

Chapter-VI

Summary of Findings and Concluding Observations

(A) Summary of Findings:

Decentralization of power to grassroots level creates new power centres in rural society. Prior to the implementation of Panchayati Raj, on the basis of universal adult suffrage, in India as well as in West Bengal, non-political privileged class ruled the rural people. But after the implementation of Panchayati Raj, on the basis of adult suffrage unprivileged and inarticulate rural people get opportunity to come into rural leadership. Even women get chance to participate in Local Government, after the 73RD Constitution Amendment, more than before. In spite of several arrangements done for the mass participation in local politics, questions have been raised from various corners as to ascertain how far the old privileged rural leadership has been replaced by the new type of leadership constituted with unprivileged and inarticulate people? From this point of view, the present study tries to examine the changing pattern of rural leadership on the basis of different variables like sex, age, caste, education, occupation, income, party affiliation, and leadership culture (perception of leadership). The study is based on the districts of Murshidabad and Cooch Behar.

In the introductory chapter, the present study deals with the review of literature. From the writings of various writers, researchers and columnists, it is found that regarding the socio-economic background of rural leadership questions no unanimous view has been developed. Specially in case of West Bengal rural leadership, G.K. Lieten, Niel Webster, Atul Kohli, Swapan Kumar Pramanick and Prabhat Datta believe that due to the implementation of Panchayat Raj on the basis of adult suffrage, it is found that a new generation of rural leadership has emerged in West Bengal. Poor rural people, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes and women have taken active part in the rural governance. G. k. Lieten observed from his study that a new type of leadership had 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 had come very much to the forefront.¹ Neil Webster observed from his study that the poorer sections and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes had significant formal participation in the Panchayats of West Bengal.² Atul Kohli concluded from his study in West Bengal that small farmers, share-croppers and agricultural labourers constituted about a half of the new Panchayat Leaders.³ Swapan Kumar Pramanick and Prabhat Datta observed a concentration of poor peasants and low income group people in the leadership structure in rural West Bengal.⁴

On the other hand, some scholars differ from the above view point. Ross Mallick, Ashok Rudra, Krishna Chakraborty and Swapan Bhattacharya did not believe that due to the introduction of Panchayat Raj on the basis of adult suffrage in West Bengal, the poor rural unprivileged and inarticulate people had established their dominant leadership in rural governance. Ross Mallick observed that old pro congress elite was now replaced by a new elite class which was less wealthy than the old set, but better placed than the majority of the rural masses.⁵ Ashok Rudra observed that there was usually a handful of big land owners who effectively dominated the village society.⁶ Krishna Chakraborty and Swapan Bhattacharya criticized in a way that the achievement of Left Front Government in the field of Panchayat Leadership is marginal. The West Bengal Panchayat system did not succeed to replace the old and traditional rural elites by enlightened leadership from the hitherto unprivileged and inarticulate masses.⁷

Besides, this chapter-I contains also a discussion on the conceptual framework of rural leadership. Leadership has been defined as the exercising of influence over others on behalf of the leader's purposes, aims or goals. In the Encyclopedia of Social Science, F.G.Bailey has mentioned that the effective leader is said to be 'group oriented' fulfills group needs and oils the wheels of human interaction.⁸ However, in respect of Rural Leadership, it is defined that the Panchayat is a formal organization, it is a very important part of wider village political system. The Panchayat is a political group. The Panchayat Leadership is achievement status. The achievement status is open or restrictive. In an open

contest all those who are eligible are in a position to contest. In the restrictive contest only SC/ST, woman (reserved) can contest. This type of achievement status is found in West Bengal Gram Panchayat election. In this study rural leaders are those who contest in the panchayat election.

