

## CHAPTER - II

### METHOD OF STUDY

The present study is based on the correlation between the practical field experiences and data with various practical implementational projects and policies with a special emphasis on the theories involving peasants life. Individually, there exists various separate communities who are living side by side with different social customs and rites but in economic and political field, they never maintain their separate identity on the basis of social customs. In this field they are the peasants differentiated with economic holding cutting across community customs which is on the wane day by day in a process of integration and differentiation into a class society of having material possession.

In modern sociological research, we find a discussion or a few lines about the methodological nature, design and practices of the study. Usually this portion contains details on the procedure of the selection of field, collection of data and interpretation, the field problems and objectives of the present study from the quantitative as well as qualitative point of view about phenomena of the universe. Various methodological techniques have been developed for grasping a situation of the field taking a cue from other studies. Every study has its own dimensional method in line of the generalised methodological approach developed by the western sociologists. So a study cannot accommodate all the approaches we find in the discipline. A particular study may develop or follow various methodological approaches but not all we find in the literature. Most of the present

studies are following the multiple approach. "The multiple methodological approach comprises a thorough going, well knit procedure for ascertaining the inter-relationship between the past and present conditions of an area of study. It is attained with the help of simultaneous use of the tools of historical and descriptive methods at first in a contextual build up which is put to statistical generalizations later. Truly speaking it is a gradual course of methodological finesse-the most balanced approach to a set of phenomena which is notorious for its variability"<sup>1</sup>.

#### Approach:

The present study conforms to the basic principle of somewhat multiple methodological approach of a generalised statistical method. The method follows different historical facets of the past incidence connected with the present investigation and tries to analyse the various statistical data collected from the field through sample survey method. The study also shows the present development of the society as a whole and communities particularly where special emphasis lies on the problems of Scheduled Castes and Tribal Communities of the socially backward section as per governmental rules and regulations. The present development of the society cannot be understood properly, if we do not focuss our attention on the past condition and nature of the society of our field. The present study also shows the integration of different communities including tribals into a single economic and political unit irrespective of their separate community rites and customs. The term 'peasant' maintains a general

terminology where almost all the rural folks including different communities pursue the same category of economical activities with a different occupational perspective according to their position in the field of activity rather economic class. The community never identifies the specificity of occupational activity maintained formally in our society. The basic objective of the study is to establish by our collected data in the rural society the process of integrity from the economic and political point of view which ultimately controls the community behaviour of the society as a whole. The effects of modern economic and political activity of the general people identified as peasants are coming close into a single one social and cultural set up gradually where the orthodox policy of community customs is decreasing day by day. Formally every aspect of the society was controlled by the upper castes of the so-called Hindu society and the rest of other castes and communities followed them, and, as a result, some Hindu customs and behaviour we find in most of the communities existing side by side. These basic findings of our study have been gathered as a participant observer of the social intercourse of the rural general masses in our field of study.

The study also maintains link between the past and present socio-economic and political participation in the general field of activity where the lower income groups of the universe have no contribution which was previously maintained by a group of elite belonging to the upper castes of the society; the fact has been collected from various published documents and reports. The contextual historical aspects have also been strengthened with the experience

gathered as a participant observer through various social intercourse of the people where we are grown up. There is no distinction between the past and present domination in various fields of activity, except the terminological differentiation of class in lieu of caste. The enquiry reveals its originality where the different classes according to their position in the society maintain their various activities but the tendency of the upper class of the higher income group of the people is to accumulate more and more naturally the middle income groups of the people are being pushed and forming a group of 'haventots' who closely approximate themselves to the Marxian relations of production. The setting of various questionnaire is on the basis of a pilot survey that also generates a degree of inductive method. The theory of the study is based on the principle of available material. Though the study is a synthesis of the method of induction and deduction, the principle is mainly on the basis of induction.

It is conceded that the study may have several gaps, but the study of peasant society of Bengal irrespective of community differentiation which links the whole society with a unit, is a new one and we could hardly neglect it. The society is linked particularly with me and my family till now. The specificity of the universe is sought to be determined in the following sections of the chapter.

#### The Units:

The universe of our study is the peasant society, the society of a single district which is subjected to empirical investigation,

not only because of our personal interest but also as a problem of our society as a whole which the peasants are facing in their daily life. Here it is necessary to note that the peasant is a generalized terminology where different castes and communities are encompassed within this single terminology. The tribal people constitute the majority of the peasants and the number of other backward communities is not nominal. Santal and Oraon are the only major tribes of the area constituting 38.45 per cent and 31.47 per cent respectively. It thus places 69.92 per cent of the total population, other backward communities of scheduled castes constitute 13.75 per cent and the rest constitute the 16.33 per cent who, according to the governmental measure, stand in the position of more or less developed communities. But originally a major portion of them are not developed in the economic sense of the term, rather from the peasant view point.

