

CHANGING PATTERN OF RURAL LEADERSHIP: A STUDY
OF MURSHIDABAD AND COOCH BEHAR DISTRICTS

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By
Abdul Kader Ahammed

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PROF. M. YASIN
DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL

DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH BENGAL
RAJA RAMMOHUN PUR
DARJEELING-734013

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Preface

From the very childhood a question haunted me why poor and lower class people in the rural areas could not settle any dispute in an arbitration meeting; only rich and upper class people played the role of arbitrator. This is indeed related with the question of leadership. Prior to panchayat raj through democratic decentralization, the rural leadership concentrated to hands of rich and upper class. Democratic decentralization has ushered in the beginning of a new era of the poor and lower class people assuming the role of rural leadership. So, the present research deals with the question – how far the pattern of rural leadership has been changed under the umbrella of democratic decentralization.

The process of decentralization and, consequent upon this, the introduction of Panchayat Raj has resulted some important social changes. It has created new centres of power in rural society. Before the implementation of Panchayat Raj in West Bengal, as in India, one finds non - political rural leaders who were land lords, money lenders and businessmen who ruled the rural people. Actually, the privileged and influential class dominated the rural people. It also continues with certain changes after the implementation of Panchayat Raj. After 1978, a new generation of leadership in rural West Bengal has emerged, but the caste and class background of the new leadership have not changed much. It has developed new institutional structure, decentralized in form, the poor, lower caste, non-educated persons and the women represent the panchayat bodies but their influence in decision making process is still a far cry.

Given this background, the present study seeks to find out the changing pattern of rural leadership in West Bengal on the basis of intensive study of two districts of West Bengal – Murshidabad and Cooch Behar. The changing pattern of rural leadership has been measured in terms of caste, class, gender, land holding, occupation and income like key variables.

The present research work was carried out under the guidance of Prof. M. Yasin, Department of Political Science, University of North Bengal. I owe a very considerable debt to him for his affection and tolerance during the day when this research work was under preparation. Without his sympathetic supervision this work would not have been possible.

I am really indebted to the employees of Manikchak Gram Panchayat and Lalgola Block of Murshidabad district and also the employees of Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat and Haldibari Block of Cooch Behar district. And I would like to thank the leaders of the two Gram Panchayats of the two districts. Sans their active cooperation it was not possible for me to complete the field survey.

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Besides, I take this opportunity to acknowledge and record my deep sense of gratitude to Dr. S. Ahmed, Principal, S.S.College and my colleagues of this college, specially to Dr. P.K. Roychoudhury and Sri A.K.Mukherjee.

Finally, it would be unfair if I do not express my deep sense of gratitude and indebtedness to my parents. I have no adequate words to express my pleasure that my wife Jasmin Aktar Banu inspired me to complete this work and she has always been a dependable partner in all my efforts.

Despite my best intensions, it was not possible to avoid all limitations of my research work. There may be some deficiencies for which I alone am responsible.


Abdul Kader Ahammed

ABBREVIATIONS

INC	-	INDIAN NATIONAL CONGRESS
CPI	-	COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA
CPI (M)	-	COMMUNIST PARTY OF INDIA (MARXIST)
SUCI	-	SOCIALIST UNITY CENTRE OF INDIA
RSP	-	REVOLUTIONARY SOCIALIST PARTY
FB	-	FORWARD BLOCK
BJP	-	BHARATIYA JANATA PARTY
TMC	-	TRINAMUL CONGRESS
ICDS	-	INTEGRATED CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Chapter-I

Introduction

(A) Introduction:

Devolution of power to grass roots level creates new power centres in rural society. In a process of decentralization, Panchayati Raj has been established in India after Independence, though its genesis could be traced from ancient India and it was in a limited manner established during the British rule. However, before the proper implementation of Panchayati Raj in West Bengal, as well as in India, it is found that non political rural leaders who were land lords, money lenders and businessmen ruled the rural people. Perceptively the privileged and influential classes dominated the rural people.

Through the interaction among the members of the rural community the leadership has been emerged and developed. Socio-economic and political status of any society has close impact upon the leadership of local and national level. In a caste divided society, upper caste has greater chance to capture the political power than the lower caste holder. In rural India, traditionally, leadership positions were under the control of such persons who belonged to higher caste and economically sound position. Religion plays a role in emerging leadership where communalization of politics could not be avoided. In a patriarchal society women do not get chance to participate in rural politics as well as in decision making process. To overcome the misogyny in India, constitutional arrangements have been undertaken through which 33% reservation of seats for women in the local bodies have been envisaged. If lack of spontaneity persists, how far it is possible for Indian women to take part actively in local government has become a question of vital importance.

Economically, where uneven distribution of wealth prevails, the rich section of society ruled the poor section. Political system of any society determines who

rules whom and how. And also political system of any society does not deny socio-economic bases of any society. Political ideologies of different political parties have impact upon the recruitment of leadership.

After the proper implementation of three – tier panchayat system of 1973 Act in 1978, a new generation of leadership in rural West Bengal has emerged. The poor, lower caste, non-educated persons represent the panchayat bodies. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 created an avenue for women to access in the rural local bodies; though in West Bengal, reservation of 1/3 seats for women came into force prior to 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. And the institutions like Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad enhanced broadly the scope of rural people to participate in the decision making process of rural development. In spite of several provisions for general rural people to participate in rural governance, the class and caste background of the new leadership have not been changed much. And the participation of common rural people in the decision making process is still a far cry.

However, an observation of the decentralized local governance in West Bengal over the last three decades reveals that a new generation of leadership has come into rural politics. The participation of younger generation, female and lower caste leaders has increased; but their dominance in the decision making process is marginal. In this field party leaders and rural elites maintain their dominance. And the vested interests remain unchallenged in the rural society.

There is no doubt that the socio-economic background of the rural leaders has changed from the traditional pattern of leadership due to the introduction of Panchayat Raj based on adult suffrage. But the role of the elected members of the Gram Panchayat in the decision making process is not recognized by the party leaders. Specially left party leaders want to guide their elected members to act according to their will. Besides, among the elected members of the Gram Panchayat economically, educationally sound and the upper caste members

influence the poor, lower caste, illiterate and female members of the Gram Panchayat in the decision making process.

(B) Objectives of the Study:

The main objectives of the present research work are as follows: (i) to find out the changing pattern of rural leadership in West Bengal, on the basis of intensive study as well as data collected from two gram panchayats, one from Murshidabad and the other from Cooch Behar district. The changing pattern of rural leadership has been measured in terms of sex, caste, religion, education, occupation, land holding, income, life style, party affiliation and perception of leadership. However, the present study has tried to find out socio-economic background of the contesting candidates of two gram panchayats of the two districts from 1978 to 2003 panchayat elections. And the study has also paid attention to define the changing pattern of rural leadership on the basis of above variables within the said period.

(ii) The present research work deals with the discussion of the evolution of the local self-government in India; side by side the study is related with the history of panchayat system and the evolution of leadership in West Bengal. The study has further tried to know different literature about the rural leadership through which the present study has been justified.

(iii) In this connection, the study has tried to make a comparison of the state emerging pattern of rural leadership in the two selected districts. Through a comparison it has become possible to define any attitudinal difference to leadership of a Muslim dominated district Murshidabad and Hindu Scheduled Caste dominated district Cooch Behar. This is important in this respect that the question of leadership does not deny the political culture of any society.

(C) Conceptual Framework:

Leadership is a universal phenomenon. Because man is social being and participates in groups, he needs constant guidance and direction; and these are provided by the leader. In respect of definition of leadership, we find lack of uniformity and hence, universality in explication. In Encyclopedia Britannica, leadership has been defined as the exercising of influence over others on behalf of the leader's purposes, aims or goals. Thus characterized it can include what is spoken of as autocratic and democratic leadership; as intellectual, religious, military, artistic or scientific eminence; as a face-to-face relationship in which one directs, guides or inspires the activities of others in some special way. A democratic society has in observable fact a vast number of potential leadership situations. In fact, in the setting of a democratic society, one criterion of a good executive in action is or should be his success as leader. Greatness in leadership is clearly associated with greatness of purpose. The great leader is the one who has by one means or another most enriched the personalities of those who follow him."¹ 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. Followers can be bought, but the purchaser is not leader; he is an employer. Domination can also be achieved by force. That can be one element in effective leadership; but not that alone, if only, because the required concentration of sustained force is impossibility. The right to dominate is given to the one who has the gift of leadership; what Max Weber called 'Charisma'. Weber saw charisma as one among other styles of domination; in fact all effective leaders command some measure of devotion. In one way or another leader must seem to be super human".²

According to Durbin "Leadership is the exercise of authority and the making of decisions"³ Jean Blondel defined "a leader is a person who is able to modify the course of events. Political leadership is a special type of power in that it is exercised over a wide range of subject matters. While many of us have power over a group, perhaps for relatively long periods, and may be leaders as a result, political leaders exercise his power over an area comprising foreign affairs,

defence, the economic and the social well being of the citizen, and even culture and the arts."⁴ Lasswell and Kaplan defined leader as "most active power holder, effectively in the perspective of the group."⁵ Hunter defined, leaders are those who enjoy such power that "they are in position to make decisions having major consequences."⁶ B.N. Ghosh defined leader as "Person who most effectively influences group activities towards goal setting and goal achievement".⁷ Besides these, we find in the writings of Lasswell, Lerner and Rothwell, the most useful structural definition of leadership on the basis of high organization office. Leaders hold high institutional position in the executive legislative or judiciary or in the important private institutions.⁸

From the above discussion, we can say that a leader is person, whose guidance and direction are supposed to be accepted by the rest of the people in the community. A leader is human being and is related together human beings through different sets of relationship. Linderman described the leader as "an individual whose realizations and judgments and feelings are accepted by group as bases on belief and action."⁹ Tead opines the same as "leadership is the activity of influencing people to co-operate some goals which they come to find desirable."¹⁰ Bernard also laid some emphasis by saying: "any persons who is more than ordinary efficient in carrying psychological attitude to others and is thus effective in conditioning collective responses may be called a leader."¹¹ Allport emphasized the personal relationship of leadership: Leadership according to our present usage means the direct face to face contact between leader and followers. It is personal social control".¹² Bogardus states similarly, "a leader is a person who exerts special influence over a number of people. Everyone exercises special influence over at least a few other persons but we can not say that such activity is leadership."¹³ A more recent definition is given by Robert Tannenbaum and Fred Massarik: Leader is an interpersonal influence exercised in situation and directed through the communication process towards the attainment of specified goal or goals."¹⁴

There is no human organization, direction and control without leader. Inspiring leadership can act as a spark plug for igniting the will to work in the followers. According to William A. Welsh, wherever there is human organization for the purpose of goal achievement, there are leaders."¹⁵ James Macgregor Burns defines that leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize in competition or conflict with others, institutional, political, and psychological and other resources so as to arouse, engage and satisfy the motives of followers. According to him "Leadership as leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and the motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations - of both leaders and followers"¹⁶ Leaders and followers may be inseparable in function, but they are different. The leader takes the initiative in making the leader led connection; it is the leader who creates links that allow communication and exchange to take place.

During the period of election we want a leader who competes for election. In our organization, we evaluate managers for their leadership. Leadership is normative concept because implicit in people's notions of leadership are images of social contract. Leadership is related with mobilizing people to tackle tough problems. Ronald A. Heifetz argues that the common personalistic orientation to the term leadership with its assumption that "Leaders are born and not made," is quite dangerous. We ought to focus on leadership as an activity of a citizen from any walk of life mobilizing people to do something."¹⁷

Leadership plays an even more consequential role in converting economic and social expectation into political demands, that is, specific demands uphold strongly against government. What person's demand of government will be affected by leadership in several ways. Leaders at the grassroots—teachers, priests, community activists, village elders- will closely influence persons' perceptions of their own needs, as against 'objective' definition of their needs by observers. Political activist and practitioners will take the lead in mobilizing support behind certain demands and behind others (depending on the ambition

and ideology of those activists and politicians) and in organizing support that can be converted into pressures on government and in government in diverse ways and for diverse goals.¹⁸

Leadership is a group process through which individuals initiate activities for achieving the common objectives of group or community by working together, stimulating each other, supplementing abilities and resources, and evolving an effective organizational and hierarchical pattern. And, "almost certainly for rural India and probably for India as a whole, it will", Wood correctly points out, "be necessary for social scientists to explore leadership structure by looking for processes rather than for persons."¹⁹

Leadership is an interesting social phenomenon, which challenges the student of sociology, politics and psychology at every turn. It is an eternal and universal phenomenon. Being a social-psychological process, it is present, to save degree, whenever human beings gather together, whether it is primitive family of cave dwellers or twentieth century national community. Due to growing pluralistic nature of society and the emergence of complex social organization, leadership phenomenon has acquired greater importance. In the context of rural situation, particularly in backward societies, the problem of rural leadership has acquired more importance.

In an article prepared by the UNESCO Research Centre, we find: "Although the term 'Village leadership' is relatively new, the phenomenon itself has been studied for sometime. It has received attention in many ways from social anthropologists and sociologists who have investigated folk and peasant communities over several decades, as may be seen from the extensive literature now available on the subject. In fact, the expression 'Village leadership' has now gained general acceptance not because it opens a new area of research, but because it conveniently subsumes the multiple facets of one basic phenomenon, many of which are new only in the sense that they have acquired greater

significance in the countries situation of several countries particularly among the emerging nations in southern asia."²⁰

Coming to the present rural situation in India, the study of leadership is the most needed demand in the field of social Research. Rural India is passing through a period of transition and bewilderment. The new social and economic forces generated by the large scale development plans have shaken up the social structure.

The intellectuals and practitioners, since ancient time, attached importance to the role of leadership in social, political and organizational fields. In the case of ancient Europe, Plato, Aristotle and Tacitus, to cite three notable examples, attached considerable importance to an understanding of the nature of political leadership. Particularly in the context of the societies in which these men lived, a strong interest in the nature of political elites and leadership is easy to understand. The concentration of political power was a central characteristic of ancient Rome and Greece, notwithstanding the experiments in democracy for which Athens historically is known.²¹

We remember here the name of Plato who was the first one in the history of western political thought to deal with the questions of elitism and leadership in the most comprehensive manner. Like the ancient Indians, he also divided the society in terms of distinctly identified classes and justified the concentration of political power at the higher levels. Plato's Guardians were superior human beings who were automatically higher placed and who wielded political authority without any hindrance and with full justice. Plato's unique achievement lay in notionally reconciling order and justice on the basis of hierarchical division of political power. Plato, of course, insisted on proper upbringing and rigorous training of his philosopher-rulers for developing their personality traits appropriately.²²

The political authority was divided between the church and the state in the middle age in Europe. During this period, it was preferred to articulate the political

issues in religious terms. So, the questions of leadership and power could seldom be discussed in secular terms. The Renaissance restored the human being to the central place and Machiavelli came out with his practical prescriptions on the leadership question. The fragmented and disorderly political backdrop of contemporary Italy did not allow him to go into the realm of fundamental social bases of political power. He rather had to concentrate on the desired traits of a leader that could make him a successful king. Machiavelli's prince, the secular benevolent dictator, who was both 'a lion' and 'a fox', became the ideal model of a modern political leader. Many subsequent studies on actual and desired personality traits of leaders unconsciously followed the tradition initiated by Machiavelli.²³

In the following centuries, however, the connection between the fundamental social divisions and political power increasingly appeared to be more and more important for the theorists and practitioners. Marx and Engels interpreted the exercise of political power in terms of social class divisions. According to them, in all societies, the means of production were owned and controlled by the ruling classes and the state was embodiment of exercise of political power by the ruling classes. In the Marxian theory, therefore, individual personality traits were relatively unimportant in the context of the obvious exercise of institutional and political powers by the economically dominant classes.²⁴ In the History of political thought, the significance of Marxism is for restoring the primary importance of basic social factors in understanding distribution of power in the superstructure.

The rampant inequalities prevailing in the nineteenth century Europe generated other alternative theories of social stratification and political power. Max Weber, for instance, found wealth to be only one of the bases of social stratification. He also distinguished between different kinds of authority and leadership, traditional leadership and legal-rational leadership have become celebrated in the history of political thought.²⁵

Later, the elite theories of Pareto, Mosca and Michels and others provided the explanation for leadership phenomenon and internal power distribution in society. Pareto presented the theory of 'Circulation of the elite' and declared that "every people are governed by elite, by a chosen element in the population."²⁶ Mosca similarly offered a theory of the ruling class and argued that in every society "two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous performs all political functions, monopolies power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous, class is directed and controlled by first..."²⁷ Michels similarly made an argument that people were generally in capable of governing themselves. In a democracy finally, the ruling minority in every political party dominated politics.²⁸

Leadership theorists have entered the realm of social psychology as well. Freud once wrote that "the leader of the group is still the dreaded primal father; the group still wishes to be governed by unrestricted force; it has an extreme passion for authority... a thirst for obedience."²⁹ While there have been several social psychologists who pursued this line of thought and generated elaborate theories of leadership in terms of personal aptitudes and group attitudes there have been others who have tried to link sociology and psychology for understanding the relationship between the leaders and the led. Harold Lasswell, for instance, suggested a way in which the factors of social structure (which determines political opportunities), Personality structure (which supplies the political motivation) and skills (which determine the level of political success) might be combined into a single unified theory of political decision makers.³⁰

However, we can say that political philosophers and thinkers in every age have tried to appreciate the location and role of political ties and public leaders in terms of the social context out of which they come. While there have been some efforts to explain leadership in terms of the leaders personal attributes, it has been generally felt that distribution of political power is more intimately linked with social stratification. Carlyle's heroes may appear to be superman.³¹ but the history of

political thought teaches us to appreciate their roles in terms of their roles in terms of their social back ground and situational constraints.

Approaches to Identify the Patterns of Rural Leadership:

Several studies have been undertaken in India and abroad on leadership patterns of communities. Most of these studies have employed the positional approach, the reputational approach, the decisional approach, or a synthesis of these three approaches to locate the community leaders.³²

Positional Approach:

The positional approach is the oldest and simplest method employed to identify community leadership. The positional approach presumes that those who occupy key positions in the formal, social economic, political and voluntary organizations of the community are leaders. Mills mentioned these key positions as "the strategic command posts".³³ there have been major criticisms of the positional approach. Critics like Hunter Dahl and Polsby have questioned the validity of assumption itself. They asserted that formal position is not necessarily correlated with actual power.³⁴

Reputational Approach:

The origin of reputational approach is derived from the theoretical formulations of Weber and H.D. Lasswell. This approach is found to be the most widely adopted approach in identifying community leaders. Hunter employed the reputatioanal approach for the first time to investigate the community power structure in Atlanta city. This approach is based on the assumption that those having a "reputation for power" are indeed leaders. Scholars like R.C.Angell, Earnest A.T.Barth and B.Abulaban, D.C.Miller, R.D.Schulz and L.U. Bloomberg and O.E. Klapp and L.V.Paggett in western countries, and Dhillon, Lewis and S.K.Lall in India are some of the scholars who have applied this approach for identifying leaders. However, it does not measure the leadership itself but rather the reputation for leadership.³⁵

Decisional Approach:

This decisional approach is otherwise known as “event analysis” or “issue participation approach”. Political scientists like Dahl and his associates at the Yale University have mostly made use of this approach. The assumption behind this approach presupposes that “active participation in decision making process implies influence and exercise of actual power”³⁶

This approach is more effective for exploring important aspects of community decision making. It facilitates conceptualization and measuring power more empirically, yielding fairly reliable results. The limitations of this may be defined as follows: the bias of the investigator selecting the issues can have critical effect on empirical findings. “The decision making approach ignores those actors who may be able to keep latest issues from emerging into open controversy”.³⁷

However, it is right to say that every approach of identifying and measuring leadership has its own advantages and disadvantages. None is ideal. Without common sense and judgment, all can produce indecorous; use skillfully however, each is likely to be useful.

Integrated Approach:

An integrated approach will be of much use in understanding the leadership patterns in rural villages in a fuller perspective. In the light controversies and criticism with regard to each of the three approaches taken individually it becomes imperative to test the validity of the approaches through comparative analysis. Each approach may turn up its own leaders and those who are determined by two or more of the methods may constitute some other types of leaders.³⁸

Classification of Leadership:

Formal Leadership and Informal leadership:

Formal Leadership in a village is enjoyed by those who hold any official position such as the membership in the panchayat bodies. In theory, from the governmental standpoint, these men are the leaders of the village. It should, however be pointed out that when the government calls a person as the head man (Pradhan), it does not mean that the village also will call him the leader. Because of relative dominance of primary, and in cases, intimate, relationships and primordial bonds in the village social structure, the villagers attach greater importance to the informal leaders than to the formal leaders.³⁹

A man who is frequently called upon to settle disputes or to discuss village problems is regarded as an informal leader whether or not he enjoys any official position. He achieves this position by becoming a 'big man', that is, by throwing his capacity to get things done. He achieves commands and influence over others because of his financially sound position and his ability to advance loans to the needy, to provide jobs or employment to the jobless or unemployed and to extend security to those who flock around him against harassment by the rival factions or the police or administration and the like. He represents note worthy group of people, and appears to the others in the group to posses exceptional wisdom and fair-mindedness. His followers will follow him because they have confidence in his ability, because they trust him, because he lends them money, because he is a member of their own kin-group and caste, or because they all face or have to contend a common rival or enemy.⁴⁰

Passive and Active leader:

Among these informal leaders there are some who become leaders primarily by virtue of the respect they inspire in others. Their advice is solicited and their actions are emulated, and obedience or allegiance to them is voluntary and not the result of any compulsion attempted by the leaders. This type of leadership coming from these persons may be called 'Passive. 'Others are

leaders because of the power they exercise over people. They initiate or prevent, instigate or prohibit activities and their right to do the same is sanctioned by the majority, though their decision may be contrary to the desires and requirements of many. Their leadership has been termed 'active' leadership by Orenstein.⁴¹

The essential features of the passive leader are that he should have a high caste standing, a good economic position, and an age that may receive respect. He is not in the race or struggle for power. Above all, he must be a man of strict morality and discretions. He never defames others or repeats to other people what is told to him in private or in confidence. The morality or such a leader goes beyond the moral norms of ordinary 'good' men in the locality. Generally he is conservative in out look and to the extent that his behavior and beliefs are emulated, he retards change.⁴²

The active leaders, on the other hand, are leaders in the sense that they have powers over the fortunes of others and that they organize village affairs. Their chief mark of identification is that they are men who can get things done their way despite the contrary wishes of other less power full people, and that others recognize the property, or, one would better say, inevitability of their doing so. They are men of power, and this fact is accepted. Like passive leaders they came of high castes and are wealthy men. But unlike the passive leaders, they need not live up to the ideal moral standards of the community. Further, they need to be ostentations about their wealth, and when any social ceremony or festival is held in their families, it becomes always notable.⁴³

It is these men who organize the activities which are sponsored by the village as a whole. They arrange matters for the annual village fairs, or the worship of the village deities. They decide what is to be done on such occasions, what will be the budget as well as a how the necessary fund will be raised.