Chapter-II of the present study covers: A) Evolution of Local Self Government in India; B) Evolution of Panchayat system in West Bengal. The term Local Self-Government has been defined as a local area smaller than state. The local area may be town or village. The present study deals with the area of village. In this connection Venkatrangaia and Pattabharam defined Local Government as "the administration of a locality – a village, a town, a city or any other area smaller than the state."⁹ The present research work has been done on the basis of field survey of two Gram Panchayats of Murshidabad and Cooch Behar Districts. The Governments of two Gram Panchayats are known as Local Governments.

The origin of Local Government in India is traced from ancient period and through medieval period the Local Self- Government developed in British period in the hands of Lord Ripon. With a great debate in Constituent Assembly Village Panchayat system had been included in Chapter IV of the Indian Constitution. Due to inclusion in Directive Principles of State Policy; it was not enforceable in Court. The Panchayat system in India developed through the Community Development Programme which was introduced in Oct, 1952. Besides, we found two committees like – Balwant Rai Mehta Committee and Ashok Mehta Committee which recommended various principles for strengthening Rural Local Self-Government in India. The remarkable recommendations are: to establish three-tier Panchayat system and to allow political parties to participate in Panchayat election. In the process of development of Panchayat system in India, we find various committees like – C.H. Hanumant Rao Team, G.V.K. Rao Committee, Laxmimal Singhvi Committee and P.K. Thungan Committee. These committees' recommendations accelerated the speed of journey of Rural Local Self-Government. Finally, 73rd amendment of the Indian Constitution boosted the Panchayat Raj in India. This amendment made an avenue for the women's

participation in Local Government by allowing 1/3 reservation of seats for women. And the institutions like Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha are the model of Direct Democracy.

In chapter-III, it has been also discussed on the evolution of Panchayat system in West Bengal. During colonial rule the first Panchayat introduced through the Village Chowkidari Act, 1870, which is named as 'Chowkidari Panchayat'. This institution was basically concerned with watch and ward problems.¹⁰

After Ripon's resolution on Local Self-Government in Bengal, the Act of 1885 provided District Board at the District level and in Local Board at Tehsil or Taluk level. Later on, the act of 1919 established in rural Bengal, at the district level District Board and at the lower level Union Board. In spite of these arrangements for rural Government, general people's interests were not fulfilled and the rural Government was controlled by the vested interests, particularly the landed gentry.¹¹

After independence, on the basis of the Article-40 of the Indian Constitution the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 and the Act of 1963 introduced four-tier (2+2) Panchayat in rural Bengal. According to the above acts at the lower level Village Panchayat and Anchal Panchayat, at the Block level Anchalik Parishad and at the district level Zilla Parishad were introduced. Later on, on the recommendation of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, in 1973, three-tier Panchayat system was established during the regime of Congress party led Government. But due to lack of political will this act was not implemented. In 1978, under the regime of Left Front Government this act was properly implemented through the Panchayat election on the basis of adult Suffrage.

The Panchayati Raj got more impetus after 73rd amendment of Indian Constitution in 1993. In a patriarchal rural Bengal society participation of 1/3 woman members were ensured through this amendment. And the institutions like

Gram Sabha, Gram Sansad, State Election Commission etc. came into force. In 2003, Gram Unnayan Samiti (Village Development Committee) was established. This type of institution was highly criticized by eminent scholars for by passing the elected body of Gram Panchayats. D.Bandyopadhyay criticized in a way that it is to appease the lower rank and file who have not succeeded in election by making them members of the Village Development Committee either through manipulative limited election or by nomination.¹²

Chapter-III of the present study also deals with the evolution of rural leadership pattern in West Bengal. This chapter highlights that traditionally leadership positions were enjoyed by the rural elites who were, generally speaking, aged and moderately educated, belonged to the high clan/castes. The zamindars, village head men and the village priests acquired their leadership as hereditary right.

