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DEVELOPMENT IMPASSE OR SILENT REVOLUTION?

The concept of development gained currency among the scholars, policy makers and administrators after the Second World War, when the newly emergent and independent countries of the post colonial third world were struggling hard to develop their society, economy and polity according to their respective imagination and perception of development.

The study of the process of development had gained momentum in the U.S.A. under the guidance of the sub-discipline of comparative politics with patronage of the Social Science Research Council.

Generally by development is meant the maintenance of a socio-economic and political condition wherein everybody can enjoy his freedom best by fulfilling his needs and desires.

From analysing various methods of development, adopted by various newly independent nations, scholars, belonging to various schools of thought, have developed various ideas of developments. Amongst them, some of the major schools are represented by modernists, liberals, Gandhians and the Marxists respectively.

Samuel P. Huntington and S.N. Eisenstadt have strongly opined that political development is a method of institutionalisation of organisations and procedures which makes them viable and persistent in present day fast-changing world. Through the process of development various strong, durable and specialised institutions, e.g., political parties, pressure groups and so forth have evolved. These newly evolved institutions act as checks and balances so that no institution can become more and
more powerful by usurping power of other institutions, as, in accordance with the ideas, cherished by Huntington, democracy is the primary valuable object of the inhabitants of the Third World Country.¹

In order to meet the demand of setting strong and powerful democracy in the Third World Countries, which has been raised by the inhabitants of the countries, belonging to the Third World, economic development is badly needed. And for the development of the economic condition of the Third World Countries the emergent new bourgeoisie along with expanded market economy are very important.

Defining the concept of political development from structural-functional standpoint, Almond and Powell have opined that an important feature of the developed polity is the functional diversification and specialisation among various branches of the government. In accordance with their opinion, any political system would be considered as developed only when that system completely responds to the “developmental problem through structural diversification functional specialisation and cultural secularisation”.² Such diversification of specialisation protects the rights of the ordinary citizens from the attacks of those individuals who are very much willing to usurp power and authority in society.

The exponents of the Dependency theory have said that there are certain problems, like population explosion, stagnant social structure, absence of agrarian reform and so on, embedded in the society of the Third World Countries. Development of such countries, belonging to the Third World, may be attained only when such internal problems of the society, e.g., population explosion, problem of unemployment and so forth would be eradicated from the society with a radical restructuring of the global order and putting an end to the dominant dependent relationship between the developed North and the underdeveloped South.³
The concept of such developed and developing countries are moving around the notion of industrial development of which the U.S.A. is the pioneer. The idea of such type of industrial development is the off-shoot of the modern capitalist economic system. Thus it would not be an exaggeration to say following Andre Gunder Frank that only proper industrialisation of the developing countries would bridge the gap between developed and developing countries.

Some thinkers have cherished the opinion that in the democratic set-up, economic development can not be achieved. During 1970s, it has been found that some countries, specially the countries of Latin America, e.g., Brazil, which have been economically developed to some extent, have failed miserably in attaining democracy. Thus many scholars have held the opinion that in comparison to the democratic form of government, development oriented authoritarian form of government is more acceptable in the developing countries. Professor Huntington has opined that rapid economic growth may lead to either non-achievement or negative achievement of other targets of development, e.g., growth, equity, democracy, stability and national autonomy.⁴

Professor Amartya Sen has offered a critique of such typically western paradigms of development. In the opinion of Professor Sen, for all-round development of human being certain pre-requisites for better human life, e.g., expansion of basic primary education, primary health care, agricultural advancement, and eradication of untouchability must be fulfilled.⁵

Another important approach to rural development is proposed by Gandhi. Gandhi has put emphasis upon the ‘small industry small city model’. According to this model the decentralised production system should be more and more acceptable. For he has firmly believed that only through the decentralised production system
ample opportunities of providing jobs for huge number of unemployed youth, residing in rural areas can be generated. This is the thrust area of the ‘small industry small city model’ propagated by Gandhi.

Gandhi has strongly believed that for the all-round development of India, rural development is very much essential. Because he has believed that in India, maximum people are found to live in the rural area. By rural development is implied the expansion of irrigation facilities for agricultural development, construction of school building with a view to expanding education in rural India and some such initiative catering to the needs of the simple life of the rural folk.

Gandhi has said that in the acute class-divided society over all human development can not be achieved. As in such acute class-divided society no class can properly enjoy the fruits of development. Therefore, Gandhi has been in favour of a non-violent class less society. Because in his opinion only in such non-violent class-less society people can appropriately utilise the natural resources. Along with this in such non-violent society, people should not be afraid of any form of intimidation.7

Gandhi has said that for overall growth and development, India does not have to import ideas and wisdom from any foreign countries. He has strongly opined that in the traditional Indian idea of development, the essence of socialism is to be found.8 In accordance with the idea, cherished by Gandhi, in ancient India Gopala was identified as God. And at present Gopala is nothing but the state. So in terms of traditional idea, by the statement – all land belongs to Gopala - is meant that all land would be owned by the state. Gandhi has also argued that man is the creator of the prevailing caste-system for his own interest. As with the use of this age-worn caste-system, some men belonging to the higher castes have heaped wealth for themselves exploiting other so called lower-caste men and women.

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For the realisation of his dream Gandhi has been very keen on the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions. In his cherished dream, a Panchayat would consist of five members, possessing certain stipulated qualifications. They would be elected for one year. Such kind of Panchayat would perform mainly three kinds of functions, e.g., legal, judicial and administrative. The ideal form of village, reared by Gandhi, would be governed by the non-violent rules and regulations only.

