CHAPTER VII

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT AND MODERNIZATION
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I. The Change Process

Development is 'organized growth'. It is a change in the desired direction. The 'Third World Countries' as a class, are exposed to this systemic process of change, operating at the core and on the contour. With a desire to stabilize and internalize this process, governing elites of these newly born countries are utilizing every platform - institutional, formal and informal and are spelling out the concept, its contents, its importance in social, economic and political spheres and the relevance of concerted effort to keep going, this country-wide process.

Such an effort would give meaning to various activities and purpose to administrative processes. Because administration in the 'Third World Countries', is not merely concerned with tangible development indicators, such as increased kilometers of roads, improved agricultural inputs, or extension of civic amenities, but is mainly concerned with the process of realizing these indicators - the process of change, the process of development. Governments of these countries
are keen to strengthen and sustain this process, so that benefits of development could be distributed over larger areas, than hitherto covered. Development in this sense, is more an activity than an isolated act.

Institutional apparatus provides a formal channel to conduct and make continuing such an activity, which with similar activities carried in sequence or consequence, would help to introduce change. Such a change is an organized one, affecting individuals and their groups and altering their individual and group relationships. The institutional apparatus, therefore has to function in this larger socio-political environment and to interact with it. As it functions, it has to adjust its structures, alter or create new ones, so that it would deliver the goods and this, at the desired rate.

But due to inherent constraints, socio-political and economic, political elites are not able to speed up this process. At the same time, they have a realization, that administrative capabilities are too limited to cope up with the challenge of change. Governments have therefore tried various strategies to administer the much desired, the much awaited change, and over a period have learnt that associating masses with the process of change, would be the most unfailing way, to make the development process enduring and lasting.
Indian experiment of Panchayati Raj is an expression of this awareness. 'Rural India is real India'. Therefore, development, if it has to be effective, must reach there and must be predominantly rural, in content and scope. It is only then, that developing rural areas would, in the ultimate analysis, lead to developing national unity. Efforts of rural development prior to Panchayati Raj, were not so comprehensive in content and extensive in scope. Whatever development that was initiated, therefore turned out to be adhoc and could not be integrated with the larger nationwide process. The search was for an apparatus, which would be more participative in operations.

Panchayati Raj structure, introduced in the late 1950's, is such an apparatus suitable for introducing the change. It is a live socio-political mechanism, administering change and at the same time, affecting its contents and scope. Panchayati Raj has been an ambitious country wide experiment, taking some of the government processes to the door-step of its citizens. All efforts are therefore made to make these institutions able to acquire the status and dignity of viable and responsible people's bodies.¹

But there has been a general feeling that these expectations have not been realized. These institutions
have factionalized and politicized the development process and in its wake, welfare of the weaker sections has been neglected. Deferred elections, inadequate resource mobilization and lack of expertise have affected the vital function of these bodies - planning for development and its effective implementation. To pursue the spirit of Article 40 of the Constitution, 'there is an imperative need to enshrine in the Constitution, certain basic and essential features of Panchayati Raj institutions so as to impart certainty, continuity and strength to them'.

II. Crucial Leadership Function in Development

Leadership is a function of influencing actions and thinking, of individuals and their groups, towards the realization of a pre-determined goal, in a given time. It provides drive, mobilizes resources, co-ordinates efforts, vitalizes processes and conditions their success. Douglus McGregor rightly observed that, leadership is the product of four interacting factors, the personal characteristics of the leader, those of the followers and their individual/group needs, organization and fourthly the environment.

Effectiveness of any organization depends on the nature of leadership, it has thrown-up. The way, they
conceive the problem, identify strategy, manipulate resources and provide direction, collectively condition the success of an organization. Leadership, therefore becomes crucially important in the 'Third World Countries', when these embark on the path of development. It is the leadership and its perceptions of development, that detail contents of the programmes. It is the maturity and resourcefulness of the leadership, that make development stable and comprehensive. Leadership is important to any organization, still more for a development organization like the Panchayati Raj in India. The problem is to locate this leader, the individual person who can give new direction to administration, can practice participative planning and thereby realize development with its twin dimension - economic and social.

Development is a phenomenon. It does not occur overnight. Its base is development consciousness, which is a product of the larger process of social and economic transformation. Leadership first imbibes this spirit in its exposure to the process of change and then carries this to the people and enthuses them to make development participative.

Leadership at the grass-roots level, not only should enthuse people but also energize them, so as to involve them in the implementation of development
projects. Such involvement would help people to reap maximum benefits and reap these, over a long time. Further, it would also develop in them a sense of satisfaction, as they too get a role, in the eventful process operating at the local level.

No real development would be possible, if this leadership is not responsive to the demands of the people. Realization of leadership with a proper perspective and orientation, towards rural development is the first need of the time. While commenting on the role of leadership, I.H.Khan states that "leadership is the 'sine-qua-non' of success in all human activities, but in a democratic system, particularly at the lower levels, it assumes greater significance and wider proportions."  

