The pluralistic approach towards the solution of long standing village problems and the creation of necessary instruments thereto is not new to Indian politics. Nobody would deny that each and every bit of social progress necessitates the formation of agency to ensure coordination and collaboration of works of different individuals and give a lead to the same. Today the Panchayat has been such a village agency for the solution of manifold problems of the area under its jurisdiction. It is a well-known fact that an agency devoid of welfare aspects cannot claim to be an agency at all. Thus, rural development and rural welfare are inextricably linked with the Panchayat. In a word, rural welfare and rural progress are the basis or the backbone of the Panchayat system.

From the very inception of the 1st Five Year Plan the system received due emphasis and in the fourth year of the Third Five Year plan the establishment of the system has been almost complete all over India. The role of the Panchayat in the rejuvenation and reconstruction of rural India...
can never be overestimated. We come across many such organs in different countries and found their effective and positive role. The Planning Commission in the first five year plan realised the importance of the Panchayat and sought to make the organ as the 'village agency for development'. The commission held the view that 'the functions of Panchayats are conceived widely enough to permit them to comprehend most of the civic and economic activities of a village community. In addition, Panchayats also have judicial functions. The commission in laying emphasis on Panchayats observed: 'unless a village agency can assume responsibility and initiative for developing the resources of the village, it will be difficult to make a marked impression on rural life, for, only a village organisation representing the community as a whole can provide the necessary leadership. As the agencies of the State Government cannot easily approach each individual villager separately, progress depends largely on the existence of an active organisation in village which can bring the people into common programmes to be carried out with the assistance of the administration.' The Ist. Plan was framed at State Headquarters and the scheme for rural reconstruction was executed and implemented through the agency of the Panchayat but the latter was denied the right to initiate planning in the domain in

1. The First Five Year Plan, PP-132-33.
which it would work it. The Second Plan, on the other hand, sought to mitigate the said defects by recognizing local initiative in formulating plans and local effort and resources in carrying them out. Thus in the first Plan Panchayat was an instrument of rural welfare in the hands of the State Government; but in the Second Plan the said organ had been given the authority to initiate Planning and development in the rural area independent of paternal control of the State Government.

The Planning Commission during the formation of the Second Five Year Plan observed that these suggestions were generally followed and in all State village plans and district plans were prepared and formed a basis of the draft plans presented by State Government. The 1st Plan conceived that only the development of agriculture would bring about reconstruction and rejuvenation of the down-trodden rural economy but the Second Plan thought that not only agriculture but also expansion of rural industry would help reach the goal.

The Third Five Year Plan opens with a new Chapter, a new outlook and a new object. The administration as well as development through

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1. The Second Five Year Plan, P-151.
2. Ibid.
the systems of Panchayats from the district upward to the village level is the main tenet of the third plan. In the place of the 'village agency for development' and 'village planning and village Panchayats,' as used by the 1st and 2nd Plan respectively, the phase 'Panchayati Raj' has been used in the Third Plan. And it is laid down that '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 Panchayati Raj as offering new avenues of service to the people rather than opportunities for the exercise of authority. The successive Five Year Plans of the Government of India have enumerated two types of functions of village Panchayat: administrative and judicial. The administrative functions of the Panchayat do embrace civic, development, land management and land reforms. For the performance of its judicial functions Nyaya Panchayat has been constituted almost all over India. A review of the Act shows that the administrative functions of the West Bengal Panchayat are placed under three categories, viz, obligatory, permissive and discretionary. It is also observed that the Gram Panchayat under the Act has been made the mainstay of the Panchayat system as all the positive

1. The Third Five Year Plan, P-338.
and constructive functions relating to rural welfare have been entrusted to it in pursuance of the recommendations made by the Planning Commission under the Second Five Year Plan. The Anchal Panchayat under the structure happens to be the financial authority; its functions have been the imposition, assessment and collection of taxes, fees, tolls etc. and distribution of the same amongst its constituent Gram Panchayats. In addition, an Anchal is responsible for the maintenance of rural peace and security, the proper constitution and administration of the Nyaya Panchayat established under this Act and the performance of such functions as may be transferred to it under section 31 of the Cattle Trespass Act, 1871. In the hierarchical set up of the present Panchayati Administration, over and above the Gram and Anchal Panchayats there are Anchalik Parishad and Zilla Parishad whose duties have been the distribution of revenues amongst constituent Gram Panchayats and the supervision and control of the activities of the same.

