

| AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT<br>WASHINGTON, D. C. 20523<br><b>BIBLIOGRAPHIC INPUT SHEET</b>   |                                      | FOR AID USE ONLY                       |
|---|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. SUBJECT CLASSIFICATION   | A. PRIMARY<br>Social Science         |  |
|   | B. SECONDARY<br>Development Planning |  |
| 2. TITLE AND SUBTITLE<br>Panchayat Raj, rural development and the political economy of village India  |                                      |  |
| 3. AUTHOR(S)<br>Nicholson, N.K  |                                      |  |
| 4. DOCUMENT DATE<br>1973  | 5. NUMBER OF PAGES<br>66 p.          | 6. ARC NUMBER<br>ARC                   |
| 7. REFERENCE ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS<br>Rural Development Committee and South Asia Program, Cornell University,<br>Ithaca, New York 14850   |                                      |  |
| 8. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES ( <i>Sponsoring Organization, Publishers, Availability</i> )<br>(In South Asia occasional papers and theses, no. 2)  |                                      |  |
| 9. ABSTRACT<br>In 1960 the government of India decided to direct its rural development efforts through two new local institutions: a system of cooperatives and a new form of local self-government: the Panchayat Raj, or rule by Panchayats. This study analyzes the functioning of that latter system. Among the author's conclusions: the panchayat leader has little power, status, or prestige. Unlike the earlier situation, when development workers pleaded and bargained with village leaders to follow their advice, the leader's constituents place pressure upon him; he must plead with development authorities for resources that will maintain his position. He is very dependent upon those external resources because he cannot raise them within the village. Similarly, he is dependent because the "currency" of factional exchange is unconvertible outside the factional dyad and must therefore be limited to goods and services of immediate value. In such a situation the capacity for collection action is low, and the likelihood of sustained cooperation even lower. There is some indication that the links among farmer, politician, and administrator may be undergoing some change. A growing percentage of villagers are dealing with government officials directly, rather than using the panchayat leader as intermediary. However, such a development is inhibited by the fact that so many development functions are linked with local politics through the Panchayat Raj system. For the immediate future, the situation confronting the farmer is a difficult one politically. Agricultural inputs are distributed through a variety of agencies, most of which do not work on market principles and are controlled either by powerful administrators or by local elites. |                                      |  |
| 10. CONTROL NUMBER<br>PN-AAC-187  |                                      | 11. PRICE OF DOCUMENT                  |
| 12. DESCRIPTORS   |                                      | 13. PROJECT NUMBER                     |
|   |                                      | 14. CONTRACT NUMBER<br>AID/asia-C-1102 |
|   |                                      | 15. TYPE OF DOCUMENT                   |

# Panchayat Raj, Rural Development and the Political Economy of Village India

Norman K. Nicholson



South Asia Occasional Papers and Theses  
South Asia Program  
Cornell University



# **Panchayat Raj, Rural Development and the Political Economy of Village India**

Norman K. Nicholson

Visiting Professor  
South Asia Program and  
Department of Government  
Cornell University

and

Associate Professor  
Department of Political Science  
Northern Illinois University

SOUTH ASIA OCCASIONAL PAPERS AND THESES, No. 2

Published jointly by the Rural Development Committee and  
South Asia Program, Cornell University, 1973

Copyright 1973, Cornell University, Center for International  
Studies, Rural Development Committee

## CONTENTS

|   |    |
|---|----|
| INTRODUCTION  | 1  |
| THE POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH                              | 3  |
| THE EVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT AGRICULTURAL<br>POLICY IN INDIA | 10 |
| THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE: SOCIAL STRUCTURE<br>AND POWER      | 19 |
| THE CURRENT SITUATION: ECONOMIC RELATIONS<br>AND POWER      | 26 |
| THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF VILLAGE INDIA                    | 29 |
| PANCHAYAT RAJ AND DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION                | 44 |
| CONCLUSIONS   | 58 |

I would like to express my appreciation to W. D. Buddemeier, Harry Blair, Mary Carras, Norman Uphoff, and John Mellor for their comments on an earlier version of this paper and to the Rural Development Committee of the Center for International Studies, Cornell University for their encouragement and assistance. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Mid-West Conference on Asian Affairs, Urbana, Illinois, October 15, 1972.

## INTRODUCTION

In 1960 the Government of India, acting on the Congress Party's Resolution on Agrarian Organization adopted at its Nagpur session in 1959, decided to direct its rural development efforts through two new local institutions: the first, a system of cooperatives which could mobilize and coordinate the economic activities of individual farmers and serve as a conduit for many scarce agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizer and credit; and the second, a new form of local self-government--Panchayat Raj, or rule by Panchayats--which would serve to raise resources for public works and community development projects as well as assisting extension officers in the spread of new agricultural techniques, health practices, and other improvements within the village. The two institutions were perceived as complementary in their functions and integrated by a set of shared principles: local self-help, collective attacks on common problems, the improvement and strengthening of the position of the farmer in Indian society, and intimate cooperation between local agencies and the organs of state administration.

The co-operative was viewed as an organization that would initially serve the individual needs of the farmers and help to strengthen farmers as a class vis-a-vis the market. Eventually, as the co-operative movement spread and as participation was made more complete within the village, following complete implementation of land reform laws by the several states as well as development of mechanisms for including laborers and marginal farmers in its benefits, the co-operative was to become the basis for the management of land in rural India. Far more than a mere convenience, it was to be the model for the organization of rural economic life. In conjunction with other policies, such as land reform it would not only improve rural incomes, but would also play a major role in the just distribution of that increase.

Panchayat Raj, on the other hand, was to provide the political expression of village needs and to provide the village with the means for attacking the whole range of community problems related to the modernization process--both economic and non-economic. As a lobby for the farm community, it was hoped that the panchayat system would, through its elected leaders, overcome much of the apathy, inefficiency, lack of coordination and "quota-consciousness" which had plagued the purely administrative approach of the

earlier Community Development Program. Representative institutions were to inject life and purpose into the flagging development administration. Furthermore, the village as a vital, and now creative and progressive, unit would be resurrected from the despondency engendered by British rural policies. The panchayat was to be the mechanism through which these immense resources, both material and spiritual, could be mobilized for development.

The results of both programs have, however, been mixed. It is evident that increased local control over the financial and material inputs into agriculture has stimulated intense local involvement in the development program. In that respect at least the program has had revolutionary effects. Similarly, it appears that the program has indeed served to encourage the emergence of an agricultural lobby capable of placing pressure on policy makers which affects both the formation and implementation of rural policies. On the other hand, it is far from clear that the new arrangements have generated greater "collective" or "community" efforts to solve local problems. On the contrary, Panchayat Raj seems to have intensified political conflicts within the village which have effectively inhibited cooperative action and restricted the mobilizational capacity of the new institutions. Furthermore, serious questions have been raised about the equity and rationality of the direct interaction between government development efforts and the local power structure which these new institutions have in fact encouraged. India's national leaders seem to have been somewhat taken aback at the capacity of local elites to use the cooperative and the panchayats to influence the distribution of the extensive resources which the Government channeled through them. Obviously not all of the Government's intentions were subverted by the local power structure, but many of them were and among them the most socially and politically innovative and significant.

It will be the purpose of this study to explore three discrete bodies of literature--village power studies, studies of development administration, and the work of agricultural economists--in an attempt to explain systematically both the successes and the failures of the new approach to rural development. Although the study will be concerned both with the co-ops and with Panchayat Raj, the major emphasis will be on the latter. The reasons for this are fairly straightforward. It is hardly surprising that the locally rich and powerful take control of a cooperative's resources. In the normal course of events, the rich control more of the shares, are more "credit worthy," and are in a better position than the poor to profit from the new agricultural inputs channeled through the co-ops. The problem of the elected panchayats, on the other hand, is more complex. The combination of elite domination and institutional ineffectiveness which has characterized panchayat government is related to a variety of

factors including: the villager's use of his vote, the nature of village politics, the nexus of local politics and local administration, and the relationship between political power and the control of agricultural inputs. Our main interest in the cooperatives, therefore, will be in their informal relationship to the village power structure and in their formal relationship to the Panchayat system.

The thesis that will be presented here is that the problems which have been identified by each of these three bodies of literature are interrelated and can be explained by an analysis of the political economy of the development process. The term "political economy" is used here in both its more traditional sense and its more modern application. That is to say, the problems stem from the interaction of rural India's economic and political institutions and are, therefore, rooted in the very structure of rural society--the more traditional meaning of "political economy." In addition, however, the problems are perceived as the consequence of the institutional weakness of the local political order. It will be argued, in the language of the new "political economy," that the power "income" of the institutions of local government is insufficient and insufficiently liquid to sustain the heavy and complex demands on rural leadership which India's national elite have built into the Panchayat Raj system. A brief discussion of the conceptual framework within which this analysis will be presented will be useful here before proceeding to the political economy of rural India specifically.

#### THE POLITICAL ECONOMY APPROACH

Some of the conceptual problems that bear on an analysis of panchayat raj and rural development in India have been addressed by social and political scientists in terms characterized as the "new" political economy. To some readers, the terms will appear quite, perhaps too, abstract. Others will find the concepts illuminating not only for the questions under consideration here but for other development problems as well. In this section, I will set forth some of the basic ideas of the political economy model as they relate to Indian rural development. This is something of a conceptual preface for the sections that follow. Readers not finding it readily comprehensible will, I think, find the subsequent sections more appropriate to their concern with what has been happening in the rural sectors of India.

The "new" political economy represents an attempt to interpret the political system as analogous to the productive process in the economy; after all, we usually talk about the

political "process" and the "profitability" or "liabilities" of certain courses of political action. This new approach is concerned with the conditions which made for productivity or non-productivity of government policies and takes seriously the ideas of political "assets," "resources," "capital," and even "bankruptcy." In this view, the end product of the polity is not "utility" (goods and services) as for the economy, however, but "opportunity for effectiveness," to use Talcott Parsons' phrase describing the capacity to command the cooperation of human beings.<sup>1</sup> It will be apparent from this definition that politics is ubiquitous throughout society and is an essential process in every form of social organization. What distinguishes politics at the national or community level from other forms of politics is simply the scope of the cooperative capacity invoked, the nature of the sanctions available to enforce the "bindingness" of authoritative decisions, and the location within some value hierarchy of the norms which legitimize the goals collectively pursued. The basic conception is of governing institutions constituting a political system in which "authority" is backed ultimately and legitimately by the use of force. This conception is consonant with many of the definitions of politics most widely accepted in political science.

The unique contribution of the new political economy is that it views the maintenance of governmental authority, and hence the capacity of government to continue to secure cooperative relationships with the public in pursuit of common goals, as essentially problematical. The political system is not merely a construct for automatically "converting" demands into policy decisions. The prior problem, analytically and indeed empirically, is the generation, maintenance and expansion of the power and authority of government which make the political leadership effective in pursuit of regime goals.

---

<sup>1</sup>T. Parsons, "The Political Aspect of Social Structure and Process," Politics and Social Structure (New York: Free Press, 1969) p. 319.

<sup>2</sup>D. Easton, A Framework for Political Analysis (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1965) p. 50.

Emphasis on the critical role of leadership and of elites generally in the political process is another characteristic of the new political economy. The process of maintaining governmental power, balancing inputs and outputs, is not an automatic "homeostatic" process but rather the consequence of policy interaction among elites in pursuit of their own goals, and their success depends on their respective resource endowments and their own skills. Success goes to entrepreneurial skill in manipulating the political market by developing new markets, new products, etc., and to technological competence, in improving the "capital-output ratio" of political processes. Within such a context, the analysis centers on the substantive questions of political exchange and the technical problems of institutional arrangements rather than on abstract system "functions." In consequence, it is possible to bring the discussion much closer to the real circumstances of decision makers and the real dilemmas which confront them in choosing among alternative strategies and goals.

In the new political economy, then, "exchange" becomes the organizing concept for studying political processes, seen in terms of interaction and transactions. The political process is one in which political actors, both those making up the regime and those challenging its rule, mobilize resources for collective purposes by exchanging economic resources, social status, information, or sharing in authoritative decision-making in return for the citizens' cooperation and acceptance.<sup>3</sup> Elites in authority may acquire income in a variety of forms--economic, social, political, informational, normative--and from a variety of sources--i.e. different sectors of the polity. The central problem for the regime is how to use this diverse income received to generate commitment to regime purposes: in Parson's terms, translating the factors of effectiveness (the factors of political production, as analogues to land, labor and capital in economic production) into claims on public cooperation (public goods). Elites must exercise judgment concerning which resources they choose to exploit, how much energy they will expend in extracting resources, and above all, what technical skills to employ in converting the production of commitments to effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> If they fall below some

---

<sup>3</sup>Warren Ilichman and Norman Uphoff, The Political Economy of Change (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

<sup>4</sup>Parsons, op.cit., p. 319.

minimal acceptable performance in any of these areas, they will fail in competition with alternative elites, and the political system will be poverty stricken in terms of its public capacities, undergoing political "recession" or even "depression." With respect to any political system, then, we must ask about the resources available to the government elite (or elites), the institutional arrangements for converting these factors into political goods and services, and the growth potential of the political economy as a whole.

Adopting the metaphor of exchange does not mean that this always entails a direct barter of goods for goods. In the economy, exchange is facilitated and extended in time and space by the utilization of currencies, transactional media which permit the storage and transfer of value. The value of money in the economic process is determined by a variety of factors, not all of them economic. While the ratio of money supply to the available goods and services clearly has a major effect on its value in transactions, other factors also enter in, such as trust in one's fellow citizens and faith in the institutional support of the currency. These are attitudinal requisites of a stable monetary system. Further, it is clear that if certain crucial values are not monetized and are unavailable from market exchange, the common currency will be of less importance and be less acceptable as the basis for facilitating exchange. If one cannot buy job insurance on the market, as an obvious example, one may acquire some security through an exchange of other resources, by entering into a patron-client relationship, offering or pledging, say, support instead of money. All this is to say that in developmental societies we need to be particularly concerned with the aggregation of power to support governmental effectiveness and that various political currencies serve the facilitating role of freeing exchange relations from the constraints of barter; with support, promises, threats, etc. as liquid claims on resources, the political process can work more smoothly and in a more expansionary manner.<sup>5</sup>

Political exchange, the political economists argue, is characterized by the emergence of currencies or media that are analogous to money in the economy.<sup>6</sup> Commitments to effectiveness (collective action) are stored and transferred through time and space by means of currencies which confer

---

<sup>5</sup> R.T. Holt and J.E. Turner, The Political Basis of Economic Development (Princeton: Van Nostrand, 1966) p. 311.

