This work attempts to analyse the structural and functional processes of a Bhil (tribal) village panchayat, namely; Alsigarh Gram Panchayat in Southern Rajasthan from a systemic perspective. The three key concepts which have been employed here to analyse the processes are politics, development and modernization. Whereas the analysis of politics or democratic structure has led us to survey a prolonged historical process of panchayat formation, the concept of development in the analysis has the focus on the politico-developmental dynamics generated over the infra-structural investments in the panchayat and the modernization framework has necessitated to discuss the end-products of dynamics and interactional patterns of democratic structuration and development. In the treatment of the structural features of the panchayat, there have been mainly highlighted four attributes of leadership in the microcosm of the panchayat: Emergence, continuity, discontinuity and re-emergence. Thus, an attempt has been made to study the leadership structure in terms of the four attributes individually as well as collectively to highlight the tendency in the leadership not only to persist but also to undergo adaptive changes. Development here acts as cultural innovations introduced through the structural innovative mechanism of the panchayat itself. Modernization emerges as the end-products or patterns out of the interaction between the democratic structure and the development in the panchayat. The three concepts are analysed to depict the comprehensive dynamics of change through traditional structural and cultural response to the structural and cultural innovations introduced in the Bhil setting in India.

The first chapter The Study: Its Context and Execution introduces the study in the context of regional system, historicity of the Bhils and conceptual framework. The conceptual framework of the three processes is formulated to seek their inter-connections and working in a tribal social structure. The second chapter Historical-Institutional Perspective of Panchayat System in India traces evolution of panchayats as structural and cultural phenomenon in India and introduces the institution of panchayats in India, particularly in Rajasthan. In the chapters that follow, the substantive realities of settings and working of the panchayat have been discussed through the conceptual categories. Through this, the social change has been placed in a logical context for the social analysis. Beginning with the analysis of settings, it has been found that the reality of a tribal panchayat, too, is complex and multi-layered rather than to be simplistic as commonly conceived. It is, therefore, required to be analysed in terms of the panchayat as a whole as well as the subtleties within it. The third chapter Settings of the Alsigarh Gram Panchayat deals with physical, social, cultural, occupational and political structures of the panchayat as a whole as well as of the village systems and phalas within it.

The fourth chapter Structural and Cultural Parameters of the Panchayat Polity analyses the nature of structuration of the panchayat in terms of structural and cultural factors such as gotra, village, phala, age, education, occupation and land holding. The fifth chapter Panchayat as a Vehicle of Developmental Functioning systematically applies a blend of historical, structural and dialectical methods to analyse the process of developmental functioning and witnesses traditionalization and formalization, politicization, cooperation and conflicts in the tribal social structure. The sixth chapter Tribals Towards Modernization deals with the changes in socio-cultural, occupational
and political aspects generated through interplay of politics and development and micro and macro structures. The last chapter Conclusion: Politicisation, Change and Persistence highlights the general patterns of continuity and change in the tribal social structure. Unanimity at elections and continuity in power, increasingly growing conflicts in the developmental functioning and adaptive changes are the prominent features crystallizing in the panchayat.

The study pertains to the panchayat leadership emerged under the Panchayati Raj institutions envisaged in the acts existing before the Constitution (Seventy Third) Amendment Act 1993. After this amendment the states have enacted acts to follow and the earlier Panchayati Raj has been re-organized in terms of representation of the backward sections, i.e., the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, Other Backward Classes and Women, jurisdiction, financial powers, elections of the bodies, etc. Thus, it would be useful for future researches to study the emergence of new leadership at the panchayat level after the constitution of the new Panchayati Raj bodies in Rajasthan in December-January 1994-95.

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