Panchayati Raj provides such a channel at the local level. It is further expected to generate and sustain such a developmental leadership. It needs to be remembered that functional success of the institution is wedded to this leadership.

Local problems are of such a nature that, their tackling requires a leadership which is 'more alert, keen, honest, public spirited and experienced as well as well-informed'. Traditional leadership, keen and honest, however was found inadequate to undertake the challenge of change - challenge of development. The new leadership
naturally had to emerge to carry out this task. And for this, it needed to be action-oriented, goal-oriented and committed to development.

III. Developmental Leadership - The Emerging Profile

As panchayats offer power to control distribution of material benefits, various social and political groups have come forward to compete and capture this power structure. The emerging profile of leadership, indicates that the younger age-group is replacing the traditional and old leadership. Higher leadership positions, such as Presidentship/Vice-Presidency are going in favour of the middle-age group. Replacement of the old age group by the young, is a sign of dynamics of change the socio-economic and political transformation that is taking place in rural areas. The young have now been freshly inducted as voters.

However village leadership as tradition would have it, is predominantly a male affair. Even with high level of female literacy, female leadership has yet to come out of the traditional conservative notion that, 'men are born to rule'.

The size of family also has played an important role in building leadership profile. People with smaller
number of dependents were generally coming forward to contest elections. This is against the common trend, which is found in other parts of the country. The nuclear family system, along with a smaller number of dependents seems to have helped, non-official leaders to divert their leisure time and resources for involvement in the working of these bodies.

Leadership positions are not going in favour of high castes. The number plays a decisive role. The economically backward castes of the district, with their numerical strength capture a major number of leadership positions. Community, which is sizeable in number is getting an easy access to village leadership. This is evident especially in case of reserved seats, viz. all the 10 reserved seats have gone in favour of Pulaya community, which enjoys numerical dominance among the scheduled castes of Kerala.

Education also is an equally important dimension of leadership profile. Higher level of education has developed better understanding amongst the leaders and has helped them to conceive development goals in proper perceptive and to guide development activities in proper direction.
People from different walks of life have evinced interest in the affairs of panchayat. Village leadership therefore is no more the monopoly of agriculturist. The secondary and tertiary sectors are also, equally represented in the leadership profile. This shows that voters at the local levels, have realized the importance of these bodies and are willing to spare their time and energy and associating in its working.

Better economic condition rooted in land holdings, is not only an important factor in getting a person elected to a leadership position. Election campaigns are becoming expensive and money makes it go. However, it is not the sole determinant. Backing from one's community is also an equally important factor.

The salient feature of panchayat leadership in Kerala seems to be its strong political affiliation even at the lower levels. It is because of the equally strong political consciousness of the people at all levels, that the non-official leaders are forced to secure support of one or the other political party. Though they would like to maintain non-partisan approach to panchayat administration, they have an equal awareness that 'politics has come to stay at the local level'.
Along with party organizations, community organizations also provide base for leadership. These help non-officials to develop wider contacts and gain vital experience in decision making processes. This is reflected in smooth panchayat administration.

The overall profile of development leadership in the ten selected panchayats of Kerala seems to be that of the middle aged, experienced group, with majority having sound economic background. Their educational level also has been commendable. Politically conscious and actively associated with the working of community organizations, it is no surprise that it provides a picture of resourceful and mature leadership aware of its socio-political obligations.

Such a leadership is in a better position to understand the problem of development, its impact, and expectations and therefore, better equipped and prepared to play its role in translating development needs of the community, through the functional administration. Such a role assumes less of an agent of development but more of an actor in the process of development.
IV Leader - An Actor in Modernization

In the larger process of social transformation, leader is expected to carry the onus of spreading the message of development. As a leader, he is the first to get exposure to the forces of development, the forces of change and in a sense, to the comprehensive process of modernization. He must carry his experiences to the people, who look up to him for guidance and he must share the fruits with the people, whom he guides. As he performs this task, he identifies himself with the people and the process, and gets himself actively involved. In the effective sense, he becomes an actor, sharing and contributing to the process.

It is not necessary to reject old structures and bring in the new. Traditional structures can be moulded, to fit in the new requirements. These would provide continuity, which is valuable during the period of transition. Rudolph and Rudolph observed that, modernization in India would essentially be a process of restructuring the tradition along democratic lines.

Panchayati Raj leadership, which has emerged from the grass-roots, seems to be adequately exposed to the forces of modernization. It is sufficiently involved, in its processes also. It is natural, that such leadership


would come up to the expectations of the people. It would not only act as an agent of change, but because of its involvement, its role would be elevated to that of an actor in the process of change.

The leadership that is emerging is better informed, better qualified and is in a better position to accelerate, the process of change. Its resourcefulness adds vitality, its democratic faith makes it participative and its involvement gives it dynamism. The leader now, becomes an integral part of the comprehensive process of social transformation, as he identifies himself with it.

V. Towards Effective Leadership

Effective performance of leadership is conditioned partly by the structure, within which it works and partly by its own profile. Structural constraints could be minimized by introducing reforms and rationalizing administrative procedures, while the profile could be built by leadership development programmes.

