequent growth. Thus the working out of an economic regime for manuring, for watering and for plant protection will be of great importance, if costs are not to prove prohibitive.

#### Technical Guidance and Technical Staff

It should be apparent that technical guidance is as necessary for achieving success in tree plantations, even as with any other

undertaking connected with agriculture. The forest staff in the States should obviously be the best equipped for the task, —especially if the risk (mentioned earlier) of favouring one class of trees (fruit trees) is to be avoided. It is strongly to be advocated that the Village Agricultural Production Plans should include—as a specific item—tree planting programmes. Even for composting or green manures, tree and shrub planting have been recognised as essential for providing basic organic matter in adequate quantities. All this calls for suitable staff exclusively to further tree plantations by Panchayats.

Great importance has to be attached to the provisions of the Panchayat Act which prescribe that every Panchayat should do its best to plant and preserve trees on waste lands, in order to increase the fuel, fodder and other resources of the village community to the maximum extent possible. This will necessarily involve securing technical advice and guidance from trained foresters, so that the work may be organised on a planned basis and executed with adequate skill. Tree planting in a systematic and scientific manner can be best achieved only if a Forest Extension Officer is attached, at least one to each Panchayat Union to begin with. His duties will include preparation of Panchayat (tree plantation) plans, forming nurseries (for tree seedlings), procuring or collecting tree seeds and assisting in all ways to raise the plantations. He would also help in the protection of existing trees on public lands. Further, he will guide individuals in planting trees on private holdings.

#### Achievements up to date; Future Prospects

"Though the vested and entrusted public lands are meant to be utilised for the purposes for which they are intended, the Government (of Madras) has made it clear that these public lands can be utilised for raising tree plantations for development (local) fuel, fodder and manurial resources. Many Panchayats have taken to tree plantation on public lands in an enthusiastic manner. However, many Panchayats have yet to make a start in this regard. There is not likely to be any difficulty regarding financial resources because raising tree plantations is one of the items of activity for which Agricultural Grant may be utilised... A large number of Panchayats (in the State) have been engaging themselves in this activity and there are enough indications that these activities are not inspired by any short-lived enthusiasm but are bound to continue, and are based on a sense of responsibility which is linked to freedom and on a firm realisation that such plantations will constitute valuable community assets yielding (regular) incomes for the Panchayats in future."

5. Government of Madras, *op. cit.*

### *Panchayats and Public Trees*

Panchayats have also another important role to play with reference to existing public trees. It is a well known fact that public trees i.e., trees on public lands (such as along highways) are badly lopped, cut or mulcted by thoughtless people. Such damage can be best minimised only by the village community in the neighbourhood taking an active interest in the protection of the trees. In the Madras Panchayat Act, 1958, full recognition has been given to the role of Panchayats in maintaining and safeguarding public property. This includes trees of all kinds associated with such properties. Now that (in Madras) the entire rights of all trees standing on vested public lands have been transferred to the Panchayats concerned, it will be up to them to look after these existing trees carefully, realise the best returns from them and replace them systematically and as due. It is likely that similar action has been taken by Governments in other States also. This step could usefully be followed up, by Governments granting similar rights to the Panchayats in respect of trees standing on non-vested and non-entrusted public lands also, or at least conceding to them lease rights for exploiting dead and windfallen trees and the usufruct of live trees on such lands. This could help to augment the funds available to the Panchayats for further development works, besides enthusing them in the cause of trees and tree planting, so necessary for the general welfare of the people.

### *Conclusions*

(1) Among the constructive activities under Panchayati Raj, the foremost place should be given to tree planting programmes, in order to ensure complete and rational utilisation of all village and common waste lands. 'Tree' here would include all trees, shrubs and perennial vegetation, that would yield small timber, fuel, fodder, fruit, green leaf manure, organic matter for composting, fencing material, fibre and a host of other plant products essential for rural welfare.

(2) Diversification of tree planting is necessary in order that all available land is planted with species most suited to the site and all varieties of products necessary for the community are locally raised. Otherwise, there is the risk of specialisation in just a few items of high economic value, leading in turn to the continued neglect of much of the public lands.

(3) Initial efforts hold much promise of sustained work and good results: and this (tree planting) activity requires to be encouraged fully.

(4) Technical efficiency in respect of all details of work will be essential, as also constant watch over expenditure, if successful and satisfactory plantations are to be ensured.

(5) Specially trained extension forestry staff is necessary on a whole-time basis, for (a) setting up central nurseries conveniently for each group of Panchayats and (b) assisting the Panchayats in organising and undertaking systematic tree planting, tree crop maintenance (and utilisation, later on) and farm forest management.

(6) The Agricultural Grant to the Panchayats and Panchayat Unions should specifically set apart adequate allotments for tree planting programmes (including costs for manuring, watering, establishment for watching etc.).

In the words of Dr. Ram Subhag Singh, "Concerted efforts on these lines will lead to tangible results and substantially help not only in solving some of the essential economic needs of our country but also in beautifying our countryside".<sup>6</sup> Let the Panchayati Raj of the country take up this challenge with the earnestness it deserves, and bring the 'Green Glory' to our land.

6. Government of India, *op. cit.*

## PANCHAYATI RAJ

DEVENDRA PAL VERMA

G.D.H. Cole observed that a socialist society that is to be true to its equalitarian principles of human brotherhood must rest on the widest possible diffusion of power and responsibility, so as to enlist the active participation of as many as possible of its citizens in the task of democratic self-government. Panchayati Raj in India is based on such an ideal, and it may well be described as one of the concrete steps that the country has taken for the attainment of a socialist society. Panchayati Raj provides content and meaning to the ideals enshrined in our Constitution—the ideals of political equality and economic well-being. It stands as a dividing line between the past which is known for utter neglect, exploitation and even oppression of the rural folk and the present which affords them multitude of opportunities to carve a better future for themselves by their own efforts. It marks the end of the era of helpless contentment and resignation and the beginning of a period of healthy and conscious effort to meet the challenge of abject poverty and sub-human level of existence. It closes the chapter of blind and unquestioned dependence on the forces of fate and tends to make the simple village people rely on concerted self-help to better their own lot. In brief, it is the beginning of new dawn with a good deal of hope in it.

### *Community Development Project*

India entered the 'planning era' in the year 1951. The targets of the First Five Year Plan were realised more or less by gearing the official machinery—the bureaucracy—into greater action. But it was soon realised that if the various aspects of the Community Development Projects were to attain success in the real sense of the term, some definite steps should be taken to secure the participation of the people of the rural areas in the implementation of the tasks that vitally affected them. The people were not to be the mere recipients of certain benefits accruing as a result of official action here or there. The Government of India thought, and very rightly so, that the village folk should be helped to determine their own needs, and afforded opportunities to be the active participants in the realisation of their own objects. They were no longer to be the helpless destitutes waiting for 'destiny' to smile and descend on them from the top. They were to be the makers of their own destiny with their own hands.

### *Democratic Decentralisation*

In September 1956, a study team headed by Balwantray Mehta was set up to study the situation and suggest ways and means of securing the willing and active co-operation of the people of the rural areas in the implementation of the Community Development Programme. The study team suggested that there should be devolution of power and decentralisation of administration so that responsibility of planning and execution of development programmes were exercised by the popularly elected representatives of the people of the rural areas. The view is generally held by the students of Public Administration and Political Science that planning leads to centralisation, the concentration of more and more powers at the top. But in India this view seems to have no validity, no applicability. Here planning has resulted in democratic decentralisation, in the devolution of power to grass-root institutions, in the establishment of Panchayati Raj. It has, or is expected to, become the vehicle of change of socio-economic conditions of the 80 per cent of the Indian population living in the villages. Thus Panchayati Raj tends to transform the very nature of democratic government in India. Democracy with us is no longer a form of government carried on by the mere consent of the governed; it is a government by active participation of the people—a joint venture of carving a better future for the present and the coming generations of India.

### *Three-Tier Scheme*

The reconstitution and re-organisation of local self-governing institutions at and below the district level on the basis of the recommendations of the Balwantray Mehta Committee Report has given the country a more or less uniform pattern of local institutions, endowed with a common purpose and ideal and vested with, more or less, the same type of functions and powers. Whether it is Rajasthan or Andhra Pradesh, Punjab or Madras, it is the three-tier system of Panchayati Raj that is now found working. We now have in the country a hierarchy of local bodies within each district and a wide range of duties and powers as well as financial resources have been vested in them. At the bottom of the three-tier scheme are the directly elected Village Panchayats. At the intermediate level—the block level—are the Panchayat Samitis elected by the members of the Village Panchayats within the block, and possessing a large number of functions and powers of development. At the top are the Zila Parishads, which supervise and co-ordinate the working of Panchayat Samitis. This well-knit and integrated system of local self-government institutions has replaced a confusing medley of local bodies existing in the pre-Panchayati Raj period, which had their origin

in the days of the British raj and which suffered from lack of resources and lack of responsibility.

#### *Fundamental Aim of Panchayati Raj*

The fundamental aim of the scheme of Panchayati Raj is to evoke local interest and initiative in the field of development, to make the people of the rural areas 'development-minded', so that the pattern of our rural life is transformed as a result of the initiative and efforts of the people themselves. There is hardly any doubt about it that the scheme of democratic decentralisation has caught the imagination of the rural people of our country and they have evinced keen interest in the elections that were held to constitute the Village Panchayats, the Panchayat Samitis and the Zila Parishads. The scheme has everything in it to commend itself to the people and to enthuse them to better their own conditions. The Panchayati Raj is in a way a challenge to the old ways, traditions and even philosophy of life that permeates every small hut in our rural areas. It is an opportunity afforded to the people in the villages, unique in its character and perhaps without a parallel in the entire history of the country.

All this is true. However, the question is as to what extent the institution of Panchayati Raj has been able to fulfil the aspirations and expectations of the framers of the scheme. Perhaps a period of three to four years is too small to make a proper assessment of the work done hitherto by these local bodies. But Panchayati Raj has generated certain forces, it has created a certain type of climate, some type of an environment that can provide us with some clue, with some inkling of the shape of things to come. And it is on this basis that we can make an attempt to arrive at some conclusions regarding the success or failure of the scheme in future.

#### *Responsibilities of Rural Leaders*

The annual reports and statistics prepared by the government give us a heartening picture of the realisation of the Community Development targets as a result of the functioning of the Village Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. But here we are not concerned with statistic and physical targets attained. These at the most reveal only one side of the picture. The other side concerns itself with the conduct and the character of the people, the elected representatives of the rural areas, who have been all of a sudden endowed with enormous amount of responsibilities to carry out the tasks of which they had little or no knowledge and experience at all, and for which they were ill-equipped from every point of view. The power that has devolved on the village people may be described as a 'political windfall'. Perhaps it was sudden and unexpected

and there is a danger that this 'wealth' got with little or no effort and without the necessary degree of preparation may be squandered. The ideal behind the establishment of the Panchayati Raj is pure and laudable but it is the calibre and the character of the human element upon which ultimately depends the realisation of the ideals and objectives.

#### *Educating the Villagers*

The fear that fills the mind of a student of Public Administration is that the establishment of this organisation of Panchayati Raj has not been preceded by efforts to impart the necessary training to those who have been called upon to handle a multitude of complex tasks. They even lack the civic and political consciousness and without this awakening Panchayati Raj by itself would not be in a position to take our rural people far enough. It is not being suggested that the rural representatives ought to have professional training and skill in the implementation of the development programmes. Not the least perhaps. However, some effort in educating the villagers and equipping them mentally, helping them to know and grasp the new ideals that the country has set before itself ought to have gone before the processes of Panchayati Raj were set in motion.

#### *Traditional Outlook ill-suited*

The minds steeped in old and traditional values are definitely ill-suited to the new purposes that have set before ourselves. And when the anti-diluvian outlook is brought to bear upon new institutions and new goals, it is the latter that are distorted and perverted. This is the danger that the Panchayati Raj is already encountering—a danger from within and not from the people of the urban areas or the bureaucrats engaged in the various developmental activities. Take for example the forces that elections to these bodies have let loose. The worst type of tribal loyalties have been awakened and the atmosphere vitiated to an extent that is hardly imagined. The tragedy with our idealists is that they have taken it for granted that it is only the angels that tread the rural paths and reside in the village huts, that the people dwelling there are the living symbols of everything good in the life of India, and as such are worthy of highest kinds of responsibilities, functions and powers. When we talk and think of our rural areas and people we are swayed by emotions and sentiments more than anything else. It will do us good to realise that the people living in the villages, though simple in habits, are afflicted by many social ills and as such lack those qualities which are absolutely necessary to change a decadent socio-economic order.

