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BENEFICIARY AND NON-BENEFICIARY PERCEPTIONS ON THE ROLE OF PRIS IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF ANANTHAPURAMU DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

India has been a welfare state ever since her Independence and the primary objective of all governmental endeavours has been the welfare of its millions. Planning has been one of the pillars of the Indian policy since independence and country's strength is derived from the achievement of planning. The policies and programmes have been designed with the aim of alleviation of rural poverty which has been one of the primary objectives of planned development in India. It was realized that a sustainable strategy of poverty alleviation has to be based on increasing the productive employment opportunities in the process of growth itself. Elimination of poverty, ignorance, diseases and inequality of opportunities and providing a better and higher quality of life were the basic promises upon which all the plans and blue-prints of development were built. Keeping in view the needs and aspirations of the local people, Panchayat Raj Institutions have been involved in the programme implementation and these institutions constitute the core of decentralized development of planning and its implementations.

INTRODUCTION

Rural development implies both the economic betterment of people as well as greater social transformation. In order to provide the rural people with better prospects for economic development, increased participation of people in the rural development programmes, decentralization of planning, better enforcement of land reforms and greater access to credit are envisaged. In order to ensure that the fruits of economic reform are shared by all sections of society five elements of social and economic infrastructure, critical to the quality of life in rural areas, were identified. These are health, education, drinking water, housing and roads.

Historically, Ananthapuramu district has been a perpetually drought prone area. The district is also backward socially and economically when compared with the other districts Kurnool, Kadapa and Chittoor in the Rayalaseema Regions, Circar and Telangana. Geographically, Ananthapuramu district has been one of the largest districts in the state covering an area of little more than 19,000 square kilometers.

In view of this, it was no wonder even if this district remained an area of utter backwardness for years to come. In the pre-independence era apart from the regular administrative apparatus in the district headed by Collector and District Magistrate, there were such institutions as the Village Panchayat, Taluk Boards and District Boards. But there was hardly any other institutional set up which could be compared favourably with the present day Panchayat Raj set up. This institutional set up in the post constitutional period was an administrative corollary of development planning and allied nation – building programmes. When the political and

administrative efforts were initiated to implement the proposals of the Balwanth Ray Mehta study team, the importance of district as the principal administrative unit was not lost sight of.

The Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Samithi and Zilla parishads Act, 1959, was the legislative effort in the direction of establishing Panchayat Raj bodies in Ananthapuramu district. This legislative enactment followed by Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayats Act, 1964, provided the much needed legal frame work of Panchayat Raj set up in the district. The implementation of these two legislative enactment completed the establishment of Panchayat Raj bodies in the district-Gram Panchayats at the village level, Panchayat Samithies at the block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level. Establishment of the three-tier Panchayat Raj set up in the state was in consonance with the recommendations of the Balwanth Roy Mehta Committee.

One aspect of Panchayat Raj set up needs in the state some clarification at this Juncture. Through Andhra Pradesh, one of the States that agreed to act in pursuance of this report, the state government got two separate legislative enactments passed in 1959 and 1964 respectively. The former provided for the setting up of Panchayat Smithies and Zilla Parishads and the later paving the way for constituting Gram Panchayat. Since all these institutions constituted the three institutional ingredients of the Panchayat Raj set up in terms of democratic decentralization, one could not help feeling or asking where was the need for getting two separate legislative enactments, and instead of these two legislative enactments one single and comprehensive legislative enactment would have been sufficient. It is difficult to deny the force of logic underlying arguments of this kind. But there was nothing wrong or something unusual in getting enacted two pieces of separate legislative enactments.

An analysis of these two said enactments will not fail to carry conviction in this regard. Unlike the Panchayat Samithies and Zilla Parishads that were designed to be the institutional agencies of rural development, village Panchayats were created to play a dual role, agencies of rural local self-government and instrument of rural development. Considering this dual role of Gram Panchayat, it was not something unusual or unwarranted that separate and district legislation was enacted in respect of Gram Panchayats. Besides this, there is also another formidable reason. Long before the advent of the Panchayat Raj set up there were Gram Panchayats as an integral part of the rural local self-government set up.

When Andhra Pradesh was formed in 1956 there were three separate laws dealing with the village / Gram Panchayats that were in force in three different administrative regions-erstwhile Madras, Hyderabad and Mysore. There was an urgent need for rectifying this administrating anomaly. This rendered necessary the passage of one single and comprehensive legislative enactment to deal with the institutional set up of Gram Panchayats throughout the state. This fundamental administrative need was of no less consequence in getting the Andhra Pradesh Gram Panchayats Act, 1964, passed separately.

