

# **Chapter -VI**

## **Power Structure**

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## Power Structure

"Power" is an important aspect of social relationship which determines interpersonal and inter group relations in rural society. Therefore, dissection of power is an important task in realizing the agrarian structure. The concept " power" is used here in Weberian sense. To Weber, 'Power' is " the chance of a man or a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action "( Weber in Gupta :1993 :456) .To Bottomore, " power is meant here the ability of an individual or a social group to pursue a course of action ( to make and implement decisions, and more broadly to determine the agenda for decision making) if necessary against the interests, and even against the opposition, of other individuals and groups."( Bottomore 1979 : 7 ). Thus power denotes domination of one group or individual over others.

### **The Rural Power**

At present, in rural West Bengal, power is mainly concerned with *panchayat* institution and other elected bodies which are concerned with governance of the village affairs. Beteille (1996) holds the view that power structure of the village could be analysed in terms of *panchayat* and political party. The *panchayat* literally means a group or council of five. Traditionally it refers to a group that presides over and resolves conflict, punishes people and launches group enterprises. At present *panchayat* refers to statutory local body formed through election vested with legal power and empowered with certain governmental responsibilities. The 73 rd amendment of the Indian Constitution made *panchayats* not only a constitutional body but also ensure them to prepare plans for economic development and social justice. The State legislatures have been empowered to endow the *panchayat* with such powers and authority as it is thought best to enable them to function as institutions of self government ( Bandyopadhyay 1997 : 2450 ).

When the left front government came into power in 1977, they committed to decentralize

power. Accordingly they hold *panchayat* election regularly since 1978 at an interval of five years. The fifth *panchayat* election was held in 1998. The CPI(M) is a major partner of the left front government, a well organized and ideologically based party committed to rural development involving the rural poor. The *panchayat* system in West Bengal is unique in two respects. First it is political; political parties have openly participated in the election. Secondly, it has become an essential component of a new system of governance (Mukherjee and Bandhyapadhyay 1993 :3).

### **Party Domination in the Region**

The two sample villages are under the two separate jurisdictions of *Lokshabha* (Parliamentary Constituency) and *Bidhansabha* (State Assembly Constituency). The village, Guriarpar is under the Alipurduar Reserved (Scheduled Tribe) Parliamentary and the Tufanganj No. 9 Reserved (SC) Assembly Constituency. On the other hand, the village Balaghat, is under the Cooch Behar Reserved (Scheduled Caste) Parliamentary Constituency and the Natabari Assembly Constituency (Unreserved). Both the parliamentary seats are under the control of left parties. The Alipurduar Parliamentary Reserved Seat (ST) and the Cooch Behar Parliamentary Reserved Seat (SC) have been under the control of Rastriya Socialist Party (RSP) and Forward Block Party respectively since 1977. But, both the *Bidhan Sabha* seats have been controlled by CPI(M). Thus, left parties dominate the political affairs of the two villages under study.

### **Party domination in Panchayat**

The *panchayat* system of West Bengal is three tier viz *Gram Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samity* and *Zilla Parisad*. The two sample villages are under the jurisdiction of the same *Zilla Parisad* (Cooch Behar) and *Panchayat Samity* (Tufanganj-I). But, they are under the two separate *Gram Panchayats*, as mentioned earlier in Chapter-I. Guriarpar and Balaghat are under the *gram panchayats* of Dhalpal-II and Deocharai respectively.

Direct participation of political parties in *panchayat* election had been introduced since

1977. Party wise position of the *panchayat* member at the state level ( West Bengal) in 4th *panchayat* election held in 1993 is shown in table 49.

**Table 49** Distribution of *panchayat* members by tier and party in West Bengal in the 4th *panchayat* Election held in 1993.

