Decentralization, the existing boon of the seventy third Amendment Act of Indian Constitution (1992) has an intrinsic value in Indian democracy. Till the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, the rural development has not materialized its objectives in true sense of the terms. This provision of the Amendment gave a little hope regarding the practice of democracy at the grass root level with active participation of the people in local affairs. To incorporate the provisions of 73rd Amendment Act, 1992 of the constitution, the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 was introduced and replaced the Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1986 and introduced three tier system viz., Gaon panchayat at village level; Anchhalik Panchayat at Block level and Zilla Pauished at district level. Assam has entered into a new phase of establishing strong and effective Panchayati raj system in the state. Activity mapping was prepared and notified vide Notification No. PDA 336/2001/Pt – III /32 dated 25th June, 2007 for devolution of functions, functionaries and funds to Zilla Parisad, Anchalik Panchayat and Gaon Panchayat. Activity mapping has been prepared meticulously for 23 subjects demarcating roles of each tier of Panchayats. Panchayati Raj Institutions are now in the position to know about their specific roles.

The concept of democratic decentralization ingrained in the community development programme was expected to provide the positive pattern for building up the structure of Panchayat Raj bodies functioning at the village, block and district level. The effective decentralization looks for the scrutinized functioning of the Panchayat Raj Institutions of these three tier level, which has now reached plateau. Decentralization stimulate the local authorities with certain power and functions such as control over policy, resources and people, thereby bringing effective peoples participation in decision making, implementation and sharing of benefits of development programmes. With the decentralized manner of project implementation,
people’s participation in the process of rural development has been stressed and made an indispensable component of the program. Members of PRI’s play an important role in moulding social, economic and political life of the rural people. They may also be required to promote re-orientation of outlook of the people and the acceptance of new values and mobilize them for economic process. Members of PRI’s are expected to take decisions on critical socio-economic issues and to ensure that appropriate executive action follows. In the past the type members of PRI’s which were in existence are traditional, cooperative, functional, situational and opinion leaders in performing the roles in maintaining the social order and harmony, in addition, playing various roles and responsibilities. It is tempting to note that the vitality and scope of any agriculture and rural development programme depends on strong local members of PRI’s leaders who are imbibed with a sense of social responsibility. They act as the catalyst for group action and also serve as spokesman of the needs and aspirations of their groups, act as facilitators in coordinating the efforts of agriculture department to bring in socioeconomic development through successful implementation of various agricultural development programmes. However, the line of resistance between a farmer and a officer is hard, the members of PRI’s playing an important role in establishing linkage between officials and the beneficiaries. Role clarity of members of PRI’s for planning and implementation of various agricultural development programmes is very essential. To what extent the members of PRI’s serve the agriculture need of the people, need to be evaluated and assessed so that the PRI’s can be revitalized to meet the challenges in the coming decade.

What is the viewpoint or opinion of the members of PRI’s on the prescribed list of role items on agricultural development programmes as per Assam Panchayati Raj Act. 1993? What is the actual behaviours of the members of Panchayati Raj Institution in accomplishing prescribed roles in relation to various agricultural development programmes?

Thus, present study entitled “A study on Role Perception and Role Performance of elected members of Panchayati Raj Institutions in relation to
implementation of various agricultural development programmes in Upper Brahmaputra Valley Zone of Assam”. Focuses on the role perception and role performance aspects and attempts to examine the importance of rural leaders and their personality level, identifying interactive relationship between members of Panchayati Raj Institutions and socio-personal profiles with their role perception and role performance. Therefore, the present study has been undertaken with the following specific objectives.

1. To study the role perception of elected members of panchayati Raj institution in three tier system about various agricultural development programmes.

2. To study the role performance of elected members of panchayati raj institution in relation to various agricultural development programmes.

3. To study the influence of some socio personal and socio psychological characteristics of PRI members with their role perception and role performance.