The actual amount of funds that might be made available to implement the projects of rural development in West Bengal have neither been laid down by the Panchayat Acts (the W.B.Panchayat Act

1. Secs. 27 & 71 of the W.B.Zilla Parishads Act, '63 and Ch.XII of the West Bengal Zilla Parishads (Election, constitution and Administration) Rules, 1954.
and Zilla Parishads Act taken together) nor by the rules made thereunder. Thus nobody is sure about the nature and momentum of rural development that might be achieved through the mechanism of the new system. Section 13 of the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 has enumerated a long list of welfare functions of the Gram Panchayat which have been made obligatory in character, but at the very inception of the section it has been laid down that 'subject to such conditions as may be prescribed, a Gram Panchayat shall, as far as possible, within the limits of the fund at its disposal, provide within the area under its jurisdiction' etc. The Act in incorporating such a clause had made the functions of Gram Panchayat a caricature, a mockery and a myth. The perennial complaints of Adhyaksha for the paucity of funds for which they fail to undertake various long standing projects make the system ineffective and unworkable. The aforesaid statement is also corroborated by the Report of the Study Team on Panchayati Raj finance published in the year 1963. The report states that it is true that Panchayats had in many cases made genuine efforts to discharge their functions. There were, of course, instances where they were not discharging even the minimum obligatory functions, largely due to paucity of funds. Even the basic civic amenities like safe drinking water supply, sanitation and conservancy, were not being provided to the community. Panchayats had shown greater initiative and
enthusiasm in constructing school buildings, community halls, Panchayat Ghars and village approach roads, through local contributions and government matching grants but had been unable to maintain them in good repair.

A perusal of the third five year plan of West Bengal shows the insufficiency of the allocation of government revenues to each Anchal Panchayat which is generally constituted by ten thousand population. Under the said plan the government make an annual lump sum grant of Rs. 10,000 for development work. Thus the amount of one thousand is to be shared by ten thousand people in the area concerned. Save and except the government grants there are, of course, taxes, fees and tolls to be paid by the people but everybody will easily realise the tax paying capacity of the rural people mainly dependent on agriculture.

It was revealed in the Report of the Local Finance Enquiry Committee published in the year 1951 that the incidence per head of local taxation in India was half per cent of the per capita income whereas in England it was 2.7 per cent. But from the point of view of the tax payer the tax in

2. Chapter-X P-71.
India is really higher than that in England, because the total national dividend in India is so low that it would deserve to be exempt from taxation altogether.

The annual revenue of every Anchal Panchayat in West Bengal at present ranges between Rs. 5,000 and Rs. 6,000 including government grants and assistance. A study of the budget estimate of every Anchal Panchayat in West Bengal clearly proves the fact that about half the revenue of an Anchal is spent on establishment charges and to give remuneration to its Secretary, Dafadars and Chowkidars. Thus, nearly Rupees two to three thousand are generally left for development work of an Anchal which has ten thousand population.

One of the basic principles of Panchayat is the active participation of the people in planning and development work of the country. With this object in view Government have always endeavoured to execute schemes of development like construction of roads and schools, digging wells for drinking water, etc. through the help of the local people. On their part, the local people in West Bengal have also co-operated.

willingly. A portion of the expenditure incurred for executing the schemes has also been borne by the people themselves. The value of the total assistance thus given by the people so far would be over 1.61 crores in West Bengal. Considering the economic position of the people of West Bengal it can be safely said that the response of the people in local development works in this state is good.