These leaders exercise, if and when they themselves are not formal leaders, a lot of influences over the village formal leaders who more often than not

try to ascertain their opinion on a particular case before they made or take a decision on the same. The head of the village panchayat, in effect, acts as a link between the Government and the informal, active leadership, and serves to reflect the desires of the latter. He cannot achieve the goal of the panchayat in the absence of effective co-operation from the latter.⁴⁴

Unsanctioned Leaders:

Orenstein presents a third group of informal leaders-unsanctioned leaders. Their leadership is based directly on force. Their power is not considered by the villagers justified by the same features as characterized the exercise of power or influence by the sanctioned passive and active- leaders. Nonetheless, these unsanctioned leaders have the power to get things done their way their emergence and effectiveness are explicable mainly in terms of the rapidly changing and disorganized conditions in a village or villages. The absence of strong social cohesion permits them to continue their activities without fear of effective co-operation aimed at obstructing them.⁴⁵

However, the panchayat is a formal organization; it is a very important part of wider village political system. The panchayat is a political group. Panchayat statuses mean political statuses. Achievement status means leader comes in office through contest. Status achievement contest occurs if status allocation by unanimous decision fails. The panchayat status achievement contest is a process by which the contestants, independently or partly nominated, achieve panchayat statuses of personal or party choice. The status achievement 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.⁴⁶ the study of leadership will be done on achievement status through open and restrictive contest.

For the present study, a leader is one who mobilizes people, organizes groups and leads them for any action or counter action by participating or seeking

to participate in panchayat affairs. Thus viewed, rural leaders are those who contest panchayat polls.

(D) Research Questions:

The present research on Changing Pattern of Rural Leadership has been carried to inquire into some questions related with leadership. In this connection, the study aims at addressing the following research questions:

1. What was the nature of Rural Local Self – Government and its leadership in India as well as in West Bengal before Independence?
2. What was the nature of panchayat system under 1957 and 1963 and the leadership pattern in West Bengal before the implementation of three-tier panchayat of 1973 Act?
3. What are the socio-economic background of the leaders from 1978 to 2003 Panchayat election in West Bengal and what has been the change in leadership pattern?
4. What has been the impact of party ideology upon the rural leadership pattern in West Bengal?
5. What is the state of the leadership pattern in Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts?
6. Is there any change in the leadership pattern in West Bengal?

(E) Review of Literature:

With the journey of Panchayati Raj in independent India, in general, and West Bengal, in particular, a number of books, articles and reports have been published by the social science researchers, writers, Journalists and columnists. Here, we would like to review the literature on panchayati raj in West Bengal as well as in India with special reference to rural leadership.

From a number of field studies on village leadership, Oscar Lewis (1955)⁴⁷ and H.S. Dhillon (1955)⁴⁸ had tried to show the varied roles of caste and kinship faction in the decision making process in rural India. A detailed works on Indian Political Leadership was edited by L.Park and I.Tinker (1959)⁴⁹, the volume- "Leadership and Political Institutions in India", includes the papers originally presented at a seminar at the University of California in 1956. Most of the papers were related with the leadership questions a national or regional level though some of the authors discussed the question of local rural leadership as well. John T. Hitchcock (1959)⁵⁰ presented a papers on how a Brahmin was elected to the office of the Pradhan in a North Indian village, though the gram panchayat could hardly challenge the existing Rajput domination. Hency Orenstein (1959)⁵¹ observed that the newly formed village panchayat and its leaders in Bombay village had some prestige but practically no power in the face of the prevalent elite equation. Alan Beals and William McCormack(1959)⁵² discussed that a new set of formal leaders was coming up in Mysore through the emerging panchayati raj institutions but this new leadership was yet weak and feeble and could hardly challenge the traditionally entrenched and socially powerful elite groups. Baijnath Singh (1959)⁵³ in the same volume mentioned that the new leaders were relatively young and belonged middle income groups.

According to the report on the working of the Panchayat Raj in Rajsthan (1962)⁵⁴, the most of the Sarpanchas were young and education upto middle level. Occupationally, 87 percent of the village leaders, 67 percent of the leaders and 33 percent of the district panchayat leaders, were cultivators. At the higher level greater representation were from business men and service holders.

Mohit Bhattacharya (1965)⁵⁵ observed that the benefits of the Panchayati Raj in the West Bengal had not gone to those who were in need of them. Some scholars had examined about the result of politicisation of rural cases. Ramen (1965)⁵⁶ noted that the tensions between various parties was due to that the Panchayat Raj was emerging as a powerful political force. Seshadri (1966)⁵⁷ observed as to how power, prestige, monetary, gain and patronage had motivated



the people to gain the leadership. On the point of politics and factionalism Iqbal Narain and Mathur (1967)⁵⁸ showed that the Panchayati Raj was not free from power factions.

K.Ranga Rao (1968)⁵⁹ from his study, observed that the traditional leadership is losing its hold gradually though it has some control over sources of power in Andhra Pradesh in the context of the changing composition of leadership. The Sociologist S.C.Dube (1968)⁶⁰ and M.N.Shrinivas (1969)⁶¹ had contributed to the study of leadership both in terms of concepts and methods. Dube felt that the concept of dominant caste was not much help, since only a handful individuals or families in a caste hold the prestige of status symbols, financial resources and position of influence within and out side the caste group which gets further weakened the wake of village factionalism. On the other hand, M.N.Shrinivash observed that the dominant caste was functional for the maintenance of village community and also works as a referral point for the lower castes to improve their position, both social and economic.

Bhambri (1969)⁶² studied the relationship between political parties and panchayati raj institution. From the sociological and anthropological point of view Patnaik (1969)⁶³ had indicated that the panchayati raj institutions were still functioning on traditional lines with power influence of caste and kinship. Yogendra Singh (1969)⁶⁴ had examined the nature of the power structure in six villages of Uttar Pradesh. He discussed the patterns of traditional and emerging leadership.

V.M.Sirsikar(1970)⁶⁵ worked on the district level field studies in Mahrastra in the context of Indian panchayats and found that, despite some local variations, certain broad conclusions could be drawn regarding the social background of the panchayat leader of the field study area. He found that 75 percent of leaders belonged to the 24-25 age group and thus there was a dominance of younger generation in the panchayat bodies. Among the several caste groups, the Marathas come out as the overwhelmingly dominant caste and they constituted

77.30 percent of the leaders. Educationally, majority of them did not go beyond class VII level and occupationally, 93.13 percent of the leaders were cultivators. A study of the income and land holding patterns indicated that the leaders formed "a propertied class of ruling elites."

S.R.Mehta (1972)⁶⁶ from his study on "Emerging Pattern of Rural Leadership", tried to identify the leadership patterns in the changed social structure of three villages of Ropar district of Panjab. He came into conclusion that the leadership pattern was diffused rather than specific and it would depend on the nature of the social structure of the community.

Some studies were found regarding the actual decision makers at Panchayat level. Dubey (1975)⁶⁷ noted that in Maharashtra, significant decision makers at the panchayat level were those who were influential persons having relations with state level political executive. Bhat (1977)⁶⁸ had studied dominant caste and its relation with political process. A.K.Mukhopadhyay (1977)⁶⁹ found that in West Bengal the leadership was in the hands of the elderly people. As there had been no election to panchayat councils since 1958-59 the young section of the rural society had no scope to assume leadership of the Panchayats. Secondly, age always helped accumulation of property and the rich man in traditional rural society always found himself in better positions than one who was not so rich. Nearly 70 percent of Adhyakshas and Pradhans came from land owning cultivating families, and were known to have considerable annual incomes. As regards qualifications of formal education, 45 percent of the Pradhans and 75 percent of the Adhyakashas had no formal school education. He further defined that the Panchayati Raj had, however, led to some important social changes. In panchayat councils popular representatives, whether they belonged to high or low castes participated in the process of decision making. The socially and economically high-ups in the rural society today found it difficult to ignore and suppress the ordinary people.

From a study on Panchayati Raj in Haryana, Ranbir Singh (1978)⁷⁰ commented such as "Panchayati Raj continues to be dominated by the land owning agricultural castes who get into the concept of dominant castes. The Scheduled Castes failed to acquire a foot hold in power structure. Even in those panchayats where Harijans have been able to capture the position of Sarpancha, the real authority is vested in the elite from the dominant castes".

A detailed study of the process of political recruitment and the social background of the panchayat leaders of the state was conducted by National Institute of Rural Development. On the basis of the study, M. Shiviah, K.B. Shrivastava and A.C. Jana (1978)⁷¹ pointed out in their Panchayat Raj elections in West Bengal, 1978, that a majority of the newly elected Gram Panchayat members were young (below 35 Years), and almost a half of these members were considerably educated. Occupationally, about a half of the new leaders were found to be farmers while the next biggest category was that of professionals. On the whole, the study identified the new leadership as young and educated.

From empirical study on traditional bases of leadership in Rajasthan B.S. Bhargava (1979)⁷² concluded that the leaders of the higher tiers were older than the leaders of the lower tiers and educationally, the higher levels had better representation of the educated persons. For example, 49.10 percent of the village panchayat leaders of the Bhargava study were illiterates while only 2.70 percent of the Panchayat Samiti leaders came under that category. There was no illiterate at the Zilla parishad level, Bhargava, however, noted that the upper caste Hindu male domination was virtually unchallenged at all levels.

Sachida Nand Mishra (1980)⁷³, social science researcher, argued that the caste and the land holding factors still played a dominant role in shaping the village leadership and major section of the leaders belonged to the rural elite groups. However, the leadership of high caste and the high income groups was

being increasingly challenged and the researcher found examples of leaders coming from low-income and low-caste strata also.

Government of West Bengal, in their report on the Gram Panchayats in West Bengal and Their Activities: Survey and Evaluation (1980)⁷⁴ found that the average age of the Gram Panchayat members was 39yrs. Though the average age of the Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan was slightly less. Average schooling years of the members came to be only 7.6 years, suggesting thereby that on an average the educational level of the members was up to middle school only. Occupationally, the owner-cultivators were found to constitute the majority. An analysis of the land holding patterns, however, indicated that most of the owner-cultivators were small and marginal farmers only.

In assessing the Panchayati Raj, in West Bengal, in its new carnation under the Left Front Government Ashok Rudra(1981)⁷⁵ pointed out that it was the central principles of Marxian political theory that as long as there was private property, democracy could not be ensured merely by adherence to the principle of one vote for one individual. But he also praised the operation barga in West Bengal. He told that there is no question that barga registration was a progressive measure for which the Left Government could take credit. And the programme of 'Food for Work' as means by which the Left Front claimed to have liberated the masses of rural poor from the clutches of the handful of village rich.

From a study of 'Panchayat and Rural Development: some relevant questions re-examined with the case of Purulia district in West Bengal', Pradosh Nath (1982)⁷⁶ observed that the rural poor had received no substantial representation in the new panchayats. In particular, the marginal farmers and the agricultural labourers were found to be grossly under represented. Specifically the study found that there was no agricultural labourer among the respondents, while 1.5 percent of them are marginal farmers and 9.8 percent were small farmers on the other extreme were the big and the rich farmers who constituted 57 percent of

respondents. Others were absentees and middle farmers. On the whole, Prodosh Nath detected no major sign of structural change in the West Bengal Panchayats.

Atul Kohli (1983)⁷⁷ from a sample of 60 Gram Panchayats members took an intermediate position that institutional power had, at least for now, been transferred from the hands of the dominant propertied groups to a lower middle stratum.

K. Westergaard (1986)⁷⁸ wrote in her book about the empowerment of rural poor in West Bengal through the panchayats. She observed that changes set in motion as regards the rural power structure in West Bengal are considerable; she cautiously concluded that the first steps necessary for process of increased popular participation had been taken.

Atul Kohli (1987)⁷⁹ was however more enthusiastic about the new grounds broken by the Panchayats in West Bengal since 1978. From the study he observed, share croppers and agricultural labourers constituted about a half of the new panchayat leaders. He assessed that 60.1 percent of the rural leaders were agriculturists, while 8.3 percent were landless labourers and 31.6 percents were teachers and social workers etc. Among the owners of land again, about 75 percent had holdings below 5 acres, while on the other extreme only 2.8 percent had more than 10 acres of land. He also appreciated the high educational levels of the most of these leaders and assessed that over 50 percents of the heads of Gram Panchayat and 70 of the heads of Panchayat Samitis in West Bengal were graduates.

Paul Brass (1990)⁸⁰ in his writings about state and local politics in India, observed that the most of the political leaderships were reluctant to devolve much power to the district level and below for they feared that if such local institutions acquired real powers they would become alternative sources of political influence and patronage, which would threaten their own abilities to exercise influence in the districts and to use influence as bases of there own power at the state level.

V.Lalini (1991)⁸¹ in her study found that while majority of rural leaders hailed from upper and middle social background, a significant representation of such leaders was noted from the lower strata of the society also.

G.K.Lieten (1992)⁸² in his study of socio economic background of panchayat leaders in West Bengal confirmed 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, mainly on account of the composition of the CPI(M) panels. On the basis of time series, it appeared that the FB and particularly the INC were engaged in a catching up process, but that the bigger land owners were still dominant, particularly in the INC.

G.K.Lieten also felt that a new type of leadership had emerged, not only in terms of political party affiliation but also in terms of class and caste. He had got such experience from Muhammad Bazar Block of Birbhum district. The survey, on the other hand, noted the quasi complete absence of women as candidates in such an important social and political event in which, as per the recent polls, 80.5 percent of the electorate took part. Unlike the SC/ST population and the landless and near landless occupational groups, women had not increased their visibility.

Neil Webster (1992)⁸³ observed from his study that the poorer sections and the scheduled castes had significant formal participation in the panchayats of West Bengal. He noted the under-representation of women but admitted that the current participation of the marginal farmers and the poor was a considerable step forward from pre 1978 situations. He observed that the Left Front's introduction of direct elections to all the Panchayats had broken the dominance of vested interests in rural Bengal. He further pointed out that while Muslim members were present on Saldya Gram Panchayat, reflecting their significant presence in locality, the fact that women possessed little more than token presence on the two

Gram Panchayats did demonstrate that fundamental social and cultural obstacles still remained there.

Ashok Rudra (1992)⁸⁴ discussed the self-contained village society on the basis of patron-client type of relationship between the majority labourers and minority property owners. Among property owners there were usually a handful of big land owners who effectively dominated the village society. Prabhat Datta(1992)⁸⁵ in his writings, mentioned that the success of Panchayati Raj experiment in West Bengal shows that, in the ultimate analysis, it was the political will of the State Government which was the most important pre-condition for the successful functioning of the Panchayat system. Political will of the government might be the product of the politico-ideological commitment of the party or parties in power or the narrow partisan interests of the party or parties in power.

A.T.Kitur (1992)⁸⁶ in his work "Emerging Pattern of Leadership: A Study of PRIs in Dharwad District ", tried to analyse the emergence of rural leadership on the basis of their socio-economic background. From the study he came into conclusion that the Panchayat leadership was younger in age, involved itself in the process of rural development and modernisation and hailed from the locally dominant caste. The weaker sections of the society were not able to penetrate into the panchayat power structure except in the case of their reserved seats. The panchayat leadership belonged to literate groups even with graduates in some Mandal Panchayats and Zilla Parishads. Land lords and moneyed people only were able to contest the election and they monopolized the panchayat powers.

In a study on social back ground of the Gram Panchayat Pradhan G.L.Ray and Sagar Mondal (1993)⁸⁷ observed that 60 percent of the leaders belonged to the middle and lower middle classes while about 40 percent belonged to the upper middle and upper classes. The leaders were found to be mostly young and generally well educated. In a comparative study between Bihar and West Bengal village panchayat Arjun Sharma (1993)⁸⁸ came into conclusion that in the both village panchayats of Bihar and West Bengal the rich peasants were voted to

power in both the village Panchayats. In both cases the power holders were come from the upper and middle castes.

From a study on West Bengal Panchayats Ross Mallick(1993)⁸⁹ observed that the old pro-congress elite was now replaced by a new elite class, which was less wealthy than the oldest, but better placed than the majority of the rural masses. In other words, he emphasized that there had been some displacement of power from the hands of the old vested interests, through the lowest classes were yet to throw their own leaders. Specifically, Ross Mallick made an analysis upon the findings of the different surveys and compared these different findings to make conclusion that the West Bengal panchayats were no longer dominated by the biggest land owners though there was gross under –representation of the landless.

Promesh Acharya (1993)⁹⁰ found that despite the apparent success of Panchayat Raj in West Bengal under Left Front rule the overall domination of privileged classes over the rural power structure remained unchallenged. In another articles Promesh Acharya (1994)⁹¹ raised a question - can a party in power which is based on democratic centralism allow space for democratic decentralization at the Panchayat level.

Swapan Kumar Pamanik and Prabhat Datta (1994)⁹² studied the social background of the Gram Panchayat leaders to find that there had been a concentration of poor peasants and low income group people in the leadership structure and absolute absence of the rich land lords in the Panchayats. 46 percent of their respondents cultivated their lands themselves which several were wage labourers. The authors believed that this pro-poor orientation of the Panchayats in West Bengal had made them instruments of social changes. Bidyut Mohanty (1995)⁹³ in his article mentioned that the reservation itself could only be regarded as the first step in this direction. It was necessary to create proper social, economic and political conditions to enable women to participate effectively

in the local government institution without endangering the positive values of the prevailing family system.

In a comparative study, between India and United States, on the state and the poor John Echeverri-Gent (1995)⁹⁴ observed that the West Bengal panchayats have been largely democratized, though the rural middle classes continued to dominate the panchayat at bodies, but the authors agreed that "the social background of Pradhans differed from that of the traditional elite".

G.K.Lieten (1996)⁹⁵ in his another book confirmed that the picture which was resulted from an earlier survey in Birbhum district. He further observed that the present survey indicated that the character of public space had changed. Poor peasants and agricultural labourers and therefore also the Scheduled Castes and Schedule Tribes had very much come to the forefront in the public arena.

Mahi Pal (1997)⁹⁶ from his study on "Panchayat Raj in India: Issues and Challenges", concluded that the dominant castes in the form of politicians and bureaucrats, had not allowed to enable the Panchayats to provide space for the weaker sections. Though the 73rd Amendment to constitution was watershed in decentralization, it provided a share for weaker sections and women in Panchayats composition.

Dilip K. Ghosh (1997)⁹⁷, from his study on "Grassroots Women Leaders: Who are they? A study in West Bengal District" attempted to identify the class of rural women who were able to emerge as rural leaders by virtue of the seventy-third constitution amendment and their own characteristics. From a field study in Birbhum district, he concluded that rural women participated in grassroots politics in large numbers irrespective of caste, creed and religion; mostly women of younger age group with lower status of education compared to their male counterparts, came to the forum of Panchayat Raj institutions, a large number of women leaders came from agricultural families, while the majority of them were housewives.

K.Jeyalakshmi (1997)⁹⁸ from her study on "Empowerment of Women in Panchayats -Experiences of Andhra Pradesh", observed that reservation ensured opportunities for all social groups to participate in the governance of panchayats, thereby promoting grassroots level leadership.

A study on the Socio economic background of the members of the different tiers of the panchayats in Jalpaiguri district of West Bengal made by State Institute of Panchayats and Rural Development (SIPRD) (1997)⁹⁹, in this study it was observed that the dominance of younger people in all tier of panchayat irrespective of their caste. In the lowest level, occupationally it was found that 4.86 percent of the Gram Panchayat members are agricultural labourers, 2.55 percent are bargadars and 42.86 percent are cultivators. But the presence of rural artisans, fishermen and persons engaged in animal husbandry was very insignificant. Teachers constituted 8.91 percent of the members. In the Block level, agricultural labourers constituted 1.46 of the Panchayat Samiti members with 1.75 percent bargadars and 30.99 percent cultivators. 17.28 percent of members were school teachers. In the District level, it was found that 15.38 percent of the Zilla Parisad members were teachers, 15.38 percent were in other business and 19.23 percent of them were cultivators. In respect of party affiliation the study had shown that 56.70 percent members, in Gram Panchayat were from GPI (M) party and 28.74 percent member from congress (I).

Snehatata Panda (1997)¹⁰⁰ in her study on "Political Empowerment of Women: A Case Study of Orissa", had mentioned in conclusion that women entered in politics due to the mandatory provision of one- third reservation; most of the women were non-political and entered in politics due to persuasion by their family members or pressure from the village community or pressure from the political party. She further tried to show that the socio-economic background of the leader had been changed in a dynamic rural society.

Manu Bhaskar (1997)¹⁰¹ from his study on 'Women Panchayat Members in Kerala - a profile', observed that the political leadership of women in grassroots democracy in Kerala had been influenced by the caste and community representation. The study has also found that variables like age, occupation and income determined entry into politics and that the influence of political parties was strong during elections, while it played an insignificant role in motivating women in to politics.

P.Jeyabal and K. Dravidamani (1997)¹⁰² from their study on "Women Panchayat Presidents", found that the majority of the women Panchayat Presidents were from young age group(21-35), backward communities and Hindu religion. And the educational qualifications of the presidents were up to higher secondary level.

Surjya Kanta Mishra (1998)¹⁰³ mentioned in his book that 70 percent of the total land of West Bengal are in the hands of patta holder, bargadar, marginal and poor peasants. For this reason, it has become possible for them to oust the power brokers from three-tier panchayat; and 85 percent of the above class have elected in the Panchayat Raj institutions.

In another type of writings on the 'Role of Panchayat Leaders in Primary Education' written by Akshoy Kumar Singha (1998)¹⁰⁴ emphasized that our primary education would be success only if we had effective and fair panchayat leaders and dedicated teachers. Teachers must be as much aware of social issues as panchayat leaders of educational issues.

Abdul Aziz (1998)¹⁰⁵ observed from his study entitled "An Outline of the Contours of Panchayat Raj", that reservation had brought in as large proportion of elected representatives from the weaker sections into the panchayat raj system.

Glyn Williams(1999)¹⁰⁶ noted that though there were several difficulties in panchayat raj institutions in West Bengal but there could be no doubt that

Panchayati Raj had helped to produce positive changes in the livelihoods of labouring families in the villages studied. The Panchayats were playing an important role in the empowerment of the rural poor.

George Mathew (2000)¹⁰⁷ noted in his writings that "One of the most positive results of the 73rd constitutional amendment has been women's participation in a big way in the democratic institutions at the district, block and village levels. Lakhs of women are performing leadership roles". Mathew also mentioned that the women representatives did not set dignity from the male colleague members and also from bureaucracy. The women members were used as proxy members by their male family members who wielded the real power.