4. To study the opinion of beneficiaries about role performance of PRI members.

5. To study the constraints faced by the PRI members in performance their assigned roles.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was conducted in Assam, one of the states of North-eastern India, lying between 24° to 28°18' north latitudes and 89°50' to 97°4' east longitudes. A purposive cum random sampling method was followed to select the respondents. Out of six agroclimatic zones Upper Brahmaputra Valley was selected. The districts selected for this study were Jorhat, Golaghat and Sibsagar. Amongst five districts these three districts were purposively selected based on criteria of higher scope for agricultural development compared to other two districts.

Two types of respondents were selected for the study. Respondents from elected members of Panchayati Raj Institution and respondents from beneficiaries benefitted from agriculture department within gaon panchayat territory.
From zilla parishad level 3nos. president and 9nos. members, from block level 9nos. president and 27nos. members of anchalik panchayat and from gaon panchayat level 27nos. president, 81nos. unit member and 81nos. beneficiaries and make the total sample size 237.

The dependent variables of the study were ‘Role perception of members of Panchayati Raj Institution in relation to various agricultural development programmes’ and ‘Role performance of members of Panchayati Raj Institution in relation to various agricultural development programmes’. The following independent variables were selected for the study viz. Age, Education, Social participation, Caste, Family type, Leadership behavior, Extension participation, Decision making ability, Cosmo politeness, Personality level of PRI members, People’s opinion on role perception and role performance, Constraints faced by members of PRI’s in performing their assigned roles. The primary data in the present study were collected directly from members of the PRI’s and farmers with the help of a pretested structured schedule, through personal interview method. Only the functional heads of the household were taken as respondents of the study. Keeping in the view role perception and role performance of members of PRI’s about agricultural development programmes, the present study was undertaken in Jorhat, Golaghat and Sibsagar districts of Upper Brahmaputra Valley zone of Assam. The statistical measures used in this study were frequency, mean, ranking using weighted mean, Pearson’s product Moment Co-efficient of Correlation and multiple regression analysis.

FINDINGS

The salient findings of the present study are summarized below:

5.1 SOCIO-PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

The findings of this study revealed that majority (52.56%) of PRI members, (50.62%) of beneficiaries were of middle age group and (57.69%) of PRI members, (39.51%) of beneficiaries were graduate followed by (44.23%) of PRI members, (45.68%) of beneficiaries were OBC/MOBC caste. A healthy percentage (42.30%) of the PRI members possessed medium level social participation and 58.97
per cent were office bearer in various social organizations and 64.74 per cent PRI members shows regular participation in various social organizations. 42.30 per cent of PRI members possessed medium level leadership behaviour and 72.44 per cent of them possessed medium level extension participation. The study also showed that (60.25%) of the respondents possessed medium level cosmopolite ness and (46.79%) of the respondents have medium level decision making ability followed by (60.25%) of the respondents have medium personality level. The findings also revealed that (56.41%) of the PRI members have medium level role perception followed by (77.77%) of the members of Zilla Parishad have high level role perception. 100 per cent of the presidents of Zilla Parishad have high level role perception . 44.45 per cent of the members of Anicalik Panchayat have medium level role perception. 77.77percent of the presidents of Anicalik Panchayat have high level role perception followed by 62.96 per cent of the presidents of Gaon Panchayat have medium level role perception. 71.60 per cent of the unit members of Gaon Panchayat have medium level role perception. In respect of role performance 54.49 per cent of the PRI members possessed medium level and 66.67 per cent of the members of Zilla Parishad possessed medium level role performance. 66.67 per cent of the presidents of Zilla Parishad, 40.74 per cent of the members of Anicalik Panchayat have medium level role performance. Majority (77.77%) of the presidents of Anicalik Panchayat have high level role performance. 59.26 percent of the presidents of Gaon Panchayat and 56.79 per cent of the of unit members Gaon Panchayat possessed medium level role performance. Majority of (44.44%) beneficiaries perceived low level role performance of members of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

5.2. Relationship between selected characteristics of members of panchayat raj institutions with their role perception.

A positive and significant relationship existed between role perception and role performance of members of zilla parishad and some selected characteristics like education, leadership behaviour, extension participation, cosmopoliteness, decision making ability and personality level. A negative and significant relationship
between role perception and role performance of members of zilla parishad and caste and family type was observed. The other two variables age and social participation did not have any impact on the role perception and role performance of the members of zilla parishad.

