



## **The Pyraveekar: "The Fixer" in Rural India**

G. Ram Reddy; G. Haragopal

*Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 11. (Nov., 1985), pp. 1148-1162.

Stable URL:

<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0004-4687%28198511%2925%3A11%3C1148%3ATP%22FIR%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>

*Asian Survey* is currently published by University of California Press.

---

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/about/terms.html>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/journals/ucal.html>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

---

The JSTOR Archive is a trusted digital repository providing for long-term preservation and access to leading academic journals and scholarly literature from around the world. The Archive is supported by libraries, scholarly societies, publishers, and foundations. It is an initiative of JSTOR, a not-for-profit organization with a mission to help the scholarly community take advantage of advances in technology. For more information regarding JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

---

# THE PYRAVEEKAR

## *"The Fixer" in Rural India*

---

G. Ram Reddy and G. Haragopal

---

During the past three decades the central concern of the planners and policy makers in India has been to attack widespread poverty and to bring large numbers of families above the poverty line. Several public policies have been designed to realize this important goal. Popularly known as anti-poverty programs, these policies are intended to help such target groups as small and marginal farmers and landless laborers. If implemented with a reasonable degree of efficiency, the programs would probably have produced better results than they actually have. In fact, according to one observer, "none of these have succeeded in achieving these objectives."<sup>1</sup>

The experience with these policies for rural development has been one of a wide gap between promise and performance. By the late 1960s it was realized that the benefits of development did not percolate to the poorer sections of society. To be effective, these programs require suitable institutional linkages and the establishment of a number of intermediate institutions through which the new development message can be communicated and necessary technology transmitted. In a society characterized by rampant illiteracy, poverty, a low level of civic consciousness, and poor communication facilities, the decision-making levels should be not only closer to people but also devoid of formalism and cumbersome procedures. However, the administrative structures responsible for implementing these programs are modeled on traditional administrative arrangements known for their complexity, cumbersomeness, elitism, centralization, legalism, red

---

G. Ram Reddy is Vice-Chancellor of Andhra Pradesh Open University, and G. Haragopal is Senior Fellow, Centre for Economic and Social Studies, Andhra Pradesh Open University, Hyderabad. The authors wish to thank Professor R. Radhakrishna, Dr. Waheeduddin Khan, Dr. V. C. Prasad, and Dr. A. Jaganmohan Chary for offering comments on an earlier draft of the article.

© 1985 by The Regents of the University of California

1. T. N. Srinivasan, quoted by M. L. Dantwala, "Poverty: Not by Statistics Alone," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 10:16, April 1975, p. 663.

tape, and inertia. No wonder the system proved to be unequal to the task; the gap between the people and the development agencies is wide. As long as this situation remains, the public policies intended to ameliorate the conditions of the poor will not have the desired impact and societies will experience ruptures or jerks in their movement.

In rural India the gap between the administration and the people is filled by the "middleman" or "the fixer"—the *pyraveekar*, as he is familiarly called. It is a matter of common knowledge that the *pyraveekar* has come to play an important role in the public affairs of rural India, but this strikingly significant aspect of rural life has gone unnoticed by the scholars who have been working on the problems of rural development in this country. This article attempts to explain this phenomenon of the *pyraveekar* and to answer the following questions: (a) Who is the *pyraveekar* and what are his origins? (b) What are his attributes and what techniques does he use? (c) What role does he play in rural India? (d) What are the factors—societal and administrative—that give rise to and sustain this phenomenon?

### Who Is the Pyraveekar?

The *pyraveekar* is a middleman possessing professional skills in exerting pressure on the administrative system through what is known as *pyravee*—that is, the art of approaching officials for favors and making the wheels of administration move in support of such favors.<sup>2</sup> The word *pyraveekar* is derived from the Persian word *pyrov*, which means follower or one who pursues, and *kar*, which refers to work. *Pyraveekar*, therefore, means one who follows up work. This traditional institution in the rural sector has not only survived the vicissitudes of political regimes but has also stepped in to fill the institutional vacuum in the government's development strategy, which in fact has provided a fertile ground for the *pyraveekar* to exploit and thrive on.