With little resources at its command and local help about 11,122 water supply works were completed within the period from April, 1961 to September, 1964 by the Panchayat in West Bengal. It is also to be noted that about 2,338 water supply works are still in progress in West Bengal. The village Panchayat which is functioning in West Bengal was created in 1957 and the activities which it had shown in its first decade were really praiseworthy in some cases as they really aimed at the promotion of rural welfare. Reports of party politics, corruption, malpractices, favouritism, sectarianism which undermined the aims and objects of the Panchayat in many places are also not rare in West Bengal. But inspite of its defects and lapses it must be said that the aim of the system is really good. Panchayat is the

2. F.N. 1.6 crores are contributed by the people during the 1st, 2nd and third Five Year Plans.
machinery which is to initiate development planning of the villages: the promotion and uplift of agriculture, irrigation, animal husbandry, cottage and small-scale industry, village sanitation and health etc. do all depend on the noble enterprise of the Panchayat. It is also known that the Panchayat is now the agency through which government assistance and grants would reach the village. Thus, under the system the Panchayat has immense possibilities of bringing about all-round progress and development of the rural life of the people of West Bengal as well as India. The actual contribution which the Panchayat will be able to make on the rural life of West Bengal as well as of India depends, firstly, upon the availability of finance; secondly, upon the initiative and enterprise of the Panchayat; and, lastly, upon the honesty and integrity of the Panchayat.

It is always true that the new system must be manned by honest, energetic, intelligent and capable persons of the locality: otherwise, the system will fail. Formerly, Union Board in West Bengal could not work well because of its lack of independence and sufficient resources at its command. But under the present system the Panchayat has been ensured greater independence and larger revenue than the past union Board and, thus, it is expected that the
present system would show its performance better. The present Panchayat, it is assumed, will be associated with more and more revenue as the country will march forward by planning and development. Thus, in the ultimate analysis, we think that nothing will stand in the way of the Panchayat if it really wishes and wills the welfare of the rural people. It can be emphatically said that the working of the Panchayat depends on the people who would work with it.

Panchayat and Community Development:

Though the concept of community development as of recent origin, the concept does stand for the progress and uplift of the rural people. So we do not find any difference between community development and rural development as discussed beforehand. As the two things are the same and converge practically one with the other the functions of community development have been lately assigned to the Panchayats with their creation.

The 1st Five Year Plan of the Government of India provided expenditure to the tune of ₹ 90 crores for community projects and
proposed the establishments over a period of about ten years of a network of extension workers throughout the country. But the Commission opines that if the people are to be trained to be the builders of the future, the works have to be entrusted, even at certain risks, to the people themselves through their representative agencies, the governmental organisation furnishing the technical assistance and the essential finance.

The analysis of the object of community Development and the Panchayat as published in the Acts of different states including West Bengal will clearly demonstrate that they overlap one with the other. Community Development is a movement designed to promote better living for the whole community by the use of techniques of arousing and stimulating it in order to secure its action and enthusiastic response to the movement. It includes the whole range of development activities in the District.

The main lines of advance will be in the subjects as noted below:

1. Agriculture and related matters.
2. Irrigation.
3. Communication.

1. The First Five Year Plan, P-229.
2. U.K. Hicks - Development from Below, 1961, P-520.

C.F. “Community development can be tentatively defined to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and the fullest possible reliance upon the community initiative.” (Aspects of administration-Edited by Dr. A. S. Avasthi, 1964, P-378).
In establishing relation between the Panchayat and Community Development it has been observed that the latter in Eastern Nigeria is very closely tied in with local government; many of the larger projects are joint enterprises between Community Development and the local council. Community Development has become largely a method of getting quickly the works which the local government would undertake in time, if it had not so many other things to see to. Moreover, councils by their very nature respond to Community forces, rather than create them.

It is laid down in the 1st Five Year Plan that some sort of contribution either in the form of money or of labour on the part of

1. The 1st Five Year Plan, p-225.
2. J.K. Hicks - Development From below, 1961, p-525.
villagers is a condition precedent to execute the project of community development. It is found to be essential that a community development programme should not only have the sanction but the support and whole-hearted participation of the millions of persons living in the hundreds of thousands of village communities who form the vast bulk of the population of the under-developed countries.