But after independence, the Congress Ministry, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, did not follow Gandhian notion of development. For all-round development of the country and the cure of the wound of the Second World War and the partition of India, the then leaders adopted the policy of five year planning, following the erstwhile U.S.S.R. which implemented this policy very successfully, under Marxist regimes.

The then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his principal economic adviser, Professor P.C. Mahalanobis relied heavily on the help of both the U.S.S.R. and the U.S.A. for capital and food grains. But the problem was felt when the opportunity of getting foreign aids, especially food grains from the capitalist block, declined sharply. Almost around the same time, Community Development Project was launched with a view to increasing food grain production in 1952 which was continued for a long time. But this project failed miserably to bring in the desired results.

Thus in January, 1957, a committee was appointed under the Chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta to sustain the utility of local initiative and create institutions for the improvement of the socio-economic condition of people in rural India. This committee recommended adoption of a decentralised body which would remain responsible for all developmental work under its jurisdiction. While advising a decentralised organisation, which should be based on democracy at the grass root
level, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee was guided by the provision under Article 40 of the Constitution of India for the introduction of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in villages.

But with the death of Nehru, the system of the Panchayati Raj Institution became inactive rapidly. A new chapter on Panchayati Raj was unfolded in the late 1970s when the Ashok Mehta Committee was formed in 1977 for the rejuvenation of the Panchayati Raj Institution. This Ashok Mehta Committee observed that the Panchayati Raj Institutions could have survived if these were properly encouraged by endowing some responsibilities on them as 'a vanguard of development in rural India'.

The recommendations of the Ashok Mehta Committee have been accepted, but all the proposals of the Ashok Mehta Committee have not been followed thoroughly for rejuvenation of local self government in rural India.

Another alternative approach to rural development has been advocated by the Indian Marxists. The Left Front has been voted to power in 1977 under the leadership of the C.P.I. (M) for the first time in West Bengal. After the formation of the ministry an attempt was initiated for social change. For the experiment of social change, the Left Front has chosen the rural area first. Though Left Front Government has been led by the C.P.I. (M), who has been swayed by Marxist ideology, the Left Front does not follow the Marxist idea of the revolutionary theory of social change for attaining the goal of social development with justice and empowerment of the rural poor in the immediate future. It is much more concerned about giving some relief to the poor within limits set by the Constitution of India for administering parliamentary democracy without harnessing a violent revolution.

With the help of land reform programme, the Left Front has been very eager to bring about a perceivable change in the rural power structure without a bloody class-struggle.
As the land reform programme has been organised under the surveillance of the Left Front, no real class-struggle has occurred for land in the country side. Though in some corners, some resistance has been thrown up against the government policy of land reform by a small segment of the rural gentry, such kind of resistances do not bear any fruitful result. The Left Front Government, under the leadership of the C.P.I. (M) has used the traditional Panchayati Raj System to effect the change in rural West Bengal.

The success of panchayats in several states to administer decentralised development of the rural economy convinced the Government of India during the early 1990s that a constitutional amendment is necessary for rejuvenation of the Panchayati Raj Institution properly through out the country. Not only that it has also felt that these institutions should be financially self sufficient to perform the entrusted responsibilities. And this is another important pre-requisite for the survival of the Panchayati Raj Institution as an autonomous body.

At last, through the seventy-third Constitutional Amendment in 1993, the Panchayati Raj Institution has become a constitutional body. Though the seventy-third Constitutional Amendment is a landmark in the history of the evolution of the Panchayati Raj Institution in India, it does not transmit any new idea to the West Bengal Government, except forming certain new bodies like the State Finance Commission, the Gram Sabhas and Gram Sansads or the District Planning Committee.

For the creation of employment avenues for the unemployed youth, Gandhi has been in favour of decentralised production system. Thus for all-round development of India Gandhi has strongly advocated rural development. Gandhi has laid emphasis on three pre-requisites for setting up of his ideal village. These are – firstly, power should be distributed amongst the rural people, secondly, voluntary co-operation should be promoted amongst the rural people so that for the enjoyment of
full freedom, they can get over all forms of dependence on the larger state machinery, the bureaucracy or their urban counterparts. And thirdly, if these two conditions are properly developed among the rural people, despite the internal conflict the village would enjoy a vibrant life.

In the ideal village, cherished by Gandhi, the learned people would not hesitate to labour physically. In the same way, they would encourage the illiterate people to be educated with the help of literate people. The inhabitants of the rural area would remain conscious so that no epidemic diseases would spread due to their ignorance. Gandhi has also said that rich people would invest their money through the needy rural artisans for the production of essential commodities. This would not only facilitate the rapid increase of production but also creation of employment opportunity for the rural people.\(^10\)

Gandhi has favoured that such kind of villages would be administered by the Panchayati Raj Institution which would be composed of five people and elected for one year only. In Gandhi’s ideal village no caste-based discrimination would be allowed.

Gandhi has said that while the planning would be prepared for the development of the villages, the locally available resources would be given first preference to use as the raw materials for the purpose of production of necessary goods and services. For this end, integrated production system may be launched. The surplus produce of one sector may be used as the raw materials for the production in other sectors.

After independence, the rural poor remain the victim of both pre-capitalist and capitalist forms of exploitation. The Indian Marxists have tried to free them from the shackle of the exploitation. Keeping this end in mind, the Indian Marxists have tried hard to change the correlation of class forces by involving poor and working people in an organised manner in the process of development. Thus, they have waged struggle
for some rational demands, e.g., implementation of land reforms, better wages, tenancy rights etc. in the agrarian sector.