There are *pyraveekars* at the local, state, national, and international levels. As commission agents in the regulated markets, or as *dalaries*<sup>3</sup> in the local shandies or unregulated markets, they occupy a key middleman

---

2. *Pyravee* is an equivalent or a combination of "pursuit," "lobbying," "liaisons," "influence peddling," "pleading," etc. See B. P. R. Vithal, "Vithal's Law of Indirect Pyravi," *Swarajya*, August 26, 1979. *Pyravi* is an Urdu word that conveys the steps one takes to further one's case before the government. See Myron Weiner, *Sons of the Soil* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 246.

3. The word *dalari* originated from the word *dalal*. The role of the *dalal* originally was that of quality inspector, but in the course of time it was transformed into an institution that makes money by indulging in unhealthy practices.

position between the sellers and the buyers. The brokers in real estate and property transactions, as is well known, are intermediaries who have become firmly entrenched in the economic life of their community; even in the matrimonial and ecclesiastical spheres the middleman plays no less important a role. Thus the institution of middleman exists in different forms in almost all segments of national life in India.<sup>4</sup> Though the pyraveekar has several similarities with these institutions, he has a number of distinctive characteristics of his own. The purpose of this article is to examine the distinctive features of this institution in the context of rural development programs.

The pyraveekars in the rural areas are not a homogeneous group of functionaries, since they are of different kinds. Village officers such as karnams or patels<sup>5</sup> who hold semiofficial positions have traditionally functioned as pyraveekars. A second category of politician-pyraveekars is those who engage in *pyravee* while holding formal positions at various levels of the political ladder. The third category of pyraveekars comes from the regular administration, which includes official functionaries such as village development officers, block development officers, district officers, and teachers. The fourth category is those who do not hold any formal political or administrative positions but take to *pyravee* as an allied profession that is an important source of livelihood and influence for them. It is this last category that is becoming increasingly important. Therefore, it is necessary to examine its evolution, nature, significance, and politico-administrative dimensions.

The origin of the professional pyraveekar is traceable to the feudal system.<sup>6</sup> The studies of land relations in this system show that "there are three types of claims on land: the customary claims of the peasants in the

---

4. See Walter C. Neale, "The Role of the Broker in Rural India," in Peter Robb, *Rural South Asia—Change and Development* (London: Curzon Press, 1983). Neale describes the different types of brokers in rural India and the variety of roles they play. Anthropologists have categorized them as "culture brokers" or "social translators"—the links between two cultural worlds, urban and rural. Also see Eric Wolf, "Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society," *American Anthropologist*, 58, December 1956; Sydel F. Silverman, "Patronage and Community in National Relationships in Central Italy," *Ethnology*, 4, April 1964; and Clifford Geertz, "The Javanese Kijaji: The Changing Role of a Culture Broker," *Comparative Studies in History and Society*, 2, April 1960.

5. Karnams and patels are the traditional revenue functionaries at the grass-roots level. These institutions have been abolished very recently.

6. "On the plane of theory, the king under European feudalism combined in himself authority over all persons and things in his kingdom. The king in India did not, in theory, create subordinate owners of land. What he delegated to the intermediaries was not even his sovereignty understood in this restricted sense, but only the specific and individual rights of zamin, the revenue collecting power." Hence the significance of the intermediaries in the

village; the delegated or derivating power of the intermediary; and the superior claims of the sovereign."<sup>7</sup> In feudal times the intermediaries were of different grades, powers, social environments, and languages whose allegiance was never centralized or focused on a single person or institution, and who were, moreover, scattered widely over a vast territory.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the intermediaries did not themselves engage directly in cultivation. They enjoyed the patronage of the sovereign power which they assisted in maintaining order; they also contributed a portion of their income to the public exchequer. Thus they seemed to constitute a link between the sovereign and the people. The feudal societies having such intermediaries created a socioeconomic environment that proved to be conducive to the emergence of institutions like that of pyraveekar in different walks of life.