### *Caste System, a Danger*

At present we are witnessing in India a phenomenon of conflict between the dominant social institutions and the equalitarian political order and it seems that the first round has been won by the strong and rigid social institutions, as would be seen by the impact of casteism on the political life of the country. This perversion of our political life has greatly been due to the enormous hold of the caste system, particularly on the minds of the villagers. This upsurge of casteism on such a huge scale is a very potent danger to the unity and integrity of the country. We have hardly given any serious thought to checkmate this danger. And it is on this base that we have launched the experiment of democratic decentralisation. The development targets may well be attained by the participation of the rural people, but this alone will not lead to the grass-rooting of democracy in India.

### *Panchayats Unsuitable for Judicial Functions*

We have always eulogised the role played by the village panchayats in ancient India and the establishment of Panchayati Raj in general and constitution of a Village Panchayat in every village of India in particular is being interpreted as the right attempt to revive the old and glorious traditions of our village life. If Village Panchayats can usher in an era of progress and harmony in rural India we would have a lot to thank our political sagacity, sense of right judgement and foresight. But when an actual study is made of the functioning of the panchayats, all the idealism tends to disappear. We have endowed our panchayats with jurisdiction to try civil and criminal cases. And it is here that the principles of the Rule of Law are being violated. The villagers might have been spared from the clutches of the lawyers and the urban courts and they might have been assured of prompt and swift disposal of their cases. But to think that they have been assured of justice—free, independent and impartial justice—is to close our eyes to the realities. The panchas, directly elected by the people, with all the pressures and pulls of the election processes have been called upon to sit as judges and to administer justice. What kind of justice flows out of the deliberations of the Village Panchayats constituted as they are today can well be imagined, keeping in view the fact that parties to a dispute have direct access and opportunity to influence the members of these Panchayats. An extensive field study conducted in selected areas in all the States of the country can only provide us with a true picture of this aspect of the functions of the Village Panchayats. One thing, however, is very clear and it is that 'panchayati justice' is not conducive to the maintenance of the principles of the Rule of Law. More than this, the rich and influential sections of our village communities have secured

a better hold and a stronger say in the working of our Panchayats and the upper two tiers of the Panchayati Raj. The poorer sections still groan under the feeling of neglect and when approached reveal the true state of affairs, particularly with regard to the discharge of the judicial functions by the Panchayats.

### *Accentuation of Vested Interest*

Our villages are already torn by various types of factions. Panchayats have accentuated this tendency. The rivalries that crop up during the elections are not forgotten; instead these are perpetuated in one shape or the other. Certain sections of the village communities remain unrepresented on the Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis and these harbour all sorts of feelings against these institutions, withholding voluntary co-operation in the implementation of the developmental tasks for which these bodies have had been primarily constituted. It has been pointed out that the chief objective of the Panchayati Raj is to instil a democratic way of life in the body-politic of India and to afford equal opportunities to all sections of people for participating in the developmental programmes. This objective is not wholly being realised. The privileged sections of the rural society have got more than is due to them and this creates a feeling of uneasiness amongst those who have been deprived of their due share. Care has got to be taken during the initial state itself that Panchayati Raj is not converted into a raj of the privileged ones. For if that comes to happen, the very purpose, the very essence of democratic decentralisation will be lost. It would perhaps be better to have power concentrated in the higher State organs working for the establishment of a socialist society, than to have power dispersed to the grass-root institutions that will enable the disgruntled landlords and others of their kind to satiate their thirst for power and dominance. If care is not taken and safeguards not provided for, such an apprehension will continue to persist in the minds of certain sections of the people that these institutions are nothing but devices to protect the interests of the vested classes. Some positive steps to checkmate the dominance of the privileged classes will go a long way in creating a good deal of confidence, faith and trust in these bodies.

### *Financial Irregularities*

The Panchayat Samitis and the Zila Parishads have been vested with certain taxation powers. Sri V.T. Krishnamachari in his Report entitled "Indian and State Administrative Services and Problems of District Administration" has emphasised that it is essential to the success of Panchayati Raj that taxation powers conferred on Panchayat Samitis and on Zila Parishads

should be utilised for mobilising local resources to a greater extent than has been possible so far. There can be no two opinions about this point of view. But along with this greater care has got to be taken to see that public funds are not wasted or misappropriated. A tendency has been discerned to ignore the cases of financial lapses on the part of these bodies as reported in the audit reports. Sometimes pressure from higher quarters is exerted on the auditors to by-pass serious irregularities committed by the Panchayats, the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. It is easy to understand the purposes for such influences and pressures. There may be a certain amount of exaggeration in the reports and charges that one comes to hear about. But due weight ought to be paid to the lapses pointed out in the official audit reports and defaulters punished appropriately with a view to creating confidence in the mind of the public that the extra taxation burden that they are bearing is only being utilised for their own good and betterment.

#### *Lessons for the future*

The Panchayati Raj movement is expected to bring about a revolution in the country-side by associating people's representatives with the administration of law and order and economic development programmes at the village level. It is true that Panchayati Raj has caught the imagination of the people in the States; it is also to be conceded that in the States like Punjab nearly 80 per cent of the rural electorate participated in the elections to the Panchayats. These are hopeful signs; but let us remember that 80 per cent voting participation does not mean that 80 per cent of the problems of the rural areas have been solved. This is merely a first step—the step of preparing the 'soil' and putting the 'seeds' in it. Much would depend upon the quality of the 'manure' supplied and the creation of the right type of climate. This can only be secured when the villagers are properly educated about their responsibilities to the three-tier institutions of the Panchayati Raj which promises to usher in an era of prosperity in the country-side. More than this, the success of the movement will directly depend upon its ability to ensure social justice to the weaker sections of the village community.

## THE GRAM SABHA AND PANCHAYATI RAJ\*

IQBAL NARAIN

Few could deny that Gram Sabha should ultimately become one of the most vital institutions of Panchayati Raj, if not the most important institution in itself. There may, however, be differences about the question whether Gram Sabha should be treated and even statutorily made the starting point and the steering wheel of the entire system of Panchayati Raj at the present stage or it should be looked upon as the logical culmination of the process of Panchayati Raj. The problem posed here is whether Gram Sabha should be treated as an agent for the activation of the system in terms of people's participation, sense of responsibility, supervision and control, or whether an active Gram Sabha of this description would emerge as part of a natural (may be even a drawn out) process. This process may begin with an up and doing Panchayat which may in turn activate the wards through the Panchas and, ultimately, the people in the wards, thus instilled with the zest for participation, may be enthused to join hands in a really conscientious, responsive and active Gram Sabha which may then grow to be the backbone of the system of Panchayati Raj.

### II

The latter alternative, though perhaps a little less romantic and idealistic or a little over-orthodox and conservative, appears to be the only practicable proposition. The following reasons can be advanced in support of this contention:

(i) It has not been possible to activate so far even the Panchayats,<sup>1</sup> their committees and individual Panchas, not to speak of their wards.<sup>2</sup> To have an active Gram Sabha to precede all

\*It is an enlarged version of a note submitted for the consideration of the members of the Study Team on Gram Sabha constituted by the Union Ministry of Community Development, Panchayati Raj and Co-operation. The paper deals with some theoretical considerations in the light of the author's experience in Rajasthan.

1. Recently the Evaluation Organisation, Government of Rajasthan, has published a report on "*The Working of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan (April, 1961 to March 1962)*" in June 1962 according to which "the Panchayats as bodies are generally not taking substantial initiative with regard to the development programmes and they merely act as agents of the Panchayat Samiti", p. 90.

2. The Evaluation Organisation Report, *op. cit.*, corroborates the author's experience in the field about the lack of interest, initiative and

this would be the proverbial case of putting the cart before the horse. The process of activation should begin with Panchayats and percolate through individual Panchas to the wards, and then, as seen earlier, to the Gram Sabha. *In fact active ward Sabhas should precede an active Gram Sabha.*

Even at the risk of digression it may be pointed out that the lack of zest and activity in Panchayats is not due to absence of an active Gram Sabha but its causes lie elsewhere. Lack of resources, the power and prestige in the hands of the Sarpanch,<sup>3</sup> the overwhelming position of Panchayat Samiti as the second but superior tier,<sup>4</sup> consequent concentration of attention on Panchayat Samiti on the part of the State Government, district level officers, the B.D.O. and Extension Officers—all these account for the consequent neglect of Panchayats. In fact authors of the Balwantray Mehta Report themselves can be held responsible for this imbalance. They were envisaging Panchayats as the basic unit but in the blueprint of the three-tier system that they evolved, Panchayats appear at best on their knees before the Panchayat Samiti. Gram Sabha cannot be used as an institution to redress this imbalance so long as Panchayat Samiti continues to occupy a dominating position; it may at best be made to share the helplessness in which the Panchayats find themselves at present if the present trends in Rajasthan can be relied upon as any indication. The process of restoring the balance should begin from the Panchayat Samiti,<sup>5</sup> the second tier, which is

effort on the part of Panchas in its observation:

"Hitherto it has generally been noticed that the Panchas do not take as much interest as would be desirable either in the affairs of the Village Panchayats or in the development of the villages that they represent." p.91.

3. While dealing with the factors which have stunted the growth of Village Panchayats, the Evaluation Organisation Report (*op. cit.*, p.90) mentions the following as one of the factors:

"Strange as it may seem, the overriding importance of the Sarpanch due to the fact of his direct election and his membership of the Panchayat Samiti which has had the effect of overshadowing the Village Panchayat as a body."

4. The same Report also accepts "the close proximity of a much more powerful body the Panchayat Samiti" as one of the factors which have stunted the growth of Village Panchayats (*Vide: Ibid.*).

5. Cf. "All observers appear to be unanimous in the view that the operation of Democratic Decentralisation in Rajasthan has bolstered up the Panchayat Samiti to the detriment of the Panchayat. . . Democratic Decentralisation really visualises a partnership between the village Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti and it is unfortunate that this relationship does not appear to have emerged in Rajasthan".

(*Vide: Report of a Study Team on Democratic Decentralisation in Rajasthan*, AVARD, Feb., 1961, P. 157.)

In Andhra, however, the reverse is the case. "The Panchayat Samitiss have no power to co-ordinate and supervise their constituent Panchayats. They can only submit their suggestions to the competent authority. It

in the danger of becoming an island empire with the Pradhan as the new-despot and the Sarpancha his satellite.

(ii) The experience with the Gram Sabhas has not been encouraging. The officials at the block level and the Pradhan and Sarpanchas have treated them as picturesque formalities. The Pradhan delivers a speech with the seriousness that a modern youth attaches to rituals. The progress report is read in a hurry, most often in a language an average villager can hardly follow. The programme is announced. Budget is prepared till the end and then read out. And then the average villager, the king-pin of the Gram Sabha, comes into the picture. He is asked by the dominating Pradhan or the Sarpanch if he has any objections, comments or suggestions. By then the villager forgets what he had been made to listen all this time. He prefers silence which is taken as acceptance or merely nods his agreement. The approach of the average villager is one of fanfare and festivity towards Gram Sabhas. He is more interested in film songs or cinema shows than in contributing constructively to public good. This is further borne out by the thin attendance in quite a few Gram Sabhas, particularly in those in which there is no arrangement of any entertainment. Occasions are common when villagers do not turn up at all and the meetings of Gram Sabhas cannot be held. Even in the best attended Gram Sabhas the attendance is very poor. According to a recent estimate "the average attendance of the adults of a village at the meetings of the Gram Sabhas was 11.1%".<sup>6</sup> The unmistakable conclusion drawn even in the Evaluation Organisation Report which has not taken a lenient view of the Gram Sabhas in Rajasthan is: "Although the institution of Gram Sabhas is slowly emerging, it has yet to find its place in the fabric of Panchayati Raj and be a determining factor in the planning and development at the village level."<sup>7</sup>

(iii) Villagers will take time to come to the ideal of an active Gram Sabha. At the moment, by and large, they are docile and indifferent.<sup>8</sup> They also lack the capacity to comprehend the niceties of policy-making, budget-formulation,

clear that it is necessary for Panchayat Samitiss to function vis-a-vis their constituent Panchayats as the Zilla Parishad functions vis-a-vis its constituent Panchayati Samitiss." (*Vide: Report of a Study team on Panchayati Raj in Andhra Pradesh*, AVARD, Oct., 1961, P. 29. *The Problem, therefore, is one of balanced relationship between the two.*)

6. Evaluation organisation Report, *op. cit.* P. 73.

7. *Ibid.* P. 73.

