New Panchayati Raj System in Orissa

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Political-Administrative Dynamics of Officials and non-officials:

The entire success of the Panchayati Raj System depends a great deal on the interaction between the two functionaries namely, officials and non-officials. In this study, an effort has been made to study the background and responsiveness of officials and non-officials at Panchayat Samiti level. This study attempts to determine their interaction, which would present some clues to the harmonious and fruitful or hostile and dysfunction relations between the two groups.¹

Officials and non-officials bring with them certain values, norms and attitudes which were formed largely long before they started working together. Such values, norms and attitudes constitute the background of a person. In the formation of these values, norms and attitude, social economic factors play a very important role.² Social psychologists argue that attitudes reflect predispositions to behave in a particular manner. Attitudes are integrally related to most aspects of social life, carrying expectations about our own behaviour and behaviours of others. Since, attitudes are evaluative predispositions, they condition the way people act towards others, the programmes they actually undertake, and the manner in which they carry out. "Thus attitudes are conceptualized as precursors of behaviour, as determinants of how a person actually behaves in his daily affairs."³

The official set of functionaries is headed by Block Development Officer who is the rank of OAS officer. There are other officials belonging to group B categories who are all deputed from the governmental services, for each Panchayat Samiti. The official members of the Panchayat Samiti are BDO and other block level officers in charge of education, revenue, agriculture, veterinary, cooperative, health etc. The government also deputes group C and group D staffs. The non-official members are the Samiti members directly elected by the people. The Sarapanch of the Gram Panchayats, Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Panchayat Samiti, the Chairman of the local NAC and Municipality, the MLA and MP, whose constituencies include the block. The term of office of the elected members is five years commencing from the date of first meeting of the Panchayat Samiti. Official members of the Samiti do not have the right to vote at the Samiti meeting. Only non-official members enjoy such right and the official members only can participate in the discussion. The seats are also reserved in proportion to the population of SCs and STs. Similarly, one-third seats of non-official members are reserved for women. In one
Panchayat Samiti, if chairperson is not a woman the office of the Vice-Chairperson is reserved for women.\textsuperscript{4}

During the community development period preceding the Panchayat Raj, active involvement of the rural people in the development work was desired but the initiative for the plans, policies and schemes for the local areas came from the officials. Therefore, the people's role was secondary. However, the introduction of the Panchayati Raj brought about a noticeable change in the style, pattern and authority in the structure of district development administration. Panchayati Raj has resulted in the transfer of important powers and functions from the officials to the elected representatives of the people. The officials who used to behave as rulers earlier are now to carry out the wishes of the people and they have to work alongwith, often under the direct control of peoples' representatives.\textsuperscript{5}

In the past officials largely due to the colonial background were more paternalistic, arrogant, impatient, and authoritarian in their dealings with the public. Their interaction with the people was excessively influenced by the consideration of enforcing rules and regulations rather than appreciating and removing the difficulties of the people. This behaviour cut them off from the masses. On the other hand, after independence, people are made responsible for performing the duties of administration, resulting in de-bureaucratization and creation of parallel hierarchies of authority. Hence, there is clear erosion in the prerogatives, powers and privileges of the officials.\textsuperscript{6}

The pattern of relationship between officials and non-officials has been an important issue for discussion, debate, and investigation. A lot of academic and professional attention has been given to it since the sixties. Social scientists agree that the very success of the programme is contingent on the type of relationship between, officials and non-officials. The basic postulate of democratic decentralization is that there should be mutual sense of regard and understanding between the administrative machinery and respective local bodies. The initiative is to come from the people's representatives and expert advice from the officials.\textsuperscript{7} The actual operation of the programme in various states has presented a picture, which is contrary to the expectations and is far from satisfactory. Various reasons have been assigned for this undesirable state of affairs. While most of the social scientists view it as malfunctioning of the system, a few consider it as a natural process in the transitory stage. They are of the opinion that with Panchayati Raj, rural society for the first time has been exposed to modern democratic political process. The interaction between the traditional social order and modern political and administrative system is bound to release new forces and create strains and tensions in the initial stage.\textsuperscript{8}