Subrata K. Mitra (2001)¹⁰⁸ mentioned in his writings on Making Local Government Work: local elites, panchayati raj and governance in India, that the political leadership that the Bengal Panchayats had developed showed the combination of the organizational resources of the CPM at the level of the higher leadership and an openness to induct a wide cross-section of local society as ordinary members. The Pradhan (known as Sarpanch in other parts of India) was the veritable fulcrum of the Panchayat organization. Usually Pradhan was a party man. The average profile of the Bengal Pradhan showed a veritable workhouse, involved in a number of sub-committees specializing in the problems of particular segments of society such as agricultural labourers, women, literacy, culture and so on both at the level of the village and higher levels of panchayat system. Middle aged men coming from the middle castes predominated, but there were appreciable numbers of Pradhans who were Muslim, or came from the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Sonali Chakravarti Banerjee (2002)¹⁰⁹ from her study on social background of panchayat leaders in West Bengal, found that the small and marginal farmers constituted the dominant groups among the cultivator-leaders of the panchayat bodies and this was certainly an indication of the empowerment of the lower strata. And her hypothesis was partially true that the women were able to some

what increase their presence at the Gram Panchayat level. But the male leaders dominated the village still now. Moitree Bhattacharya (2002)¹¹⁰ in her study concluded that the parties exercised all possible influence over the Gram Panchayat members in order to keep under their control. They did not allow the elected representatives to take decisions independently. The elected members passively obeyed the decisions taken by the party leadership.

A.Celine Rani (2002)¹¹¹ found from her study in the Dindigul district of Tamilnadu state that 79.6% of the rural women leaders belonged to younger age group of 20 -40 yrs. with an average of 34.4 yrs. In her study she tried to show the impact of socio-economic status upon the emergence of women leadership.

D. Bandyopadhyay (2003)¹¹² in his writings on 'Panchayat Puzzle' made a comment following the Act of Village Development Committee, 2003, that a state in another country had stifled the constitutionally created autonomous institutions of self-government through a cumbrous, unworkable and confusing law perpetuating the rule of party caucus over the masses. In another writings D.Bandyopadhyay and others (2003)¹¹³ mentioned in conclusion that our analysis clearly shows that from Ripon to Rajiv Gandhi the tendency of the ruling classes has been to control in various ways the potentially explosive countryside through shades of local democracy without reforming the bureaucratic framework of local governance. Even after the 73rd constitution amendment things have not changed radically, because the same historically power full forces are still in operation.

Sukanta Bhattacharya (2003)¹¹⁴ in case study on caste, class and politics in a village of Burdwan district of West Bengal, confirmed that the numerical strength of the lower castes and lower classes has been established at the level of panchayat. But at the leadership level concentration of power is found in the hands of middle peasantry.

Pradeep Narayanan (2003)¹¹⁵ emphasized in his study that unless the excluded sections within a committee are empowered, their productive

participation can not be ensured and sustained. So, no broad participation can be made without empowering the excluded sections.

Prabhat Datta (2003)¹¹⁶ in another Book 'Towards Good Governance and Sustainable Development', noted that "West Bengal is the first state in the country to generate through pro-poor leadership and to make the Panchayats work as instruments of rural social change by changing the correlations of class forces in the country". He further mentioned, actually the elections resulted in a completely new type of rural leadership in West Bengal.

Prabhat Datta with Panchali Sen (2003)¹¹⁷ from their study on "Women in Panchayats", observed that large numbers of the women members who had been elected to the Gram Panchayats were neo-literate. Due to their neo-literacy they faced difficulties in performing their roles as elected representatives.

Buddhadev Ghosh and Girish Kumar (2003)¹¹⁸ criticized the role of Left Front Government for their attitude towards Panchayat Raj institution. According to them "the Left regime has allowed the panchayats to develop up to a certain stage but has shown reluctance to grant them autonomy. The institutions therefore, have remained 'agencies' of the state Government for the implementation of its plans and programmes. They have not graduated into institutions of self government capable of expressing the 'will' of the local people". They further noted that the elected representatives from CPI (M) party, to panchayat raj institution, are not free to exercise their statutory powers.

Mahi Pal (2004)¹¹⁹ in his article entitled as "Panchayat Raj and Rural Governance", observed that until the political parties are prepared to accept effective decentralization as one of the issues in their election manifestos, the panchayats will remain at the mercy of the central and state governments even after another amendment.

According to West Bengal Human Development Report (2004)¹²⁰, the Gram Panchayat level shows a very substantial representation from the occupational categories that make up the rural poor, that is agricultural labourers, bargadars, rural artisan and those engaged in fishing and livestock cultivation. Cultivators are well represented at both Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti levels. It is interesting to note that while the extent of representation of these categories does decline at the highest level of district government, the Zilla Parishad such groups still are represented those and the largest occupational group at the level is not that of land lords or money lenders, but teachers. The report presented that the 13.5 percent members are agricultural labour, 23.5 percent cultivators, 18.3 percent unemployed and 6.7 percent teachers, 15.5 percent social service worker of Gram Panchayat level; at the Panchayat Samiti level 7.7 percent members are agricultural labour 20.1 percent cultivator, 15.5 percent teachers, 23.3 percent unemployed and 14.0 social service worker; at the Zilla Parishad level 2.8 percent Agricultural labour, 7.3 percent cultivator, 32.5 percent teachers 23.1 percent unemployed and 18.5 percent social service workers. This social composition made on the basis of 1993 election of eight districts of West Bengal.

Some information regarding the social composition of panchayat members made on the basis of panchayat election-2003 reveals that the agricultural labour is reasonably well represented at Panchayat Samiti level. West Bengal has had a history of substantial representation of women in panchayats well before the 73rd and 74th amendments were passed by Parliament, in fact, more than one third of panchayat members have been relatively well represented not only in Gram Panchayat level even at the higher tiers of district Government such as the Zilla Parishad. The Panchayat election in 2003 have created even more gender balance because of the active policy of ruling party and the partners in terms of fielding more women candidates, and now the Sabhadhipatis of several districts are women.

S. Sumathi and V.Sudarsen (2005)¹²¹ from a case study of Pappapati Village in Madurai district of TamilNadu observed that dalits elected as Panchayat are not allowed to function.

Girish Kumar (2006)¹²² highlighted that with the introduction of quota system at the level of panchayats certain percentages of seats are reserved for the categories of SCs, STs, OBCs and women. Representation of some unrepresented castes and communities in the local bodies has been ensured by this quota system. In this process, the number of representation of general castes and communities has been reduced.

But he observed that panchayat leaders suffered on account of lack of autonomy. In West Bengal the elected women members found themselves a hapless lot. The responsibilities of the women leaders are handled by male colleagues or by party leader; on the basis of the fact he mentioned the women leadership as de jure, not de facto leadership.

(F) Justification of the Study:

In a liberal democracy, it has virtually raised major criticism like that people are governed by the creamy section of the society. Out of this hypothesis, the present research paper has tried to investigate that in the process of democratic decentralization who governed the rural people of West Bengal? Is there any change in the pattern of rural leadership through the implementation of three-tier panchayat system in West Bengal? Until and unless the rural people would be governed by their own class/ community development will not take place in their socio-economic life.

The present research has tried to make a study about rural leaders who contested in West Bengal panchayat election from 1978 to 2003. Most of the literature regarding rural leaders deal with the elected members of panchayat. The studies defined rural leaders as those who were elected members of panchayat.

Those studies did not treat the contesting candidates as rural leaders. So, in the present study rural leaders have been chosen on the broader perspective. The present study not only highlights the socio-economic background of panchayat leaders, but also it focuses upon the perception of leadership quality and choice of leaders.

From the review of literature it is revealed that most of the writings of researchers, writers and columnists studied rural leaders to find the socio-economic backgrounds of the leaders. And the studies are confined within two or three years panchayat elections. The studies do not indicate the changing pattern of rural leadership throughout consecutive years of panchayat elections.

The present study not only highlights the socio-economic background of panchayat leaders, but also it focuses upon the perception of leadership quality and choice of leaders. The question of perception of leadership has been ignored by all studies more or less. In order to know the political culture of Muslim dominated district Murshidabad of South Bengal and Hindu Scheduled Caste dominated district Cooch Behar of North Bengal, a comparative study has been made between the leadership patterns of two districts. This comparison will help a researcher to identify any religious and geographical impact upon the leadership pattern. Hence, the present research, by adopting a broad framework aims at touching upon the different dimensions of rural leadership. The study is indeed comprehensive compared to the earlier studies made. Herein lies the significance of the study.

(G) Research methodology:

The present study is, by its very nature, an exploratory type as well as descriptive and diagnostic type. As an exploratory research, the present study aims at exploring the different theoretical, conceptual and applied dimensions of the question of leadership. As such, the exploratory design has been followed for the purpose. Intensive literature review was undertaken and experience survey

and analysis of insight stimulating cases were also resorted to. As part of the descriptive and diagnostic design, field survey was conducted in the two selected districts of Murshidabad and Cooch Behar on the basis of structured schedule administered to the leaders so defined. On the basis of the field survey, attempt has been made to diagnose what are the forces and factors that contribute or leave impact on the emergence of leadership as well as changes in the emerging leadership. The selection of the respondents was purposive because the scope of the study demanded the selection of elected as well as contesting candidates in the panchayat elections in West Bengal from 1978 to 2003.

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Chapter-II

Evolution of Local Self-Government in India and in West Bengal:

A) Evolution of Local Self-Government in India

Before going to discuss about the historical development of local self-government in India, it is necessary to define the concept of "Local Self-Government". In Encyclopedia Britannica, "Local Government means authority to determine and execute measures within an area inside and smaller than the whole state. Local means a restricted area. The variant, Local Self Government is important for it emphasizes upon the freedom of the locality to decide and act. Local Self Government has been traditionally used of Local Government in Great Britain"¹. The United Nations Division of Public Administration defines Local Government as, "a political sub division of a nation (or, in a federal system, a state) which is constituted by law and has sub-national control of local affairs including the power to impose taxes or to extract labour for prescribed purposes. The Governing Body of such an entity is selected or otherwise locally selected....."²

According to M.A. Muttalib and Mohd. Akbar Ali khan, "Local Government is an ancient institution with a new concept. In political terms, it is concerned with the governance of a specific local area, constituting a political subdivision of a nation, state or other major political unit."³

As a representing body, the local government representing a particular set of local views, conditions, needs and problems, depending on the characteristics of population and economic elements. According to M. Venkatarangaiya and M. Pattabhiram, "the term Local Self-Government is ordinarily understood the administration of a locality -- a village, a town, a city or any other area smaller than the state - by a body representing the local inhabitants, possessing a fairly large amount of autonomy, raising at least a part of its revenue through local taxation and spending its income on services which are regarded as local and

Epic Era:

We find two parts of administration i.e., 'Pur' and 'Janpad' or city and village in the study of Ramayana. Villages were 'Janpad' and the village people were called 'Janpada'. Gram is village, mahagram is big village, and the 'Ghosh' is group of village. There were local bodies like 'Shreni' and 'Nigam', but there was no description about their constitution in Ramayana. The welfare of the people has been described as the main object of the local bodies.⁶

The existence of Self-Government of a village is found in the 'Shanti Parva' of Mahabharata and Manu Smriti, we find the concept of Gram Panchayat in the 'Sabha Parva' of Mahabharata. Manu Smriti emphasized on the organized system of the local self-government and also focused on the importance of devolution of the function of the state. In the 'Manu' we find the village as a smallest unit of governance. Units of 10, 100, and 1000 Village groups were also a part of the system of self government.⁷

The nature of the local self-government of the Vedic era was 'Caste Panchayat'. According to the versions of 'Sabha Parva' of Mahabharata, it is not clear whether the Gram Panchayats were elected by the people or nominated by the Kings. But there is no doubt that the members of local body were come from higher caste and old-age group and they were educated and knowledgeable persons.

Ancient Period:

Kautilya's Arthasastra gives us detailed information about the village administration, i.e., Local Self-Government of Ancient India. Kautilya in his Arthasastra advised the king to constitute units of villages having 100-500 families. There would be centres of 10 villages, 200 villages, 400 villages and 800 villages. These centres were known as "Sangrahan", "Karvatik", "Dronamukh", and "Sthaneeya" respectively.⁸

According to kautilya's Arthasastra we also describe that the 'Samahartr' that is head quarters of the state capital is divided into four divisions, each in charge of an officer called 'Sthanika'. Under the Sthanika there are to be junior officers called 'Gopas' each in charge of five or ten villages. The Gopa is to maintain a record of all agricultural and other holdings in the villages, in his charge and take a census of every house hold, noting down the number of inhabitants with full details about the profession, property possessed, the income, the expenditure and the revenue received from each house hold.⁹

The village was normally carried under the supervision and direction of the village head man. The Arthasastra attested to his important part in the administration. He was called 'Gramika' in northern India. There was only one head for each village. The post of headman was hereditary. Government having the right to nominate another scion of the family if the succession of the son was not approved. By caste, the head man was usually a non-Brahmana. He was the leader of the village militia and belonged to the Kshatria Caste. But some time Vaisyas too aspired for and obtained the office. The village headman was the most influential person in the village. The Sukranitis observation that he was like the father and mother to the villagers is substantially true. Defence of the village was the most important duty of village headman. The collection of the government revenue was also vital duty of the headman. The village office had to keep records of the rights and transfers of village lands. Jatakas informs us that the village head man is guided in the administration by the opinion of village public, which made itself felt through the village elders, who formed a kind of informal council since very early times.¹⁰

Great men of the village being so large a body could obviously have carried on the administration only through an executive committee or council, which was known as Village Panchayat in later times. During the Gupta period the village council has evolved a regular body at least in some parts of India. They were known as 'Panchamandalis' in central India and 'Gram Janapada' in Bihar. A large number of the sealings of the different village councils (Janapadas) have been

discovered in Nalanda, which doubtless sealed the letters sent by them true to the administration of the Nalanda University.¹¹

The village administration assumed new dimension in the Gupta period. Village affairs were managed by the village head man with the assistance of elders, mahattara, who were some times associated with the government of the Visaya (greater than village). The Gupta inscriptions refer to the participation of leading local elements in the administration of the village or small town called 'Vithis'. No land transaction could be effected without their consent.¹²

In the history of Satbahan Kingdom in the 1st century B.C., we find the existence of local bodies. The governance of the village was also developed by the Chola rulers. Chola dynasty's inscriptions helped us to present a more detailed picture of the constitutions and functions of the village assemblies and executive committee in Tamil country. The primary assembly of the villages was known as 'Ur' in the case of ordinary villages and 'Sabha' in the case of 'Agrahāra' villages, mostly tenanted by learned Brahamanas.¹³

From the above discussion it is clear that we find the existence of local government during the Ancient period. The local bodies performed various function independently. The village community in Ancient India had a tradition of autonomy in terms of organization, functions and finances. The powers, authority and responsibility had evolved over a period of time and had the sanction of society; it did not develop nor was handed over to the community by a fiat of a ruler. The village Committee was not organized on the basis of any set of rules laid down by the authorities and required to be followed; here was, therefore, no uniform pattern of organization.

Every village community had the freedom to develop and set up its own institution of governance. The powers of governance were derived by the tacit consent of the community, some times expressly given to a group of persons constituting a committee or a group of committees, for doing specific or general

purpose duties. The village community assembled periodically to deliberate and decide issues. The village headman known by various names in different regions was entrusted with the responsibility of day to day management in some areas. Any misuse or abuse of power was questioned in the meeting of the village assembly.¹⁴

In North eastern India, there were 'Small Republics' which were quite independent in the internal matters. The village panchayats were vested sufficient administrative powers without any interference from king. But at that time upper caste holders like Brahmana, Kshatriya dominated the local bodies. Age old and learned persons had greater opportunity to rule the village community.

Medieval Period:

During the sultanate period, it was believed that without the devolution of power, it was not possible to rule the whole kingdom. So the whole kingdom was divided into provinces called 'Vilayat', 'Amir', 'Vali', was principal ruler i.e., head of the province. For the governance of the rural area there were three types of officials. i.e., 'Mukkadam' for administration, 'Patwari' for collection of revenues and 'Choudhurie' for the settlement of disputes with the help of Panch. A village of the smallest unit, its affairs were looked after by the 'Lambardar', 'Patwari', and 'Chowkidar'. Villages had sufficient autonomy in respect of local governance. Actually the panchayats played dominant role in the village governance in the medieval period. Marathas also constituted local self-government institutions in rural and urban areas during the rule of the Peshwar in the Maharashtra area.¹⁵

British Period:

For the attainment of British imperial interest local self-government was introduced in India. According to S.R.Maheshwari, "A beginning of local government may be said to have been made in 1687 when, for the first time, a local governing body - a municipal corporation was set up for city of Madras."¹⁶

The subsequent history can be detailed as follows:

1687-1881:

In 1687, the Madras City Corporation was established to look after the public affairs. The duties and functions of the corporation was not only the collection of taxes; the corporation also dealt with the civil and criminal matters. In 1726, Bombay and Calcutta Municipal bodies were established. According to Sir Charles Metcalfe, the Governor General of India (1835-36), the Indian Village communities are 'Little Republics.'¹⁷ In the history of local government in India, the year 1870 was landmark, because in this time Lord Mayo passed a resolution suggesting further devolution of power. The 1880 Famine Commission urged for the vital role of local bodies for relief works.

1882-1919:

During the tenure of Lord Ripon as a viceroy in India, the Local Self-Government Resolution 1882 was accepted. He regarded local self-government as "an instrument of political and mass education"¹⁸ In his tenure local boards were established in the rural areas. Districts and Tehsils were formed. The Local Boards were authorized to perform some function and collect revenues. During 1883-85, the Local Self-Government Acts were passed in many provinces.

The Royal Commission (1909) reported that the local bodies were not functioning effectively due to paucity of funds and caste and religious disputes. The commission also recommended that attempt should be taken for the constitution and development of village panchayat. In 1918, Montegu Chelmsford Report suggested that the Local Boards would be made representative bodies.¹⁹

1920-1937:

In 1930, Simon Commission evaluated the implementation of local self-government. The Commission reported that they did not find any progress in rural areas except Uttar Pradesh, Bengal and Madras. The local bodies did not show any good performance during the period between 1919-1930. Hence, it was recommended by the Simon Commission for more control of the state over the

local bodies. During the period between 1920-37, the Local Boards were elected bodies, chairmen were non-official persons and the administrative and financial powers of the local bodies were increased.²⁰

1937-1947:

The Provincial Governments were empowered and got provincial autonomy under the Government of India Act, 1935. It had become the duty of Provincial Government to democratize the local self-government institution, including the village panchayats. Thus, the local bodies were organized properly during the British period, though the popular government vacated the office during the period of 2nd world war, 1939. But the status of the local government institution remained unchanged till august 1947.²¹

So, from the ancient period, the existence of local self-government in India was found more or less; it had got good shape after the independence of India.

Post-Independence Period:

The establishment of village panchayat was an ideological part of the, Indian National Movement. Gandhiji had given the idea of 'Gram Swarajya': The Government of the village will be conducted by the panchayat of five persons annually elected by the adult villagers, males and females possessing minimum prescribe qualifications. These will have all the authority and jurisdictions required. Since there will be no system of punishment in the accepted scene, the Panchayat will be legislature, judiciary and executive combined to operate for its year of office. Any village can become such Republic today Here there is perfect democracy based on individual freedom. The individual is the architect of his own government.²²

It is sad that the first draft constitution did not have any reference or article on the villages or village panchayats. There was an acrimonious debate on this subject in the Constituent Assembly. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar who represented the dalits strongly argued against the empowerment of Village Panchayats, as,

according to him the landed gentry of upper castes would invariably dominate them and these institutions would be utilized for perpetuating the exploitation of the lower caste people and the poor.²³ He also condemned the village as a "sink of localism, a den of ignorance, narrow-mindedness and communalism." So, Dr. Ambedkar argued that caste ridden villages in India had little prospects of success as institutions of self-government. Incidentally Dr. Ambedkar position was very close to that held by Nehru who wrote to Gandhi, thus, a village, normally speaking, is backward intellectually and culturally, and no progress can be made from a backward environment, narrow-minded people are much more likely to be untruthful and violent.²⁴

However, several members expressed strong resentment against the uncharitable observation made by Ambedkar. H.V. Kamath criticized the attitude of Ambedkar as a typical of the "Urban high - brow". Mr. Kamath supported the inclusion of village panchayats. He opined, "it is due to Mahatma Gandhi, it is due to you (i.e. Dr Rajendra Prasad) sir, and it is due to Sardar Patel and Pandit Nehru and Netaji Bose, that we have come to love our village folk....." God save us" Mahatma Gandhi taught us in almost the last mantra that he gave in the last days of his life to strive for Panchayati Raj. If Ambedkar cannot see his way to accept this. I don't see what remedy or panacea he has got for uplifting our villages.....²⁵

It is an irony of history that Ambedkar, who was one of the principal architects of the liberal democratic frame work of Indian constitution, found himself in the company of those who did not find any incompatibility between the bureaucratic district administration and democratic governance. Such was the complexity of the historical legacy left by the imperial rulers.....²⁶

The view that was adopted was that even though it may not be possible to provide for the reestablishment of 'Village Republics' immediately as these were known in the earlier part of history, it should be our ultimate objective. Mr. Ananthasayanam Ayyanger said, "But where these Republics? They have to be

brought into existence.....therefore, I would advise that in the directives, a clause must be added, which would insist upon the various Governments that may come into existence in future, to establish village panchayats, give them political autonomy and economic independence, in their own affairs.”²⁷

Ultimately the arguments for inclusion of village panchayats were prevailed and it took place in the chapter of Directive principles of state policy, Art. 40 of part IV of Indian constitution. The Article reads as under: “the state should take steps to organize village panchayats and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self government”. So, the Art. 40 of the Indian constitution directs the state to take steps to organize village panchayats which may enable to work as units of self government.

The fundamental belief that village panchayats could play an important role in the social transformation and implementation of development programmes could not be disregarded easily. But the pertinent question still remains unanswered. The question is that why did panchayat system come under the part IV of Indian constitution? This part IV was not enforceable legally. Why were they not given the constitutional status and recognition they deserved? The answer is simple that the urban and rural elites and their representatives in politics (from the time of National freedom movement onwards), had a disdain for panchayats and this has ever since remained intact. Whatever genuine attempts were made for the devolution of power, these interests saw to it that the attempts did not succeed. This is a story of panchayat institution since independence.²⁸

Another point of view about the incorporation of panchayat system in part IV is that after the line of criticism was successfully established, it was written a letter to Sir B.N. Rao, the constitutional adviser, for re-examination and re-drafting the whole constitution regarding the incorporation of panchayat system. It was pointed out by Sir B.N. Rao, it was then too late in the process of constitution making to re-draft the whole constitution having the panchayats as its basis. It was then, thought better to incorporate panchayats in the Directive Principles of State

Policy, and retain framework of parliamentary government based on direct popular election both at the centre and in the states of the Indian Union.²⁹

The Community Development Programme:

Panchayati Raj in India today owes its origin to the Community Development (CD) Programme which was introduced in October 1952. It had established the decentralization of rural administration in the sense that responsibility and power for executing programmes of economic development and social welfare delegated to officials in newly created administrative units of Development Blocks. The programmes of Block development were to be translated into action under the leadership of the Block Development Officer; this required the co-operation and association of the local people with the block staff but there was no transfer of power and responsibility to the people.³⁰

“The Planning Commission in the first five year plan, described community development as the method through which the five year plan seeks to initiate a process of transformation of the social and economic life of the villages.”³¹ “Implementation of Community Development Programme on a national scale requires: adoption of consistent policies, specific administrative arrangements, recruitment and training of personnel, mobilization of local and national resources and organization or research experimentation and evaluation A programme of community development is most successful when it becomes an integral part of, or is closely related to, the existing administrative organization at the local, intermediate and national level.”³² So, development depends upon the responsibility and power. Community development will become real when the community realizes its problems and responsibilities, exercises the necessary powers through its chosen representatives and maintains a constant and intelligent vigilance on local administration. Various complaints were raised against CD regarding the wastage of funds, corruption, malpractices and favoritism.