<sup>6</sup> P. Blau, Exchange and Power in Social Life (New York: John Wiley, 1967) p. 268; see also Parsons, op.cit., p. 325.

power on their recipients and holders because they represent claims on others' resources. Indeed, Parsons would have us view power as a generalized medium for securing cooperation in the pursuit of common goals.<sup>7</sup>

It is entirely possible, however, that political exchange, like economic exchange, may in certain circumstances be characterized by direct, face-to-face barter arrangements. The existence of such barter arrangements in either arena is usually interpreted as the consequence of "primitive" social systems which have not yet evolved the more complex, autonomous and flexible systems of market exchange through generalized currencies which characterize "modern" systems. The major consequence of such "underdevelopment" is that the scope of collective action is restricted by the limited capacity of direct barter exchanges--characteristically in two-person dyadic relationships.<sup>8</sup> In such a situation, little surplus can be generated and neither can there be much support or credit generated by the political system to employ for collective purposes as defined by the elites.<sup>9</sup> As with money, the reasons for the society's failure to develop generalized media of exchange may be varied. It may very well be that the social structure limits exchange parochially and particularistically to fairly narrow arenas, so that generalized capacity is simply not relevant.<sup>10</sup> Concomitantly, a decline in community consensus on normative values may reduce the level of trust and understanding within the community, a condition which is even more disastrous for sustaining the value of power as a medium of exchange than it is for money.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Parsons, op.cit., p. 361.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 344.

<sup>9</sup>S. N. Eisenstadt, The Political System of Empires (London: Free Press, 1963) p. 27.

<sup>10</sup>An excellent example of such containment of political exchange can be found in Max Gluckman's description of the mechanisms of social control in his Custom and Conflict in Tribal Africa (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1967). In these tribal societies, social control is highly ritualized and hence specific in its application. It also depends on diffuse face-to-face contacts for its effectiveness. In such circumstances both "elites" and regulatory institutions lack autonomous capacity to direct the use of resources.

<sup>11</sup>The classic study of the consequences of such a normative collapse for a society's capacity for collective action is E. C. Banfield, The Moral Basis of a Backward Society (New York: Free Press, 1958).

Finally, institutional mechanisms for transferring "factors of effectiveness" or political income to elites may mean that they have little to exchange on the political market, even if a market exchange were possible. Whatever the cause, where the scope of exchange is constrained, there is little growth potential in such political economies.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, in the context of political economy, it is generally assumed that political actors are both rational and calculating in their choice of policy. That is to say, that the politician has a schedule of preferred goals, that he makes some calculation of the cost-benefit ratio of alternative strategies, and that he reaches a decision on the basis of which strategy will economize on his resources and maximize his gains. It need not be assumed that the actor is omniscient nor that his goals are mutually compatible--merely that he calculates. Analysis based on such assumptions is often valuable in that it expands the explanatory potential of the situation, which can be fairly objectively defined, and reduces the role of such amorphous factors as "personality" and "culture." Thus one can frequently show that when a farmer fails to adopt a new agricultural technique, it is because, given his schedule of preferences, it simply does not pay.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, when a political leader fails to act for the general benefit of the community, it may simply mean that the returns from such dedication to the public weal are not nearly so productive politically as comparable resources applied for more private ends.

It may even be argued, as does Mancur Olson, that there are situations in which appropriate choices will not be made even though they "pay" for everyone.<sup>14</sup> The crucial factor

---

<sup>12</sup>Parsons, op.cit., p. 345.

<sup>13</sup>Scarlett Epstein, for example, traces the complex calculations of Wangala's small farmers who must weigh the greater profits and greater labor demands of paddy cultivation against the problems of water supply and the availability of employment outside the village. The best solution for many is to grow a less valuable crop of ragi, which makes little demand on time and investment, and to seek employment outside agriculture. cf. Economic Development and Social Change in South India (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1963) pp. 222-3.

<sup>14</sup>The Logic of Collective Action (New York: Schocken, 1971), Introduction

here, he suggests, is not a simple cost-benefit ratio, but rather the ratio of individual benefits to total benefits. Where the benefits are widely diffused, the individual does not appreciably improve his profits or his competitive position by making the contribution, or investment, expected of him. Only if he could control the distribution of benefits or alternatively, compel others to share in the cost would it make sense for him to finance what is in this case both in his and the public's interest. Thus, even without attributing nefarious motives to the village elites or cultural backwardness to the peasant community, one might anticipate that rural development programs might impose some awkward and even irrational choices on local politicians which they would prefer to avoid.

In the analysis which follows, particular attention will be given to three aspects of the foregoing sketch of current political economy thinking. First, the distinction between media (currency) exchange and barter exchange will be of particular importance in explaining the weakness of local leadership. It will be argued that the major political income of local elites in village India comes from direct dyadic bargains for benefits and does not develop into stores of generalized claims on cooperation. Second, it will be argued that the foremost institutional arrangement for producing political power out of the factors of effectiveness--the popular election--produces in this case an adulterated product. Resources (usually economic) are exchanged for votes, but votes do not seem to represent a transfer of power. The election may determine who exercises direct control over the resources which are channeled through the local government institutions, but they do not transfer any generalized legitimacy to the office holder, and legitimacy is one of the most valuable resources he can possess since it entitled him to secure voluntary compliance with authoritative decisions. Third, it will be argued that a careful examination of the political benefits and costs of cooperation with various government development programs will explain many of the successes and failures of the Panchayat Raj experiment. Generally speaking, any program which provides the politicians with influence over the distribution of scarce and divisible benefits will be popular. However, no program that demands that he raise resources from within the village will be of interest to him unless the village elites are virtually unanimous in their calculation that the project provides considerable personal advantages.

This may all sound fairly pessimistic, but it focuses on points at which the Panchayat Raj experiment has run into the most difficulty. It assumes a model of human behavior--rational and self-interested--which has proved more realistic

than any of those with which the experiment began. Further, it raises consideration of the Panchayat Raj system to a level where its implications for the political development of India can be assessed. With this conceptual background, we turn to our examination of the Indian experience with panchayat raj and rural development.

#### THE EVOLUTION OF GOVERNMENT AGRICULTURAL POLICY IN INDIA

In attempting to understand the performance of the new institutions of local government in India, one must place them in the context of administrative and political decisions that have done so much to shape the relationship of the villages with the outside world since independence.

The community development program which was initiated in 1952 was not the single, coherent, rationally conceived development program which Government of India documents would have one believe. Nor is it really adequate to speak of "the program" and "the policy of the Government of India" as many Western scholars do. It should be recognized from the outset that development policy in India, like public policy anywhere, is the result of a political process in which interests and pressures are adjusted to produce a viable program. In the Indian case, there were three politically significant bodies of opinion on the problems of the village; none of them, it might be noted, the opinion of farmers. The civil servants constituted the first group. They were initially the most important, because they had had the responsibility for regulating food and agriculture extensively during the Second World War. Almost immediately upon the transfer of power to the Congress Party in 1967, a second group appeared, as a small development lobby began to stake out a claim to the village and matters affecting the village as their special prerogative. Central to this lobby were various Gandhian elements in the Party, although association with Gandhi was not the only source of enthusiasm for rural uplift. Third and somewhat late in the game, the economists of the Planning Commission began to use their access to the Prime Minister and their central role in the planning process to influence the distribution of resources.

There were a number of points on which all three of these elite groups were in agreement. Their first and most important agreement was that the villager, being viewed as backward and illiterate, was the focus of the problem to be solved. At the outset at least, the best that the development workers could expect from the farmer was apathy; at the worst, outright

hostility. A second point of agreement was a basic mistrust of the market mechanism and, most especially, of the merchant class that served as the intermediary between the village and the market. Depending upon what was perceived as the goal of government action, the profit motive, at least as embodied in India's merchants, was viewed alternatively as immoral, irrational or inefficient. Moreover, serious doubts were expressed about the capacity of the market for economic mobilization and the extent to which its operations were compatible with social justice.

The solutions of the three groups to these rural problems differed, but again it was generally accepted that any solution would require positive government initiative, in one form or another, to transform or overcome the dead weight of the rural economy.<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> cf. Government of India, Planning Commission, The First Five Year Plan (New Delhi: Government of India, 1952). Although the First Five Year Plan is replete with statements such as "While the official machinery has to guide and assist, the principle responsibility for improving their own condition must rest with the people themselves." (p. 223) it is equally clear that the planners perceived that this would not occur naturally. Compare the foregoing statement, for example, with the following: "Extension is a continuous process designed to make the rural people aware of their problems, and indicating to them the ways and means by which they can solve them. It thus involves not only education of the rural people in determining their problems and the methods of solving them, but also inspiring them towards positive action in doing so." (p. 232).

Similarly, V. T. Krishnamachari, one of the leading figures in the design and inspiration of the early Community Development Program, commented "...the fundamental objective of the National Extension movement is to bring about a social change, to assist in the creation of a new pattern of society, and to change the outlook of the families in the countryside." Community Development in India (Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1958) p. 60. Even more to the point is the comment by Tarlok Singh, one of the leading Planning Commission administrators: "It is not to be expected that by itself the village community will be an activating, dynamic force. It can become so only in virtue of the catalytic forces released by planned economic development on a national scale." Toward an Integrated Society (Westport: Greenwood, 1969) p. 23.

The program was to be voluntaristic, flexible, oriented toward increasing the village's capacity for self-help and the villager's self-assurance--true. Nevertheless, this capacity for self-help was a goal to be attained by inspired administrative leadership; it was not seen as characteristic of the existing situation. Finally, as a corollary of government's positive role, the immediate problem seemed to be the nature of the administrative arrangements which linked government to the rural society. It was thus argued that the salient issues were primarily administrative (the structure of governmental power in the village).

The first group, the civil servants, had in many ways the most effective, if the least dramatic, effect on the development of rural policy. Having suffered through the experience of war-time controls, officials in the Food and Agricultural Ministry in Delhi, and in the States as well, were virtually unanimous in rejecting extensive, direct, physical controls on the production process, prices and distribution. During the war, it was argued, the Government had been trapped in a bog of ever-increasing controls which strained the administrative machine beyond its capacities and the public beyond endurance.<sup>16</sup> Decentralization, flexibility and a relatively free market (suitably contained when necessary) were to be preferred to massive administrative intervention. Nevertheless, the Ministry had no doubt that it was only through administrative initiative, guidance and perhaps regulation that the farmer could be expected to overcome his backward state.<sup>17</sup> The Grow More Food Campaign and the Integrated Production Program of the early fifties demanded government leadership in a comprehensive program in which "...land, water and livestock resources of the country will be coordinated on a scientific basis and developed..."<sup>18</sup> Even today, in the new system of Panchayat Raj, there is still a tendency to see initiative and coordination as government responsibilities and exclusive attributes of government.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> cf. N. K. Nicholson, "Political Aspects of Indian Food Policy," Pacific Affairs, Vol. XLI, No. 1, Spring 1968, pp. 37-9.

<sup>17</sup> C. H. Hanumantha Rao, "Agricultural Policy Under the Three Plans," in N. Srinivasan, ed., Agricultural Administration in India (New Delhi: Government of India, 1951) p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Agriculture, Integrated Production Program (New Delhi: Government of India, 1951)p.1.

<sup>19</sup> cf. Government of India, Planning Commission, Fourth Five Year Plan (New Delhi: Government of India, 1966) p. 181.  
"The role of government...is to assist farmers to take the right decisions consistent with national goals and policies and to implement them to their utmost capacity and resources."

The second group, which we shall term the "Gandhians," agreed with the administrators that the administrative controls of the war era had been disastrous, but most particularly on the moral values and initiative of the community. Such controls should, therefore, be avoided. Instead, government efforts should be directed toward social reform and moral revival to restore to the village, as a community, the autonomy, initiative, energy and integrity which it was presumed to have once had. In this effort the guidance of dedicated development workers would be needed and in the area of land reform, if necessary, the coercive power of Government might even be employed. With adequate effort, however, rural society could be reconstituted from the torn shreds left by colonialism and war. It would not be shoddy, but a new village millenia.<sup>20</sup>

The Gandhians dominated the idiom of the early development program and in fact its basic programmatic emphasis. Although provision was made to improve the supply of inputs into agriculture and there were demands early in the fifties that greater attention be given to the economic problems of the farmers, the stated emphasis of the community development program remained rural reconstruction and not the problems of farm productivity. The welfare of the farmer was to be advanced not so much by strengthening the farm economy as by strengthening the village.<sup>21</sup> The central issue related to the productive process was the control of social justice rather than an economic issue.<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Shriman Narayan, Principles of Gandhian Planning (Allahabad: Kitab Mahal, 1960) Parts I and II. See also M. K. Gandhi, Village Swaraj (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House, 1962).

<sup>21</sup> V. T. Krishnamachari, Planning in India (Bombay: Orient Longman, 1961) pp. 42, 48, 179. Krishnamachari argues, for example, "The objective [of the First Five Year Plan] is to change outlooks--to create a feeling of identity of interest in the community and ensure that those who are well placed feel that they have obligation to improve the condition of the other members." (p. 179).

<sup>22</sup> See R. S. Newel, "Ideology and Realities: Land Redistribution in Uttar Pradesh," Pacific Affairs, Vol. 45, No. 2 (Summer 1972) p. 238; W. C. Neale, Economic Change in Rural India (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) Chapter 11; H. C. L. Merillat, Land and the Constitution in India (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970) pp. 105-109.

India's planners' analysis of rural problems was largely dominated by economic models that stressed the efficacy of capital-intensive development. The influence of the Harrod-Domar models on Indian planning is too well known to warrant further comment here,<sup>23</sup> but concomitant with the emphasis on heavy capitalization was the assumption that India's rural economy could neither theoretically nor empirically justify massive inputs of capital and resources.<sup>24</sup> Indian villages were unproductive and bottomless pits into which resources could be poured without end and to no effect. Certainly the rural sector was never viewed as a source of dynamic growth in the economy.<sup>25</sup> In a sense it was accepted that agriculture was ultimately the foundation of India's development efforts but this was because some surplus might be skimmed off if the government had adequate controls to separate that surplus from the villager. In the final analysis, however, it became easier to utilize foreign aid rather than fight the existing opposition to controls; and controls would be essential to any internal mobilization of resources.<sup>26</sup>

The Community Development program was then something of a compromise. The Community Development enthusiasts argued that they could at little cost (in terms of capital) and with a minimum of direct administrative control (the C.D. program was extensive but did not require intensive indepth control of the rural economy) produce dramatic behavioral changes in India's villages which would have dramatic economic benefits. The program also had a general appeal in that it satisfied the conscience of the Congress organization which felt it must do something for India's masses and wanted to believe that agricultural shortages were the consequence of colonial

---

<sup>23</sup>A. H. Hanson, The Process of Planning (London: Oxford, 1966) Chapter 5.

<sup>24</sup>cf. R. Harrod, Towards a Dynamic Economics (London: St. Martin's 1948); E. D. Domar, Essays in the Theory of Economic Growth (London: Oxford University Press, 1957).

