CHAPTER : IX

PANCHAYAT ELECTION AND SCHEDULED CASTE LEADERSHIP.

The introduction of Panchayat Raj had contributed in increasing the political awareness of people. Panchayat Raj had also extended the areas of political activities from villages to the district and to the state levels, and in this way had broadened the base of leadership. Dube maintained that the use of the electoral method in the choice of leaders implied a change in the conception of the 'ideal' leader.¹

The Panchayat elections had thrown a new type of village leadership which was based on the adult franchise. In Maharashtra, in 1962, with the introduction of Panchayati Raj, the "little republics" were brought within the complex of the state's political structure. In 1962 for the first time, election to the Panchayats was conducted in Maharashtra on the line of new Panchayati Raj system.
It has undercut the customary principle which guided the formation and functions of the traditional panchayat.

The process of election might be termed as cornerstone of any democratic system, as it provided people an opportunity to elect their own government which could preserve and protect their rights and liberty, fulfil their aspirations and create an environment in which they could develop their overall personality. The process gets an added significance in a parliamentary democracy where the entire responsibility vests in the people, who, after adjudging policies, programmes, and promises made by different political parties for the development of society, gave their mandate in favour of one party for the governance of the country for a constitutionally defined period.

In brief, elections carried the most representative voice of the community. It was a way to sort out the means and to chart the way towards the goal. It was an index and instrument of dynamics of democratic process through which qualitative changes occurred in a democratic polity. It was one of the
crucial indices by which one might attempt to measure how far democracy as a value had been internalized among the political elites and masses. It constituted the mechanism for communication, influence and control from grass-roots upward. This mechanism involved both the political parties and voters: one for materializing the public welfare programmes and the other for the institutionalizing the people’s will. So, election was the oxygen of democracy. Elections were central to the functioning of modern democracies.

At the grass-root level, Panchayati Raj institutions were supposed to play an important role in the welfare of backward sections of the society in general and Scheduled Castes in particular. Reservation of seats on the elective bodies for Scheduled Castes at the local level was provided by the Constitution.

**Table 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are the Panchayat Elections held time?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of Respondents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes. 134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total. 134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respondents were asked whether the Gram Panchayat elections were held regularly. Respondents said in the affirmative.

The next question was asked to the respondents by which method they have been elected.

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Direct Election</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personal Interview.

All the respondents said that they have been elected by Direct Election to the Gram Panchayat. There was not a single candidate who was nominated or co-opted on the Gram Panchayat.
But the experience with systems of Co-option had not been a happy one. Some studies had come out with the finding that Panchayati Raj Institutions did not co-opt even the minimum prescribed number of members of the weaker sections. There was also evidence to suggest that the co-option was utilised by the Chairman as a weapon for consolidating their strength. A study conducted by the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes indicated that out of 2,648 elected members in the Panchayat Samitis in Orissa, only 148 or 6 percent of the total were tribal, though they constituted 20 percent of the population in the state.

The Bongirwar Committee (1971) reported with regret that "very poorer sections were not coming up in proportion to the extent of their population presumably more because they have as yet not participated in these activities. Similarly caste and community wise, minority communities appeared to be not getting proportionate representation."

J.F. Narayan was of the opinion that elections to village panchayats should be held without any contest. After seeing the working of Panchayati
Raj he was fully convinced that contests to the elections of village panchayats must be avoided. The village today was a much divided house .... there was no collective will in the villages ..... A community spirit must first be created before there might be a proper community development ... electoral contests have already produced such tensions that there was a virtual stalemate in the affairs of the panchayats. If this state of affairs continued there was a danger that in a few years every one would become so sick of the very words 'Panchayat' and 'Panchayat Raj' that Government from above through efficient civil servants would come to be welcomed with open arms and people's democracy would be declared to be a total failure.9

Thus one view was that there should be unanimous elections where there would be no faction, no clash and no illwill among the people. Unanimous elections were still prised and sometimes an incentive was offered by higher authorities for panchayats with such elections. That was popularly known as partyless democracy.
Again we could see that in our history of village panchayat, the unanimous election were not new to us. Because, from 1000 B.C. to 500 B.C. in India's history was called the era of Jampads, and generally, these Jampads elections were held on unanimous basis. But when there was difference of opinion, the opinion polling the majority of votes was adopted.\textsuperscript{10}

Before that, we could see in ancient India, except the early Vedic period, the status of the kings was hereditary.\textsuperscript{11} The British rulers introduced the electoral idea in the country when they set up the representative institutions.

But it was not possible and feasible to have unanimous elections for the village panchayats. Because the question of consensus had to be examined against the background of facts of village life, country's parliamentary set up and other socio-economic factors.\textsuperscript{12}

In fact, factions were the primordial political variable of the Indian villages. Lewis defines "faction as a small cohesive group which was the locus of power and decision-making."\textsuperscript{13} The study of factionalism was "vital in understanding the functioning of
the village community, especially its leadership pattern, channels of communication and its balance of power. Factions were an old ingrained pattern in village life.

In this way, we can see, the Indian society was traditionally stratified into religious and caste groups. Oscar Lewis study of the north Indian village revealed the existence of twelve different groups called "Dharas" by the village people. According to him functions were an old ingrained pattern in village life and need to be considered as a basic aspect of traditional village social organization along with castes and other groupings.

On the basis of such situation, the unity of village community, unanimous elections and decisions on the basis of consensus, in spite of being plausible were utopian propositions. A leading westerner-scholar, Myron Wiener, rightly argued that factionalism and caste positions were nothing new in the villages. There were caste and class differences, there were family and personal factions, and there was hardly any collective will in the village. In the context of such a
village life, unanimous elections (if elections are free and fair) were neither possible nor desirable, because that unanimity was likely to be more artificial and imposed than genuine and spontaneous. Shri S.K. Dey, observed that if unanimous elections were artificially promoted, there was a likelihood of perpetuating the three evils which had beset our country, viz. feudalism (Samant Shahi), capitalism (Poonji Shahi), and exploitation in the name of religion and morality (Mahant Shahi).

Out of the objectives of panchayati raj was to activize the people who would thus be motivated to destroy the hold of traditional leadership based on caste, religion or money relationships. Panchayati Raj was expected to provide new leadership by throwing out an opportunity to the masses to challenge the established authority of the traditional leaders at the time of elections. The Indian villager was to be taught and trained in the art and necessity of challenging the old institutions, systems and practices. That could not be done if 'unanimity' was imposed in the name of preserving the unity of the village - a unity which really did not exist.
The same scholars also subscribe to contestless elections to give the impression of a unified society. But contestless elections did not mean unanimity and consensus. Some State Governments also tried to encourage that virtue by announcing cash rewards. In spite of such offers contestless elections were very few, and such practice should not be encouraged because it might tend to suppression of minority by majority or weak majority by strong minority. In the words of P.C. Mathur, "Giving monetary incentives for contest avoidance appears to be patently political activity in which a democratic Government should not ordinarily indulge." It would suffice to give a picture from Rajasthan, the first state to launch Panchayati Raj movement how contestless elections were decreasing gradually. As many as 2257 of the over 7300 sarpanchas in the state were elected unopposed in the first panchayat elections. In the second panchayat elections held in 1965 the number of Sarpanchs elected unopposed deceased to 1625. The number came down to 697 in the third election held in 1978 and fell to just 538 in the last elections held in 1981 (Times of India 31-5-88).
In all the state this is the trend.\textsuperscript{22} It is due to the awakening of the people and intrusion of party politics. Under Hindu, Moghul and British Raj common people were in perpetual subjugation and accepted it as their destiny. Now the story of the same people aspiring to assume office was definitely a progressive sign. The path should not be blocked.\textsuperscript{23}

Some critics have tried to show that Panchayat elections had accentuated castes, community or religious rivalries. According to them there existed a 'Cold War' atmosphere in the village owing to the creation of Panchayat raj.\textsuperscript{24} The advocates of this viewpoint therefore, suggested that with a view to avoiding this 'Cold War' atmosphere and to eliminating rivalries, all kinds of incentives should be given for unanimous elections and contests should be avoided.\textsuperscript{25}

The answer to this criticism was that rivalries and factions existed before the creation of panchayati raj. The dominant group exploited the weaker sections without any moral pangs or sense of mercy. Panchayati Raj had provided an opportunity to the weaker sections to challenge in the open the established authoritarian
hierarchical order. Panchayati Raj had not created a cold war atmosphere; it had only brought the hidden and dormant contradictions to the surface. For the first time people had experienced the value and importance of vote; for the first time they have got an opportunity to challenge those whom they were previously expected to obey and worship; and for the first time the dominant groups were being challenged— a fact to which they were not used. Hence, political rivalries many a time, took an ugly turn and resulted in violent conflicts. But in course of time when the dominant group would get used to this 'challenge', and old groups would be replaced by new ones, when traditional leadership would give place to new leadership, the charges that elections lead to 'cold war' or open conflict would become stories of the past.