Party Control	Name of the Tier		
	Gram Panchayat	Panchayat Samaty	Zilla Parishadmati
CPI (M)	35342 (57.93)	6333 (66.99)	528 (80.49)
CPI	799 (1.31)	90 (0.95)	06 (0.91)
Forward Block	1238 (2.03)	169 (1.79)	17 (2.59)
RSP	1526 (2.50)	241 (2.55)	14 (2.13)
Cong-I	16292 (26.70)	2158 (22.83)	73 (11.13)
BJP	2367 (3.88)	125 (1.32)	-- --
Janata	17 (0.03)	--	--
A		--	--
B			
Janata	2	—	—
Indipendent	3382 (5.54)	330 (3.49)	17 (2.59)
Election not held	46 (0.08)	7 (0.07)	01 (0.15)
Total No. of seat	61011 (100.00)	9453 (100.00)	656 (100.00)

Source : Paschim Banga : June 18th,1993.

Total number of *Gram Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samati* and *Zilla Parishad* in West Bengal is

3223, 328 and 16 respectively according to 1993 election. Table 49. Shows that election of 46,07 and 01 seats in *Gram Panchayat*, *Panchayat Samati* and *Zilla Parisad* respectively was not held. However, it shows that CPI(M) being the major partners of the left front government, dominates in all the tiers. Secondly, the BJP and Janata Dal are not represented in all the tiers. Thirdly, the percentage of seat shared by CPI(M) is higher in Zilla Parisad and lower in Gram Panchayat where as it is reversed in case of Congress-I. Finally, independent candidates have represented in all the tiers. It is evident that left parties dominate the rural power in West Bengal.

The same trend is also observed in Cooch Behar. Party control over *panchayat* in Cooch Behar district is shown in table 50.

**Table 50** Distribution of *panchayat* Members in Cooch Behar by tier and party.

Name of the tier	Total No	Total No. of seats	Party position							
			CPI(M)	CPI	F B	RSP	Con-I	BJP	Janata A B	Inde-ndent
Gram Panchayat	128	2418 (100)	1393 (57.61)	01 (0.04)	75 (3.10)	03 (0.12)	539 (22.29)	78 (3.23)	---	329 (13.61)
Panchayat Samity	12	375 (100)	235 (62.67)	---	10 (2.67)	---	79 (21.07)	06 (1.60)	---	45 (12.00)
Zilla Parishad	01	24 (100)	15 (62.50)	---	03 (12.50)	---	02 (8.33)	---	---	04 (16.67)

Source : *Paschim Banga*, June 18th 1993.

The pattern of party control as shown in table 50 is similar to that of the state level. The CPI(M) dominates in all the tiers. The other partners of the Left Front like CPI, Forward Block, and RSP have a minimum representation. RSP and CPI have no representation in *Panchayat Samity* and *Zilla Parisad*. Among the opposition parties, Cong-I has representation in all the tiers but BJP has representation only in the two tiers i.e., in the *Gram Panchayat* and *Panchayat Samity*. Janata Dal had no representation in Cooch Behar *panchayat*. On the other hand, independent candidates have representation in all the three tiers. Though the two Lokshabha seats of the two villages have been controlled by RSP and Forward block, they have little representation

in Panchayat. It is the CPI(M) who dominates the local politics. The party control in the two Gram Panchayat is shown in table 51.

**Table 51** Distribution of Panchayat members of the two Gram Panchayats by party.

Name of Gram Panchayat	Total No. of seat	Party position							
		CPI(M)	CPI	F B	RSP	Con-I	BJP	Janata A B	Independent
Dhalpal (Guriarpar)	16 (100)	09 (56.25)	---	---	---	07 (43.75)	---	---	---
Deocharai (Balaghat)	25 (100)	18 (72.00)	---	---	---	07 (28.00)	---	---	---

Table 51 shows that both the *Gram Panchayats* are controlled by CPI(M). Though Dhalpal is under the Alipurduar Loksabha Reserved (ST) Constituency which is controlled by RSP, not a single member from RSP is represented in the *Gram Panchayats*. Similarly though the *Lokshaba* Constituency of Deocharai is controlled by Forward Block, they have no representation in *Gram Panchayats*. The Cong-I, the main opposition party shares 43.75 and 28.00 percent to total seats of Dhalpal and Deocharai respectively. Thus it appears that CPI(M) mainly dominates the two *gram panchayats*.