What matters very much in the actual organizational set up of Panchayat Raj in Ananthapuramu district is not merely the legal and administrative frame-work as provided or laid down by law, but the type of men and women who constituted these bodies, and the kind of influence they brought to bear on the working of these institutions. Thus, from this angle it would be of utmost importance to deal with the social, educational and political background of members who constituted the Panchayat Raj bodies in the district and examine objectively



at length how far their experience and background were of any consequence in influencing the actual working of the Panchayat Raj bodies in the district.

After assumption of power the Telugu Desam Government, in 1983 realised that development activities and welfare schemes had not been taking place in adequate measure in the three-tier structure of Panchayat Raj Institution. A Cabinet Sub-Committee of the government examined the Mandal system recommended by Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) and made its recommendations based on which Andhra Pradesh Mandal Praja Parishads, Zilla Praja Parishad and Zilla Abhivrudhi Mandals Act was enacted in 1986 repealing the earlier statutes. Under the provision of new Act, 1104 Mandal Praja Parishads (MPPs) came into existence in January 1987 in place of 330 Panchayati Samithis. As per the new act in Ananthapuramu district 63 Mandal Parishads were established. At present the Panchayat Raj Institutions in the district are functioning on the bases of Andhra Pradesh Panchayat Raj Act, 1994. Tables 1 give the details of Gram Panchayat Institutions working in the district.

Table -1

Social Category Wise Elected Representatives to Gram Panchayats in Ananthapuramu District in 2014 Elections

Sarpanch / Ward Member	Scheduled Tribes			Scheduled Caste			Backward Caste			Un reserved			Total		
	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total
Sarpanch	20	28	48	79	98	177	129	164	293	222	263	485	450	553	1003
Ward Member	126	296	422	613	1153	1766	1488	1689	3177	2646	2439	5085	4873	5577	10450

Source: District Panchayat Office, Ananthapuramu

It is evident from table 1 that there are 1003 Sarpanches/Village Presidents in Ananthapuramu district among them 29.21 per cent to belong Backward Classes, 17.65 per cent belongs to Scheduled Castes and 4.79 per cent belong to Scheduled Tribes. The remaining 48.35 per cent are unreserved category. In all social categories more than half of the village presidents are women. in all 55.13 per cent are women representatives.

On the other hand there are 10, 450 ward members in the district. Among them 48.66 per cent of seats are unreserved. Around 30.40 per cent seats are allotted to Backward Classes, 16.90 per cent to Scheduled Castes and 4.04 per cent to Scheduled Tribes. Among Scheduled Tribe ward members nearly 70.14 per cent are women. It slightly reduced to 65.29 per cent in case of Scheduled Castes; it further reduced to 53.16 per cent in case of Backward Classes. Among the unreserved ward members only 47.96 per cent are women. In all nearly 53.37 per cent of ward members are women.

KNOWLEDGE ABOUT RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The developmental schemes under taken by Panchayat Raj Institutions intended to assist various sections of the society. They are helpful to cultivators, agricultural labourers, unemployed youth, women, businessmen etc. The knowledge and awareness is a pre-requisite to estimate the precautions of beneficiaries on rural



development schemes/programmes. Table 2 gives the details of respondents' knowledge about development schemes.

Table – 2
Respondents' Knowledge on Major Rural Development Schemes
(Multiple Responses)

S. No.	Rural Development Programmes	Beneficiaries	Per cent	Non-Beneficiaries	Per cent
1	MGNREGS	120	100.50	103	85.83
2	Rural Housing Housing	98	81.67	67	55.83
3	Watershed Programme	89	74.17	74	61.67
4	Velugu	106	88.33	87	72.50
5	CLDP	79	65.83	56	46.67
6	Social Security Pensions	117	97.50	101	84.17

Source: Field data

The data in Table 2 shows that all the 120 beneficiary respondents are aware of Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Scheme. It means that almost all beneficiary respondent families are benefiting by the scheme. Among the non-beneficiaries only 85.83 per cent of respondents are aware of MGNREGS in the study area. The knowledge with regard to social security pensions is high compared to other remaining programmes. Here, also the beneficiary respondents (97.50 per cent) are ahead than the non-beneficiary respondents (84.17 per cent). The Velugu programme which is intended to develop rural women through the formation of Self Help Groups is known to 88.33 per cent of beneficiary and 72.50 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents. Integrated Watershed Management Programme (IWMP) is known to 74.17 per cent of beneficiary and 61.67 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents. The CLDP programme was launched in the year 2004 with an objective to develop the poor quality of assigned lands of SC, ST, BC and other poor beneficiaries and to enhance and diversify livelihood options of the poor by bringing these lands under diversified farming systems. Around 74.17 per cent of beneficiary and 61.67 per cent of non-beneficiaries are aware of this programme. The rural housing programme is known to 81.67 per cent of beneficiary respondents. In this regard non-beneficiary respondents are far behind with 55.83 per cent.