Those who look at as the malfunctioning of the system try to find out reasons for the stresses, strains, tensions and conflicts in the organization and structure of Panchayati Raj institutions and outside it. The scholars have assigned different reasons in this regard. Chaturvedi (1964), for instance, finds cause in the factional policies and officials involvement in it, and lack of clarity in the demarcation of spheres of action between officials and non-officials. While Gaikwad (1969) ascribes socio-psychological factors as the basis of conflict, Roy and Kothari (1969) also find psychological factors responsible for the distrust of one another. An additional factor is the desire of non-officials to have a share in the implementation of it. Singh and Ashraf (1971) point out that the leaders use resources of local institutions to preserve their own
power position and to further their personal ends. For the fulfillment of these ends, they exercise unfair pressure on officials. This according to them, is the main reason, they think, is the very diversity of political and bureaucratic cultures that make it difficult for officials and non-officials, to work together harmoniously.\(^9\)

In the block level, the elected and the appointed groups otherwise known as non-official groups, have different roles to play. Theoretically, the elected group is responsible for policy formulations and appointed groups for implementation. The need for such an arrangement is felt for two reasons. First, the representatives of the people should be able to determine the priorities, and the appointed persons, being technically qualified and expressed should implement the decisions taken by the elected members, it is felt that there is a need for blending the nonprofessional's view with that of the technical expert. Otherwise, it is feared that technical man is so taken up with the technical aspects that he would ignore the human problems involved.\(^10\)

Under the Panchayat Samiti programmes, officials have not only to work for the people but they have to work with them. Person's representatives under this scheme share equal responsibility of rural development alongwith officials. It is essential that approach and out look of both officials and non-officials towards one another one properly oriented to get maximum and quick results. If both are willing to understand and appreciate each other's difficulties, there is bound to be a healthy relationship prone to greater accomplishments.

The relationship between officials and non-officials at Block level can be interpreted with particular reference to these aspects - awareness, participation and relation.\(^11\) Both officials and non-officials mainly have faith in the new Panchayati Raj System after the 73rd Amendment Act of the constitution. The 73rd Constitution Amendment Act of 1992-93 provides the Panchayats with more powers, authority and responsibility alongwith the Constitutional status. They would have control over twenty nine items like land improvement, minor irrigation, animal husbandry, fisheries, education, women and child development etc. The state legislature have the capacity to delegate powers to the Panchayats. The Eleventh Schedule provides a scheme of distribution of powers between the state legislature and the Panchayats.\(^12\)

Though a good number of officials and non-officials have no awareness of the central reports on Panchayati Raj system as well as the earlier Orissa Act and 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992, both officials and non-officials, to a considerable extent, have some working experience under the pre-existing Panchayati Raj institutions in Orissa.\(^13\) Language is also not a problem in respect of officials and non-officials. Almost all officials know Oriya and English. Even among non-officials, all know Oriya invariably, which is the state language. Therefore, there is no communication problem between the officials and non-officials.\(^14\) Non-officials by profession belong to different categories such as agriculturalists, businessmen, industrialists, advocates, social workers etc. This in turn helped them to know the problems and needs of the rural mass as a whole.\(^15\)

In respect of collective participation of the officials and the non-officials at the Block level, one can notice satisfactory performance in the Panchayat Samiti programmes and schemes. The attendance, participation and interest shown by the non-officials particularly the elected members, are far better than that of the other categories of non-officials. The participation and interest shown
by the ruling party members are far greater than those of the members belonging to opposition parties. This is mainly because the strength of the members of the opposition parties is very limited and joint action by the opposition parties is lacking. Therefore the members of the opposition parties cannot bring pressure on the ruling party members.  

The relation between officials and non-officials were studied both at the vertical and horizontal levels. It demonstrated a significant degree of cooperation, harmony and mutual interactions between them. However, there is some confusion and difficulty on those occasions when the directions of the Panchayat samiti and the state government are conflicting. On such occasions, officials showed some slackness at the implementation stage. Since the officials (group A and Group B) are all deputed to the Panchayat Samiti by the state government, they were justified in a soft pleading, the process of implementation especially when there was an apparent contradiction with the directions of the state government. There is no proper manpower planning in all the departments / sections. Even no sanctioned official posts of Panchayat Samiti are filled up. All those resulted in heavy workload to some of the officials' staff.

