



Problem and prospects of rural development through panchayat system in Birbhum district of West Bengal

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Abstract

Panchayat systems have been playing an important role in order to monitor these rural development programmes. These institutions have been helpful in identifying real beneficiaries in order to get maximum benefits out of these schemes. Under these schemes priority has been given to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, women, weaker sections and the upliftment of backward areas. A number of hurdles and constraints and deficiencies are also responsible for failure of these rural development programmes. In this paper, an attempt has been made to examine various issues, aspects and dimensions related to Panchayat system in Birbhum district of West Bengal. It has been sought to analyze changes in the rural society and its impact on socio-economic transformation due to panchayat, political participation, and political mobilization etc. There are number of factors responsible for created hurdles in performing the role of PRIs. These are castism, groupism and factionalism, which resulting to bitter infightings, allegations and counter-allegations, mutual suspicions and rivalries etc.

Keywords: mobilization, socio-economic transformation, development programmes

Introduction

Panchayats have been the backbone of Indian villages since the beginning of recorded history. Panchayati Raj Institutions in India is a homogenous effort for capacity building of rural people to promote greater participation of them in their own governance. The concern of the government for the life, liberty, and prosperity of the rural masses, soon after independence, was reflected in various measures adopted by it to better their lot. A number of prominent leaders such as: Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru and Jai Prakash Narain indicated that the major task of independent India would be to take democracy to the grass roots level and involve the rural masses in the task of national reconstruction. According to Mahatma Gandhi, true democracy could not be worked by twenty men sitting at the centre. It has to be worked out from below by the people of every village. The restoration of democracy in 1977 once again revived the hopes for the revitalization of decentralized governance in the wake of the recommendations of Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) [15] for strengthening Panchayati Raj Institutions. But these were ignored by the Government of India and the political leadership of most of the states as they had no faith in decentralized governance. However, these recommendations were implemented in a modified form in Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal where the Panchayati Raj Institutions were strengthened and made effective. After the Ashok Mehta Committee followed by G.V.K. Rao Committee (1985), L.N. Singhvi Committee (1986) and Sarkaria Commission (1988) have been constituted to make PRIs more functional and effective. Since 1989 there have also been three serious attempts to accord constitutional

status of PRIs. Unfortunately 64th (1989) and 74th (1990) Constitution Amendment Bill could not be translated into Act.

In the context of the changed scenario related to Panchayati Raj, it is essential to assess the impact of the above political innovations on the nature and pattern of grass roots politics in West Bengal. The major portion of population of Birbhum, as elsewhere in West Bengal, live in the villages and the working of panchayat system in this state has affected the life of the rural masses and they have realized a sense of participation in the democratic functioning of the government. It is true that a plethora of studies exist, regarding the various aspects of Panchayati panchayat system. But very few systematic studies have been conducted with specific reference to, rural factionalism, groupism, secret leadership, struggle and impact of reservation of seats for the women, SCs/STs and OBCs etc. It can fairly be assumed that this innovative and radical step must have influenced the process and pattern of grass roots politics.

Location of the study area

Birbhum (23° 32' 30" and 24° 35' 0"N and 88° 1' 40" and 87° 5' 25" E) extends over 4545 Km². Birbhum is bounded on the north and west by the Santal Parganas of Jharkhand state and the district of Murshidabad; on the east by the districts of Murshidabad and Burdwan; and on the south by Burdwan, from which it is separated by the Ajoy river. Administratively, it comprises of three Sub-divisions (Suri, Bolpur and Rampurhat), 19 Community Development blocks and 2,467 villages.