Under the Chowkidari Act of 1870, the Panchayats were not democratic in nature. The Panchayats were composed of the nominated persons. As per the Act of 1885, the District Board members were indirectly elected. The majority members of the local institutions were zamindars, land lords and legal practitioners. The Act of 1919 did not allow general people to elect their leaders. Only the tax payers enjoyed the right to elect the rural leaders. Naturally the landed gentry, zamindars and intermediaries and professional classes ruled the rural people.¹³

After Independence, under the Act of 1957 and 1963, only the Gram Panchayat members were directly elected; the other three tiers' members were either ex-officio, nominated or co-opted, with some being elected indirectly. Naturally most of the members of the local bodies came from the cream level of the society.¹⁴

When the Left Front Government came to power, according to the Act of 1973, three-tier Panchayat system was implemented in 1978 through the

Panchayat election based on universal adult suffrage. So, a new generation of leadership came into existence. From the study of National Institute of Rural Development M.Shiviah, K.B Srivastava and A.C. Jena pointed out that a majority of the newly elected gram Panchayat members were young (below 35yrs) and almost half of these members were considerably educated. Occupationally, about a half of the new leaders were found to be farmers.¹⁵ However, it is found from the studies made by scholars like G.K.Lieten, Atul Kohli, Neil Webster and Prabhat Datta argued from their observation that in West Bengal rural poor, agricultural labourers, lower caste holders and women have assumed leadership in Local Self-Government in a good number. While Ross Mallick, Ashok Rudra, Krishna Chakraborty and Swapan Bhattacharya argue that the role of the poorer sections of the society in rural leadership is marginal.

Chapter- IV deals with the Changing Pattern of Rural Leadership in Murshidabad District. The changing pattern of rural leadership has been studied on the basis of some variables like - sex, age, religion, caste, education, occupation, income, life style, party affiliation and perception of leadership. In this regard a field survey had been done in Manikchak Gram Panchayat under Lalgola Block of Murshidabad District. The purpose of the field survey was to collect data for defining socio-economic background of the contesting candidates of the said Gram Panchayat from 1978 to 2003 Panchayat election.

From the data analysis, it is found that in Murshidabad younger leadership came into existence after 1988. So, the rural governance got rid of the clutches of the aged persons after 1988. Only one female leader gave her leadership before 1993 Panchayat election. After 1993, due to reservation of seats for female, women played their role in village politics. Most of the female leaders came from the age group of upto 30yrs. So, the change in leadership pattern on the basis of sex is found after 1993 Panchayat election. The patriarchal rural society faced challenge from the side of women. Due to reservation of seats for SC/ST, leadership from the lower caste took place in rural politics. Murshidabad is a Muslim dominated district; therefore, in Panchayat election religious polarization

cannot be overcome. From 1993 no illiterate contested the Panchayat election. The days of non-educated leadership had gone after 1993 Panchayat election. But the number of highly educated leaders is poor in village politics.

In Murshidabad, leadership from cultivators which was highly concentrated in 1978 Panchayat election was transferred to other professions. From 1983 the male leadership came from teachers, business men, bidi binders and quacks in Murshidabad district and most of the female leadership was from house wives. But someone was ICDS worker. Analyzing the changing pattern of rural leadership in terms of land holding it could be found that the quantity of land of the rural leaders reduced gradually from 1978 to 2003 Panchayat election. But in some cases it was found that some leaders' land holding position quantitatively increased than earlier. The INC nominated leaders had better land holding position in respect of quality of land and quantity than CPI (M). The annual income of Gram Panchayat leaders had been gradually increasing from 1978 to 2003. The economic status of some leaders, who had contested and elected two or three times consecutively, had increased remarkably. The life style of the rural leaders in respect of residential house, sanitation, use of radio, TV, bicycle, motorcycle and news paper reading is in medium position; though on the basis cleanliness and sanitation the said Gram Panchayat has been declared by the ministry of Panchayat and Rural Development as NIRMAL GRAM in 2006.

In terms of Party affiliation the said Gram Panchayat had been dominated both by the INC and Left parties from 1978 to 2003. Regarding the perception of leadership in the said Gram Panchayat, the nominated contesting candidates did not like to think themselves as leaders. But INC nominated contesting candidates thought themselves as leaders. The philanthropic value of all parties' members was more or less same and it had been continuing from 1978 to 2003. But the old leaders who were Panchayat Pradhans/Members did not believe upon the present leadership irrespective of all parties. They alleged that the present leadership lacked social value and are entangled with corruptions.