<sup>25</sup>Government of India, Planning Commission, The First Five Year Plan: A Draft Outline (New Delhi: Government of India, 1951) p. 14. In the discussion of long term trends in the Indian economy the contrast between the discussion of the industrial sector and the agricultural sector is indicative. In agriculture the "broad picture suggests conditions of stagnation" whereas industry had grown, but not enough to meet the needs of a growing population.

<sup>26</sup>Nicholson, op.cit., p. 43.

status and therefore artificial and unnecessary. The administrators saw it as a means to combat the Planning Commission's growing commitment to extensive physical controls. The economists of the Planning Commission, for their part, don't seem to have been enthusiastic about the proposal, but in the face of intense resistance to their proposals for extracting rural surpluses and given the obvious need for an expansion of wage goods, the program at least had the advantage of making a minimal demand on the Plan's capital budget. Who could tell, it might even pay off. Thus the program became an established part of the Indian development program.

Clearly, none of the parties got entirely what they wanted. In spite of immense enthusiasm in the early stages, the C.D. program never developed the chiliastic zeal the Gandhians hoped for and soon became bogged down in administrative procedure and a concern for physical targets which could be easily evaluated by administrative superiors. The "new" rural development program was there, but administrative controls threatened to destroy the spark of new life. By the mid-fifties it was evident that public response was poor and that the actual results either in community integration or in production were minimal.<sup>27</sup>

It also transpired that many of the economic efforts of the C.D. program while certainly not useless, were not likely to maximize production.<sup>28</sup> All three of the groups which influenced the development of the program perceived themselves as public servants, responsible for the public welfare, and biased, therefore, in favor of projects with a broad public benefit. Emphasis was placed on large, multi-purpose projects, on roads, on community buildings and facilities; and it was hoped that the C.D. workers could arouse enthusiasm and solicit cooperation of the masses in these programs.

Part of the blame must also be laid at the door of the economists' lack of knowledge of what was needed in agriculture-- technological advance and the combination of inputs--but the

---

<sup>27</sup> Government of India, Planning Commission, Committee on Plan Projects, Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service (New Delhi: Government of India, 1957), Volume I, p. 44; Volume II, p. 608.

<sup>28</sup> John Mellor, et.al., Developing Rural India (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968) p. 41. See also, C. H. Hanumantha Rao, op.cit., for a survey of the effects of the agricultural development program during the first three plans.

socialist outlook, Gandhian, Marxist or otherwise, which pervaded the atmosphere made it difficult to think in terms of using government power to alter the conditions of choice of the individual farmer. The government attempted to overcome this difficulty by stressing co-operative farming, but this was never very successful. In the circumstances, therefore, it is not surprising that the farmer was forced to find mechanisms to mediate his private interest and the public interest of the C.D. administration. I would suggest that this is one of the major reasons for the wide-spread conviction among villagers that only the intercession of powerful and well-connected patron-politicians could make the administration sensitive to the needs of individual farmers. It would also be argued that the reported diversion of resources to unplanned uses and the extensive corruption of government intentions represented a recurrence of the age-old village solution to bureaucratic dominance.<sup>29</sup> Through both of these mechanisms, the development process at the local level became increasingly embroiled in factional and patronage networks.

The decade of the sixties witnessed extensive changes in India's agricultural policies. The Ford Foundation's Intensive Agricultural District Program (IADP)<sup>30</sup> made the first major innovation with its emphasis on the needs of the individual farmer.<sup>31</sup> Basically, it recommended a package of essential practices and inputs, provided by government and concentrated in a few key productive areas, as the means by which India would be enabled to rapidly increase production. In its emphasis on production, the Ford Team report stimulated and reflected growing concern in administrative and planning circles about the state of Indian agriculture. Population growth and inflation had both brought about rapid increases in demands for food grains which the farmers proved unable

---

<sup>29</sup> For example, see: Planning Commission, Program Evaluation Organization, Study of Utilization of Cooperative Loans (New Delhi: Government of India, 1965) Chapter V. This is a typical example of government frustrations with the machinations of the local elites. An interesting comparison could be made with R.E. Frykenberg's treatment in Gunter District: 1788-1848 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965).

<sup>30</sup> Government of India, Ministry of Food and Agriculture and Ministry Community Development and Cooperation, Report on India's Food Crisis and Steps to Meet It (By the Agricultural Production Team sponsored by the Ford Foundation), (New Delhi: April, 1959).

<sup>31</sup> cf. C.T. Taylor, et.al., India's Roots of Democracy (New York: Praeger, 1965) pp. 245-259, for an excellent description of the Ford proposals, see especially p. 249: "...all points focused on the objective of assisting individual cultivators... to increase their agricultural output."

to supply, and as alternative approaches proved inadequate the persuasiveness of the Ford Team's position became greater. The IADP was not by any means an overwhelming success.<sup>32</sup> But it did provide a strategy of development and a new orientation for policy which, when added to other factors, produced substantial changes in the social and economic philosophy of India's planning efforts.

Ever since World War Two, the Government of India had been experimenting with various systems of controls, on the assumption that the problem was in the weakness of the market and the vices of the trading community. But although controls had been able at times to alleviate the symptoms of shortage they had not overcome the basic problem--lack of food. Beginning in 1964 the Government of India began to take a much more active role in manipulating grain and other agricultural prices in order to maintain production levels.<sup>33</sup> Once again, however, it appeared that prices were only symptomatic of the basic weaknesses of the rural economy--low productivity, inadequate technology, lack of key inputs, and an imperfect market mechanism--and could not be solved by public control over "anti-social elements" or through the mechanism of price incentives.

Political developments during the sixties added pressure in the direction of the Ford proposals. Domestically, the growing power of the agricultural castes in local politics had begun to place demands on party leaders to increase government services to the farm community in order to secure the base of the Congress Party. Internationally, India had learned by 1965 the diplomatic risks involved in a continuing dependence on American grain shipments; as when the United States stopped the flow of P. L. 480 grain to India in an attempt to bring pressure on the Government of India to terminate the Indo-Pakistan war which broke out that year. Self-sufficiency had long been a slogan in Indian politics but never had it been politically more attractive.

---

<sup>32</sup>Nicholson, op.cit., pp. 44-5.

<sup>33</sup>D. D. Brown, Agricultural Development in India's Districts (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).

The final fillip to the shift in priorities and strategy occurred in 1965-66 when India began to acquire the new "miracle" hybrid grains and her planners began to perceive that the diversion of capital investment to agriculture and the expansion of industrial capacity for the production of essential farm inputs (e.g. fertilizer) would in fact now yield a respectable return on investment.

The other major theme in India's rural development during the sixties came from the Mehta Committee Report.<sup>34</sup> The Report provided the basic outline for the new system of Panchayat Raj which emerged in the sixties as the major vehicle for channeling agricultural inputs to the farmer. Here again the original emphasis of the Community Development enthusiasts was revived. Public enthusiasm and cooperation, stimulated by government authority, were still the answer to India's rural problems. Community action would be strengthened by a massive input of external resources into community institutions.

In the sixties as in the fifties, the combination of populist enthusiasm with administratively guided growth proved awkward. The panchayats had relatively little opportunity to pursue their own programs in their own way, largely because they lacked the will to raise their own tax resources needed for such programs. In consequence they remained dependent on external resources and tied to official programs. This dependence has been further encouraged by the fact that Panchayat Raj was and is widely viewed as a part of the "administration of rural development." It is the lowest tier in the system of an administratively controlled development effort. The financial control of the district administration over the panchayat is impressive, as is the Block Development Officer's responsibility for the proper functioning of the panchayat and its programs. Panchayat politics, then, very much centers on the relationship between local government and administration.<sup>35</sup>

Government intentions in the village over the years have, thus, been mixed and often contradictory. Some of the programs have been productive and well founded, some not. But it would be a mistake to assume that a consistent

---

<sup>34</sup> Government of India, Planning Commission, Committee on Plan Projects, Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects and National Extension Service (New Delhi: Government of India, 1957).

<sup>35</sup> Iqbal Narain, et.al., Panchayat Raj Administration (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1970) Part II.

philosophy consistently implemented has in fact characterized the experience of the villager with his government over these two decades. To reiterate the point, the theme of community revival has consistently been in conflict with the theme of controlled and coordinated economic development. It would also appear that the needs and interests of the individual farmer, at least in the short run, have frequently been in conflict with the intention of the C.D. program to manipulate him for broader community purposes. It could be argued, for example, that scarce agricultural inputs under the control of development agencies have often been used to barter for farmers' cooperation with various development programs. The external observer has the impression that all of the criticisms of administrative inefficiency and lack of coordination and energy in getting these needed seeds, fertilizers etc. to the farmer merely represent a misunderstanding of the functional significance of these resources to the development program. They are, in fact, the price of cooperation with administrative purposes. Most of the literature on community development tends to avoid these political issues of conflicting purposes and pressures and to treat their consequences as problems of administrative inefficiency and lack of training. In consequence we have very little information on the politics of the development process or, which is more crucial, any consensus on the framework within which such questions should be asked. It is hoped that the present study can contribute somewhat to this.

#### THE TRADITIONAL VILLAGE: SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND POWER

In view of the variety of rural conditions in India and the diversity of administrative arrangements which have linked the village to the Government over the past century or two, it is probably risky to posit a model of the "traditional" village. Nevertheless, there are a number of characteristics of village life that appear to have been fairly common and are directly relevant to our interests here. These will be presented with reference to the jajmani system which we will assume represents an ideal type stable solution to the problem of rural society in India as well as a model of the "good" Hindu society. Individual villages may only have approximated the jajmani system to a greater or lesser degree, but we will accept as a fact that this was the model toward which they moved in

their efforts to harmonize relations within the village.<sup>36</sup>

The "traditional" village is perceived both analytically and empirically as an autonomous unit. Although the outside world intruded in the form of tax collectors, and the villager's attention was directed outside for marriages and occasional religious functions, this does not seem to have altered the parochial nature of the village community. This isolation is important for our analysis for two reasons. First, various imperial administrations, be they British or Moghul, do not seem to have made any fundamental changes in the village power structure. This assertion should probably be qualified with the observation that the British so seem to have strengthened the position of the intermediaries between the village and the outside, the zemindars, but this had a marginal effect on the village.<sup>37</sup> Because of the autonomy of the village, power within it was largely self-sufficient. Village accountants and other agents of the Government were inevitably men of influence within the village, but their influence was limited by the government's unconcern with village affairs. The most important local source

---

<sup>36</sup> Useful analyses of the jajmani system can be found in the following: T. O. Beidelman, A Comparative Analysis of the Jajmani System (Locust Valley: J. J. Augustin for the Association for Asian Studies, 1959); H. A. Gould, "The Hindu Jajmani System: A Case of Economic Particularism," Southwestern Journal of Anthropology, Vol. 13, pp. 3-16; P. M. Kolenda, "Toward a Model of the Hindu Jajmani System," Human Organization, Vol. 22, pp. 11-31; D. G. Mandelbaum, Society in India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) Vol. I, Ch. 9; W. L. Rowe, "Changing Rural Class Structure and the Jajmani System," Human Organization, Vol. 22, pp. 41-4.

<sup>37</sup> An excellent analysis of the capacity of the village to resist Governmental intrusions is found in R. E. Frykenberg, Gunter District, op.cit. Other studies of British land policy and its effects include: E. Stokes, The English Utilitarians and India (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959); R. E. Frykenberg, ed., Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965); W. C. Neale, Economic Change in Rural India (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); P. Griffiths, The British Impact on India (London: Macdonald, 1952). In addition, R. G. Fox, Kin, Clan, Raja and Rule (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971) offers an interesting analysis of the consequences of state power for the peripheral village.

of power was land and, in the absence of alternative externally supported power roles, it was the landlord (jajman) who was supreme.<sup>38</sup>

In addition to the economic power derived from control of the land, ritual status within the caste system has always been an important source of power within the Indian village. Although the two sources of power, economic and ritual, are independent in the short run, they are intimately interrelated in the long run. Over time, the economic success of a caste will usually result in a substantial improvement in their ritual status. Even in the short run, there is some inter-relationship in that the jajmani system defines land control as an upper caste function and tends to add ritual prestige to the economic power of the jajman.<sup>39</sup>

The second consequence of the autonomy of the traditional village is in the structure of the economy. In the traditional village the factors of production are located entirely within the village and are almost entirely under the direct personal control of the jajman mediated through the socio-economic relationships defined by the jajmani system. As in the power structure, the economic structure is relatively unaffected by extra-village influences. Technological change is irrelevant, the village economy is poorly linked with the broader market, if at all, and machinery and other capital inputs into agriculture are little used. In short, the productive process is self-contained within the village and under the control of the landlord.

It should also be noted that the jajman's control over the factors of production is not a function of his economic efficiency (or rationality). Although it is probably true at the margin that incompetence and irrationality in the productive process will lead to individual, clan, or village decline, this is quite different from saying that economic resources will be distributed according to their most productive uses. Access to land, agricultural labor, and services is largely ascribed in the jajmani system and maintained by the fusion of economic, political and ritual power. Within limits, the jajman is insulated from the effects of economic irrationality or incompetence.

---

<sup>38</sup>W. C. Neale, "Land is to Rule," in R. E. Frykenberg, ed., Land Control and Social Structure in Indian History, op.cit., pp. 3-16.

<sup>39</sup>Kolenda, op.cit., p. 21.

In Parson's terminology, then, the jajman controls "opportunities for effectiveness" within the Indian village. His strategic location within the jajmani system means that he concentrates command over all the factors of economic production and it is only through him that his clients can organize their productive activities.<sup>40</sup> Within our model he also controls the factors of political production. He combines in his hands the "rights" and ritual status of the jajman, the diffuse ties of loyalty and interest of a type of patron-client system, and the economic services of his parjan (client). Although the system appears to have permitted caste mobility and competition according to pragmatic<sup>41</sup> conflict rules, the results were always validated by changes in ritual status thus reinforcing the normative authority of the higher castes, specified in any

---

<sup>40</sup> Harold Gould's analysis in "A Jajmani System of North India: Its Structure, Magnitude and Meaning," Ethnology, Vol. 3, pp. 12-41, suggests that such a statement should be made with reservation. There were many exchanges which took place within the village which were unrelated to the network of interdependence surrounding the jajman. Similarly, E. B. Harper, "Two Systems of Exchange in Village India," American Anthropologist, Vol. LXI, pp. 760-778, finds two systems of economic organization among villages in the same region. One was the jajmani type, but the other was a cash-based, market-oriented system for the production of cash crops. It is useful to keep in mind, therefore, that the jajmani system was most likely characteristic of subsistence--i.e., non-market--agriculture and limited in its classic form to the network of interdependence surrounding the village elite. Even with the reservation, however, it is still useful as a contrast with the present circumstances of village elites.