SELECTION OF BENEFICIARIES

Various rural development programmes initiated by Central and State Government yield results, only when the really needy people get enrolled in those programmes. There are reports that in some schemes, affluent and dominating families are getting their names enrolled at the cost of marginalized sections. As such beneficiaries were asked to express their satisfaction over the selection of beneficiaries for various developmental schemes and the same is presented in Table 3.

Table – 3

Respondents' Satisfaction Levels on the selection of Beneficiaries for Rural Development Schemes

S. No.	Responses	Beneficiaries	Per cent	Non-Beneficiaries	Per cent
1	Satisfactory	61	50.83	33	27.50
2	Non-Satisfactory	53	44.17	76	63.33
3	No Response	6	5.00	11	9.17
Total		120	100.00	120.00	100.00

Source: Field data

The data in Table 3 makes it clear that only half of the beneficiary respondents have expressed satisfaction over the selection of beneficiaries for various development programmes. In case of non-beneficiaries it further reduced to 27.50 per cent. Among the beneficiaries nearly half of the respondents have either dissatisfaction or no response. To be precise about 44.17 per cent have expressed dissatisfaction, while 5 per cent have expressed neither satisfaction nor dissatisfaction. Coming to non-beneficiary respondents a preponderant majority i.e. 63.33 per cent respondents expressed dissatisfaction, while 9.17 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents expressed either satisfaction or dissatisfaction

RESPONDENTS VIEWS ON THE SELECTION OF BENEFICIARIES

The data in the previous Table (Table 2) reveals that nearly half of the beneficiary and 63.33 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents are not satisfied with regard to selection of beneficiaries for various rural development programmes in the study area. Closely following their satisfaction levels on the selection of beneficiaries, they have been asked to suggest the correct method/procedure for selection of beneficiaries. Their views are presented in table 4.



Table – 4
Respondents' suggestion on the selection of Beneficiaries

S. No.	Responses	Beneficiaries	Per cent	Non-Beneficiaries	Per cent
1	Gram Sabha	85	70.83	88	73.33
2	Gram Panchayat President	6	5.00	4	3.33
3	Village Leader	13	10.83	13	10.83
4	Government Officials	14	11.67	11	9.17
5	Others	2	1.67	4	3.33
Total		120	100	120	100

Source: Field data

The data in Table 4 shows that overwhelming majority of beneficiary and non-beneficiary respondents declared that the selection of beneficiaries is to be done in Gram Sabha meeting. To be precise 73.33 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents and 70.83 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents opted Gram Sabha, for the selection of beneficiaries for all rural development programmes. It means that in Gram Sabha meeting the needy and marginalized sections will get due say in enrolling their names for various developmental schemes. It is a healthy development that the people have recognized the principle of democratic method for selection of beneficiaries. Equal per cent (10.83) of beneficiary and non-beneficiary respondents favoured some political involvement in the selection of beneficiaries. On the other hand 11.67 per cent of beneficiary and 9.17 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents opined to left the selection procedure to concerned government officials. Nearly 3.33 per cent of non-beneficiaries and 1.67 per cent beneficiaries opted for the involvement of others.

UTILITY OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The rural development programmes/schemes are intended for the comprehensive development of rural areas. During the field study the respondent's perception were recorded about the usefulness or non-usefulness of these programmes and the same was tabulated in Table 5.



Table – 5
Respondents views on the Utility of Development Schemes

S. No.	Responses	Beneficiaries	Per cent	Non-Beneficiaries	Per cent
1	Useful	98	81.67	96	80.00
2	Not Useful	13	10.83	18	15.00
3	No Response	9	7.50	6	5.00
Total		120	100.00	120.00	100.00

Source: Field data

It is observed from table 5 that a preponderant majority of beneficiary as well as non-beneficiary respondents reported that the ongoing rural development programmes are useful. To be precise 81.67 per cent of beneficiary and 80 per cent of non-beneficiary respondents declared that rural development programmes are useful to the development of rural areas. On the other hand 15 per cent of non-beneficiaries and 10.83 per cent of beneficiaries reported that the ongoing rural development programmes are not useful. Around 7.50 per cent of beneficiary respondents and 5 per cent of beneficiary respondents were denied to respond.

CONCLUSION

One of the tasks stressed from the beginning of Panchayat Raj activities was to assist for the development of rural areas. This has been held to be the objective of various plans, programmes and schemes. The successive Five Year plans and the programme evaluation organizations underlined the need of equitable distribution of fruits from development and the people's participation in the plans of rural development. Today the challenge of rural poverty cannot be met without the active involvement of Panchayat Raj. Panchayats are looked upon as a means to achieve socio-economic transformation of our rural societies. With this noble aim, Panchayat Raj institutions have been introduced in India. Panchayat Raj has been made its way from its uncertain past to its so significant present, in spite of the so many adverse situations it had to encounter on its march. Now it is generally believed that the socio-economic benefit of Panchayati Raj and rural development has not gone to the needy people.



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