Chapter- V concentrates on the changing pattern of rural leadership in Cooch Behar District. As the field survey in Murshidabad, another field survey was done in Uttar Haldibabari Gram Panchayat, under Haldibari Block of Cooch Behar District. It is found from the data analysis that leadership in Cooch Behar District came from younger generation from 1993 Panchayat election. Unlike Murshidabad District there was no leader, in Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat, belonging to the age group of above 60 yrs. In terms of sex it is found that from 1978 to 1988 Panchayat election, there was no female contesting candidate in Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat. On the grace of 73rd amendment female leadership came into the stage of rural politics.

Being the Scheduled Caste dominated District, in Cooch Behar, more than 80% rural leaders belong to the Scheduled caste. In 2003 Panchayat election 100% male leaders were from the Scheduled Caste category. From this tendency it could be said that caste feelings among SC is acute. They did not tolerate the other caste leadership. From the survey it is found that in order to overcome the dominance of Brahmin class some lower caste holders had taken strategically 'Maitra' title which is normally used by Brahmin class. In this Gram Panchayat less than 10% Muslim leaders contested the Panchayat election from 1978 to 1998. In 2003, only one Muslim (female) leader contested the Panchayat election. From this experience it is clear that communal polarization played a vital role in the selection of rural leadership in Cooch Behar District.

In terms of education it is observed from the study that prior to 1988 Panchayat election most of the rural leaders had either primary or secondary level educational qualification. Only one Graduate leader contested the 1983 Panchayat election and in 1988 two Graduate leaders contested the election. From 1993 to 2003 more than 50% male and female leaders contested the Panchayat election. The dominance of secondary level qualified leaders remained unchanged. Occupationally, more than 60% leaders came from the cultivating section of the society from 1978 to 1988 Panchayat election. And from 1993 to 2003, more than 25% leaders were from house wives. Besides, the participation

(B) Comparative Analysis of the Two Districts:

Female leadership came into local politics from 1993 panchayat election in both districts. Only one female candidate contested the panchayat election in 1983 in Murshidabad district. The dominance of 31 – 45 yrs. age group leaders came into existence from 1993 in both districts. From 1993 to 2003 female leaders concentrated to the age group of up to 30 yrs. in Murshidabad district; whereas in Cooch Behar district only in 1993, female leaders concentrated to age group of upto 30 yrs; in other years female leaders to the age group of 31- 45 yrs. In Murshidabad, it is found that from 1978 to 1988, 6.66% to 3.33% leaders belonged to the age group of above 60 yrs, where there was no leader in the age group of above 60 yrs from 1978 to 2003 in the Cooch Behar district. So, the leadership of aged person was not found in Cooch Behar district throughout the six consecutive years of panchayat elections.

In terms of caste and religion it is found that Cooch Behar district is dominated by the Hindu and Scheduled Caste leadership; whereas the Murshidabad district is dominated by Muslim and General Caste leadership.

Both in Murshidabad and Cooch Behar, the educational qualification of the leaders concentrated more or less to the secondary level; only in 1978, leadership was concentrated to the primary level in Murshidabad district. The number of graduate and post-graduate leaders of the two districts is almost equal. The number of higher educated leaders is very poor in the two districts.

From 1978 to 2003 panchayat elections, occupational background of leaders in both districts concentrated to the cultivation group. And from 1993 to 2003 female leaders concentrated to the house wife group in the two districts; only few female leaders engaged in the job of ICDS in both districts. The leadership from teachers was more or less same in the two districts.

In order to get exemption from election duty few teachers contested the panchayat election in both districts. Unlike Cooch Behar districts, contesting

candidates in Murshidabad came from various occupational groups like quack, bidi binder and rural artisan etc. It is worth to mention that the social mobility in rural leadership is better in number in Murshidabad than in Cooch Behar district.