8. The Evaluation Organisation Report, while recording the extent of participation finds people's participation 7.9% (adequate), 6.7% (Casual, and 25% (inadequate). (*Vide: Evaluation Organisation Report op. cit.* P. 75. Though this is not borne out by author's own experience, yet in itself it is far from satisfactory.)

supervision and control. They have been kept so far from participating in the management of their own affairs that they will take time before they regain confidence and come to realise the importance of their own participation.

It may be argued that the experience with Gram Sabhas has not been encouraging so far, because they did not enjoy much power. The grant of more power will not necessarily create more interest in the members of the Gram Sabha, if the interest of the villagers in the use of whatever little power they have is any index. People's interest in Community Development in rural India and, more than that, in participating constructively in this effort at regeneration is not a mechanical process. It cannot be merely measured and manipulated in terms of power. It is essentially a social revolution at the psychological plane and could at best be helped to take its own spontaneous and natural course which has to be both gradual and slow. At the moment, even if the Gram Sabhas were given more power, they would at best become a formal check susceptible to easy manipulation. Also there is the risk of their being used at best as a slogan. They may become the media for accentuating personal, caste and party feuds between the majority and minority groups in a village. The grant of more powers to the Gram Sabha in the present immature stage will only accentuate politics (in the Machiavellian and not in the Aristotlean sense) which is already proving the bane of the Panchayati Raj.

### III

A plea is not being made here to give up the experiment of Gram Sabha, as we have it today in some States like Rajasthan. What is made out here is that as long as people in the village are in the transitional stage of preparation, and till Panchayats, their committees, Panchas and through them the wards become alive, the Gram Sabha should be relied upon as one of the media for preparing the rural folk to become an active member of the village assembly instead of using Gram Sabha as an agent responsible for activating the Panchayati Raj system in terms of people's participation and people's management in the developmental activities and making it responsible, responsive and self-disciplined.

The present transitional stage apart, it is worth while to think in terms of the future model of a Gram Sabha as a functional agency in its fully developed form which at once presupposes and will also mark an advanced stage in the development of Panchayati Raj. The main point at issue then is whether the Gram Sabha should be developed as a *deliberative* or *consultative* body. The balance appears to tilt in favour of visualising the

image of the Gram Sabha of the future just as a *consultative body* only. A number of arguments can be advanced in this regard, the more important being:

- (i) A Gram Sabha is disqualified by its *sheer numbers* to act as a sober *deliberative body*. The great mass of people attending a Gram Sabha will be too heterogeneous and too disorganised (even when an ideal situation is reached in this regard unless it is organised under a totalitarian hush-hush environment or under a one party directive) to evolve a coherent and practicable work programme. The decision about the work programme, if left to a body of this type, will get involved in the perennial conflict between what Mill has called the *self-regarding impulse* and *others regarding impulse*, the former standing for personal, group, or caste interest and the latter for community interest. The work programme that would thus emerge would at best be a compromise between the two impulses; hence too atomistic to be practicable. Also it will become more difficult to reconcile it with the national planning than what it is today.
- (ii) The student of group psychology and group behaviour know that persons who as individuals are both rational and reasonable are swept off their moorings when acting as a large group and, worse still, as a crowd (howsoever organised and disciplined it may be). The confusion is likely to become worse confounded, if interested persons or parties make efforts to lead astray a large group or crowd by appealing to their sentiment and emotion rather than to reason. Again, a large group of crowd is prone to be either too conservative or too radical, while a deliberative body worth the name should be capable of balanced thinking, keeping in view all the pros and cons of a decision. These psychological considerations further weaken the claims of a Gram Sabha to become a trustworthy deliberative body, as it is subject to the psychology of a large group or a crowd in its behaviour pattern.
- (iii) The issues that are likely to engage the attention of a Gram Sabha as a deliberative body (if it is granted this status) are likely to be too complex to be decided by this body. Planning from below in all its aspects (and that also when it is to be synthesised with national planning) hedged by intriguing problems of resources, budgeting, implementation, supervision and control is a great challenge even to a Panchayat Samiti today,

not to speak of a Panchayat or more important a Gram Sabha.

- (iv) The Gram Sabha as a deliberative body, instead of helping matters, may weaken initiative and sense of responsibility in Panchayats. If the deliberative aspect is divorced from the implementation aspect with Gram Sabha becoming a deliberative body and Panchayats remaining just the implementing agencies, it would be a divorce between power and responsibility. This would not be in the larger interests of administrative efficiency.

The Gram Sabha, therefore, should be organised as a *consultative* body and not as a *deliberative* body. It could be invested with the authority to approve and censure and not to take policy decisions and plan. It can also be used as one of the media of rural education for inculcating plan-consciousness among the people, for rousing them into action and thus making them constructively active in the great partnership of rural community development. It can also be entrusted with some *constituent* or *elective* functions. It should elect the Panchas who should in turn elect the Sarpanch. If the Sarpanch is elected directly by the Gram Sabha, he is likely to play the overlord in relation to Panchas and try to grab all power and initiative. If he is the creation of the Panchas, he is likely to behave as *primus inter pares* and not as an *autocrat*, thereby also behaving better in the exercise of his institutional functions. The Panchas who feel and behave like non-entities today may thus gain self-confidence and contribute their bit towards the stupendous task of rural reconstruction. Panchayati Raj which today (at least in Rajasthan) begins and ends with Pradhans and Sarpanchas may thus reach the Panchas and through them ultimately to the rural people.

Far from abandoning the Gram Sabhas or thinking in terms of increasing their powers, what is important is to make an earnest effort to improve the tone of the working of Gram Sabhas even in their present modest role. The following suggestions may be made in this regard:

- (i) The Gram Sabha meetings should be called quarterly to synchronise with the quarterly programme of Panchayat Samiti and Panchayats.
- (ii) Ward Sabhas should meet monthly to (a) check that the decisions taken by the Gram Sabha are being implemented both at their end and by the Panchayat and (b) thus to see that the tempo created by the meeting of the Gram Sabha does not subside and get lost. Ward Sabhas can serve both as catalytic

agents for the people, the Panchas and the Panchayats and link the Gram Sabha with Panchayats in a living and lasting manner. These can also be used as agencies for implementation, as these are more manageable in size and area of operation, more so because these are also being treated as units for area planning. In case a ward is unmanageable in numbers, it can be delimited.

- (iii) Such organisations as the youth clubs, Mahila Mandals and the Co-operatives should be energised with a view to creating a real and lasting interest among the people in the villages. The net work of these organisations would provide a firm base to the institution of Gram Sabha which would thus be able to get men who would be really interested in rural reconstruction.
- (iv) Gram Sabhas as well as Ward Sabhas should be taken more seriously by the officials and such non-officials as Pradhan and Sarpanch. Fanfare may be necessary but it should not become the be-all and end-all of a Gram Sabha or a Ward Sabha. Business should be taken seriously. It should be conducted in a way as to encourage willing participation and not make it a mere formality. Itemwise discussion and approval in language the villagers can follow will be a great help. The villagers may be encouraged to ask questions for some time and make observations on the working of the Panchayat for the period under review. They may be given a chance to ventilate their grievances and speak about their problems and difficulties.
- (v) What is equally important is that a clear image about the objectives of a Gram Sabha should emerge. It should be decided on the basis of empirical evidence in the field, experience with similar institutions elsewhere and a realistic appraisal of rural scene and rural politics whether the Gram Sabha should be conceived as a *deliberative* or a *consultative* body.<sup>9</sup> Absence of clarity of objectives, indifference to do basic thinking in fundamentals and refusal to have courage to face realities as they are not conducive to any institutional experiment, be it the Panchayati Raj or a Gram Sabha.<sup>10</sup>

9. The case for Gram Sabha as a consultative body has already been argued.

10. The appointment of Diwakar Committee on Gram Sabha with wide terms of reference by the Government of India is for this reason a welcome step.

To sum up, what is needed is an honest and sincere effort, first to make the institution of Gram Sabha a live institution in its present form and then to let it grow to its full stature on the principle of gradualness and spontaneous and natural growth, not in isolation but in organic unity with the Panchayati Raj movement, not merely in the light of theoretical surmises but keeping in view the actualities of India's rural scene.

#### PANCHAYATI RAJ, WELFARE PROGRAMMES AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES

V. M. KULKARNI

With the introduction of the Panchayati Raj in the country, as a part of democratic decentralisation, we have broken new ground. As we have a responsibility to help Panchayati Raj to discharge its obligations, so it is also for us to help it fulfil the expectations it has aroused.

The Panchayati Raj legislation has been enacted almost in all the States and the centrally administered areas. The Village Panchayats, the Panchayat Samitis, the Zila Parishads or equivalents of these institutions, have started functioning in some States and will start functioning soon in others. The institutions, organisations and programmes in these areas have to readjust themselves and establish a relationship with the Panchayati Raj. This will be true of welfare programmes also.

The programmes of Panchayat institutions, for various reasons, it seems, will concentrate primarily on providing minimum civic amenities and implementing programmes of economic development—like growing more food, and producing more of the other economic goods. Services allied to these activities will also receive attention in the Panchayati Raj.

The Panchayati Raj may also provide educational and health services, take some action about housing and undertake work relating to the welfare of backward classes and Scheduled Tribes, etc. to the extent possible.

Among the functions of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads, it is interesting to find mention of the following items belonging to the fields of social services and social welfare services:

"To maintain secondary, industrial and elementary schools; compulsory primary education; pre-primary education; re-organisation of private educational institutions; social education; maintenance of hospitals and dispensaries; public health and rural sanitation; medical relief; preventive and remedial measures connected with epidemics; family planning; maternity and child welfare; rural housing; welfare of backward classes; maintenance of students hostels; programmes for social welfare services; child welfare activities; maintenance of poor houses." Much attention to these areas might not be possible unless a new approach is adopted and additional resources are procured.

Fearing that the necessary resources will not be available welfare functions of the Panchayati Raj institutions have been made optional.

#### *Consolidation of Welfare Work in Rural Areas*

In some places, with full awareness or owing to local pressures or inadvertently, programmes in rural areas have developed certain welfare components. The various programmes initiated by the Central Social Welfare Board including welfare extension projects, the welfare component of the C.D. Programme—particularly with reference to work for women, children and youth, work done by other agencies by starting welfare services—all these have rendered service to the people in rural areas and towns and have raised certain expectations. The grants-in-aid programme of the Central Social Welfare Board has supported the work of the welfare agencies both in towns and cities. There is, therefore, great need to consolidate and strengthen this work and to continue to secure release of more voluntary resources both in men and money, for more work in this area.

It is because of this, the need for understanding the importance and having proper appreciation of well-planned welfare programmes, must be explained and emphasised for those who are concerned about the Panchayati Raj programme. In the absence of such appreciation, welfare programmes may not develop as they should and consequently an important factor vitally needed in accelerating and consolidating economic development will continue to be missing.

Education, health, housing, etc. are considered social services and it is accepted that they should receive attention of the Panchayati Raj. Even in these areas, the programmes cannot be considered to have been supported by a sense of urgency, imagination, intelligent approach and adequate resources. The welfare programmes are still less thought of. This paper is more concerned with the welfare programmes in the Panchayati Raj, the way to formulate and to implement them.

#### *What are "Social Welfare Services"*

Before we proceed to study the relationship of Panchayati Raj with welfare programmes and voluntary agencies<sup>1</sup>, it would

1. The terms 'voluntary agency' and 'voluntary association' in the context of social services, are used interchangeably to cover those bodies which provide some form of social services, which control their own policy, and which depend in part at least, upon financial support from voluntary sources. To a greater or lesser degree they receive personal help from voluntary, that is unpaid, workers but many of them, today, have salaried officers in key positions.

be better to know what the phrase "Social Welfare Services" stands for.