### Panchayat Members of the two Villages

There are six *panchayat* members in our two sample villages. Their party affiliation is shown in table 52.

**Table 52** Distribution of *panchayat* members by party of the two villages.

Name of the village	PARTY			TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	OTHERS	
Guriarpar	03 (75)	01 (25)	---	04 (100.00)
Balaghat	---	02 (100.00)	---	02 (100.00)
Total	03 (50)	03 (50)	---	06 (100.00)

Source : Records of Panchayat samity.

Table 52 shows that the Cong -I and the CPI(M) have equal representation in the *panchayat*. At Guriarpar three out of four *panchayats* belong to the CPI(M) . Here the CPI(M) dominates the village politics. On the other hand, at Balaghat, the two *panchayat* members belong to Cong - I party. During my field survey I came to know that some members have frequently changed their party affiliation. Askar Mia, a *panchayat* member of Guriarpar, had contested twice before finally elected in 1993. First time he contested as a Cong - I candidate, then as an independent candidate . And finally, he had been elected as a CPI(M) candidate in 1993. Similar phenomena is also observed at Balaghat where one *panchayat* member who was elected as CPI(M) and in the next time i.e., in 1993, he was elected as a Cong-I candidate. At Guriarpar, there is one female *panchayat* member who belongs to Congress-I Party.

#### **Background of *Panchayat* Members of the two villages :**

Before analysing their class position, it is essential to highlight some of the demographic features of the *panchayats* of the two villages under study.

#### **Age :**

It is observed that young members are represented more in number in the *panchayat* than others. Age of the *panchayat* members is shown in table 53.

**Table 53** Distribution of *Panchayat* Members by age of the two villages.

Age Group ( in years )	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
20-25	—	—	—
25 -35	02 (50.00)	01 (50.00)	03(50.00)
35- 50	01 (25.00)	01 (50.00)	02 (33.33)
50+	01 (25.00)	-	01 (16.67)
Total	04 (100)	02 (100)	06 (100)

Table 53 shows that people prefers younger candidates since they may be dynamic and active; they may serve better for the villagers. 50 percent of the total panchayats members are in the age group of 25-35 years. Only one person belongs to the age group of above 50 years.

### Marital Status

Marital status of the panchayat members is shown in table 54.

**Table 54** Distribution of Panchayat members by status of Marriage of the two villages.

Marrital status	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Married	02 (50)	01 (50)	03(50)
Unmarride	02 (50)	01 (50)	03 (50)
Widow / widower / Divorcee	—	—	—
Total	04 (100.00)	02 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

In respect of marital status of the *Panchayat* members, it is observed from table 54 that percentage of married and unmarried member is equal . However, there is none from the widow/ widower and divorcee.

### Family Size

Family size is also another important contributory factor of becoming a leader. In rural society generally it is considered that the large size family has an impact on economy and politics. The size of family of the *panchayat* members of the two villages is shown in table 55.

**Table 55** Distribution of Panchayat members by family size and party of the 2 villages.

Village	Party	Family Size				Total
		Small (1-5)	Medium (6-10)	Large (11-15)	Very Large (15+)	
Guriarpar	CPI(M)	---	---	03 (100.00)	---	03 (100.00)
	Cong - I	---	01 (100.00)	---	---	01 (100.00)
Balaghat	CPI(M)	---	---	---	---	---
	Cong -I	---	02 (100.00)	---	---	02 (100.00)
Total			03 (50.00)	03 (50.00)	---	06 (100.00)

It is evident from table 55 that the panchayat members have equal representation from the medium and large families. Small family has no representation. All the members of the CPI(M) have been represented from large family comprising of 10-15 members.

### Education :

Nowadays education is considered to be a means for access to power. Educational standard of the *panchayat* members of the two villages is shown in table 56.

**Table 56.** Distribution of *Panchayat* members by education of the 2 villages.

Education	Village		Total
	Gurirarpar	Balaghat	
Primary	01 (33.33)	01 (50.00)	02 (33.33)
MP / HS	02 (50.00)	01 (50.00)	03 (50.00)
Graduate	01 (17.67)	-	01 (17.67)
Total	04 (100.00)	02 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 56 shows that all the *panchayat* members are literate having formal education. 50% of

them have passed the Madhyamik and Higher Secondary examination, One member has had the Graduate Degree. Thus demographic background shows that educated, young persons having large size family background are considered suitable for *panchayat* members.