But in several cases they become the battleground of village factionalism. With the elective system in panchayats, because it gives rise to conflict and factions in the rural community. They vigorously plead for evolving some method of unanimous choice in Panchayats, so that harmony, instead of conflict could prevail in villages.
There are others, who hold a contrary view and plead for retention of elective element in panchayat elections on the ground that factions also existed in Indian villages long before statutory elected procedures were introduced and there is no cause to be upset over the element of conflict in elections.

Caste in Panchayat Election and Scheduled Caste Leadership:

The political system and the socio-economic process of a polity not only complement and supplement each other, but they work simultaneously and harmoniously also. The democratic political system was looked upon to change the static socio-political conditions in the country.

A look at the Indian society would prove that it was a traditional society-ridden with archaic considerations e.g. caste, community, race, language, region and with the deepest stress possible on religion. These characteristic features of the Indian society made specific demands from the new democratic polity and in turn influenced its course in the following years.
The institution of caste had been found socially useful to begin with otherwise it would not have continued for thousand of years. Caste system in Indian politics had come in for severe condemnation only in recent years due to its increasing politicisation and consequent parochical outlook of politics. The modern politics was certainly caste-ridden politics, candidates were chosen on caste considerations. There was increasing domination of higher castes on the lower ones. The casteism in Indian society had tended to stay but it should contribute positively in the development of the democratic polity.

Next to religion in the caste system which was a peculiar institution of Hindus and had affected their economic and social life in many ways. Caste, the most astoundingly stiff and enduring social institution that developed quite early in India had been an important factor influencing the course of social history of India. Even today it had been a forceful factor governing the social and political life of India.

There is another important feature which has crept in the caste system, that is the attribution of the innate endowment only to birth in a particular caste.
The caste developed as an autonomous social unit with its own caste-organization (called Panchayat) for enforcing the various caste rules among the members of the concerned caste and for regulating the inter-caste relations. The overall behaviour of each person belonging to a caste right from the birth till the death, was controlled by these castes organisations. Thus each caste contributed a veritable subculture with its distinct code of morality, traditions, rituals, food and dress habits and a distinct status in the caste hierarchy.

Indian caste system could hardly be compared with any other social system throughout the world and was a most distinctive feature of the Indian society, which had been exercising a profound influence on the functioning of the society.

Caste role in society

From the point of view of the individual member of a caste, the system provided him from birth a fixed social status from which neither wealth nor poverty, neither sources nor disaster could remove him. With regard to the individual the function of caste was to predetermine
his pattern of behaviour in the world to a very consider-derable degree of nicety, leaving little to the individual choice than to usual thing in a casteless society.

Again, the caste system not only determined the individual's social station on the basis of the group to which he was born but also differentiated and assigned occupational and economic roles. It thus gave a place to every individual from the highest to the lowest and made for a high degree of identification. 

Caste : One of the dominant feature of Indian Politics:

The Indian caste system had its roots in Varna system. The distinction between Varna and Jati was that Varna represented the theory of structure whereas as Jati relationship represented the actual way in which society functioned, and this word was better translated as caste. Varna became the ritual rank whereas Jati was the actual status so that its order in the hierarchy could be easily assigned. 36

The privilege being always related to power, the Indian caste system must be seen in the ideology of power. The lower castes were kept out of power so that they are compelled to concentrate on heavy manual work
and the surpluses are syphoned off by power vested castes by keeping the remunerations depressed.

Men are borne into castes and each caste is endowed with certain occupations to be followed which determines their status. Every individual had ascrptive personality and there was nothing for him to achieve on his own.

In India, an individual was never 'a primary unit' of the society. The 'caste' had been 'a unit' of the Indian society. He had no separate entity and existence operated from the caste to which he belonged. Individual had no rights as against his caste. The individual was a non-entity.

It was well evident that the impact of caste system manifested itself in the whole behavioural pattern, whether in the family or in the administration and politics. It would, therefore, be worthwhile to consider as to what form was the caste taking in the modern political set-up and how the present politics are influenced by the traditional caste oriented structure.
To understand the impact of the caste in politics, it was necessary to make a distinction between the functions of caste at the social, ritual and political levels. The constitutional provision of the universal suffrage and of certain other concessions for some backward castes originally encouraged a sense of emotional unity among these castes. For taking full advantage of these opportunities, the small groups which had so far been protecting their identity through endogamy and restricted commensality among the numbers of the caste-group, entered into an alliance with each other in order to present themselves as bigger entities. Thus the old caste system started undergoing a fundamental change. It was perhaps for the first time in the history that the dominated or under-privileged castes (forming the majority) had come to an advantageous position as against the dominant castes (forming the minority) and this state of affairs was often utilised successfully to serve the caste interests, quite distinct from the interests of the individual voter.

The working of the caste consciousness in the public affairs manifested itself in the General Elections, State Assemblies, Parliament and specially,
the elections to Panchayats and Municipalities confirmed that the caste considerations were predominant in the matter of elections.37

Political competition in a representative system was bound to give casteism 'a new lease of life' as Vinoba Bhave put it.38 The Gandhian economist Sriman Narayan declared that the 'present system of election had undoubtedly given strength and encouragement to casteism.39 Casteism and economic disparity posed a great danger to the country. The Indian society was divided by for 'too many castes and income groups.

**Impact of politics on caste:**

It was not caste alone which influenced the politics. Politics also transformed the caste and affected its solidarity and hierarchy. A caste conscious of its social stratification, strived to better its position for the sake of modernising the lift of its members and thereby saving itself from the on slaughts of social injustices.

Rajni Kothari said that it was not politics that got caste-ridden, it was caste that got politicised.
Dialectical as it might sound, it was precisely because the operation of competitive politics had drain caste out of its political context and given it a new status and identified witherto unknown had begun to disintegrate.

It was well known that the basis of all electoral politics was manipulation of votes with a view to capture political power. As a result of the introduction of universal adult franchise under the Indian constitution, even those social groups, which stood very low in social hierarchy and were economically backward, had come to wield enormous political power. These groups had been made conscious of their importance by the various political parties which approached them to solicit their support. Even, in a reserved constituency such caste sentiment was also strong. The distribution of tickets and formation of ministries, caste considerations invariably crept in.

The political behaviour of the people was influenced by caste considerations and it was quite evident at the different points of political process. Caste not only influenced the politics of the country, but it also affected the socio-economic system of the country.
Today the influence of caste on Indian politics was becoming so important that it rejected the familiar notion that there was a dichotomy between a traditional society and modern polity.

Today, the assumption of some of the national leaders that caste was a social evil, was generally regarded as a normative statement. On the strength of empirical studies, it was asserted that caste was not only playing a very "useful" role of democratising and secularizing the polity but it was also providing meaningful content to the political process itself.45

In short, new conditions in Independent India, had given a new vigour to the politicization of caste. As a result, caste had begun to manifest itself as regional rather than local force.