The term 'Social Welfare Services' is used to refer to that set of services which are intended to meet the special needs of persons and groups who, by reason of a social, economic, physical or mental handicap, are unable to make use of or are traditionally denied the use of amenities normally provided by the community. In this sense, 'welfare services' are oriented to the needs of the 'weaker' or dependent sections, like children, in the community. Its recipients may be the physically handicapped persons such as the blind, the deaf, or the crippled, the socially dependent groups like the orphan, the widow, the destitute, etc. the mentally retarded individuals, the economically underprivileged groups living in slum areas, and women handicapped by restrictive social traditions.

The term 'Social Welfare' is also used sometimes to refer to special services not recognised as a part of the normal social services such as those of health and education. Examples of such special services might be found in the youth welfare movement and the child welfare movement. The services visualised in these two movements are meant for all persons not only the socially dependent and the needy. It is primarily their character, since voluntary endeavour pioneered in these fields, which tends to make them regarded as a part of welfare services. It is possible, however, that some of them may pass over it into the area of what are called social services, once the State has accepted them as a part of its normal responsibilities.

#### *Expectations of Panchayati Raj*

The Study Team on Community Projects and National Extension Services in December, 1957, recommended: "The functions of Panchayat Samitis should cover the development of agriculture in all these aspects: improvement of cattle, promotion of local industries, public health, *welfare work*, administration of primary schools and collection and maintenance of statistics". The same Study Team further said, "It lies in our objective and effort of arousing the rural community to democratic action so that it will function like a healthy community, which . . . takes initiative in utilising the resources which are available and in procuring and in creating new resources which may not be easily forthcoming".

The primary objective of Panchayati Raj, it is said, is to enable people of each area to achieve intensive and continuous development in the interests of the *entire population*. The "entire population" includes the weak, the vulnerable and the handicapped sections of the community. The welfare programmes are, therefore, thought of by implication. It is also clear

that in Panchayati Raj a good deal of action is expected of voluntary agencies and organisations.

The main test of success of Panchayati organisations, it is said, will be related to the following aspects:

- (i) Development of education and adult literacy.
- (ii) Assistance of the economically weaker sections of the village community.
- (iii) Progressive dispersal of authority of initiative with special emphasis on the role of voluntary organisations.

The rural development should largely proceed on the basis of local efforts and resources, with special emphasis on voluntary organisations.

In our effort to fulfil these expectations much work could be done in the social welfare field.

If we realise the importance of welfare programmes in national development and the role of voluntary agencies we shall be able to fulfil expectations in relation to the people's social welfare needs and the role of volunteers and voluntary agencies in the Panchayati Raj.

#### *Benefits for the Less Privileged*

Some welfare programmes have already developed in the Panchayati Raj areas. They are also needed by the people. Through them family burdens will be eased. From time to time, evaluation reports on the C.D. Programmes have drawn attention to the fact that the benefits do not reach the less-privileged sections of the village community. One of the ways by which benefits could reach the less-privileged section of the community is to provide social services and social welfare services free of cost or at moderate cost. This will also bring relief to the economically weaker sections of the community.

We have also realised that at this stage of development of the Panchayati Raj, the panchayati institutions will have to concentrate essentially on the obligatory functions within the resources available to them. It will be a great thing if they will find adequate resources for discharging the responsibilities assigned to them as 'musts'. There will, therefore, be emphasis on minimum civic amenities and concentration on programmes of economic development in the Panchayat programmes. While this is inevitable and therefore accepted, it is our contention that social services and social welfare services should also be considered as an important factor in development and one of the first things to be done first for progress. They should not be entirely made optional and left to discretion of Panchayat institutions for being taken up, if and when resources were available. If social services and social welfare services are considered as

important and vital as matters of economic development, the only difference in handling these two functions will be in the manner in which the obligatory and the optional functions are to be performed. While the work for civic amenities and economic development should be handled by the Panchayats directly, the work in relation to social services and social welfare services should be mostly pressed forward through voluntary organisations and agencies. We should have an integrated approach to the functions of Panchayat institutions. No function is less important than the other. Social services and welfare services should be included in the core of the obligatory functions. The manner of implementation should be as indicated above. It is an administration in joint partnership between the Panchayati Raj institutions and voluntary agencies.

#### *The Questions*

The problem, therefore, is how to consolidate the welfare work done in the areas of Panchayati Raj? Who is to do it? How to do it? Where to find resources, personnel, and the technical assistance? What machinery is to be evolved for attending to the welfare needs and welfare programmes of the people in the Panchayati Raj?

The welfare programmes in the Panchayati Raj areas will have to be handled with initiative and imagination. A part of the district welfare programme will be meant for official action but the rest of the curative, preventive, positive and promotive welfare programmes should be implemented through voluntary agencies.

Under the circumstances, it seems that at the Zila Parishad level, it would be useful to have District Welfare Department to attend to the official part of the district welfare programmes and to help and to work with voluntary agencies. This unit may be very small, compact, but competent. It should be responsible for looking after the welfare programmes of the Union Government, the State Government and the programmes which the Panchayati Raj will be formulating, in the area, all this to be known as the official programme.

#### *District Welfare Council*

There should be a District Welfare Council to draw up a welfare programme for the district and to follow up its implementation. This Council should be on the line of the Coordinating Council suggested by the Renuka Ray Committee. In this council there should be representatives of Zila Parishads, Panchayat Samitis, representatives of the Panchayats of the area, members of the State Social Welfare Board from the district, women members of the Zila Parishads, the

officer-in-charge of the welfare department and or his deputy.

The programmes in the District Welfare Plan should include the official programmes as well as the programme of the voluntary agencies. The official portion of the programme should be taken up by the District Welfare Department and the rest should be executed by voluntary agencies.

The grant-in-aid from the Government of India, Central Social Welfare Board, State Governments, State Social Welfare Board, and other sources meant for voluntary programmes should be used to strengthen the voluntary agencies. These funds should not be diverted to other purposes nor should they be used for the official programme of the Panchayati Raj institutions for which there should be a regular provision in the district budget supported by local authority taxes or specific Government grants.

Thus we see that at the district level, there would be machinery which would draw up a welfare plan, follow up its implementation and that the same programme could be implemented jointly by the District Welfare Department and the voluntary agencies. If voluntary agencies are promoted and strengthened with the help of the grants-in-aid programme people can be involved in the welfare programmes and release of resources in terms of funds and services, which may not be forthcoming otherwise, could be secured.

#### *Parallel of Co-operatives*

Further, in relation to the welfare programmes, the Panchayati Raj should follow the same policy as they are expected to follow with reference to co-operative organisations. The Third Plan says, "it is also of the highest importance that there should be clear recognition of the distinctive role of federal co-operative organisations functioning at the State and district levels, as in the field of banking, marketing, processing, distribution and education and training. Many obligations are undertaken by co-operative organisations and they should be enabled to fulfil them in accordance with *the approach and principles of the co-operative movement*". This very approach needs to be adopted in relation to voluntary welfare programmes and voluntary agencies and for the same and many other reasons.

#### *The Contents of the Programme*

At the district level the welfare programme could contain services and agencies for the handicapped people of all age-groups, youth welfare, socio-economic programmes, distribution of old age pensions, recreation, after-care programmes prohibition work, social education, measures to combat juvenile delinquency, rehabilitation of displaced persons, rehabilitation of the

various handicapped groups, organisation of balwadis, administration of special programmes for the members of backward classes and scheduled tribes, hostels for working women, enforcement of Suppression of Immoral Traffic in Women and Girls Act, maternity and child care, welfare programmes, mid-day meals programmes, technical guidance in the preparation of welfare plans, administration of the grants to voluntary welfare agencies received from the State Government, Union Government, Social Welfare Board, implementation of official programme and follow-up of voluntary programmes, etc. It is to be remembered that it is neither advisable to wait indefinitely, awaiting economic affluence to underwrite welfare programmes, nor it is proper for the Panchayati Raj institutions to undertake the welfare programmes themselves for it would amount to nationalisation of welfare services which should, for various reasons, be avoided and opposed in the interest of work and democratic pattern of our life.

#### *The Government Lead*

In a developing country, in the field of welfare, as in other fields, Government has to accept great responsibilities and give lead. But in a democratic set-up, Government should use its position of vantage and the resources at its disposal, in helping the voluntary agencies to build voluntary welfare programmes to be operated, having regard to the needs of the people, in a co-ordinated manner, in a climate not marred by cumbersome administration and procedures and characterised by the vision and zeal of pioneers. This incidentally makes additional resources in men and money available for welfare programmes. In such action we also succeed in achieving:

- (i) Voluntary action and initiative on the part of community for its welfare;
- (ii) Release of unifying strength-generating factors keeping the community united on a commonly agreed programmes, keeping divisions on the political and ideological grounds, within healthy bounds;
- (iii) Procurement of additional resources for community work;
- (iv) Flexibility needed to adapt programmes to changing needs and needs of the local communities; and
- (v) Intensive participation of the people in the programmes.

#### *This is Possible*

Thus we see that:

- (i) There is no need to divide functions of the Panchayat Institutions as obligatory and optional but that all these functions need be made obligatory;
- (ii) A welfare programme for the Panchayati Raj areas could be drawn up and the same could be jointly

implemented by the Panchayati institutions and voluntary agencies;

- (iii) A demarcation of functions between Panchayati institutions and voluntary institutions is possible;
- (iv) For historical, philosophical and scientific reasons much of the welfare work needs to be done by voluntary agencies; and
- (v) While for welfare programmes resources should be locally raised, these resources should be strengthened and supported by the grants-in-aid programme.

Further, such a programme will secure intensive participation of the people in the organisation and running of welfare services and welfare agencies. The lead for this action will have to come from District Welfare Council and District Welfare Department of the district administration.

#### *The Plus Factor*

If we clarify our thinking on this subject and evolve a pattern of work in relation to the social services and social welfare services in Panchayati Raj and help evolve necessary administrative set-up in the light of the above discussion, for which there is enough by way of statutory mandate in the directive principles of our Constitution and the Panchayati Raj legislation, the welfare programmes need not be held back, till the economic prosperity comes. They can be initiated here and now and thus we can provide a vital missing factor in our struggle for economic welfare, better standards of living, national integration and strengthening of democratic institutions and practices. They will also provide incentive, relief in family burdens and better sense of participation in national development work and a sense of satisfaction for the people. Welfare programmes so planned would be a plus factor in the current situation and not a burden on our plans made and resources earmarked for economic development. Panchayati Raj without vigorous welfare programmes would be incomplete, inadequate and may not meet the needs of the people and expectations of it, well.

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## THE PANCH-SARPANCH SAMMELANS\* IN RAJASTHAN

(With special reference to the Sammelan held at Duda in Jaipur District)

P.C. MATHUR

### I

#### *Introduction*

When the initial glow of pioneering in introduction of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan was beginning to diminish it was quickly recognised that the flow of enthusiasm and energy for this new scheme was not so large either in velocity or in volume, as envisaged in the original estatic, rhapsodic visions, mainly because some of the non-officials who were now elevated into the master's gaddi could not find their feet; their presence in the new capacity instead of acting as a catalytic agent for starting a mass chain reaction was itself creating a dragging liability. This was specially true as far as the Panchas (members of the Panchayats) were concerned; the Panchayat had been declared to be the basic institution of the Panchayati Raj structure; yet the creation of bigger and powerful (in terms of resources, funds and personnel) institution like the Panchayat Samiti in close proximity to it led to apathy on the part of the Panchayats.

With the general dormancy and growing passivity of the Panchayats the Panchas had little to do and their position was further weakened by the provision that the Sarpanch of a Panchayat was to be an *ex officio* member of the Panchayat Samiti and as such acted as the sole link between the Panchayats and the Panchayat Samiti. The other Panchas had little chances of knowing about the discussions/decisions at the Panchayat Samiti level. While on the one hand, the Panchas had no direct access to Panchayat Samiti their utility was being further reduced by the irregular, chaotic manner in which the Panchayat meetings were being called and conducted. *The cumulative result was a feeling of apathy among the Panchas who felt themselves left out of it all.* The ushering in of 'Democratic Decentralisation' which was expected to unleash a mighty revolutionary force in the rural India, was consequently deprived of its major source of energy. This state of affairs was diagnosed

\*Sammelan, a Sanskrit word meaning Conference.

by the Rajasthan Government in its early stages<sup>1</sup> and it launched upon a number of remedial steps.