### **Power and Class**

There has been a debate on class position of *panchayat* members in West Bengal. A good number of studies demonstrate that *panchayat* members of West Bengal are poor belonging to the schedule caste and schedule Tribe (Lieten : 1992; Westergard: 1986; Webster:1986; Kumar and Ghosh: 1996). " The survey on the composition of the panchayat members in terms of caste and class in any case confirms that a new type of leadership has come to dominate the stage at the lower levels in the system of political devolution. Poor peasants and agricultural labourers, and therefore also the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes, have come very much to the forefront, mainly on account of the composition of the CPI(M) panels. On the basis of time series, it appears that the Forward Block and particularly the Indian National congress are engaged in a catching up process, but that the bigger land owners are still dominant, particularly in the Indian National Congress" (Lieten : 1992 : 118). Webster also holds the same view "..... there is now significant representation in the gram panchayats from among the poorer and more marginal social groups. In particular, landless and marginal land owners, scheduled castes, women and in Saldya, Muslims all have members in gram panchayat " ( Webster 1992:24).

But, critics have pointed out that though the Left Front Government is trying to organize the rural poor regardless of caste by sharing power and by distributing the developmental benefits, they are far away . The rural poor have occupied a peripheral position in the power structure of the Panchayat ( Chakraborty and Bhattacharjee: 1993; Acharya 1993; Mallick 1993). Chakraborty and Bhattacharya observe{ 1993:194}, " however the poor of the village are still far from the seat of power. We have found, further , that the decision making in the village regarding the major or vital issues i.e.; in those which concern the distribution of power and economic

resources, is still the monopoly of the leader ( both formal and informal) belonging to the dominant lineages- which have been dominating the village over the years." The similar view is also expressed by ( Acharya 1993 1080). To him," no doubt, there emerged a new generation of leadership in rural West Bengal but the class and caste background of the new leadership may not have changed much . There developed a new institutional structure, decentralised in form but still dominated by the middle and rich peasants . The agricultural labourers and poor peasants, though not in proportion, have their representatives in the new structure but their participation in the decision making process is still a far cry " .

Similarly Mallick (1993:215) observed " in the rural areas the party politics were such that the CPI(M) leadership would not confront the dominant rural elite. For all the communists talk about their base among the rural poor, this was only manifest in election time. The party organization and the Left Front Panchayats were controlled by the rural middle and upper classes, whose own political and financial interests were threatened by any independent mobilization of the lower classes. Therefore, it was in the political interests of the CPI(M) to maintain a middle-class alliance dominated by the rural elite, which could be maintained only by soft pedalling redistribution reforms ..... However, it did not change the balance of power in the villages in favour of the poor, ...." .

### **Class character of the Panchayat Members**

The class character of the *panchayat* members of the two villages are analysed in terms of their occupation, family income, land holding, possession of farm asset and use of hire labour .

**Occupation :** Occupational pattern of the *panchayat* members of the two villages is shown in table 57.

**Table 57** Distribution of Panchayat members by occupation and party of the two villages.

Occupation	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Households activities	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Cultivation	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Govt Service	01 (33.33)	01 (33.33)	02 (33.33)
Unemployed	02 (66.67)	--	02 (33.33)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

It is evident from table 57 that share cropper and agricultural labourers have no representation in the panchayat. There is a single member whose principal occupation is cultivation and he belongs to Cong I party. There is one female member whose principal occupation is household activities. There are two government servants; one of them is a primary school teacher and the other is a constable in West Bengal Armed Police. There are two unemployed youths in the *panchayat* members. Though they are unemployed, they are doing some business relating to agricultural products. Thus 93 percent of the *panchayat* members are engaged in non-agricultural activities.

### Sources of Family income

Individual occupation alone is not sufficient for the analysis of class character of the panchayat members.