Caste in Panchayat Raj Elections:

The major function of the traditional panchayats was to preserve religious and social traditions and to regulate behaviour patterns of the individuals and groups so as to maintain order in the village. These Panchayats functioned primarily as an instru-
ment for settlement of disputes and were only to a minor extent concerned with governmental activities other than the adjudicatory functions.

The Indian village today is the focus of varied activities sponsored by the centre and the state authorities. Panchayati raj agencies are considered to be the instruments for revitalization of the village corporate life and their area of activities has been considerably enlarged when compared with that of the traditional panchayats. They are now charged with a series of obligatory duties and functions such as construction, repair maintenance, clearing and lighting of public streets, medical relief, sanitation, regulation of the construction of new buildings, assisting the development of agriculture, commerce and industry and administration of civil and criminal justice, construction and maintenance of public wells and the care and management of the common grazing grounds. They have also been empowered to carry out certain discretionary functions such as assisting and advising agriculturists in obtaining government loans, development of co-operatives and procurement of improved seed. To enable them to discharge these functions effe-
actively the gaon sabhas have been empowered to borrow money, to levy and collect taxes and to resource such fees as are legally due to them.

The Sarpanch's office has assumed special importance. He is not only the custodian of all the developmental activities in the panchayat area, but also the voice and symbol of the panchayat and represents in the world outside the village officials when they visit a village first contact the executive officer of the panchayat i.e. the Sarpanch. It is, therefore, quite natural that great importance is attached to the various offices of the panchayati raj bodies. A review of the studies in the field shows that introduction of the system of election for various offices has led to considerable strife among the villagers to acquire control over these bodies.

Caste as a social institution had deep roots in our society. An individual is born, lives and dies within the limits of his caste. Other professional organisations are not strong enough to give him a sense of security, identity, participation and self-interest.
He, therefore, stays within the caste system. Caste is the most important factor which determines the rural leadership. A person born in a high caste has an edge over other members of the society who belong to the lower and middle castes. In majority of the villages the leaders hail from the high castes. Occasionally persons belonging to the middle and lower castes may also get to change to become the leaders but they do not exercise much influence. All the efforts made by the Government to uplift the backward people (especially those belonging to the low castes) have not yielded the desired results and they have not been able to assert themselves. Therefore, one can say that caste considerations is still an important factor in determining the rural leadership in India.

The caste system provides an instrumental basis for tolerance. A caste based society is a pluralistic cultural universe, with each caste having its own occupation, customs, rituals, traditions, etc. The involvement of castes in politics is a process of mobilisation of different sections of society for political purposes.
When the scheme of democratic decentralisation acquired an institutional form through the establishment of the three tier Panchayati Raj bodies - the Village Panchayat, the Panchayat Samiti and the Zilla Parishad - it implied acceptance of the idea that these bodies should be constituted by election.

In the Panchayat elections, more or less, the factors influence the voters. There is, however, one difference, that the caste consideration family atmosphere, the economic condition and social status of the candidates exert a relatively more powerful impact on the voter rather than the candidates' political ideology and affiliation. Dominating the Panchayat election scene will be local issues, many of them pertaining to promotion of the common interest of the village population and the creation of the common community assets for the village, such as improvement of irrigation facilities, supply of fertilizer, seed and credit to the farmers, reduction of unemployment among agricultural workers, provision of health and educational facilities for the people and children respectively. Many recent studies of rural India have
revealed that while on these matters there cannot be wide or even any kind of divergence, voting in Panchayat elections are largely dictated in many villages by the traditional influence and the economic power that individual candidates command.

The panchayat elections, based on adult franchise have accentuated casteism and caste conflict in the rural community. According to the Balwantray Mehta Team, "Panchayats constituted for small villages are generally swayed by narrower considerations and sometimes dominated by caste interests." The Committee further added that several caste organizations, regional and local, suddenly sprang up during the elections.

It is not secret that in India elections are fought on caste lines rather than on party lines. The Panchayat elections are not an exception to this. In the Panchayat elections generally the rival candidates belong to the same caste but may belong to different sub-castes.

As a result the political parties at national level also, while selecting their candidates, they
reinforce the caste sentiment. In each constituency, during election, they keep it in mind the caste composition of the electorate, they put up candidates belonging to the dominant caste in that constituency; so that they can get maximum votes and capture the seat. It is only when more than one person of the same caste contests from the same constituency that the members of these groups vote according to their 'conscience' and the caste considerations assume secondary prominence. They use caste associations and persuade caste leaders to appeal to their caste fellows to vote for them.

Of-course people do not vote on the basis of caste alone. In the success of the Janata Dal in 1989 parliamentary elections, minority groups and backward classes played a major role. For political success the various castes enter into alliances and reliances. If any political party gets the support of more than one caste or community, one cannot regard it as a caste or communal party. Its politics cannot be described as caste based. However, certain castes have a dominant position in particular parties. This has more apparent in 1977 and 1990.
There is ample proof that the caste ties have grown in significance and every political party, including the communists, have taken due note of it, though the overly caste system is denounced by the leaders of all political parties.59

But it is interesting to note here that out of total 472 members of District Councils in Kerala 16% members have refused to identify their caste, saying they do not believe in caste. Interestingly, all of them belong to the Communist Party (Marxist).60

Dominant Caste and Scheduled Caste Leadership:

A feature of rural life in many parts of India was the existence of dominant, landowning castes.61 For a caste to be dominant, it should own a sizable amount of the arable land locally available, having strength of numbers and occupy a high place in the local hierarchy. When a caste had all the attributes of dominance, it must be said to enjoy decisive dominance.

The politics in India was influenced to a great extent by a number of non-political factors. Among those factors the most important were caste, religion and
regionalism, although the ideology and culture had also exercised some influence.

The social structure of India was to a large extent based on caste structures and caste identification. In the past the caste system was determined on the basis of the occupation. The political power was considered as the exclusive prerogative of certain castes and the others were not given any share in the administration of the country. The status of a person came to be determined on the basis of his financial position, irrespective of his caste attachment. This setback of the caste system was largely due to the introduction of the new means of transport and communication as well as the introduction of western education. The western education played a significant role in weakening the bonds of caste.

Prof. Srinivas, rightly believed that caste system continues to be an important factor in the politics of India. He said that there was a widespread impression
among educated Indian that caste was on its last legs and that the educated urbanised and westernised members of the upper classes had already escaped its bond. Both these impressions were wrong. 62

Prof. Rudolphs also said that within the new context of political democracy caste remained a central element of India's society while adopting itself to the values and methods of democratic politics. Indeed it had become one of the chief means by which the Indian mass had been attached to the process of democratic politics. 63
Table No. 3
Are the Panchayat Elections are held on
Caste basis?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total.</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personal Interview.

After theoretical analysis let us examine the views of respondents. The respondents were asked that whether Gram Panchayat elections are contested on the caste basis? 93 respondents said yes. They are fought on the caste basis. They expressed that caste plays an important role in Gram Panchayat elections. At the time of selection of the candidate of the electorate and candidate is given importance. In an informal interview with the voters they said propaganda
of the caste candidate is done openly. Every voter think that his caste candidate should be elected. 41 respondents said that elections are conducted on the group basis and not on the caste basis. There are many groups in the villages and at the time of Village Panchayat election, these groups became active. Many respondent said that caste has no role in the village, as there are many people, who resides in the village.

Table No. 1

Important factor in the Election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Res.</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Caste.</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Money.</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Political parties.</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Land.</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Good behaviour.</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total.</strong></td>
<td><strong>134</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Personal Interview.*
Respondents were asked, which are the other factors important in the Gram Panchayat election, after caste 39 respondent gave preference to money. They said money is necessary in the election. A poor person cannot get elected. 20 respondents said a political party to which the candidate belongs is also taken into consideration. 10 respondents said that good behavior of the candidate is also considered, whereas 4 respondents said that the land of the candidate is also sometimes looked.