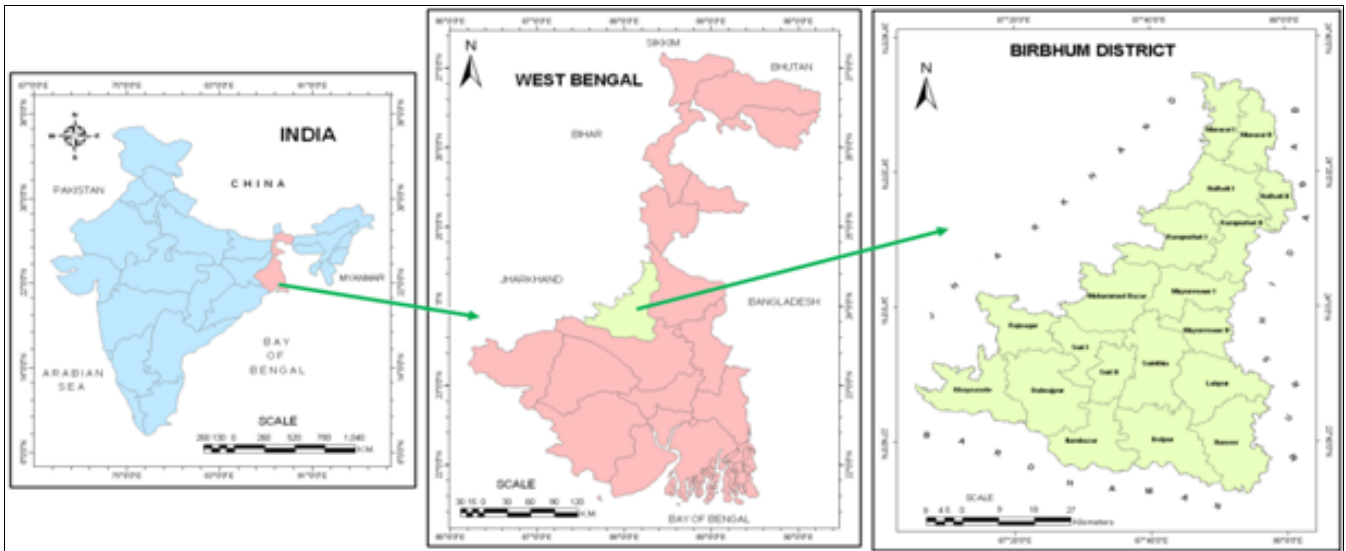


Fig 1: Location Map of the Study Area

Review of literature

Chetama Singh (2012) [2] emphasized that there are enormous hopes as Panchayat Institutions under the Act have established their significance in sharing of the power among the larger community, in managing the local resources otherwise ignored, in providing a large number of talents in political works and in protecting the socioeconomic and political interests of the marginal sections of the Indian society.

Nirmala Buch (2012) [3] emphasized that Gram Sabha has been described as the institution to direct democracy for participation of the local community in decisions on their concerns, programmes and projects, fixing priorities, selecting beneficiaries, receiving annual reports and accounts, approving the coming year's programmes, conducting social audit etc.

Prabhat Kumar Datta (2013) [4] revealed that the constitutional provisions have laid the foundation stone of local government the superstructures of which have to be built up for which what is urgently needed is spontaneous initiative on the part of the people.

V.N. Alok (2013) [5] conducted that Karnataka has done the best. Rajasthan and Maharashtra follow in this regard. Other significant scores are Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

December 2012 have been considered.

P.P. Satyendra Tripathi (2013) [6] depicted that despite their responsibility for water collection and sanitation management, women rarely participate in decisionmaking when the construction of facilities is planned.

Vikas Nandal (2013) [7] dealt with the awareness and constitutional knowledge of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The study has been conducted on 50 women respondents in village Anwali District Sonipat Haryana.

M. Venkat Reddy (2014) [8] emphasized that the task before the country to put back Panchayat Raj on the track is a Herculean one. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has brought about a structural change. To make this functional there is a need to strengthen various aspects of PRIs.

G.R. Jayanandam & Panjala Narasaiah (2014) [9] emphasized that political will and wisdom of the politicians are required to take necessary measures to protect the interest of the weaker sections that are prevented from enjoying their constitutional rights.