The pyraveekar is in wide currency in several parts of the country, but here we draw upon the institution as it exists in the Telangana region of Andhra Pradesh, which was earlier a part of the feudal principality of Hyderabad. The institution, it is reported, came into existence during times of the survey and settlement of land records. As the land revenue administration became more complex, the villagers who were illiterate and inexperienced in administrative matters found it difficult to deal with a formalized administrative machinery that was situated far from the village. Therefore, they came to depend on an intermediary—the pyraveekar. He was a local person or a native of the village who represented local interests to the revenue officials, who were invested with wide powers and discretion. The pyraveekar possessed the requisite skills to deal with the time-consuming and complicated procedures and was well versed in administrative and legal matters.

Another factor contributing to the development of this institution in the past was the communication gap existing between the rulers and the ruled. The official language of Hyderabad was Urdu, which was spoken by the elite groups, while the language of the people was Telugu. The resulting gap was filled by the pyraveekar, who knew not only Telugu but also Urdu, which he in fact mastered.

In the early phase the pyraveekar enjoyed the patronage of both the peasants and the government; the peasants gave him their power of attorney and the government permitted him, either through certification or by prescribed formal qualification, to represent the peasants' cases in the legal world. In a way this practice was a prelude to the institution of the pres-

---

Indian social and economic system. See K. S. Shelvankar, "Indian Feudalism: Its Characteristics," in A. R. Desai, *Rural Sociology in India* (Bombay: Popular Prakasham, 1978), p. 151.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 150.

8. *Ibid.*

ent-day lawyer.<sup>9</sup> But as the number of lawyers with formal qualification increased, the pyraveekar then also became the man between the lawyers and their clients in legal matters in rural areas. Although the pyraveekar has been formally replaced by the lawyer, the peasants continue to depend on the former for pursuing their cases in the courts. Therefore, the pyraveekar's legitimacy and importance in the life of the rural community has not only remained unaffected but even spread into new areas.

The institution of pyraveekar mainly draws its sustenance from the agrarian nature of the larger social system. The attempts to introduce westernized, "Weberian" administrative structures into such a system have not met with much success. While these structures outwardly appear to be Western, their actual working is influenced by the socioeconomic conditions and cultural values of the society.<sup>10</sup> In a society where kinship ties are strong and where human relations are based on personal loyalties, the individuals and institutions alike respond more to nonformal and personal approaches than to the formal and legalistic. The institution of pyraveekar, therefore, draws its strength from the presence of the two conflicting pulls—those of the impersonal formalized methods and of personalized human relations.

With the launching of development policies that extended loans having an attractive subsidy component, the institution of pyraveekar has found greener pastures on which to thrive. In these programs the subsidy component ranged from 25 to 50% depending on economic conditions, landholding position, and the place of the concerned household in the caste hierarchy. The subsidy is 33.3% for landless laborers but goes up to 50% for scheduled tribes. These programs aim at supporting small and marginal farmers financially and seeing that they attain economic viability and cross the poverty line. In the case of scheduled castes and scheduled tribes who have remained at the bottom of the socioeconomic pyramid and belong largely to the landless category of the rural poor, the schemes aim at providing subsidiary occupations that can generate employment and income. Though these programs with a high subsidy component have laudable objectives, they have brought in new dynamics in rural development that have given a fresh impetus to the institution of pyraveekar.

Pyraveekars come largely from middle income groups who have enough time to engage in *pyravee*. While their formal educational qualifications

---

9. The pyraveekars were popularly known as "chettukindi pleader" ("pleader under the tree").

10. It is this process that gives rise to what Riggs described as formalism. See F. W. Riggs, *The Ecology of Public Administration* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1967).

are not always impressive, they have a remarkable grasp of the intricacies of official procedures and an appreciable understanding of the politico-administrative culture of the system. Their understanding of the nature and psychology of the rural people is sound. They generally are adept in handling their clients' cases and are able to deal with different categories of administrative functionaries with ease and understanding. The pyraveekers are good at public relations and are able to establish rapport with the functionaries at all levels in the administrative hierarchy. They follow up cases, virtually chase the files, go around the offices, and negotiate with a variety of functionaries in diverse situations in achieving their objective. They are noted for their perseverance and persuasive capacity. It is because of this kind of versatility that pyraveekars can penetrate any bureaucratic setup and exploit it to their advantage.