There are others, who hold a contrary view and plead for retention of elective element in panchayat elections on the ground that factions also existed in Indian villages long before statutory elected procedures were introduced and there is no cause to be upset over the element of conflict in elections.
The concept of the dominant caste was crucial to the understanding of rural social life in most parts of India. Whether analysis was to be made of the hierarchy of a multi-caste village, the settlement of a dispute at the level of village or caste, or the pattern of Sanskritization among the several castes of an area, a study of the locally dominant caste and the kind of dominance it enjoyed was essential. Occasionally a caste was dominant in a group of neighbouring villages if not over a district or two, and in
such cases, local dominance was linked with regional dominance. Such linkage also existed when the caste which was locally dominant was different from the caste which was regionally dominant.

The concept of 'dominant caste' was quite significant for the understanding of interaction of caste and politics in rural areas and particularly in Panchayati Raj institutions.

However, the dominant castes were not the only practitioners of inequality. It occurred at lower levels inclusive of the Scheduled Castes who formed a hierarchy among themselves. One of the commonest and a rather cynical features of the present movement towards equality was that each caste regarded itself as the equal of castes superior to it while simultaneously denying similar claims from those inferior to it.

With the introduction of the universal adult suffrage, the numerical strength was evidently very important, but the influence of the traditionally dominant castes in the particular villages or areas
was still observed on account of their economic stability and the political and economic situations. Most of the educational, economic and political opportunities and the development programmes launched in the post-independence period had been grabbed by these people. This state of affairs resulted into frequent complaints from the masses that the benefit of the various development schemes introduced in the rural areas helped only the traditionally well to do sections of the society and the lot of the poor remained unchanged. According to the traditional economic structure developed under the caste hierarchy, the Harijans evidently very poor and landless, constituted an important source of labour, agricultural and otherwise and the development of education and the consequential consciousness of their rights posed a grave challenge to the privileged position of the dominant castes.

Dominant castes in Scheduled Caste Community:

The term 'weaker sections' was generally applied to the Backward Classes - Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. The classification of these people as weaker sections rested primarily
on their socio-cultural and economic backwardness, and the provisions made for them to meet their political aspirations derived from the fact of their socio-economic backwardness. The people who were not homogeneous either socio-culturally or economically, were placed at varying types and degrees of economic dependence.

There were so many surveys suggested that the constitutional facilities which were provided to the Scheduled Castes have been enjoyed by a small class that underwent social and political awakening. There was enough evidence to support the above point from the recently conducted sociological studies, such as the Iravas of Kerala and the Nadars of Tamil Nadu. Lingayats and Okkaligas in Mysore, (Jatavs and Chamar caste) in Uttar Pradesh. Those were the dominant castes among the Scheduled Castes in different parts of India.

About the Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra, we have taken a review in details. The Scheduled Castes in Maharashtra were an important social category and form an integral part of the social system, in the
rural as well as urban areas. Mahars were numerically the largest caste in Maharashtra.

In Maharashtra the contemporary pattern of politico-economic dominance was widely understood as that of the Marathas as dominant caste. The ruling elite of the so-called dominant caste maintained their dominance over the unprivileged members, of their own caste, and other subordinate castes by manipulating established political institutions and regimes and, if necessary, by changing them so as to conform to their interests.

The different groups among the Scheduled Castes differed from one another even in these other characteristics, mainly political awareness, and numerical strength. But unfortunately, the economic educational and political facilities have not yet reached certain SCs and hence they were facing a precarious condition. Unorganised nature of the SCs, lack of leadership among them were mainly responsible for their backwardness. The SCs other than the Mahars e.g. the Mangs, Chambhars, Dhors and Bhangis have remained far away from political, educational and other benefits.
Mahars alone, among the Harijans of Maharashtra have taken successful to political means for enhancing their social status. Before independence of India, Mahar, Mang, Chambhar and Dhor were only under the pressure of upper caste people. But after independence Mang, Chambhar and Dhor came under the pressure of other untouchable caste particularly that Mahars, the Neo-Buddhists. With Dr. Ambedkar as their leader the Mahars organised themselves in the Republican Party.

**Dominant Caste among SC in Latur District:**

The concept of 'Dominant Caste' was quite significant for the understanding of interaction of caste and politics of Scheduled Castes in Panchayati Raj institutions in Latur District in Maharashtra. It was also necessary to understand the concept of dominant caste in relation to Scheduled Caste leadership in Panchayat Raj Institutions, especially in Village Panchayats under study. Here, we have tried to understand the nature of dominant caste and how it effected sub-caste and how it effected among the Scheduled Castes to get the leadership in Village Panchayats.

In relation to dominant caste respondents were asked which caste in backward class was politically advanced.
Table No. 5

**Dominant Caste among backward class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Caste</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mahar</td>
<td>114</td>
<td>85.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mang</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>07.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chambhar</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>04.48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhor</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>02.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>134</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personal Interview.

114 respondents said Mahar were the dominant caste in the backward class. The reason, which was attributed were that they were more in number and also they were more educated than other backward classes. The influence of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar was more on Mahar than other caste. Mahar took full
advantage of their number and education and therefore they became leaders in Gram Panchayat. After Mahar Mang were next, who occupied the leadership seat. After Mang the Chambhar and after the Dhor became leader. But virtually the number of Mang, Chambhar and Dhor was very poor and therefore the leadership of Mahar dominated in the villages.

Before independence all these Scheduled Castes were under the pressure of higher castes dominance. But after independence, Mang, Chambhar and Dhor came under the pressure of Mahar community.

Inter-Caste Relations and Scheduled Caste Leadership:

Indian caste system has been an extreme example of hierarchical arrangements in the society. In that hierarchy, all the castes were given due place on the basis of certain ascriptive principles. The caste system was indeed something unique in our society which continued to persist from generations.

Indian society continued to be hierarchical, though the Indian constitution expressed its preference for a radical alteration in social ideology.
Historically the population of India has been made up of groups belonging to several races and religions. The caste system has been one of the salient features of Hindu social organisation that has influenced even Islam and Christianity in India to a certain extent.  

For all practical purposes the Sudras were given menial tasks which involved physical labour. In course of time physical labour became identified with lower social status and those castes were labelled socially inferior. As soon as this identity was accepted, the Brahmins who belonged to the profession of learning and priesthood, came to be accepted at the top of social hierarchy. Thus emerged a social hierarchy in which the Brahmins were at the top and the Sudras at the lowest level.  

The Harijan caste groups differed from the higher caste group. Even though the Harijan caste groups belonged to the same category and had the problem of pollution in their social relations with other higher caste numbers they did not have caste-free interactions among themselves. The category
of Harijans was not homogeneous. The notion of hierarchy was operative. It was comparable to other castes. Each of the Scheduled Castes and all the castes taken together displayed phenomenon common to the Hindu society as a whole. The continued significance of ritual hierarchy, pollution and purity was seen in the way. The Harijan castes observed these values and norms in their inter-group relationship. They did not accept food or attend one another's family functions. They lived as separate entities. The Mangs beat drums for the funeral processions of the higher castes. They prepare the funeral pyre for the dead of the Mahar or Chambhar or Dhor caste. They were paid in cash for these services. They accept food from the higher caste members including the Dhor or Chambhar but not from Mahar. They neither eat in the houses of the other Harijan Caste members nor attend their family functions, since they consider themselves superior to them.

All this show that the inter-caste relations were reciprocal only among the caste groups of
equal status. The Harijans did not come close to one another in their social relations. The Harijan caste groups maintained a social distance among themselves.84

The hierarchy as found existing within the Scheduled Caste cluster seems to be as follows: Chambhar, Dhor, Mahar, Mang. In the absence of any measurable indice regarding the social placement of these castes, the present gradation was arrived at by ascertaining and arriving at a general consensus.85 The Chambhars consider the touch of a Mahar or other Harijan as polluting. They consider themselves slightly superior to the Dhors. In the villages along with the higher castes their houses were said to be nearer the Hindu quarter or inside. Hierarchy did not mean power and wealth but ritual status. Betellite juxtaposed ritual and secular statuses in terms of a value-interest axis. The hierarchy principle expressed the value-dimension of the Hindu social system and interests sub-serve the materialistic interests in economic and political realms.

