



ISSN: 2582-8169

**“ROLE OF GRAM PANCHAYAT IN RURAL DEVELOPMENT:  
A MICRO-STUDY ON THE PURULIA DISTRICT OF WEST BENGAL”**

Nakul Chandra Das<sup>1</sup>, Research Scholar  
Department of Geography, RKDF University Ranchi  
Dr. Sheetal Topno<sup>1</sup>, Assistant Professor & Head,  
Department of Geography, RKDF University, Ranchi

*Received: 15th February 2024;*

*Revised: 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2024*

*Accepted: 12<sup>th</sup> May 2024*

**Abstract:**

Rural development has been engaging the attention of the Indian leadership even before Independence. The goals of development in general and rural development in particular have been enshrined in the constitution and Five-Year Plans. The constitution has laid down the goal in terms of building a socialist, secular and democratic society. In order to realize these goals, it became necessary to devise institutional mechanisms, mobilize resources (both human & material) and transform existing institutional structures and value patterns with a view to build a new social and economic order based on the values of equality, freedom and justice. The role of panchayat Raj institution as instrument of rural reconstruction and- development needs no emphasis. They have been recognized with under powers and financial resources not merely as institution of political participation but institution of social and economic development. It is a commonly held view that local development administration is married to such institution. It is not an end in itself: - it is means of rural development. Research paper based on primary and secondary data. The research article examines the performance of Panchayat Raj system in rural development and the impact of different programmes implemented by Panchayat Raj institution in Purulia District. This article also studies about identify problems and recommendation of villages of this district in implementing rural

**Keywords:** Rural Development, Constitution, Panchayat Raj Institute, Programmes

**I. INTRODUCTION**

The genuine headway of a nation relies upon development of rural setting, for nearly eighty percent of country's total population reside in villages. This justifies the saying that India lives in village. The large section

\*Corresponding Author: **Nakul Chandra**

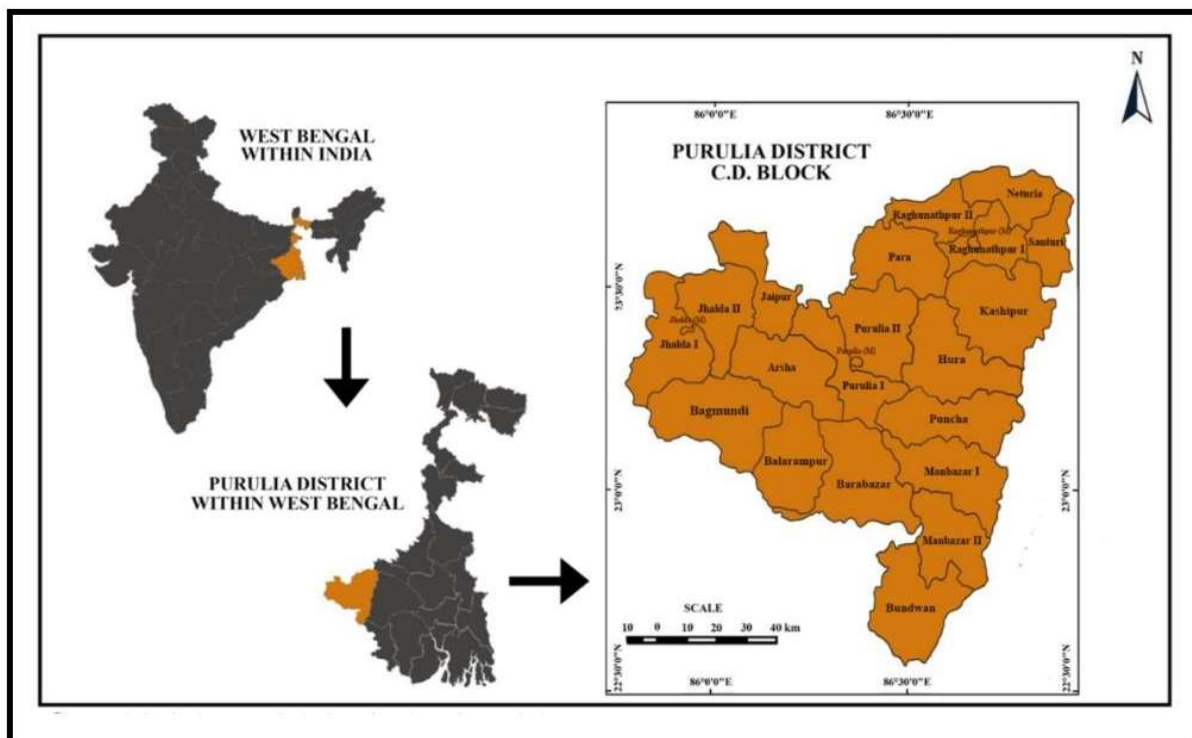
**Das**

\*Email: [nakul.das100@gmail.com](mailto:nakul.das100@gmail.com)