The basic unit of our study is not confined to the economy of the separate community but of the peasant activities on the plains of rural Bengal where the tribes and other community members are more a part of the general peasantry than a separate cultivating community. While discussing the peasant economy we have mentioned various impacts of the present schemes of rural development and change among the peasant economic structure we may call the process a sociological dynamism.

Next, the study highlights the object of the peasant society as a whole because the ecological condition forces the tribal in a single economic activity because the tribal people can not get any proper field for developing their own economy they possessed primarily. Naturally, migrating to the plains areas they are following

the economy of the general people of the area. At the initial stage they maintained their own economy at the time of British administration when they first migrated themselves into the areas. Later various migrated people both from different places in our country and East-Pakistan now (Bangladesh) settled in the universe and began to follow the economy of a separate type which ultimately influenced them individually because of the excess of production and other facilities available within the system of agriculture and the related activities of meeting their livelihood. The separate economic activities led them to curtail their former economic habit which ultimately impressed upon their community behaviour and customs they followed, and this forced them into a single economic activity as a whole where separate identity is on the basis of economic class, not on the basis of community.

Landholding is the main basis of class determination in the village peasant economy which ultimately influences the other facets of the society. But the quantity of land alone cannot determine the better class in the society, here quality of land is also required. So the quantity and quality combine to make one's position better. "The basic indicators to distinguish the classes are land, income and labour"<sup>2</sup>. Income power increases when one has the capacity of availing better irrigational facility by using pumping set or other instruments by which productivity increases inspite of the appearances of any natural hazards. In a word, capacity of applying modern mechanical devices with chemical fertilizer and manure together with pesticides, if necessary, make better productivity of a land that

enhances one's economic conditions in a better place of the society because of the increase in income. Naturally, it makes proper identity of determining a better class. The better income imposes the other members of the family to divert other activities like availing better educational facilities, mostly uncommon to rural areas which ultimately comes in a position of increasing family's total income. Some of the peasants have possessed a better quantity of land. Their major portion is within the dry areas where productivity is uncommon. Again, lands within the lower areas also destroy productivity frequently because of the overflow of erratic rains. So quantity alone cannot make one's position better unless it is combined with other variables. "Besides some peasants may be perpetually indebted to a patron and pledge or mortgage a portion of harvest or land, while its usufruct right may remain inalienable. In such cases, ownership is of little significance. Moreover, landholding sizes are merely quantitative indicators, which do not necessarily specify the relationship between classes"<sup>3</sup>.

Income is another source, if one possesses extra source of income besides possessional holding, that also helps in finding proper class position of the society. "Appropriation of surplus labour is the other essence of class analysis. In the process of production, whether one expends labour or not is the first stage of division of classes, between landlords and peasants. Those who contribute labour, may do so only in their own farm, or in leased in land, or in others' farm, or in a combination of these farms. Conversely, for the cultivation of their own farm, they may use only household labour (middle/

small peasants), or only hire in labour/lease out land (landlords), or mainly hire in labour while a minor part of labour requirement is met by the household labour (rich peasants), or mainly hire out labour while a minor part of the total available household labour is used in own farm (small peasant), or only hire-out labour in agriculture as the main source of living (agricultural labour)"<sup>4</sup>. This is a system of labour exploitation which is the primary source of class identification and the analysis of class structure. So land with other fruitful variables determine one's class position and its identification.

The study examines the hypothesis of the stunted agricultural growth, that is, lower yields and single crop cultivation without the application of modern knowledge, results out of the variation in the interests among the owners of land of the cultivators. Majority of the peasants are of the lower income group who have not the simple material of production like plough and bullock for cultivation of land naturally we can never imagine it of the application of mechanical gadgets like pumpset for irrigation purposes or application of chemical fertilizer for better production. Even they cannot apply any pesticides for removing various diseases from the crop because of their poor financial condition. Major number of lower marginal peasants with some small peasants are employing themselves in others' field for money on the basis of daily wage labour; in such a case how will anyone expect better production by giving special attention to their own production? Only a few rich peasants are applying some modern scientific appliances for better production whose amount we find

nominal. Besides, they have no protective capacity against natural calamities or hazards that damage huge crops every year. Naturally, the total productivity of crops is never increasing. Moreover, for the lack of proper irrigational facility peasants cannot produce extra crop except seasonal paddy. Only a little amount of other crops is produced by the side of different ponds and other water reservoirs. Naturally, the production stands in the bottom of the scale of production that seldom moves up.