Like Murshidabad district it is found in Cooch Behar district that more or less all parties nominated their contesting candidates from cultivators and house wives. And in both districts, left parties also emphasized more to nominate unemployed persons to catch the younger generation in rural leadership than non-left parties.

The land holding background of rural leaders of both districts is more or less same; but the position of land holding is slightly better in Murshidabad district than Cooch Behar. It is alarming that in both districts there was no patta holder/ share cropper among the rural leaders from 1978 to 2003 Panchayat election.

Unlike Cooch Behar it is found in Murshidabad that INC nominated rural leaders had qualitatively better land position. In Cooch Behar CPI (M) and FB nominated leaders had better land position than INC. Not only in respect of quantity but also in respect of quality left parties hold better land position in Cooch Behar district. But from 1978 to 1988 INC leaders had better land position in respect of quality and quantity; from 1993 to 2003 it is found the opposite picture that the left parties hold previous position of INC leaders.

In respect of income group of the panchayat leaders of two districts, it is found that in 1978, leaders of both the districts had about same position. In 1983, 50% leaders of Murshidabad district belonged to the income group of Rs. 20001 – 40000; whereas in Cooch Behar in this year only 10.20% leaders belonged to this income group. In 1988, 45.16% leaders came from the income group of Rs. 40001 to 60000; in Cooch Behar 5.35% leaders belonged to this income group. From 1993 to 2003, Murshidabad district panchayat leaders also held better income group status than Cooch Behar district panchayat leaders.

The life style of panchayat leaders of two districts is also noteworthy. In 1978, in Murshidabad, only 6.67% leaders had brick house but in 2003, it reached to 50%. In Cooch Behar, in 1978, it was same to Murshidabad and in 2003 it was 9% less than Murshidabad. In respect of sanitation both district leaders had more or less equal status. But the said gram panchayat of Murshidabad district had been declared as Nirmal Gram by the Ministry of Panchayat and Rural Development (now Ministry of Panchayati Raj), Govt. of India. The use of TV by the Murshidabad district leaders is better in number than the Cooch Behar district. But the use of radio by Cooch Behar district leaders is more in number than Murshidabad district. The news paper reading practice of Cooch Behar district leaders is much better in number than those of Murshidabad. The use of cycle and motor cycle is same in the two districts. And the percentage of tending of milch cow/bullock by the rural leaders is more or less same in the two districts.

In Murshidabad, the dominance of one party leadership was not found at all from 1978 to 2003. Both INC and Left Parties (CPIM & RSP) leadership shared to play their role of dominance in Manikchak Gram Panchayat. On the other hand, in Cooch Behar, it is found that from 1978 to 1988 FB and CPI (M) leadership had played the role of dominance in Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat; though INC bagged 30% to 40% seats in these periods. In 1993, due to intra party feuds the veteran leader Sri Kamal Guha left the FB and established another party as Socialist Forward Block. In this situation INC leadership established their greater dominance than in the previous years. Later on, from 1998 to 2003 the left parties consolidated their position and as such, dominated in Uttar Haldibari Local Government. In this connection it would be fruitful to mention that in local politics, both in Murshidabad and Cooch Behar, Left parties did not make any pre / post-election alliance in panchayat election as they did in Assembly election.

Besides, it is remarkable that in spite of Hindu majority area, BJP leadership did not succeed to establish their dominance in the local politics of Cooch Behar district. Only in 1998 they got one seat. On the other hand, in Murshidabad, though Manikchak gram panchayat is a Muslim majority area, the BJP was able to

bag one seat. Comparatively BJP leadership had better dominance in Manikchak gram panchayat than Uttar – Haldibari gram panchayat. It seems that out of the minority complex of Hindu people in Murshidabad district, they supported the BJP leadership for safety.