The institution of pyraveekar is highly adaptable and readily changes its strategy to suit the client, the administrator, the scheme, and the time. In an administrative culture that is afflicted with feudal egocentricity, the pyraveekar is a master of the technique of ego tickling and gratification of one's vanity. It has been noticed that the pyraveekar's strategy in flattering an officer consists of accusing his predecessor of incompetence and an unhelpful nature, and this strategy works because in India officers tend to like such criticism of their predecessors. If the officer is arrogant and unhelpful, the pyraveekar resorts to threats, not hesitating to press into service his vocal chords for this purpose. The instances of a pyraveekar threatening an officer that he would take the matters to the streets and expose his corrupt practices are not lacking. However, most administrators feel secure in dealing with pyraveekars because they generally find them to be "trustworthy." Very shrewdly, the pyraveekers size up the functionaries and decide on the "appropriate techniques," which they employ with tact and timeliness.

The modus operandi of the pyraveekar is: first, to elicit information from the officials about various available schemes and use it to the pyraveekar's advantage; second, to entertain government officials whenever they visit the village with a view to letting the people know the pyraveekar is on intimate terms with these officials and thereby gaining the people's confidence; third, to take up some deserving cases initially so as to inspire confidence in others about their capacity to deliver the goods; and lastly, to frighten their clients with descriptions of the difficulties they will face in approaching government departments and to assure them that the pyraveekar can accomplish the task economically and efficiently.

## How Pyraveekars Work

In most political systems there are individuals and institutions that ensure linkages between the government and the people. In Western societies this role is played by well-organized lobbies—the institutionalized forms of various pressure groups present in this socioeconomic system.<sup>11</sup> In socialist societies, the organized cadres of the political party of the grass-roots level take up developmental issues and pursue them.<sup>12</sup> But in most Third World countries, the people are not organized, nor are there any well-developed institutions capable of mediating and providing a linkage between the people and their government.

Most of the formal political institutions introduced in the developing countries are too new to have put down roots. Since the level of civic consciousness among the people in these countries is extremely low, the existing political institutions are unresponsive and the people are not in a position to exert pressure on them. The pressure groups in rural areas have not crystalized to a point where they can articulate their group interests effectively and pressurize the administrative system into making a favorable decision. This indicates that these societies suffer from both economic and political underdevelopment. The two processes are, of course, interlinked: economic underdevelopment results in the politics of scarcity,<sup>13</sup> and this in turn generates undue pressure on the system, which is by nature highly lethargic and slow, and also remote from its clientele. In a system in which the wheels of administration move very slowly, the pyraveekar acts as a lubricant. These factors help individual pyraveekars who take upon themselves the responsibility not only for articulating the interests of individual members of the target groups but also for securing for them the benefits of these programs. The overall underdevelopment provides scope for its exploitation by individual pyraveekars whose sole interest is to enrich themselves.

The centralizing of planning is another important factor contributing to the pyraveekar's increasingly active role in developmental activities. Most schemes are evolved at the central or state level with hardly any participation by the people. Thus, the development programs coming from above do not reflect the real needs or choices of the people. The whole process of

---

11. For a detailed discussion, see Mancur Olson, *The Logic of Collective Action* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 132–165.

12. Sartaj Aziz, "The Chinese Approach to Rural Development," *International Development Review*, 15:4, p. 2. Priya Mutalik Desai, "Ujamma Villages: A Tanzanian Experience," *Africa Quarterly*, 16:2 (1976), p. 976.

13. Myron Weiner, *The Politics of Scarcity* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1963), pp. 13–19.

planning and the way it is formulated leaves the people in the dark about the schemes intended to benefit them. As the news of a program trickles down, the pyraveekars are usually the first to hear of it through political representatives or government officials. It is access to information that energizes the pyraveekar. Thus the centralized nature of decision making and the absence of an effective communication network account for the crucial role the pyraveekar has come to occupy in developmental activity.

The institution of pyraveekar has its own well-established political linkages to both the local power structure in the villages and the outside political framework. The politicians holding formal positions at all levels not only engage in *pyravee* themselves but also lend support to various individual pyraveekars. Pyraveekars invoke their political linkages with legislators and ministers for carrying on their *pyravee*. Consequently, they select those members of the target groups who are loyal to their political group and prevent others from getting the benefits.<sup>14</sup> In this way pyraveekars help political leaders to enlarge and consolidate their area of influence in villages. The politicians contesting elections have come increasingly to lean on these pyraveekars at election time, and in the absence of organized local units of political parties, the pyraveekars have come to play the role of party cadres.