It also examines the proselytising activities among the poorest people of the tribal peasants who go not for growing faith and conviction among them, but primarily because of some extra material benefits from the missionaries. They never follow the original path of the Christian Religion. In the universe we never find a rich peasant who possesses a good economic condition as a Christian converts. Naturally, the hypothesis proves its truth.

#### Selection of the Universe:

The universe we have selected for our study on the basis of a pilot survey which reveals the major tribal population more or less all of whom are related to the agricultural activities; other people of the area, besides the tribals, are also engaged in cultivation. The major number of tribal people are existing within the people of other communities among them we find a considerable number of scheduled castes population though less than the general people. In this situation tribal people are not keeping their own traditional agricultural process, they are maintaining a general process of cultivation of the common peasantry to the contrary. They are not a separate group of the common peasant society we find in other places; they

are the part of a common peasant society where we never find in any exceptional method of cultivation. A process of tribal integration is found within the general peasant society consisting of other communities. Here the majority peasants are of marginal category and a portion, who have no land but are related to agricultural activities, and are the original producers of the area. We have selected the area for highlighting the special attention to the tribal people who are a part of the general peasantry. So we have selected the villages within the Tapan Block of the district where the existence of tribal population is more than that of any other blocks of the district. They constitute 23.73 per cent of the total population and scheduled castes people constitute 30.99 per cent of the total population. Both of them constitute more than half of the total people. Among these villages we have surveyed one from the Balurghat block of the urban vicinity for studying extra behaviour, if they have any. Within the block 16.79 per cent of the total people are tribal, less than the Tapan Block. Whereas we find 10.82 per cent of the total population of the district of West Dinajpur constitute tribal population and 28 per cent belong to the scheduled castes. Naturally, the major part of the tribal people are living within the rural areas holding agriculture as the mainstay of livelihood. Any discussion on peasant society can not get its proper shape without a reference to the tribal peasants who take a major part of the total peasant society in the area and specially within the district. The majority of the tribal peasants are within the group of marginal peasants and landless agricultural labourers but the rich peasants

are comparatively less in number from the tribal communities. The ethnicity, rather than class, may play a major role in the peasant society.

Our study is confined to 12 villages inhabited by 10 separate communities; among them two are within the tribal group. The enquiry has been completed on the basis of interview method. Every head of the family is our marked interviewee, who is available in all ten communities. These ten communities are: Santal, Oraon, Rajbanshi, Kshatriya, Bhumali, Ghatol, Tili, Kayastha, Brahmin and Muslim. All these community members are in the twelve villages of our study. These villages are : Berakuthi, Bhalkadaha, Kathalpukur, Shalukkuri, Dangapara, Mallikpur, Gorenda, Kartikpur, Ahira, Nimpur, Kamdevbati, and Khadinpur Dighipara from Balurghat block. These villages are selected on the basis of a different type of habitat for the convenience of our study. So among these villages we find single tribal village, multi-tribal villages, multi-community villages for observing the proper peasant activity and characteristics beyond their community characteristic which ultimately disorganising and repatterning into a single economic way of life in an integrated common living characteristics we call peasant society.

All the households of the villages we have studied are 502. "Normally households consisted of single families; and in a few cases which had undivided large families, each smaller unit is assigned equal share of assets and incomes but treated as only single household for most purposes. The heads of the households are only interviewed, but in some cases, where the heads remained absent, other

members were contacted. Except the few cases where the households did not have any adult male the senior most male member was treated as the head of the household"<sup>5</sup>. From among these households we have collected different information about their personal life and condition and their possessional holding by which we classified peasant class and others.

### The Methods:

The random sample survey has been adopted for collecting various information about the tribal culture and specially of the peasant behaviour and attitude towards the dimension of social, economic and political field they participate and direct action of the society. The use of documentary materials is limited because of different dimensional problems. The source of information from various official materials and other documents is only for limited aspects of discussion used as a secondary method. So, in a sense "the study has allowed the method of participant observation to determine the nature and dimension of research problem"<sup>6</sup>. Naturally, we have opted for the only direct contact research method. For studying various past and present problem of the dimension, referring various micro and macro level discussions require some extra documentary information, archival material existing as a document. "Likewise, though the significance of qualitative data is emphasised, unlike the tribal researchers, quantification is not ignored. The qualitative data which are incommensurable and irreducible to quantity are permitted freely, and some of those have indeed provided insight into crucial structural distinctions"<sup>7</sup>.