of population remains socially depressed, economically vulnerable and politically backward. To transform these ignorant, illiterate and politically unconscious masses into socially advanced, economically well-

off and politically vigilant citizen has gained primacy in almost all efforts made by architects of Indian Constitution and successive Governments. In other words, rural Development became an urgent need. Rural development is not regarded of late as just launching a few poverty alleviation programmes or any community development project. Rather it represents a very comprehensive concept of total development of rural communities, removal of rural poverty and attaining a sustaining growth of the rural economy. But rural development in developed countries perceived as the improvement of infrastructural facilities and beautification of country side. Different authors have defined rural development in different ways. Accordingly different concepts and views have been explained in this study.

But at this stage it may be stated that rural development is concerned with development of rural economy and well-being of rural people. Rural development becomes meaningless without alleviating poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and misery of the rural people. Rural development programmes are primarily launched in India to remove the distress of the rural people. This aspect of rural development has been focussed in India. Accordingly, rural development is viewed generally in India as the rural development programmes launched by the government. But, by rural development we mean all the measures that are taken for the amelioration of social and economic conditions of rural people. The Panchayats are expected to play an important role in rural development in India, particularly after independence.



### Fig1:Location Map of the Study Area

Purulia District lies between 22°04' to 23°045' North Latitude and 85°055' to 86°055' East Longitude (Fig. ). The district is located in the westernmost part of West Bengal. The shape of the Purulia District resembles a triangle whose top is located in the west, and the base is situated north to south. Jharkhand surrounds the district's northern, western and southern parts, whereas the eastern portion is bounded by three districts- Paschim Bardhaman, Bankura and Jhargram. The Tropic of Cancer passes through this district. With the size of 6259 sq. k.m., the district occupies the fifth position in West Bengal. The district has three Subdivisions, namely (a) Purulia Sadar (East), (b) Purulia Sadar (West), and (c) Raghunathpur. This district has a total of twenty-one police stations. It is divided into twenty Community Development (C.D.) blocks and has twenty-eight urban units (3 Municipalities and 25 census towns). This district has 170 Gram Panchayats and 2,667 villages. Purulia City is the district's headquarters. Objective

- To Explain the structure of the Panchayat Raj system in rural development.
- To Study the various Rural development programmes
- To study the impact of different programmes implemented by Panchayat Raj institution in study area

- To identify problems of villages of Purulia district in implementing rural development programmes.

- To give suggestions for the better implementation of policies and development

#### 4. Methodology

In the light of objectives of the study, a systematic research design is drawn. The relevant data for the study was collected through primary and secondary sources. Samples of 100 beneficiaries of various development schemes were taken to assess the impacts of the various development schemes/programmes on their lives. Research tools such as interview schedule and participant observation was used. Separate questionnaires were used for collection of information from Gram Panchayat members, and rural poor tribal people, who have taken assistance and other benefits under the jurisdiction of Gram Panchayat. A questionnaire was prepared which comprised questions on various aspects dealing with their social, economic, political and educational conditions.

#### 5. Significance of the Study

The significance of the work lies in analysis of role of the Panchayat Raj Institutions in rural development. The importance of the work is that it focuses on various rural development programmes adopted by Panchayat Raj institutions in rural

development. Rural development programmes taught a high degree of performance in the plans documents. It also helps the process of people participation in development programmes. The state government helps the Panchayats by giving them financial grants to carry out the plans for village improvement.

## 6. Discussion And Major finding

### Panchayat structure of the study Area

West Bengal's experience in local governance under the PRI is unique in comparison to those of other Indian states. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 (West Bengal Act XLI of 1973) has governed the state's second-generation Panchayat system since 1978. As a result, elections for Panchayats have been held every five years since then. As a result of these changes, local governments now have the authority to collect taxes and fees on behalf of the people (Government of West Bengal, 2009). Changing the representation of women and other underrepresented groups in the political system has been the most important development since 1978. Although the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992 guaranteed reservations for backward classes and women in the PRI system in India, more

than a third of PRI members in West Bengal had been women since the 1980s (Government of West Bengal, 2004). It's also encouraging to observe that, through the panchayat system, the poorer sectors of the population have gained significant representation since 1978. According to Webster (1990), the state saw a rise in the representation of small peasants and landless workers in PRI between 1978 and 1988. Women's engagement in the panchayat system as elected representatives is lauded. The Panchayat System has three tier Structures.