Among the efforts to awaken the Panchas and utilise their latent energies the holding of Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans ranks as one of the major conscious efforts to carry the message of Panchayati Raj to the Panchas and make them take an active part in its activities. Starting only one year after the inauguration of Panchayati Raj, Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans were held all over Rajasthan and by now they have become a regular annual feature.

#### *Aims and objectives:*

In the context of the general background of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan just outlined the main aim of the Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans is to galvanize the Panchas into action and make them fully associated with the scheme of rural reconstruction and development being formulated or implemented by the Panchayats and other Panchayati Raj institutions. The Sammelans seek to secure greater involvement of the Panchayats in the Panchayati Raj schemes by entrusting upon them functional responsibilities and putting them in charge of specific activities. In a general way, all members of a Panchayat are committed to

1. Much of what occurred later was anticipated by Sri P. K. Choudhuri who writing on the eve of inauguration of Democratic Decentralisation in Rajasthan had noted certain provisions of the Rajasthan Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act 1959 which were "likely to cause frictions between the Panchayat Samiti and the Panchayats under it", (p. 1367) and had pointed out the 'anomaly' or having Sarpanchs as members of the Panchayat Samiti. Vide: "Decentralisation or Delegation of Power?" *Economic Weekly*, October 3, 1959, P. 1365-1368.

Our analysis finds corroboration in the Report on 'The working of Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan (April 1961 to March 1962)' published by the Evaluation Organisation, Government of Rajasthan, which points out that "Hitherto it has generally been noticed that the Panchas do not take as much interest as would be desirable either in the affairs of the Village Panchayats or in the Development of the villages they represent. Usually, the entire initiative in this respect is exercised by the Sarpanch" and adds that "one of the main factors which has thrown the village Panchayat in the background is the overriding importance of the Sarpanch as an individual. This is mainly due to the fact of his direct election and his membership of the powerful body—the Panchayat Samiti" (p. 91).

The Report on p. 70 gives the percentage of cases in which the Sarpanchas apprised the village Panchayats about (i) Decisions taken in the Panchayat Samiti meetings. (ii) Views expressed by him in the meeting of the Panchayat Samiti on subjects which were of interest to the Village Panchayats. (iii) Discussions held in the Panchayat Samiti meeting for the State as a whole to be 14.4%, 11.4% and 13.8% respectively.

These extremely low percentages show that the Sarpanchas rarely reported in the Panchayats as to what transpired in the Panchayat Samiti meetings.

contribute their best towards the Panchayat plans and schemes but one of the main objectives of a Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan is to assign specific tasks and specific targets for each of these tasks, for each individual Panch. In other words, the attempt is to reduce the institutional loyalty of Panchas towards the Panchayats into concrete terms of individual responsibility.

However, the objective is not merely the fixation of individual Panch-wise targets but to synthesise them into a village plan. The ultimate aim, therefore, is the formulation of a village plan with the help of the local people in which each Panch has a definite role to play. Such Plans can be more easily prepared and will secure a more popular acceptance if all the people concerned with the plans are associated with the task and are assembled on a common platform to discuss its various aspects.

Another objective of a Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan is to emphasise the significance of 'Associate Institutions' such as Navyuvak Mandals and Mahila Mandals which are mainly non-statutory voluntary bodies without whose existence and effective functioning the statutory institutional structure of Panchayati Raj would be incomplete.

The third major aim of organising such Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans is to provide an annual opportunity for all people connected with Panchayati Raj in a given area to get together and review the progress made during the past year and to suggest appropriate remedies for the problems encountered. This brings to surface many functional problems which would either have never come to light or would have remained submerged in mass of official files.

#### *The General (Organisational and Operational) Pattern:*

Every Panchayat Samiti holds a Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan every year on dates (generally in summer) fixed in consultation with the Zila Parishad. Normally the Samiti headquarters town is the venue but in many cases the Sammelans are held at other places also.

The Panchayat Samiti bears the cost of these Sammelans while the Zila Parishad<sup>2</sup> also makes an ad hoc grant towards the expenses. The Panchayat Samiti also issues guidance circulars to all the Panchayats and other village institutions in this connection. It also circulates a proforma suggesting some suitable qualitative and quantitative details of the targets to be discussed and finalised in the Sammelan. The Zila Parishad and the

2. For the financial year 1961-62 the Jaipur Zila Parishad has made a provision of Rs. 4000 for Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans out of a total Budget expenditure of nearly Rs. 60,000. In fact these Sammelans rank as one of the best ways in which the Zila Parishad can act as a link between the Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis and the State Government.

District Development Officer draw up a uniform schedule and agenda which is usually followed by all the Panchayat Samitis.

Each Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan is attended by all the officials as well as the non-officials connected with Panchayati Raj in that area and is not merely an assembly of Panchas and Sarpanchas as its title would seem to suggest. Thus, the Pradhan, and all the other members of the Panchayat Samiti (including the co-opted members), the Vikas Adhikari and all the Extension Officers as well as most of the Block staff, all the Secretaries of the Panchayats, the Co-operative societies, the Navyuvak mandals, the Mahila mandal and all the Gram-sevaks and the Gram-kakis are usually present at a Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan. Besides these persons, each Government Department is expected to be represented by a District Level Officer and the Secretary and the Pramukh of the Zila Parishad also make it a point to attend such Sammelans. Often many dignitaries like ministers and other leaders also attend and participate in the Sammelans. In all, the total attendance at a Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan ranges from 200 to 400 depending upon the size of the Panchayat Samiti and the number of Panchayats in it. The Sammelan extends over two days, and after a brief inauguration ceremony the Sammelan dissolves into a number of subject-matter 'Goshtis' whose membership and agenda are fixed and circulated in advance. Each 'Goshti' tackles an important subject or group of related subjects and prepares a report embodying its decisions and recommendations. A 'Goshti' has about 30 to 40 members with a chairman and one of the officials present at the Sammelan acting as its Secretary. Normally all the persons attending the Sammelan are associated with one or the other 'Goshti'. The reports of all the 'Goshtis' are collected and presented before the plenary session of the Sammelan and members are asked to comment on them and endorse the decision-recommendations embodied therein. Sometimes as a result of discussion many such recommendations are altered or rejected. After the reports of all the 'Goshtis' have been discussed (which generally takes up most of the second day) the Sammelan breaks up into the Panchayats that constitute the Panchayat Samiti. Since all the sarpanchas and the Panchas of the Panchayats are present each Panchayat holds its meeting separately and discusses the decision arrived at in the Sammelan. The Panchayats are expected to formally adopt these decisions, as they see fit in the light of their own circumstances and requirements. After the Panchayats have all met and decided their own programmes and targets, a meeting of the Panchayat Samiti is called which again formally adopts the decisions reached in the Sammelan and also takes the necessary action to give effect to its various recommendations.

3. Goshtis, a Sanskrit word meaning Study Groups.

While this business is transacted on the first day and most of the second day, the first hour of the second day is reserved for an 'informal session' which has no fixed agenda and in which any member present can raise any general problem germane to the working of Panchayati Raj, etc.

The Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan is also utilised for various other connected activities such as sports meets, prize distribution, film shows, variety entertainment programmes, etc.

## II

### THE DUDU PANCH-SARPANCH SAMMELAN

The Dudu Panchayat Samiti<sup>1</sup> organised a Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan on 15th and 16th May 1962 at Naraina<sup>2</sup> a town nearly 56 miles from Jaipur and which was attended by well over 300 persons including Panchas, Sarpanchas, Pradhan, Vikas Adhikari, Extension Officers, representatives of Navyuvak mandals, Mahila Mandals, co-operatives societies, Panchayat Secretaries, Gram Sevaks, District Level Officers and the Secretary and Pramukh, Jaipur Zila Parishad.<sup>3</sup>

The Sammelan was held in a large, spacious, well decorated hall with the Pramukh, Jaipur Parishad, in Chair, who in a short speech bid success to the Sammelan. The Secretary, Jaipur Zila

4. The Dudu Panchayat Samiti (in Jaipur district) functions in a 'Shadow block'. Yet it emerged, in 1960-61, as one of the best five Panchayat Samitis in Rajasthan in a State-level evaluation competition organised by the Development Department, Government of Rajasthan.

As far as activities and achievements under the scheme of Democratic Decentralisation are concerned the Jaipur district is in the vanguard and as a general average, the Jaipur district alone has contributed nearly 33% of the total achievements obtained in the entire State. In some respects the share of Jaipur district is as high as 50% and 66%. For further information in this connection a Hindi booklet *Jaipur Zila : 1961-62*, prepared by the District Development officer, published by the Jaipur Zila Parishad and available at the Government Central Press, Jaipur, may be consulted.

5. The choice was mainly dictated by absence of proper lodging-board facilities at Dudu which is the Samiti Headquarters; Naraina, apart from being situated on the Jaipur-Ajmer railway line offered a tailor-made venue for holding of such a huge sammelan. Naraina is one of the 'centres' of Dudu panth and members of this sect hold a vast festival every year and to accommodate the large number of people gathered on this occasion have constructed many fine buildings and discussions halls where religious discourses are held. These were utilised for this Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan and this solved many headaches which perplexed organisers in other Panchayat Samitis.

6. The author attended this Sammelan and 3 others with the purpose of collecting material for research work on the topic "The theory of Democratic Decentralisation in the specific context of India's developing economy and its practice in Rajasthan" accompanied by his supervisor Dr. Iqbal Narain, Reader and now Offg. Head of the Dept. of Political Science, University of Rajasthan, Jaipur.

Parishad then explained the purposes and objectives of such Panch-Sammelans and lastly the Pradhan made a brief plea to the various officers as well as non-officials present not to take umbrage at any criticism, advanced during the Sammelan. The Sammelan, he said, was not meant to criticise but its aim was to bring the latent problems of Panchayati Raj to surface and to discover the appropriate remedies for them.<sup>7</sup>

With these preliminaries over, the Sammelan dissolved into 13 Goshtis<sup>8</sup> each consisting of 30-40 members and dealing with specific items. All these Goshtis held their meetings simultaneously; hence it was possible to attend only one of them and below we proceed to describe the meeting of the 'Finance and Panchayat Resources' Goshti which was mainly concerned with Panchayat's financial resources and ways and means of augmenting them.

*A Goshti (on Finance and Panchayat Resources) Meeting:*

To begin with, the Goshti proceedings were dull as only 5-10 members were present for the first half an hour but slowly attendance increased to nearly 25 out of a total membership of 34.

The deliberations of the Goshti were mainly carried out in the local dialect upon the suggestion of the official member, a Panchayat Inspector in this case.

The Chairman, a Sarpanch, started the discussion with the remark that people's participation was not forthcoming in the required amount especially in case of wells construction and suggested that its proportion be reduced from 33% to 25% of the total cost. This suggestion was accepted in the Goshti but later rejected by the Sammelan.

The discussion then veered round to ways of increasing Panchayat resources and the members suggested a variety of non-tax income sources. The various Panchas and Sarpanchas

7. This seems to be the appropriate place for the author to echo the Pradhan's plea and point out that this paper is being solely written for academic study purposes and though references to actual persons (in their official capacity, at least) cannot be avoided the emphasis is not on the person concerned but on the problem involved.

8. The 13 Goshtis were formed for the following items: (1) Co-operatives and Industries, (2) Navyuvak Mandals, (3) Mahila Mandals, (4) Revenue and Defence, (5) Administration, (6) Finances and Panchayat Resources, (7) Agricultural Production and irrigation, (8) Animal Husbandry and Forests, (9) Electricity, House construction, Sharmadan and Transport, (10) Social Education and Social Welfare, (11) Education, (12) Health and Family Planning and (13) Small Savings and Rural Insurance. This was the uniform pattern at most of Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans and as is evident from the above list the Goshtis covered most of the relevant and significant aspects of Panchayati Raj and rural development and facilitated some thinking on these matters by the Panchas and others all over the State.

present clearly ruled out tax effort on their part and rejected the proposal of a House Tax strongly canvassed by the official member.