**Table -58** Distribution of Panchayat Members by source of family income .

Sources of family income	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Only Cultivation	--	02 (66.67)	02 (33.33)
Cultivation and Service	02 (66.67)	01 (33.33)	03 (50.00)
Cultivation and Business	01 (33.33)	--	01 (16.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 58 shows that sources of family income of the panchayat members are either only cultivation or cultivation with other activities like cultivation with service or cultivation with business. *Panchayat* members whose family income is derived from cultivation constitute 33.33 percent of the total members. About 67 percent member's family income is from cultivation with either business or service. Cultivation with service is the major source of family income (50 percent). Sources of family income of the CPI(M) *panchayat* members are either cultivation with service (66.67 percent) or cultivation with business (33.33 percent) . On the other hand, the source of family income of majority members of Cong I is cultivation (66.67 percent) . It may be due to the fact that since CPI(M) is the ruling party, its members get the opportunity of having job or other activities.

#### **Size of holding :**

The economic position of the *panchayat* members could be understood better from their size of holding (family) which is shown in table 59.

**Table 59** Distribution of Panchayat members by size of holding.

Size - Class (in acre)	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
0	--	--	--
1 - 5	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
5 - 10	--	02 (66.67)	02 (33.33)
10 - 15	02 (66.67)	--	02 (33.33)
15 +	01 (33.33)	--	01 (16.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 59 shows landless people have no representation in the *panchayat*. In terms of land holding CPI(M) members are in a better position than the Cong I since their size class is high.

### Labour Use Pattern

Economic position of the *panchayat* members is analysed by their use of labour in cultivation. The pattern of labour<sup>use</sup> is shown in table 60.

**Table 60** Distribution of *panchayat* Members by pattern of labour use and party.

Pattern of labour use	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Purely family labour	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Predominantly family labour	--	--	--
Predominantly hire labour	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Purely hire labour	03 (100.00)	01 (33.33)	04 (66.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Since all the panchayat members have cultivable land, they require hired labour for cultivation along with their family labour. They may engage hire labour. The households of *panchayat* members have been classified into four groups. First is the purely family based which includes those households who cultivate their land mainly with family labours. They may engage hired labour in case of exigencies. Their status is equivalent to the poor peasant. Secondly, the extent of hired labour used to the total labour requirement is 25 percent of those households who are regarded as the predominantly family labour based households. Their status is equivalent to middle peasant . That is about 75 percent of the total labour requirement is met by family labour. The third category includes those households whose family labour participation to total labour requirement is below 25 percent . That is about 75 percent of the total labour requirement is done by hired labour. Their status is equivalent to enterprising peasant and they are identified as predominately hired labour used family. Finally, the fourth category includes those households who do not contribute family labour to cultivation. The extent of their hired labour used to their total labour use is almost 100 percent. They get their works done by hired labour. Their status is almost similar to that of the rich peasant . Table 60 shows that 66.67 percent of the *panchayat* members cultivate their land with the use of purely hired labour. Only one family cultivates their land mainly by their family labour. All the panchayat members of CPI(M) belong to the 4th category i.e. rich peasant.

#### **Farm Asset :**

Mode of production depends on type of technology used in the production process. Therefore, possession of technology is also another indicator of judging the economic position of the members. Table 61 shows the type of farm asset possessed by the panchayat members

**Table 61** Distribution of *panchayat* members by possession of types of farm asset and party.

Type of farm asset	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Plough set without draught animal with or with out shallow	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.66)
Plough set with draught animal with or without shallow sprayer	--	--	--
Single set plough, draught animal, pump set, sprayer with more than one shallow	--	01 (33.33)	01 (16.66)
More than one set of plough, draught animal, pump set, sprayer and shallow	03 (100)	01 (33.33)	04 (66.67)
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 61 shows that on the basis of farm asset, the households have been classified into four categories. The table 61 shows that about 66.67 percent of *panchayat* member has double set of ploughs, Draught Animal, Pump Set, Shallow and Sprayer. Their economic status is equivalent to that of the rich peasant. With the help of irrigation they cultivate vegetables and Bodo paddy for market. All the three *panchayat* members of CPI(M) belong to this class. On the other hand, only one *panchayat* member of Cong-I belongs to this class. One member of the Cong I party has only plough set. Her economic status is equivalent to that of the poor peasant. However, there is one in the third category. His class status is similar to "enterprising farmer". Thus in terms of possession of farm assets it is evident that most of the *panchayat* members have been represented from such families whose economic status is to be categorised as rich peasant.