Methodology

The study is based on the primary data. The samples under this study are taken from Birbhum district of West Bengal state. Total numbers of samples are 505, selected on convenient sampling basis. The responses of respondent were collected with the help of interview schedule and observation techniques. Review schedule includes both open and close ended questions to understand the perception of respondents.

Objectives of the study

In this perspective, it seems imperative

- To study the conceptual framework of the rural development and panchayat system
- To analysis the Factors Responsible for Failure/Success of Panchayats in rural area.
- To assess the Implementation of Development Programmes in study area.
- To recommendation about prospects of rural development through panchayet system.

Results and Discussion

Development is a broad concept which encompasses every aspect of human life. It is essentially an activity carried out by state involving policy formulation and execution on the part of the government for the benefit of society. Rural development, on the other hand, means an overall development of rural areas in social, economic, political and cultural spheres so that people could lead a pleasant life (Pandit and Kulkarni 2012, 160). It is a broad, inclusive term which takes in its consideration the socio-economic and political development of the rural areas. It includes measures to strengthen the democratic structure of society through the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as measures to improve the rural infrastructure, improve income of rural households and delivery systems pertaining to education, health and safety mechanisms (Mishra, Akhtar & Tarika 2011, 45).

Panchayati Raj bodies are looked upon as instruments of rural development. As such, it becomes relevant and meaningful to evaluate the working of these institutions. Contributing to economic development and social welfare is the core strategy of panchayati raj. Considering and evaluating this view point, one can point out that the

relationship between panchayati raj and rural development are not only interconnected but interlinked also. The objectives of both panchayati raj and rural development are the two sides of a coin. Since the commencement of the planning era in India in 1951, growth with social justice has been set forth as the cardinal principle of Indian planned economic development. Indian economy is a rural economy; India is a land of villages and it consists of 5,75,936 villages. The potentiality for progress and valuable resources

lies in villages and not in a few metropolitan or municipal areas. The objectives of rural development may broadly be defined as maximizing production in agriculture and allied activities in the rural areas, development of rural industries with emphasis on village and cottage industries, generating maximum possible employment opportunities in rural areas, specially for the weaker sections of the community so as to enable them to improve their standard of living; providing basic service like drinking water, communication facilities, health and welfare and education. The success of any development programme intended to benefit the rural poor, requires an efficient organizational structure. This is because organizational effectiveness is an essential input for planning and implementation of development programmes. Although many other complimentary factors influence the overall performance of the programme, an efficient administrative organization is a pre-requisite for effective implementation of any development scheme. The importance of the efficient administrative apparatus is further felt, by the planners as the Seventh Five Year Plan took the view that the shortcomings in the implementation of anti poverty programmes are basically the result of the weaknesses in the administration. Rural development policies and programmes are shaped and funded by the Centre, even though rural development is within the jurisdiction of the states. At the Centre, there is no institutionalized mechanism for coordination of these activities, which are handled by several ministries apart from the Rural Development Ministry. A similar lacuna prevails at the state level. District administration is essentially revenue administration and it is ill-equipped to meet the challenges of development. Policymaking and other strategic positions are manned by the generalist administrators and not by specialists.

Development of rural areas has been at the core of planning process in the country and also in the State. Rural Development is a broad, inclusive term which takes in its consideration socioeconomic and political development of the rural areas. It includes measures to strengthen the democratic structure of society through the Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as measures to improve the rural infrastructure, improve income of rural households and delivery systems pertaining to education, health and safety mechanisms. Poverty alleviation is a key component of rural