Most of the members wanted the Panchayat Samiti to help the Panchayat financially and all wholeheartedly agreed with the official member's suggestion that a proportion of the Samiti's own income might be transferred to the Panchayats. This proportion was fixed at 75% after some discussion leaving only 25% for the Panchayat Samiti.

The chairman as well as other members expressed dissatisfaction with the existing financial link between the Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayat<sup>9</sup> and suggested that either the Panchayat Samiti should bear the expenditure incurred on Nyaya Panchayat in its area or the Nyaya Panchayat might be abolished altogether handing back to Panchayats the administration of justice.

The goshti agreed to the official member's suggestion that under the present budget formula<sup>11</sup> the Panchayats could not even pay enough salary to a Secretary and hence recommended that the establishment costs might cover 60% of the entire budget as against the present 40%.

The official member put forward the idea of the community tax and without much discussion the goshti agreed that every resident of a village must either contribute sharmadan for 4 days or pay Rs. 7 per year.

As will be evident from the above the official member played a dominating role in the Goshti and most of the suggestions emanated from him. Among the members some Sarpanchas took active part but most of the Panchayat members remained passive spectators in even such a small body.

*Discussion of the Goshti Reports:*

After all the Goshtis had concluded their deliberations the plenary session of the Sammelan was resumed and the reports of

9. This refers to income derived by the Panchayat Samiti from its own efforts such as from property taxes, levies etc.

10. In Rajasthan a Nyaya Panchayat has been formed for 5 to 7 Panchayats and each Panchayat has to contribute towards its financial expenditures. The Finance Standing Committee of the Panchayat Samiti considers the budget of the Nyaya Panchayats and directs each Panchayat to 'Provide in the Panchayat budget a particular amount for contribution towards the expenditure of the Nyaya Panchayat'. This amount is calculated according to the population of the Panchayats, Vide: Rule No. 292 *Ibid* P. 77.

11. Under the prescribed rules expenditure on the establishment should not exceed 40% of the total receipts in the year and there must be a working balance of not less than 20% of the estimated receipts of the year. The rest 40% is to be spent on developmental schemes and works vide Rule No. 291, Rajasthan Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayat (General) Rules, 1961.

the Goshtis were read out, in most cases by the Chairman concerned but by the official members in some cases. The reports of the Goshtis on 'Navyuvak Mandals', 'Mahila Mandals' and 'Co-operatives and Industries' were first taken up for discussion since one of the purposes of the Sannelan was to lay special emphasis on these activities. Among the 13 reports those of the Goshtis on 'Animal Husbandry and Forests', 'Social education and Social Welfare', 'Electricity, House construction, sharmadan and Transport', did not evoke much discussion; they were just read out and were perfunctorily adopted by the Sannelan. This was mainly because these reports contained only specific recommendations about specific requirements of the area and everybody wanted to bring them to the notice of the State Government.

Discussions on the reports of the 'Health and Family Planning' and 'Small savings and Rural Insurance' Goshtis were even briefer and they were hurriedly endorsed.

The reports of Goshtis on "Navyuvak Mandal" and 'Mahila Mandal' mainly contained some concrete steps to strengthen these organisations and these were also quickly accepted.

There was a serious discussion on the reports of the 'Revenue and Defence', 'Administration' and 'Finances and Panchayats Resources' Goshtis and many significant points were raised in the discussion on the reports of the 'Agricultural production and Irrigation' 'co-operative and Industries' and 'Education' Goshtis. Below we are giving the salient points of some of these reports and indicating the lines on which discussion followed.

(1) *The Revenue and Security Goshti:*

Among other things the report recommended that: (i) The system of revenue collection through the Patels should be abolished and the Panchayats should be entrusted with the work of revenue collection; (ii) The Patwaris who at present do not give much co-operation to Panchayat should be asked to attend its meetings; and (iii) village watch and ward arrangements should be made to check theft, etc.

The first recommendation sparked off a lively discussion in which most speakers emphasised that the institution of Patels should be abolished because (i) they had become too powerful and acted as over lords, (ii) they received a large commission (5% for revenue collection which if given to Panchayats will stabilise their financial position, (iii) the Panchas were already rendering a lot of assistance to Patwaris in their work and they could easily take over the entire work, and (iv) such a hereditary system was an anachronism in the context of 'Democratic Decentralisation' and it should not be allowed to persist.

Though so many effective arguments were put forward against Patels their defence was not weak; one of the M.L.A.'s

and a few Sarpanchas pointed out that the Patel knew his village like the back of his palm and his knowledge in land affairs was indispensable. Finally the Sannelan could not arrive at any decision.<sup>12</sup>

The third suggestion also touched off a serious discussion as the Dy. S.P. outlined a simple plan under which two people were to patrol the village in night hours to safeguard property and bring about social unity<sup>13</sup> and though he expressed himself at length on the utility of his scheme his peration fell on deaf ears and the members remained unconvinced.

(2) *The Administration Goshti:*

Among the main points of this report were (1) the Panchayat Secretary should be the agent for rural insurance; (2) 50% of the Panchayat Samiti's own income should be handed over to the Panchayats; and (3) the Gram Sevak should act as the Planning Secretary to the Panchayat and maintain control over the Panchayat Secretaries for development work.

The report as a whole was keenly discussed and many side issues were dragged in an effort to criticise the Pradhan who acted as the chairman of this Goshti. Thus taking the recommendation about rural insurance the ex-Pradhan (who had been unable to become a member of Panchayat Samiti in 1960 elections) proceeded to compare the amount of rural insurance collected in his village and the Pradhan's village and he further pointed out that the Secretary should collect rural insurance on behalf of the Panchayat and not in his own name. The latter part was confirmed by the representatives of L.I.C.

The proposal about placing the Sachivs (Secretaries) under the 'control' of Gram Sevak encountered stiff opposition; most of the Sarpanchas called this a foolish step and regarded it as a disguised attempt to take away the Gram Sevak from their control. The Secretary, Zila Parishad, clarified that this was not at all the intention but the aim was to associate the Gram Sevak with the developmental functions of the Panchayats and train the Sachivs in preparation of village Production Plans and other plans. This explanation, however, did not cut any ice and

12. While the Rajasthan Government is still considering the matter it may be noted that Maharashtra has gone ahead and abolished the system of hereditary paid 'Patels', under the Maharashtra Patels (Abolition) Act to which the President has recently given his assent.

13. His argument was, in essence, that since one man will be responsible for guarding the property of all the others he will be trusted by all the others and as each person will take turns to act as watchmen and guard all men will begin to trust each other and this will give rise to greater social cohesion and unity. It is interesting to record that this line of thinking failed to convince most of the people present and shows the extent to which social values of Indian ruralities have changed.

most of the Sarpanchas opposed the idea tooth and nail and refused to accept the proposal.

(3) *The Finance and Panchayat Resources Goshti:*

As we have seen earlier, the main proposals of this Goshti were: (i) 75% of the Panchayat Samiti's own income might be given over to Panchayats, (ii) Nyaya Panchayats should be separated financially from the Panchayats, and (iii) Community Tax should be levied.

The first item was accepted but a Sarpanch pointed out an alternative, viz. that the Panchayat Samiti should bear the entire recurring expenses, mainly the establishment charges of the Panchayats but it was not formally accepted.

Most of the persons who spoke on this report pointed out the inability of the Panchayat to levy taxes and all mentioned one or the other non-tax sources of revenue which could be tapped such as Registration and Mutation fees, Toll on quarries, Royalty on mining, etc. This was countered by the Secretary, Zila Parishad, who pointed out the basic dilemma in which the Panchas found themselves, viz. that "Taxes will make them unpopular but if the Panchayat remains inactive then too they will become unpopular for the Panchayat cannot do much until it levies taxes to increase its resources."

(4) *The Agricultural Production and Irrigation Goshti:*

The Goshti recommended the following Panch-wise targets:<sup>14</sup> (a) construction of Five wells and distribution of 150 cement bags for this purpose, (b) planting 50 fruit-bearing trees, (c) 25 acres of 'Medhbundi', (d) distribution of 3 improved tools, (e) distribution of 5 tons of green manure and 1 bag of fertilisers, (f) preparation of 20 compost pits.

Each Panch was requested to treat these as minimum targets for fulfilment in his area, i.e. the ward with the help of people's participation.

The discussion on these 'targets' was rather lukewarm and most of them were accepted except that of construction of new wells where the original target of five per Panch was reduced to five per Panchayat.

*Appraisal of Goshti work:*

The foregoing account has given some idea as to how the Goshtis worked and how their reports were discussed. These

14. Most of these targets were the same as circulated by the Panchayat Samiti except in case of new wells and distribution of chemical fertilisers where it halved the suggested targets.

Goshtis gave the various Panchas and others a chance to discuss their local problems and suggest their own solutions. Most of the Goshti discussions were dominated by the official member; nevertheless, others got a full opportunity to express themselves. The Goshti reports revealed several hidden bottlenecks and brought to surface many local problems with which the District Level Officers had been, hitherto, unacquainted. Many reports made specific recommendations on which action was taken locally and immediately. The reports also revealed many latent sources of leadership as well as revenue, specially non-tax revenue. Finally, the discussion on the reports gave an excellent opportunity to many people to express their views and for most of the persons present gave an indication as to how well-conducted meetings and discussions are carried out.

*The 'Informal Session':*

Useful as the Goshtis were, from the official point of view, the 'informal session' proved to be a mine of information about the working of Panchayati Raj. It provided a close-up view of the Panchayati Raj revealing its peaks as well as depressions. It not only gave the people a chance to ventilate their genuine grievances but also uncovered many of the grudges and grouses they bore against each other and thus presented a more truer picture of Panchayati Raj than is otherwise available.

The first few speakers were Panchayat Secretaries who complained that (a) their pay and D. A. were not fixed, (b) their pay was too low, and (c) it was seldom paid in time and in case of some their salary was in arrears for five months. This was because the Panchayat Samiti never approved the Panchayat budgets in time, e.g. up to May 1962 the budgets for 1961-62 had not been passed and returned to Panchayats.

Many Sarpanchas next took the floor to point out that while Panchas helped the Patwari in his work he seldom reciprocated. One Sarpanch, in a forceful language criticised the work of Extension Officers and two or three of them complained that Gram Sevaks did not attend the Panchayat meetings and did not assist the Panchas in their work. This drew a sharp rejoinder from a Gram Sevak who pointed out that when he visited the Panchayat meetings he was made to cool his heels for the whole day as Panchas indulged in private work and only towards the evening some Panchayat business was transacted thus wasting his entire day. This, several other Gram Sevaks corroborated as being their own experience. One of the local, influential Sarpanch joined issue

with the Gram Sevaks and roundly charged them of being inefficient and "not knowing their job".<sup>15</sup>

At this point, the Pradhan called upon the lady members present to say something but after much urging and prodding only two ladies rose to speak and they just uttered one or two sentences about role of women in Panchayati Raj and hurriedly sat down.

A Sarpanch during the course of discussion pointed out that the collector was the appellate authority against the decisions of the standing committee (of Panchayat Samiti) on Administration and at that stage the Panchayat Samiti usually lost its cases as it did not have any legal aid in presenting its case. He pleaded for the appointment of a Legal Adviser and the Secretary, Zila Parishad, explained that this matter was under the consideration of Government and meanwhile Zila Parishad was giving legal advice to Panchayat Samitis.

The Secretary, Zila Parishad, intervened in the discussion and requested the audience to ponder over two questions which he thought were important in the context of Panchayati Raj. The first, according to him, was whether the introduction of Panchayati Raj has impaired the social unity of the villages? In this connection he referred to the criticism and counter-criticism of Panchas, Patwaris, Gram Sevaks, Sarpanchas and Extension Officers which had been just aired in the Sammelan and wanted to know whether it was a result of breakdown of emotional unity of the villages? This, however, did not bring much response except that most of the persons thought that "We are just as before".