### **Class and Party :**

Thus from the analysis of the class character of the *panchayat* members we can now distribute the *panchayat* members according to their class nature in table 62.

**Table 62** Distribution of *panchayat* member by class and party.

Class	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Rich peasant	03 (100.00)	01 (33.33)	04 (66.66)
Enterprising Peasant	—	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Middle peasant	—	—	—
Poor peasant	—	01 (33.33)	01 (33.33)
Agriculture Labour	—	—	—
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

All the *panchayat* members are from owner cultivating class. It is evident from table 62 that five out of six *panchayat* members belong to the higher class. They enjoy the rural power and dominate the village affairs. Agricultural labourer, share cropper and middle peasants have no representation in the village power structure. Moreover, all the *panchayat* members of the CPI(M) belong to the rich peasant class.

### Caste and Power

The relationship between caste and power has not remained the same over a period of time. Many studies (Beteille 1996; Bailey 1957) confirm that before independence caste, class and power had been related but after independence they have been dissociated. To Beteille (1996), in the traditional set up, power within the village was closely associated with land ownership and high ritual status. But, today power has been dissociated with high status. " Party membership, contacts with officials, and ties of patronage are factors which play an increasing important part" (Beteille 1996 : 183). Kumar and Ghosh (1996 79) observe "the domination of landowners, money lenders,

and high caste people have been broken. Bhadra (1991) also observes the same phenomena. To him, caste and power to a large extent have been dissociated. On the other hand, some studies also confirm that caste, class and power are co-related (Bose : 1984:254). He observed that the upper classes who also come from upper caste continue to hold power in the villages.

However, the pattern of relationship between caste and power is not uniform through out the rural India. Chatterjee (1982) observes that there is a difference between left politics in West Bengal and rest of India since left politics based more on ideologies rather than popular on consciousness. To him, the structure of organized politics does not take the form of caste (Chatterjee : 1994 96). As it is mentioned earlier that caste factor is insignificant in the agrarian study of Cooch Behar due to nonexistence of higher caste people in significant number. In the two villages, only four families belong to higher caste group (one Kayastha and three Brahmins). They are found at Guriarpar only. Balaghat, the other village, has no higher caste people. Of the two villages, the percentage of scheduled caste, Muslim, OBC and Higher caste house holds to the total is 74.13, 21.61, 3.63 and 0.63 respectively. The caste/ community identity of the panchayat members is shown in table 63.

**Table 63** Distribution of *panchayat* members by caste and party.

Caste / community	Party		TOTAL
	CPI (M)	CONG- I	
Rajbanshi (SC)	01 (33.33)	02 (66.67)	03 (50.00)
Muslim	—	01 (33.33)	01 (16.67)
Jalia Kaibartas (SC)	02 (66.66)	—	02 (33.33)
Others ( General & OBC)	—	—	—
Total	03 (100.00)	03 (100.00)	06 (100.00)

Table 63 shows that other caste groups have no representation in the panchayat. The other caste groups include general castes like *Brahmin* and *Kayastha* and also OBC castes like *Tanti*, *Kumbhakar*, *Napit* and *Sutradhar*. 50 percent of the total members is from the Rajbanshi caste. Though numerically the position of the Jaliakaibarta is third, their sharing in power is next to the Rajbanshi. Only a single seat is shared by the Muslim. It is commonly believed that the CPI(M)'s stronghold is concentrated on the locality of migrant people from East Pakistan, (now Bangladesh). Our data also confirm this phenomena since the two- panchayat members of the Jalia Kaibarta belong to CPI(M) who were migrated from Bangladesh. On the other hand, rest of the *panchayat* members are from the Rajbanshi and the Muslim; three of the four members belong to Cong-I (75 percent) and only one (25 percent) belongs to the CPI(M). Thus no significant correlation between caste and power is appeared from the two villages under study.