Village panchayat, as the grass-roots base of democracy can play an important role in administering social transformation, through rural development
programmes. Panchayat administration, though geared to realize this transformation, is however beset with administrative, financial and political constraints. These constraints not only affect its functioning but also restrict, effective functioning of its leadership. A look into procedures and practices, therefore would help in locating missing links and giving direction to tie these up.

(1) Devolution of more administrative powers

There should be more devolution of power in the area of local development. These institutions are nearer to people, so in a better position, to identify their needs, chalk out programmes and realize these effectively. Instead of considering it as an agency of state/central government, Panchayati raj should be considered as self-government unit, at the panchayat level. Assigning more responsibilities and demarcating administrative powers in clear terms, would strengthen these bodies and help them to take their proper place in the nation-wide system of governance and in the process of rural development. A plea therefore is made, to recognize local government and provide it with a constitutional status.
(2) **Holding timely elections**

Timely elections to these bodies are a pre-requisite for its democratic functioning. This would also help development of responsible and responsive leadership at the grass-roots. Constitution should therefore guarantee timely elections to these bodies. Considering a long spell of 16 years (1963-79), when no panchayat elections were held in Kerala, this assumes more significance. Constituting 'Autonomous Election Commission' for panchayats at the state level should be favourably considered. There should also be a provision to conduct by-elections, to fill-up the vacancies, if a ward is missing representation, for a larger part of its term.

(3) **Control unwarranted political interference**

Development activities should not suffer on account of petty political interest. Unwarranted political interference in the functioning of these bodies should be restricted as far as possible. There needs to be rethinking, about the ex-officio association of M.L.As/M.Ps to these bodies. This then, would not only make development smooth, but would also help smooth development of local leadership. Politics has come to stay with these institutions. Efforts should be made to make it more constructive and less personal.
(4) **Financial autonomy**

Democratic decentralization not only means devolution of functions to local units but it also means, sharing of financial powers and proceeds. At present a greater part of local resources are coming, in the form of grants-in-aid from the state government. This financial dependency would make leaders lazy in their efforts to mobilize local resources. Panchayats in Kerala are bigger in size, as compared with panchayats in other parts of the country. These would therefore find little difficulty in raising local contribution. The state government should come forward with a progressive grant. No democratic institution can continue longer, while still depending on external resources, for its development. In this context, the state/central governments should decide to share proceeds of some taxes with these bodies, for improving their financial position. It should also consider and assign some taxes, exclusively to these bodies.

Panchayat leadership should also try to exploit taxation capacity of the panchayat, to its fullest extent and should try to improve tax receipts. Six panchayats under the present study were in a position to record 100 per cent tax collection. It means that, such a task may be difficult but not necessarily impossible.
(5) **Employment generation**

Government statistics makes it clear that more than 10 per cent of the total registered unemployed persons belong to this small state. According to the 1990 figures, Kerala is having more than 33 lakh registered unemployed persons. With low level of industrialization, the state is only in a position to export the skilled human resources. The potential human resources (with 100 per cent literacy) go waste, along with abundant natural resources that remain untapped. The effectiveness of panchayat administration would therefore be indicated not only by the execution of welfare services but more by locating, strengthening and developing the overall growth potential of the area. Here the leadership can play a crucial role.

Raw material which is available in the state, is going to the neighbouring areas and coming back to the state, in the form of finished products. This can be checked by establishing agro-based industries in rural areas and processing the raw material. Looking at the availability of resources in the select district Alleppey coconut based industries (coir, oil) are having a good potential. It is difficult to imagine and believe, but in the 1992 Barcelona Olympics, ice-cream was served in coconut shell containers, specially designed and crafted in Kerala.
Developing marine and inland fishing, also would provide employment opportunities in the district. The ponds and lakes of the district can develop prawn and crab farming. These products are having good export potential. This potential needs state-level consideration.

(6) **Training inputs for non-official and officials**

For the better functioning of these bodies, the non-officials and officials should be trained in the art and science of local administration. The Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA) and the State Panchayat Training Institutes at Trivandrum and Kozhikode, play a positive role in this area. Training is not restricted to imparting functional skills, it is imparting knowledge and introducing attitudinal change. As a U.N. report says, 'Training is an investment in human resources and it is a good investment'. The grass roots leaders should be given a fair knowledge about the functioning of the political system as a whole, the nature of interaction between the sub-systems and its total value orientations. They should also be appraised of the role of officials in the process of administering development, the need for their co-operation and limits of their area of discretion. This will develop a 'creative partnership' between the two sides of administration. Responsiveness of leadership
decked with professionalism of the administrator would make this partnership live and interacting and elevate their 'interest' in the functioning of these institutions, to the level of 'faith' about their social utility.

Institutions take birth out of social needs, these take structures from their interaction with the environmental ethos, but it is the 'leadership' that puts 'life' in them and makes them dynamic and developing.
References