The second issue he raised was whether the Panchayat Samiti was having an excessive concentration of powers and funds and if so, how to strengthen the Panchayats. This issue too, was side-tracked as the discussion was directed to the problem of payment of salaries or allowances to the Panchas as to most of the members this seemed to be the only way of enthralling the Panchas to do their work sincerely. This raised a lively controversy in which several members opposed such an idea and pointed out that money alone would not make the Panchas work and the Pradhan argued that this will turn the Panchas into paid servants while they should act as dedicated social

15. This exchange of hot words, despite the Pradhan's plea not to touch personal matters or name particular persons, brought to surface a minor local scandal about distribution of treesapling. This is only one example of the many disputes, quarrels, controversies which erupted constantly into the deliberations and interrupted the flow of discussion.

workers.<sup>16</sup> The main point at stake between the Panchayats and the Panchayat Samiti was however lost sight of in this inconclusive discussion.

The 'Informal Session' thus provided a free and frank discussion and revealed many of the weak links of Panchayati Raj. However, even in this 'free for all' only 20 persons participated out of which only 10-12 played an active role. The large number of Panchas present were just content to sit, listen and gossip and even on matters of vital concern for them such as, payment of allowances to Panchas, very few expressed their views.

#### *The Panchayat Meetings :*

On the second day, after the Goshti reports had been discussed, the Panchayat meetings took place to consider the recommendations adopted by the Sammelan. However, the two-day programme had put a heavy strain and on the evening of the second day the members seemed in a hurry to leave. Hence, the Panchayat meetings were just held as formalities and the main business transacted was to lay emphasis on the 'targets' which the Sammelan had just adopted. In this task the various District Level Officers and Extension Officers assisted the Panchayats in drawing up Panch-wise targets. It may be pointed out that the Sammelan targets were not just adopted as such by all the Panchayats. In many cases Panchayats modified them to suit their own needs and circumstances; *the general tendency was to lower the 'targets' accepted in the Sammelan by fixing targets for the Panchayats as a whole rather than for each Panch. This meant that one of the main objectives of the Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan was frustrated since the Panchas*

16. In Rajasthan the Pramukh (Chairman of the Zila Parishad) is paid a monthly allowance of Rs. 250 and the Pradhans (Chairmen of Panchayat Samitis) are paid Rs. 150 per month but the Sarpanchas and Panchas are not paid any fixed allowances.

The Sarpanchas and Panchas are, of course, eligible to receive daily and travelling allowances for journeys performed in connection with Panchayati Raj affairs. (Vide Rule No. 3 of *The Rajasthan Panchayat and Nyaya Panchayat (General) Rules, 1961*. However, the Sarpanch not only gets higher amount of T.A. and D.A. than the Panchas he also gets more opportunities to collect T.A. and D.A. in connection with Panchayat Samiti and Standing Committee meetings. Hence while holding the post of Sarpanch is financially advantageous the Panchas find their office a liability specially since they do not get any T.A. and D.A. for attending the Panchayat meetings. Needless to add that they are seldom interested in moving about in their Panchayat Circle in connection with Panchayat work.

Till so far, however, the official line of thinking (at Central as well as State level) has not reconciled itself to the idea of payment of monthly allowances to the Sarpanchas and Panchas as this step is regarded as making the Panchayati Raj set-up too expensive.

refused to be drawn out of their passivity and did not like to be assigned specific responsibilities.

The Sammelan ended with a short general Panchayat Samiti meeting in which was decided to forward the Sammelan's recommendations and resolutions to the State Government for necessary action.

### III

#### AN APPRAISAL

Though highly successful on the organisational front (a no mean task considering that lodging-boarding facilities had to be arranged for well over 400 people including the organisers) and fairly interesting and informative in its operational aspects the Dudu Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan left much to be desired. *The main objective of such a Sammelan, viz. to activate the Panchas was only inadequately and mainly indirectly achieved.* The Panchas numbering nearly 150 in a total gathering of about 300 people were mere spectators for most of time; they did not contribute much in the Goshti meetings and were clearly relegated to the background in the plenary session of the Sammelan. It may also be mentioned that out of a total number of 463 Panchas only 156 attended the Sammelan. This meant that only one-third of the Panchas could benefit from the holding of this Sammelan. Even in the 'Informal Session' which provided sufficient scope for impromptu remarks and extempore speeches the presence of Panchas was hardly noticeable. The Panchayat meetings which were expected to thoroughly discuss the issues raised and targets adopted in the Sammelan turned out to be mere formalities in which some targets (on the whole, lower than those recommended by the Goshtis and Sammelan) were hurriedly adopted. Further, no attention could be paid to the important task of formulation of village plans as the time available for the Panchayat meetings was short.

Indirectly, of course, the Sammelan proved to be very beneficial for the Panchas; they were able to get together and discuss common problems not only with fellow Panchas but also with all the officials connected with the Panchayat Raj in their area. Many new links were formed and the District Level Officers who generally tend to remain distant and whom the average villager still distrusts were specially enabled to forge direct contacts with the people. *Further, the Panchas had the benefit of attending a well-conducted meeting and listening to orderly discussions (including free and frank criticisms) carried out in a parliamentary manner which, in itself, constitutes a highly useful training in grass-roots democracy.*

The second main objective of such Sammelaning to emphasise and encourage the 'Associate Institution' was more or less lost in face of much more interesting issues which occupied the minds of the Panchas and Sarpanchas. Though the Navyuvak mandals of the area were fully represented in the Sammelan their problems were not fully discussed; the report of the Navyuvak Mandal Goshti aroused little interest and was quickly disposed of. Its main recommendation, viz. that the Panchayats should pay a regular subsidy to the Navyuvak Mandals was brushed aside as impracticable in the context of impoverished financial state of the Panchayats. The report of the Mahila Mandal Goshti received even less attention and the problems relating to women's programmes under Panchayat Raj were not discussed at all. Only a handful of women were present in the Sammelan and none of them played a significant role in the deliberations either in the Goshti or the Sammelan. *On the whole, it can be said that the Sammelan failed to act as a catalytic-booster for the 'Association Organisations' of Panchayat Raj in this area.*

*The Dudu Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan was a rewarding effort and a resounding success as far as the aim of discovering local bottlenecks and resources was concerned.* Many local bottlenecks as well as general problems relating to Panchayat Raj came to light during the discussions in the Goshti meetings, the Informal Session and the plenary session of the Sammelan. These related to almost all the aspects of Panchayat Raj and this was immensely beneficial to the officials (e.g. the D.L.Os.) who could note them and promise necessary action. The Sammelan provided a forum for the officials to explain the policies of their departments and this opportunity was utilised by all of them to draw the attention of the people towards aspects which are Panchayats and the Panchayat Samitis had so far neglected. On the other hand, the Panchas and Sarpanchas placed their difficulties before the concerned officials and thus a two-day exchange of information between the officials and non-officials took place. In fact, as some of the District Level Officers later revealed this Sammelan provided them a chance to dispose of most of their Department's business concerning the Dudu Panchayat Samiti region. *Hence the Sammelan proved specially effective in clearing the administrative communication line and thus bringing the administration much nearer to the people.*

Apart from the general suggestions put forward the Sammelan brought into open a number of concrete proposals which could be usefully implemented straightway. One special feature of the Sammelan was that it revealed a number of non-tax sources of revenue which could be tapped for enhancing

the Panchayat revenue and showed that villagers were not much averse to contributing Sharmadan for Community benefit.

However, against the fact that a number of local, functional and administrative problems were located or unearthed must beset the fact that many people thought that most of the suggestions and recommendations of the Sammelan would never be put into practice and the utility of the Sammelan would end with its completion. During the Informal Session, in the Plenary session and in their private talks many people called such a Sammelan as a "criminal waste of money". They characterised it as a 'mere tamasha' not taken seriously by anyone. In their support they pointed out that one such Sammelan had been convened last year also and it had made a number of proposals about whose fate no one was aware or concerned. In their opinion a similar fate awaited the proposals adopted by this Sammelan.

This view was opposed by many officials and non-officials who claimed that Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans had justified their cost in form off the mark.<sup>17</sup> Much of this controversy could have been avoided, as some members pointed out, if the Vikas Adhikari in his progress report submitted to the Sammelan laid special emphasis on this point and had given the actual facts about the last year's Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan.

#### Findings and conclusions :

Below we summarise some of the significant facts and trends about Panchayati Raj as revealed in the Dudu Panch-Sarpanch Sammelan:

#### Organisation :

(1) The Gram Sevak has not been properly linked with the Panchayats and as a result the Gram Sevaks and Panchas are critical of each other's actions and attitudes.

(2) There is a widespread demand for complete separation of the Panchayats and Nyaya Panchayats; the existing system under which a financial contribution has to be made for the

17. This reflected the views expressed by the B.D.O. in his report to the Zila Parishad wherein he paid a tribute to the Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans in the following words "A reading of this Report would reveal that in the year 1961-62 the achievement of physical targets has been, in case of almost all the significant items many times than that achieved last year...The credit for this goes to all those Panchas and Sarpanchas who accepted the responsibility of achieving definite targets for all these significant items in their respective area in the various Panch-Sarpanch Sammelans organised last year". *Jaipur Zila : 1961-62. Op. cit.*

Nyaya Panchayats by the Panchayats in proving to be irksome to the Panchayats.

#### Finances and Resources :

(3) Panchayats have inadequate incomes; they are not able to pay the salaries of the Secretary and the peons and are finding it hard to keep their 'Establishment charges' within 40% of their budgets; they want this to be statutorily increased to 60%.

(4) The Panchas and Sarpanchas are not in favour of increasing taxes but prefer non-tax revenue and are ready to point out many sources for it which are as yet not being tapped.

(5) The Panchayats are eager and willing to perform the task of revenue collection and till the time it is finally entrusted to them they are anxious to secure a large share (10% to 25%) of it.

(6) The Sarpanchas and Panchas are anxious to see that the Panchayat Samiti's own income is distributed among the Panchayats or else the Panchayat Samiti bears the Establishment expenses of the Panchayats.

#### Official—Non-official Relations :

(7) The relations between the officials and non-officials are far from smooth and harmonious; the rural scene is full of charges of disinterest, inefficiency and non-co-operation against the officials to which they are apt to counter that non-officials neglect them as well as their advice and force them to act in illegal and unauthorized ways.

(8) The revenue officials in general and the patwaris in particular have not been able to establish smooth operational relations with the Panchayats.

#### General :

(9) The institution of village Patels is being subjected to searching scrutiny and general criticism; the Panchas are complaining that as they do most of the Patel's work, the Panchayat and not the Patels, should get the 'Panchotra' (5% commission for land revenue collection).

(10) The Panchas as a whole are not playing their role in the Panchayats and some of them are in favour of instituting monetary incentives (like monthly allowances) to make them more active. Their enthusiasm and active participation is markedly lower than that of Sarpanchas who play a dominating role.

## SOME ASPECTS OF PANCHAYATI RAJ AND SARVODAYA

VISHWANATH PRASAD VARMA

### Introduction

Sarvodaya is a comprehensive social, economic, political, moral and spiritual philosophy. But the new concept of integrated Panchayati Raj is only a specific administrative technique to be practised at the district, block and village levels. It is true, however, that this technique of administration has been more or less also accepted by the Sarvodaya movement with some reservations. Democracy in the classical sense of rule of the people or sovereignty of the general will or government of, by, and for the people is a mere wishful utopia in the vast complicated technological commercial civilization of today. On the other hand, democracy in the sense of the 'sovereign choice' among competing candidates for rulership is not a very worthy ideal. In this context, the slogan of more democracy through providing the people with increased chances of political and administrative participation is certainly to be lauded. *Panchayati Raj* scheme is an attempt to work out the maximum decentralization of political power through democratic processes. It is a courageous venture in giving to people the responsibility for managing their own affairs. To provide the five lacs or so of India's villages with the institution wherein they can practice participating democracy is a gigantic experiment indeed, and this revolutionary venture is much more widespread in its implications than the older quest for people's co-operation in the development plans. One of the greatest dangers of a democratic structure is that it lacks intermediate bulwarks of strength between the national governmental agencies and the infinite number of disparate voters. In such a situation if the superstructure is captured by clever dictators the entire edifice collapses. The Sarvodaya movement has supported the scheme of Panchayati Raj, of course with vital modifications and reservations, on the ground that it aims to provide intermediate supporting structures of participant democracy between the nearly two hundred million voters and the national Parliament and executive. The Panchayati Raj agencies will certainly be more than the units of local self-government although they will not be the full representatives of grass-root organic democracies since they will be concerned only with problems of rural finance and rural administration and will not bother themselves with the key concerns of politics like national finance, foreign policy and country-wide transport.