### **Power other than *Panchayat***

At the village level, *panchayat* is the constitutional authority of power. But, practically *panchayat* is not the alone who manages the village affairs. The public institutions at the village level are being managed by different representative bodies. Hence these representatives other than *panchayats* also share power. Even *panchayats* are also being controlled and guided by their own political parties through different committees. These committees are formal in nature where some are informal.

### **Different Committees**

School, *Anganwadi* committee are formal since these are constituted following the guidelines of the government. On the other hand, committees of religious institutions like *Mandir*, *Marjid*, Political Parties, Both Committees etc. are informal committees since these committees are not controlled and guided by the laws of the government. Hence in order to understand the reality of the power structure at the village level, we have to analyse their nature, function and the background of their members. Chakraborty and Bhattacharjee (1993 14) observe, " any researcher studying the

political structure in a village will find that what occurs at the surface level is not sufficient, and, even not important for an adequate and accurate understanding of its nature. The village politics is a combination of formal and informal forces, big and petty issues".

It is well known that the panchayat system has been introduced for involving the rural poor in the development process of the rural society by decentralization power. But, there has been a debate over the issue of decentralization. To some scholars in formulating plans for rural development, the panchayats have little choice. They are executing the various developmental schemes framed either by the Central Government or by the State Government. Further, in executing the developmental works, they are not alone enough to take decision. They have to consult with other persons involved in different committees. These committees are of different names viz, Booth Committee, *Panchayat Parichalana* committee, etc. These committees are constituted with the people of their respective constituency from which the *panchayat* is elected. Thus it is found that those people on such committees, are also sharing power with panchayats. Hence it is essential to analyse the nature and functions of such committees.

In our two small villages we find Booth Committee, *Anganwari* Committee and School Committee. Table 64. Shows the total number of committees with their members in the two villages under study.

**Table 64** Distribution of committees by name and villages.

Name of the Committee	Village		Total
	Guriarpar	Balaghat	
Booth Committee	02	02	04
Anganwari Committee	02	01	03
School Committee	01	01	02
Total	05	04	09

There are two Booth committees and one school committee in each village. There are two Anganwadi Committees at Guriarpar and one at Balaghat.

**Booth Committee**      *Booth* committee is constituted generally within the constituency of each panchayat. It is formed to assist the *panchayat* members in performing their daily activities. It serves two purposes. First, it exercises control over the activities of the *panchayat*. Secondly, it involves local people in developmental activities. The main function of the Booth Committee is to select the beneficiary and supervise the developmental activities like construction of roads, sinking of tube-well etc of the *panchayat*. Generally, the Booth Committee consists of the members of the frontal organizations of the political party. At Guriarpar, there is no Booth Committee in the jurisdiction of Cong -I panchayats. The only female *panchayat* (Cong- I ) did not form the Booth Committee because no developmental work is allotted to her as she belongs to the opposition party. Of course, at Balaghat the two Cong-I *panchayat* members have formed the Booth Committee.

**Anganwadi Committee**      Following the recommendations of the National Policy for Children adopted in 1974, the Integrated Child Development Service Scheme was launched in 1975-76 in 33 community development blocks in the country on experimental basis. The Anganwadi is the focal point for delivery of services provided under the ICDS programme. The objectives of ICDS sought to be achieved by providing a package of service to children in the 0-6 year age group, to expectant and nursing mothers and to women between 15-45 years from disadvantaged segments of society. During our survey we find, there are three such Anganwadi Centres working in the two villages; two at Guriarpar and one at Balaghat. However, for smooth functioning and supervising the activities of the programme each centre is governed by a committee. Total number of members of the committee is twenty .

**School Committee**      Each village has a primary school having a managing committee. School

committee is found to look into the daily affairs of the school. Number of members in the school committee is five and four at Guriarpar and Balaghat respectively.