development. Government of India has taken many initiatives for rural development. For this purpose it has setup the Ministry of Rural Development. This Ministry is a nodal department for the two international organizations viz., the Centre on Integrated Rural Development of Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) and the Afro-Asian Rural Development Organization (AARDO). The Ministry consists of the following three Departments: 1. Department of Rural Development 2. Department of Land Resources 3. Department of Drinking Water Supply The Department of Rural Development implements schemes for generation of self employment and wage employment, provision of housing and minor irrigation assets to rural poor, social assistance to the destitute and Rural Roads. Apart from this, the Department provides the support services and other quality inputs such as assistance for strengthening of DRDA Administration, Panchayati Raj Institutions, training & research, human resource development, development of voluntary action etc. for the proper implementation of the programmes. The major programmes of the Department of Rural Development are Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, (PMGSY), Rural Housing (RH) Sampoorna Gramin Rozgar Yojana (SGRY) and Swarnajayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana (SGSY). Panchayati Raj Department is an important department of WestBengal related to the rural development. The main objective of this department is to strengthen the Panchayati Raj System in the state according to the 73rd amendment of Indian constitution. So that panchayats can realize the dream of rural administration and rural development with complete coordination and transparency. For this purpose the department has provided a Citizen Charter. For the sake of public convenience and knowledge, this charter has been divided into 7 subjects:- 1. Financial aid to Gram Panchayats; 2. Rural Cleanliness Programmes; 3. Responsibilities of the Panchayats-(Transparency in work, rural administration & development); 4. Responsibilities of public towards Panchayat; 5. Decentralization Programme; 6. Control over the Gram Panchayats; 7. Arrangement of Panchayat Help-line. Citizen Charter is a continuous process which will change periodically according to the feelings, recommendations, experiences and reactions of the public. Thus, the economic development conceived in the framework of centralized planning has curbed local initiative and aspirations. Increasingly, central and state government control over economic resources and political power has come in the way of locals building their identity and acquiring legitimacy. District administration has to be restricted, and panchayati raj institutions must function not merely as appendages of the central and state governments for implementation of programmes but must operate as centres of local power and authority, and in fact as a third tier of the federal polity that is very much alive and kicking.

Table 1: Views of the Respondents about Factors Responsible for Failure/Success of Panchayats according to Age Groups

Respondents (in completed years)	If problems faced by panchayat to completion the work, factors responsible for the problems							Factors responsible for success of panchayat		
	Factionalism	Regional political parties	Lack of participation	Lack of cooperation	Disharmony	Lack of money	Corruption	Completion the aims	Cooperation Of people	Motivation by government
18-25	05 (1.39)	02 (0.55)	02 (0.55)	04 (1.11)	05 (1.39)	05 (1.39)	06 (1.67)	08 (1.58)	28 (5.54)	07 (1.38)
26-45	25 (6.98)	14 (3.91)	12 (3.35)	20 (5.58)	23 (6.42)	21 (5.86)	26 (7.26)	35 (6.93)	139 (27.52)	24 (4.75)

46-60	23 (6.42)	16 (4.46)	14 (3.91)	22 (6.14)	21 (5.86)	24 (6.70)	25 (6.98)	33 (6.53)	144 (28.51)	24 (4.75)
61 and above	07 (1.95)	04 (1.11)	04 (1.11)	06 (1.67)	05 (1.39)	08 (2.23)	09 (2.51)	12 (2.37)	45 (8.91)	06 (1.18)
Total	60 (16.75)	36 (10.05)	32 (8.93)	52 (14.52)	54 (15.08)	58 (16.20)	66 (18.43)	88 (17.42)	356 (70.49)	61 (12.07)