The findings of the Balwant Rai Mehta team led to the following conclusion: "Admittedly One of the least successful aspects of community development and National Extension Service Work is its attempt to evoke popular initiative few of local bodies at a level higher than the village panchayat have shown any enthusiasm or interest in this work; and even the panchayats have not come into the field to any appreciable extent So long as we do not discover or create a representative and democratic institution which will supply 'the local interest, supervision and care necessary to ensure that expenditure of money upon local objects conforms with the needs and wishes of the locality', invest it with adequate power and assign to it appropriate finances, we will never be able to evoke local interest and excite, local initiatives in the field of development."³³

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee:

The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee comes to know that Community Development Programmes were the programmes of government and not the programmes of the village people. The village self-sufficiency only could be attained through the partnership of village people. In considering this idea the Mehta Committee suggested that the villagers should be given power to decide about their own problems and implement the soluble programmes accordingly. Bidyut Mohanty while explaining the recommendation of the Mehta Committee observes: In 1959, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee suggested that an agency should be set up at the village level which would not only represent the interest of village community but also take up the development programmes of the government at its level. The Gram-Panchayat which was to constitute this agency was therefore, perceived as an implementing agency of the government in a specific, viz. developmental sphere.³⁴

The major objectives of the Panchayati Raj, which was established according to the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, were: 1) to represent the felt needs of the village community; 2) to give power to the non-officials for the development of the village communities; 3) to give power of implementation or execution of programs to the people.

The main recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee were as follows:

1. Development block covering about 100 villages and having population of 100 thousands should coincide with taluk / tehsil / sub-district unit.
2. There should be three – tier - Zilla Parisad at the district level instead of district board, Panchayat Samiti at the block level and Gram-Panchayat at the village level.
3. Panchayat should work under supervision of Panchayat Samiti
4. Composition of Panchayati Raj bodies should be representative of all section of the people by and large.
5. Effective training arrangement would be made for people's representative of three tiers.
6. People's representative would plan the community development and allied programmes.

Thus, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee legislatively made the villagers active partners in the task of village development. The responsibility of the execution of development programmes was left to the elected members of the Panchayati Raj. Panchayat Raj was firstly established in Rajasthan on the birth day of Gandhiji i.e., 2nd October, 1959. Then it was established in Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu in 1959. And in Assam, Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh and other states, it was established in 1960-61. Different states followed different system of Panchayati Raj. While Jammu and Kashmir followed 1 tier, Haryana chose a 2 tiers and Rajasthan and Andhrapradesh 3 tiers system.

The Panchayati Raj could not come out as successful story. Though, theoretically, the decisions had taken by the non-officials at the three-tier of Panchayati Raj; but the officials became the major decision makers in practice. Due to illiteracy, uneducated and inefficiency the non-officials could not wield their power. There was also lack of coordination between the three-tier systems.

Therefore, the failure of this system have evolved a new pattern on the recommendation of Ashok Mehta Committee.³⁵

Ashok Mehta Committee:

The Ashok Mehta Committee was appointed by the Government of India in 1977, in order to study the role and powers of the Panchayati Raj institution and give some remedial suggestions. The basic recommendation of the Committee are as follows:

1. More genuine and effective devolution of powers to Panchayat Raj institution should take place.
2. Primary unit in the Panchayati Raj system should be the Zilla Parishad and not the Panchayat Samiti because Zilla Parishad had better leadership and resources.
3. Mondal Panchayat with proper powers and resources and covering smaller area than development block and larger area than village should replace the Panchayat.
4. To ensure co-ordination among the rural and urban bodies the municipal bodies should also representatives in the Zilla Parishad and the Mondal Panchayat.
5. Political parties should take part in the election of panchayat raj.
6. A Panchayati Raj Finance Commission should be set up.
7. The Zilla Parishad should prepare the district plan which should be implemented through the Mondal Panchayat.

Andhrapradesh and Karnataka state accepted this suggestion and implemented by creating Mondal Panchayats. The West Bengal Government also took initiative in 1978 to revitalize the panchayat in accordance with the Ashok Mehta Committee's recommendations. But the recommendations of Ashok Mehta Committee were not accepted by the Central Government due to the change of ruling party; though few states accepted the recommendation.³⁶

After Ashok Mehta Committee various team and committees were formed which can be mentioned as follows:

C.H.Hanumanth Rao Team (1982):

The planning commission emphasized upon effective mass participation through the Panchayati Raj institution in the field of rural development. The planning commission experts, under the leadership of Dr. C.H. Hanumanth Rao, were deputed to study as to how to prepare plans at the district level. It was suggested that decentralization of planning should take place. Local people should be associated from the plan formulation stage.

G. V. K. Rao Committee (1985):

In 1985, the Central Government also appointed G. V. K. Rao Committee to advise on poverty alleviation programmes and organization of the Panchayati Raj institution. The committee suggested that regular election should be held for Panchayati Raj institution and plans should be formulated at the district level.

Laxmi Mal Singhvi Committee (1986):

This Committee was formed by the Government of India to make suggestions for revival of Panchayati Raj. It advocated that Panchayati Raj should primarily be viewed as the Local Self-Government system and should be strengthened accordingly. The Committee suggested that Panchayati Raj should be constitutionally recognized on the basis of this suggestion 64th constitutional amendment bill was introduced.

P. K. Thungan Committee (1989):

This Committee recommended for regular elections and according constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions. And, also suggested that Zilla Parishad should play the role of agency of planning and development.

In 1989, 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill i.e., 'Panchayat Bill' was introduced in Loksabha and was passed in this house; but the Bill was not

accepted by the upper house (Rajya Sabha). As a result of the recommendations of various committees the Central Government decided to give constitutional status to the Panchayati Raj institutions and passed 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act., 1993. 73rd amendment of the constitution of India had escalated a landmark development in the history of local self-government in India.

73rd Constitution Amendment Act:

In 1993, 73rd Constitution Amendment Act was passed. A new part IX with heading 'Panchayat' was added to the constitution. Art 243, a new schedule XI, containing 29 powers to be transferred to panchayats, was added. Unlike the Balwant Rai Mehta pattern, the present pattern of Panchayati Raj differs in respect of political institution. According to Balwant Rai's recommendation, elections to panchayat raj bodies were held on individual basis. The candidates contesting for election were not nominated by political parties. The 73rd Amendment Act allows political parties to enter into the election fray. Besides, the present Panchayat Raj is not an implementing body to the development programme. It is a decision making body and rules over the governance of the village. One very prominent aspect of the present panchayat is that it empowers the women and weaker sections of village in the wielding of power.

So, the present Panchayati Raj is constituted under the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act in India. Naturally, it is central Act, which is adopted by the states and the union. The basic features of the 73rd Amendment Act are as follows:

1. Panchayat will be considered as political institution in a truly decentralized structure.
2. The 'Gram-Sabha' shall be recognized as the life - line of the Panchayat Raj. The voters of the village of clusters of villages will constitute its membership.
3. There will be direct election in all the three-tire of Panchayati Raj.
4. For the empowerment of women, the Act has made provision for reservation of seats; $\frac{1}{3}$ of the total seats shall be reserved for women. In case of SC/ST $\frac{1}{3}$ seats reservation for women will be followed.

5. The tenure of each Panchayati Raj Institution will be five years.
6. The election of Panchayati Raj Institution will be conducted regularly.
7. There will be separate Election Commission and Finance Commission for Panchayat Raj institution in every state.

Though most of the State Governments have amended their Panchayat Acts following the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, during 1993 and 1994; yet things have mostly remained on paper. The panchayati Raj institutions are still playing the role as agency for development rather than institutions of self-government.³⁷ In the era of Globalization when the 'participatory democracy' has become a slogan of liberal democracy in India, where quasi-federation, politics of coalition and centralized party structure prevail, in this environment we have to see how far Gandhian concept of 'Gram Swaraj' will come into existence.

B) Evolution of Panchayat System in West Bengal

Previously, it has been defined about the origin of local self government in India. In that discussion we have found that the local government is not new in India; it has been traced from Vedic period in various names. Here, we would like to discuss about the evolution of Panchayat system in West Bengal from the colonial period in India.

Colonial Period:

The British had become interested to establish the local self-government after Sepoy Mutiny.³⁸ After 1857, it was found consequent rise of mass awareness against alien domination and rise of resentment against British rule. In this situation British understood the need for Indianisation of Administration. The public opinion was in favour of decentralized administration and self-governance.

A question may be raised as to why the British rulers at all interested in establishing these local government institutions. For a reasonable answer, we need to understand the complexities of the British rule in India. The timing of the introduction of these institutions also requires to be noted. Attempts to introduce local government institutions started soon after the annexation of India by the British crown. It was a time when the trauma of the uprising of 1857 was still fresh in the minds of the colonial rulers. It was also the time when the business of governance passed almost in its entirety to the provincial governments. As the arm of the government stretched to remotest parts of the countryside, the local communities lost what ever power they had in managing their own affairs, if not on democratic basis, at least on the basis of some caste or communal norms.³⁹

It was at this historical juncture that the British rulers invented a form of 'modern' local government for the country. There were several compulsions for this. The first and foremost was a fuller political and economic integration. Second, it was necessary to build a reliable information system extending right up to the villages, because even after 1857, there were sporadic peasants movements in different parts of India. The Chowkidari Panchayats, and later the Union Committees and Union Boards, made it possible for the state to penetrate deep into the country side and simultaneously put in place reliable information system. It is interesting to note that one of the obligatory functions of Union Board was to keep the district magistrate informed about the law and order situation of the villages. Similarly, the Dafadars had to report to the Officer-in-Charge of local police station on a regular basis. All these could be ensured without putting any additional burden on the state exchequer.⁴⁰

The local government institutions in the villages also helped the imperial government to recruit a new group of collaborators in the countryside apart from the erstwhile permanently settled zamindars. They came from the ranks of big intermediaries and the traders cum merchants cum money lenders whose economic power had been increasing overtime and now increased further because of commercialization of agricultures. These groups come to enjoy

additional power and prestige by virtue of their position as elected representatives in different tiers of the newly introduced rural local government structure. By becoming a part of the imperial system of the governance to which the local government institutions were integrated, their distance from people was now complete. It is an irony that technically they were representatives of the citizens. In reality they were new patrons in a crystallized network of patron-client relationship of which the imperialist rulers were the highest patron. They not emerged as powerful but also as legitimate mediators of both public and private affairs of people in the countryside.⁴¹

As a result, there were several Acts, like Indian Council Act of 1861, 1892 and 1909. Each act was in favour of Indian control over administration. But the primary motive of the British Raj was to save the imperial interests. Prior to this, the Charter Act, 1793, introduced the municipal administration in the towns of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

However, the British recognition of Lord Mayo's resolution 1870, made avenue for the rural decentralized governance for the first time. It proclaimed the need for local interest, local supervision and local care in order to bring about success in management of fund devoted to education, sanitation, medical relief and public works. The effects of the Mayo's resolution could be defined into two ways: 1) Devolution of power from Central Government to Provincial Governments; 2) enactment of local self-government for rural areas of the Bengal, Punjab, Bombay and North-West Frontier Province.⁴²

The first Panchayat introduced in colonial Bengal through the Village Chowkidari Act, 1870, which is called Chowkidari Panchayats. These Panchayats were strictly concerned with village watch and ward problems.⁴³ Later on, the Chowkidari Panchayat was supplemented with District Road Cess Committees. These committees were engaged with the fixation of the rates of road cess and maintenance of roads in the District. A district committee headed by collector was composed with 2/3 members nominated by the government from the tax payers

and 1/3 members were the government official. In the colonial history for the first time the non-officials were engaged with the public works.⁴⁴

In the history of local self-government in India, the year 1885 was most remarkable; because, in this year, the self-government act was passed to implement self-governance in rural area. The act was passed according to Lord Ripon's Resolution of 1882. On May 18, 1882, Lord Ripon's resolution on local self-government was adopted, which emphasized four fundamental principles, viz., a) elected non-official majority, b) non-official chairman; c) government's control over local bodies to be exercised from without rather than from within and d) elastic and sufficient financial resources for the local bodies. Thus the resolution of the liberal viceroy heralded the dawn of a new era in the history of Indian Administration.⁴⁵

Lord Ripon conceived local self-governing institution in terms of instrument not only for effecting improvement in administration, but also for political education of the people. As a follower of the philosophy of J.S. Mill and Hume he proposed to establish a large network of rural local boards in India.⁴⁶

The Local Self Government Act of 1885 introduced two-tier system of local self-government viz., District Board at the district level and Local Board or Sub-District Board at tehsil or taluk level. It had also provided for Union Committees for group of villages. Because of its wide jurisdiction the district tier failed to live up to the expectations. The Local Boards at the sub-divisional level had no autonomy, and were abolished shortly. In this regard, Neil Webster described that the local boards had no fixed roles as such and they rapidly became redundant because of their total reliance upon very limited grants and subsidies. The Union Committees had little role outside context of village politics. For their part, the District Boards increasingly lost their responsibilities to functionally specific boards such as the District School Board.⁴⁷

Though the Bengal Self-Government Act, 1885, established local self-government in Bengal, but it could not attain real devolution of power. Despite provision of elective principles and non-official chairmanship, under the Act of 1885, the Bengal Administration Report of 1891-92 showed that elected members were minority in both the tiers, out of 790 members in the District Board covering 38 districts of Bengal, 138 were ex-officio members, 313 nominated by British Government and 309 were elected by local boards, i.e., indirectly elected. In the Local Boards out of 1248 members, 40 were ex-officio members, 730 nominated by the British Government and only 469 were elected. The elected members were the representative of zamindar, government servants and lawyer. Poor masses did not represent in the local boards.⁴⁸

The claim for effective decentralization was intensified in Bengal after the Bengal partition, 1905. As a result, the Royal Commission was formed in 1907, under the chairmanship of Hobhouse. The Commission submitted its report in 1909 for the effective devolution of power. The report did not come into existence, much of its provision remained on paper.⁴⁹

For restructuring the local self-government the District Administrative Reforms Commission in Bengal has been appointed in 1914. The Commission recommended that rural local governments must be unified by combining the Union Committees and Chowkidari Panchayats. As a result under the proposed scheme of diarchy the Montagu Chelmsford Reform 1919 indicated that panchayats should come under the purview of provincial government. So, another attempt was made for the devolution of power under the colonial government in India.

Like other province in Bengal, we found Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919, which provided for two tier structure: Union Boards at the lower level and District Board at the higher level. Each Union Board was comprised with 9 members - three nominated and six elected. Each Union covered on average 8 to 10 villages with total population 10,000.⁵⁰ On the other hand, $\frac{2}{3}$ members of the

District Boards indirectly elected by members of the Union Boards under it and 1/3 members were nominated by the governments, and the District Magistrate was given free hand in the appointment of nominated members. In appointing the Dafadars and Chowkidars who played vital role in rural law order and administration, the wishes of elected members of the Union Boards were ignored. These Defadars and Chowkidars were responsible to Police Thana (station) in the Union Board area and not the Union Board directly.⁵¹

The weakness of Rural Local Government, under the act of 1919, is found in West Bengal Human Development Report-2004. However, the main colonial legacies with respect to local government in rural Bengal were low resources capability of local government, the relative weakness of lower level tiers of local government emphasis on mainly municipal function, excessive bureaucratic or official control and above all, controlled by vested interests, particularly the landed gentry.⁵²

As a result of all these factors, apprehension arose about real intention of the British government. What followed as the anti-Union Board agitation, 1921, people refused to pay taxes, Union Boards refused to work. The stalemate continued, more or less, till 1930s. After this the 2nd world war, Quit India Movement and pre-independence agitations left no space for creation or consolidation of local self-governments in Bengal as well as other parts of India.⁵³

Post- Independence Period:

The Constituent Assembly included the provision of Panchayati Raj in the chapter of Directive Principles of State Policy, Art 40 of part IV of Indian Constitution. The Draft Constitution did not have any reference or article on the villages or village panchayats. There was an acrimonious debate on this subject in the Constituent Assembly. Art 40 of part IV was the out come of this debate. The urban and rural elites did not like to give constitutional status and recognition to the panchayat system. Due to the inclusion of panchayats in part IV of the Indian constitution, it was not compulsion upon the union and the states government to

implement it. In spite, some states tried to implement panchayat system. Experimentally West Bengal Government implemented panchayat system in the Block area of Baruipur, Mahammad Bazar, Santhia, Shaktigarh, Guskura, Jhargram and Fulia. There was no legal institution of experimental panchayat system. So, this type of panchayat worked under the previous Union Board.⁵⁴

According to the recommendation of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, three - tier panchayat system was implemented in all about Indian states. But the situation in West Bengal was different. The Union Board which was established in Bengal and functioning as rural self-government was hard to avoid it. For these reason four- tier panchayat system was established in rural West Bengal. The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957⁵⁵ introduced two-tier panchayat system: in the village level--Gram panchayat and in the old Union Board level--Anchal Panchayat. On the other hand, the West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act, 1963⁵⁶, introduced Anchalik Parishad at the Block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level in 1964.

Zilla Parishad:

The Zilla Parishad was entrusted with wide ranging powers and functions relating to public works, sanitation, education, social welfare and public health etc. Unlike the District Board Zilla Parishad was expected to play a meaningful role in rural planning. The Zilla Parishad was comprised with the following members: i) the president of all Anchalik Parishad of the districts; ii) two Adhyakshas from each sub-division of the district elected by the Adhyakshas from amongst themselves; iii) all the members of the parliament and the state legislature; iv) one municipal chairman or mayor to be nominated by the state government; v) the president of the District School Board and vi) two women to be nominated by the state government. The Act of 1963 scrupulously avoided the direct elective principle at the district level. Every Zilla Parishad has one executive officer and one secretary, both normally belonging to the West Bengal Civil Service. The District Magistrate was however, yet to have any organic or integral linkage with the Zilla Parishad.

Anchalik Parishad:

Like the Zilla Parishad the Anchalik Parishad was entrusted with powers and functions. Anchalik Parishad was composed with the following members: i) the Pradhan of all the Anchal Panchayat's of Block; ii) One Gram Panchayat Adhyaksha to be elected by the Adhyakshas from amongst themselves from the territorial limits of each Anchal Panchayat of the Block; iii) all members of the parliament and the state legislature (excepting the minister of the Block); iv) two women and two persons from Block Ward Committees to be nominated by the state government and v) two social workers to be co-opted by the other members. Besides the Block Development officer was included in the Anchalik Parishad as an associate member.

The structure and composition of the Anchalik Parishad ensured that it was a loose and disjointed combination of different types of members. The combination of indirect election, lateral co-option and nomination could hardly be a substitute for direct elective principles.

The Block Development Officer was the ex-officio chief executive officer of the Anchalik Parishad. The Parishad was empowered to take a resolution seeking the removal of the Block Development Officer and it was made obligatory for the state government to abide by the recommendation. Under the Act of 1963, bureaucratic machinery was controlled by the Panchayati Raj at the Block level.

Anchal Panchayat:

The West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957 provided for one Anchal Panchayat for a cluster of villages. The Anchal Panchayats were given very little substantive powers. They had no developmental role. An Anchal Panchayat was meant to control the Dafadars and Chowkidars of the area. In functional terms, the Anchal Panchayats were not in a better position than Union Boards.

Regarding the composition of Anchal Panchayat the principle of direct election was not followed. However, unlike the Zilla Parishads and the Anchalik Parishads; the Anchal Panchayats did not have provisions for nomination of members or co-option of officials. There were only two types of members in an Anchal Panchayat: i) the Adhyakshas of all the Gram Panchayats concerned; and ii) some members elected by the Gram Panchayat members. In other words, the Anchal Panchayats were formed on the basis of vertical integration and indirect election. At the first meeting of after the election, one Pradhan and one Upa-Pradhan were elected by the members of the Anchal Panchayat among themselves.

Gram Panchayat:

The first step towards constituting the Panchayati Raj structure was the constitution of Gram Sabha. The Act of 1957 empowered the state government to constitute the Gram Sabha (at the village level), consisting of all persons whose names are included in the electoral role of the Legislative Assembly. In theory, Gram Sabha was designed as the meeting of all adult members of the village. Gram Sabha was expected to consist of all voters of the village. It was further stipulated that the members of the Gram Sabha would elect the members of the Gram Panchayat from amongst themselves. Thus, the principle of direct election was introduced at this level. At the first meeting of the Gram Panchayat its members were to elect one Adhyaksha and one Upadhyaksha from among themselves.

In consistence with the expected democratic vigour of the Gram Panchayats, they were entrusted to perform the function relating with public health, sanitation, supply of drinking water and maintenance of public road etc. They were expected to perform both civic and developmental functions, while they had a limited role in rural policing also. The Adhyaksha and Upadhyaksha were expected to play leading role in these fields.

Evaluation:

The Act of 1957 and 1963 conjointly designed an elaborate Panchayati Raj network which failed to give a fair and practical trial. It was with a certain amount of fanfare that this system was introduced in a newly born post-colonial society; but lack of organized support from below and political ambivalence at the top soon brought an early death to an infant system the late sixties were politically turbulent times for the entire nation also for the state in particular, and this climate was not exactly conducive for promotion of self-government at the grassroots level.⁵⁷

In 1981, Uday Bhadhuri, the Assistant Director of Panchayat in west Bengal wrote of the early implementation of Panchayati Raj in the state; this was undoubtedly an important step towards democratic decentralization; its socio-economic significance is indisputable. But in the economic base on which the gradual evolution lay, there was very little place for the poor. The rural and panchayat leadership was on that emerged out of the green revolution in the farms of big land holders (Jotedars). The Zilla Parishads and Anchalik Parishads met their inglorious death as soon as they were born. The reason behind this fact was that the unorganized landholder (Jotedar) class could not be a match for the neo-bourgeoisie a product of the industrial cities. Beginning right from the national movement up to 2nd decade after Independence the national leadership was mainly in the urban areas. Therefore, though the rural institutions got the theoretical recognition; in practice it was beyond the notice of national leadership.⁵⁸

While the Zilla Parishad and Anchalik Parishad died a premature death, the Gram Panchayats and Anchal Panchayats did continue to function at the local level. Their role as institutions of local government was extremely minor- some involvements in the disbursement of relief collection of Chowkidar tax and the payment of Chowkidars and Dafadars. From the out set they could never be described as institution for popular participation. Although given a four year period of office new election was never held and the members remained in office without any proper attempt at recourse to local opinion. Besides, the failure was aggravated by the continuing existence of massive rural poverty. The local

government remained undemocratic institution in the hands of dominant village elite.