Having been induced by Marxist ideology, the Left Front, under the leadership of the C.P.I.(M), has successfully implemented land reform programmes to make the position of the rural people economically strong. Thus the land reform programme has also served two purposes. Firstly, the land less people have now become the owners of small plots of land which have empowered them to rise against exploitation and secondly, the landed people have lost interest in the agricultural production for various reasons. Now the enthusiastic sharecroppers who have been benefited by the land reform programme, have shown keen interest in the agricultural production.¹²

But only land reform programme can not be the panacea for all the problems in the rural area. Thus for the all-round development of the rural areas, which is the motto of the Indian Marxists, planning through the Panchayati Raj Institution is very important.¹³

For the formation of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, Indian Marxists have prescribed the method of direct party based election. As through the election method, people of all strata of the rural area will get a chance to participate directly otherwise the people would not realise the future planning and programme of the political parties which will bewilder them regarding the ideals of the political parties. Because the political parties will participate in the election in disguise.¹⁴

District has been identified as the unit of the Panchayati Raj system for mainly two reasons. In the past, the district has played a very vital role in the local administration and secondly, the staff, which is required for both planning and execution of the same planning,¹⁵ can be made available only in and through the administrative structure of the district.
After the district, the Mondal Panchayat would be regarded as the centre of development. At this level, people would get an opportunity to prepare the planning of their own development for which locally available resources would be utilised.\(^{16}\)

E.M.S. Namboodripad has not been in favour of division of the functions of the Panchayati Raj Institution merely in regulatory and developmental functions. He has been much eager to divide those functions which are not related with national question, such as defence, finance etc. between the provincial government and the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The Marxists have also argued in favour of reservation of seats in the Panchayati Raj Institution on the basis of the economic condition rather than caste system. For in their opinion, if this policy has not been adopted in the reservation system, an intellectual class, enjoying all government privileges would emerge as the ‘creamy layer’ resulting in a clear division among the oppressed people.\(^{17}\) They are very much willing to reserve seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, as to them, if the women are not properly empowered, they would remain easy target of various forms of exploitation.

The Indian Marxists have strongly believed that such type of Panchayati Raj Institutions would help the land less peasants secure the benefits of land reform. It would be feasible as the Panchayati Raj Institutions would be no more controlled and regulated by the rural gentry. The land reform programme would be jeopardised, if the Panchayati Raj Institutions do not take initiative in the implementation of the same. As the vested interest of the landed people of the rural area would be hampered, they would oppose the implementation of this programme.

The Left Front was voted to power in 1977, under the leadership of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). This Left Front was formed to implement a
common programme. In this common programme, important are decentralisation of power, proper protection of the interest of the poor people, public participation and total social change where poor would get proper importance.

After attaining power in 1977, the Left Front Government has taken upon itself mainly three responsibilities for proper functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The first responsibility, undertaken by the Left Front, is to revive the moribund rural economy. The second responsibility is to democratise rural governing process so that rural people can participate in the governing process replacing the financially dominant section of the rural population from the controlling position. And the third important function, performed by the Left Front is the removal of ‘rock departmentalism’.

The area for which developmental programmes should be initiated through the Panchayati Raj Institutions are (i) land reform, (ii) spreading literacy, (iii) radical reduction of endemic morbidity and malnutrition, (iv) providing social security arrangement for general people, (v) proper functioning of local governance, (vi) participation of women in various programmes.

The Government has put emphasis on land reform programme for mainly two reasons. Firstly, ceiling-surplus land would be distributed amongst the landless people who would be encouraged to produce more and more crop and secondly, they have become the owner of the land as their names have been recorded as the sharecroppers of the land.

But to execute this programme, the Government, led by the C.P.I. (M) has faced a major problem. Owing to close proximity with the land owners the bureaucrats are not eager to implement this programme.
With a view to eradicating this problem, the Land Reform Act has been modified to a great extent. After the modification of the Land Reform Act, the responsibility of the execution of the land reform programme has been entrusted upon the Panchayati Raj Institutions. At the Panchayat Samiti Level, a Standing Committee has been formed mandatorily, whose main function is the preparation of the list of the beneficiaries amongst whom the ceiling surplus land would be distributed, bearing in mind the advice and suggestions rendered by the Gram Panchayats.  

Except the above functions, the Panchayati Raj Institutions extend their help in settling the dispute between the land owners and the sharecroppers over the sharing of the crop. Along with this, the Panchayati Raj Institutions extend support to the poor peasants by giving them agricultural implements, manure, fertilisers and other inputs at very low cost. 

The Panchayati Raj Institution also makes arrangements for getting loans easily from various financial institutions so that the poor sharecroppers would not be the easy victims of private money lenders. Side by side, irrigation facilities are made available to the lands which were not under the purview of the irrigation system in the past. Along with this many advanced technology have been adopted for the increase of production.  

Elementary education is regarded as the basic criterion for a better standard of living. It is true that there are many pitfalls in the academic curricula but the present educational system has empowered the oppressed class, especially the women and the disadvantaged section of the society to liberate themselves from the shackle of exploitation and tradition.  

Education and health are two important components of freedom. They are interlinked with each other.
Without proper education, sound health would not be possible and without sound health one can not enjoy the output of development.

