

LEADERSHIP AND GROUPS IN A SOUTH INDIAN VILLAGE, 1955

The Study

It was a well known fact that conditions of rural society in India were far from uniform. Their knowledge was a pre-requisite not only for forming an appropriate programme of reform in each area but also in implementing it as quickly and extensively as possible. Programme Evaluation organisation(PEO) therefore, conducted an intensive type of study in a South Indian village which presented some facts and tendencies which had a vital bearing on the success of the rural development programme. The South Indian village was taken for this study with a view to have a South Indian variant to the North *Indian Study* on 'Group Dynamics in a North Indian village' undertaken earlier by Dr.Oscar Lewis, Anthropological consultant of the Ford Foundation as a part of the general evaluation programme of the P.E.C.

2. Objectives

To find out the real state of the people's attitudes, their habits of action and the leadership which they can muster to *institutionalize their* culture.

3. Sample Size/Criteria for Selection of Sample

A village in a development area in Mysore State was chosen for intensive type of study. The selection of a village for this study from among villages of the Malavah Extension Project was guided by the consideration of size, accessibility and not unduly affected by urban or commercial influences.

4. Reference Period

Field work was undertaken from Oct.1953 to June, 1954.

5. **Main Findings**

I. **General Characteristics**

1. Most of the people were agriculturists. Differences in Land holdings existed, but very large holdings were not there, the maximum holding being less than 25 acres. Accordingly, no significant differences in occupation or income, social status, education etc., in the village existed.

2. The study clearly brought out the fact that the village was divided into two hostile groups, and the development work under the pilot project met with only limited success in spite of the effort of a keen, enthusiastic, well-trained and capable village extension worker. It was so mainly because the VEW failed to appreciate the group rivalries in the village and did not know fully the background of some of the issues he took up.

II. **Kinship**

3. The caste factor which dominated the North Indian village was almost completely absent in Haripara.

III. **Leadership**

4. The study revealed that the bigger land owners, the traditional wealthy and influential people in the village provided the influential primary leaders.

5. Appearing to be humble, non-aggressive, 'not showing, off were considered essential qualities for leadership in villages. Age and economic status, good reputation and social position of the family were important guide to identify the leader.

6. In the South Indian village, the highly institutionalized ceremonial life provided another guide to identify leader. The leaders were given ceremonial honour at important ceremonies like marriages.

7. Leadership was largely defensive, protective, conservative and interested mainly in preserving accepted social and moral values of ceremonial life.

8. Youth leadership did not normally exist in the village.

IV **Institutions**

9. Development workers were frequently asked to participate actively in village affairs and attend functions and ceremonies. Such participation was valuable both for the personal contacts and for the insight in to the psychology and habits of the people.

10. The study of both villages indicated that the real seat of effective social influence was not in the official **Panchayat** which attended to specific needs according to prescribed rules, but in the **traditional Panchayats**.

v **Conduct of the Gram Sewak**

11. Distribution of the economic benefits viz. taccavilooms, loans for irrigation and other improvements, improved seeds and fertilizers posed problems for the Gram Sewak. Any suggestions that these benefits were being conferred preferentially on a section of the community with which the Gram Sewak appeared to be friendly would make gram sewak person *non-grata* with the other sections of the Community. Such misunderstanding would mar the prospects of a community wide efforts of development Programme.

6. **Major Suggestions**

Experience gained during the course of the study clearly indicated that development workers should identify different groups in a village and the pattern of leadership and conduct themselves in such a manner that they were not inadvertently involved in group rivalries. The Gram Sewak, in his enthusiasm for reform, should not disregard the ceremonies which the villagers had been celebrating for ages and which constituted a very important aspect of social organisation. He should not start as a preacher of social reforms. He should do this only after he had won the confidence of the villagers through sympathy and constructive work.