However, it is fruitful to mention that in some ways, the panchayati raj experiments of this phase were to have lasting impact on the subsequent exercises. Despite their avoidance of the direct elective principle at all the tiers (except the lowest), the Acts of 1957 and 1963 succeeded in introducing popular representatives at different levels of rural self-government. Besides, the newly introduced panchayat raj was conceived as an indigenous experiment and the vernacularisation of the associated nomenclature was definitely a popular gesture. The Indianised panchayati Raj was, to the extent, less elitist than the network established in the colonial era.⁵⁹

Panchayati Raj at Present:

For restructuring the panchayat system in West Bengal, in 1973, the West Bengal Panchayat Act was passed, annulling the previous laws. The four tier structure was replaced by the emerging all India three-tier panchayat system: Gram Panchayat at the lowest level; Panchayat Samiti at the Block level and the Zilla Parishad at the top level. The new Gram Panchayats were similar to the Anchal Panchayat of 1957 Act and consisted of group of villages with a population 10 to 12 thousand. Following the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report's recommendation Panchayat Samiti was coterminous with Blocks; and Zilla Parishads were the coterminous with district. The Act provided for the direct election of members of all three tiers and for the tenure of four years (increased from 1982- 5years term)

However, although the Act was passed in 1973, it failed to be implemented because of political instability in the state at the time and Indira Gandhi's subsequent declaration of a state emergency in India in 1975.⁶⁰ So, the national political scenario was not conducive for effective decentralization of powers. Growing centralization of powers was the most dominant phenomena in national politics. Added to it was the infighting and internal bickering within the Congress in

the state. Rampant factionalism had further damaged the party organization. The Congress party in the state did not have effective, efficient and acceptable leadership. The central leadership started intervening in many issues and the factional leadership began to depend on them for strengthening their respective position.⁶¹ In this situation, it was not possible for the state government to implement new panchayat system. The new panchayat system was revitalized only after the Left Front Government came to power in 1977. The first general panchayat election under the new Act took place in 1978 and new elected local bodies were installed with great enthusiasm.

Zilla Parishad:

At the top level of three tiers Panchayat Raj was the Zilla Parishad (Mahakuma Parishad at sub-divisional level for Siliguri after the constitution of Darjeeling Hill council in 1988) under the chairmanship of Sabhadhipati and in his absence a Sahakari Sabhadhipati. The parishad was composed with the following members: i) two members elected on the basis of adult franchise for each constituency within the territorial limit of Zilla Parishad; ii) all MPs and MLAs(except minister) of the territorial area were the ex-officio members; iii) Sabhapatis of Panchayat Samitis were the ex-officio members; iv) reservation of seats for women and SC/ST would be done according to recent amendment. The District Magistrate was the executive officer of Zilla Parishad. The functions of Zilla Parishad included providing financial assistance regarding agriculture, industries, livestock, irrigation water supply, communication, establishment of schools, hospital etc. According to 1973 Act, there were various standing committees to perform the functions. At the district level, there was District Planning and Co-ordination Committee (DPCC) and District Planning Committee (DPC) for the decentralized planning.

Panchayat Samiti:

At the Block level there was Panchayat Samiti under the chairmanship of Sabhapati and in his absence Saha-Sabhapati. It was comprised with the

following members: i) three members elected from each village on the basis of adult franchise; ii) Pradhans of Gram panchayats were the ex-officio member; iii) all MPs and MLAs(except minister) of the territorial area were the ex-officio members; iv) reservation of seats for women and SC/ST would be done as per recent amendment act. The BDO was the ex-officio executive officer of Panchayat Samiti. The functions of Panchayat Samiti were related to agriculture, taxation, small industries social service, relief of distress anti-epidemic measures and supervision and co-ordination of works made by Gram Panchayats within its area. At the Block level for the implementation of decentralized planning it was found Block Planning Committee (BPC).

Gram Panchayat:

At the lowest level of three - tier panchayat system was Gram Panchayat. The total elected members would vary between 5 and 30 depending on the number of voters in the area. Reservation of seats for women and SC/ST would be done as per recent amendment act. The members elected a Pradhan and Upa-Pradhan from among themselves. The Pradhan exercised administrative powers. There would be a secretary and Job-assistant to transact day to day business of Gram Panchayat. The Gram Panchayats would provide sanitary, medical and drinking water, maintenance of public road, tanks, grounds, street lighting and minor irrigation etc. The Gram Panchayats would monitor and oversee almost all the important aspects of village life.

However, election of these bodies was not held until the Left Front Government came into power in West Bengal in 1977. In June 1978, elections were held simultaneously for all the tiers of the rural local bodies had been held at the regular five years interval as stipulated by law, with most recent elections taking place in May, 2008.

Amendment of West Bengal Panchayat Act:

There were several times amendment of West Bengal Panchayat Act had taken place till 1994. These amendments had changed the character of West

Bengal Panchayati Raj institutions further. In 1982, amendment was made to increase the tenure of three-tier panchayat 4 yrs to 5 yrs. In 1992 amendment, it was provided that not less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the seats shall form quorum at each tier. It also made such provision that at least $\frac{1}{3}$ of the seats in each tier of panchayats should be reserved for women. The reserved seats should be rotated in every election. In 1994 Amendment Act, it was included that only for ordinary member's reservation would be effective also for the seats of chairpersons. Reservation of seats for SC/ST according to their proportion to total population was also provided. Secondly, two popular bodies 'Gram Sabha' and 'Gram Sansad' were set in operation with changed connotation.

Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha:

The Gram Sabha has been incorporated by all the states in their amended laws on panchayats, although there are variations in respect of numbers of meeting to be held, the issues to be discussed in the meeting and the like. West Bengal has however taken step forward by making provision for Gram Sansad apart from Gram Sabha. All the voters of each of the electoral constituencies of a gram panchayat constitute a 'Gram Sansad'; all the voters of a Gram Panchayat area constitute a 'Gram Sabha'.

The meeting of the Gram Sansad will be held twice in a year. The half yearly meeting to be held on November for consideration the budget for the coming year and written opinion is taken regarding this budget and the last audit report comes into consideration. The annual meeting of the Sansad to be held ordinarily in May for the consideration of revised budget of previous year, the accounts of the last six months, the activities undertaken during the last year and proposed to be undertaken in the coming year. The meeting of the Gram Sansad will be convened by Pradhan, in his absence, by the Upa-pradhan.

The Gram Sabha meets ordinarily in December every year after the completion of half-yearly meetings of the Sansad in November. The Agenda items of the Sansad are included in the Gram Sabha meeting. It is the duty of the Gram

Panchayat to place before the meeting of the Sabha the budget of Gram Panchayat. The Panchayat has also to place before the meeting of the Sabha the decisions of the Gram Sansad along with the observation of the Gram Panchayat. The opinions of the Sabha have to be recorded in the resolution book. The meeting of the Gram Sabha is convened by Pradhan, in his absence, by the Upa-Pradhan.

The Gram Sabha is really cornerstone of the entire scheme of democratic decentralization. It is a direct democracy at grass roots level. The Gram Sabha has been regarded as the 'Soul' of Panchayati Raj. Reports available from various states indicate that success with regard to the holding of Gram Sabha meetings is mixed. West Bengal has better record. In 1995, Gram Sansads in West Bengal held 63 percent of the statutory meetings. The figure rose to 88% in 1998.⁶² But D.Bandyopadhyay tried to show the lack of attendance in his writing.⁶³ According to him Gram Sansad in West Bengal are notorious for lack of attendance by members. Figures made available by Government for Gram Sansad meetings held in May and November 2002 show the average of 12% and 11% respectively with the high of 19% and low of 6% (November 2002). The percentage of adjourned meetings was abnormally high. It was 25% in May and 18% in November 2002(PanchayatiRaj Samachar no.-2, November 2002 and no 1 and 2 January-February, 2003 Institute of Social Science).

Thirdly, independent State Election Commission would be established to conduct the panchayat elections. Fourthly, State Finance Commission would be constituted for every five years to review the financial position of panchayat. Fifthly, provisions for creating a district council were made in every district under the chairmanship of the leader of recognized political party which is in opposition in Zilla Parishad. Sixthly, the total member of Gram Panchayat was increased from a maximum of 25 to 30.

Village Development Committee (Gram Unnayan Samiti)

In 14 July, 2003, West Bengal Government passed the West Bengal Panchayat (amendment) Act for the establishment of Village Development Committee. The Act is that it tries to establish through law organic linkages among the various tiers of panchayat. It creates a Block Sansad and Zilla Sansad where the representation of lower tier is adequately provided. The object VDC is to ensure active participation of the people in implementation, maintenance and equitable distribution benefits.

The Village Development Committee to be constituted through a process among three options: i) it could be constituted by a general election by all the members of the Gram Sansad, ii) it could be elected only by the members of Gram Sansad present in a particular meeting ; iii) VDC member could be nominated by the government or any other authority. The government is not interested in the first option is very clear. If it were so, it could have clearly stated it in law. D. Bandyopadhyay criticized that in the name of participation; firstly, it is to create a front organization under the law in the shape of the Village Development Committee to legalize the illegitimate exercise of power by the party local committee. Secondly, it is to appease the lower rank and file who have lost elections by making them members of the VDC either through manipulative limited election or by nomination.⁶⁴

Evaluation:

The Panchayat Raj institution in West Bengal have been functioning from the very long time. At present, we can not think about the rural life of Bengal without the existence of Panchayat Raj institution. These institutions are known as an instrument for socio-economic development of rural people. It is no doubt that the rural people have gained benefits from panchayat. But how far Panchayat Raj institutions have been succeeded and failed it has become a question of debate. Some one praised the role of West Bengal panchayats and some one put it opposite view.

Reorganization of the system of local government was one of the most important of the institutional changes brought about by the Left Front Government from late 1977 onwards. In the process West Bengal has created a history of participation of the common people through the process of decentralization, which is unique in India. A system of democratic election in local bodies like Gram panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad was in 1978. They have subsequently been held every five years making West Bengal the only state in India to have had regular elections to local bodies every five years for the past 30 years.

In the first phase after 1978, newly elected panchayats were increasingly involved with the execution of Land Reforms. Panchayats took the initiative in exposing benami lands holdings, ensured the identification of excess land and the declaration of vested land and were also given charge of ensuring the legal rights of recipients of vested land and Bargadars (share croppers) over land.⁶⁵

G.K.Lieten in his study had come into conclusion that the role of panchayat Raj in West Bengal in the field of rural development cannot be ignored. From his field work conducted in a village of Birbhum, he concluded that the Left Front broke the traditional strangle hold of land lord, money lenders and morois with ushering in regular election. Now the people do not throng the money lender's house for meeting their needs. Although they do not get jobs and loans, or any other help from panchayats, but these bodies have increased their sense of security.⁶⁶

Besides, G.K Lieten emphasized upon the rural development in West Bengal in respect of the following heads:

1. The push forces, pushing people out of the rural habitat have become feeble, and out migration from villages have virtually stopped.
2. Employment opportunities appear to have grown considerably, leading to decrease in the percentage of rural non-workers between 1981 and 1991,

unlike in the rest of India where the percentage of non-workers has increased.

3. Agrarian production between the mid 1970s and the early 1990s has virtually doubled. Out put figures suggest that in recent years West Bengal has come to occupy the first position among all the states in terms of growth of food grains produced and per capita increase in food grain consumption.⁶⁷

Neil Webster has shown in his discussion that the success of the new Gram Panchayats to be presented as the attitudes of the substantial majority of house holder interviewed in the two Gram panchayats are quite explicit in their recognition of the new institution success in implementing development works and the general improvements, material and political, that have brought to the villages. Besides, he described that the implementing panchayat raj was a bold and innovative strategy by the Left Front in West Bengal. The experience of Burdwan districts demonstrates that it can bring some degree of economic improvement to the poorer sections of rural social formation.⁶⁸

In assessing the Left Front Government in West Bengal Atul Kohli described that "landless labourer, share croppers, and small land owners constitute the majority of rural population in West Bengal. These are also the groups that have become the CPI (M)'s main supporters, enabling the CPI (M) to win three consecutive state elections. As one would expect in the case of a leftist party, larger land owners, business man and industrialist tend to oppose the CPI (M). It is important to note, however, that the CPI (M) has gone out of its way to make itself acceptable to such groups.⁶⁹ From this discussion, it is clear that West Bengal Left Front Government has played vital role for the welfare of the poorer sections of the society. It has become possible through Panchayat Raj instrument in rural Bengal.

On the other hand, Ross Mallick in his book 'Development Policy of a Communist Government: West Bengal 1977', discussed that the Left Front failed

as a force for revolutionary change and its reformism was less impressive than that of capitalist parties in other states.⁷⁰ Panchayats have merely consolidated the interest and control of dominant landed elite at the expenses of the lower classes, making rural change for their own benefit.⁷¹

D. Bandyopadhyay criticized the panchayat system in West Bengal. He described that the Left Front forgets that legislation is no substitute for action. In Kerala, the great success in planning did not require only change of the local law. It only required political will, faith in the genius of the masses and sustained effort by the leadership on the ground. In a report Nirmal Mukherjee and D. Bandyopadhyay mentioned that West Bengal's success in the realm of panchayats is quite tangible, specially, in land reforms, generating awareness among the masses and also in rural development programmes. At the same they mentioned that the initial enthusiasm of the people after 1978 have now largely faded away resulting a stagnancy of the panchayats.⁷²

Harihar Bhattacharya criticized the West Bengal Panchayati Raj in a way that the so-called process of decentralization in West Bengal since 1978 has not been translated into democracy at the grassroots. The process of decentralization has witnessed a process of centralization which remains strong challenge to democracy in rural West Bengal. The real reason explaining why democracy, institutionally, has failed in rural West Bengal's paradigmatic. It is the party's version of Marxism which is the guiding spirit behind it panchayat discourses and which believes only in 'Guided Democracy', and sees panchayats as feature of 'bourgeoisie democracy. But H.Bhattacherya believed that the West Bengal Panchayats are full of radical potentialities. They have been able to attract considerable popular attention. Villagers now accept them as part of their life.⁷³

In going to evaluate the success of West Bengal Left Front Government, Krishna Chakraborty and Swapan Bhattacharya mentioned that the achievement of Left Front Government led Panchayat system does not succeed to replace the old and traditional rural elites by enlightened leadership from the hitherto

unprivileged, inarticulate masses. Village elites and faction leaders still retain the power. The Panchayat system only allows transfer of power from leaders of one faction to another. The vested interest groups have not suffered much due to the introduction of Panchayat Raj based on adult franchise. They only mentioned it as 'structural change' in the villages.⁷⁴

G. K. Lieten from his study defined that the survey on the composition of the panchayats' 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, labour in agriculture, lower caste holder come into the forefront. They also take part in the panchayat system.⁷⁵ This is an achievement of West Bengal Panchayat Raj. Atul Kohli also discussed in his book 'The State and Poverty in India' that small farmers, share-croppers and agricultural labourers constituted about a half of the new panchayat leaders.⁷⁶ But Ross Mallick believed another opposite view. Mallick observed that the 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 population.⁷⁷

Despite the arguments made by some scholars against and for, it can not be denied that Panchayat Raj institutions have become familiar with rural people. At present, the West Bengal Panchayat Raj is running under the light of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act. The new amendment has established participatory democracy and empowered women. Participatory democracy has been established in panchayat system through Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad to be compared with the citizens' forum of direct democracy, which existed in the Greek City states.

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Chapter-III

Evolution of Leadership Pattern in West Bengal

In rural India, traditionally leadership positions were enjoyed by the rural elites who were, generally speaking, aged and moderately educated, belonged to the high clan/castes. The zaminders, village headman and the village priests acquired their leadership as hereditary right. Land being the principal source of subsistence becomes crucial in determining the rural stratification system and power structure. The landholder dominates over landless and land poor. Besides, in Indian patriarchal society, man is superior to woman. Keeping in line with this tradition the leadership in villages happens to be male dominated. In a discussion presented by M.S.Gore, we find that most of the papers on leadership in India give suggestion that the rural leader cannot be imagined without man. Women have obviously no place in the wider social sphere. It cannot be seriously argued that the anthropologists who have written the several papers have accidentally or by design chosen only male leaders for study. Studies on political, economic and the social – particularly in relation to caste - spheres of life, it is found not even one woman playing an influential role in these aspects of life in the villages. It is found from several studies that generally in peasant societies women are subordinate to men.¹

In the early days, the village rich handled the functions like decision-making, settlement of disputes, initiation of activities etc. These types of functions were performed through formal or informal institutions. The most important among them were panchayat and the headmanship. The panchayat, the council of village elders is a traditional institution in the Indian village. It was mainly constituted of the representatives of dominant families in the village.

Before the introduction of statutory panchayats, however, the two types of 'sanctioned' leaders, viz, passive and active, were not very distinct in India. Indeed, the village leaders at that time came from the dominant caste group from which the village elites emerged. They were the propertied men of the village, belonging a high caste status. And they had some education or a certain level of literacy in contrast with the average or common villagers who were mostly non-literate or illiterate and were engaged in occupation like agriculture, business, money lending or service-occupations which allowed them to have sufficient amount of both funds and leisure to be devoted to the affairs of others on the one hand and, on the other, to be free from thralldom to others. They could oblige other villagers by extending help, security, advice and information to them in times of their necessity. As they enjoyed sufficient amount of confidence of the villagers, and engaged in settling disputes among the villagers through 'Salisi' or arbitration. As a result, there were little litigations among them.²

During the British Raj in India the village council was more of an organ of local government. The village council or the panchayat consisted of the elders from among major castes and lineages in the villages. The zamindars had their representatives in the meetings of these councils, and they were most influential members in these bodies. The zamindari system, the village council, and the caste council, thus, appeared to be the three overall institutional components of the power system in the villages in India before abolition of the zamindari system. Most of the times the rural peoples had to refer to the zamindar(s) and to the village council in case of their political and economic interests were involved and to the caste leader in case any problem of a social, cultural or ritualistic nature was associated.³ Yogendra Singh strongly holds the view that it was the landlords who absorbed all effective power in the village, and the panchayat leaders like the leaders in other spheres in the village to protect their interest⁴

The traditional pattern of leadership in rural India was not democratic in nature. Most of the leaders who were rich, educated and upper-caste holder led their role of leadership and influenced the dependent peoples in rural village.

Leaders were not elected democratically. Leaders achieved obligation from the general people who were economically and educationally weak and lower caste holder of the society.

Recently, the structure of rural society has changed. It is reported from some studies that traditional authority has been challenged and destroyed. Invariably the opposition came from those who could free themselves for economic dependence on the landlords, either as a consequence of land reform or by changing their occupations, and who had some education. This new economic independence and access to education were generally the privileges of the middle stratum of village society; the lowest enjoyed no relief. Some observers have defined this phenomenon the emergence of middle class. Wherever reforms have not changed the economic structure, the traditional pattern of authority has persisted, often under a new form of legitimacy such as election to local bodies like the panchayat.⁵

In Bengal, panchayats were statutorily established in 1870 through the Chowkidari Act. The panchayats were not democratic in nature. It was composed of persons nominated by the District Collector or any subordinate officer chosen by him, with the sole purpose of levying and collecting chowkidari tax for the maintenance of the village watchmen. Under the Bengal Local Self-Government Act of 1885, District Board members were indirectly elected Local Boards. Members of the Local Boards and Union Committees were elected by a restricted electorate. The Bengal Administration Report, 1891-92, showed that elected members were in minority in both tiers. Out of 790 members of District Boards covering 38 districts of Bengal, 17.5% members were ex-officio, 40% members were nominated, and 39.62% members were elected by Local Boards, i.e. indirectly elected. Out of these members 31.5% were government servants, 26% were zamindars and landlords, while 26.6% were legal practitioners.⁶ Out of 1248 members of Local Boards 3% members were ex-officio, 58 members were nominated by British government and 37% members were elected. Most of the

elected members belonged to upper classes. Poor section of the society were unrepresented.⁷

Under the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919, Union Boards were formed all over Bengal as units of local government comprising nine (9) members—three nominated and six elected. The Act of 1919 had provided for the creation of the Union Committees consisting of group of villages. Each Union Committee was to have an elected body known as the Union Board. The electorate was to consist of all adult males having residence within union and paying local tax. However, the social and economic power in the villages was concentrated in the hands of small group consisting of the landed gentry, zamindars and intermediaries and the professional classes.⁸ The pre-independence Union Boards were, thus, in a sense, part of the Raj and presidents/vice-presidents of these boards enjoyed prestige and had considerable influence in the local area. In most cases, the office bearers of the Union Boards belonged to the elite groups drawn from amongst the zamindars or other land owning classes.

After the dawn of independence, with the introduction of panchayats, Land Reforms, the Cooperative Movement and the Community Development Programme, a new pattern of leadership has emerged gradually in rural India, as well as in West Bengal. Universal adult franchise enables for the first time in the Indian history each adult citizen (from 21 years of age and above; at present the age has been lowered to 18 yrs for exercising voting right) irrespective of his/ her gender, caste, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or creed to participate in the election of the members of the popular representative bodies. The introduction of the adult franchise and the Panchayat Raj, when acting in combination, have produced some worth reckoning effects on the economic structure, power structure, and emerging pattern of leadership in the villages as well as on the attitude of the villagers towards politics and power in general and towards village politics in particular. It has provided an alternative to the traditional monolithic power structure of the village community and has substituted an elected leadership for hereditary authority.⁹

After independence, the West Bengal Panchayat Bill was passed in 1957. The Act of 1919 was replaced by West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1957, which provided a Gram Panchayat for every village and Anchal Panchayat at the previous union level. Most of the Gram Panchayat members came from the upper section of the society. There was a provision for nomination of eminent person of locality by the state government. It was found that most of the Adhyaksha or President and Upadhyaksha or Vice-President came from the cream level of the society. Later on, the West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act was passed in 1963. It replaced the District Boards by creating Zilla Parishad at the district level and Anchalik Parishad at between Anchal Panchayats and Zilla Parishads. Except for Gram Panchayat none of the other tiers had any directly elected members. The members of the Anchal Panchayat, Anchalik Parishad, and Zilla Parishad were either ex-officio, nominated or co-opted, with some being elected directly. There was another class of members known as associate members who had no right to vote.¹⁰ In a discussion on West Bengal's rural local governments, Buddhadev Ghosh and Girish Kumar mentioned that from 1947 to 1967, when the congress was in power in West Bengal, the socio-economic background of the party was restricted to the elite, the landed gentry, the professionals and traders. Unlike many other states, the force of caste identities was never strong in West Bengal for political mobilization, even though it remains a fact that elite sections came mostly from upper or intermediate castes. Due to their social, economic and professional background, it was possible for them to influence the local peoples. The strategy of Congress was to co-opt them for securing electoral support of the masses. The elites were accommodated in the local party units, and in other power structures like Union Boards, District or School Boards.¹¹ Therefore, the above Panchayat system did not allow the poorer class, women, lower caste holders and young people to access to rural government. Only it will be possible if the rural government of all tiers will be constituted on the basis of adult suffrage. It is no doubt that 4 tiers panchayat system of 1957 and 1963 Act did not allow a broad scope of emerging democratic rural leadership.