In Maharashtra's Scheduled Castes hierarchy existed as we find amongst Scheduled Castes in other parts
of the country. The leather-working Chamar in Uttar Pradesh considered himself superior to the Bhangi, a sweeper. The Kannada Holeya placed himself above the Madiga; he proudly stressed the fact that he did not accept even water or betel leaf from either the smith or the Marka Brahmin. 86

The hierarchy principle expressed the value-dimension of the Hindu social system and "interests subserve the materialistic interests in economic and political relations." 87

One of the sociological realities was that Scheduled Castes were not a homogeneous unit. They were designated legally as a category for sharing certain ritual and socio-economic disabilities and hence recipients of privileges. Within the broad Scheduled Caste cluster, the several Harijan castes were atomic units, were endogamous and there was observed a hierarchy and social distance between them. 88

All this showed that the inter-caste relations were reciprocal only among the caste groups of equal status. The Harijans did not come close to one
another in their social maintain and a social distance among themselves remind as it was.

All this show that the inter-caste relations are reciprocal only among the caste groups of equal status. The Harijans do not came close to one another in their social maintain a social distance among themselves.

In this enquiry an attempt has been made to analyse the pattern of inter-caste relations and social distance in the form of untouchability among Scheduled Castes Village Panchayats leaders with special reference to Latur District in Maharashtra.

Respondents were asked whether Village Panchayat leaders maintained the superiority and inferiority complex among themselves because unless until this is removed, SC leadership could not function in a better manner.

Table No. 6
Superity and Inferiority among leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>59.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personal Interview.
Out of 134 respondents 54 respondent said that superiority and inferiority maintained among SC leaders. But day by day it is reduced. 80 leaders said that it is not maintained and each other go to various ceremonies of other caste people also.

Respondents were asked whether attempts were made by the leaders to remove this complex situation.

Table No. 7

Attempts to remove superity and inferiority nature.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>58.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Res.</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>26.87%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total: 134 100.00%

Source: Personal Interview.

20 Respondents said that leaders made attempts. 78 leaders said no attempts were made as they had no time. 36 respondents did not say any thing.
Respondents were asked whether other backward class people helped them in their election.

**Table No 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>132</td>
<td>98.51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personal Interview.

132 respondent said yes. They further added that SC people who felt that their representative should be elected to remove their difficulties and therefore they helped in their election.

Respondents were asked how in the relations of his caste with other backward class people.
### Table No. 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relation of your caste with other caste</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>53.73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordinary</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>46.27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Source:** Personal Interview.

72 respondents said that their relations are good and 62 respondents said they are ordinary. Some have due to conflict in Panchayat election the relations becomes tense.

Respondents were asked whether the leaders felt that there must be unanimity among the SC people.
Table No. 10

Unanimity at the time of election.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>80.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>19.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>100.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personal Interview.

108 leaders said that they feel that there must be unanimity among the SC people. 26 leaders felt that conflict are created by the leaders, themselves. The people of other caste tried that SC should not unite, because their purpose will be lost. In the study of four villages Vijay Kumar has concluded that due to their unity SC got the village leadership. The Chambhar organised the caste panchayat separately in other six villages to bring unity among the Harijan and decided to support the unanimous decision to support a Jat candidate.\(^89\)
Political Parties in Panchayat Elections and Scheduled Caste Leadership:

Public participation in politics and some measure of party system as Morris Jones observes go together. The party system provides the people a government as well as an opposition. "Without such party organisation", Maciever explains, "there can be no unified statement of principle, no orderly evolution of policy, no regular resort to the constitutional devine of parliamentary elections, nor of-course any of the recognised institutions of means of which a party seeks or maintains power."  

Political parties play a key role in the indoctrination of the people. The role of political parties within the legislature is as important as outside it. They are most active and direct agents of political socialization.

They provide political education, and act as a link between the government and the people; and above all, they ensure an orderly and peaceful change of government. Thus political parties have been
proved to be the most effective agency of political socialization at all levels.

Modern political parties perform the functions of interest articulation and interest aggregation, and mobilize the people to participate in governmental decision making. Parties compete against one another to win support in order to capture governmental power. The alternation of political parties in a democratic political system is considered the hall-mark of freedom and competitive politics is regarded as a basic value in western democratic philosophy.

Modern political parties function in a different political milieu than their predecessors. Mass suffrage demands that parties establish direct and intimate contact with their supporters and sympathizers. A party is required to reach every segment of society to broaden its base of support and to weaken that of its opponent.

Political parties have to legitimize the system by making themselves acceptable to the people as legitimate instruments for the exercise of political power. Parties have to legitimize themselves before the people.
and in the process become institutionalized as an accepted part of the political system.

The socialization of the people has to be performed by political parties. Parties have to socialize people along lines that rulers are not born, they have to be chosen. Having been chosen, these leaders must be held accountable for their acts. Further, if one set of rulers has not proved acceptable, the people have to elect another set. All the roles of education, socialization, etc. which go with "Political participation" have to be performed by political parties in developing countries. Political participation does not mean that the voter goes to the polling booth to cast his vote and forgets about everything else. Political participation means an involvement in governmental decision-making which are continuous and operate at various levels of governmental organization, centre-state-local.

Political Parties and Panchayati Raj:

In fact the late Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru warned that the idea of partyless Government would result in undesirable and anti-social elements dominat-
ing society. To quote his words, "I am entirely in favour of the party system of Government." 92

The process of politicization of the rural people and different sections has influenced local bodies and community as a whole. The elections for different offices at different levels have become a popular and influential phenomenon. These elections have resulted in the politicisation of the rural people. The political parties have attempted to extend their activities to the villages and local institutions in their attempt to win power and extend their 'influence-zones'. 93 The village fairs, festivals, exhibitions, camps, ceremonies, cultural and national festivals, local weddings, caste gatherings and organisations, flood and famine relief works, loans and scholarships, transfers and appointments factions and litigations, inauguration of schools, tanks, roads, and buildings, film-shows and prize distributions, donations and regular subscription to local funds, visits to holy places etc. are very important media of extending political activities by various political parties. 94
The village has come to stay as an important starting point of political, social and economic development in India. The Panchayati Raj System under the recommendations of the Mehta Committee, has tried to combine the formal official structure and the informal non-official structure so as to create a representative and democratic institution and to excite local initiative in the field of development.

The power of village panchayats is considerable under the new legislation is some states, and the very reasons which interest parties in gaining control of Samitis and parishads lead them to enter the panchayats. So long as the panchayats had little powers, there was little reason for political parties to have much interest in them, but once their powers were increased, parties were inevitably drawn to them.

The local leaders have been also observed much interested in the political leaders which have attracted them towards the party politics. They are well aware of the importance of these local bodies. The involvement of the panchayat Raj leaders in local politics is at
times so deep and possessive that they hardly find time
to play their developmental role and help the extension
services in mobilizing people's co-operation, support
and help. Prof. Srinivas finds in village Rampura,
"Every administrator and politician speaks of 'party
politics' in villages, and even villagers are also
often heard saying, "There is too much parties in such
and such village." 

The President of the Panchayat has considerable
influence in the village, even with respect to how a
substantial part of the village, will vote in assembly
and parliamentary elections.

The Panchayat Raj programme in India is in fact
means as an ancillary to the Community Development move-
ment to build up leadership cadre from the village
through the block and the district levels, to the state
leadership hierarchy. Unfortunately, however, the
growth of such leadership has neither been healthy nor
uniform in most areas. One suspects that Panchayati
Raj has tended to glamorize the patronage of political
office, rather than the avenues of service such office
provides; in many cases, the success of a Pradhan or Sarpanch seems to be judged by the help he has rendered to his political group and not in the service he has done to the village or Block Community. 101

Reasons 102 for politicilisation of the Panchayats may well be summarised in the following way: The Panchayats in their principles as well as in actual practise exert their influence on the political democracy of the country. They serve as decentralised democratic institutions at all times - Village, block, district, state and national. Since in their internal working they adopt democratic methods of administration, they serve as schools of training of democratic leadership and preserve democratic values. Democratic management is one of the principles of the Panchayati Raj.

