

## Study on the Emerging Pattern of the Panchayat Leadership in Tamil Nadu

By

K. RADHAKRISHNA MENON<sup>1</sup> and R. ANNAMALAI<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Majority of the present panchayat leaders-presidents in Tamil Nadu are middle aged agriculturists in profession, having education upto elementary school level belonging to hindu, backward class and equally distributed among different farm size categories *viz.*, big, medium and small land holders. The panchayat leadership is also being changed with every election. Though majority of the panchayat leaders had rated themselves as 'opinion leaders' also, their degree of performance of this role was only medium.

### INTRODUCTION

With the introduction of panchayat raj followed by the secret ballot election of people's representatives to this institution, the leadership structure seems to be slowly undergoing a change from tradition to modernity. The influence of caste, family status, wealth and age as determinants of leadership roles seem to be giving way to education, political identification with the ruling party.

Vidyardhi (1967) was of the opinion that traditional leadership is undergoing a change and new patterns of leadership are emerging on the scene. Krishnaswamy and Guruswamy (1970) stated that a majority of the middle aged people assumed leadership position in panchayats followed by young and old. Barnabas (1958) reported that leaders in rural

area with high social status own more land and are better educated.

Andre Beteille (1966) based on his study in the villages of Thanjavur district has concluded that the emerging leaders of the village are not members of the old land owning class and belong to the class of small cultivators. Their power is to a large extent based upon numerical support within the village and political contacts outside it. These two factors stand to re-inforce each other. The present study is an attempt to find out, the characteristics of the present day panchayat leadership in Tamil Nadu and whether these formal leaders also act as opinion leaders in the villages.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was carried out by selecting respondents from all over

1. Associate Professor, and 2. Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural Extension  
Tamil Nadu Agricultural University, Coimbatore-641003.



Tamil Nadu. A total number of 1890 Panchayats were selected by employing 'Proportionate sampling technique'. The required particulars were collected from the existing presidents of these 1890 panchayats through 'mailed questionnaire' which was pretested prior to despatch to the respondents. The factors which were considered in this study were the age, education, religion, caste, occupation, land holding, social participation, status of family and tenure of office.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Age:** When the sample respondents were distributed by their age categories, it was found that 70-80 per cent of them belong to middle age category and only 18.73 and 10.47 per cent belonged to young and old categories respectively. Thus majority of the panchayat presidents are middle aged only.

**Education:** As regards the educational level of the panchayat presidents, 76.70 per cent of them had education upto primary level and 15.54 per cent had studied upto secondary level. The percentage of presidents with collegiate education was only 6.39.

**Religion and Caste:** Of the panchayat presidents studied 83.45 per cent belong to Hindu community. As regards the caste of the leaders, majority of them came from backward caste (63.54 per cent) and only 25.93 per cent came from forward caste.

**Occupation:** The main occupation of overwhelming majority of the presi-

TABLE 1. Distribution of panchayat leaders according to the various characteristics

Variable	Number n = 1377	Per cent
<b>Age</b>		
a) Young (35 years)	258	18.73
b) Middle - 35 - 50 Years	975	70.80
c) Old 50 Years	144	10.47
<b>Education</b>		
a) Illiterate	19	1.37
b) Primary upto VIII Std	1056	76.70
c) Secondary IX - XI Std	214	15.54
d) Collegiate	78	6.39
<b>Religion and Caste</b>		
<b>(i) Religion</b>		
a) Hindu	1149	83.4
b) Muslim	98	7.11
c) Christian	130	9.44
<b>(ii) Caste</b>		
a) Backward	875	63.54
b) Most Backward	145	10.53
c) Forward	357	25.93
<b>Occupation</b>		
a) Agriculturist	1226	89.04
b) Non-agriculturist	151	10.96
<b>Size of Holding</b>		
a) Small 5 acres	372	30.34
b) Medium 5 - 10 acres	396	32.30
c) Large 10 - acres	458	37.36
<b>Social participation</b>		
a) Co-operative	1241	90.12
b) Political party	1170	84.96
c) Commercial association	16	1.16
d) Educational institution	111	8.06
e) Religious association	32	2.32
f) Others	169	12.27
<b>Status of Family</b>		
a) Jamindars	77	5.59
b) Nattanmaikarai	178	12.92
c) Mirazdars	130	9.44
d) Ur Goundars	17	1.23
e) Maniakarar	109	7.91
f) Others	868	62.55
<b>Tenure of Office</b>		
a) 5 years	1020	74.04
b) 6 to 10 years	223	16.19
c) More than 10 years	134	13.77

\*Multiples of responses do not agree with total



dents (89.04 per cent) was agriculture only. Only less than 11.00 per cent had occupation other than agriculture.

**Size of land holding:** The present village leadership was found to be distributed in equal proportion among the three categories of land owners *viz.*, small, medium and large. Thus the extent of land owned did not seem to influence the emergence of leaders in rural areas.

**Social participation:** As regards the participation of the panchayat presidents in other organisation in the villages, it was found that 90.12 per cent of them were either members or presidents of the village cooperative institutions. So also a majority of them (84.96 per cent) had association with one or other of the political parties in the area.

**Status of family:** More than two thirds of the present panchayat presidents came from ordinary families only. Thus the power exercised by the affluent families like mirazdars and maniakaras in early period has started dwindling now and ordinary people are coming forward to assume positions of leadership.

**Tenure of office:** It was found that 74.08 per cent of the present panchayat presidents were holding the position for less than 5 years while and 16.19 per cent from 6 to 10 years. and 9.73 per cent held the position for more

TABLE 2. Panchayat presidents as opinion leaders

Opinion giving	No	Percentage n=1377
Less	206	14.96
Medium	821	59.63
More	350	25.41

than 10 years. As such there is no monopoly of leadership by a small group in the villages.

It could be seen (Table 2) that 85.00 per cent of the panchayat presidents rated themselves as having played the role of opinion leaders also. However, the degree of performance of this role by them was not the same. The degree of performance of the role of 'opinion leader' by majority of the presidents (59.63 per cent) was found to the medium only

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