Source: Author Calculation

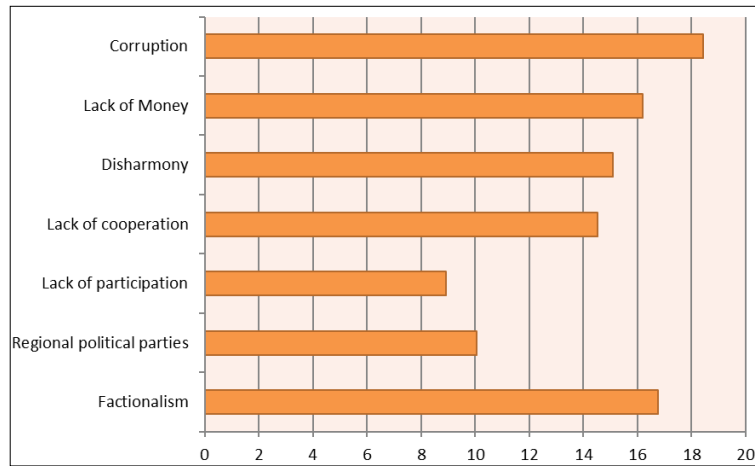


Fig 2: Views of the Respondents about Factors Responsible for Failure

Table – 1 depicted that 18.43 per cent of the respondents felt corruptions is responsible for completion the work. 16.75 per cent of the respondents favored factionalism in this regard. 16.20 per cent of the respondents agreed with lack of money, 15.08 per cent of the respondents supported to disharmony is main problem. 14.52 per cent of the respondents indicated as lack of cooperation in this regard. 10.05 per cent of the respondents felt that regional political parties were barrier to completion the work and 8.93 per cent of the respondents agreed with lack of participation is main problem to completion the work of panchayat.

Further, the Figure3 revealed that 70.49 per cent of the respondents felt that cooperation of people is the main factor responsible for success of panchayats, 17.42 per cent of the respondents agreed with completion the aim in this regard and 12.07 percent of the respondents were felt that motivation by the government is main factor responsible for success of panchayat. Thus, these factors are considered as the main problems faced by panchayat to completion the work and the responsible for their success.

Table – 2 revealed that 74.65 per cent of the respondents felt that gram sabha has been playing an important role in rural development programmes in the village. 24.66 per cent of the respondents supported the programmes i.e. construction of roads and sanitation works. 29.44 per cent of the respondents supported another programmes on health and education. 25.19 per cent of the respondents felt that panchayat has started small saving schemes for the rural people. 20.68 per cent of the respondents supported the programmes of hand pumps. 61.58 per cent of the respondents were written to the panchayat to solve these problems, and 38.41 per cent of the respondents did not write to panchayat about the same. 43.72 per cent of the respondents agreed with panchayat have solved these problems and 56.27 per cent of the respondents felt that the panchayat did not solve their problems. Thus, panchayat has been playing an immense role to solve their problems of the people.

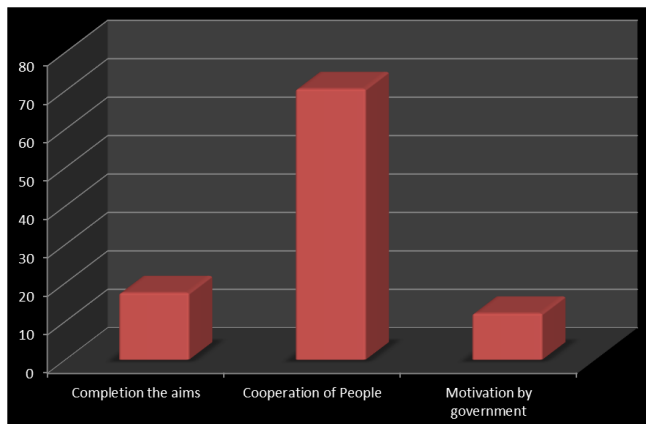


Fig 3: Success of Panchayats according to Age Groups

Table 2: Views of the Respondents About the Major Development Programmes According to level of Education

Level of Education	Do you want to give credit about some major development programmes to gram sabha?		If yes, tell about programmes				Did you write to panchayat about problems?		If yes, was it solved by panchayat?	
	Yes	No	Construction of roads and sanitation	Health and Education	Small saving schemes	Hand pumps	Yes	No	Yes	No
Primary	81 (16.03)	33 (6.53)	20 (5.30)	24 (6.37)	21 (5.57)	16 (4.24)	66 (13.06)	48 (9.50)	28 (9.00)	38 (12.21)
Upper Primary	75 (14.85)	32 (6.33)	18 (4.77)	22 (5.83)	17 (4.50)	18 (4.77)	60 (11.88)	47 (9.30)	25 (8.03)	35 (11.25)