The pyraveekar manages the local power structure with considerable tact and finesse. He maintains cordial relations with the local sarpanch, patwari (village officer), and landlords. He establishes effective rapport with the village officer because the latter controls the land records that are important in completing the legal formalities prescribed for drawing benefits from development programs. The linkages with the sarpanch and local landlords facilitate the pyraveekar's task not only at the village level but also at higher levels. The network of relations among them is based on mutual advantage. The pyraveekar does not take up cases that hurt the interests of the "rulers" of the village. They, in turn, extend their helping hand to him and even exhort the villagers to seek his help; they also use their good offices at higher levels to expedite the disposal of the cases taken up by the pyraveekar.

Thus the work a person does as a pyraveekar helps promote his political interests. In fact *pyravee* may be used to capture positions of power, and some pyraveekars have gone up the political ladder because of their profession. In one instance, a pyraveekar belonging to the lower middle class was elected to the post of sarpanch, to the dismay of many in his village.

---

14. Some of the villages that benefited least from the development schemes are the opposition villages. See Ch. Balaramulu, *Administration of Anti-Poverty Programmes—A Study of SFDA* (Warangal: Kakatiya School of Public Administration, 1984), pp. 121–122.

In another village, a person who was considered a political nonentity but was engaged in *pyravee* became an upa-sarpanch. Thus, *pyravee* is the key that unlocks the doors of politics to those who wish to enter.

An underdeveloped political system largely depends on its administrative structures for implementation of public policies. In India, this can be seen in the proliferation of administrative institutions in the post-independence period. While the quantitative expansion has been enormous, the working of the system has not improved qualitatively very much. Instead of replacing the *pyraveekars*, the administrative system has given a further fillip to that institution. In fact, it is the administrative system and its operational style that largely account for the survival and growth of the *pyraveekar*.

Analysis of the bureaucratic structures in the Third World in general and in India in particular reveals that there is a strong propensity for the centralization of power and authority;<sup>15</sup> most of the time decisions flow from above. The power centers are remote and inaccessible to the people at large. In contemporary India the nearest decision-making center for many purposes is the district headquarters, and the district is a very large unit with a wide area and large population. Some districts have a population of more than three million,<sup>16</sup> with the villages scattered and in some cases located more than 250 km<sup>17</sup> from the headquarters. The problem of bringing the decision-making centers nearer the people has not been effectively tackled, even after the introduction of panchayati raj (local government) institutions. Although the Panchayat Samithi is located at an intermediate level between the village and the district, it is not endowed with any vital decision-making power; in fact, it mostly serves as a kind of post office.<sup>18</sup> The village panchayats (councils) are nearest to the people and accessible to them but have hardly any say in development programs.<sup>19</sup> As a result, people have to trek long distances to receive the benefits extended by these programs.

---

15. G. Ram Reddy, "Institutional and Organisational Arrangements for Decentralisation: The Rural Development Experience," paper presented for the United Nations Inter-Regional Seminar on Decentralization for Development, Khartoum, Sudan, September 14-18, 1981.

16. The districts of East Godavari, Krishna, and Guntur in Andhra Pradesh each have more than three million people. The population of East Godavari is as large as 3.7 million. See *Census of India, 1981*, Director of Census Operations, p. 9.

17. In Khammam district the village of Krukul is 255 km by road from the district headquarters. In Visakhapatnam district 532 villages are more than 200 km from the district headquarters. See *Census of India, 1981*, p. 9.

18. G. Haragopal, *Administrative Leadership and Rural Development* (New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1980) pp. 49-50.