A look at the existing Panchayats will demonstrate how a handful of men have succeeded, generally through political backing, in gaining control of these organisations and manoeuvring them to suit their own purpose. What is really important is to eliminate from the movement the practice of putting unworthy people in-charge of organisations on considerations of electoral politics. 103
It is natural that political parties will try to dominate an important organisation like panchayats in the countryside and for this, they will try to fill different committees of panchayats with their own men. But unfortunately in some cases they do adopt certain strategies to win these elections which are in no sense desirable.104

Against:

Since the inception of the Panchayati Raj, a controversy has existed regarding the involvement of political parties in the working of these institutions. There has been almost universal agreement that the political parties should not operate on the Panchayati Raj institutions. It was feared that political interests of the parties would relegate the main issue of socio-economic progress of the people into background and would bring sectarian forces to the surface. This is a significant fact that the political parties have kept away from panchayat elections, though they make use of panchayat factions for elections to Vidhan Sabha and Lok Sabha.105
Two schools of thought have clearly emerged. Several official and non-official bodies feel that party politics should be excluded from the Panchayati Raj bodies; they regard it as unhealthy to introduce party politics into the already fragmented village societies. The Sarvodaya opinion as strongly favoured this thought.

The late Shri Jayaprakash Narain while welcoming the Panchayat Raj experiment had sounded a note of caution when he said that the elections and functioning of these bodies must be a non-party basis. If party-politics is not achieved, the whole idea would meet with a miserable failure. India had a caste ridden cleaved society. Party-politics and social stratification are the two factors which are harmful to the system. The panchayat membership chiefly consists of well-to-do farmers and higher caste groups. The richer element-big landowners, who also command respect due to their caste and their family connections control the membership. The rival groups of pseudo-politicians can easily carry the gullible uneducated masses and win at the polls.
According to him the condition of self-rule is that people agree to work together. "Self-government through faction fighting will not be self-government, but self-ruination." The caste and class distinctions have made it a divided house. "To introduce electoral contests in the villages is to throw monkey wrench into the works." Panchayat performs the function of local development better when it represents unity and harmony than when it reflects factionalism and discord. Jayaprakash castigates those who declare the idea of uncontested election as impractical on the ground that village community is already rent with conflicting interests. "The sad thing is that there should be persons with such split minds as to ask villagers, in one breath, make a common endeavour to better their lives, and in the second breath, ask them to fight among themselves for the power to achieve the very end."

To the argument that if political parties do not get themselves involved the traditional bosses of rural society will capture power, he replies that they would do so even if elections were held because the remedy for the same is not the existence of
political parties but that power, prestige and wealth are redistributed. He answers that political parties would awaken the under-dog to assert its power and claim its rightful share of power by arguing that the task of providing minimum of social security and welfare can be performed only by obtaining the goodwill and cooperation of the stronger ones unless legislature steps into alter the socio-economic pattern of the rural society.

Studies in Maharashtra reveal that the local political system is under the control of a leadership which comes from the richer peasantry which has tradition, social status and wealth. The gap between the leaders and the led is shocking, too wide. The hold of the richer peasantry on the whole mechanism of power as it operates at the local level in all fields of life has serious repercussions for both, the democratic set-up and socialistic goals. The caste ties help a leader to gain power in rural panchayats; which in turn helps in crystalizing groups and factions which are primarily caste groups now wielding power. As a result, under the political fiat created under
this rising colossus, those who had joined the community
development with a mission to discharge, began to move
like vagrants and in some cases like orphans without
knowing what to do which way to turn.112

A large section of public opinion is against the
participation of political parties in the activities
of the panchayati raj institutions because these insti-
tutions have to deal with strictly local problems where
the introduction of political parties has no relevance
and can only hamper local initiative. They argue that
the necessity of party activities arises only at the
state and national levels where policy making decisions
are being taken.113 Local functions like sanitation,
health and education are so simple and basic that there
is hardly any scope for different opinions to prevail.
Besides, political parties are inconsistent with pan-
chayati raj because no party can have a programme appli-
cable to all the rural areas in the country. The issue
was discussed at length by the Rajasthan Study Team
on Panchayati Raj which observed "As things are today,
it is necessary that we focus the attention of the
people on the tasks of rural development which face
this rising colossus, those who had joined the community development with a mission to discharge, began to move like vagrants and in some cases like orphans without knowing what to do which way to turn.\textsuperscript{112}

A large section of public opinion is against the participation of political parties in the activities of the panchayati raj institutions because these institutions have to deal with strictly local problems where the introduction of political parties has no relevance and can only hamper local initiative. They argue that the necessity of party activities arises only at the state and national levels where policy making decisions are being taken.\textsuperscript{113} Local functions like sanitation, health and education are so simple and basic that there is hardly any scope for different opinions to prevail. Besides, political parties are inconsistent with panchayati raj because no party can have a programme applicable to all the rural areas in the country. The issue was discussed at length by the Rajasthan Study Team on Panchayati Raj which observed "As things are today, it is necessary that we focus the attention of the people on the tasks of rural development which face
the local institutions. These tasks are mostly of a constructive and nation-building kind .... Right approach to these tasks has nothing to do with either caste or any political or religious creed.  

So elections on party line at Gram Panchayat level will make it more intense and the wound will be deeper. Further, if a Gram Sabha elects candidates who do not belong to the ruling party, they may face difficulty in getting approved the development schemes initiated by the panchayat. Moreover, party interests will take precedence over real development. But, it is a common knowledge that decision-making by the Central and the State Governments have been by and large by party interests and it is a global phenomenon. In this connection H.S. Verma holds, "If the subordination of State and Central Governments decision-making apparatus to the party interests is acceptable, one is indeed surprised to note how the same development at village level could not be appreciated." 

It is also argued that the quality of leadership in such constituencies are low. But it is not wholly correct. Because, the leadership obtaining in state and central government level is not that encourag-
ing. Through participation people learns the quality of leadership and it is also found that better leadership is emerging at local level through the participation of educated persons. Furthermore, when the ruling party of Centre and States are different in various states and they are functioning side by side, the argument that the Sarpanchas of those gram panchayats who don't belong to the ruling party will face problems so much so that they cannot function is no correct.

It is not possible to keep the political parties off the panchayat domain. Even after gram panchayats election are over, every political party of the state concerned count the number of those Sarpanchas who support them. Local politicians also campaign directly or indirectly for their supporters anticipating in return their support in assembly elections. They know well the importance of these bodies. The sarpanch of a panchayat has considerable influence over the voters of that panchayat. Further, as most of the political parties of India are not cadre based, in general elections the leaders come to approach the
villagers through the sarpanchs and the sarpanchs act as leading workers of their parties.\textsuperscript{118}

The Sadiq Ali Study Team on Panchayati Raj suggested, "All the political parties should, by agreement, devise code of conduct for keeping away party politics from Panchayat elections. The political parties should not be recognised for Panchayati Raj elections. Election symbols of political parties should not be allotted to candidates.\textsuperscript{119} The Santhanam Committee on the scope for Unanimity in Panchayati Raj also recommended that the Panchayat election should not be contested on party basis.

\textbf{In favour:}

For the successful functioning of any modern democracy the existence of political parties is an indispensable condition. As Bryce has pointed out, 'parties are inevitable.' No free country with large territory has been without them. No one has shown how representative government could be worked without them.\textsuperscript{120} Thus if democracy is not a localised idol, but an all pervasive dynamic process throughout the
polity; and if the system of political parties is the life-blood of democracy then the conclusion is inescapable that this blood stream is bound to reach along with the permitting democracy to the grass-root levels of the polity. For basically, as Carl. J. Friedrich, has observed, political parties organised and developed in response to democratisation, they continue to do so.