Upto MP	92 (18.21)	28 (5.54)	24 (6.37)	27 (7.16)	25 (6.63)	16 (4.24)	72 (14.25)	48 (9.50)	33 (10.61)	39 (12.54)
Up to HS	63 (12.47)	19 (3.76)	15 (3.97)	19 (5.03)	13 (3.44)	16 (4.24)	53 (10.49)	29 (5.74)	23 (7.39)	30 (9.64)
Graduation	42 (8.31)	11 (2.17)	10 (2.65)	12 (3.18)	12 (3.18)	08 (2.12)	36 (7.12)	17 (3.36)	16 (5.14)	20 (6.43)
P.G	24 (4.75)	05 (0.99)	06 (1.59)	07 (1.85)	07 (1.85)	04 (1.06)	24 (4.75)	05 (0.99)	11 (3.53)	13 (4.18)
Total	377 (74.65)	128 (25.34)	93 (24.66)	111 (29.44)	95 (25.19)	78 (20.68)	311 (61.58)	194 (38.41)	136 (43.72)	175 (56.27)

Source: Author calculation

Table-3 revealed that 44.55 per cent of the respondents felt that MNREGA has been implemented by the government. 19.40 per cent of the respondents agreed with surva shiksha abhiyaan, 15.64 per cent of the respondents supported to national agriculture development programmes, 11.88 per cent of the respondents agreed with Indira Awas Yojana and 8.51 per cent of the respondents expressed their opinion that national rural health mission plan has been implemented by the government.. Out of which, 35.60 per cent of the respondents expressed their views castism is the main problem to implement these schemes. 30.62 per cent of the

respondents indicated as lack of awareness is the main problem in this regard. 14.92 per cent of the respondents supported to favourism is the main problem. 10.73 per cent of the respondents agreed with corruption is the main problem and 8.11 per cent of the respondents felt that red tapism is the main problem. Thus, panchayat have been playing an immense role to implement various programmes provided by the government for rural development, and also panchayat faced various problems to successfully implement in these programmes.

Table 3: Views of the Respondents about Implementation of Development Programmes according to level of Education

Level of Education	Some Major Development Programmes, Implement by Government					Successfully Implemented		If No, What Problems Faced by Panchayats?				
	MNREGA	Indira Awaas Yojana	Surva Shiksha Abhiyan	National Agriculture Development Programme	National Rural Health Mishan Plan	Yes	No	Lack of Awareness	Favourism	Red Tapism	Corruption	Castism
Primary	50 (9.90)	14 (2.77)	21 (4.15)	18 (3.56)	11 (2.17)	27 (5.34)	87 (17.22)	25 (6.54)	14 (3.66)	11 (2.87)	10 (2.61)	27 (7.06)
Upper primary	45 (8.91)	12 (2.37)	18 (3.56)	20 (3.96)	12 (2.37)	23 (4.55)	84 (16.63)	21 (5.49)	11 (2.87)	09 (2.35)	13 (3.40)	30 (7.85)
Upto MP	54 (10.69)	17 (3.36)	24 (4.75)	16 (3.16)	09 (1.78)	30 (5.94)	90 (17.82)	27 (7.06)	15 (3.92)	06 (1.57)	09 (2.35)	33 (8.63)
Up to HS	37 (7.32)	05 (0.99)	18 (3.56)	16 (3.16)	06 (1.18)	21 (4.15)	61 (12.07)	21 (5.49)	09 (2.35)	03 (0.78)	05 (1.30)	23 (6.02)
Graduation	25 (4.95)	07 (1.38)	11 (2.17)	06 (1.18)	04 (0.79)	14 (2.77)	39 (7.72)	14 (3.66)	06 (1.57)	00 (0.00)	01 (0.26)	18 (4.71)
P.G	14 (2.77)	05 (0.99)	06 (1.18)	03 (0.59)	01 (0.19)	08 (1.58)	21 (4.15)	09 (2.35)	02 (0.52)	02 (0.52)	03 (0.78)	05 (1.30)
Total	225 (44.55)	60 (11.88)	98 (19.40)	79 (15.64)	43 (8.51)	123 (24.35)	382 (75.64)	117 (30.62)	57 (14.92)	31 (8.11)	41 (10.73)	136 (35.60)