19. V. Sivalinga Prasad, *Panchayats and Development* (New Delhi: Light and Life Publishers, 1981), p. 210.

The development strategy in the postindependence era talked of decentralization of power, but it has, in effect, not strengthened the lower decision-making levels. This makes clear that the existing structures are based on the colonial approach—that is, the attitude that the higher levels are honest and efficient and the lower levels are not trustworthy. It is a common experience that whenever an argument for decentralization is put forward, the officers at the higher levels object to it on the ground that power would be abused. This colonial postulate continues to condition the administrative culture.<sup>20</sup> All the debates on democratic decentralization have so far not produced a concrete idea about the system needed at the village level, the absence of which has resulted in widening the gap between the people and the governments, with the administrative machinery located outside the village virtually inaccessible to the ordinary person. Villagers have neither the time nor resources, much less skill, to go around to distant offices to achieve their goals. Inevitably, this compels villagers to depend on the services of the pyraveekar in dealing with the governmental machinery.

The problem of coordination is acute in rural development administration. This is one of the results of inadequate integration, the absence of effective linkages, and the paucity of coordinating points in the administrative pyramid.<sup>21</sup> For implementing the development programs, the support and cooperation of a number of agencies (agriculture, animal husbandry, fisheries, industries, revenue, registration, cooperatives, panchayati raj, and banks) is necessary. But the administrative culture is conflict-ridden, with, for example, conflicts occurring between the electricity department and banks, and between engineering departments and banks. For instance, the electricity department insists that a beneficiary possess an electric motor in order to get a power connection while the bank requires the beneficiary to have an electric motor to obtain a loan for a power connection.<sup>22</sup> The revenue department refuses to furnish the documentary evidence for the sanctioning of loans to be advanced by the development agencies, the

---

20. G. Ram Reddy, "Revenue Culture in Indian Administration," *Indian Journal of Political Science*, 13, October–December 1981, pp. 1–13; G. Haragopal, "Regulatory Vs Development Departments: Conflict Between Two Administrative Sub-Cultures in Rural Development," *Journal of Administration Overseas*, 19:3, July 1980, pp. 175–182.

21. G. Ram Reddy, "Institutional and Organisational Arrangements for Decentralisation."

22. In a seminar organized by the Andhra Pradesh Administrative Reforms Committee, a high-level official said that a large number of electric motors were in the hands of small and marginal farmers who lacked the necessary power connections.

banks decline to provide information to the Panchayat Samithi,<sup>23</sup> and the district development officers do not extend cooperation to the special agencies. These are familiar instances of noncooperation in development administration. In a situation of this kind, effective coordination becomes essential. But in the rural areas there is no institution other than the district collector with the necessary authority to secure cooperation among the various development agencies. At times, even the district collector finds it difficult to secure the cooperation of certain agencies, such as commercial banks that are not placed under his direct control.<sup>24</sup> The crisis of coordination in rural development thus provides a fertile ground for the pyraveekar to operate.

The inaccessible and parallel structures inevitably give rise to complicated procedures that are time-consuming and formality-centered. Although certain marginal changes can be noticed in the structural configuration of the administration at the district level and below, substantial changes in the procedures have been few. This aspect of development administration has not been examined in detail, nor has any attempt been made to change them. The procedural rigamarole accentuates the gap the colonial system created between the people and the development administration which is still filled by the pyraveekar, who is an expert in circumventing the procedures.

The attitudes of administrators are also determined by the structures in which they function.<sup>25</sup> Their power consciousness is so strong that they tend to look down on the rural poor. A villager who personally approaches an official is often treated in a casual and callous manner. It is a frequent complaint among poor villagers that administrators do not care about them, and some villagers even assert that the officers think "the poor are of no consequence." In some instances officials openly advised villagers to approach a pyraveekar and not come to the official on their own.<sup>26</sup>

---

23. In one district a collector publicly denounced the attitudes of bankers, leading to criticism and counter-criticism.

24. When a block development officer approached a bank for information about the loans given to his Samithi, the bank manager not only refused to furnish the information but even asked the BDO to get out of his office. In another instance in a district coordination committee meeting the collector appealed to all the heads of departments to depute some of their block level functionaries to look after the work of the Small Farmers Development Agency, but no district officer was willing to do it. Everybody expressed his inability to spare an officer under one pretext or another.

25. V. A. Pai Panandikar, ed., *Development Administration in India* (Madras: Macmillan of India, 1974), Introduction.

26. In one case, when a group of ten villagers came to a Panchayat Samithi to find out the status of the loans they applied for, the BDO was terribly annoyed and started shouting at

In such a situation the villagers are left with no other option than to depend on the pyraveekar.