So, logically party politics is bound to appear in the arena of village panchayat in its democratic process, especially in view of the organic link of the panchayats with the other higher tiers of our polity.

Closely following this is another reason why our panchayats cannot be free from party politics. In spite of the territorial division of our polity into various tiers of democratic units, the organic unity of the whole structure is reinforced by the fact that the panchayat voter is also a voter for elections to the high tiers that is the state legislatures and parliament. Therefore, so long as these elections to the State Legislatures and Parliament are fought on party lines and the Central and State Government represented by political parties and are ruled by poli-
ticians, it is inevitable that the involvement of political parties and politicians cannot be altogether avoided in the panchayat raj institutions also.123

Another allied factor which compels the political parties to enter into the orbits of village panchayats is concerned with the problem their own-existence, survival and success. Ballots having replaced, bullets in political struggle, each of the parties which strives for mastery must have a wider extension and access to the grass-root level polity and must try to draw adherents from all sections and classes within the polity; and also must try to bring the largest possible number of voters into its ranks, organise them locally, appeal to them and bring them up to the poll.124

So obviously, the infiltration of party politics into our village panchayats is bound to keep pace with the devolution of more and more powers to these units of self-government. The more and more these units become centres of power and influence, the more and more would be the involvement of political parties in the affairs of village panchayats. Thus, on this count also poli-
tical parties are bound to take active interest at panchayat level. For, politics in panchayats does not begin and end at the local level; but instead it has its consequent repercussions on the state and national level politics.  

Wherever there is politics, there would be political parties based as they are on the democratic right of different groups to work through peaceful means and within the constitutional frame work to realize their objectives. Political parties, which seek to capture government, are found to be patterned in accordance with the government structure. Panchayati raj institutions being in line with union state-district-block-village nexus must draw and the impact of political parties.

Panchayati Raj is really parliamentary system of administration at village level. It is impossible to immunise the panchayats from party politics. "There cannot be democracy without elections and there can be no elections without politics", said one speaker at the M.Ps. Study Camp in June, 1962, where the consensus of opinion was that there was nothing wrong in politics at
the panchayat level. Since there is a system of election, there are bound to be more than one party to contest the elections. In the election to the legislative Assembly and to the Lok Sabha, the support of the members of the Panchayats has to be sought by various political parties. Therefore, political parties are bound to be interested in the Panchayat elections. Sometimes the suggestion, that all political parties should take a vow not to interfere with the election of panchayats and other local bodies under the three-tier system, is made. In this way, Panchayati Raj is offering equality of opportunity to political parties.

The remarkable feature of the Asoka Mehta Report is its recommendation favouring the 'open participation' of political parties in Panchayati Raj affairs, thereby seeking a bold and deliberate departure from the convention under which political parties abide by a gentlemen's agreement not to contest elections to panchayati raj institutions - though West Bengal and Jammu and Kashmir have held Panchayat elections on a party basis. The extent to which such a policy is upheld in practice
may be assessed from the fact that in many states where local elections are non-partisan, the political parties have, nevertheless, been deeply involved in the fray. The partyless pools acquire, in practice, the same competitive character, except of course for the labels.

The recommendation that political parties be allowed to contest the panchayat elections is thus pragmatic, as also desirable. Not only are political parties the main channels of mass involvement in current issues including local ones, but they also become accountable when they are openly involved in panchayati raj institutions. The view that political parties are a species of impurity from which rural local government in India needs to be shielded carries little meaning. Political parties are an essential ingredient of the democratic process; but they must reorient themselves and learn a new style of functioning at the local level. Otherwise, their involvement may engulf rural society in perpetual turmoil and strife, and thus prove to be dysfunctional. As visualised by the committee, Panchayati Raj elections should be based on political parties. With open participation of poli-
tical parties the local leaders will learn how to convert their mutual competition into constructive cooperation. In this connection, Asoka Mehta Committee has suggested, "we have reached a stage of political evolution, when it would be unrealistic to expect that political parties would keep themselves away from election." Political parties should not make back-door proxy, instead they should involve in panchayat level and see how to improve the performance of their local party units participating in village politics.

There were many arguments that politics should not be permitted to enter local institutions where stress should be on developing local potentialities and solving local problems. More particularly, it was argued that political parties should have nothing to do with these institutions because requirements in the local areas like a school, a hospital, a cooperative, a veterinary hospital, a community centre, an approach road, a small irrigation canal, a warehouse, street lights, garbage clearance, sanitation and hygiene, etc. are all the common requirements of any
village and the mobilisation of the people need not be painted by party politics. But unfortunately, this view is an idealistic over-simplification of the process of socialisation. Participatory democracy is intended to throw up leadership functions according to political and perhaps psycho-cultural factors. It has to be conceded that wherever decision making is involved, there politics would operate. Where a major social transformation is contemplated, politics would operate in a big way dramatising the whole process.

Our villages are dominated by sectional and factional interests, caste has been the biggest influencing factor in decision-making, which leads to strict adherence to tradition. There had been, therefore, resistance to improved methods of production and distribution of necessities of life. Elections to the panchayats, it was hoped, would remove the domination of caste and would eliminate the conservative element. But during the elections to the institutions of Panchayati Raj in various states, malpractices were observed. Groupism and factionalism were the basis of contesting elections.
In such circumstances, only political parties can cut across and factions based on caste, creed, language and religion. Political parties, therefore, are essential for the successful working of Panchayati Raj and for bringing a healthy atmosphere in the villages. The active participation of the parties will bring about a new and vigorous leadership. For an ambitious, good and honest worker, it can be a stepping stone for leadership at the state and national levels. This would establish an organic link between Panchayats and Parliament.

No doubt political parties play an important educational role in the development of the country but the danger of their involvement in Panchayat bodies is that it may frustrate the realisation of the ideals of individual freedom and popular participation, impose a centralization under the name of decentralisation and lead to manipulation and use of Panchayati Raj institutions for achieving political power.

Political parties are naturally interested in getting their candidates elected to the office of Sar-
panch or President of Zilla Parishad; so that for the assembly and parliamentary elections they can mobilise public opinion in the area in their favour on the basis of their achievements at the local level. Further, political parties have to groom their leaders. This process of grooming of leadership will now start at the panchayat, panchayat samiti and Zilla Parishad levels. Thus political parties have great many stakes in panchayati raj politics and as such it is difficult for them to leave these institutions alone.

The organizational structure of a party will grow along panchayat area, block, district, state and centre. Parties will have to step up their various units of organization around the various levels of panchayati raj institutions. A party has to establish a network of organization and various bases from which it can operate. The panchayati raj institutions provide 'natural bases' for political parties for creating organizational structure. Stronger the organization at the base level, better are the prospects of a political party to win elections at various levels.
The involvement of political parties is, thus, inevitable in panchayati raj institutions. If political parties enter panchayati raj politics, they will try to win the support of various village factions. In this process many of the old factions will break down and people, instead of rallying round caste or community groups, will even break away from these traditional groups and join political parties. It provides an alternative to the people where they can rally together irrespective of caste or kinship considerations. It will be positive good for village life in India.

Further, that political parties divide people while the need of the times is to units. It has to be proved that unity leads to better government. Decisions arrived at after proper argument and discussion.

Political parties, through their involvement in panchayati raj politics, will focus the attention of the rural people on national issues. They will act as important media of modernization in village India. Political parties can strengthen the roots of Indian democracy by involving the apathetic and indifferent millions of the Indian villages in the maintenance of Indian politics.
PRI's gives an opportunity for all the political parties to accommodate persons in its rank and file who could not otherwise be accommodated as positions in State Assembly and National Parliament were limited. Thus, the panchayat raj system was mainly a political device, according to them, to satisfy the increasing number of dissatisfied and disgruntled members at and below the district levels.