In respect of perception of leadership both Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts' leaders believed that rural leaders should have some qualities like social bravery, honesty, sincerity & able efficiency. The party culture of INC & TMC of the two districts was more or less same. On the other hand, the Left parties like CPI (M), RSP & FB nominated contesting candidates had homogeneous political culture. The INC & TMC nominated contesting candidates of the two districts thought themselves as leaders; whereas the left parties nominated members did not think themselves as leaders; they treated local committee secretary, district committee secretary as leaders. The old aged leaders of the two districts irrespective of all parties did not believe in leadership of younger generation due to lack of honesty and sincerity.

(C) Concluding Observation:

On the basis of several findings of the study, it is to be concluded that with the proper implementation of Panchayat system in West Bengal a new type of leadership has emerged. Due to the introduction of Panchayati Raj, on the basis of universal adult suffrage, general people like rural poor, women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes gave their leadership in local politics. But rural women duly participated in local politics from 1993 panchayat election and after 73rd amendment of the Indian constitution. However, in this respect the findings of the present study do not contradict the study of G.K.Lieten, Niel Webster, Atul Kohli, Swapan Kumar Pramanick and Prabhat Datta.

But when we examine the leadership pattern throughout the six consecutive Panchayat elections (1978 – 2003), it is found that rural leadership came from various groups of people who were inarticulate and unprivileged. Side

Fifthly, Left parties and BJP nominated contesting candidates did not think themselves as leaders. They believed in party leadership. In their attitude Local Committee Secretary, District Committee Secretary and State Level party organizers were the leaders. And specially the CPI (M) nominated members did not take any decision independently. It was the party committee who took decision. No doubt, it is due to the principle of 'Democratic Centralism'. On the other hand, the INC nominated contesting candidates thought themselves as leaders.

Sixthly, it is interesting to note that some backward class rural leaders took the title of upper castes such as, 'Maitra' only to get rid of the exploitation of Brahmin class. It is commonly known that the 'Maitra' title holder is known as Brahmin. So, in the eye of society they seem to be higher caste holder apparently; but as per the government record they also got the facilities of backward class. This could be defined as a 'strategic leadership' in our rural Bengal.

Seventhly, communal polarization could not be ignored in the formation of leadership pattern. It is strikingly perceptible that where Hindu people form the minority, they sometimes suffer from that minority complex. Consequent upon such sense the minority Hindu people have supported sometimes the BJP leadership for security. In this process the dominance of BJP nominated contesting candidates had been developed.

Eighthly, during the period of field survey some questions were posed to the contesting candidates related to the perception of leadership. In a question regarding the quality of leadership, most of the respondents emphasized upon honesty, social work and bravery, sincerity etc. But interestingly the old aged leaders who covered two terms as a Pradhan/member, did not believe in the present leadership irrespective of all parties, due to lack of honesty and sincerity.

Finally, we would like to mention that good leadership is essential tool for strengthening rural governance in the process of democratic decentralization. Firstly, honesty and sincerity are essential features of leadership. Secondly, for the women empowerment, socially and economically they should have to become independent. In this process female leadership will help the rural development. Thirdly, committed leadership is essential. Rural leaders should be committed to development, not political ideology; otherwise the views of Ambedkar about village as a "sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow mindedness and communalism"¹⁶ could not be eradicated.

In fine, observation shows that the leadership pattern in West Bengal witnessed substantial change in the initial years of Left Front Government's decentralized governance. During this period, the leadership began to percolate from the lower strata of the society. But in the following years, particularly after 1988, the leadership pattern has again been found to be tended to concentrate in the upper castes and classes of the society particularly because of the mobilization pattern of the Left parties in general and that of CPI(M) in particular. In these years due to the new strategy of vertical mobilization, leadership pattern has been shifted in favour of the upper echelons of the society. Thus, there is indeed change in the leadership pattern but the change has been in favour of the upper castes and upper class of the society under which the poor and the marginal sections have again been found to have a marginalized role. Changing pattern of leadership has thus assumed a bottom up trend instead of the top down trend.

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