A positive and significant relationship existed between role perception and role performance of president of anchalik panchayat and some selected characteristics like age, leadership behaviour, extension participation, cosmopolitaness, decision making ability and personality level. A negative and significant relationship between role perception role performance of president of anchalik panchayat and caste and family type was observed. The other two variables education and social participation did not have any impact on the role perception and role performance of president of anchalik panchayat.

Findings showed positive and significant relationship existed between role perception of members of anchalik panchayat and three selected characteristics viz. leadership behaviour, extension participation, decision making ability. A positive and significant relationship existed between role performance of members of anchalik panchayat and two characteristics viz. leadership behaviour, decision making ability. Caste and family type possessed negative and significant relationship with role perception and role performance of members of anchalik panchayat.

In respect of presidents of gaon panchayat positive and significant relationship was observed between role perception and four selected characteristics viz. age, leadership behaviour, extension participation and personality level. Role performance of President of gaon panchayat had positive and significant relationship with leadership behaviour and extension participation where as family type had negatively significant relationship with role performance of presidents of gaon panchayat.

In respect of unit members of gaon panchayat a positive and significant relationship existed between role perception and role performance of unit members of gaon panchayat and some selected characteristics like age, leadership behaviour,
extension participation. A negative and significant relationship existed between role perception and role performance of unit members of gaon panchayat and family type.

5.3. Multiple Regression analysis

5.3.1. Multiple Regression analysis of role perception and role performance of President of Gaon Panchayat with socio personal parameters: Multiple regression analysis showed that the regression coefficients of extension participation (b=4.562*), personality level (b= 0.911*) were found to be significant with role perception of president of gaon panchayat. Therefore, these two parameters can be termed as good predictors of role perception of president of gaon panchayat. The value of coefficient of multiple determination ($R^2$) value being 0.593 indicated that the socio-personal parameters jointly contributed 59.30 per cent towards variation in role perception of president of gaon panchayat. The F value (F = 2.474**) was found to be significant. This indicates the significant effectiveness of these socio-personal parameters in predicting the role perception of president of gaon panchayat when all of them were functioning jointly. In respect of role performance of president of gaon panchayat the regression coefficients of extension participation (b=2.349*), leadership behaviour (2.133*) personality level (b= 2.637*) were found to be significant with role performance of president of gaon panchayat. The value of coefficient of multiple determination ($R^2$) value being 0.528 indicated that the socio-personal parameters jointly contributed 52.80 per cent towards variation in role performance of president of gaon panchayat. The F value (F=2.306**) was found to be significant. This indicates the significant effectiveness of these socio-personal parameters in predicting the role performance of president of gaon panchayat when all of them were functioning jointly.

5.3.2. Multiple Regression analysis of role perception and role performance of unit members of gaon panchayat with socio personal parameters: In respect of unit members multiple regression analysis showed that the regression coefficients of extension participation (b = 4.747*), cosmo politeness (b= 2.872* ) were found to be significant with role perception of unit members of gaon panchayat
where as extension participation (b = 4.489*), cosmo politeness (b= 2.531*) were found to be significant with role performance of unit members of gaon panchayat. Therefore, these two parameters can be termed as good predictors of role perception and role performance of unit members of gaon panchayat.

5.3.3. Multiple Regression analysis of role perception and role performance of Members of Anchalik Panchayat with socio personal parameters

Multiple regression analysis showed that the regression coefficients of education (b=-26724*), family type (b = -20.646*), leadership behaviour (b=5.559*), personality level (b= 4.168*) were found to be significant with role perception of members of anchalik panchayat. Therefore, these parameters can be termed as good predictors of role perception of members of anchalik panchayat. The value of coefficient of multiple determination (R²) value being 0.770 indicated that the socio-personal parameters jointly contributed 77.00 per cent towards variation in role perception of members of anchalik panchayat. The F value (F = 5.692**) was found to be significant. This indicates the significant effectiveness of these socio-personal parameters in predicting the role perception of members of anchalik panchayat when all of them were functioning jointly. In respect of role performance of members of anchalik panchayat the regression coefficients education (b=-26.981*), family type (b = -17.622*), leadership behaviour (b=6.441*), decision making ability (b = 5.725*) were found to be significant with role performance of members of anchalik panchayat. The value of coefficient of multiple determination (R²) value being 0.565 indicated that the socio-personal parameters jointly contributed 56.50 per cent towards variation in role performance of members of anchalik panchayat.