Now, once it is established that the participation of political parties in village panchayats is an inevitability in the system, then it is unrealistic to approach that inevitability from the point of view of desirability, for whether it is desirable or not, it is bound to be there. So it is futile to spend our time and energy, both in academic and official circles, to see how far it is desirable and practicable for party politics to kept out of our panchayat institutions, and also there is little point in passing formal resolutions by the national parties asking for their so-called political detachment from the sphere of village panchayats. But instead, it would be realistic and profitable if we attempt to make this political participation in village panchayats more conscious, meaningful and respon-
sible; and if the political parties at State and National levels take effective steps to improve the responsible functioning and performance of their local units in the village politics.  

To conclude it may be said that its hightime for the Indian society evolve a more realistic and pragmatic approach towards this identified problem of the participation of political parties in Panchayat Raj institutions.

We expect the political parties to play their positive role at the local level. Politics, is, as it appears, inevitable and there is nothing wrong about healthy politics having a full play in Panchayati Raj institutions. The fear that the political parties would disturb the village unity is almost a myth, and does not exist in reality. Inspite of the claims of advocates of non-party or coalitional governments, they do not divide, in fact, they unite. Therefore, political parties should step in and contest elections to Panchayati Raj bodies. The political parties, having a nationwide appeal, based on socio-economic programmes of action, alone can break narrow loyalties and cut
across family, caste and sectional barriers and wild people with identical political views into one harmonious whole.

Some examples:

A recent study carried out by the Department of Economics and Public Administration of the Rajasthan University revealed that political parties are taking active interest in the activities of the panchayati raj bodies in Rajasthan. The study also pointed out that even the state level leaders of various political parties are playing dominant role in the elections of these bodies. K.S. Bhat has conducted a survey of five panchayats of South Kanara district in Mysore State. Regarding the party activities, it was found that all the political parties were taking keen interest in the activities of these local bodies selecting candidates, issuing policy directives to them formed the major activities of these parties. B.A. V. Sharma write that all political parties are increasing-
ly participating in the affairs of rural local bodies. N.R. Inamdar points out that various political parties and groups have taken keen interest in these
elections and the proceeding and activities of these bodies. R.V.R. Chandrasekhar Rao's paper highlights how the Panchayati Raj institutions become victims of party politics. In order to strike at the hold of the Congress Party over the Zilla Parishads in Orissa, the Swantantra Jana Congress coalition government abolished the Parishads in 1968. In West Bengal, says Mohit Bhattacharya, there is keen contest among political parties to gain ascendancy in each tier of the Panchayati Raj. Ranbhir Singh notes that factionalism is rampant and that group politics cut across party lines.

A survey was carried out under the auspices of the Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, to understand the social background of the newly elected district council members in Kerala. The Kerala District Council members election, held in January 1991 attract national attention. The elections of district council totally were held on party base.

All the evidence goes to prove that only lip service is paid to the ideal that parties should refrain from participating in the P.R.Is. Political parties in all the states are keen to capture these rural local
bodies. It is a natural desire for any political party to strengthen its hold over the institutions which are close to the people and wield enormous influence by distributing patronage under developmental programmes. To ask them to keep away from the Panchayati Raj bodies is like asking them to cut their lifelines. Instead, it would be more practical to evolve a code of conduct for them which they should be asked to scrupulously adhere to in their behaviour toward these bodies.

Thus, in spite of all the academic arguments as to the exclusion of politics from village panchayats and in spite of the official philosophy and the resolution of the national parties with regard to the deliberate abstention of political parties in these units of self-government remains as a hard reality, which is well established of evidence. And from what we have said so far, it is clear that this involvement of political parties in panchayat institutions as an inevitable feature of our village democracy - both from the viewpoint of our democratic polity as an organic whole and relative position of village panchayat in it, and also from that viewpoint of the very nature of political parties.
Political parties and Scheduled Caste Leadership:

The contribution of panchayati raj bodies in providing the leadership at the village level can also not be ignored. It is because of these bodies, that a number of leaders from the grass-roots have been able to reach to the state assemblies and national Parliament.

The weaker sections have been given a higher place in the society of these bodies. Harijans who were a neglected section of our society, and other minority communities have now obtained a place of honour since the introduction of Panchayati Raj.151

The creation of Panchayati Raj, the dominant group exploited the weaker sections without any moral pangs or sense of mercy. Panchayati Raj has provided an opportunity to the weaker sections to challenge in the open the established authoritarian hierarchical order. Panchayati Raj has not created a Cold War atmosphere, it has only brought the hidden and dormant contradictions to the surface. For the first time they have got an opportunity to challenge those whom they were previously expected to obey and worship and for the first time
the dominant groups are being challenged, a fact to which they are not used.

The contribution of political parties is to inject the ideological issues in the traditional disagreements. It is with the introduction of Panchayati Raj that the people have experienced for the first time, the value and importance of vote, particularly the weaker sections, who are provided with a weapon to challenge openly the established authoritarian and dominant groups. It is for the first time that the weaker sections find themselves in a better bargaining position.

As mentioned above the awakening and political participation is less marked in the weaker sections of the rural society, while the upper socio-economic strata in our villages has captured the political power in the Panchayati Raj institution.¹⁵² Even then as a result of the various development programmes the status of lower strata in general, is gradually changing. Construction of new roads, improvement of old ones, increasing transport facilities are bringing the rural centres closer to the urban ones and influencing their way of thinking in several ways.
Table No II

Whether the Gram Panchayat election should be contested on Party lines?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes.</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Res.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total.</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Personal Interview.

Respondents were asked, whether the Gram Panchayat election should be contested on Party lines? 26 respondents said yes to this question. They said in a democracy political parties play an important role and therefore why they should be dep
dy only at the Panchayat level only. In a democracy political parties are very important. In urban bodies they take active part and why they should not be given the chance in rural politics. Political parties explain their work and policies through propaganda. 90 respondents opposed the role of political parties in
Panchayat Raj. They said that rural people are uneducated and therefore their entry will create complications. Due to party rivalry groupism in the village increases. 54 respondents were silent on this issue.

Politisation of Scheduled Caste leaders is thus a very low degree. They are apathetic or alienated. Apathy of such a vast number of people denotes that they have no political interest and do not indulge in political activities. They lack the sense of political efficacy which means that they do not realise the importance of their vote and do not think that their participation in politics is useful for them as far the society. The same fact was found by Dr. Devendra Thakur. Apathy may grow both out of feeling of satisfaction, or out of that helplessness.
References:


22. Ibid.,

23. Ibid.,


25. Ibid.,

26. Ibid., p. 311.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid.

29. J. Narain, an ardent champion of this view states, "The more I have thought over this question, the more I have discussed it with others and the more I have learnt of the workings of the village panchayats, the more convinced have I become that if Panchayati Raj is to succeed, contests at village elections must be avoided ... To introduce electoral contests into the village is to throw a monkey-wrench into the works ... self-government through faction fighting will not be self-government but self-ruination ... Electoral contests have already produced such tensions that there is a virtual state of siege in the affairs of the panchayats." Panchayati Raj, June, 1961, pp. 9-10. Quoted by Rangnath, "The Changing Pattern of Rural Leadership in Uttar Pradesh, Indian Academy of Social Sciences, New Delhi, 1971, p. 22.


42. *Ibid.*


65. Ibid.,

66. Dominant caste is one of the important concepts in understanding the village politics. The concept was the first to use systematically by Prof. M. N. Srinivas in his various studies, especially in the


68. Ibid.


74. Ibid.,


83. The Ibid., p. 63.

84. Ibid.,


88. Ibid., p. 187.


94. Ibid.,


96. Ibid.,


104. Ibid.,


118. Ibid.


124. Ibid., p. 128.


126. Zia Uddin Khan, P.R. and Democracy, ed. by M. V. Mathur and Iqbal Narain, P.R., Planning and Democracy, Amish Publishing House, Bombay, 1969, p. 277.

127. Dayal, R., Community Development Panchayati Raj and Sahakari Samaj, Metropolitan Book Co., Delhi, 1965, p. 106.

128. Ibid., p. 107.


130. Ibid.
131. Bhargava, B.S., *P.R. System and Political Parties*, Ashish Publishing House, New Delhi, 1979, p. 120.