Spread of basic education helps the common people become aware of their basic needs of a social life and they raise their voice against the malpractices and other social problems from which they have been suffering for a long time. Thus a new policy, known as Total Literacy Campaign (T.L.C.) has been launched by the Central Government to make the poor aware about their destitute condition. But the success of this programme has depended upon voluntary activities. Thus the Panchayati Raj Institutions should encourage the people to participate in the programme of spreading education voluntarily.26

Sans the above measures, the Panchayati Raj Institutions have built up shops at the market place or the bus-stand to give them among the unemployed youth on either lease basis or rent basis encouraging them to start their own business with a view to eradicating the problems of unemployment.27

Another important attempt has been undertaken for reduction of poverty and equalisation of the unequal. Various programmes for alleviation of poverty have been introduced. Amongst them, two important schemes are National Rural Employment Programme and Integrated Rural Development Programme. The main objects of these two programmes are creating employment opportunities for both the unemployed youth and agricultural labourers, who remain unemployed for maximum time during the year.

For the proper functioning of the local governance, people’s participation in the local governance is badly needed. Thus arrangements have been made to conduct free and fair election at every stage of the Panchayati Raj Institutions every five years as free and fair election can only ensure the people’s participation in the local governance. The legislation of the Panchayati Raj Institution and the parallel institutions of the C.P.I. (M)
are designed to empower the poor so that they may actively participate in the local government and local development process. Now summoning of the Gram Sabha once a year has become mandatory through the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. In the meeting of the Gram Sabha, the general people, whose names have been enlisted in the voters' list, actively participate in various discussions from audit report to the selection of the names of the beneficiaries of various schemes, sponsored by either the Central Government or the State Government.  

In the past, in such meetings generally affluent people of the rural area held sway and their opinions were attached importance in these meetings. But now in a changed scenario the poor people may easily express their opinion on various issues which affect their daily life. Not only that the rural people interact among themselves on various issues unofficially at various informal places, like market, play ground, and club room. The output of these discussions is conveyed in the meeting of the Gram Sabha through various organisations like Krishak Sabha, D.Y.F.I. etc. The Gram Sansad, which has become mandatory through the 73rd Constitution Amendment, is the successor of the concept of Gram Sabha, incorporated in the Act of 1957. With the help of such informal meetings the illiterate, shy rural people participate indirectly in the discussion on various issues concerned with themselves without being vocal in the meeting.

By dint of enactment for women's reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, attempts have been taken to empower women properly. It is true that despite various social constraints, women are ready to participate in the public life. The political parties should utilise this golden opportunity for developing political consciousness amongst the women.
But despite this golden opportunity for empowerment of women through the 73rd Constitution Amendment and their eagerness for participation in public life, their participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions is very meagre. Not only that the power of the women participants in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has been usurped by the male members of their family. Along with this, the rural women having been deprived of enjoyment of various privileges, have lost their courage and self-confidence which make them vocal against various kinds of oppression, of which they have been victims for a long period. Women representatives to the Panchayati Raj Institutions from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities have attained enough self-confidence to face various problems of their new assignments and they are trying to adapt their new roles as partners in rural leadership. Now they do not hesitate to come out from their home even at night to solve any kind of problems if situation so demands. Thus a positive trend amongst women, specially belong to disadvantaged section of the society in West Bengal towards women empowerment has been identified. Thus, the responsibility upon the C.P.I.(M) and its women's organisation has increased to make them conscious of their poor condition as well as their inner strength with which they may raise the voice against oppression.

Through Integrated Rural Development Programme, women of rural Bengal have improved their economic condition. But some times the male members of the family utilise the financial aid for their own business though the financial help is generally granted for the female member of the family.

Thus another important scheme, named Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas has been introduced for reaching the benefits directly to the women. The basic unit under the scheme is a group of 10-15 poor women who have come close to help each other with a view to using their collective strength for breaking
social constraints which have deprived them of income generating and self-fulfilling opportunities. Before starting this programme women should be made familiar with the objectives and benefits of group formation under this scheme. The amount, fixed per group is Rs. 25,000/- and the amount has been divided between the Central and the State Government on a fifty fifty basis. Gandhi would have been happy to see more than 3 lakh Self-Help-Groups, formed exclusively by poor rural women, flourishing in West Bengal through efforts and initiatives of the Marxist left committing itself to policies and programmes of participatory community development. They are also encouraging voluntary social action deferring for the time being the strategy of all out class battle in rural areas.

Two options are opened before the Left Front just after they have been voted to power in 1978. These two are firstly the consolidation of power in the rural area through the establishment of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Secondly, supervision of the local self government through party cadre. The Left Front has attached more importance to the second option. The Panchayati Raj Institutions are now controlled by the party-sympathiser leaving the important supervisory role over the Panchayati Raj Institutions to the disciplined party cadre. This option has been accepted only to accommodate lower rural classes into the politicised Panchayati Raj System.32

Many Panchayati Raj Institutions have performed functions, like arbitration in trivial rural quarrels, resolution of local disputes involving individuals or groups in a locality.33 The simple rural people generally approach the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, while facing any problem. And the decisions, taken by the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been accepted by the concerned rural people. Not only that it has been found that off and on District Magistrates take the help of the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions to defuse communal and other tensions.
In spite of the above, it has been found that the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions till now do not know about the self governance which is the focal point of the Panchayati Raj System. To change such situation, District Magistrate centric bureaucratic set-up, which is the legacy of colonial rule in India, should be changed and people centric democratic self governance should be ushered in.

The activities of the Panchayati Raj Institutions have been on the wane after the completion of the first term of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in 1983. After 1983 the Panchayati Raj Institutions are mainly engaged in routine work. The Panchayati Raj Institutions generally perform three main functions namely identification of the beneficiaries for various Government sponsored schemes, spotting the places wherein the schemes, financed by either Central Government or the State Government would be executed and the building of resources from their own area through either tax collection or non-tax sources of revenue.