<sup>41</sup> R. Nicholas, "Rules, Resources, and Political Activity," and F. G. Bailey, "Paropolitical Systems," in J. J. Schwartz, ed., Local-Level Politics (Chicago: Aldine, 1968) pp. 293-322.

particular instance to the local dominant<sup>42</sup> caste. Similarly, the ritual system influenced the nature of the patron-client tie. Though there was undoubtedly an element of calculated self-interest in such relationships<sup>43</sup> and continual adjustments of obligations (especially if a given service caste was in short supply), the jajmani system was relatively insensitive to "price changes" and "changes in demand." The ritual definition of status and obligation produced a structure that was highly inelastic. Finally, the status of the jajman was assured by his direct control over both the land and its produce (life itself) in the form of grain portions that were exchanged for the service and loyalty of his parjan. [The words parjan and jajman have no plural form in Hindi.]

Where the village was organized in something resembling the jajmani system, therefore, power clustered around jajman in vertically organized groupings which are reasonably independent economically and politically for most village purposes. Whenever the jajmani system breaks down, however, alternative structures are possible. Ralph Nicholas suggests, for example, that where land and power are concentrated in a very few hands, the clusterings of the jajmani model are replaced by horizontal caste/class divisions.<sup>44</sup>

To complete the picture of the traditional village polity, it is necessary to mention two additional power structures both of which have had some significance for modern village politics. The first is the caste panchayat and the second the village panchayat.<sup>45</sup> The caste panchayat is usually composed of the

---

<sup>42</sup>M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) p. 13.

<sup>43</sup>cf. J. D. Powell, "Peasant Society and Clientelist Politics," American Political Science Review, Vol. LXIV, pp. 411-425, and J. C. Scott, "Patron-Client Politics and Political Change in S. E. Asia," American Political Science Review, Vol. LXVI, pp. 91-113, for general discussions of the relationship. Kolenda's discussion of Leach's analysis is also relevant here, op.cit., pp. 24-8.

<sup>44</sup>R. Nicholas, "Politics in Villages in Southern Asia," in M. Singer and R. Cohn, eds., Structure and Change in Indian Society, (Chicago: Aldine, 1968) Chapter 11.

<sup>45</sup>Mandelbaum, op.cit., Chapters 16-18.

elders of a particular caste and even today regulates the ritualized behavior code of caste members--enforcing compliance and directing and sanctioning alterations. In the past, the integrity of the whole caste system depended on the successful integration of caste performances through the regulatory functions of the caste panchayats. Furthermore, such flexibility as existed within the caste system also depended on the caste panchayat, because the ideology of caste demands that changes in the ritual behavior of the entire caste group must accompany changes in its power if the higher status to which the caste aspires is to be legitimized. Naturally the reverse is also true.<sup>46</sup> If a caste is to avoid losing status it must prevent the deviation of any of its members from prescribed norms. The caste panchayat has traditionally provided the sanctions to either encourage or prevent alterations in the group's ritual practice.

The power of the caste panchayat within the caste emanates from a variety of sources. Certainly the cultural veneration of age helps to maintain the authority of the caste elders. In addition, the individual caste member's social and psychic identity depends on the ascriptive status he gains as a caste member. He has, in consequence, a strong interest in helping to maintain that status. The panchayat also performs important welfare functions for the caste in protecting the rights of individual members when they come in conflict with their jajman or others within the village.<sup>47</sup> The caste ideally has a monopoly over certain occupations, access to which, for example, is protected and distributed, in case of conflict, by the caste panchayat. The caste may even deny its services entirely to the community if it feels that the rights of members have been abrogated.

Fundamentally, however, the power of the caste panchayat rests on the caste system's definition of status and function in group terms. To the extent that the system inhibits the pursuit of individual interests through individual effort, the panchayat benefits from being the only available mechanism for

---

<sup>46</sup> cf. B. Cohn, "The Changing Status of a Depressed Caste," in McKim Marriot, ed., Village India (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955) pp. 53-77; Bailey, op.cit.

<sup>47</sup> cf. M. C. Pradhan, The Political System of the Jats of Northern India (London: Oxford University Press, 1966) p. 195; A. C. Mayer, Caste and Kinship in Central India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960) Ch. XII.

caste action within the traditional order. In consequence, whenever group interests are clearly salient, its power may be substantial. It depends, nevertheless, on the willingness of caste members to make their services available to the caste leadership to enforce, through social pressures, panchayat decisions. The caste panchayat has no coercive capacity of its own and it has no authority outside a caste-based social order.

The village panchayat has been the subject of much discussion over the years. It is widely perceived as the village government and hence as the institution through which village cooperation should be mobilized. It should be recognized, however, that the authority of the village panchayat rests on two major foundations both of which are highly pragmatic. First, the panchayat is highly valued as a vehicle for effecting and expressing consensus because it is widely recognized that internal conflict within the village can lead to violence, on the one hand, and seriously weaken the village in defending itself against the outside world, on the other. The second foundation of panchayat authority is the fact that it is usually the creature of the dominant caste or, which is to say the same thing, the collective jajman. A useful pragmatic rule is that when the powerful speak, the weak obey. The authority of the panchayat expands to any issue, then, which is likely to endanger the harmony of the village--inter-caste conflict, inter-factional demands, and even caste or clan disputes that threaten to spread into broader conflicts.<sup>48</sup> The effective power of the panchayat, as distinct from the authority it claims in the name of consensus, is the power it draws from the services of the leading landlords. When the leading powers of the village are in agreement, the panchayat can claim all of the fused power of the collectivity of jajman. In the absence of such agreement, however, it stands little chance of asserting itself against a deviant caste or clan or even a recalcitrant jajman.

In a sense, then, the village panchayat is institutionally the weakest of the three centers of power within the traditional village. If one examines the sources and structure of power within the village it becomes clear that the power of the panchayat is largely derivative from the power of the jajman

---

<sup>48</sup> Pradhan, op.cit., p. 31; Mandelbaum, op.cit., Chs. 19-20; R. Retzlaff, Village Government in India (New York: Asia, 1962) pp. 21-26; C.C. Taylor, et.al., India's Roots of Democracy, op.cit., p. 93.

as well as from the authority of caste leaders and their interest in maintaining the structure of caste relationships. Whenever either of these indirect sources of power declines, the village panchayat, as an institution, has little autonomous power. I would argue, then, that although undoubtedly a powerful force within a stable, traditional village, the panchayat was in institutional terms a rather weak foundation for a program of community development and village self-government during a period of rapid change and decay in the structure of jajmani and caste relationships.

THE CURRENT SITUATION: ECONOMIC RELATIONS AND POWER

In the current situation, although landholding may be somewhat more diffuse as a result of land reform and rural incomes have generally risen, economic power in the village is still highly concentrated. Nearly 60% of all holdings are still under five acres and these households account for only 15.5% of the cultivated land.<sup>49</sup> The availability of land for rental or lease is a matter of some dispute. P.V. John suggests that larger landholders (over 50 acres) lease out as much as a quarter of their holdings, being unable or unwilling to cultivate the entire holding personally. An alternative, and not necessarily contradictory, interpretation is that, beginning with land reform and reinforced by the introduction of the new high yielding seed varieties, there has been a strong trend in rural India toward greater insecurity in access to land. The land reform laws made it difficult for landlords to make and enforce leases, causing them to resume control over their lands directly or, alternatively, to enter into temporary and uninstitutionalized tenancy agreements with clients. As production was made more profitable by use of cash crops or new grain varieties, there was a strong pressure on farmers to do away with tenancy entirely and to work their land with hired labor that they could more directly control.<sup>50</sup> Thus land, the major source of rural economic power, still remains in the hands of the few.

---

<sup>49</sup> P. V. John, Some Aspects of the Structure of Indian Agricultural Economy (Bombay: Asia, 1968) pp. 91-102.

<sup>50</sup> S. K. Sanyal, "Has There Been a Decline in Agricultural Tenancy," Economic and Political Weekly, May 6, 1972, pp. 943-5; P. C. Agarwal, "Impact of Green Revolution on Landless Labor," Economic and Political Weekly, Nov. 20, 1971, pp. 2363-5; F. R. Frankel, India's Green Revolution (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971) Ch. 1.

The major change between the current and the "traditional" rural economy is not in the pattern of landholding, but rather in the integration of the rural economy into the market system and the growing complexity of the productive process. No longer does the mere possession of land assure control over "effectiveness" through the security of the jajmani system. Although many jajmani relationships persist,<sup>51</sup> agricultural labor is increasingly removed from the system and becomes a market commodity. In most areas this has not presented a problem because labor has been in surplus supply.<sup>52</sup> There is some evidence, however, that as labor demands are increased by the utilization of the new varieties, the farmer may be forced to go outside the village system for a solution--farm machinery.

For factors other than labor, effective farming already depends on control of extra-village and extra-jajmani resources. Credit, water, seeds, fertilizer, and technical knowledge are all essential to modern farming and all are supplied through extra-village agencies. This means that the farmer's traditional combination of economic and ritual power no longer suffices to make him an effective farmer with complete control over the factors of production. Second, the facts of the Indian situation are such that most of these inputs are in scarce supply and reach the village through a plethora of different channels--the market, cooperatives, administrative agencies, and semi-political panchayats. The farmer must then develop a new set of entrepreneurial skills necessary for bringing together these inputs into an effective package. The fact that, for the most part, these new inputs are most effective only as a package makes these new skills doubly important.

In this emergent situation, Government development policy will have a major influence on the precise nature of the skills which the farmer develops to adapt to the market, on the nature of the resources he employs to manipulate his environment, and on the manner in which the new "opportunity for effectiveness" is institutionalized. Before turning to the consequences of Government policy for the village economy, it is useful to note that available evidence suggests that in fact, "opportunity for

---

<sup>51</sup>J. W. Elder, "Change in the Jajmani System of an Uttar Pradesh Village," in K. Ishwaren, ed., Change and Continuity in India's Villages (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970) pp. 105-128.

<sup>52</sup>R. W. Herdt and E. A. Baker, "Agricultural Wages Production and the High-Yielding Varieties," Economic and Political Weekly, March 25, 1972, pp. A-23-A-30.

effectiveness" in the post-independence era has been mainly a function of farm size.

In analyzing the relationship between farm size and the access to the new package it is important to distinguish between the productive aspects and the political-economic aspects. A. M. Khusro in an extensive analysis of Indian farming, indicates that returns to scale are constant in Indian farms.<sup>53</sup> There is, he argues, no appreciable increase either in productivity per acre or efficiency (measured either as ratio of paid-out cost to unit of output, or paid-out cost to unit of income) as one increases in size. It is true that there is a minimum size below which it is not economical to use a pair of bullocks or a tube well, but beyond that the returns to scale on these inputs are usually more than offset by increased labor costs and reduced labor efficiency. Nevertheless, other studies indicate larger farmers are far more likely to adopt the new HYV package and to reap its benefits.<sup>54</sup> The crucial factors appear to be two. First, access to credit is crucial for the purchase of all other required inputs and it is abundantly clear that the smaller farmer's access to credit is limited.<sup>55</sup> Second, the reliable access to the whole package of inputs is of great importance in assuring success and in inducing farmers to take the risks of modernizing. Even in a pure market economy, the larger farmers would have an advantage in dealing with the market because of their larger total resources.

In the initial stages of innovation, when risks are high and supply of inputs small, the larger landholders would naturally be the first to profit from the new opportunities. In the Indian situation, however, there is an additional factor that reinforces, and perhaps exaggerates, this advantage and may perpetuate it. This is the politicization of the supply of inputs by channeling many of them through administrative or semi-administrative agencies. In these circumstances the political resources of the farmer become highly relevant in providing him access to needed inputs. Here again the larger farmer has an advantage. The interrelationship between political activity and economic change thus becomes a matter of some interest.

---

<sup>53</sup>A. M. Khusro, "Returns to Scale in Indian Agriculture," in Khusro, ed., Readings in Agricultural Development (Bombay: Allied, 1968) pp. 123-59. It should be noted, however, that net profit per acre does increase with size of farm (p. 158).

<sup>54</sup>M. Schluter and J. Mellor, "New Seed Varieties and the Small Farm," Economic and Political Weekly, March 25, 1972, pp. A-31-A-38.

<sup>55</sup>H. B. Shivamaggi, "Provision of Credit for Small Cultivators," in A. M. Khusro, op.cit., pp. 241-261; U.K. Shrivastava, et.al., "Green Revolution and Farm Income Distribution," Economic and Political Weekly, December 25, 1971, pp. A-163-A-172.

THE POLITICAL STRUCTURE OF VILLAGE INDIA

The most dramatic political development of recent years in village India is the introduction of democratic elections and the adoption of universal adult franchise. Most studies agree that the system of elections has diffused political power to a considerable extent within the village and altered both the political process and the political structure.<sup>56</sup> To put the

---

<sup>56</sup> A good survey of the mode of electing Panchayats as of 1965 can be found in the Report of the Committee on Panchayati Raj Elections (New Delhi: Government of India, Ministry of Community Development and Cooperation, 1965). Of particular interest are the variety of arrangements. In some cases the village is treated as a single constituency, in others election is by wards. Similarly, in some instances the Sarpanch (Panchayat President) is directly elected by the people and in others he is chosen after the Panchayat has been elected, from among the elected members. Although in most cases the Panchayat is elected by secret ballot, it was true in 1965 that one state, Himachal Pradesh, still used an open election at a public meeting. At higher levels, as of 1965, membership in the block-level Panchayat Samiti was ex-officio for Sarpanches and in all states but Rajasthan the Pradhan, or chairman of the Samiti, was elected by the Samiti membership from among its own members. In Rajasthan the Pradhan was elected by an electoral college composed of all panchayat members in the block. The same pattern persists for the district-level Zilla Parishad. The one exception to the pattern at higher levels is Maharashtra, which has direct election of the Zilla Parishad from special Zilla constituencies. At the Samiti level, Maharashtra establishes that the elected members of the Zilla Parishad whose constituencies lie within the Samiti are Samiti members. In addition, each Zilla constituency within the Samiti area is divided in two and elects one Sarpanch of the primary Panchayats as its representative on the Samithi. The Panchayat members serve as an electoral college for this purpose.

matter in its simplest form, political power has become a function of numbers and organization, which has made the creation and maintenance of electorally effective groups the key to political success.<sup>57</sup> The easiest basis for such groups have been lineage (therefore caste) ties and economic interdependence (jajmani interconnections).

As politicians have vied for support within the village, power seems to have slowly shifted from lineages that were very rich and high-caste, but numerically small, to the more numerous "middle peasants" of the cultivating castes. In some areas, particularly in North India, even these middle peasants are still predominantly from the upper, "twice-born," castes. In many areas of the South, however, where the upper caste population was smaller and less directly involved with managing the land, the change has been more dramatic as shudra, lower caste, cultivators have risen to local importance. In either case, this is indeed a political revolution, albeit a modest one.