- Gram Panchayat (Village Level)
- Panchayat Samiti (Block Level)
- Zila Parishad (District Level)

### **Gram Panchayat (Village Level)**

In the structure of the Panchayati Raj, the Village Panchayat is the lowest unit. There is a Panchayat for each village or a group of villages in case the population of these villages happens to be too small. Gram Sabha, a general body of villagers, consists of all the adults residing within the jurisdiction of the Panchayat. The Panchayat is accountable for all its actions to the Gram Sabha,

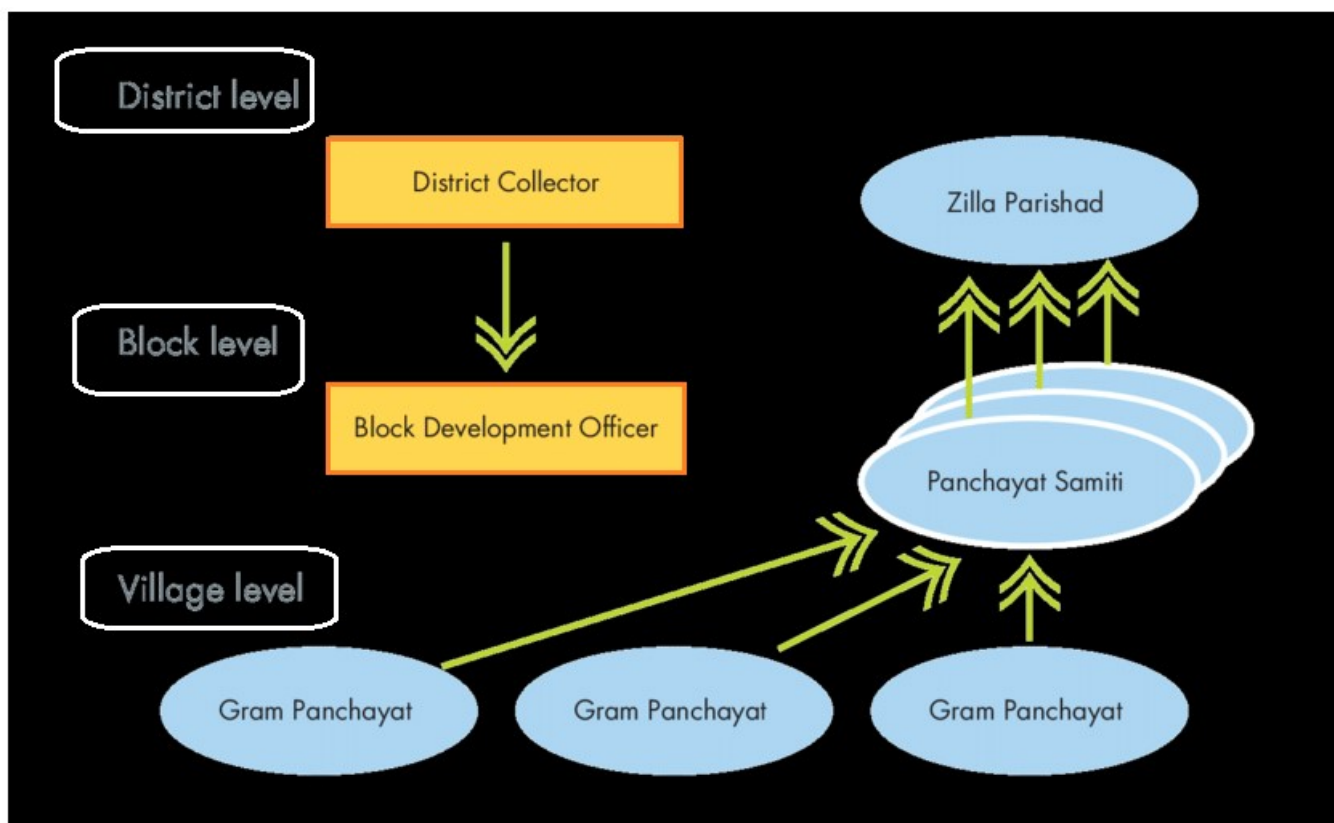


Figure 2: Structure of Panchayat System

The Panchayat chiefly consists of representatives elected by the people of the village. Chairman is elected from among its members, known as 'Sarpanch'. Sarpanch is an ex-officio member of the Panchayat Samiti and participates in its decision-making as well as in the election of the Pradhan and of the members of various Standing Committees.