The reasons for such stagnant condition of the Panchayati Raj Institutions are mainly two. First and foremost, the elected members do not know for what purposes the Panchayati Raj Institutions are formed. Due to lack of knowledge, they are unable to innovate new functions and role for the well-being of the rural people. Secondly, the elected members strongly opine that land reform programme is their only function. But land reform programme is exhausted by the end of the 1980s. Thus new programmes and policies should be adhered to for rejuvenation of the Panchayati Raj System.

As the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, especially the members of Gram Panchayat do not know about planning, they do not prepare any five year plan. But preparation of the five year planning is very important for proper development of the rural area. Thus, the Panchayati Raj Institutions remain busy only in spending money, received from either the Central or the State Government. And these funds are
generally allotted for certain specific programmes. So while spending the funds, the Panchayati Raj Institutions remain bound to follow various directives, issued by the funding agencies succinctly. And the fund, received as untied fund is not totally untied in nature. When these untied funds are released, so many conditions are imposed upon them, that the Panchayati Raj Institutions become fussy about the clear demarcation between what they can do and what they can not.\textsuperscript{37}

Thus, the West Bengal Government has fixed certain responsibilities for every tier of the Panchayati Raj System, keeping in mind the amount of subsidy, received from either the Central Government or the State Government. In this order, the responsibilities of various upa-samities are determined. Such steps have been taken in order to restrict the overlapping problems amongst various upa-samities. In this order, it has been also said that the staff posted at the block or district level, required for the implementation of various schemes of the government should remain under the control of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.\textsuperscript{38}

But the real story is different. Despite the provision of section 207A of the West Bengal Panchayat Act and order, issued by the Chief Secretary, maximum departments do not show any interest in placing the functionaries under the disposal of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Such attitude of various departments put the autonomy of self-government under a great question mark. Generally, the head of various tiers of the Panchayati Raj Institutions have no control over the staff, important for the implementation of various programmes. Along with this, the heads of the various strata of the Panchayati Raj System do not have any role in the recruitment of the employees. Thus, they have been compelled to rely upon the employees of their own, like Executive Assistant, Gram Panchayat Secretary and Sahayak, who are mainly generalist in nature. These generalists do not have any
specialised knowledge about various specialised departments, e.g., Animal Resource Department, Agriculture and so on.\textsuperscript{39}

At the Gram Panchayat level, some upa-samities have to be formed as these are main implementing agencies of the Panchayati Raj Institution. But unfortunately, no members of these upa-samities are aware about their responsibilities, methods of functions. They, thus, depend upon the employees of the Gram Panchayat.\textsuperscript{40}

Lack of information about the functioning of the upa-samities at the Gram Panchayat level has become hindrances in performing various functions. The government order and circular are not circulated among the sanchalaks by Pradhans of the Gram Panchayats. But the sanchalaks are the nerves of the functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Therefore, they are unable to make a clear-cut demarcation between what should be done and what should not be done.

Not only that the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, whose academic attainment is too low to be able to comprehend the orders and circulars, written in complex English mostly, feel at a loss in discharging their functions. On the other hand, the employees of the Gram Panchayat are so overburdened with various types of functions, that they have no leisure to convey the meaning of the orders and circulars, issued by the government, going through them thoroughly. Naturally the Panchayati Raj Institutions have become only the implementing agency of both the Central Government and the State Government, much to the discomfort of both Gandhians and Marxists.

With a view to eradicating such problems, it is very important to arrange training programme for sanchalaks of various upa-samities at the sub-divisional level.\textsuperscript{41} Not only that, training for capacity building amongst the members of the Gram Panchayats is badly needed. For it is the general phenomenon that due to lack
of proper knowledge, many important functions of the Gram Panchayats, e.g., writing of resolution correctly and clearly, participation of the members in the various meetings of the Gram Panchayat are not performed properly. Generally the span of time of the training which is imparted to the members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions is maximum 6 days. But training of such a short period can not remove all types of lacunae of the functions of the Gram Panchayat. Thus training programme should be adopted in such a way that members of the Gram Panchayats, specially the women members can be informed how to actively participate in various meetings of the Gram Panchayat. This type of training should be arranged at regular intervals so that the women members and members from the disadvantaged section may overcome the uneasy feeling in the meetings of various organs of the Gram Panchayats.

Along side the training, exposure to the best areas, wherein women members and the members from disadvantaged sections have attained their self confidence, may produce expected positive results. For such type of training, tour for the members of the Gram Panchayats to other states should be arranged.42

Though there are enough provisions to collect revenue for its own independent expenditure in the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, the Panchayati Raj Institutions have not been in a position to collect revenue due to legal, administrative and political compulsion which has jeopardised the economic autonomy of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.43

Thus, the Panchayati Raj Institutions should be encouraged to open new avenues for creation of new assets and enrichment of its resources. The Zilla Parishads may use lands and buildings which they have possessed as the succession from the District Board for the commercial purpose to strengthen the scope of revenue. Not only that, the Panchayati Raj Institutions may raise their resources by
encouraging the influential and affluent people of the rural area to denote movable and non-movable properties for the greater interest of the rural people.\textsuperscript{44}

The Panchayati Raj Institutions have faced three major problems in the financial devolution process. The Panchayati Raj Institutions get only a fraction of fund, allotted for development purpose through three channels. Firstly, there is a great chasm between the district plans and the allotment of funds in the state budget. Secondly, the Panchayati Raj Institutions are unable to know how much fund is allotted in a year. Thus, it has to rely upon the line department at the district level to get information about the allocation of funds for execution of planning. And “the third channel of untied funds has almost dried up making the district head even more inaccessible since the Panchayats have nothing to give them now.\textsuperscript{45}

For the proper manifestation of local self-government, free and fair election is very much urgent. As to free Panchayati Raj Institution from the fetters of the bureaucrats, free and fair election is badly needed. Keeping such information of free and fair election in mind, the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitution Amendment makes provision for the formation of the State Election Commission to conduct and supervise free and fair election. According to the provision of the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment, the State Election Commissioner would be appointed by the State Government and removed by the State Government following the same method, adopted for the removal of a judge of a High Court.