The administrators who are inclined to deal with the people directly find themselves constrained by the unhelpful attitudes of their counterparts in other departments. In the absence of any effective mechanism to perform the job, even a well-intentioned officer has either to depend on the pyraveekar or to do *pyravee* on his own. The pyraveekar, who has contacts with all departments, provides the missing links, not only between the people and the administration but also between various governmental agencies in the implementation of development programs. In the administrative jungle he alone knows the way to reach the goal, and it is no wonder that the rural poor are dependent on him.

The administrators also seek the help of the pyraveekar because cultural and communication gaps make it difficult for them to deal with rural clients. These gaps range from the type of dress worn to the kind of language spoken, with many urbanized administrators feeling that the behavior of the villager is rustic and uncultured. In a situation of this kind the pyraveekars are quick to pick up some of the polished behavioral modes—in fact, they have perfected the art of pleasing the bureaucrats. Therefore, the gap between the administrator and the pyraveekar, both in terms of culture and communication, is less than that between the administrator and the rural masses, and the pyraveekar, by reducing the gap between himself and the bureaucrat, is in a position to accomplish his task.

### Impact on the Development Process

While the institution of pyraveekar has come to play a dominant role in development programs, it has its own deleterious effects on the development process. The perversions of the institution stem from its highly private and personalized nature which provides a wide scope for playing on the whims and fancies of the individual pyraveekar. It is non-formal and extra-legal in character; hence its accountability to any individual or institution is not ensured. Nor does it command the legality of formalized structures or the legitimacy of a well-organized political party.

As a channel of communication, the pyraveekar quite often indulges in distorting information. In his eagerness to get the members of the target group to apply for schemes, he not only cajoles and coaxes them but entices them with incorrect information. Often the real purpose for which a loan is sanctioned is not correctly communicated to the villagers. In-

---

them, remarking: "Why should all of you come to the Samithi, instead of sending one person for the information?"

stances of pyraveekars conniving with members of target groups in diverting a development scheme to a purpose other than that intended are not lacking.<sup>27</sup> Large-scale diversion of the loan amount for different purposes can partly be traced to the pyraveekar's pumping of distorted information into the village. It is also reported that an impression has been wrongly created among the rural poor that loans extended to them would be written off.<sup>28</sup> Commenting on this phenomenon, one official said: "It is the pyraveekar who instigates the innocent poor people not to repay the loans telling them that they would be written off." He added that "those who are not entangled with pyraveekars not only utilise the loan but pay back the amount properly."<sup>29</sup> The unimpressive recovery of the loan amounts in several parts of the country can be traced in part to this phenomenon.

The institution of pyraveekar has a propensity to contaminate the already unhealthy climate of rural administration. It is widely discussed in rural areas that nothing moves unless the palms of the officials are greased, and that the "commission" the pyraveekar charges includes the share for various functionaries. The officials allege that the pyraveekars have become a major bottleneck in the entire development process, charging their clients exorbitant rates under one pretext or another. A senior officer observed that "in most of the cases the pyraveekar subjected the poor to manipulative techniques and landed them in cobwebs of corruption."<sup>30</sup> It is not really known whether the officials' "share" is actually given to them or has been pocketed by the pyraveekars. This situation contributes to the difficulty in identifying the points at which pilferages in rural development actually occur.

The "commission" charged by the pyraveekar is not fixed, and thus its amount depends on the level of ignorance and the degree of gullibility of the clients. In one instance, a villager who had given Rs. 500 to the pyraveekar for a loan amount of Rs. 3000 felt that the pyraveekar charged a very reasonable amount as "commission."<sup>31</sup> There are cases in which not only the entire subsidy amount has been swallowed as "commission" but inroads were also made into the loan component itself. Instances were noted in which some of the beneficiaries did not even know that loans had

---

27. Ch. Balaramulu, *Administration of Anti-Poverty Programmes*, pp. 121-122.

28. Quite a few beneficiaries are under the impression that the loans would be written off by Mrs. Gandhi. The rural poor say that "amma" ("mother") sent the money from Delhi and she would never ask her children to return it.