In West Bengal, a fresh effort was initiated for rejuvenating panchayat and in this effort the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973 was passed. Even though the Act was passed, the government took no step to implement it. As a result, the entire panchayat system of the state languished. The Zilla Parishad and Anchalik Parishad remained superseded. After the first elections, no elections were held to the Anchal and Gram Panchayats. Consequently, when the Congress Government went out of office in 1977, elections to Anchal Panchayats and Gram Panchayats had been due for periods varying from ten to fifteen years. The period between 1967-72 had been marked by political unrest and absence of stable governments. No purposive policy towards strengthening the panchayat system could be introduced during this period. There was a stable government in 1972-1977, but it had no commitment towards panchayat raj, even though the comprehensive panchayat act was passed during this period.¹²

The Left Front Government in 1978 brought into force the West Bengal Panchayat Act, 1973. In 4 June 1978, elections were held simultaneously for all the tiers of the rural local bodies for the first time. The event heralded a new era for Panchayat Raj system in West Bengal. This was the moment when Asoke Mehta Committee was undertaking its study. By the time the Committee's Report became public in August 1978, nearly 56000 representatives were in position to undertake the new responsibilities of democratic governance at the district, block and village levels.¹³ Since then, election to the local bodies have been held at regular five years intervals as stipulated by law. The last Panchayat election was held in May, 2008.

The panchayat election, in 1978, gave birth a new pattern of rural leadership in West Bengal. The panchayat Act of 1973 implemented after the Left Front Government came into power in 1977. The ground was prepared during the rule of United Front Government in 1969-70. During this time, a massive drive had been undertaken to detect and vest lands that had been clandestinely held by landowners beyond their legal entitlement. This had paralysed the influence of the big landlords on rural society. In this connection, Prabhat Datta quoted Atul Kohli's

statement that the panchayats in West Bengal or in most parts of India, "have seldom been free of domination by landlords or rich peasants. This is beginning to change in West Bengal. The CPIM is carving out a pattern of political organization in rural West Bengal rare in India, namely, that of involving penetration in the country side without depending on the larger landowners."¹⁴

From a large number of macro and micro studies it could be defined that panchayats are free from the domination of big landlords. Several studies mentioned that the panchayats at the village level are under the clutch of middle farmers who already have significant resources under their control with a large percentage of them being teachers and other professionals.¹⁵ Besides, some surveys have confirmed the dominance of well- educated in rural panchayats.

The village panchayats in West Bengal are composed also with poor sections of the rural society and the representation of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes members are increasing rapidly. In addition, many research works have proved the significant presence of poor peasants, bargadars (sharecroppers), land labourers, school teachers etc. However, from the various studies the evolution of rural leadership pattern in West Bengal can be defined following.

The pattern of panchayat leadership in West Bengal after 1978 could be understood through a detailed study that was conducted by the National Institute of Rural Development. The study focused on the process of political recruitment and social background of panchayat leaders. On the basis of the study, M.Shiviah, K.B.Srivastava and A.C.Jena pointed out that majority of the newly elected gram panchayat members were young (below 35yrs), and almost a half of these members were considerably educated. Occupationally, about a half of the new leaders were found to be farmers, while the next biggest category was that of professionals. On the whole, the study identified the new leadership as young and educated.¹⁶

Ross Mallick has tried to show, from the studies of M.Shiviah, K.B.Srivastava and A.C.Jena, the party affiliation of panchayat members in 1978 panchayat election of West Bengal. In 1978 panchayat election, the Left Front Government got an overwhelming mandate. At the village level, out of 46,700 seats Communist Party of India (Marxist) got 28,105, the Revolutionary Socialist Party 1,674, the Forward Block 1,539, the opposition Congress (I) 4,536, Congress-S 580, Communist Party of India 825, and the Independents 9,436. The Panchayat Samiti, grouping several village Gram Panchayats, gave the CPIM- 5,596 out of 8,454 with the Congress gaining only 623, the RSP-353, FB- 320, CPI-132 and Congress-S-105. The only substantial non-CPI (M) group in the Samiti were independents who got 1,323. Of the district level-Zilla Parishad seats, CPIM got 488, RSP-30, FB-44, CPI-5, Congress (I)-23 and independents-53.¹⁷

According to "Tathya O Samiksha" (data and survey),¹⁸ 1998, published by West Bengal State Committee of CPI(M), the political affiliation of elected members of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads of Murshidabad district could be presented as follows: In 1978, CPI(M) bagged 59.14% seats of Gram Panchayats, CPI-0.48%, RSP-18.49%, FB-0.73%, INC-17.19%, Independent & others-3.97%. In the Panchayat Samitis, CPI(M) won 60.98% seats, CPI -0.66%, RSP - 20.00%, FB- 0.82%, INC -12.79%, Independent & others -4.75%. In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) won 61.22% seats, RSP -26.53, FB -2.04%, INC -10.20.

In the 1983 panchayat election, CPIM won 39.49% seats of Gram Panchayats in Murshidabad district, CPI - 0.75%, RSP -11.07%, FB-0.91%, INC-40.70%, BJP-0.28%, Independent others-6.75%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 42.44% seats, CPI -0.73%, RSP -11.48%, FB -0.44%, INC -42.73%, Independent & others-2.18%. In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) got 44.23% seats, RSP -9.62%, INC -46.15%.

In the 1988 panchayat election, CPI(M) - won 55.25% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Murshidabad, CPI - 0.38%, RSP - 11.64%, FB -

2.07%, INC-26.56%, BJP-0.31%, Independent & others 3.80%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 60.99% seats, CPI – 0.55%, RSP – 12.77%,FB – 0.96%, INC – 23.21%,Independent & others -1.51%.In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M)- 69.23%, RSP – 21.15%,INC – 9.62%.

In the 1993 panchayat election, CPI(M) – won 43.94% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Murshidabad, CPI – 0.29%, RSP – 6.33%, FB – 2.07%, INC-26.56%, BJP-5.64%, Independent & others 3.18%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 50.20% seats, CPI – 0.13%, RSP – 5.65%,FB – 2.23%, INC – 37.45%, BJP – 2.76, Independent & others -1.58%.In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) – 69.23%, RSP – 3.85%,INC – 26.92%.

In the 1998 panchayat election, CPI(M) – won 40.69% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Murshidabad, CPI – 0.89%, RSP – 7.91%, FB – 0.86%, INC-32.13%,TMC -6.37, BJP-6.52%, Independent & others 2.17%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 50.00% seats, CPI – 0.72%, RSP – 8.14%,FB – 0.86%, INC – 27.14%,TMC – 4.29%, Independent & others -0.71%.In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) – 75.00%,CPI – 1.67%, RSP – 6.67%,INC – 13.33%.

After sixth panchayat election, we also find the party affiliation of panchayat members in "Tathya O Smiksha"¹⁹ published by the State Committee of CPI(M).In the 2003 panchayat election, CPI(M) – won 39.67% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Murshidabad, CPI – 0.53%, RSP – 4.83%, FB – 2.29%, INC-46.53%,TMC -1.44, BJP-1.34%, Independent & others 3.34%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 43.75% seats, CPI – 0.28%, RSP – 4.16%,FB – 1.14%, INC – 48.78%,TMC – 0.57%, Independent & others -0.57%.In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) – 38.33%, RSP – 5.00%,INC – 55.00%.

According to "Tathya O Samiksha" (data and survey),²⁰ 1998, published by West Bengal State Committee of CPI(M), the political affiliation of elected members of gram panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zilla Parishads of Cooch Behar district could also be presented as follows:In1978, CPIM bagged -

49.24%seats of Gram Panchayats, CPI-0.51%, RSP-0.06%, FB-33.52%, INC-15.59%, Independent & others-1.08%. In the Panchayat Samitis, CPI(M) won 51.15% seats, CPI -0.33%, FB- 0.82%, INC -12.79%, Independent & others - 0.66%. In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) won 45.45% seats, FB -54.55%,INC - Nil.

In the 1983 panchayat election, CPI(M) won 42.36% seats of Gram Panchayats in Cooch Behar district, CPI – 0.17%, RSP -0.17%, FB-19.60%, INC– 36.43%, Independent others-1.27%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 46.55% seats, FB -18.92%,INC -34.53%, In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) got 50.00% seats, FB – 29.17%, INC -20.83%.

In the 1988 panchayat election, CPI(M) – won 59.45% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Cooch Behar, CPI – 0.39%, RSP – 0.10%, FB – 22.00%, INC–17.66%, Independent & others 0.39%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 62.25% seats, FB – 22.25%, INC – 15.49%. In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) – 58.33%, FB – 37.50%, INC – 4.17%.

In the 1993 panchayat election, CPI(M) – won 57.12% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Cooch Behar, CPI – 0.04%, RSP – 0.12%, FB – 3.18%, INC–22.14%, BJP–3.27%, Independent & others 13.49%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 62.40% seats, FB – 2.40%, INC – 21.60%, BJP – 1.60%, Independent & others -12.00%.In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) – 62.50%, FB – 12.50%, INC – 8.33%, Independent & others – 16.67%.

In the 1998 panchayat election, CPI(M) – won 50.88% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Cooch Behar, CPI – 0.43%, RSP –0.05%, FB – 5.64%, INC–11.50%,TMC-9.47%, BJP–8.83%, Independent & others 13.20%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 58.70% seats, CPI – 0.29%, FB – 5.90%, INC – 12.68%,TMC – 7.08%, BJP- 5.61%, Independent & others -9.74%. In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) – 66.67%,FB – 7.41%, INC – 14.81%,Independent & others - 11.11%.

After sixth panchayat election we find the party affiliation of Gram Panchayat members in "Tathya O Samiksha"²¹ published by the CPI (M) state committee. In the 2003 panchayat election, CPI(M) – won 56.95% seats of Gram Panchayats in the district of Cooch Behar, CPI – 0.36%, RSP –0.15%, FB – 12.59%, INC–8.66%,TMC-5.66%, BJP–3.20%, Independent & others 3.93%. In the Panchayat Samitis CPI(M) got 64.60% seats, CPI – 0.58%, FB – 13.86%, INC – 7.66%,TMC – 4.12%,BJP- 2.06%,Independent & others -6.48%.In the Zilla Parishad CPI(M) – 69.23%, FB – 26.92%, Independent & others -3.85%.

From an independent survey done by the National Institute of Rural Development in Hyderabad on one gram panchayat at each in the districts of Nadia, Midnapore and Jalpaiguri found the education level of panchayat members high enough to justify appreciation of the voters' judgment. There was no illiterate panchayat member. Farmers made up 47%, 24% were professionals, 22% businessmen and 4% service holders. Only one person was a labourer, indicating that the village middle and elite class which controlled these panchayats. From the findings of the survey it had been defined that while, the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes continued their traditional occupations, the upper castes that had dominated during the zamindari period had now branched out from their landed base into the services and professions where their traditional literacy skills, higher educational levels and better linkages with urban areas (an aspect of bhadrolock syndrome) must have stood them in good stead. It was these occupational and educational elite, which controlled the panchayat government in these rural areas. Ross Mallick further quoted the argument of P Roychoudhury that the panchayats were dominated by "the same old class of rural vested interests including money lenders."²²

According to the report of West Bengal Government about Gram Panchayats and their activities: survey and evaluation (1980),²³ It could be defined that the average age of the gram panchayat members were 39 yrs., though the average age of the Pradhans and Up-Pradhans was slightly less. Average schooling years of the members came to be only 7.6 yrs suggesting thereby that

on an average the educational level of the members was up to middle school only. Occupationally, the owner-cultivators were found to constitute the majority. An analysis of land holding patterns, however, indicated that most of the owner-cultivators were small and marginal farmers only.

In 1982, from a study on panchayat and rural development, Pradosh Nath had explained from his observation in Purulia district of West Bengal that rural poor had received substantial representation in the new panchayats. Particularly, marginal farmers and the agricultural labours were found to be grossly under-represented.²⁴ But Atul Kohli had tried to show different pictures from his study on panchayat leaders in West Bengal. He observed that since 1978, West Bengal panchayat governments were dominated by small farmers, share-croppers and agricultural labours. Statistically he defined the background of panchayat leaders that 60.1% of the rural leaders were agriculturalists, while 8.3% were landless labourers and 31.6% were teachers and social workers etc. He also found from his study that the educational levels of the most of these leaders were high. 50% of the heads of the Gram Panchayats and 70% of the heads of the Panchayat Samitis were graduates.²⁵

From the study of socio-economic background of panchayat leaders in West Bengal, in 1992, G.K. Lieten found that a new type of leadership had come into existence in the Bengal villages, poor peasants and agricultural labourers, and therefore, also Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, had come very much to the forefront, mainly on account of the composition of the CPI (M) panels. On the other hand, he defined that, panchayat leaders under the panel of INC, were remained in the hands of bigger landowners. From his study, he concluded that a new type of leadership had emerged, not only in terms of political party affiliation, but also in terms of class and caste. He emphasized upon the absence of women leaders in panchayat level. According to him, unlike the SC/ST population and landless and near landless occupational groups, women had not increased their presence in panchayat raj.²⁶

In 1992, Neil Webster concluded from his study on the background of panchayat leaders in West Bengal that most of leaders belonged to the poorer sections and the Scheduled Caste of the society. And he mentioned specially that the existence of women class in the local bodies were poor.²⁷ Ross Mallick had studied from a survey in 1993, that the old pro-congress elite was now replaced by a new elite class. Which was less wealthy than old set but better placed than majority of the rural masses.²⁸

In a discussion of evolution of leadership pattern in West Bengal, we could mention the observation which was made by Swapan Kumar Pramanick and Prabhat Datta in 1994. According to them, the panchayat leaders belonged to poor peasants and low income group people.²⁹ Another study which was conducted by the State Institute of Panchayat and Rural Development (SIPRD) in 1997, gave us an idea about the pattern of rural leadership in the district of Jalpaiguri of West Bengal. The study mentioned about the dominance of younger people in all tiers of panchayat irrespective of their caste. In the lowest level, occupationally it was found that 4.86% of the gram panchayat members were agricultural labourers, 2.55 % were bargadars and 42.86% were cultivators. The study further mentioned that the presence of rural artisans, fishermen and persons engaged in animal husbandry was very much insignificant. Teachers constituted 8.91% of members. In the block level agricultural labours constituted 1.46% of the Panchayat Samiti members with 1.75% bargadars and 30.99% cultivators. 17.25% of the members were school teachers. In the district level, it was found that 15.38% were in other business and 19.23% of them were cultivators. In respect of the party affiliation, the study had confirmed that 56.7% members in Gram Panchayat were from CPI (M) and 28.745 members were from Indian National Congress.³⁰

Regarding the participation of rural women leaders in West Bengal Joshi and Narwani have mentioned in their writings that in 1993 panchayat elections, a total of 24,799 women candidates were elected at the different tiers in Panchayat Raj. Women chairpersons were in 8 districts, 91 blocks and 191 village

panchayats.³¹ When the 73rd Constitutional Amendment came into force in West Bengal with the other states of India, the most positive result had been women's participation in a big way in the democratic institutions at the district, block and village levels. A large number of women were performing leadership roles.

The nature of leadership in West Bengal could be understood through the writings of Sonali Chakravarti Banerjee in 2002. In her Book entitled as 'Social Background of Panchayat Leaders in West Bengal', defined that the small and marginal farmers constituted the dominant group among the cultivator- leaders of panchayat bodies and this was certainly an indication of the empowerment of lower strata.³² In another study conducted by Moitree Bhattacharya in 2002, highlighted that the parties exercised all possible influence over the Gram Panchayat members in order to keep under their control. It was not possible on the part of the elected representatives to take decisions independently. The elected members were guided by decisions taken by the party leadership.³³

It is essential to mention that left regime in West Bengal does not allow the panchayats to act autonomously. It is clear from the decision of CPIM State Committee that the final decision at each level of panchayat system will be taken by the particular committee of party.³⁴ So, the elected members of panchayats are truly dependent of party. Harihar Bhattacharya has tried to show from a field study that the elected members of panchayats are only in name they do not do anything at all. He mentions that this type of democracy is "guided democracy", not a "dialogic democracy". And it is for the principle of democratic centralism of Marxist philosophy. Proper democratic leadership can be achieved through "dialogic democracy". Hebermas calls this process of "open uncoerced discussion" to arrive at an agreement.³⁵

The elected members are guided by the CPI (M) party leadership hampers the work of elected members. The roles of elected members are curtailed. It is impossible on the part of elected panchayat members to avoid the decisions of party leaders.³⁶

Later on, through a case study on caste, class and parties in a village of Burdwan district of West Bengal, Sukanta Bhattacharya concluded that the numerical strength of the lower castes and lower classes had been established at level of panchayat. However, the leadership remained in the hands of the middle peasantry.³⁷

Girish Kumar, in his book entitled "Local Democracy in India", has tried to show that large numbers of young people dominate the panchayat system. Very few old people dominate the panchayats. He also highlighted that in West Bengal elected women members found themselves a hapless lot. Some members were poor and illiterate and belonged to the SC/ST categories. They were at pains to admit that their responsibilities were handled by the party members or their male colleagues. One member had received university education, belonged to a well-to-do family and sounded articulate too. But her father, a former of GP, played her role by proxy.³⁸ Due to perpetual tutelage in our Indian society, women leaderships do not play their actual role.

From the various studies, we came to know that the leaderships in the rural government are still remaining in the hands of middle and upper caste of the society. Though, women and lower caste holders are elected to panchayats due to reservation, but their influences in panchayats are so little.

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Chapter- IV

Changing Pattern of Rural Leadership in Murshidabad District

For authentic and meaningful discussion of leadership we can not ignore the geography, demography, history and culture of any area. The pattern of rural leadership of any district is greatly influenced by the socio-economic and political profile. There is close relationship with the leadership and environment of any district. Unless the spatial setting of any district is properly understood, we can not analyze the leadership pattern of rural government i.e., panchayat of any district. In the context of the present research work, it is necessary to know the profile of Murshidabad and Cooch Behar districts.

Murshidabad District Profile:

Geographical location: Presently Murshidabad district is situated in South Bengal, i.e., lies on the north side of Gangetic West Bengal. The district lies between $23^{\circ} 43' 30''$ and $24^{\circ} 50' 20''$ north latitude and $87^{\circ} 49' 17''$ and $88^{\circ} 46'$ east longitude.¹ The boundary of the district is demarcated by Santal Pargana of Jharkhand state and Birbhum district. There are Ganga and Padma rivers on the side of north and north east of this district; on the east side Rajshahi district of Bangladesh, on the south side, Nadia and Burdwan district and Jalangi River is on the side of south - east.

Area, Population & Literacy: The area of the district is 5324 square kilometers and it contains 58,63,717 population as per census report of 2001. Out of this 30,04,385 (51.23%) male and 28,59,332 (48.76%). According to census report 1991 Muslim population was 61.40% and Hindu population was 38.39% in Murshidabad district. In Lalgola Block 75.04% of total population was Muslim. According to census report 2001, the population of Lalgola Block was 2, 67,641, out of this 1, 36,801 male and 1, 30,840 female. The number of SC persons was 26,788.² In terms of literacy, the rank of Murshidabad district in West Bengal is 16 as per 2001 census report. According to census report 2001, 55% of the district

population was literate and the rate of literacy of Lalgola block was 40.61% when the state literacy rate was 68.2 %.³

History of Murshidabad:

The district is named from the name of Murshidabad town. The name Murshidabad originated from Moksudabad. Though Tiffen Theller believed this town was named as Akbarabad because it was established during the regime of Akbar. According to Raymond the ancient name of the town was Moorsudabad. The name Moksudabad was renamed as Murshidabad by Murshidkuli Khan when he was appointed as Nazim of Bangla, Bihar and Orissa in 1703.⁴

In the year 1704, Murshidkuli Khan shifted the Dewani department from Dhaka to Murshidabad. And he established independent Nawabi in Bengal. From Murshidkuli Khan to Alibardi Khan the economic condition of Bengal suba augmented. But it weakened during the regime of Siraj-ud-doulla. In 1757, Siraj was defeated by East India Company led by Robert Clive in Plassey battle field. And the Nawabi rule ended with the transfer of administrative office from Murshidabad to Calcutta in 1769.⁵

Weather:

The nature of weather of Murshidabad district is excessively hot in summer and humidity in weather remains all over year. During monsoon, rain fall in district is equally distributed. The climate of the district may be classified into four seasons. They are: Summer from March to May, South-West monsoon from June to September, post- monsoon from October to first half of November and cold season covering from the middle of November to February.

Land reforms:

The post independent Murshidabad district took step, under the land reforms act, for abolishing zamindari class and other subordinate classes which were created during the British period. According to West Bengal Zamindari Acquisition Act 1953, all small and big zamindaris and all intermediaries classes

were abolished from 1954. With the initiative of land reforms administration and panchayats in Murshidabad district the following vested land was distributed as follows up to 15.04.2000.⁶

Distributed land and Patta holders:

Distributed land:

1. Agricultural land—35127 acres
2. Non-agricultural land-5808 acres and 4 decimals
- Others land—708 acres and 66 decimals

Account of Patta holders in Murshidabad district

1. ST (7445)	2392 acres and 17 decimals
2. SC (28466)	8392 acres and 37 decimals
3. Others (105545)	30515 acres and 52 decimals
4. Male (119146)	37307.875 acres
5. Female (6680)	1225.165 acres
6. Husband and Wife collectively (15630)	3112.02 acres

Number of recorded Bargadars (sharecroppers) and quantity of land up to 1999.⁷

After Land Reforms operation amendment:	23961(persons) – 20382.76 acres.
After Operation Barga:	57568(persons) – 20382.76 acres.
Recorded Bargadar:	84802(persons) – 66249.25 acres.

Nature of land:

The Bhagirathi River has divided Murshidabad district into two parts .On the west side is 'Rarh' and on the east side is 'Bagdi'. The west part land is comparatively ancient, high, uneven and full of ditches and east part is plane and fertile. The soil of this district is conducive for multi-corps.⁸

Administrative units:

There are five sub-divisions in Murshidabad district, i.e. Jangipur, Lalbagh, Sadar (Berhampore), Kandi and Domkal. There are 26 blocks, i.e. Farakka, Shamsarganj, Suti-1, Suti-2, Raghunathganj-1, Raghunathganj-2, Sagardighi, Lalgola, Bhagwangola-1, Bhagwangola-2, Raninagar-1, Raninagar-2 Murshidabad-Jiaganj, Nabagram, Khargram, Barayan, Kandi, Bharat Pur-1, Bharat Pur-2, Beldanga-1, Beldanga-2, Nowda, HariharPara, Berhampore, Domkal & Jalangi. And the 26 Police Stations are: Shamsarganj, Raghunathganj, Suti, Sagardighi, Farakka, Bhagwangola, Ranitala, Nabagram, Lalgola, Murshidabad, Jiaganj, Berhampore, Doulatabad, Beldanga, Hariharpara, Rejinagar, Nowda, Kandi, Khargram, Barayan, Bharatpur, Salar, Raninagar, Islampur, Domkal, Jalangi. Under Murshidabad Zilla Parishad, there are 26 Panchayat Samitis and 254 Gram Panchayats.