The experience in the execution of the community development programme showed that the response of the people was good largely in terms of their willing-ness to carry out the official programmes and to accept the recommended practices; but the idea that the people should have a role in the planning of programmes and in formulating their needs for the fulfilment of which they were prepared to work if aided by Government, was given little importance. As a result the idea of self-reliance in the people remained somewhat in the background and their dependence on Government's assistance and on official had tended to increase. It was observed that even after the operation of blocks for several years the people are not becoming ready to take up new works and activities on their own initiative, that they ask for more assistance.

1. First Five Year Plan, P-229.
2. B. Mukherjee - Community Development in India, 1962, P-5.
3. Ibid, P-29.

*G. F. All should remember that "community development is a people's programme with government aid and not a government programme with people's aid. Its progress depends on the people themselves". (Kurukshetra, February, 1968, P-16.)
from Government and not less, that they are not willing to contribute a larger share of the costs of works than they did in the beginning and that on the whole there is now more dissatisfaction in the people with what Government is doing for them than there was before the community development programme was started.

But it is definitely true that community development can never succeed wholly on the basis of local resources which are always inadequate. Thus there is always the necessity of governmental subvention. But in the Second Plan the financial provision for the community development programme was Rs. 200 crores out of the total of Rs. 4,800 crores. This amount was really inadequate provision for the rural areas. The Third Plan, on the other hand, provides for a total outlay of Rs. 294 crores on the subject, in addition to about Rs. 28 crores for Panchayats. This amount was not also sufficient for the said project for the vast country like India where millions and millions of persons live in abject poverty, squalor and disease. Instead of enhancing the quantum of govt. grants for community development projects the same have, of late, been reduced to the tune of Rs. 200 crores in the fourth Plan.

Moreover, community development methods in all cases did not produce spectacular

1. Ibid, PP-102-3.
2. Ibid, P-81.
3. The Third Five Year Plan, Ch.XX, P-332.
4. Fourth Five Year Plan-A draft outline, P-185.
results. In many areas under community development, it was observed, the process of social change and human growth was slow and difficult.

Mehata Committee remarked that 'development cannot progress without responsibility and power'. Community Development can be real only when the community understands its problems, realises its responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers through its chosen representatives and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration. With this objective, we recommend an early establishment of statutory elective local bodies and devolution to them of the necessary resources, power and authority.'

In compliance with the recommendations of the Mehata Committee the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 and the West Bengal Zilla Parishads Act, 1965 were passed and a five tier structure of the Panchayat has been created, viz. Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, Anchal Panchayat, Anchalik Parishad and the Zilla Parishad. With the establishment and creation of the Anchalik Parishad in West Bengal it seems useless to have a separate Block Development Office attached to each and every Anchalik Parishad.

1. Bikukherjee-Community Development in India, 1962, P-44.

* F.N. After seventeen years of its working it is still observed that the community development programme is treated as an official venture and the people depend on the Government to do things for them". For the progress to be true, the people must ...
A high ranking officer of the Government of West Bengal also holds the view that 'one of the main objectives of the Zilla Parishad Act is to execute development work through the representatives elected to different Panchayats. This is nothing but a legalised form of the basic principle of community development. As a result, the responsibility of executing the development schemes is gradually being shifted to the Panchayats.'

If this be the fact, the existence of a Block Development Office is definitely useless. If the Panchayat is equipped with necessary funds and resources and is given general guidance whenever necessary, the execution of community development schemes will certainly not be a difficult and a stupendous job. Thus, it is suggested that the entire block staff should come under the control of the Anchalik Parishad. Under the present arrangement the entire block personnel with the exception of the B. D. O. is independent of the control of the Anchalik Parishad. Thus, if Anchalik Parishad needs the assistance of a block staff for the execution of a project, it has to make a request to the Block Development Officer who will supply the same.