Elections to the three tiers of Panchayati Raj institutions held in 1997, 2002 and 2007 in conformity with 73rd Amendment Act. At present 1,00,862 elected representatives of 30 Zilla Parishads, 314 Panchayat Samitis and 6,234 Gram Panchayats are getting the opportunity in the governance of Panchayati Raj institutions. Participation is an active process by which beneficiaries acquire knowledge, understand role, responsibilities and functions of the concerned institutions including their own, influence the direction and execution of a development project so as to ensure their well-being in terms of income, personal growth, self-reliance or other values which the projects underline as the objectives. It is, therefore, essential that not only the likely beneficiaries but also all the rural households of the village must participate to secure all the programmes of the Panchayat Samiti. The process of empowerment is both individual and collective. Since it is through involvement in groups that the people most often begin to become aware and develop the ability to organize themselves for taking decision in bringing about change.

Suggestions:

In order to achieve greater levels of awareness, participation and harmonious relations between officials and non-officials, the following measures may be adopted.

1. Organization of training programmes for the beginners both officials and non-officials conduct seminars, orientation courses, lecturers etc. publishing pamphlets, booklets, articles and maintaining a small library. These will enhance the awareness and knowledge of the officials as well as non-officials.

2. For the officials, there should be regular supervision, review and surprise checking by the higher officials, accompanied by the chairperson vice-chairperson of the respective standing committee. This would lead to greater efficiency in the working of the system.

3. There should be proper manpower planning in every department / section, taking account into consideration the nature and gravity of the work.

4. Only such of those officials who are necessary during the deliberations of the Panchayat Samiti meetings should be requested to attend instead of calling the officials from all the departments/sections.
5. Any communication to the Panchayat Samiti officials, from outside, may be passed on through the sub-collector and not directly from the respective heads of departments.

6. Necessary provisions have to be made to give harmonious and other facilities to the elected members of Panchayat Samiti just as the MLAs and MPs get for their work.

7. The office of the vice-chairman may be provided with certain specified powers and functions instead of working of making him a dummy as it is now. This would enable a proper distribution of workload, especially reducing that of to chairperson.

8. The role assigned to the MPs, MLAs with regard to Panchayati Raj may be reexamined to make the system more democratic.

9. There may be a separate civil service for Panchayati Raj administration, known as district local services with its own cadre and recruitment rules on parity with state services.

10. Planning and details of working in regard to schemes and programmes should originate from the Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad itself, based on the local conditions.

11. Some of the essential regulatory functions such as acquiring land for undertaking developments working and covering of loans may be transformed to Panchayat Samiti.

12. The state government should go for advance allotment of funds so that the Panchayat Samiti is not put into hardship while implementing the developmental activities.

13. There may be a fixed percentage of shares in the income of the state, assigned to all Blocks and power of collection of money in respect of certain items may rest with the Panchayat Samitis. The Panchayat Samitis may be provided with certain powers in respect of diversion of funds, taking into account the needs of a specific situation.

14. The government should also change its former attitude towards the Panchayati Raj institutions. It should give up its attitude of histility or indifferences. The officials concerned including the district collector should be directed to help the local bodies in every possible way. Excessive government control and interference of the government in the day to day administration of local bodies are also sometime responsible for failure of local bodies.

15. The Panchayati Raj institutions need better personal as well as a better office organization and methods, certain qualifications should be laid down for recruitment to the staff of the Panchayati Raj institutions. Special provisions should be made for the training of personnel of the Panchayati Raj institutions.

16. There can not be any dramatic movement in the system just by including non-officials women member in Gram Panchayat institutions. At the same time, it is also essential to shed certain stereotyped prevailing notions about role and importance of women in socio-economic development. Women should be encouraged to play a more active part. The male representatives (non-officials) have to establish a rapport with the female representatives and give due respect and attention to their views. Of course, there is some awareness among women due to reservation for them in Panchayati Raj institutions. However, there is need for appropriate training and education relating to different aspects of functioning of Panchayats to make women members conscious enough of their effective role and representation in the Panchayat Samiti. This kind of training can be organized at the district or block level immediately - following the election.
References:

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