**Block & Panchayat Samiti:**

Panchayat Samiti is a local government body at the tahsil (taluka) level. It works for the villages of the tahsil that together are called a Development Block. The Panchayat Samiti is the link between the Gram Panchayat (village council) and the zila

parishad (district board). The block, consisting of 20-60 villages, administered through a Panchayat Samiti, consisting of indirectly elected members of village panchayat. The chairman of Panchayat Samiti is called 'Pradhan'.

**Zila Parishad:**

Panchayat is the third and top of 3 tier of the Panchayati Raj system. Zila Parishad is an elected body. Chairpersons or Block Pramukh of Block Samitis are also represented in Zila Parishad. The members of the State Legislature and the members of the Parliament of India are members of the Zila Parishad.

### **Yuvashree**

Employment Bank is primarily a State-owned job-portal and is a unique e-governance initiative of the Labour Department, Government of West Bengal to widen the window of job-opportunity for job seekers of the State. 'Yuvasree' (earlier named as "Yuva Utsaha Prakalpa") was launched in 2013 for providing financial assistance to jobseekers enrolled in Employment Bank to enable them to enhance their employability by undergoing some education or training within the period of assistance

### **Gitanjali**

With a view to providing proper shelters, free of cost, to the poor, the Government in Housing Department has laid proper focus on construction of houses for the Economically Weaker Section of people. This scheme is being implemented in the rural areas and non-Municipal urban areas in coordination with seven other Government Departments under the name of 'Gitanjali' and 'Amar Thikana

### **Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY)**

Swarnajayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY) is a developmental initiative launched by the Government of India to provide sustainable income to poorest of the poor people living in rural areas of the country. The scheme was launched on April

1, 1999.

### **National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA):**

National Rural Employment Guarantee Act 2005 (or, NREGA No 42, later renamed as the "Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act", MGNREGA), is an Indian labour law and social security measure that aims to guarantee the 'right to work'.

It aims to enhance livelihood security in rural areas by providing at least 100 days of wage employment in a financial year to every household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

### **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Gramin)**

In pursuance to the goal - Housing for all by 2022, the rural housing scheme Indira Awas Yojana has been revamped to Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin and approved during March 2016. Under the scheme, financial assistance is provided for construction of pucca house to all houseless and households living in dilapidated houses. It is proposed that one crore households would be provided assistance for construction of pucca house under the project during the period from 2016-17 to 2018-19. The scheme would be implemented in rural areas throughout India except Delhi and Chandigarh. The cost of houses would be shared between Centre and States.

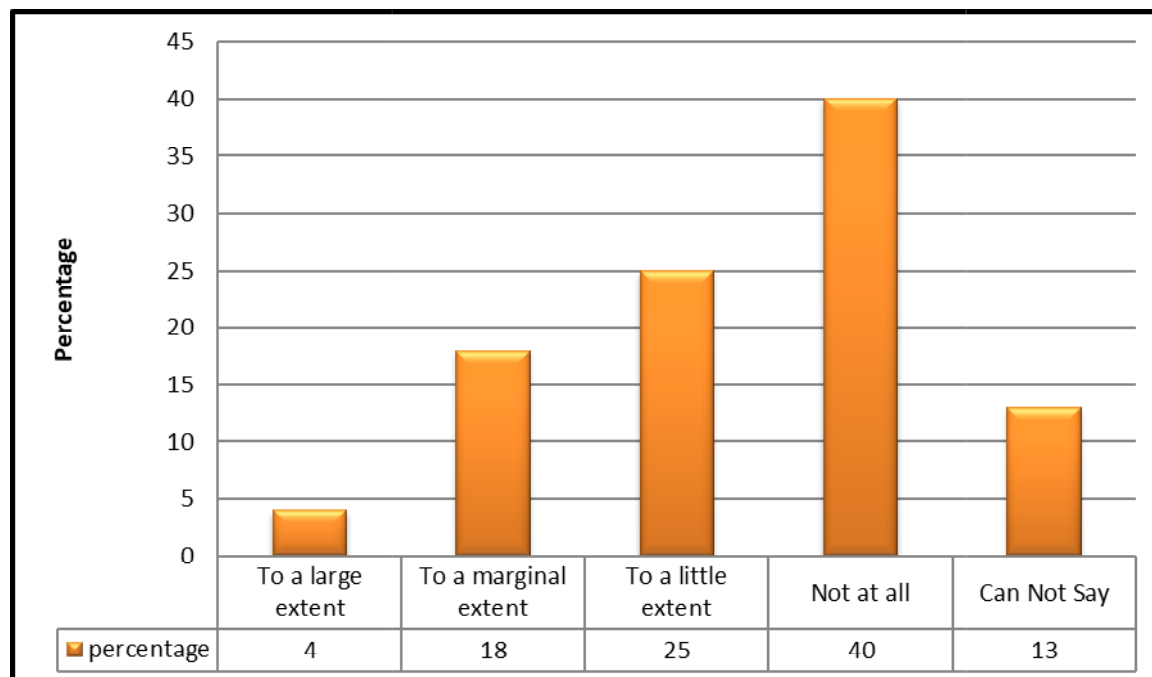
### National Social Assistance Programme