Source: Author Calculation

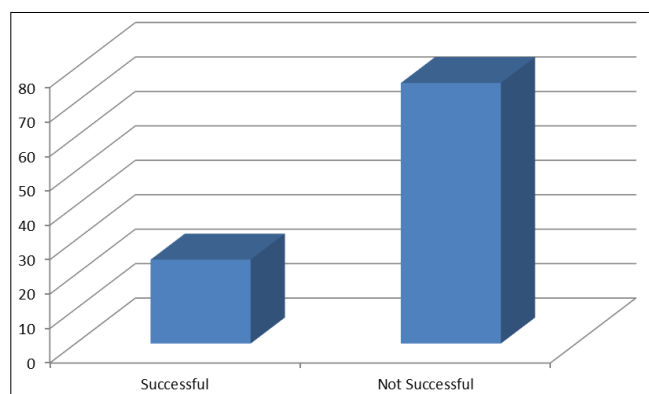


Fig 4: Views of the Respondents about Implementation of Development Programmes

Further, Figure 4 depicted that 24.35 per cent of the respondents felt that these schemes were successfully

implemented, 75.64 per cent of the respondents did not agree about this

Suggestions

- The elected representatives of the panchayats should exercise superintendence and control over government officials, i.e. serving the Panchayats instead of playing a subordinate role. Thus, there is an urgent need to educate local leadership about their legitimate role in nation-building and the governance of the country.
- The Gram Sabhas should be fully involved in the plan formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the development works to be undertaken by the Gram Panchayats. The NGOs of repute may be assigned the job of creating awareness among the members of Gram Sabha. The presence of the women should also be ensured in particular.

- To reduce the over-dominance of bureaucracy, its powers should be curtailed. Sincere efforts must be made to bring an attitudinal change in the functioning of rural bureaucracy. It would be better if all DRDAs are placed under the administrative control of the Zila Parishads.
- The requirements of financial accountability should be designed and supervised by the CAG and the power of dissolution as well as accountability of lower level Panchayat units should rest with the next higher levels of Panchayats.
- Since women for the first time have entered into Panchayati Raj politics at a large scale, proper training for them is highly essential. In this connection it may be recommended that for women representatives two types of training be given, i.e. one exclusively for them and another a combined one with their male counterparts.

Conclusions

The study concluded that the panchayat system has fragmented the rural society in Birbhum. It has created cleavages and generated tensions leading to castism, groupism and factionalism. This leads to bitter infightings, allegations and counter-allegations, mutual suspicions and rivalries which generally result in clashes leading to long drawn out litigations. The factionalism starts with different groups among panchayat leaders. The ex-leaders and defeated panches, pradhans and up-pradhans play an important part in fomenting groupism. This generally happens within the members of same economically dominant castes and classes. The study concluded that the majority of the respondents felt that the rich and powerful persons really trapped panchayats and village fund allotted for the purpose has not been properly utilized for the development of villages and muscular power has been playing a very important role to become a hurdle in the development of village panchayat. Thus, it can be concluded that rich and powerful persons have been playing an important role in trapping panchayats and misused village's money and always used muscular power and development groupism in the villages. Panchayati Raj institutions have been playing an important role in order to monitor these rural development programmes. These institutions have been helpful in identifying real beneficiaries in order to get maximum benefits out of these schemes. Under these schemes priority has been given to scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, women, weaker sections and the upliftment of backward areas. A number of hurdles and constraints and deficiencies are also responsible for failure of these rural development programmes.

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