For the smaller landholders and the landless laborers the benefits of democratization have been limited. Although the poor, and usually low caste, villagers have undoubtedly used their votes to improve their bargaining position within the village, the improvements to date have been mostly symbolic (e.g. the right of temple-entry or access to village wells, both of which were formerly prohibited by their low caste status). Their poverty and low status have generally excluded them from leadership roles while at the same time encouraging them to seek protection as clients of larger farmers rather than in class or caste-based political action. In consequence, they have exercised little influence on the course of events and neither government policies, such as land reform, nor rising agricultural incomes due to favorable terms of trade for agriculture,

---

<sup>57</sup> K. S. Shrivastava, "Directed Social Change and Rural Leadership in Rural India," in Emerging Patterns of Rural Leadership in Southern Asia, (Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1965) Ch. 9. In the same volume see also, P. Roy, "Participation in New Social Structures and Leadership," Ch. 8; K. S. and J. Panchanadikar, Determinants of Social Structure and Social Change in India (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1970) Ch. IX; S. C. Jain, Community Development and Panchayati Raj in India (Bombay: Allied, 1967) Ch. 11; M. V. Mathur, et.al., Panchayati Raj in Rajasthan (New Delhi: Impex, 1966) Ch. 11; R. S. Robins, "Political Elite Formation in Rural India: The Uttar Pradesh Panchayat Elections of 1949, 1956, and 1961," Journal of Politics, Vol. 29, pp. 838-60.

have afforded them much advantage. Only in unusual circumstances have the poor broken out of the political passivity of economic dependency.<sup>58</sup>

Traditionally within the village, overt political conflict has been disparaged. This has been variously explained as a functional response to the threat of external authority and the need for solidarity in the face of the tax collector or as a more fundamental cultural preference for social harmony. In any case, direct electoral competition and the factional struggles associated with it are viewed with disapproval by villagers. The preferred mode of selecting a leader and reaching public decisions is by consensus. The principles underlying popular elections, therefore, are at odds with the village culture's definition of ideal political procedures.<sup>59</sup>

At election time the village politician must aggregate the votes of various kin and patron-client groups in order to produce a majority for himself or his candidate, for only by commanding a majority on the Panchayat can he assure himself of control of the patronage which the system provides. In consequence, the role of the village "leader" has been transformed from one who "represents" the whole and expresses the community consensus--his traditional role--to that of an active contestant who recruits a ruling coalition. Nearly all observers are agreed that this change in leadership style has intensified conflict within the village and proliferated cleavages. It is not at all uncommon for Indian observers to attribute this to the system of elections itself.

---

<sup>58</sup> cf. K. Gough, "Peasant Resistance and Revolt in South India," Pacific Affairs, Vol 41, 1968/9, pp. 526-44; V. M. Dandekar and N. Rath, "Poverty in India," Economic and Political Weekly, Part I, January 2, 1971, pp. 25-48.

<sup>59</sup> See D. Marvick, "Party Cadres and Receptive Partisan Voters in the 1967 Indian National Elections," Asian Survey, Vol. 10, Nov. 1970, p. 962, Table 5. Marvick comments: "Thus the consensual, affirmative, nation-building aspects of partisan politics are received favorably by the citizen body. Parties are approved of because they are seen as validating the electoral process and legitimizing the national rulers. But they are not appreciated as embodiments of a serious struggle for power among mutually hostile groups." (p. 963). See also Retzlaff, op.cit., p. 24; and K. C. Gupta, "Decision Making at the Panchayat Level," Quarterly Journal of the Local Self-Government Institute, Vol XXXVI, Jan. 1966, pp. 267-74.

Nevertheless, the electoral system has the support of powers outside the village and it has proven a valuable means of access to power and advantage. In consequence, although elections lack the higher legitimacy of normatively sanctioned institutions, they have been accepted at the level of "pragmatic rules."<sup>60</sup> Pragmatic rules, Nicholas explains, are commonly understood rules of behavior operating at the margin of established institutions which are followed because of their practical efficacy. The basic question is whether the pragmatic justification of electoral conflict can, over time, be transformed into an expression of the "general will" providing a "mandate" to the victor. Without such a transformation, the capacity of a leader to solicit cooperation with public programs is limited to a direct barter of benefits for support. In Parson's terms, he will lack "power."

Caste competition, a typical form of village conflict, provides a useful illustration of the effects of electorally-oriented politics. Within the village a caste's wealth and power, its solidarity and leadership, and its life style have all been important in securing community recognition for its claims to a position within the hierarchy. Increasingly, the key role in caste competition has been played by extra-village resources of various kinds, and many of these have been provided by the state.<sup>61</sup> Electoral politics provide a link between the village and the state both because they make village voting blocs relevant to outside politics, but also because the voting rights of the citizen are part of a new package of rights which are independent of the village, caste-based system.<sup>62</sup> Electoral politics have thus made available new resources for use within the village or alternatively for supporting an effort to break out of the parochial village into the broader arena of regional politics.

In the past this competition has been restricted to the wealthy higher castes' claims to precedence within the social hierarchy. More recently, however, the mobility aspirations of lower castes have been the source of considerable tension within the villages. In fact, it is not unheard of for even

---

<sup>60</sup>Nicholas in Schwartz, op.cit., p. 304.

<sup>61</sup>Mandelbaum, op.cit., pp. 518-9.

<sup>62</sup>Bailey in Schwartz, op.cit., Parts II and III. See also R. S. Khare, "Groups and Processes of Political Change in North Indian Gopalpur," Man in India, Vol. 49, June 1969, pp. 188-210.

the lowest in the caste hierarchy, the untouchables, to press their demands collectively. Votes alone are seldom an adequate base of power with which to challenge the village social order, however, and caste mobility will more commonly be associated with groups whose position within the community provides them with additional resources to sustain their struggle with the elite.

Lower castes have used their new-found political opportunities to support symbolically important attempts to enter temples or to protect themselves against high-caste reprisals when they attempt to secure the ritually important services of various specialists. In some areas of India, however, broader regional movements of mobile castes have combined religious reform with secular citizenship status to challenge the very basis of the Hindu caste system. In either case, however, the electoral system has encouraged alterations within or challenges to the caste system which are clearly contrary to the accepted norms of village society.<sup>63</sup>

The higher castes have similarly seized upon elections as a new mode of promoting their interests and, if the reports are correct, have seen opportunities in the new system that encourage them to intensify the struggle. Government agencies now distribute valuable resources that are vital to elite economic interests; government development programs now offer new opportunities to those in a position to take advantage of them; and an expanding educational system and civil service offer new avenues for upper caste mobility out of the village. In such a situation, political power acquires a significance beyond local social status and the confines of the village economy. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that as opportunities have opened up, elite competition to control those opportunities has also increased.

In and of itself, this elite competition does not challenge the village order. Compared with the demands of the lower castes, incremental changes in the upper reaches of the village hierarchy do not directly violate the norms of the system. The indirect effects may be more consequential however. The attention of the village elite is increasingly turning outward and orienting itself toward the broader world of the market and the regional culture. A second indirect effect is the decline in

---

<sup>63</sup>Bailey in Schwartz, op.cit., pp. 286-7; L. I. and S. H. Rudolph, The Modernity of Tradition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967) Part I, pp. 49-64; M. N. Srinivas, Social Change in Modern India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967) Ch. 3.

the authority of the dominant caste within the village as its own internal divisions and secular aspirations restrict its capacity to maintain the ideal Hindu village order. The political consequences of the expanding scope of elite interests is reflected in the recurrent instances of regional integration of similar caste groups into politically-oriented "pressure" groups and the even broader elite integration exemplified by demands for linguistic states in the interests of vernacular culture and ethnic majorities.<sup>64</sup>

Conversely, the dominant caste within the village environment is frequently fragmented by factionalism and disarmed as multi-caste dominant factions replace the dominant-caste panchayat as the basis of local power. An alternative to caste-based conflict begins to appear, therefore, when the stability and integrity of the village caste structure are disturbed by social and economic change. The intense competition among the village elites for new benefits within a broader arena has frequently served to counteract the tendency toward "casteism" in politics. Thus, whereas the village studies of the 1940's and 1950's stressed the caste origin of conflict within the village, more recent studies are inclined to emphasize the extent to which village political leaders exploit divisions within castes and lineages and make alliances across caste lines in constructing their factional alliances.<sup>65</sup>

Although local elites may still be able to operate collectively in the interests of their class and caste in certain contexts, this does not appear to be common at the local level. In district, block and village politics the major issues are economic in nature and have increasingly become centered around the distribution of the benefits of government development programs. Confronted with such issues, the more well-to-do

---

<sup>64</sup> See Rudolph and Rudolph, op.cit., pp. 64-87, for an extended discussion of caste organization in politics. Also, both Pradhan, op.cit., and Richard Sisson, The Congress Party in Rajasthan (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972) Ch. 4, have excellent analyses of the political organization of rural elites.

<sup>65</sup> cf. O. Lewis, Village Life in North India (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1958), Ch. 4; R. S. Khare, "Group Dynamics in a North Indian Village," Human Organization, Vol. 21 (Fall, 1962) pp. 201-213.

farmers who constitute the village elite, and are the major claimants for those resources, have, in fact, conflicting interests. In such a situation, the obvious strategy is to limit the number of effective claimants by factional control over the distribution agencies, inhibiting the access of the powerful farmers in opposing factions. In this struggle, the poorer farmers, landless laborers, village artisans, and the service occupations, most of whom will not be members of the dominant landholding caste, are obvious allies. Their needs, demands, and interests will not be the same as those of the larger farmers and, therefore, do not compete. Even the smaller farmers, who make up part of the clientele of the village leader, do not really compete with his economic interests. The smaller farmer will most likely be an "unprogressive" subsistence farmer, whose immediate needs can usually be met by small concessions from his more wealthy patron.

Thus both patterns, caste conflict and factional conflict, seem to result from the breakdown of village autonomy. Clearly, more work is needed to explain the appearance of one or the other pattern in different villages at different times. At the present time it is impossible to establish which is more prevalent or even whether the two types may not be related stages in the modernization process. Nevertheless, the brunt of recent scholarship is that the combination of elections and economic development have made the factional pattern the more common one and in the absence of any quantitative evidence one way or the other, that position will be accepted in this paper. Keeping in mind the tenuous nature of such an assumption, we may then turn to an analysis of the effects of factional politics on village leadership.

The factionalized village seems to lack any stable means of linking power groups (such as castes) with leaders and parties. On the contrary, village alliances and majorities are in a constant state of flux as group leaders maneuver for advantage and status.<sup>66</sup> The basic mechanism of political

---

<sup>66</sup> P.C. Mathur, "Political Corollaries of Panchayati Raj," in M.V. Mathur and Iqbal Narain, Panchayati Raj, Planning and Democracy (Bombay: Asia, 1969); S.J. Eldersveld, "Indian Institute of Public Opinion," Monthly Public Opinion Surveys. "The Political Behavior of the Indian Public," Vol 9, Jan. 1964, pp. 11-12; M.E. Opler, et.al., "Indian National and State Elections in a Village Context," Human Organization Vol. 18, Spring, 1959, p. 33; D. Melnick, "The Dimensions of Political Involvement in a North Indian District," paper prepared for the 1971 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, September 1971, p. 25.

organization, therefore, is the factional system itself. Factions provide a highly flexible and adaptive coalition system in an environment where the lack of ideological conviction and programmatic agreement combines with the social distance inherent in the communal-caste structure of village society to inhibit "associational" politics. Factions are a series of dyadic relationships between active politicians and village group leaders or other "clients" which cut across communal hostilities, differences of interest, and status barriers by a direct exchange of benefits within the dyad without reference to other members of the coalition.<sup>67</sup> The responsibilities of the faction member do not extend beyond his obligations to the faction leader, his commitment is usually pragmatic and often temporary, and even the actual membership of the faction may be a matter of some mystery. Only within the central "core" of the faction is there anything resembling the solidarity and diffuse loyalty found in kin groups or among party cadres. In short, the faction represents the minimal organizational response to the problem of electoral politics at the village level.<sup>68</sup>

It is not unreasonable to argue, therefore, that in a factionalized polity the elections are a device for restricting access to scarce resources, rather than a mechanism for pursuing the collective good. The political leader combines the economic power of his rich supporters with the political power of their dependent clients, vested in their votes, to give his faction control of the panchayat. Once in control, the faction leader had directed power over the public works projects undertaken in his village, with access to any funds involved, and a major influence on the location of such projects.<sup>69</sup> As an

---

<sup>67</sup>This is illustrated in Iqbal Narain, et.al., "Political Behavior in Rural India: The Case of a Panchayat Election in Rajasthan," Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies, Vol. 5, July, 1967, pp. 109-29.

<sup>68</sup>N. K. Nicholson, "The Factional Model and the Study of Politics," Comparative Political Studies, Vol 5, Fall, 1972, p. 291-313.

<sup>69</sup>cf. S.C. Jain, Community Development and Panchayat Raj in India (Bombay: Allied, 1967) Ch. XXIV; P.R. Dubhashi, Rural Development Administration in India (Bombay: Popular, 1970) Ch. X; R. N. Haldipur and V.R.K. Paramahansa, eds., Local Government Institutions in Rural India (Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1970) Section VI, pp. 101-110.

ex-officio member of the Panchayat Samiti, the major authority over distribution of Community Development efforts in most states, he can trade his support of the Pradhan for important benefits for his village and his followers. At the very least, his official position as Sarpanch and a member of the Samiti gives him access to key administrators and makes him the obvious vehicle of official contact with the village. This in itself provides him with considerable influence. If his faction can also gain control of the local cooperative society, through which many of the key inputs for modern agriculture are channeled by the government, his control will be complete, so long as his faction can be held together.

There is little doubt that the villagers have become more sophisticated and adept in their use of the electoral system to promote their interests. Panchayat Raj has, therefore, served to mobilize Indian villages politically and to integrate them into the political and administrative process of District and State level politics. It may even be that by encouraging cross-communal alliances and emphasizing economic interests, Panchayat politics have had an important "secularizing" influence on Indian politics at the base. All of these are real "systemic" benefits and should be recognized. It still remains doubtful, however, whether electoral politics, either of the caste or factional pattern, have served to legitimize either the leader or policies that are the outcome of the electoral process.

Although the broader arena of state or national politics does provide a normative justification for the electoral system in democratic theory, this orientation does not appear to have worked itself into the village.<sup>70</sup> Rather, the authority of local leadership, if legitimized at all, is still enhanced by ascriptive or personal attributes (caste, honesty, etc.). The elected Panchayat leader may exercise the direct powers of his office, but within his village his capacity for effective leadership and for mobilizing the collective resources of the village are still largely a function of his personal and not his official status.<sup>71</sup> Local leaders who play factional

---

<sup>70</sup>Marvick, loc.cit.

