

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS AMONG PANCHAYAT REPRESENTATIVES

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Panchayats have traditionally been a part of social regulation in India. However, panchayati raj system, in the form that we see it today, is certainly a post-independence phenomenon. Panchayati raj system was formally launched to seek people's participation in rural development on 2nd October 1959 in Rajasthan. Since then, panchayats have been in existence though at different levels of functioning in different states. Similarly, various attempts have also been made at different times by central and state governments, depending upon their ideology and political motivations, to strengthen panchayats.

The decade 1990's, however, has witnessed a remarkable shift in the status of the panchayati raj institutions (PRIs). Thanks to the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act, 1992, PRIs are now a constitutional body. This new act has made several important provisions for revitalizing PRIs as a vehicle of self-reliant local governance.

Objective : The new act has generated tremendous amount of hopes and enthusiasm. To what extent these hopes are realized, would depend upon several factors. In the past, one significant factor responsible for poor performance of PRIs has been the conflicting relations among panchayat members. Therefore, a study was undertaken to explore the kind of relations existing in the newly elected panchayat representatives.

METHODOLOGY :

The study was conducted in one district each of the Rajasthan (Distt. Alwar) and Haryana (Distt. Gurgaon) states. Two Panchayat Samities from each Zila Parishad, and two-Gram Panchayats from each Panchayat Samities were randomly selected for the study. Thus, from Alwar Zila Parishad, Panchayat Samities Kishangarh Bass (Gram Panchayats : Kishangarh and Khanpur Mewan) and Tizara (Gram Panchayats: Shahpur and Bhindusi) and Panchayat samities: Gurgaon (Gram Panchayats: Islampur and Jhadsa) and Nooh (Gram Panchayats: Rewasan and Atta) from Gurgaon Zila Parishad, were selected. All the available representatives of selected Gram Panchayats and 10 representatives each, from all the selected Panchayat Samities and Zila Parishads (which roughly comes to 30% of total representatives at these levels) were randomly taken as respondents.

Thus, 79 Gram Panchayat representatives, 40 Panchayat Samiti representatives and 20 Zila Parishad representatives (total 139) were personally interviewed with the help of a specially designed schedule. Though, the two socio-economic districts belong to different States, socio-economic characteristics of panchayat representatives were similar in the two districts. This may be because of the similarity of socio-cultural milieus as the two districts are neighbouring. Therefore, the data of both districts have been clubbed.

Interpersonal relations among panchayat representatives were assessed in terms of three dimensions: (i) mutual trust, (ii) openness and (conflict). A three point rating scale was developed for this purpose which included three statements related to each dimension.

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Respondents were asked to tell their experience with reference to each statement. A score of 0, 1 and 2 were assigned to the responses for each statement. Thus, for each dimension, score of a respondent could range from 0 to 6. More score for a dimension means greater presence of the dimension in interpersonal relations among panchayat representatives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION :

(a) **Mutual trust** : The data shown in the table 1 show that panchayat representatives had average level of mutual trust (mean score 3.84 out of 6.) At Zila Parishad level, mutual trust was higher than the other two levels, though the difference was not statistically significant. Responses of two third respondents at all the three tiers of panchayats indicated medium level of mutual trust among panchayat representatives.

Table 1. Level of mutual trust among panchayat representatives

Level of Mutual Trust	No. of Panchayat Representatives			Total N = 139
	Gram Panchayats N = 79	Panchayat Samitis N = 40	Zila Parishads N = 20	
Low (<mean-1 SD)	18 (23)	6 (15)	1 (5)	25 (18)
Medium (mean \pm SD)	51 (65)	27 (68)	12 (60)	90 (65)
High (>mean-1 SD)	10 (12)	7 (17)	7 (35)	24 (17)
Mean	3.75	4.04	4.50	3.84
SD	1.46	1.56	1.00	1.35
'F' value	1.05 Not significant			

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.

(b) **Openness among panchayat representatives** : Level of openness among panchayat representatives was below average (mean score 3.48, table 2). Responses of one fifth of the respondents indicated low level of openness among panchayat representatives. Again there was no significant difference in the level of openness among different tiers of panchayats.

Table 2. Level of openness among panchayat representatives

Level of Openness	No. of Panchayat Representatives			Total N = 139
	Gram Panchayats N = 79	Panchayat Samitis N = 40	Zila Parishads N = 20	
Low (<mean-1 SD)	22 (28)	6 (15)	3 (15)	31 (22)
Medium (mean \pm SD)	46 (58)	29 (73)	8 (40)	83 (60)
High (>mean-1SD)	12 (14)	5 (12)	9 (45)	25 (18)
Mean	3.4	3.55	4.02	3.48
SD	1.93	1.10	1.07	1.65
'F' value	1.01 Not significant			

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.

(c) **Conflict among panchayat representatives** : Conflict is a negative dimension in interpersonal relations. Mean score of greater than 3.5 out of 6 (table 3) in the studied panchayats indicates, presence of high degree of conflict among panchayat representatives. Responses of 28 percent respondents indicated high level of conflict among panchayat representatives. It is interesting to note that mean score of conflict was higher in Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads than the Gram Panchayats, though the difference was not significant, statistically. This may be because of the fact that Gram Panchayat representatives are from the same or

neighbouring villages whereas representatives of other two tiers of panchayats belong to distant villages. Competition for obtaining more and more allocation for their area is high among representatives of Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads.

Table 3. Level of conflict among panchayat representatives

Level of Conflict	No. of Panchayat Representatives			
	Gram Panchayats N = 79	Panchayat Samitis N = 40	Zila Parishads N = 20	Total N = 139
Low (<mean-1 SD)	13 (16)	5 (12)	4 (20)	22 (16)
Medium (mean \pm SD)	41 (52)	26 (65)	11 (55)	78 (56)
High (>mean+1 SD)	25 (32)	9 (23)	5 (25)	39 (28)
Mean	3.55	3.92	4.00	3.63
SD	2.00	1.10	0.98	1.30
'F' value	1.03 Not significant			

Figures in parentheses indicate percentage.

CONCLUSION :

Results clearly indicate that the interpersonal relations among panchayat representatives are far from satisfactory. This issue assumes added significance in view of the fact that the 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act, 1992 aims at enhancing the participation of hitherto neglected weaker sections in development process through PRIs. This novel aim, to be achieved, calls for far more mutual trust and openness among panchayat representatives and, of course, less conflict than what is found in this study. The message is clear, it is just not sufficient to delegate powers to the panchayats for development activities, panchayat representatives should be sensitized to improve their interpersonal relations. Training programmes organized for panchayat representatives should also include this behavioural component. This will help panchayat representatives the importance of working collectively for common good of their area.