

A STUDY OF PANCHAYATS, MAY, 1958

1. The Study

The study was undertaken by the Programme Evaluation Organisation to assess the working of the Panchayats and their impact on the villages as development institutions. The study was undertaken in 15 blocks, 13 of which had been parts of the first community projects and the remaining 2 were community development blocks.

2. Objectives

To analyse the functioning of Panchayats in relation to Development Programmes.

3. Sample Size/Criteria for Selection of Sample

In each evaluation block, 2 to 6 panchayats depending upon the total number of Panchayats in the block were selected for the study. The total number of Panchayats selected for the study were 60. The sample included study of the panchayats as well as of villages in which these institutions were functioning. Thus, out of a total of 175 villages covered by these 60 panchayats, 102 villages were selected. The 73 villages which were not covered were concentrated in a few blocks. A total of 1080 respondents were interviewed of which 529 were knowledgeable and 551 non-knowledgeable.

4. Reference Period

The field work for the study was done in various centres between January and July, 1957.

5, Main Findings

1. Panchayats in most blocks did not have a nominated or ex-officio ' component. However, in panchayats of Madhya Pradesh, the village patels were nominated by virtue of their office.

2. Strength of Panchayat varied substantially in different states.

3. In Kerala, Bombay, Madhya Pradesh and Hyderabad elections to the panchayats were held by secret ballot. In Mysore, this method was followed only if more than 10 members were to be elected. Other states followed the practice of open elections.

4. The impressions gathered during the course of study supported the view that Panchayat elections had an influence on group rivalries in the villages.

5. Caste community and kinship played an important role in panchayat elections. The majority of Panchayat members were from the dominant land owning high castes.

6. Even though the promotion of panchayat activity was an important responsibility of the Gram Sevak, he was not formally associated with the panchayats in any State.

7. In most **states, the Panchayats** Acts included a long list of sources of revenue for them. However, in practice, most of these sources existed on paper only; they were not tapped, and the panchayat's income from a few sources that were tapped was very small.

8. In some States, the president was empowered to exercise disciplinary control on the Secretary and other staff of the Panchayat. The working of a Panchayat depended to a large extent upon his personality. One major difficulty in the functioning of the panchayats at that time was that most presidents were not qualified and trained so as to carry out the functions adequately or to assume the responsibilities entrusted to them under the Panchayat laws.

9. The main activities undertaken directly by one or more panchayats in different areas were lighting and sweeping of street, construction of drains, provision of drinking water facilities, improvement of communications and construction of buildings for schools and community centres. etc.

10. Some panchayats were reported to have taken the initiative in providing irrigation facilities.

11. The panchayats had shown no initiative in reclaiming waste-lands or in **soil** conservation.,

12. None of the panchayats studied were reported to have taken any initiative in organising agricultural supplies e.g. of seed and manures, in arranging credit or in popularising any improved practices.

13. Majority of the respondents did not favour the imposition of taxes by panchayats.

14. 48 per cent of all the respondents were in favour of the panchayats collecting land revenue.

6. Major Suggestions

1. There should be frequent inspection of Panchayats by panchayat officers.

2. There was the need for greater contact between the Panchayat executives and the village community. As such, frequent meetings between the panchayats and the village body should be held.

3. Panchayats should not take part in politics.

4. Panchayats should have educated, trained and full-time Secretaries.

5. The decisions of the panchayats should be unanimous.

6. Panchayat accounts should be audited properly and regularly.

7. The majority of the respondents had assigned first or second priority to financial aid. Majority of the respondents reported that the panchayats should get more financial assistance from the Government.

8. The majority of the respondents indicated the need for guidance from engineering staff in the execution of Community works.

9. The majority of the respondents in some states were in favour of 'panchayats having the power of compulsory levy of labour tax.'