<sup>71</sup>Robbins, loc.cit.; Indian Institute of Public Opinion, Monthly Survey of Public Opinion, "Opinion Survey of Rural Leaders and Officials in Panchayat Raj Institutions," Vol. 10, Oct. 1964, Ch. II. An interesting analysis of the role of various factors--personal, institutional and "ecological" in promoting village development can be found in S. Dasgupta, "Community Factors in Agricultural Development," Review of Community Development, Nos. 19-20, 1968, pp. 285-308.

politics and win elections are not involved in tapping the legitimizing power of a new order (democratic politics)--expanding their influence through the "myth" of an electoral mandate. The value of the election is that it places them in a key entrepreneurial role from which they can exploit the resources of either the village or the district environment for advantage in the other. Nothing in the electoral victory itself can sanctify factional deals and payoffs. Nor can electoral victory justify the alteration in caste relationships and dominance patterns which this new institution tends to encourage.<sup>72</sup>

In fact, of course, dominance patterns have not been greatly disturbed. The powerful are naturally in the best position to convert the new electoral-based resources into locally productive uses. But by promoting a change in the style of leadership and the content of leadership roles within the village, elections have served to introduce an element of cynicism into village politics which has undermined the remnants of traditional authority which remain.<sup>73</sup> Bailey says of the new leaders: "They respect him for his skill and

---

<sup>72</sup>N. K. Jaiswal, et.al., "Attitudes of Members and Non-Members Towards Village Panchayats Under Panchayati Raj," Quarterly Journal of the Institute of Local Self-Government, Vol. XL, pp. 207-213.

<sup>73</sup>See F. G. Bailey, Politics and Social Change (London: Oxford University Press, 1963) pp. 57-8; R. S. Khare, "Group Dynamics in a North Indian Village," Human Organization, Vol. 21, Fall, 1962, pp. 206, 208; R. S. Khare, "Groups and Processes..." Man in India, Vol. 49, p. 188; J. S. Jadhava, "Group Dynamics and Panchayat Elections in a Punjab Village," Journal of Social Research, Vol. 11, Sept. 1968, p. 64; N. Patnaik and H. D. Lakshminarayana, "Factional Politics in Village India," Man in India, Vol. 49, April 1969, p. 181.

contacts, and they are grateful when these qualities are of use to them. But there has not developed any of that lasting sense of unquestioning and uncalculating obligation which marks the true relationship with a leader. Their attitude towards him is not far above the attitude which the buyer and seller of a house have toward their estate agent."<sup>74</sup>

The developments in village politics outlined above have two consequences for agricultural development. First, they influence the form and level of rural demands placed on the system. Second, they limit the capacity of the Panchayat to act as the vehicle of rural development. Let us deal with the former first.

Although there has been increasing effective demand for agricultural inputs--fertilizer, seed, water, etc.--it is evident that this demand has been slow to reach national planners and relatively weak in competing with other priorities. It could be argued, I think, that part of the explanation for this weakness in rural demands has been due to the fact that it has not been effectively aggregated. As used by Almond, the term suggests the process of combining and organizing individual demands into a coherent and effective pressure on the government for action.<sup>75</sup> Within a factionalized system, demands are basically in the form of individual demands for specific favors or specific parts of a limited good. Public

---

<sup>74</sup>Bailey, Politics and Social Change, p. 61. cf. H.M. Raulet and J. S. Uppal, "The Social Dynamics of Economic Development in Rural Punjab," Asian Survey, Vol. 10, No. 4 (April, 1970) pp. 336-47. The authors are quite explicit about the role of the new political brokers. "His [the broker's] role sometimes requires him to represent the interests of police and other officials in their dealings with the villagers and his usefulness depends in part on ability to manipulate villagers, ranging from expropriation of property to creating false police cases, particularly in the course of factional struggles with powerful rivals. In this setting, villagers tend to be ambivalent or even cynical about broker-patrons, but their dependence remains." (p. 344)

<sup>75</sup>G. Almond and G. Powell, Comparative Politics (Boston: Little Brown, 1966) Ch. V.

goods are not useful for maintaining private alliances, for the simple reason that they provide no rewards for loyalty that are specific to the loyal.<sup>76</sup> The interest of the factional politician is in the control of non-public goods which can be transferred to specific individuals on a preferential basis. In the aggregate, factional politicians are likely to place a steady pressure on the planners for larger supplies of distributable goods and services to service their factional networks, but this does not represent a self-conscious class demand (of farmers) nor is it likely to encourage faction leaders to cooperate in the form of a lobby.

The factional system is also a system which economizes on political resources, when compared with more structured systems for example. With little party loyalty and with considerable fragmentation of politically relevant groups, the politician must depend upon bargains struck at election time. The most rational strategy in the circumstances is to put together the minimum winning coalition. If the opposition is sufficiently fragmented, this minimum may be considerably less than the 50% plus needed for an electoral majority.<sup>77</sup> The Congress Party regularly wins large numbers of constituencies with a plurality (in 1962, 47% of the State Assembly seats were won with less than a majority). The party structure assists this strategy by encouraging irrationality in Indian voting behavior. In his analysis of data provided by Indian Institute of Public Opinion Surveys between 1957 and 1962, Eldersveld finds one-third of the Congress voters are of questionable loyalty, one-fifth are economically discontent, but only 10% can see themselves switching to an alternative party.<sup>78</sup> In short, as the dominant party controlling all patronage, the Congress denies resources to alternative parties and makes it even easier for faction leaders to operate with minimum coalitions. There is simply nowhere else to go.<sup>79</sup> In a recent article in Economic

---

<sup>76</sup>M. Olson, The Logic of Collective Action op.cit., Ch. I.

<sup>77</sup>An interesting illustration of the combination of coalition theory and factional analysis can be found in M. Leiserson, "Factions and Coalitions in One-Party Japan: An Interpretation Based on the Theory of Games," American Political Science Review, Vol. LXII, Sept. 1968, pp. 770-787.

<sup>78</sup>Eldersveld, op.cit., pp. 19-20.

<sup>79</sup>Romeshwar Roy, "Dynamics of One-Party Dominance," Asian Survey, Vol. 8, July 1968, pp. 553-575.

and Political Weekly, G. R. Reddy was quite explicit about the operation of such factors. He comments on Panchayat Raj elections: "Villagers had felt that if they voted for the opposition (to the established Panchayat President) they would not hope to get anything from the Samithi (the Block-level institution within the Panchayat system)."<sup>80</sup>

Finally, because electoral competition is frequently tied up with caste mobility, status, and advantage, the nature of political demands can seldom be reduced to simple economic needs. Low caste-high caste outbreaks of violence, for example, are frequently interpreted as examples of class conflicts over economic interests. In fact, however, symbolic concessions are as important as the economic ones and mobility out of an economic-caste status is as salient as improved livelihood in it. It is no accident that the most successful efforts of the Panchayat Raj governments have been in the field of education. Here the personal economic aspirations of the individual combine with the status aspirations of his caste, because education is central to both. The point to be made here is that diffuse demands inhibit effective lobbying.

The nature of local politics explains a good deal about the character of developmental efforts in India. Commenting in 1970 on a decade of experience of "democratic decentralization" in rural India, Iqbal Narain and associates report that "As seen earlier, the panchayat raj systems in Madras, Rajasthan and Maharashtra operate under an extensive and penetrative network of controls which are mainly managed by agencies and functionaries placed outside the three-tiered institutional structure. Over this network the panchayati raj institutions themselves have no control."<sup>81</sup> In fact, they observe, "The pattern of control and supervision over panchayati raj institutions also closely resembles the pattern of control and supervision over rural local self-government in pre-independence and even post-independence India."<sup>82</sup> The latter is indeed a dramatic commentary on the limited power of local lobbies within the development administration.

---

<sup>80</sup> "Some Aspects of Decision Making in Panchayat Raj," Economic and Political Weekly, Oct. 10, 1970, p. 1702.

<sup>81</sup> Iqbal Narain, et.al., Panchayat Raj Administration (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1970) p. 155.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

Panchayat Raj has provided a localized and specialized system of popular communication with the development administration. It is localized in that as a system of direct election of leaders it is limited in most states to the small group of villages that constitute the basic panchayat. Even the two upper levels of the system, generally indirectly selected, reach only to the district level. Here their formal capacity for aggregation, influence and communication stop with the district administration.

The system is functionally specialized because its powers are to a large extent limited to the development programs and financial resources transferred to it by the state government. As we shall see later, the panchayats need not be as restricted as they have been, but their unwillingness to raise taxes reinforces their dependence on the state. In consequence, there is a great variation from panchayat to panchayat, program to program, and time to time in the resource and expenditure patterns of the panchayats--all dictated by the will of the state administration.<sup>83</sup> In an even more subtle way, however, the panchayat is circumscribed by the interests and responsibilities that are defined as part of the development program at any given time. Thus, as the emphasis of developmental policy shifted from the "development of the community," social reform, and the mobilization of local resources, to more specifically production-oriented functions, the functions of the panchayat also shifted and shrank.<sup>84</sup> With the exception of education, which is a major expenditure in states where it is a panchayat function, the bulk of panchayat spending now is on its own administrative overhead and on public development works

---

<sup>83</sup> cf. S. C. Jain's brief description of the fluctuations in expenditure on agriculture in panchayat budgets, which he attributes to changes in the state plans, op.cit., p. 230; cf. also the chart on p. 185.

<sup>84</sup> O. K. Moorthy, "Some observations on the Effect of Panchayat Raj on the Weaker Sections," in Haldipur and Paramahansa, op.cit., pp. 237-242. See also, S. R. Sen, "Planning for Agricultural Development," in Srinivasan, ed., Agricultural Administration in India (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1969) pp. 96-97. The former author, Moorthy, was Deputy Secretary in the Department of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and offers a pessimistic opinion of the effect of changing priorities on the rural poor. Sen, an official of the Planning Commission, gives a brief but convincing account of the extent to which Indian planning is from the "top down."

(roads, minor irrigation, buildings, etc.).<sup>85</sup> The major function of the panchayat leadership is to secure these development projects for the village and to act as agents for the wealthier villagers in securing more specific benefits from other development agencies.

It would be useful if we had some in-depth studies of State policy formation in the area of agricultural policy, which took into account the influence of the panchayat system, the channeling of demands through the State Assembly, the role of the Administration and the contribution of the planners. Unfortunately we do not. Nevertheless, it might be hypothesized that the panchayat system, by providing a decentralized system of farmer pressure on the administrator, takes some of the pressure off the state-level politicians and planners. In other words, the ease of utilizing local resources to influence the distribution of resources, through the panchayat system, might encourage local politicians to think that this was a more productive use of their power than attempting to challenge the Plan priorities of state and national elites.

There have been class-type rural political movements in India; one need only bring to mind the Peasants and Workers Party in Maharashtra or the self-conscious political activities of the rural rajputs in Rajasthan.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, these, as other demands, are easily undermined by the very real scarcity which inhibits class payoffs and by the regional nature of such movements which forces them to bargain within a federal structure on geographical grounds rather than by interest. In fact, it would appear, the interests of farmers, while they cannot be ignored, can be manipulated by administrators, short-circuited by local politicians, and interpreted by national planners in the interests of the plan framework.

We have, then, in Panchayat Raj a system of local self-government which has served to reinforce a number of other changes which, taken together, have reduced the autonomy of the "traditional" village, put strains on the local social structure, and helped to integrate the village into the life

---

<sup>85</sup>S. C. Jain, op.cit., p. 186. Administrative expenses constitute on the average 30% of panchayat expenditures and public works about 25%. Public health gets only about 11% and education and social welfare each only 5%.

<sup>86</sup>Sisson, op.cit.

of the Block, District and State. The influence of the panchayat on the uses of the increasing flow of government development resources has undoubtedly been the major motivating force behind the changes in village political life. The outside world has provided important resources for the local elites, and the elected panchayat leaders play a key role in mediating between administrative policy and local power structures. Nevertheless, the strains which the electoral system encourages within the village, the style of leadership which it demands, the instrumental role which the village leadership falls into as the agent both of the government and of the village elite, and the tendency to discriminate on political grounds in the distribution of benefits, have not encouraged broad-based, generalized support for villages leaders and their policies. Nor has the election helped. The election is not viewed as an autonomous institutionalized process for expressing the general will. Rather it is understood as an extension of the factional politics within the village elite and as the payoff mechanism for either past or anticipated favors from the panchayat leadership. As we shall see in the next section, the inability of rural leadership to mobilize power, in Parson's meaning of the term, through the election has been one of the major contributing factors to the weaknesses of Panchayat Raj in encouraging community action and community solidarity through community politics.

#### PANCHAYAT RAJ AND DEVELOPMENT ADMINISTRATION

Together with the block development administration and the cooperative societies, the panchayat system was intended to function as part of an integrated program of rural development. The panchayat, by mobilizing local initiative, would, it was hoped, provide the dynamism that had been lacking in the rural development programs. The Mehta Committee concluded: "Development cannot progress without responsibility and power. Community development can be real only when the community understands its problems, realizes its responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers through its chosen representatives and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration."<sup>87</sup> The traditional panchayat, of course, had not been an institution well suited to these functions. The village panchayat had depended greatly on the authority of local landlords for its effectiveness and its functions had been largely adjudicative, rather than executive, in nature. Nevertheless, the sponsors

---

<sup>87</sup>"Report of the Team for the Study of Community Projects...",  
Vol. I, p. 23.

of the Panchayat Raj program hoped that an infusion of external resources would provide the needed fillip. By all indications, however, the results have been somewhat disappointing. We shall proceed in this section to examine the relationships among panchayat, cooperative and administration in their respective development efforts in an attempt to explain these difficulties.

From the administrative perspective, the problems have not been that the Panchayat leaders have failed to "maintain a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration." We shall return to the point later, but it is clear that, whatever reservations administrators may have about the nature of the relationship, Panchayat leaders have developed a vigorous interest in development administration. The problems, on the contrary, have centered in the area of community "responsibility." In some cases public resources have been misused or left unutilized.<sup>88</sup> In other cases, although external resources have been accepted with avidity, the Panchayats have been very reluctant to raise local resources to supplement government projects or to initiate their own. At least part of the explanation for these problems can, I will argue, be found in the nature of panchayat politics.

One basic cause of the panchayats' difficulties is that a number of recent changes have served to undermine even further the already frail authority of the institution. One rather dramatic change that has been reported in many areas is that many of the highest status and most wealthy village leaders have begun to disassociate themselves from village politics. Dispossessed by land reform or attracted by new investment or career opportunities outside the village, the community's "natural" leaders have been removed.<sup>89</sup> This shift in elite perspectives has coincided with the introduction of electoral

---

<sup>88</sup>See S. C. Jain, op.cit., Ch. XXII.