5.5. Problems faced by members of PRI’s on performing their assigned roles

The members were asked to give the problems in performing the assigned roles. Analysis of problems indicates following problems with the present panchayat structure:

i. Insufficient fund and delaying in sanction of fund.
ii. Preferential distribution of funds

iii. Control over the Panchayats by superior authorities, bureaucrats, and ruling political party.

iv. Lack of proper circulation and information of the different schemes of the government to the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

v. Lack of training exposure and training need assessment

vi. Lack of communication between members of PRI’s and agriculture department.

vii. Irregular and insufficient supply of inputs.

viii. Rigid bureaucratic set-up.

ix. Dependence mentality of members of PRI’s.

x. Inadequate understanding of participation among the members of three tiers of PRI’s.

xi. Incorrect organizing on felt needs.

xii. The beneficiary selection process is largely top-down.

xiii. Limited scope for collaboration and information flow between the Panchayat tiers.

xiv. Lack of clarity in the roles between the different tiers and also within the line departments.

xv. Elected representatives have no formal line of command over the decisions of the line departments as they cannot take any formal steps.

5.4. Peoples opinion on role performance of PRI members

i. Shortage of fund and facilities.

ii. Members of PRI’s do not take initiatives in co-operative farming system.

iii. Departmental functionaries donot discuss about schemes with beneficiaries.
iv. Members of PRI’s do not take initiatives to prevent unauthorized alienation due to political issue.

v. Majority of members of PRI’s mostly busy with political activities.

vi. Unavailability of quality planting materials.

vii. Lack of knowledge of members of the PRI’s about improved method of cultivation.

viii. Lack of enthusiasm and imitativeness of the part of the members of PRI’s for promotion of cultivation and marketing of vegetables, fruits and flowers.

ix. The training need assessment not properly done and majority of training programmes conducted in close class room situation and not participatory.

x. Lack of proper circulation and information of different schemes of agricultural development programmes to the common people.

xi. The beneficiaries are selected for different schemes from among the close relatives of elected members and from the party man of the ruling party.

xii. The different user committees of minor irrigation, water management and watershed development schemes prepared at top level of PRI’s without concerning the gaon sabha or public meetings.

xiii. The line departments are not accountable to the elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institution.

xiv. Preferential distribution of governmental assistance to the beneficiaries by the members of PRI’s.

xv. The members of PRI’s. not able to develop proper network between farmers & marketing agencies.

xvi. Lack of adequate fund for establishment of extension training centre.

xvii. Major irrigation project sites selected on political pressure.
The middleman /brokers of fruits and vegetables are influential persons and they increase the gap between the farmers and members of Panchayat.

Elected members are only interested to satisfy their higher level political leaders than the voters

CONCLUSION

It is unanimously accepted that without rural development there will be no significant development of the state. It is conceived that only effective Panchayati Raj system can uplift the socioeconomic condition of the people of Assam. But there has not been considerable achievement in developing the socioeconomic condition of the rural people. The Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 has given a scope to revive the democratic spirit of the rural people providing an opportunity to associate and participate their own local development affairs. And also provided decentralization and devolution of fund, function and functionaries. The Assam Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 has enacted in due time after the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992 and held election in the last part of 2001. The aims and objectives of the new Act is to decentralize and devolution of powers and functions and empower the Panchayati Raj institutions so that it can act as the third tier of the Indian federation. The people’s participation in administration is essential for the successful working of democracy. But it is not mean that mere existence of adult franchise and periodic election .In the study it has been found that government of Assam hardly realized the importance of the new Panchayati Raj system through investigation, own experience and observation study the problem of people’s participation.