**Other Committees** Besides the above, we also find there are other committees like *Mandir* and *Masjid* (Religious Institutions), Clubs etc. At Guriarpar, we find two other committees viz Beneficiary Committee for irrigation and a committee for motor electric pump with six and ten members respectively. Indo-Dutch Terai Development Authority recently had installed six deep tube-wells at Guriarpar for helping the small and marginal farmers. Thus for proper maintenance of the pump as well as for selection of beneficiaries, the committee for motor electric pump has been formed.

**Background of the Committee Members** It appears that every public institution is governed by a committee involving the village people. These people are also sharing the village power. Therefore, it is also essential to understand their caste/ community as well as their class background.

**Caste** Caste background of the committee members is shown in table 65.

**Table 65** Distribution of committee members by caste

Caste / community	Committee			TOTAL
	Booth	Anganwari	School	
Rajbanshi (SC)	26 (41.94)	12 (63.16)	05 (55.56)	43 (47.78)
Muslim	24 (38.71)	03 (15.79)	01 (11.11)	28 (31.11)
Jalia Kaibarta (SC)	08 (12.90)	04 (21.05)	02 (22.22)	14 (15.55)
Others ( General & OBC)	04 (6.45)	—	01 (11.11)	05 (15.56)
Total	62 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	09 (100.00)	90 (100.00)

Table 65 shows that all the caste communities have representation in the committees except in *Anganwadi* committee where other caste groups have no representation .

**Occupation** Economic background may be analysed in terms of occupation and land holding . Representation from different occupational groups is shown in table 66.

**Table 66.** Distribution of committee members by occupation.

Occupation	Committee			TOTAL
	Booth	Anganwari	School	
Cultivation	35 (65.45)	10 (52.63)	05 (55.56)	50 (55.56)
Share Cropper	04 (6.45)	—	—	04 (4.44)
Agricultural Labour	14 (22.58)	03 (15.79)	01 (11.11)	18 (20.00)
Service	03 (4.48)	04 (21.05)	03 (33.33)	10 (11.11)
Artisan	02 (3.23)	—	—	02 (2.22)
Others	04 (6.45)	02 (10.53)	—	06 (6.67)
Total	62 (100.00)	19 (100.00)	09 (100.00)	90 (100.00)

Table 66 shows that of all the occupational groups, cultivators have the highest representation (55.56 percent). Next to cultivators, we find the agricultural labourers represent twenty percent of the total. Artisan group has the lowest representation (2.22 percent). The sharecroppers and artisans have no representation in *Anganwadi* and School Committee. Persons associated with services occupy the second position in the *Anganwadi* and School Committee. Any the other group comprises of petty businessmen, self employed persons etc.

**Size of land holding** Size of holding of the member is shown in table 67

**Table 67** Distribution of committee members by size of holding.

Number of the Committee	Size - Class ( in acre)						Total
	0	-1	1 -5	5 - 10	10 - 15	15 +	
Booth Committee	4 (6.45)	12 (19.35)	28 (45.16)	11 (17.75)	04 (6.45)	03 (4.48)	62 (100)
Anganwari Committee	02 (10.53)	—	08 (42.11)	03 (15.79)	04 (21.05)	02 (10.52)	19 (100)
School Committee	—	—	04 (44.45)	03 (33.33)	02 (22.22)	—	09 (100)
Total	06 (6.67)	12 (13.33)	40 (44.44)	17 (18.89)	10 (11.11)	05 (5.56)	90 (100)

Table 67 shows that maximum representation comes from the class of 1-5 acre (44.44 per cent) in all the committees. Landless people have also got represented in the Booth Committee and Anganwadi Committee. They share only 6.67 percent to all the members.

Thus it appears that our observation partially corroborates the observation of Lieten (1992), Westergard (1986), Webster (1986) Malick (1993), Acharya (1993) and others since five out of six *panchayat* members are represented from the scheduled caste. But their economic background shows that they are mostly from higher income group mainly from the rich peasant class. Though agricultural labourers, share croppers and landless people have no representation in *panchayat*, they have representation in Other Committees who also indirectly share the rural power.