In West Bengal, almost free and fair election has been conducted for the Panchayati Raj Institutions and this has been reflected through the result of the election of the Panchayati Raj Institutions which has been discussed in chapter four.\textsuperscript{46}

After the Panchayat Election, held in 1978, scenario of the rural leadership has changed to a great extent. In place of the traditional influential land owners, school
teachers and some college teachers belonging to the middle class family have emerged as the new generation leadership. Though the poor people got berth in the Panchayati Raj System, their representation in the important positions in the Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad is still inadequate. Naturally they hold important position neither in the Zilla Parishad nor in the Panchayat Samiti. The Panchayats, formed by the middle class people who seem to be deeply concerned in the matters of the poor, can not yield any good result to the poor always. But the Panchayati Raj system, formed by the poor will be more effective for themselves as such Panchayati Raj system can take decision keeping their needs in mind.47

Through the Panchayati Raj system, the rural people have become politically conscious. Many poor rural people, who crave for leadership, have got a chance to be elected as members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The rural people, being conscious about various issues, have discussed such topics which are not related immediately with their life style, informally.48

Westergaard has studied the empowerment of the rural people after 1978. He has strongly opined that despite the empowerment of poor people in the rural area, there is hardly any change in the power structure of rural politics. After analysing the result of the Panchayati Raj election, held in 1978 and 1983, he has held the view that majority of the elected members are cultivators and some of them may belong to the middle or rich peasants. He has also said that some times two members, belonging to either Scheduled Caste or Scheduled Tribe were co-opted in all three levels of the Panchayati Raj Institutions when they were not properly represented through the reservation policy prior to enactment of the 73rd amendment. This also happened in case of women’s representation. But it has been unfortunately found that both the poor people as well as the women were unable to enjoy the power which they had
acquired. As they remained mute spectators during the discussions in various forums of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Even now they are unable to control the Panchayati Raj Institutions which are supposed to be their own institutions.\textsuperscript{49}

Lieten has said in his book, \textit{Development, Devolution and Democracy} that though poor rural people have tested power through the execution of the policy of Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad, which keep strong surveillance on the various functions of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, specially the fund, allotted to them by either the State Government or the Central Government, due to heavy dependency on institutional framework of governance for collecting various data on different issues, rather than the close contact with the local people, the interest of the local people regarding the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, has diminished to a great extent. Naturally the power, which the rural poor people were supposed to have, now has been usurped by the selected rural people.\textsuperscript{50}

Prabhat Dutta has depicted a very gloomy picture of people’s participation in the various affairs of the Panchayati Raj Institutions in his book \textit{Panchayat and Local Autonomy}. He has said that the illiterate people remain mute in the meeting of the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad wherein the problems of policies related with them are discussed and framed. Dutta has said that due to illiteracy, these rural poor people are hesitating to discuss in the meeting of the Gram Sabha or Gram Sansad, the agenda that deals with their life situations.\textsuperscript{51}

The Gram Sansad has been formed to ensure people’s participation. But the rural people rarely say any thing in the meeting. To the contrary they prefer to remain mere spectators in the Gram Sansad meeting. It has been alleged by them that the advice, rendered by the rural people regarding any thing for rural development, has been given less importance. Not only that it has been further stated that no important
documents, such as income expenditure report, budget of the Gram Panchayat and latest audit report of the Gram Panchayat are submitted in the meeting of the Gram Sansad, though the Gram Panchayat is legally bound to do so. On the contrary, the people, who have proximity to the powerful members of the Gram Panchayat, generally control the total system though they are not accountable to anybody for any function, performed by them. But neither the members of the Gram Panchayat nor the employees of the Gram Panchayat show any interest to make the local people involved in the process.\textsuperscript{52}

Harihar Bhattacharyya has observed that to the C.P.I. (M), the Panchayati Raj Institution is nothing but the implementing agency of various developmental programme, adopted by the Government. He has strongly held the opinion that through the Panchayati Raj Institution, the Left Front is very keen to build a strong political support base for themselves in the rural area by executing the adopted developmental programme. It is generally found, specially in the single party dominated Panchayati Raj Institution that decisions, taken in the meeting of the Gram Sabha or Gram Sansad, are finalised else-where in accordance with the directives and influence of the local party leadership. Thus he has strongly held the view that people’s participation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions is nothing but a myth now.\textsuperscript{53}

In the participatory democratic set-up, participation of women folk is very important as participatory democracy becomes successful only when the members, belonging to every strata of society including their womenfolk attend various decision making bodies. Thus, in the 73\textsuperscript{rd} Constitutional Amendment, a new provision has been incorporated. With the help of this new enactment for women’s reservation, the Panchayati Raj Institution may take a step to empower women properly. It is true that there remain social obstruction in women’s participation in the Panchayati Raj
Institutions, though they are ready to participate in public life. Thus it is a golden opportunity for various political parties to take the initiative for accommodating them in public life by developing awareness amongst themselves. Therefore, women’s development programme should be initiated at every level of the Panchayati Raj Institution.\textsuperscript{54}