NSAP stands for National Social Assistance Programme. NSAP was launched on 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1995. The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP) represents a significant step towards the fulfillment of the Directive Principles in Article 41 and 42 of the Constitution recognizing the concurrent responsibility of the Central and the State Governments in the matter. In particular, Article 41 of the Constitution of India directs the State to provide public assistance to its citizens in case of unemployment, old age, sickness and disablement and in other cases of undeserved want within the limit of its

economic capacity and development.

Antyodaya Anna Yojana( AAY)

A National sample survey exercise points towards the fact that about 5% of the total population of the country sleeps without two square meals a day. This section of the people is called ‘hungry’. In order to make TPDS(Targeted Public Distribution System) more focused and targeted towards this category of population the Government of India launched a scheme called ‘Antyodaya Anna Yojana’ with effect from 25.12.2000.AAY is a step in the direction of reducing hunger among the poorest segment of the population.



**Fig3: Improvement of economic condition of Rural families by the help of poverty alleviation programmes.**

There is a discussion about the improvement of economic condition of Rural families by the help of poverty alleviation programmes. Regarding Poverty alleviation Programme out of 100 respondents(Figure3) interviewed 4%,18%,25%,40% respondents revealed that the economic

condition of rural families has improved largely ,marginally, little ,not at all .

**Table1: According to Respondents About Political Awareness and Activities in Political Parties**

If member of any political party, tell nature of participation		Do you go to party meeting?			If yes, tell issues regarding discussion in party meeting				
Active	Passive	Yes	No	Rare	Increasing of membership	Priority to panchayat work	Encouraging to Dalits & minorities class	To work according to party manifesto	Reservation in panchayat
60(60%)	40(40%)	60(60%)	30(30%)	10(10%)	35(58%)	4(7%)	5(8%)	10(17%)	6(10%)

Source: Author Calculation

Table1 revealed that 60 percent of the respondents were actively participated in political activities and 40 percent of the respondents did not participate actively in political activities. Further, that 60per cent of the respondents attended party meetings regularly, 30 percent of the respondents did not attend any party meeting and 10 percent of the respondents rarely attended party meetings. Out of which (who attend the party meeting regularly, Fig4), about the

issues regarding discussion in party meeting, 58 per cent of the respondents were felt about increasing of member,7 per cent of the respondents were agreed with to panchayat work according to party meeting, 7 per cent of the respondents felt priority toencouraging ofdalits and minorities class , 17 percent of the respondents felt about party manifesto. 10 per cent of the respondents felt about reservation in panchayat and only.