The systematic random sample survey of an area was our main focus of attention and to prove this we have selected the villages within our study. Our enquiry was well set in all respects even in the direction of various changes among the community as a particular and peasant on the whole. So the random survey was our full scale technique of selecting villages and communities. "Since representative of the sample is the most vital aspect of a survey"<sup>8</sup>, the area has been selected for major tribal belts of the remote place of the district. Tribals are living there with a nominal number of other community habitants. Yet, their economy is not different from the general peasant economy the others follow rather a unilateral peasant economy of the majority of the rural poor whose number has increased from the previous period. Various programmes and policies did not cure their poor condition. Documents show and our study also shows that more than half of the total people of the area are living below the poverty line.

After the selection of the villages and its nature we composed our Questionnaire and Schedule for direct interview. Interview followed door to door survey for collecting various information personally from all the inhabitants irrespective of community class and political participation. All of them gave information about their life and economic condition with various socio-political effects upon them. Interview occurred personally and sometimes together sitting in a place. Every Questionnaire and Schedule took at least two hours separately from every interviewee. We interviewed three to four persons in a day. Some other information we also collected, besides our Questionnaire and Schedule about their social and religious life,

again sometimes they were asked about various problems they faced in their daily livelihood and expected answer and way to solve those problems. We also replied as per our capacity and knowledge. Naturally, it took extra time. We took one and a half year for a total interview, because of leaving working period they engaged themselves for their earning and naturally they will avoid to waste their valuable time at seasonal period and we did not disturb them at their working period. So realistically our survey comprises the different types of people both educated and illiterate, poor and rich, political participant and independent show our interpretation and tabulation of data. Female members were also interviewed by us. They were the head of their family. Sometimes they felt shy to answer our questions but gradually with the help of other people they answered all the questions we asked. In this way all of them cooperated with us for disseminating information to the best of their capacity.

"Intensive field work in its traditional sense implies that the field-worker should deliberately participate in the village activity in order to observe and comprehend the social reality in the field. This is ideal but when the field research is divorced from the macro-context and from the history, the information that is collected gives little insight into the internal potentialities for change"<sup>9</sup>, like our study. "Therefore, both observation and more research technique were used here to collect the necessary information. Participant observation and informal interviews were used as a follow up to the structured procedures for checking the information gathered. The initial data, when found partly erroneous, were

subsequently corrected to the extent possible (Sabarwal, 1974:42-63).

Most of the rich people felt reluctant to reply clearly when we asked them about their economic position and related matters. But after a few days they were frank to us and sometimes assisted to call the absent village family head for our interview. They gradually understood that we were only interested in the collection of some facts. So no one could create any difficulty for collecting data. "Since our research design included unstructured interviews on the most intimate topics concerning their life, the rich data collected provided the basic raw material for the study. Apart from ensuring spontaneous inflow of highly qualitative data, this method enabled us to expand and contract our tool whenever necessary"<sup>10</sup>. The questions in the interview scheduled were arranged in such a way that the interviewee did not feel any uneasiness to answer and sometimes they interested also when we asked them about their religious customs method and other social customs but most of them are unaware about the things, so we collected this information generally from the aged person referred to by the villager. "The interview guide contained questions strictly on topics that were native to the respondents' experience and interests"<sup>11</sup>.

So, the primary tools of collecting data was a structured Schedule and a Questionnaire which was designed to elicit various information on their basic aspects of life which was added by participant observation. The questionnaire was designed in such a manner that the respondent could supply all about his daily affairs of life including social, economic and political stage by stage either with

pleasure or just to relax themselves about disclosing their problems and difficulties they face. Because no one came to listen their story of personal life previously, some of them also gave wrong statement about their economic conditions and other personal affairs mainly, the rich group, but we collected some proper statement about them from their neighbouring members of the village. Considering all things the questions were set in terms of the structured variety, without losing the 'non-directive' quality of the interview. In setting the questions our primary concern was to collect the data on the social, economic and cultural, including attitudinal variables<sup>12</sup>. We were also concerned with some official documents and views on the changing course of the socio-economic and political aspects of the communities particularly and peasants as a whole for our research purposes.

After the collection of data, we classified all the information categorically and processed in a tabular form through simple statistical process for securing and explaining our basic questions of the study. "The secondary data has had been for supplementing, whenever required, and comparing the objective realities with the subjective trivialities of the so-called proponents of change"<sup>13</sup>. Thus, we have come to the conclusion of our study by adopting various methodological combination and others through planned way of discussion and consultation.

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