I am a conservative in political and administrative matters. I want the country to go slow. I do not think it proper to saddle the villagers with too much of administrative technicalities and problems. We should not forget that the percentage of literates in our country is appallingly small in spite of the cry for adult mass education and social education. Hence, before we introduce too many innovations it is better to have the people acclimated with the institutions that have already been introduced. Thus I would have thought that the two-tier system should suffice for the present. The multiplication of intermediate layers in the shape of the *panchayat samitis* should have been avoided. But since the three-tier system has been adopted, now it is incumbent to strengthen it. Panchayati Raj for being stable demands not only that the district magistrate should not be a boss but also that the legislators and the members of the Parliament do not become demi-bosses.

The Panchayati Raj Scheme is calculated to be a significant experiment in the field of democratic decentralization. But if this scheme is to succeed, the virus of partisanship has to be avoided. Elections should be carried on by the local people and all-India parties should have nothing to do with the *panchayat*, the *panchayat samiti* and the *zila parishad* elections. But since legislators and Members of Parliament are also members of these bodies, it is doubtful if the virus of partisanship can be eliminated. But, for the greater cause of the service of the motherland such a self-denying ordinance has to be imposed by political parties upon themselves. If they do not do so voluntarily, perhaps parliamentary legislation may be required.

The most urgent problem today is to bring about a psychological revolution in the minds and hearts of the people. This cannot be brought about by officials. It is a sad commentary on the state of our affairs that the *gram sevaks* instead of being an 'obedient servant of the demos' is becoming a boss to some extent. He is subject all kinds of corruption. I will suggest that most of the *gram sevaks* (now called *panchayat sevaks*) and the V.L.Ws. should be recruited from the backward sections. They will do the job better. If the *gram sevaks* and the V.L.Ws. are men of the upper castes, in the minds of the poor illiterate villagers they typify the old remnants of feudal oppression. Thus along with the old traditions of social tyranny the new elements of governmental tyranny are being added. This amalgamation has to be destroyed. The elevation of the status of the suppressed strata was regarded as a matter of 'transcendental'

significance by Gandhiji.<sup>1</sup> Our Directive Principles of State Policy also are committed to this objective. But the uplift of the weaker sections demands a psychological remedy also. The programmes for providing some basic amenities to the poorer sections, like improved housing, good drinking water etc. will receive their psychological base if the members of the so-called backward classes are given more opportunities for participating in the processes of democratically decentralized administration. Only the reservation of these posts (of the *gram sevaks* and the V.L.Ws.) the incumbents of which come most in contact with the villagers, for the members of backward castes can help in the creation of that psychological *elan* which can be the foundation of the integrated rural community.

Sometimes it has been suggested that there should be a maximum devolution of administrative powers to the Panchayati Raj institutions so that we may have in the country something like 250,000 Panchayats with their informal and invisible sovereign power. It would be a sight for the gods to see if the *gram sabhas* constituted of all the adult members of the village were to exercise full powers in the decision of all matters concerning the village. They would obtain a sense of real responsibility if they have financial tasks also. But from my own experiences of *village panchayats* I am sceptical of vesting full and complete financial custody in the hands of the villagers for the present. Hence in the beginning of this paper I stated that I would like to go slow. So far as the association of M.L.As. and M.Ps. with these institutions at the village, block and district levels is concerned, it is a matter of concern that these power-hungry politicians dominate the scene. Hence these politicians should not be allowed to hold any office in the Panchayati Raj institutions nor should they have the right to vote therein. They are to be there in order to help the people through their broader knowledge of matters political and economic and opportunities have to be meticulously avoided where these politicians can build additional power-juntas for themselves. As a matter of fact, their presence should be more of an educative experience than a device for the ramifications of power. The Sarvodaya movement is doing a moral service to the nation in warning against the use of Panchayati Raj institutions as pawns in the sordid game of power politics.<sup>2</sup> But on the other hand in our rush for realizing participant democracy we should not clamour for the elimination of the district magistrate or for divesting him completely of power. I also think that the proposal to make the civil servant fully accountable to the Panchayati Raj is utopian.<sup>3</sup> I hold that the

1. V.P. Varma, *The political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya*, p. 21.

2. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Swaraj for the People*, p. 8.

Public Service Commissions must continue to be associated and actively consulted in the matters relating to recruitment<sup>4</sup> of the civil servants.

Sometimes complaints have been made against the system of dual control or dyarchy introduced in the block administration. The technical personnel or the extension advisers are under the governance of the B.D.O. so far as their day to day activities are concerned but they are under the administrative jurisdiction of their own departments. The B.D.Os. are not happy at the limitation of their power.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand the technical personnel resent the control of the B.D.O. The difficulty is enhanced by the fact that the medical personnel and the B.D.O. have almost the same scale of pay and hence the control of the latter is resented as external interference. The education officers also, some of whom have Master's degrees, resent the control of some of B.D.Os. with only a Bachelor's degree. Hence some kind of administrative rationalization is needed.<sup>6</sup>

#### ECONOMICS AND PANCHAYATI RAJ

##### *Accentuation of Agricultural Productivity*

The basic task before our country in the rural field is to increase agrarian productivity through scientific agricultural, animal husbandry, horticulture, etc. Instead of being elated at expenditure targets, the attention has to be shifted to physical targets and among the physical targets accentuation of agricultural productivity is a matter for top-most priority. Hence the preparation of Village Agriculture Production Plans have to be devised in such a way that the farmers, the members of the Gram Sabha and the technical extension officers devote themselves in all sincerity to the accentuation of the production of the agricultural fields. The bottlenecks in the expansion of rural economy cannot be effectively solved without a genuine human approach. The multiplication of administrative and co-operative institutions is a poor substitute for this human approach to the solution to the key problem of rural areas. Instead of terrifying the poor illiterate villagers by threats of increase of land revenue, (the contemplated 25% increase in land revenue in Bihar) and he

3. Jayaprakash Narayan, *Swaraj for the People*, (Varanasi, Akhil Bharat Sarva Sewa Sangh, 1961), p. 10.

4. One B.D.O. of Phulwarisharif Block made such an observation when members of our Institute visited his block.

5. A suggestion was agreed to at the 11th Annual Conference of Development Commissioners that the Collector should obtain the written views of the District Agricultural Officer before he (the Collector) would write the confidential reports of the B.D.Os. This would strengthen the case for some kind of administrative rationalization being necessary at the block level to avoid heart-burning and thwarting.

spectre of collective or co-operative farming,<sup>6</sup> the most urgent task is to increase the yield per acre. Hence programmes of soil conservation, minor irrigation, fuel plantation, afforestation, fertilizers, rotation of crops, etc. are to be encouraged for the intensification of agricultural productivity. In the light of the Panchayati Raj schemes the rural plans have to be so devised that the targets for districts, blocks and individual villages are so fixed as to have this basic objective in mind. Fodder production may also be included in this list. The active participation of the Gram Sabha is essential for the formulation and execution of the Village Agriculture Production Plan. My studies of the writings of Gandhi have convinced me that he was an individualist.<sup>7</sup> He wanted the limitation of acquisitiveness. I do think that the Sarvodaya people are wrong in putting a communistic and communitarian interpretation upon his thought. It is un-Gandhian to say that the lands of the villagers should be owned by the village community. Such slogans are only calculated to scare the villagers away. It is absolutely unrealistic to hope that with such cries and slogans the villagers would extend their co-operation to the new developmental schemes. If through minor irrigation projects the villagers can be assured even 25% increase in the crop yield they will experience a more gigantic exhilaration than can be evoked by any number of tall talks about strengthening of the people's voluntary organizations at the grass-roots. The main proximate objective is to strengthen the foundations of the agro-industrial urbo-rural economy. Instead of frittering away energies on schemes of immediate rural industrialization there is the imperative necessity of accentuation of agricultural productivity through irrigational projects and eventually through rural electrification.

#### Rural Imbalance

The democratic decentralization scheme has evolved in course of the study of the working of the Community Development and National Extension Service Schemes and it has sought to enshrine the block with an added sense of administrative glamour. Hence some of the experiences that have been obtained in course of the working of the C.D. Schemes should be taken note of. A very sad state of affairs of the new C.D. experiments has been the growth of 'village imbalance'. Some of the villagers which are geographically nearer to the block headquarter or some

6. I consider premature the suggestion that has been made in certain quarters that out of the development block funds grants should be made to co-operative farming societies. [The recommendations of the Solan (Simla) Seminar on Co-operative Farming].

7. V.P. Varma, *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi and Sarvodaya*, p. 277, pp. 217-241.

others which contain a number of clever people have profited much while the vast numbers seem to have been condemned to step-motherly treatment. From my own experience of the Rasulpur Block of the Chapra Sadar sub-division in Bihar, I can say that there is tremendous amount of suppressed resentment among the villagers at having been left uncared for. This 'village imbalance' constitutes a very serious threat to our democracy.

#### Land Revenue

One of the greatest curses of Indian history and civilization has been a romantic attachment to the local soil. It has bred an attitude of insular parochialism. The concept of India as one meaningful political unit is still very dimly experienced in the lives and thoughts of the inhabitants. Hence an attempt has always to be made that a significant dimension of the wish-fixation of the inhabitants is always focussed on 'India'. The proposal of the protagonists of the Sarvodaya school that land revenue should be placed "totally at the disposal of the village Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti"<sup>8</sup> can become disastrous as it would intensify the traditional localism of the villagers. The villagers must learn that the defence of the country also is their dominant concern. An exaggerated concern with self-sufficiency does breed an attitude of isolation. Hence at least thirty per cent of land revenue must be reserved for the State and Union Consolidated Fund. To meet the financial liabilities of the panchayat and the panchayat samiti the States and the Union may also contribute from their own funds. Thus an attitude of mutuality and reciprocity would be fostered. Otherwise the villagers will think that their land revenue is 'theirs' and the Himalayan frontier is the concern of the Government. From my limited experience of family administration I have seen that these earning members who do not contribute any money to the joint fund develop an unjustified selfish outlook. Thus I will place at least thirty per cent of land revenue at the disposal of the States and the Union for the performance of common needs even if this will necessitate the grants in turn by the States and the Union to the administration of the Panchayati Raj.

#### MORAL REVOLUTION: THE NEED OF THE HOUR

A moral revolution is needed today. It is more fundamental and is also a long term process. But unless there is a sense of dedication to the moral values, by political sermons on self-help and co-operation not much can be done. Vitality has dried out of our countryside. Our villages today are like skeletons. If the aim is to infinite a sense of dynamism and vitality

8. J.P. Narayan, *Swaraj For the People*, p. 10.

among them the real task is to go to them with a sense of humility for helping them to solve their problems. An agglomeration of administrative institutions may work out a paper solution but it will not touch the heart of the problems. Hence the 'jeep mentality' has to be avoided. Simplicity and not complexity has to be the criterion in administrative matters. The craze for big officialdom and *darbar* and large-scale administrative set-up does not look congruent in the context of our poverty. One of the greatest moral maladies in our country is the swiftness with which the Gandhian idealism is evaporating from our life. Our attachment to the artifices and adjuncts of Western civilization is becoming pernicious. Hence our moral capital is being depleted. It is one of the great services of the Sarvodaya movement that it seeks to soak the new institutional foundations for an organic participating democracy with the fertilizing waters of Gandhian ethical idealism without which institutional innovations are bound to remain mere external frameworks. Moral values constitute the solid foundation even of the political entities. The inculcation of moral values is the task for responsible citizens, intellectuals and university teachers and autonomous and voluntary service agencies. In criticism of the Panchayati Raj, it has been said that the *panchayat samitis* will be the units where the old patterns of oligarchical rule will be perpetuated through a new liaison between higher caste bosses, landed magnates and the governmental agencies. There is great truth in this criticism but this makes still more imperative the task of social and moral education of the villagers by disinterested intellectuals and voluntary associations. Only these latter, imbued with a moral idealism of the Gandhian type, can address themselves to the task of neutralization of the evert and covert oligarchical trends.