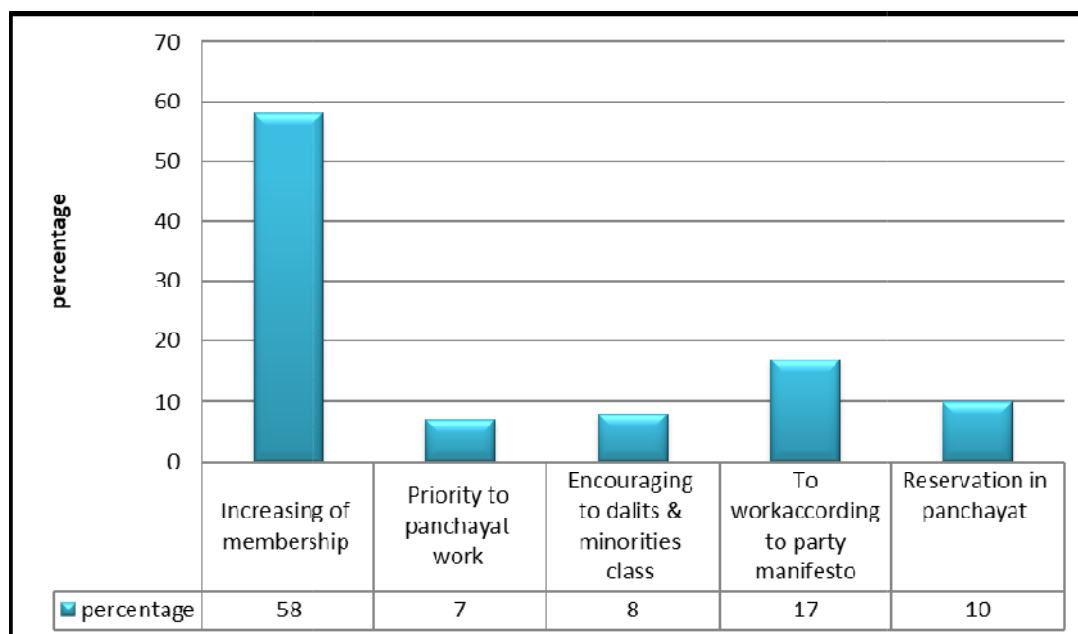




Fig4: According to Respondents About Political Awareness and Activities in Political Parties

Table 2 revealed that 80 percent of the respondents felt that gram sabha has been playing an important role in rural development programmes in the village. 50percent of the respondents supported the programmes i.e. construction of roads and sanitation works. 12percent of the

respondents supported another programmes on health and education. 15 percent of the respondents felt that panchayat has started small saving schemes for the rural people. 23 percent of the respondents supported the programmes of hand pumps (fig5).

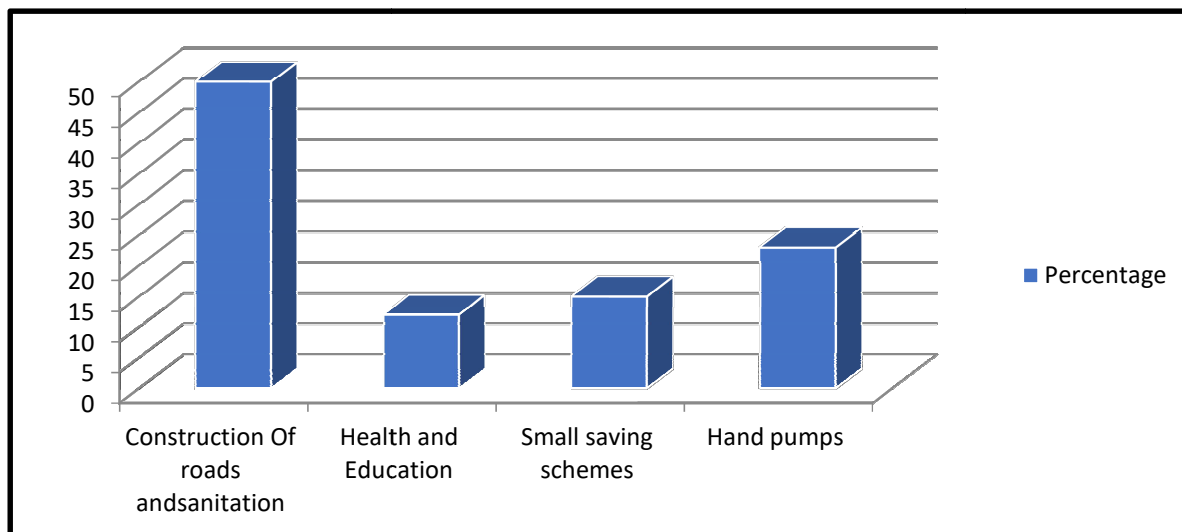
**Table2: According to the Respondents About the Major Development Programmes**

Do you want to give credit about some major development programmes to gram sabha?		If yes, tell about programmes				Did you write to panchayat about problems?		If yes, was it solved by panchayat?	
Yes	No	Constructi on Of roads and sanitation	Healthand Education	Small saving schemes	Hand pumps	Yes	No	Yes	No
80(80%)	20(20%)	40(50%)	10(12%)	12(15%)	18(23%)	90(90%)	10(10%)	50(56%)	40(44%)

Source: Author Calculation

90 percent of the respondents were written to the panchayat to solve these problems, and 10 percent of the respondents did not write to panchayat about the same. 56 percent of the respondents agreed with

panchayat have solved these problems and 44 percent of the respondents felt that the panchayat did not solve their problems. Thus, panchayat has been playing an immense role to solve their problems of the



people.

Fig 5: View of the Respondents About the Major Development Programmes

Table3 revealed that 40 percent of the respondents agreed that development programmes were not useful to villages. 35 per cent of the respondents did not agree about this statement and 25 percent of the respondents did not express any opinion in this regard. 50 percent of the respondents

felt that these development programmes are limited to caste, community and family only30 percent of the respondents did not agree about this statement and 20 percent of the respondents did not express any opinion about the programmes limited to caste, community and family.