<sup>89</sup>A. Betielle, Caste, Class and Power (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965) p. 209; J. P. Mencher, "A Tamil Village: Changing Socio-Economic Structure in Madras State," in Ishwaran, ed., op.cit., pp. 209, 214; H. Orenstein, "The Changing Political System of a Maharashtra Village," ibid., p. 239.

politics which has given the edge to popular politicians with skills as political intermediaries between citizens and government development agencies and the cooperatives.<sup>90</sup> Thus, although the new leadership in most areas still comes from the twice-born castes, it is no longer the wealthiest or the most prestigious who fill leadership roles.

Nor is the new leader ususally associated with traditional leadership roles and supported through established socio-economic linkages such as the jajmani system. Rather, he is a "professional" politician whose success depends on his personal skills. This change in style reflects a change in leadership functions. Instead of maintenance of the social order and reinforcement of village values, the new leader's activities center around brokerage and patronage.<sup>91</sup> Many studies done in the fifties, shortly after the introduction of statutory panchayats, found a dual pattern in which the "real" traditional leaders exercised power behind the facade of elected official leadership, but the trend seems to be against the traditional elite. Both Beteille and Jain find that there is increasing differentiation among the village elites as social prestige, wealth and political power become organized independently.<sup>92</sup> This may make the new leadership more "efficient" in the performance of its adaptive functions, but also less "authoritative."

The emerging role of village leadership as an intermediary between the farmer and development administration obviously reflects the growing importance of government administration in village life. Far more so than in the past, the Indian farmer is sensitive to market forces and because of this, more affected by government policy. In spite of government efforts to influence village life through programs of revival, reform and welfare, the most significant political impact of government policy has been due to its command over most modern agricultural inputs--seed, water, fertilizer, credit, electricity,

---

<sup>90</sup> Indian Institute of Public Opinion, Monthly Survey of Public Opinion, "Impact of Panchayat Raj on Political Attitudes," Vol. 8, March 1963, p. 12.

<sup>91</sup> Bailey, Politics and Social Change, op.cit., p. 60.

<sup>92</sup> Beteille, op.cit., Ch. VI; Jain, op.cit., p. 300; Robins, op.cit., p. 851.

etc. The more market-oriented a farmer becomes, the more dependent he becomes upon governmental agencies to make his market performance profitable. Thus it is the regulative-distributive functions of the administration that define the relationship between farmer and government. Furthermore, it is the politicization of these resources in Panchayat Raj that forms the basic political resource of the new village leader and, one might add, of the Congress Party.<sup>93</sup>

It is not surprising that political power and control of economic resources are closely related in India's villages. This was always the case. As in most pre-modern societies, economic resources were exchanged in order to maintain a social system and a diffuse solidarity within it.<sup>94</sup> In India, the traditional system centered usually on a role such as that exemplified by the jajman. The modern panchayat leader, however, although like the jajman in his control of substantial economic resources, is guided by different considerations--the paramount being political profit.<sup>95</sup>

---

<sup>93</sup> Indian Institute of Public Opinion, Monthly Survey of Public Opinion, "Opinion Survey of Rural Leaders and Officials in Panchayat Raj Institutions," Vol. 10, Oct. 1964, p. 28. By far the greatest proportion of requests for aid received by Panchayat leaders appear to be centered around agricultural problems and credit. A good analysis of the patronage and factional base of the Congress Party can be found in M. Weiner, Party Building in a New Nation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

<sup>94</sup> See K. Polanyi, The Great Transformation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960) Ch. 4; W. C. Neale, "Land is to Rule," in Frykenberg, op.cit., p. 5; and M. Sahlins, "On the Sociology of Primitive Exchange," in M. Banton, ed., Relevance of Models for Social Anthropology (London: Tavistock, 1965) pp. 139-236.

<sup>95</sup> Mathur, et.al., Panchayat-Raj in Rajasthan, pp. 98-102; P. C. Mathur, "Political Corollaries of Panchayati Raj," and P. D. Sharma, "Political Consequences of Panchayati Raj," in Mathur and Narain, ed., Panchayati Raj, Planning and Democracy; J. S. Jadhava, "Group Dynamics and Panchayat Elections..." pp. 66-67. K. S. Srivastava, loc.cit., argues that there is a direct connection between a leader's development activities and the size of his following.

In so far as a politician behaves rationally in this situation, he will allocate economic benefits on the basis of the value of present or anticipated support from an individual or group. From the point of view of development, there is no particular reason to believe that this form of allocation of agricultural inputs--based on political profit--will produce economically rational results. Even if we were to argue that the more powerful villagers might generally also be in the best position to use these resources productively, we are still left with a distribution system which is only potentially satisfactory. There is no reason to believe that in any particular instance, power and productivity would necessarily coincide. Furthermore, those in minority factions will presumably get little or nothing. Finally, there will be a tendency to spread the resources thin in the attempt to maximize the number of supporters for the faction leader.

Changes in the mode of panchayat leadership have also had an effect on the Panchayat's capacity to mobilize local resources and direct the collective activities of the village. It is somewhat difficult to understand why panchayat leaders have not responded to pressure from administrators above them and constituents around them to initiate more public programs and to generate thereby more "public goods." Certainly the survey research data, though limited in quantity and reliability, suggest that there are political benefits to be gained from securing the construction of various public works. The construction of roads, schools, and meeting houses is looked upon with favor by villagers.<sup>96</sup> Such projects would presumably attest to the leader's concern for the "whole village" and represent a productive investment of his political resources.

---

<sup>96</sup> Mathur, et.al., Panchayat Raj in Rajasthan, p. 214 and Jain, op.cit., pp. 182-223, both indicate the poor performance of the Panchayats in raising resources internally and, in addition, the disproportionate portion of panchayat income spent on administration compared with development and the excessive variation in income and expenditure from year to year.

Contrary to this logic, however, is the testimony of nearly every student of village politics that the Panchayats are weak, ineffective and singularly incapable of raising either money or cooperation to construct these projects.<sup>97</sup> In fact, many of the projects are the cause of divisiveness within the village because contributions (taxes), access and utility are often unequally distributed.<sup>98</sup>

It is possible that this lack of panchayat action should be attributed to attitudinal factors--the "backwardness" of the villagers--but I would argue that the answer lies in the structure of power and the nature of authority. Today, as a conduit of development resources, the village leadership received extensive support from the outside in the form of commodities, money and development projects. If these benefits are distributable the leader will transfer them to his clients. If they are in the form of collectively consumed goods he will gladly supply them to the village. In either case they reduce the necessity of raising resources within the village. He will be inclined to raise additional money to support public works only if he feels it will give him social prestige or that a reputation for benefiting the village will aid him at election time. Both of these considerations are important.<sup>99</sup> It is unlikely, however, that a reputation for munificence and village service will be afforded a leader who uses the farmers' taxes rather than his own wealth or government funds to complete a project. Traditionally, respected village leaders served at private, not public, expense. Private subscriptions and endowments for schools, temples, and festivals were highly honored, but not the machinations of a tax collector.

In addition, our examination of the dynamics of the electoral system indicated that broad public support was less important at election time than the leader's ability to strike bargains with groups of voters. A good reputation might be useful, but the return on investment in terms of votes delivered does not appear to be very high. Villagers are cynical about

---

<sup>97</sup> Descriptions of panchayat inactivity and ineffectiveness can be found in the following: Orenstein, in Ishwaren, op.cit., p. 237; Retzlaff, op.cit., Ch. VI; G. Etienne, Studies in Indian Agriculture (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1968) Ch. 11.

<sup>98</sup> Jain, op.cit., p. 324.

<sup>99</sup> Indian Institute of Public Opinion, Monthly Survey of Public Opinion, "Impact of Panchayat Raj on Political Attitudes," Vol. 8, March 1963, p. 11. For example, the major reason given by Panchayat leaders for their election was "personal service to the community" in the three states sampled (Andhra--40.8%, Madras--49.2%, Rajasthan--40.4%).

their leaders and, increasingly, the new village leadership is willing to forego traditional respectability in the pursuit of power.

A second structural restriction on collective action in the village is the general weakness of the Panchayat authority and the diffuse nature of power in most Indian villages. In such circumstances, Olson argues, it is difficult to get voluntary cooperation no matter how beneficial the project appears.<sup>101</sup> Only if the most powerful are willing to use their resources to support the project in their own interests or if the Administration is inclined to use its coercive power is the project likely to get off the ground. The factional leader, with his delicate balance of group support, is really not in a position to risk political resources. He must wait until pressure from clients, acting in their own interest, leads them to commit their own resources. At that point he may be able to facilitate action, but he has not initiated or "paid" for it.

In dealing with the world outside, however, the village leader's demand for public works is high. Panchayat leaders vie for development projects and expend considerable political resources to bring pressure to bear on District Development Councils and district administrators to locate projects in their areas. This change in the politician's stance is easily explained. Although it may not be worth while to expend his resources within the village on public goods, it is certainly a worthwhile investment of political resources raised internally (votes) to persuade someone else to spend their money on such projects. This outcome provides the village leader with the benefits of public service but none of its direct political costs. It was of course just this sort of behavior which led Indian leaders to suggest in the fifties that the village should be made financially responsible for its own affairs in order to encourage responsibility and commitment. But it is clear that when provided with the statutory power to do so, the village leaders declined.

The style of local leadership which emerges from panchayat politics is in many ways encouraged by the nature of the relationship between the panchayat, as the focus of local politics, and the state's administrative agencies responsible for rural development. The nexus of development administration and panchayat politics is, in all states except Maharashtra, the development block. At the block level the key decisions in development administration are worked out between the Block Development Officer (B.D.O.) and the Panchayat Samithi. It is

---

<sup>100</sup> Bailey, Politics and Social Change, op.cit., p. 100-101.

<sup>101</sup> Olson, loc.cit.

here that administrative and political leadership must adjust to each others' needs and expectations. The relationship is, however, complex and somewhat uncertain.

In the first place, in most states the Panchayat system has direct authority over the administration of development programs under its jurisdiction. This authority is, however, limited by several factors. First, many large and complex development works are not turned over to the panchayats because they cross panchayat boundaries and the panchayats lack the technical competence to administer them.<sup>102</sup> Large irrigation projects, for example, will remain under the direct control of the State Irrigation Department. Similarly, many projects which are germane to the rural development program are often poorly coordinated with it (e.g., irrigation, road building, etc.).

Second, because of the reluctance of the panchayats to finance their own schemes, the bulk of panchayat functions are those "transferred" to them from the state government. These transferred schemes, together with various programs for distributing agricultural inputs, are subject to various technical, statutory, and administrative restrictions which are enforced by the state government.<sup>103</sup> Thus, state engineers must approve the location of tubewells, or farm credit may be restricted to certain specific uses or even to certain classes of farmers. Furthermore, auditing of the books and evaluation of the programs remain the preserve of the State administration.

Third, the very functioning of the panchayat itself remains a matter of administrative concern. This extends to the power, under appropriate circumstances, to suspend resolutions of the panchayat bodies, to dissolve the panchayats and demand new elections, and the power to remove panchayat officials.<sup>104</sup> The location of these powers and the procedures varies from state to state but in all of them it is an administrative and not a judicial or popular responsibility.

Finally, control over personnel is heavily dominated by the state administration. The higher development personnel--and technicians and the Executive officers at various levels--are "loaned" to the panchayats by State administrative agencies.

---

<sup>102</sup> P. R. Dubhashi, Rural Development Administration (Bombay: Popular, 1970) Ch. X.

<sup>103</sup> The best single survey of the control mechanisms is Iqbal Narain, et.al., Panchayat Raj Administration (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1970). See also, G. R. Reddy, "Some Aspects of Decision Making in Panchayat Raj," Economic and Political Weekly, Oct. 10, 1970, p. 1700.

<sup>104</sup> H. C. Pande, "The Collector and Panchayat Raj Institutions," Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. XI (3), July-September, 1965, pp. 637-643.

Although the panchayats may have some input into their personnel files and may initiate certain forms of disciplinary action, these officers still remain under the control of their own services in most cases. For lower level personnel, the panchayats control the selection process but the wages and service conditions, etc. are established, once again, by the State government.

In consequence, the Block Development Officer (B.D.O.) is in an ambiguous situation. As the executive officer of the Samithi, he is under its authority. But as an officer in the State administration he also bears full responsibility for the proper implementation of the State's transferred projects and for the integrity of his administration, for which he is answerable to his administrative superiors.<sup>105</sup> Neither he nor his subordinates can forget that they are part of a state administrative service which will reward them not only on their contribution to the success of "democratic decentralization" but also on their administrative performance. The B.D.O., therefore, has certain powers and responsibilities vis-a-vis the development program which mean that he can never function simply as the agent of the Samithi.

One further consideration should be kept in mind. The technical personnel assigned to the Block have a relationship to the B.D.O. which is analogous to his relationship to the Samithi.<sup>106</sup> They are under his administrative authority, and thus under that of the Samithi. Nevertheless, they remain members of their own administrative (technical) services. They remain part of the line of control and communication with the State's technical Ministries and they remain responsible for technical performance to those Ministries. Block control over them is incomplete.

One interesting consequence of the complexity of these relationships is reflected in the common observation that a good deal of the success of development projects depends on the personal relationships of the B.D.O., Pradhan (Samithi President), and technocrat. In one Block, where relations are good, development will proceed apace. In another, rancor and dissention will prevail. To the extent that these observations are correct, and there is little reason to believe that they are not, it would indicate a lack of institutionalization of administrative-political relations at this level.

---

<sup>105</sup> cf. V. T. Krishnamachari, Report on Indian and State Administrative Services and Problems of District Administration (New Delhi: Planning Commission, 1962).

<sup>106</sup> cf. D. V. Reddy, "Agricultural Extension," in N. Srinivasan, ed., Agricultural Administration in India (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1969) p. 159-186. See also, S. N. Dubey, "Organizational Tension in the Community Development Blocks in India," Human Organization, Vol. 28 (1), Spring 1969, pp. 64-71.

The evidence would suggest that the limits of authority and responsibility are as yet unclear and poorly defined in practice. As a result, the operation of the system depends a great deal on the respective power and skill of the participants, their evaluation of each other's intentions and orientations, and even on their personal accommodation. Thus if the Pradhan is a powerful politician who appears reasonably dedicated to rational development decisions and maintains a duly civil stance toward his B.D.O., one would assume that the B.D.O. would have little difficulty in accommodating his administrative responsibilities to his role as Samithi executive officer. In other circumstances the adjustment might be more difficult.