In this a word, the Block Development Officer has been a channel of communication


be informed about the ideology and methods of community development in such a way that they understand these ideas, interpret them in the context of their own background, local situations etc. and act on them. But it is often said that the community development message has
between an Anchalik Parishad and the Block staff. This sort of administration causes delay and sometimes hardship in the execution of works. As the Block staff is independent of the control of the Anchalik Parishad they sometimes show a defiant and non-cooperative attitude to the President as well as the Vice-President of the Anchalik Parishad.

It may not be out of place here to mention that numerous reports on the clash of power and authority between the Anchalik Parishad and the Block staff have been received within two to three years of their functioning. The Block staff always feel that they are employees of the Government and so they are not amenable to the Anchalik Parishad. The Anchalik Parishad, on the other hand, feels that if they are not amenable to its jurisdiction, the entire structure is redundant and useless like the fifty wheel of a motor car. So it is suggested that either the entire block staff with their specialised knowledge and experience should come under the jurisdiction and control of the Anchalik Parishad or they should be transferred to other departments of the government and the entire block machinery be abolished.

The study team of the Panchayati Raj

* The author has collected the materials from his discussions with the Head clerk of the Zilla Parishad in his district.

not yet been communicated to the villagers". (Kurukshetra, February,1968, P-16). Two years back the National Institute of community development, Hyderabad, undertook a nation-wide survey relating to the problems of community development. Almost the first finding of the survey team is not "awareness and recognition of the general..."
finances set up by the Union Ministry of Community development and co-operation realised this difficulty and unhappy situation and, thus, in its report published in the year 1963 states: "we consider it necessary and desirable that the salaries and allowances of all staff of a Samiti should be paid from its funds and shown in its accounts. We find that, in many states, the staff is paid directly by the State Government and Samiti's accounts do not show its real expenditure in relation to its services. The fact of receiving their salaries directly from the State Government has tended in some cases to induce a feeling in the Block Development officers, Extension Officers and others that they are really not under the administrative control of Samiti."

The working group of the Administrative Reforms committee, West Bengal, recommended to the Union Government that the posts of Block Development Officers would be totally abolished in view of the recent experience of their ineffectiveness. The report as submitted by them stated that Zilla Parishads should play a larger part in preparing the development plans in future. They should collect development programmes.


goals of community development and Panchayati Raj have remained mostly at the policy-making and administrative levels." (Kurukshetra, January, 1968, p.5.)
from the Panchayats and process them into schemes for implementation and send them for final approval to the State Development Board. The working group under the Chairmanship of Mr. Rabindra Lal Sinha, the then Education Minister, recommended that the posts of circle officers should be revived and two or more blocks should be placed under the charge of the circle officers.

The recommendation of the Administrative Reforms Committee for the abolition of the posts of Block Development Officers is also welcomed by some people. The reasons for the said abolition of the posts are not far to seek. It has been observed that during the last three plan periods the said officers practically served no useful purpose. It was expected that the B. D. O.s as the head of the Block Team would guide and lead the development activities of the entire Block but it is a sad irony of fate that the said officers have belied our hope. Instead of being a leader a B. D. O. has become a real headache to many of his technical staff. He knows very little of what he has to do and on many occasions he proves himself to be a hindrance to development.

works undertaken by the Block. Practically the B.D.O.'s know very little on the development schemes of the Block. They do not usually go through the five year plans, Block Manuals and other Pamphlets issued by their department concerned. Above all, they think themselves to be administrators and rulers of the people for which they fail to have the active support and co-operation of the people in development works. So the whole machinery has become a nuisance and consequently a burden to the State exchequer.

The recent annual conferences of the State Development Commissioners and State Ministers of Community Development and Panchayati Raj have stressed the need of abolishing the duplication of staff between various Government departments and the Panchayati Raj institutions and recommended that the entire staff working in the Panchayati Raj institutions from the village to the district level " should be brought under the control of the Chief Executive Officer of the Zilla Parishad."


N.B.: The efficacy of the Panchayat to execute the scheme of community development in the district of Birbhum will be found in the Chapter on "Actual working of some Panchayats in the district of Birbhum." See ante.