There are no change has been seen in the attitudes of the rural people regarding the participation and they are not interested in direct involvement in the activities of the Panchayat except casting their votes as usual like the previous elections. The panchayat election is not free from party politics and except independent representatives the elected representatives are also not free from the
influence of their higher level party leaders in all the functions including the beneficiary selection process.

For updating and upgrading the working principles of Panchayat system in the state of Assam particularly for enhancing people’s participation, implication of the roles and responsibilities of gram sabha, overall development of awareness among the rural people in local affairs–the state government should initiate motivating guidelines keeping aside apathetic, illogical, unproductive and traditional views. It is believed that the superior authorities, bureaucrats and ruling political party workers are leading the panchayat system to undesired way.

In order to examine the defects some questions has been asked to selected three respondents of each Panchayat under the study and the respondents were selected on random sampling basis from among the beneficiaries of different schemes. Some reasons of the failure to achieve the goal of Panchayati Raj system are as follows:

Despite the substantial investment made in agriculture sector, the Panchayati Raj Institutions could not register any significant change in agricultural development. It may be due to excessive dependence of Panchayati Raj Institutions on state government for finance. So, gaon panchayat base planning to be initiated, by involving all stakeholders involve with agriculture development considering local natural resources, human resources and development resources from outside.

The members of Panchayati Raj Institutions as well as the beneficiaries reported that the members were not given adequate authority to procure and distribute the agricultural inputs. Most of the decisions are taken outside the gaon panchayat level. ML as are taking major and minor decisions. Therefore extensive orientation should be provided to the members of PRI’s on perspective and various functional areas of agricultural development programmes. Role, task, functions of the PRI members should be clearly spelt out, communicate to them, support them to play various roles.
The members of PRI’s were asked to comment on involvement of presidents of three tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions on various agricultural development programmes. They responded that the Central and State Government schemes and other are being implemented in needed thrust areas. Many members reported that majority of the benefits are cornered by the top level of PRI’s and their relatives. So, all the beneficiaries to be selected in gram sabha.

It is very interesting to find very low role performance of the few members of PRI’s although they have comparatively high level role perception. These members possessed good leadership behaviours and higher personality level, but did not have the interest and motivation for performing the assigned roles. This means that there is a need to bring about improvements in the level of role performance of members of PRI’s. This can be possible by imparting training to them. Moreover, they need to provide a copy of well defined roles. How acquainted they are about their roles need to assess from time to time so that lacking information, if any, can be provided to update them about their roles. Therefore, state government and Non Government Organization or private agencies should organize special training program to realize their actual roles and position in Gram Panchyats. The variables education, extension participation, leadership behaviour, social participation cosmo politeness, personality level and intra inter linkages with other members have contributed positively and significantly towards the role perception and role performance of members of PRI’s. Therefore, all such variables which are manipulative in nature should be manipulated so as to promote the role perception and role performance of members of PRI’s.

According to members of PRI’s agricultural department should make village level workers to stay in village who can exclusively guide the respondents and farmers about improved farming. Independent and sufficient staff should be appointed at village level to implement the activities of gaon panchayat. It was observed that in the area of the study most of the Secretaries of Gaon Panchayat were holding more than one charges of the Gaon Panchayat which affected the normal working of the
panchayats. Adequate and regular funds should be provided as demanded by the panchayats to carry the developmental activities of the village in general and agricultural development in particular. Government should pay more attention towards creation of facilities like irrigation, supply of inputs and marketing to agricultural produce. Unless the Government provide these facilities, the gaon panchayat cannot work satisfactory for all round development of village in general and agriculture development in particular.

Establishment of processing units on co-operative basis, creation of transportation facilities, elected representatives and local leaders should motivate people for co-operation, establishment of co-operative societies in agriculture, establishment of input supplying and distributing organizations, organization of farmers trips to progressive farmers filed and provision of telephone sets and furniture in the office were some of the suggestion made by the panchayat members. One of the important suggestions offered by the panchayat members were to provide independent staff and sufficient and regular funds. The other suggestions were extension workers should give timely guidance and training facilities on improved farming and allied fields should be made available in village itself. As members are the integral part of the administration of the Gaon Panchayat and directly responsible to implement the various agricultural development programmes they themselves will have to take lead in this regard.