In the Panchayati Raj System, which has been envisaged as the model of proper democratic forum, women of the villages do not come, for they are not given proper importance. The rural women generally complain that they are not properly listened to. And as the sense of self-respect has developed in them, they have lost interest about the attendance in the meeting of both the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha. Thus neither the Panchayati Raj Institutions nor various Self-Help-Groups can deny their responsibility to make space for women’s active participation in various participatory forums. For this, if it requires the West Bengal Panchayat Act should be amended so that a specific percentage of women’s attendance in various meetings of the Panchayati Raj Institutions becomes obligatory to have the quorum for the meeting.\textsuperscript{55}

So long the land reform programme has been executed very successfully by the Panchayati Raj Institutions, but there are some lacunae in the execution of land reform programme on the part of Gram Panchayat. The haste, which is needed for the timely execution of the land reform programme, is not found. If the progress of the land reform programme continues in such a pace, it will take another 30 years to complete the programme.

Most astonishing fact is that the sharing of the crop is not done always following the rules and regulations which adversely affect the interest of the sharecroppers. In Jalpaiguri district, the principle, followed in the distribution of the crop is
between land owners and bargadars in lieu of 25:75. But this is not in tune with the principle of the distribution of share-cropping. In such districts, the leaders of the Panchayati Raj Institutions do not show any interest to remove such discrepancies in apprehension that such attempt would be harmful to the so-called existing cordial relationship between the land owners and land less. 56

For the better result of the land reform programme, consolidation of holding of the agricultural land is very important. Because consolidation of land not only enables the cultivators to adopt new scientific method of agricultural production but develops the rural infrastructure through which production would be easily brought at the urban area for commercial purposes.

But for the implementation of such programme without any clamour, consent of both owners and bargadars of the land is important as both would be affected by the implementation of this programme. And obtaining consent of the concerned parties would not be difficult, if for the consolidation of land, the principle of ‘actual tiller’ basis is followed. For if such principle is adhered to, the interest of the bargadar would remain secured.

Getting consent of the sharecroppers would not be very difficult, for consolidation of holding will help the share croppers, using their man-power properly. As in this process, the bargadars have not to cultivate their scattered land. With the help of this method, i.e., the consolidation of holding, Punjab and Haryana have become the granaries of the country.

For the execution of such programme, the total land reform programme should be completed first. With a view to completing the programme of the consolidation of holding, West Bengal Government would easily depend upon people-sensitive Panchayati Raj
Institutions though the experience of Punjab and Haryana shows that these two provinces rely heavily on the bureaucrats for the implementation of this programme.\textsuperscript{57}

Land reform programme adopted in West Bengal has motivated the sharecroppers to produce more and more crop, as from producing more and more crop the sharecroppers will gain more and more profit.

For increasing production, the Panchayati Raj Institution has played a very positive role. Firstly, the Panchayati Raj Institution has become the implementing agency of both land reform programme and other schemes, sponsored by both the State Government as well as the Central Government. Secondly, the Panchayati Raj Institution has formulated local level plans despite various constraints keeping in mind the aspirations of local people, residing in this state of agro-climatic diversities. Thirdly, the Panchayati Raj Institution has become the vanguard of the people who look forward to attaining prosperity.\textsuperscript{58}

Generally, the producers of some agricultural crop, e.g., cereals do not suffer much loss as there are support prices to ensure that producers would not be forced to sell their product at the low cost. But the producers of the commodity products, i.e., milk, fish, fruits and vegetables are always afraid of great loss as they are mainly dependent upon the mercy of so-called market forces. They have to rely upon the middlemen for selling their product. But the middlemen appropriate the profit of the production leaving the original producers of such commodity products in the destitute condition. In order to eradicate such miserable condition, new method should be followed wherein the original producers would sell the product directly and get the price of their production at the earliest. If such method is adopted, the producers of such products will lead their life with much more dignity.
In this regard, Gramin Mahila Shramik Unnayan Samiti (S.M.S.U.S) at Jhilmili in Bankura District may be mentioned. Here the samiti functions on a co-operative basis. They grow *arjan* trees on the barren land, given by the villagers to them. Selling the products of these trees they live with more dignity in their native land instead of going to neighbouring districts to work as wage labourers under destitute condition. The local panchayats extend support to such organisations which are mainly based on co-operative basis. 59

In the past, private money lending system was in vogue in the rural areas to give loan to the sharecroppers. But with a view to getting the sharecroppers freed from private money lending system, West Bengal Government has initiated a new scheme to provide institutional finance to patta-holders and recorded bargadars at a subsidised rate of interest. Under this scheme, Banker’s Committee at the state level should finalise the list of the needy peasants in consultation with the state government at the beginning of each crop season. But the outcome of this scheme is not very praiseworthy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Target (Cr)</th>
<th>No. of Actual beneficiaries</th>
<th>Percentage of achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979 - 80</td>
<td>79,873</td>
<td>53,114</td>
<td>74.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980 - 81</td>
<td>1,59,674</td>
<td>71,064</td>
<td>44.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981 - 82</td>
<td>2,50,000</td>
<td>1,75,590</td>
<td>70.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 - 83</td>
<td>5,00,000</td>
<td>3,70,071</td>
<td>74.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1983 - 84</td>
<td>5,25,000</td>
<td>3,03,473</td>
<td>57.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984 - 85</td>
<td>4,20,000 (Kharif)</td>
<td>2,11,105</td>
<td>50.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985 - 86</td>
<td>5,00,000 (Kharif)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In 1985-86, the target fixed covered only 18.38 per cent of the eligible categories, that is, the patta-holders and recorded bargadars in the eight districts. The achievement or the number who actually received crop loan was 5.6 per cent of the eligible number and little over 30 percent of the target.\(^6^0\)