Local Self-Government in Murshidabad district:

According to Bengal Local Self-Government Act 1885, district board and local boards were established on 1st Oct, 1885. The District Board consisted of 21 members, of whom six were ex-officio members, five were appointed by Government and ten were elected. The District Magistrate was the chairman of the Board.⁹ The first meeting of district board was held on 27 Dec, 1886 in district magistrate's office. In this meeting Finance Committee was constituted. And the local boards were constituted as: i) Sadar- Sujaganj, Nowda and Doulatabad police stations. ii) Kandi-Kandi, Gokarna, Bharat Pur, Khargram police stations. iii) Lalbagh- Sahanagar, Manulla Bazar, Asan Pur, Kalyanganj, Bhagwangola and Sagardighi police stations. iv) Jangipur- Samsarganj, Dewansari, Mirja Pur and Raghunath ganj police stations.

The members of the Local Boards were partly elected and nominated. First meetings of Local Boards were held on 30 Sept, 1886 in the District Magistrate's office. In these meetings Sabhapatis and Saha-Sabhapatis were elected. The members of the local boards elected the members of district board. Besides, Union Committees were constituted. In 1909, Dhuliyon Union Committee was

converted into municipality. In late 1922, Union Boards were established in Murshidabad according to Bengal Rural Self- Government Act 1919. In 1928-29, 160 Union Boards were established in Murshidabad district. In the 1944, we find that there were 34 Union Boards in Jangipur sub- division, 37 Union Boards in Kandi Sub-division, 50 Union Boards in Sadar and 37 Union Boards in Lalbagh.¹⁰

Under the Act of West Bengal Panchayat, 1957 and West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act, 1963, we find that there were in 1968-1969, 225 Anchal Panchayats and 1481 Gram Panchayats in Murshidabad district. There were 26 Anchalik Parishads and the number of members was 666. There were 54 female members out of 666. According to West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act 1963, the old District Board was abolished and new Zilla Parishad took that place.¹¹ Later on, according to West Bengal Panchayat Act 1973, three-tier panchayat system established in Murshidabad district. But this new three-tier system was properly implemented from 1978, when the Left front government came in power.

Changing Pattern of Rural Leadership in Murshidabad District on the Basis of Different Variables:

The objective of the present research work is to find the changing pattern of rural leadership from 1978 to 2003 in a Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad district. In this respect, a study has been done in Manikchak Gram Panchayat of Lalgola Block in Murshidabad district. It is worth to mention that Manikchak gram panchayat has been declared by the Ministry of Panchayat and Rural Development, Government of India, as **NIRMAL GRAM** on the basis of sanitation and cleanliness in 2006-2007. This Gram Panchayat situated on Indo-Bangladesh border area. It is constituted with the following mouzas i.e. i) Durbar Para (partly), ii) Krishnupurdinurpara (partly), iii) Diar Manikchak & iv) Brahamattar. As per the census report of 2001, the population of the panchayat is 13473 and out of this 6586 male, 6887 female. The number of SC/ST persons is 2,718, out of this 1149 male and 1569 female. This Gram panchayat is Muslim dominated area.

However, for the study of changing pattern of rural leadership it has been chosen the contesting candidates of the said Gram Panchayat from 1978-2003 panchayat election. The study has tried to know the socio-economic and political background of panchayat leaders of six panchayat elections. From a comparison between different year of contesting candidates of panchayat elections, it could be analyzed the changing pattern of rural leadership. From the field study, it has come to know the background of contesting candidates and their views about leadership. The study has been conducted on the basis of some variables like age, sex, caste, religion, education, occupation, land holding, income etc. In this respect V.M.Sirsikar had studied leadership pattern on the basis of age composition, caste background educational achievements, and occupational status and income and land holding in Maharashtra.¹² Later, Iqbal Narain had given importance on the same variables like age, caste, education and economic position in a study of leaders in Rajasthan.¹³ Bhargava also studied the leader in Rajasthan on the basis of key variables like age, caste, education, occupation, economic status, religion and sex identity.¹⁴

Age:

Age is an important characteristic of human beings. It does not only refer to physical and physical maturity of man but also serves as an indication of his experience, knowledge and worldly wisdom. In traditional social structures like that of rural India, it is also considered an important factor in status and prestige. Age is quite significant to a leader for whom both experience and maturity are essential in role performance.¹⁵ Particularly in rural societies it is once the privileges of the older people to occupy the various key positions in the villages. If we focus on the history of local self-government of India, we find that in the ancient period, rural people were governed by the elder leaders.

Presently at every turn there is cry for young and better leadership. It is for energetic progressive leadership. So, age is one of the determining factors in the emergence of leadership. On the basis of age we can examine the changing pattern of rural leadership through a comparison between various years.

Sex:

Nowadays we speak for the empowerment of women. Specially in traditional patriarchal society women are dominated by men. Women have small space to play in public sphere as well as in politics. So, the attitude of patriarchal society cannot help to empower the women. For the empowerment of women it needs equal role of women in politics like men.

In modern societies, male supremacy has been challenged. In modern India, women came to public first through the freedom movement and through the chances offered by universal franchise and other modernizing socio-economic forces. In the process, India has received a few nationally important women leaders.¹⁶ In the grass roots level, an arrangement has made for women to participate in local politics, through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. This Amendment Act makes an avenue for the women to participate in local government more than 33.33%. And it has changed the pattern of rural leadership.

Table: 1

YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF AGE & SEX IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT										
YEAR	AGE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL (AGE WISE)	%	GRAND TOTAL (YEAR WISE)		
								MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL (M+F)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1978	UP TO 30YR	7	23.33	0	0	7	23.33	30	0	30
	31 TO 45 YR	3	10.00	0	0	3	10.00			
	46 TO 60 YR	18	60.00	0	0	18	60.00			
	61 YR & ABO	2	6.67	0	0	2	6.67			
1983	UP TO 30YR	8	27.59	0	0.00	8	26.67	29	1	30
	31 TO 45 YR	17	58.62	1	100.00	18	60.00			
	46 TO 60 YR	3	10.34	0	0.00	3	10.00			
	61 YR & ABO	1	3.45	0	0.00	1	3.33			
1988	UP TO 30YR	5	16.13	0	0	5	16.13	31	0	31
	31 TO 45 YR	15	48.39	0	0	15	48.39			
	46 TO 60 YR	10	32.26	0	0	10	32.26			
	61 YR & ABO	1	3.23	0	0	1	3.23			
1993	UP TO 30YR	9	24.32	9	69.23	18	36.00	37	13	50
	31 TO 45 YR	15	40.54	3	23.08	18	36.00			
	46 TO 60 YR	13	35.14	1	7.69	14	28.00			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			

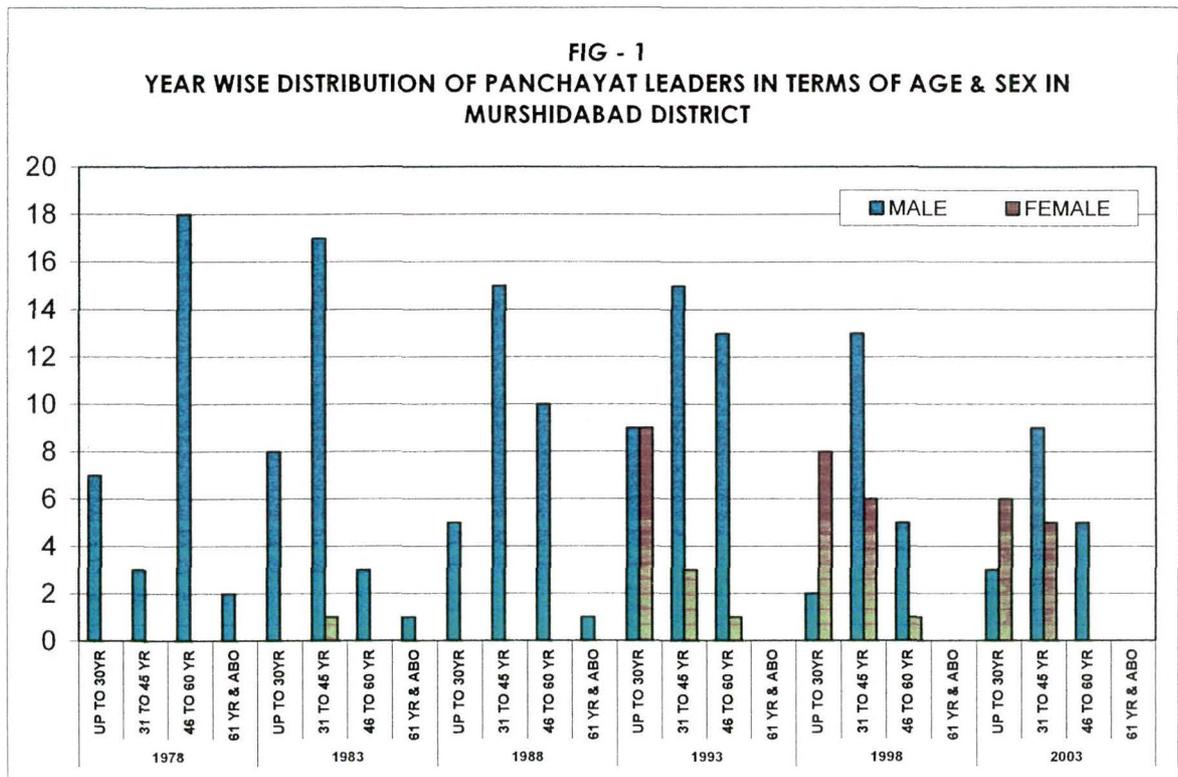
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1998	UP TO 30YR	2	10.00	8	53.33	10	28.57	20	15	35
	31 TO 45 YR	13	65.00	6	40.00	19	54.29			
	46 TO 60 YR	5	25.00	1	6.67	6	17.14			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
2003	UP TO 30YR	3	17.65	6	54.55	9	32.14	17	11	28
	31 TO 45 YR	9	52.94	5	45.45	14	50.00			
	46 TO 60 YR	5	29.41	0	0.00	5	17.86			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
COL.4 = (COL.3 / COL.9)x100; COL.6 = (COL.5 / COL.10)x100; COL.8 = (COL.7 / COL.11)x100										

Table -1 shows the year wise distribution of Gram Panchayat leaders in terms of age and sex in Murshidabad district. It is reflected that in 1978 panchayat election, there was no female leader contesting in Gram Panchayat election. And 60% male leaders were of the age group of 46-60yrs. So, the leadership was concentrated in the hands of 46-60yrs. age group people. In 1983 panchayat election only one female leader out of 30 leaders contested the election. And the leadership concentrated to the age group of 31-45yrs. In 1988, there was no female leader contesting in election and the leadership concentrated in the age group of 31-45 yrs. In 1993 for the reservation of 33% female seats, it is found that 13 female leaders out 50 leaders contested the panchayat election; male leadership concentrated in the 31-45 yrs age group and female leadership concentrated in up to 30 yrs age group. In 1998, 15 female leaders out of 35 leaders contested in the panchayat election. Female leaders concentrated in up to 30 yrs age group; male leaders concentrated in 31-45 yrs age group. In 2003, panchayat election, 11 female leaders out of 28 leaders contested the panchayat election. Female leaders concentrated in up to 30 yrs. age group and male leaders concentrated in 31 – 45 yrs. age group. From 1978 to 2003 panchayat election, it is found that except the panchayat election in 1978, most of the panchayat leaders concentrated in the age group of 31-45 yrs. And the participation of female leaders in panchayat election actually started from 1993, which indicated that female leaders did not participate in panchayat election spontaneously before 1993.

On the basis of age group it could be defined that no aged person contested the election after 1988 election. And the dominance of younger

leadership came into existence after 1988. It is worth to mention that the most of the female leaders belonged to the age group of up to 30 yrs.



Caste:

Caste is an important determinant of rural power structure. The Indian social system is dominated by castes and their specific status. Caste prescribes one's status and a person knows from his birth his position in the social ranking system. In traditional rural societies, leadership has been a monopoly of the high caste Hindus and the big landlords.

With the arrival of British in India the caste system has been changing radically. And after independence, the modern competitive politics in parliamentary democracy has changed the character of caste system in different way. In today's politics of scarcity castes are emerging as interest groups with competing claims on the state for special privileges in the form of reservation in educational institutions, jobs and legislative bodies. The present functioning of Indian caste system is, therefore, a result of both continuity and change. While

taboo on inter- community marriages and untouchability in some forms continue to prevail in some areas, the distribution of power among the different castes keep on changing.¹⁷

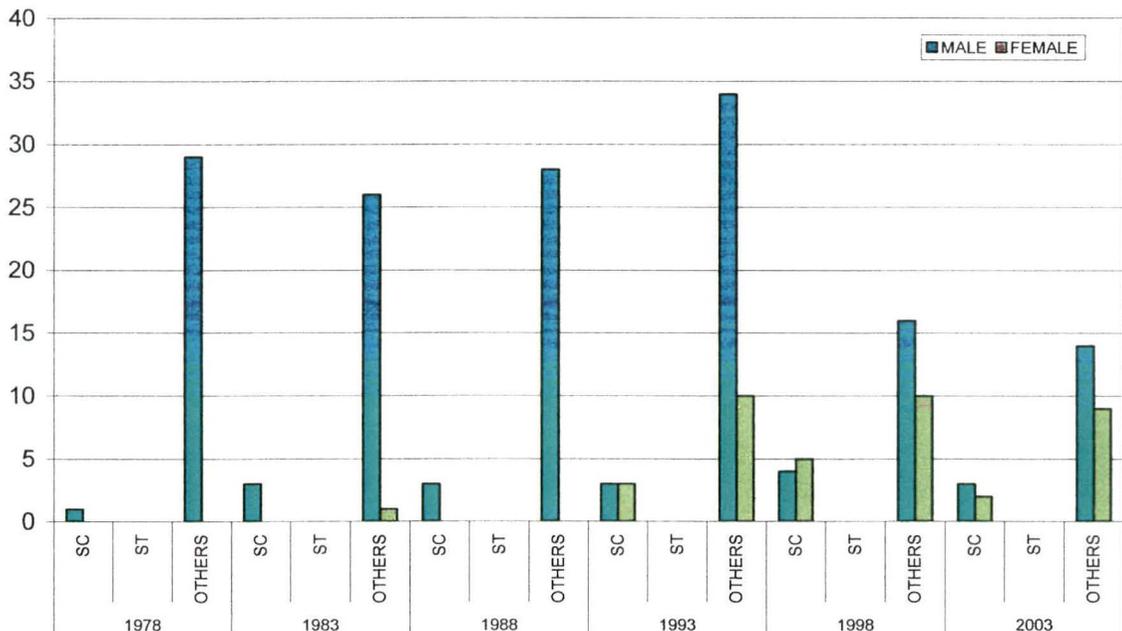
With the introduction of panchayat raj in West Bengal and provision for reservation of Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe according to their proportion of population, the scope to come in rural government has been increased. At present, upper caste holders come to an elected member of GP/a Pradhan who is a lower caste holder. So, the present panchayat system has changed the pattern of rural leadership. In this connection we can define through a chart the year wise distribution of leaders in terms of caste.

Table: 2

YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF CASTE & SEX IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT										
YEAR	CASTE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	SUB-TOTAL	%	GRAND TOTAL		
								MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11
1978	SC	1	3.33	0	0	1	3.33	30	0	30
	ST	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	29	96.67	0	0	29	96.67			
1983	SC	3	10.34	0	0.00	3	10.00	29	1	30
	ST	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	26	89.66	1	100.00	27	90.00			
1988	SC	3	9.68	0	0	3	9.68	31	0	31
	ST	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	28	90.32	0	0	28	90.32			
1993	SC	3	8.11	3	23.08	6	12.00	37	13	50
	ST	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	34	91.89	10	76.92	44	88.00			
1998	SC	4	20.00	5	33.33	9	25.71	20	15	35
	ST	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	16	80.00	10	66.67	26	74.29			
2003	SC	3	17.65	2	18.18	5	17.86	17	11	28
	ST	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	14	82.35	9	81.82	23	82.14			
C4 = (C3/C9)*100; C6 = (C5/C10)*100; C7 = C3 + C5; C8 = (C7/C11)*100										

Table - 2 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of caste and sex in Murshidabad district. It is reflected from the table that from 1978 to 1993 panchayat election 88% to 96.66% leaders came from general caste though slight change occurred in 1998 panchayat election; in this year 74.29% panchayat leaders were from general caste. However, it is clear from the table that the leadership from SC/ST increased at present more than before.

FIG - 2
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF CASTE
&SEX IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



Religion:

The study of religious-communal composition of leadership is essential where the multi- communal plural society exists. Study of the year wise of distribution of rural leaders in terms religion is important in the context of society that has experienced the divisive results of communal cleavages. The partitions of Bengal in 1947 on communal lines and the killings and riots that preceded and followed the partition have left their indelible mark on the Bengali mind. It is

important to verify whether the memories of communal riot have any impact on the formation of leadership.¹⁸

Besides, if we look upon the present Indian politics, we find that the communalization of politics dominated the election system. In West Bengal, we also find communal card plays important role in electing the candidate in assembly election. Panchayat election is not free from communal politics. Where the Muslim population is vast in numbers, Muslim candidate contests the election from more or less all parties. So, in the study of changing pattern of rural leadership the variable like religion cannot be ignored.

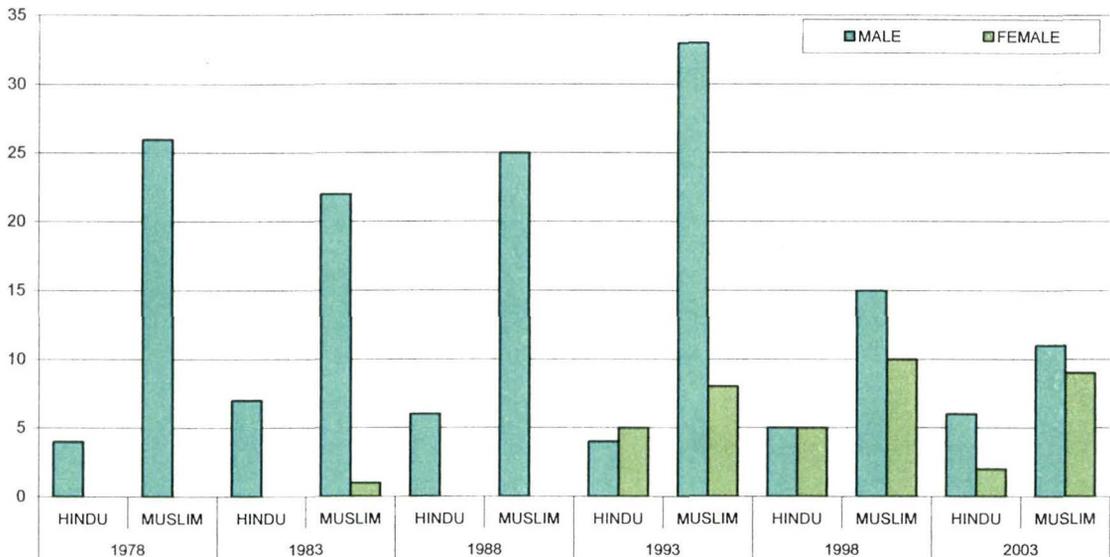
TABLE: 3

YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF RELIGION & SEX IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT										
YEAR	RELIGION	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	SUB-TOTAL	%	GRAND TOTAL		
								MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1978	HINDU	4	13.33	0	0.00	4	13.33	30	0	30
	MUSLIM	26	86.67	0	0.00	26	86.67			
1983	HINDU	7	24.14	0	0.00	7	23.33	29	1	30
	MUSLIM	22	75.86	1	100.00	23	76.67			
1988	HINDU	6	19.35	0	0.00	6	19.35	31	0	31
	MUSLIM	25	80.65	0	0.00	25	80.65			
1993	HINDU	4	10.81	5	38.46	9	18.00	37	13	50
	MUSLIM	33	89.19	8	61.53	41	82.00			
1998	HINDU	5	25.00	5	33.33	10	28.57	20	15	35
	MUSLIM	15	75.00	10	66.66	25	71.43			
2003	HINDU	6	35.29	2	18.18	8	28.57	17	11	28
	MUSLIM	11	64.71	9	81.81	20	71.43			
C4 = (C3/C9)*100; C6 = (C5/C10)*100; C7 = C3 + C5; C8 = (C7/C11)*100										

Table – 3 shows the year wise distribution of Gram Panchayat leaders in terms of religion and sex in Murshidabad district. It is reflected from the table -3 that due to Muslim dominated area, the leadership concentrated in the hands of Muslim.

From 1978 to 2003, it is found that the number of Hindu leaders was increasing from 1998 panchayat election. It is notable that prior to 1993 panchayat election, the solitary female candidate who contested in the 1983 panchayat election was from Muslim religion.

FIG - 3
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF RELIGION & SEX IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



Education:

In a democratic polity education plays an important role in shaping the leadership pattern as democracy is not the battle of bullets but ballots. Education plays vital role for the formation of sound public opinion.¹⁹ Education is another very important indicator of the quality of leadership. Although knowledge is not only the outcome of educational qualification, yet it is a significant carrier of knowledge. Due to educational qualification someone gets respect from society and becomes self-confident. In this sense, education proves an important factor in developing leadership quality.²⁰ An educated rural leader can easily understand and appreciate the legal-bureaucratic aspect of local government.

In the earlier days educationally sound persons who had elitist character ruled the local people. At present, we find that even illiterate, literate, primary school educated persons are becoming part of panchayat system. It has become possible due to adult suffrage system as well as mass participation in the local government. Where the literacy rate in West Bengal is 68.2% as per census report of 2001, the question of educated leadership does not ignore the literacy rate. Still now, we find the educational qualification of rural leader is in minimum level. From the field study of two gram panchayats of two districts can be analyzed the year wise distribution of rural leader in terms of education.