29. G. Haragopal, "Administration of Anti-Poverty Programmes in Rural Andhra Pradesh," in T. N. Chaturvedi and Shanta Kohli Chandra, eds., *Social Administration: Development and Change* (New Delhi: Indian Institute of Public Administration, 1980), p. 383.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 384.

31. From the authors' field notes.

been approved for them; in certain other cases it was found that electric motors, oil engines, buffaloes, or bullocks authorized for the poor were in the possession of either the pyraveekar or other influential village elite. The purpose of a subsidy is to provide capital support to poor farmers so that the scheme may become economically viable. But institutions like that of pyraveekar, coupled with several other agencies that indulge in pilferage, defeat its very purpose, and the capital that is meant to be pumped into the small-farm economy is being swallowed up.

It should be obvious that the pyraveekar system has done considerable damage to the antipoverty programs launched by the State with the intention of helping the poor to cross the poverty line. The pyraveekar is propelled into action more by self-interest than by commitment to the poor. Instigated by the pyraveekar, many of the poor apply for loans for "needs" they do not feel. This renders them poorer.<sup>32</sup> While the pyraveekar with one hand applies pressure, pushes the files, lubricates the process, and extracts the benefits from the system, with the other hand he passes on incorrect information, misleads the target groups, and makes a private fortune. It is the negative and exploitative dimension of the institution that speaks against it and calls for its elimination through appropriate measures.

Public policies are launched in most developing countries to remove poverty and reduce inequalities. Overall experience indicates that most of these policies have not made the impact intended. A critical analysis of development strategy reveals that the institutional network to carry out these policies suffers from a number of gaps, and it is into such a vacuum that traditional institutions such as pyraveekar move and acquire significance in the changing context. Increasing intervention of the State in the development process calls for effective linkages between the government and the people. While in developed countries there are institutional devices that facilitate two-way communication, in developing countries such as India, where people are largely unorganized, and have a low level of civic consciousness, there are agents like the pyraveekars who exploit the system into yielding favorable results. The pressures and counterpressures come to be applied on the system because of widespread scarcities and distributive bottlenecks.

The institution of pyraveekar has its roots in the social and political system. The hierarchical and egocentric agrarian society with its kinship ties and primordial loyalties proves to be conducive to the survival and rapid growth of such institutions. In the political realm public representatives have come to use *pyravee* very widely to consolidate and strengthen

---

32. G. Haragopal, "Administration of Anti-Poverty Programmes in Rural Andhra Pradesh," p. 384.

their power base. In several cases *pyravee* has become a channel for recruiting new aspirants who want to enter the formal political system.

The administrative structures on which public policy has come to rest provide a fertile ground for *pyraveekars* to flourish. In spite of a major shift in the emphasis and goals of government, these structures have not changed much since colonial days: their framework and operational style smack of the colonial legacy. Centralized planning, authoritarian behavioral patterns, inaccessible decision-making centers, unintegrated and poorly coordinated parallel departmental setups, predominantly non-cooperative attitudes, complicated and formality-centered procedures collectively render the bureaucracy ineffective with respect to developmental tasks. It is this administrative environment that helps the institution of *pyraveekar* thrive and set itself up as an important factor in the developmental process.

Although the institution of *pyraveekar* seeks to fill in the gaps created in development strategy, it has had a negative impact on the implementation of public policies, particularly in the case of public policies intended for the rural poor. The negative role stems from its being of a highly private and personalized nature. It introduces distortions in the development process, and, along with other vested interests, widens the leakages in the financial assistance programs meant for investment in the small-farm economy and for helping the disadvantaged sections of society. It is this deleterious role of the *pyraveekar* that hinders public policy in achieving its objective of bringing about social change.

The foregoing discussion relates mainly to the implementation of anti-poverty programs and the role of the *pyraveekar* in them, but this has to be taken only as an illustration of the general phenomenon in rural areas. What applies to the administrative machinery in the field of antipoverty programs applies equally to the execution of most programs. This leads to the inescapable conclusion that without sound institutions, less complicated administrative procedures, and accessible and responsive decision-making centers, the gap between the administration and the people will remain, and will continue to be filled by the *pyraveekar*.