Now a question, which comes up is from where the poor peasants are borrowing when they have lost access to the co-operative credit institutions and nationalised commercial banks due to default in payment of their loans to either co-operative credit institutions or nationalised commercial banks. The answer is to be found in the revival of the private money lending system from mid-eighties onward. Thus Panchayati Raj Institutions should initiate new methods to eradicate private money lending system from the rural arena.\(^6^1\)

The socio-economic condition of members of the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe communities who are residing in the rural hinterland and exploited by the rich in various ways has improved to a great extent. In this development process, the Panchayati Raj Institutions have played the pivotal role under the surveillance of the Left Front. Basically, the people, belonging to these communities, are motivated by the peasant wings of various partners of the Left Front in the movements, waged by the members of these deprived communities, against the exploitation of the rural gentry. They have become conscious of their inner strength when they have actively participated in the militant land acquisition movement, unleashed during sixties and seventies under the leadership of the peasant wings of various Left Parties.\(^6^2\)

Richard C. Crook and Alan Sturla Sverrison have opined that, behind the programmes, implemented by the Panchayati Raj Institutions, there is some political reason. The programmes, adopted by the Panchayati Raj Institutions for empowering
the marginal rural people, have been chalked out with a view to strengthening the political support base of the party in the rural areas. Thus, despite taking various steps for enhancing the power of rural people, picture of the rural area has not changed to a great extent. The members, belonging to socio-economically backward-class, e.g., members of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe, rarely speak in the meetings. And when they become courageous enough to speak any thing in meeting, they are simply ignored. This is also true for the female members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Thus, it may be said that the Panchayati Raj Institution has failed to ‘provide voice to the poor’. It has become merely the implementing agency of the governmental programmes.63

Maitrish Ghatak and Maitreya Ghatak have noted some drawbacks in the functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Panchayati Raj institution is devoid of autonomy, especially in the field of power, finance and functions. Not only that, though rural illiterate poor people have been given voice by enriching them through land reform programme, led by the Panchayati Raj Institutions, people’s participation in various meetings, where various issues, related with them, are discussed is very poor. Excluding this, the Panchayati Raj system is dominated by the male members of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, though the motto of government is the empowerment of the women folk.64

With a view to making the Panchayati Raj system more popular and more democratic, new endeavour has been attempted. Gram Unnayan Samiti is such a recent endeavour. All most all developmental responsibilities, touching all spheres of life, have been brought under the umbrella of the Gram Unnayan Samiti. But unfortunately no proper attempt has been made either to popularise it amongst the people or to activate it thoroughly. The West Bengal Government has not arranged
any training programme for the members of the Gram Unnayan Samiti. Therefore majority of the members of the Gram Unnayan Samiti follow their own line of activity and thinking without toeing the philosophy of the formation of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. With a view to making the Gram Unnayan Samiti more viable the West Bengal Government has empowered the Gram Unnayan Samiti to spend not more than Rs. 15,000 per month for the implementation of any scheme under its jurisdiction. Without creating proper socio-economic milieu for the survival of the Gram Unnayan Samiti, it would become just a myth. It would become like other government sponsored programme.

Though the role of the Panchayati Raj Institution as the agency of rural mobilisation has been diminished to a great extent, but at the same time its importance as vanguard of rural development has increased. Naturally, huge amount of resources has been incurred through the Panchayati Raj Institution, transforming them as the breeding ground of corruption. From the available resources, incurred through the Panchayati Raj Institution, very few people have gained. But the members of the Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti have become very powerful, which make them not only dishonest but corrupt too. Despite such limitations, the Panchayati Raj Institution has become a very important organ as through it the poorest of the poor have got access to local level administration.

It is true that there are many shortcomings in the Panchayati Raj Institutions in West Bengal. And many of these are developed due to negligence of either political parties which hold sway over the Panchayati Raj Institutions or lack of awareness of the local people about the reasons and objects of the formation of the Panchayati Raj Institutions. But there is no place of frustration in our journey towards rural development.
With a view to eradicating such problems, Left Front Government, under the leadership of the C.P.I. (M) has incorporated many salient features of the method of rural development, prescribed by Gandhi in their alternative method of rural development. In the alternative method of rural development, advocated by the Left Front, under the guidance of the C.P.I.(M.), emphasis has been put upon people’s participation, women’s empowerment and implementation of the concept of Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad. These areas, where emphasis has been attached, are the ramifications of the Gandhian notion of rural development to a great extent.

Gandhian notion of rural development is certainly not the panacea for all rural problems. It has also many defects. As Gandhi has made his theory of rural development on the basis of his ideal village, rather than on the basis of the real situation. He has also been aware of that.

An amalgamation of these two approaches namely, the Gandhian and the Marxist would be effective enough for development of rural area silently, eradicating the problems haunting India’s villages. The Marxists have become increasingly conscious over the years about the need to indigenize their strategic-tactical moves so as to gain acceptability amongst India’s teeming millions. In West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura they have achieved partial success in their enterprise. In the process, they have come to feel the contemporary relevance of Gandhian precepts and practices as can be seen in their appreciative commentaries on Gandhi in recent years.66
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