The relationship between the administrator and politician is one which is potentially very flexible and encourages a bargaining style of interaction as each adjusts to the demands of the other. The bargaining, however, seems to be restricted to the incumbents of two positions--the B.D.O. and the Samithi Pradhan. The formalization of this aspect of administrative political interaction is probably due to the bureaucratic passion for "correct" procedures and to the fact that any other policy would involve a rather dangerous meddling in local politics. This "correctness" on the administrator's part has, however, tended to strengthen the position of the Pradhan as the channel of political pressure. This in turn increases the power of the dominant faction within the panchayat. The question which we might now raise is whether the cooperative system has had any effect in reducing the politicization of rural development or diversifying contacts between the village and the government.

Both in conception and in practice, the cooperative societies are an important component of the Government's development program in rural India.<sup>107</sup> The model is a "multi-purpose" cooperative that services its members through the supply of credit, agricultural inputs, storage facilities, marketing

---

<sup>107</sup> Among the many works on Cooperatives in India, only a few can be mentioned here. For a general statement of the role of co-ops in development and the philosophy behind them, one should refer to the Five Year Plans. In addition, a general treatment can be found in S. K. Dey, former minister of Community Development, Sahakari Samaj (Bombay: Asia, 1969). An extensive treatment of Indian Cooperatives can be found in K. R. Kuldarni, Theory and Practice of Cooperation in India and Abroad, 3 volumes, (Bombay: Cooperators Book Depot, 1962).

assistance and even certain community functions such as recreation. In practice, however, the two main functions have been the supply of credit and, more recently, the supply of agricultural inputs. As the bulk of both these resources are supplied by the Government, the cooperative is as much an agent of Government administration as it is a voluntary organization of farmers.

This double function is, of course, intended. The cooperatives are the manifestation of the Congress leadership's intention to stimulate collective self-help within a democratic framework. In consequence, they are both voluntary and "private." On the other hand, as the embodiment of the new economic order, they have official sanction and encouragement which gives them a favored position in the distribution of resources. In addition, as one of the few organized links to the farmer, the cooperative is a convenient government agent. Thus ideological and practical considerations both favor their expansion.

The cooperatives are, therefore, in an ambiguous position. On the one hand, they are expected to promote the interests of members, prominent among whom are the wealthier farmers and even many non-farmers who desire access to credit or the power of distributing it. On the other hand, they are viewed as community institutions with an important role in promoting the welfare of the entire village or group of villages. On both counts, the cooperatives have received criticism.

Even from the narrow perspective of their role as credit agencies, the cooperatives have been more active in distributing loans than in collecting them and large numbers of societies are in arrears or defunct.<sup>108</sup> It is usually assumed that the local elites who control the societies have appropriated the funds, supplied by the government, with no intention of making the society work.<sup>109</sup> In instances where the government has attempted

---

<sup>108</sup> Study of Utilization of Cooperative Loans (New Delhi: Program Evaluation Organization, 1965) Ch. 1, pp. 16-19, Ch. V.

<sup>109</sup> D. Thorner, Agricultural Cooperatives in India (Bombay: Asia, 1964) Ch. 1. Also see S. C. Jain, Economic Institutions of Rural Uplift (Bombay: Popular, 1966).

to restrict the "diversion" of funds by tying the loans to specific cropping plans and including as part of the loan, supplies of improved seed and fertilizer, the farmers have often lost interest. Under such circumstances, many farmers report that they prefer to get their credit, seed, or fertilizer from private individuals rather than the cooperative.<sup>110</sup>

Nor have the cooperatives appeared anxious to undertake the promotional tasks which the development administration would like them to accept as part of their service to the community. These activities would require them to expand membership and encourage the extension of improved agricultural practices. There is no obvious advantage to the wealthier farmers in practicing such altruism. The National Sample Survey data clearly indicates that relatively little information and few resources "trickle down" to the poorer farmer, although the richer farmers have been very "progressive" in seeking their own advantage.<sup>111</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that questions have been raised about the wisdom of continuing the subsidization of the rural elite with government resources. Nor is it difficult to understand why the Government of India has recently launched specialized programs to aid the small farmer and marginal farmer. Although it is still too early to evaluate the success of these programs, it is interesting that they appear to be organized with a much more direct administrative responsibility for resource distribution than earlier programs and that those responsible for them have been highly suspicious of existing institutions.<sup>112</sup>

---

<sup>110</sup> Report of the Working Group on Cooperation in the IADP Districts (New Delhi: Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Community Development and Cooperation, 1966) pp. 10-11, 14-15, Ch. III.

<sup>111</sup> V. R. Gaikwad and G. L. Verma, "Extent of People's Involvement in the Community Development Program," Behavioral Sciences and Community Development, Vol. 2 (2), September, 1968, p. 153.

<sup>112</sup> H. B. Shivamaggi, "Provision of Credit for Small Cultivators," in A. M. Khusro, ed., Readings in Agricultural Development (Bombay: Allied, 1968), pp. 240-261. See also V. R. Gaikwad, Small Farmers: State Policy and Programme Implementation (Hyderabad: National Institute of Community Development, 1971), Introduction.

Control over the cooperatives' activities has become increasingly diffuse as cooperative functions have expanded. The credit operations of the societies are typically under the control of a State Cooperative Bank. The administrative procedures of the cooperatives, on the other hand, are the responsibility of the State Ministry of Cooperation. In specialized programs, such as the Intensive Agricultural District Program or the Small Farmers Program, control is frequently centralized in ad hoc committees at the State and district level in the interests of coordination among the various agencies involved.<sup>113</sup> Finally, in the normal course of events, the block development administration must be involved in the cooperatives' distribution of agricultural inputs, whether the cooperatives secure them from the market, producers, or the block administration itself, because they represent part of the complex web of public agencies whose development efforts the B.D.O. is expected to coordinate.<sup>114</sup>

The cooperatives form not only a part of the government's development efforts, but, and undoubtedly because of this, they are also an integral part of the pattern of local-level politics. As one source of contact with the government administration and as a distribution agent of government resources, they are a vital resource to the local politician. Similarly, for those who benefit from them, the mediation of local leaders between the village and the government is as necessary in cooperative activities as in any other activity in which the government is heavily involved. Thus, although the cooperatives do provide an additional point of access between the village and the state, and cooperative leadership is an independent source of village power, cooperative leadership is

---

<sup>113</sup> cf. R. C. Dwivedi, "The Administration of the IADP," Indian Cooperative Review, Vol. IV (4), July 1967, p. 64; Gaikwad, op.cit., Ch. 2; D. Brown, "The Role of the Coops in the IADP," Indian Cooperative Review, Vol IV (4), July 1967, pp. 95-102.

<sup>114</sup> Illustrations of the inter-relationship of these various agencies can be found in Study of the Multiplication and Distribution Programme for Improved Seed (New Delhi: Programme Evaluation Organization, 1961); Problems of Coordination in Agricultural Programmes (New Delhi: Programme Evaluation Organization, 1965).

remarkably similar in its functions and organization (in factions) to that of the panchayat. This is not to suggest that the cooperative is exclusively a political institution and specialized solely to dealing with the government. But like the panchayat it unites important economic and political functions. In consequence, cooperative resources have been controlled by those who count in local power struggles, and the cooperatives have been as much a part of local factional struggles as the panchayats. Not infrequently, the same faction controls both.

We are, therefore, brought back to one of the basic contradictions of the whole development program. The development plan is, presumably, rationally formulated by the national and state planners. Implementation is then turned over to the administrators who, whatever their limitations, have a fairly clear mandate to increase productivity and to meet certain set targets in the construction of community facilities. At this point, essentially at the point of implementation, an "irrational" factor is introduced in the form of Panchayat politicians and cooperative leaders. Although the local institutions were to have formed the lowest level in the planning process as well as in the administrative process, no one argues today that they have actually made any contribution in this area.<sup>115</sup> As agents of "democratic decentralization," their input into the system is not in the formulation of policy, but in the "adjustment of policy to local conditions." Such "adjustment" is clearly in the interest of effective administration. Nevertheless, not all inputs from the Panchayat system will be motivated by a desire for economic efficiency. Obviously, many will be "politically motivated." An administrator, if he is to do his duty, must distinguish among these pressures in order to sort out the "political" and the "irrational" from the others. Whenever he does so, however, he must set his administrative responsibilities and authority against the authority of the "representatives of the people" with an institutionalized right to influence the course of local administration.<sup>116</sup>

---

<sup>115</sup> cf. M. V. Mathur, et.al., Panchayat Raj in Rajasthan (New Delhi: Impex, 1966) Ch. 5, especially p. 95.

<sup>116</sup> cf. C. P. Bhambhri, "Official--Non-Official Relationship in Panchayat Raj," Indian Journal of Political Science, Vol. 28 (3), July 1967, pp. 133-142; Iqbal Narain, et.al., Panchayat Raj Administration, Ch. 8.

A second effect of bureaucratic style relationships with local institutions is that, given the extent of external administrative control, the major decisions of these institutions remain distributive in nature. They have little capacity for shaping the structure of government programs or the overall priorities among possible development efforts. Essentially, the panchayats and cooperatives simply take advantage of resources which are made available to them and determine where they will be put. This encourages the development of political cleavage along the lines of geography--block and village--and reduces decisions to choices among individual villagers. Such issues are well suited to the factional style of politics which has characterized local politics in India. The political style of the local politician, the functions of the panchayat-cooperative system, and the social organization of the village are reasonably well adjusted to each other.

### CONCLUSIONS

The panchayat leader has the statutory authority of his office and the power which official contacts and control over productive inputs provide. Nevertheless, his power, in Parsons' sense of the word, is low. His traditional status and prestige are low because of the middle range social strata from which he originates and because his new political functions involve him in behavior which vitiates such status. Elections transfer office and its patronage but not legitimacy. In addition, it is probably the case that the villager's definition of the Pradhan's leadership role is somewhat different from that of the development officer or national politician. The villager sees the Pradhan as the conduit of private benefits. The outside world sees him as the leader of a progressive community. The villager might well wish that the panchayat leaders would act for the public good, but their experience is otherwise and the factional basis of electoral politics in the village inhibits such a stance.

Unlike the earlier situation when development workers were urged to use the authority of the village leadership to encourage change, and village development workers pleaded and bargained with village leaders to follow their advice, the situation is now radically changed. Now the most likely source of change is the pressure which the leader's constituents place upon him and he must plead with development authorities for resources that will maintain his position. He is very dependent upon those external resources because he cannot raise them within the village. Similarly he is dependent because the "currency" of factional exchange is unconvertible outside the factional dyad and must therefore be limited to goods and services of immediate value. In such situations the capacity for collective action is low and the likelihood of sustained cooperation even lower.

Although there is little direct evidence on the problem, there is some indication that the links among farmer, politician and administrator may be undergoing some change. Eldersveld reports that 64% of his rural sample still felt the need for an intermediary in dealing with government officials. Yet he also found an impressive core of villagers (22%) with "high levels of self-confidence" in dealing with government officials.<sup>117</sup> Similarly, the panchayat leader is still the most frequent intermediary picked by villagers with problems in securing agricultural inputs,<sup>118</sup> but the Village Level Worker (the field representative of the development administration) ranks a close second and in fact is contacted by numerically more individuals though not with such great frequency.

On the basis of this information, one might be tempted to suggest that as there are indeed a variety of sources of agricultural inputs--co-ops, administration, and panchayat programs--and as farmers gain more confidence in dealing with officials, a more direct relationship might evolve between the administration and villager which could bypass the local politician. At the present time that is inhibited by the linking of so many development functions with local politics through the Panchayat Raj system; but as there is no Constitutional necessity for such an arrangement the decision could be reversed. The only restraints on such a change would be ideological (the myth of village uplift) and political (the organizational base of the party in factional patronage). There is some evidence of late that both of these restraints may have been undermined, as a newly unified and victorious Congress reassesses its priorities.

For the immediate future, however, the situation confronting the farmer is a difficult one politically. Agricultural inputs are distributed through a variety of agencies, most of which do not work on market principles and are controlled either by powerful administrators or by local elites.

---

<sup>117</sup> S. J. Eldersveld, et.al., The Citizen and the Administrator in a Developing Democracy (Glenview: Scott Foresman and Company, 1968) Ch. II.

<sup>118</sup> Indian Institute of Public Opinion, Monthly Survey of Public Opinion, "Opinion Survey of Rural Leaders...", p. 28. See also A. P. Barnabas and D. C. Pelz, Administering Agricultural Development (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1970) p. 88. Barnabas and Pelz report that 61% of the sample reported daily contacts with the Sarpanch and 52% with the V. L. W.

To aggregate all of these inputs requires political influence and a fairly high level of entrepreneurial skill. Both of these requisites must be added to the cost of farm modernization and for the small farmer they may be prohibitive. The solution for most farmers is clearly to seek the services of a political broker. Involvement in factional politics is not without its costs, however, and the client may well risk involvement in village factional disputes as the price for the broker's services. Furthermore, if the stability of supply is crucial in a farmer's decision to modernize production, the factional conduit is perhaps the least secure of all systems of supply. It is subject to all the vagaries of local alliance building and within it neither local leadership nor development administration can be viewed as neutral development agents.

One final reservation concerning the present system should be mentioned. As politics becomes a pragmatic struggle for resources and because government controls many of these resources, it is difficult for local administration to maintain its image of neutrality and commitment to the public good. No matter how honest officials are, their decisions on the distribution of scarce goods will have a profound effect on local political fortunes. Officials are in danger of being linked with the elites and factions they inadvertently support. That they have not been altogether successful in avoiding this danger is indicated by Eldersveld's data, which reports that about 60% of his rural sample assumed that most officials were corrupt.<sup>119</sup> That is, they were perceived as an integral part of the factional/patronage system. It is also possible to interpret Indian voting patterns as essentially pro- and anti-Government postures, determined by whether one is or is not in the flow of patronage.<sup>120</sup> In short, Panchayat Raj may have been of some value in "political development," if by that we mean simply the involvement of the citizens in the distribution of public resources. On the other hand, its contribution to

---

<sup>119</sup> Eldersveld, et.al., The Citizen and the Administrator..., p. 29, Table 2.16.

<sup>120</sup> cf. Gopal Krishna, "One Party Dominance: Development and Trends," in R. Kothari, et.al., Party System and Election Studies (Bombay: Allied, 1967) pp. 69-75.

institutionalizing the relationship between citizen and the state is at best transitional. It may well be at the present time that the crucial focus of institutional evolution in rural India is not the village but the bloc or district level where higher administrative officers and Samithi or Zilla politicians work out the procedures for distributing resources and the balance of administrative, technical and political elites in those procedures.<sup>121</sup>

---

<sup>121</sup>Mary Carras' The Dynamics of Indian Political Factions (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), indicates that the prospects for escaping factional politics at higher levels are somewhat limited in practice.