Table3: According to the Respondents about Information of Development Programmes

Not any gain to villages			Limited to caste, community, and family			Limited to influential people			Only on paper			Not worry about people welfare		
Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion
40(40%)	35(35%)	25(25%)	50(50%)	30(30%)	20(20%)	55(55%)	30(30%)	15(15%)	80(80%)	15(15%)	5(5%)	75(75%)	20(20%)	5(5%)

Source: Author Calculation

Further, the table revealed that 55 percent of the respondents felt that these development programmes were limited to influential people. 30 percent of the respondents were not agreed about this statement and 15 percent of the respondents did not express any opinion about this statement. 80 percent of the respondents expressed their views that these programmes are limited on paper only. 15 percent of the respondents did not

agree about this statement. 5 percent of the respondents did not express any opinion in this regard, 75 percent of the respondents felt that these development programmes were not confined to people welfare, while 20percent of the respondents did not agree about the same, and 5 percent of the respondents did not express any opinion in this regard.

**Table 4: Views of the Respondents about Political Power of Panchayats and problem of rural development**

It is said in villages that rich and powerful persons trap panchayats. What is your opinion?			Explain some reasons which are proving hurdles in the development of village panchayats		
It is true	Not like that	Can't say	Misuse of village budget money	Muscular power	Groupism
87(87%)	8(8%)	5(5%)	30(30%)	32(32%)	38(38%)

Source: Author Calculation

Table4 depicted that 87 percent of the

respondents felt that the rich and powerful

persons really trapped panchayats, 8 percent of the respondents did not agree about this statement and 5 per cent of the respondents did not express any opinion in this regard.

30 percent of the respondents felt that village fund allotted for this purpose has not been properly utilized for the development of villages. 32 percent of the respondents felt that muscular power has been playing a very important role to become a hurdle in

the development of village panchayat, and 38 percent of the respondents agreed with groupism is the main hurdle in the development of village panchayats. Thus, rich and powerful persons have been playing an important role in trapping panchayats and misused village's money and always used muscular power and development groupism in the villages (fig. 6)

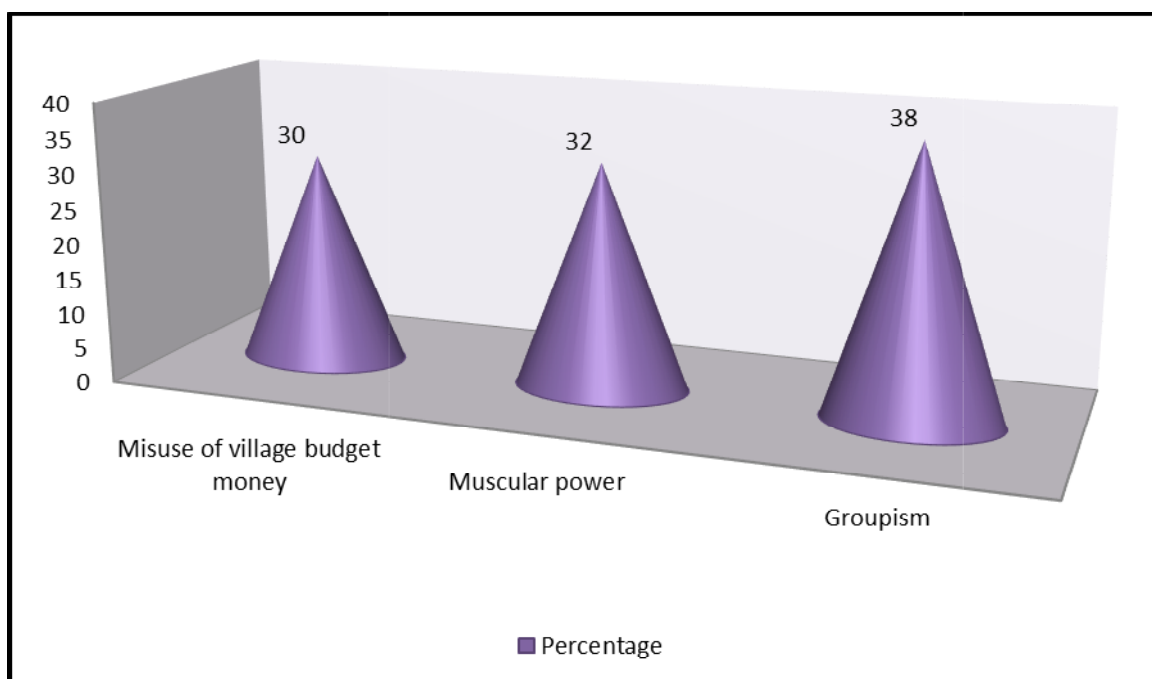


Fig 6: According to respondents problem of rural development in panchayat level

To make Gram Panchayat able to bring about all round development of village setting, following suggestions need urgent attention.

- Since agriculture is center around which prosperity of rural society revolves, Gram panchayat should take extra care in the field of irrigation, supply of improved seeds, manures, pesticides.

Though Gram Panchayat has been playing

vital role in development works in villages, the development is seen in certain areas. So to say, the development is paradoxical. More emphasis is given to construction works like laying out roads, constructing drainage, constructing houses under development programmes.

- Though provision of houses under Pradhanmantri Awas Yojna is on progress, no work is undertaken to repair

houses. Gram Panchayat should invest small amount to repair such houses.

- As regards roads, it is to mention that Gram Panchayat should pay due attention to ensure that adequate materials relating to road construction are provided and Sarpanch should supervise such work and take due care to avoid such construction in half hazard manner.
- No doubt, placement of tube well shows the pro-active role that above mentioned four Gram Panchayats play in providing safe drinking water to villagers. However, placing tube well in front of the influential persons adds stain in the dignity of Gram Panchayat. Tube well should be placed in the land where everybody can take water easily.
- Along with the initiative of Gram Panchayat, it will be useful to empower women in all the villages to execute this programme. Children should be educated right from the age of three to make use of sanitary facilities
- The majority of Panchayat representatives were not trained in Purulia. They are functioning without information on Panchayati Raj Acts, rules, regulations, functions. The training for Panchayat members should be organized in regular interval (once in a year) at district / blocks level.

- Managerial and administrative skills are essential for any successful administration. People's participation implies active participation of people in decision-making process, viz. planning, formulation, implementation, monitoring, evaluation of developmental programmes and in sharing their benefits.
- The Government Officials, higher level leader, political parties and NGOs should act as friend, Philosopher and guide to the emerging women Panchayati Raj Institution leaders who are novice in politics.

Finally, it is imperative to note that rural people are not at all conscious about democratic decentralization and political participation. After casting their votes in the Panchayat elections they forget their further duties and they are yet to learn to act as development participants in the PRIs and even they have been taught to think themselves as part and parcel of the grassroots governance. Study also found that the dominant male echelons connected with the PRIs manipulate some women representatives most of the times in their role performance. Hence, men manipulation to women leaders in their role performance virtually disrupts the vitality of women reservation. Therefore, party politics, specifically, the ruling party interference and dominance over the PRIs violate the very essence and philosophy of democratic

decentralization and grassroots governance.

## Reference

1. Adhikari, B., Di Falco, S., & Lovett, J. C. (2004). Household Characteristics and Forest Dependency: Evidence from Common Property Forest Management in Nepal. *Ecological Economics* , 48 (2), 245-257.
2. M. Mathew, Panchayati Raj in Karnataka today: its National George (ed) dimensions, New Delhi Institute of Social Science and Concept, 1986.
3. Sengupta, D., & Ghosh, D. (2004). West Bengal: State and People: Development and People's Choice – A Case Studies in North 24-Parganas. State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development. Kalyani: Panchayats and Rural Development Department, Government of West Bengal
4. Cornwall, A. (2004). Introduction: new democratic Spaces? The politics and dynamics of institutionalised participation. *IDS Bulletin* , 35 (2), 1-10.
5. Veron, R., Corbridge, S., Williams, G., & Srivast, M. (2003). The Everyday State and Political Society in Eastern India: Structuring Access to the Employment Assurance Scheme. *Journal of Development Studies* , 39 (5), 1-28.
6. Chattopadhyay, R., Chakrabarti, B., & Nath, S. (2010). Village forums or development councils: people's participation in decision-making in rural West Bengal, India. *Commonwealth Journal of Local Governance (Special Issue)*, 66-85.
7. Agarwal, A., & Gupta, K. (2005). Decentralisation and Participation: The Governance of Common Pool Resources in Nepal's Terai. *World Development* , 33 (7), 1101-1114.
8. Bhattacharya, M. (1981). Approaches to the study of local government. *The Calcutta Journal of Political Studies*, 1 (2), pp. 75.
9. Ghatak, M., & Ghatak, M. (2002). Recent Reforms in the Panchayat System in West Bengal: Towards Greater Participatory Governance? *Economic and Political Weekly* , 37 (1), 45-58