YEAR	AGE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	SUB-TOATL	%	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL (M+F)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
1978	ILLITERATE	1	3.33	0	0.00	1	3.33	30	0	30
	LITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	PRIMARY	15	50.00	0	0.00	15	50.00			
	SECONDARY	9	30.00	0	0.00	9	30.00			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	2	6.67	0	0.00	2	6.67			
	GRADUATE	3	10.00	0	0.00	3	10.00			
	POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00				
1983	ILLITERATE	2	6.90	0	0.00	2	6.67	29	1	30
	LITERATE	2	6.90	0	0.00	2	6.67			
	PRIMARY	4	13.79	0	0.00	4	13.33			
	SECONDARY	9	31.03	1	100.00	10	33.33			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	10	34.48	0	0.00	10	33.33			
	GRADUATE	2	6.90	0	0.00	2	6.67			
	POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00				
1988	ILLITERATE	1	3.23	0	0	1	3.23	31	0	31
	LITERATE	5	16.13	0	0	5	16.13			
	PRIMARY	6	19.35	0	0	6	19.35			
	SECONDARY	15	48.39	0	0	15	48.39			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	3	9.68	0	0	3	9.68			
	GRADUATE	1	3.23	0	0	1	3.23			
	POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00				

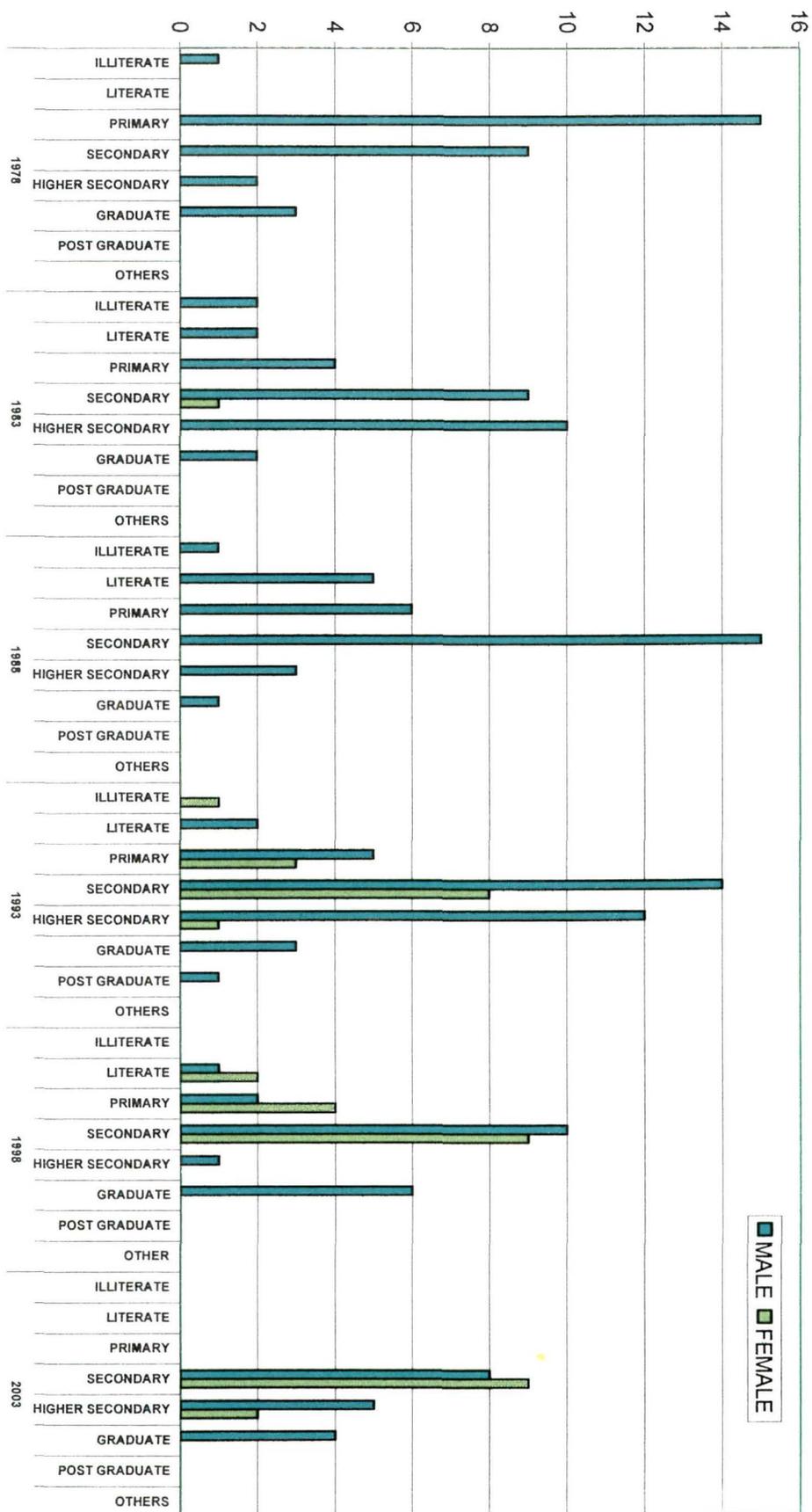
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1993	ILLITERATE	0	0.00	1	7.69	1	2.00	37	13	50
	LITERATE	2	5.41	0	0.00	2	4.00			
	PRIMARY	5	13.51	3	23.07	8	16.00			
	SECONDARY	14	37.84	8	61.53	22	44.00			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	12	32.43	1	7.69	13	26.00			
	GRADUATE	3	8.11	0	0.00	3	6.00			
	POST GRADUATE	1	2.70	0	0.00	1	2.00			
OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	20	15	35	
1998	ILLITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0				0.00
	LITERATE	1	5.00	2	13.33	3				8.57
	PRIMARY	2	10.00	4	26.66	6				17.14
	SECONDARY	10	50.00	9	60.00	19				54.28
	HIGHER SECONDARY	1	5.00	0	0.00	1				2.85
	GRADUATE	6	30.00	0	0.00	6				17.14
	POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
OTHER	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	17	11	28	
2003	ILLITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0				0.00
	LITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0				0.00
	PRIMARY	0	0.00	0	0.00	0				0.00
	SECONDARY	8	47.06	9	81.81	17				60.71
	HIGHER SECONDARY	5	29.41	2	18.18	7				25.00
	GRADUATE	4	23.53	0	0.00	4				14.28
	POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00				

Table – 4 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of education and sex in Murshidabad district. In the 1978 panchayat election educational qualification of 50% panchayat leaders was up to primary level. Only 10% graduate leaders contested in the panchayat election. In 1983 panchayat election, 34.48% leaders had education of higher secondary level. In this year only one female leader contested in election who had education of secondary level.

From 1978 to 1988 illiterate leaders also contested the election; but from 1993 to 2003 no illiterate leader contested the election except one female illiterate leader in 1993 panchayat election. Besides, it is found from the table – 4 that from 1978 to 2003, only in 1993 a post- graduate leader participated as a candidate in the gram panchayat election. And maximum number of graduate leaders contested in 1998 panchayat election. There was no female graduate leader from 1978 to 2003; all were male leaders.

FIG - 4
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF EDUCATION IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



Occupation:

Occupation is another factor for determining rural leadership structure. Persons of only those occupations can afford to be leader who get leisure time and can also stay in the village. Only traditional occupation holders like cultivators, labourers, artisans etc. get opportunity to stay in the village. Naturally most panchayat leaders come from the above profession. But in ancient period even in British India most of the rural leaders came from money lenders and big land owners. Besides, in the present panchayat system we find primary and secondary teachers took part in rural government.

Through occupational background we can indicate the class background of the persons concerned. A study of the occupational background of the rural leaders is the studies of class of rural leaders.²¹ Through the study of occupational background of rural leaders we can analyze that what classes rule the local people. And from the year wise distribution of rural leaders in terms of occupation, it can be defined about the changing occupational background of the rural leaders.

YEAR	OCCUPATION	NO	%	TOTAL
1978	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	30
	Cultivator	19	63.33	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	2	6.67	
	Teacher	3	10.00	
	Other services	0	0.00	
	House wife	0	0.00	
	Bidi binder	0	0.00	
	Unemployed	6	20.00	
1983	Agricultural labour	1	3.33	30
	Cultivator	8	26.67	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	5	16.67	
	Teacher	7	23.33	
	Other services	1	3.33	
	House wife	0	0.00	
	Bidi binder	1	3.33	
	Unemployed	7	23.33	

Contd.

1988	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	31
	Cultivator	18	58.06	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	2	6.45	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	1	3.23	
	Teacher	6	19.35	
	Other services	0	0.00	
	House wife	0	0.00	
	Bidi binder	0	0.00	
	Unemployed	4	12.90	
1993	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	50
	Cultivator	12	24.00	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	2	4.00	
	Business man	3	6.00	
	Teacher	14	28.00	
	Other services	1	2.00	
	House wife	10	20.00	
	Bidi binder	0	0.00	
	Unemployed	8	16.00	
1998	Agricultural labour	1	2.86	35
	Cultivator	9	25.71	
	Rural artisan	1	2.86	
	Milk man	1	2.86	
	Quack	1	2.86	
	Business man	0	0.00	
	Teacher	3	8.57	
	Other services	4	11.43	
	House wife	11	31.43	
	Bidi binder	0	0.00	
	Unemployed	4	11.43	
2003	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	28
	Cultivator	9	32.14	
	Rural artisan	1	3.57	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	2	7.14	
	Teacher	4	14.29	
	Other services	2	7.14	
	House wife	9	32.14	
	Bidi binder	1	3.57	
	Unemployed	0	0.00	

Table – 5 shows the year wise occupational status of panchayat leaders in Murshidabad district. It is reflected from 1978 panchayat election, 63.33% leaders were cultivators, 6.66% were businessmen, 10% were teachers and 20% were unemployed persons. In 1983 the number of leadership from cultivators decreased and the leadership from teachers increased. In 1988, the number of leadership from cultivators reached the number of 1978 panchayat election; though it was less the numbers of leaders from cultivators in 1993 to 2003 than 1978 to 1988 panchayat elections. The leadership from quack was found in 1993 and 1998 panchayat election and from bidi binder in 1983 and 2003 panchayat election. In 1983 and 1998, it is found from the table only one agricultural labour contested in panchayat election for both the years. After the implementation of 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992, it was naturally found that there was the leadership of house wives. In 1993, 20% leaders were from house wives. In 1998, 31.42% leaders were from house wives and in 2003, 32.14% leaders were from house wives. Before 1993 only 1983 one house wife contested in the panchayat election. So the participation of house wives as candidates in panchayat election was possible due to the reservation of seats for woman. We did not find spontaneous participation of women leaders in panchayat election. And we did not find women leaders from other professions sans house wife; only two women leaders in 1998 and 01 in 2003, were engaged in ICDS programme, which are indicated in other services heading. From the above table it is clear that leadership from cultivators which was concentrated in 1978 panchayat election, was transferred to the other professions in the next five times panchayat elections.

**FIG-5
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT**

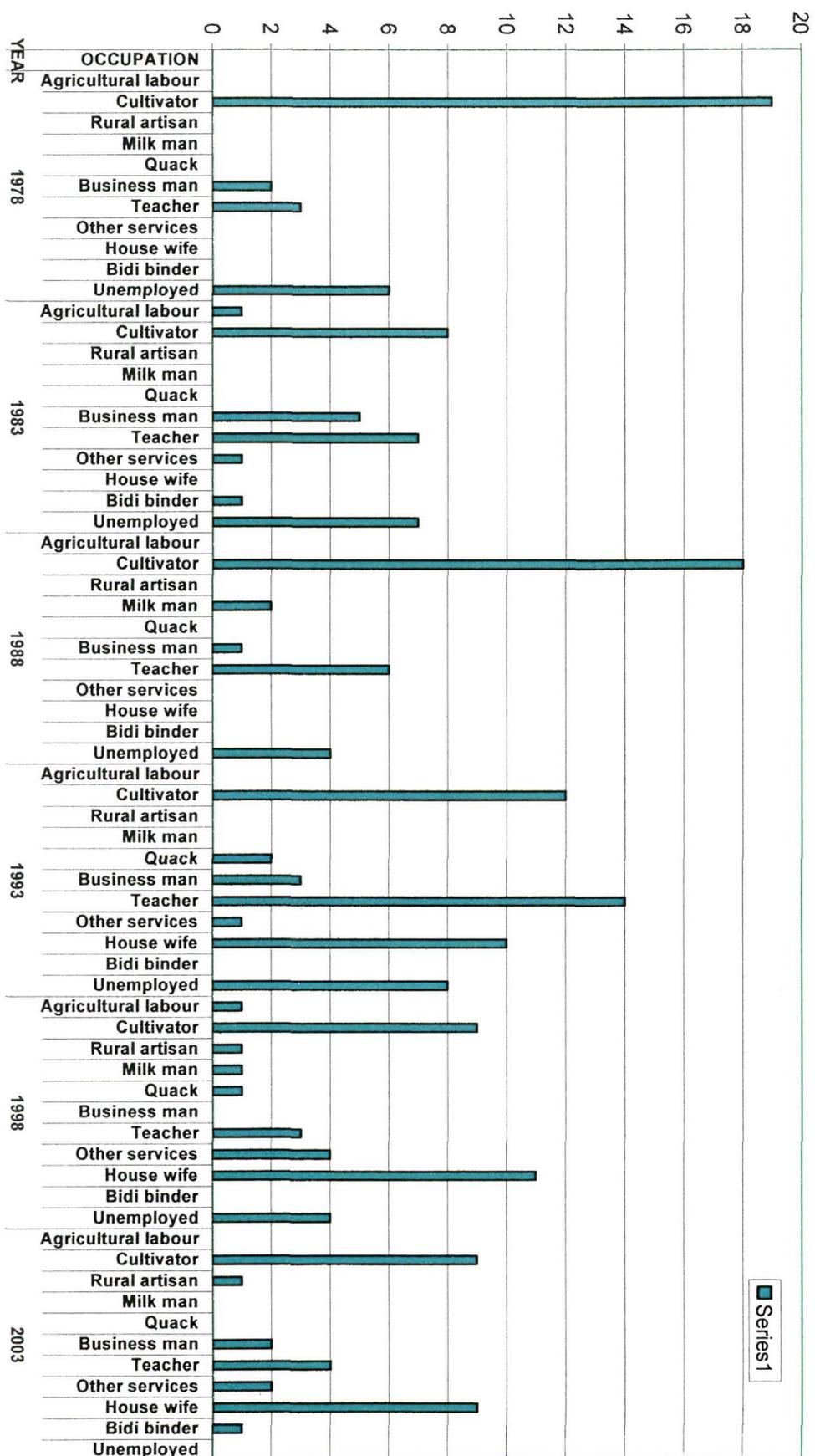


TABLE 5-A

PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

	OCCUPATIONS	1978			1983			1988			1993			1998			2003			
		NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	
INC	Agri. labour	0	0	11	0	0	10	0	0	11	0	0	12	0	0	9	0	0	10	
	Cultivator	11	100		3	30		9	81.81		3	25		5	55.55		4	40		
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	Business man	0	0		2	20		0	0		2	16.66		0	0		1	10		
	Teacher	0	0		2	20		2	18.18		1	8.33		0	0		1	10		
	Other services	0	0		1	10		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		4	33.33		3	33.33		4	40		
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
Unemployed	0	0	2	20	0	0	2	16.66	1	11.11	0	0								
CPIM	Agri. labour	0	0	11	0	0	4	0	0	6	0	0	6	0	0	4	0	0	8	
	Cultivator	5	45.45		1	25		2	33.33		2	33.33		0	0		1	12.5		
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	Business man	0	0		0	0		1	16.66		0	0		0	0		1	12.5		
	Teacher	2	18.18		1	25		1	16.66		0	0		1	25		0	0		
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		2	50		1	12.5		
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		3	50		0	0		3	37.5		
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	12.5		
	Unemployed	4	36.36		2	50		2	33.33		1	16.66		1	25		0	0		
CPI	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Cultivator	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Business man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Teacher	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Unemployed	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
FB	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Cultivator	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Business man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Teacher	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	Unemployed	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		

Contd.

RSP	Agri. labour	0	0	6	0	0	10	0	0	5	0	0	6	1	16.66	6	0	0	6			
	Cultivator	3	50		2	20		2	40		2	33.33		1	16.66		2	33.33				
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	16.66		1	16.66		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		2	20		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0
	Teacher	1	16.66		3	30		2	40		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	16.66	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	16.6	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		2	33.33		2	33.33		2	33.33	
	Bidi binder	0	0		1	10		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Unemployed	2	33.33		2	20		1	20		1	16.66		0	0		0	0		0	0	
TMC	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	0			
	Cultivator	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Teacher	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		2	40		0	0	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Unemployed	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	20		0	0	
BJP	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	3	0	0	0			
	Cultivator	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	100		0	0		0	0				
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	33.33		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		2	100		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Teacher	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	33.33		0	0	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	33.33		0	0	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Unemployed	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
OTERS	Agri. labour	0	0	2	1	16.66	6	0	0	7	0	0	25	0	0	8	0	0	4			
	Cultivator	0	0		2	33.33		5	71.42		4	16		2	25		2	50				
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0				
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0				
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	4		0	0		0	0				
	Business man	2	100		1	16.66		0	0		1	4		0	0		0	0				
	Teacher	0	0		1	16.66		1	14.28		13	52		2	25		2	50				
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	4		0	0		0	0				
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	4		3	37.5		0	0				
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0				
	Unemployed	0	0		1	16.66		1	14.28		4	16		1	12.5		0	0				

Table –5A shows the party wise distribution of panchayat leaders in 1978, 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003. It is reflected from the table that in 1978 panchayat election, all contesting candidates of INC party were cultivators; CPI (M) nominated 45.45% candidates were from cultivators; 18.18% teachers and 36.36% were unemployed persons. RSP nominated 50% candidates were from cultivators, 16.66% from teachers and 33.33% candidates from unemployed persons. Two businessmen contested in election independently. In 1983 panchayat election, INC nominated 30% cultivators, 20% businessmen, 20% unemployed persons as candidates; CPI(M) nominated 50% unemployed persons, 25% cultivators, 25% teachers and RSP nominated 30% teachers, 20% cultivators, 20% businessmen, 20% unemployed persons and 10% bidi binders. And 10% bidi binders participated in panchayat election as candidates independently. In 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003 panchayat election, INC nominated 81.81%, 25%, 55.55% and 40% cultivators as contesting candidate respectively. Respectively in those years CPI (M) nominated 33.33%, 33.33%, 0, 12.5% and 45.45% contesting candidates from cultivators; RSP nominated 40%, 33.33%, 16.66% and 33.33% contesting candidates respectively for the above mentioned years. BJP nominated only 2 milkmen as a candidate for the year of 1988. In 1993 and 1998 one cultivator and one rural artisan respectively contested in panchayat election on BJP ticket. TMC only gave their party nomination to one cultivator, one milk man, two house wives and one unemployed person in 1998 panchayat election.

However, it is found that in 1978, INC nominated 100% contesting candidates from cultivators. But they nominated from various professions in the later period of elections. CPI (M) emphasized to nominate unemployed persons i.e. young generations throughout the six consecutive panchayat elections. BJP tried to create leadership from milk man and rural artisan groups. In 1983, CPI (M) supported an independent candidate who was an agricultural labour and contested the panchayat election. And in 1998, RSP nominated an agricultural labour for contesting in panchayat election. It is alarming that in 1993 panchayat election 13 teachers contested in the panchayat election independently. From the

people of Manikchak Gram Panchayat it is known that teachers contested the election not for any public interest, they contested to be exempted from election duty.

FIG 5A Page-1/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

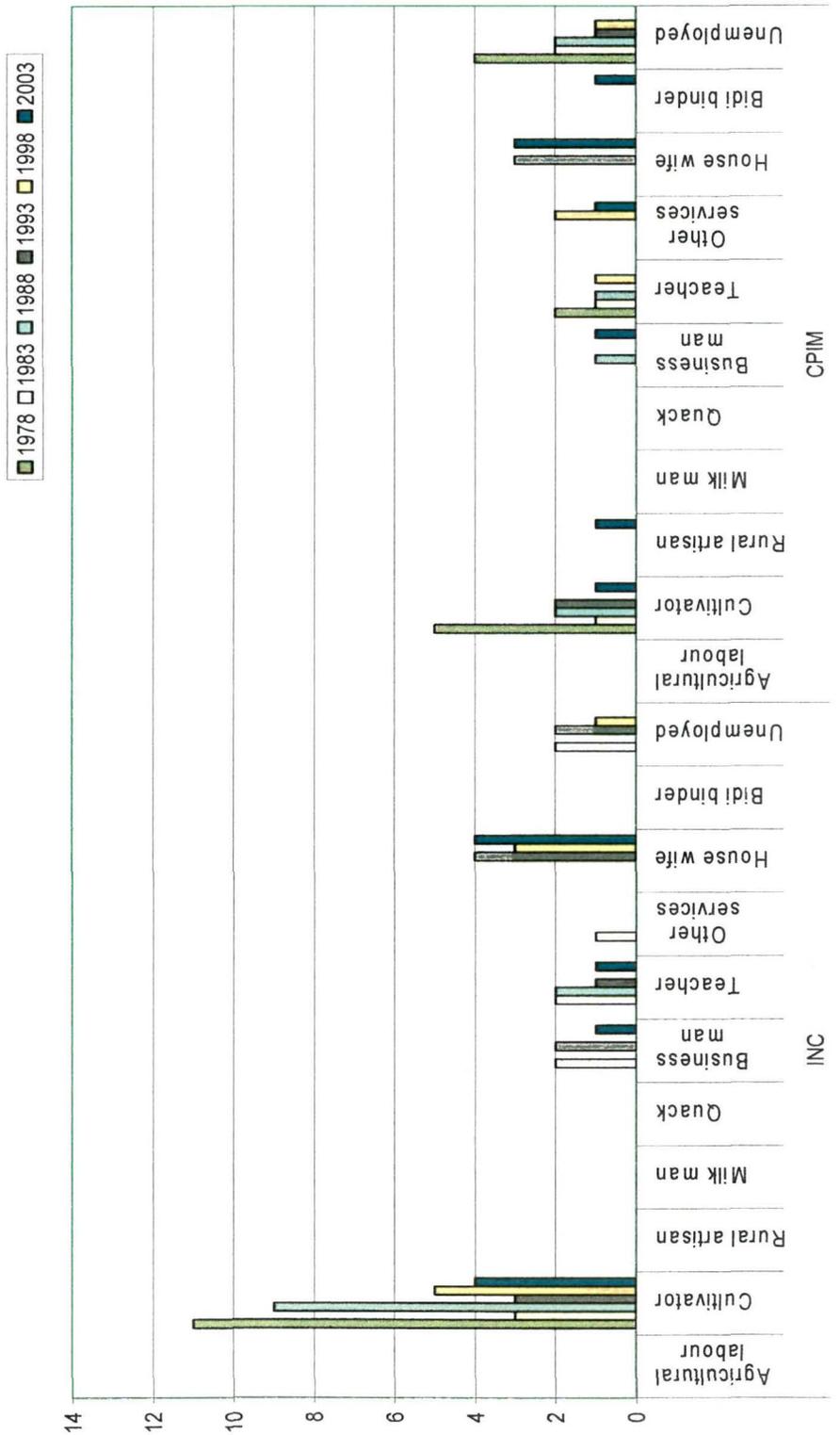


FIG 5 A Page-2/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



FIG 5 A Page-3/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

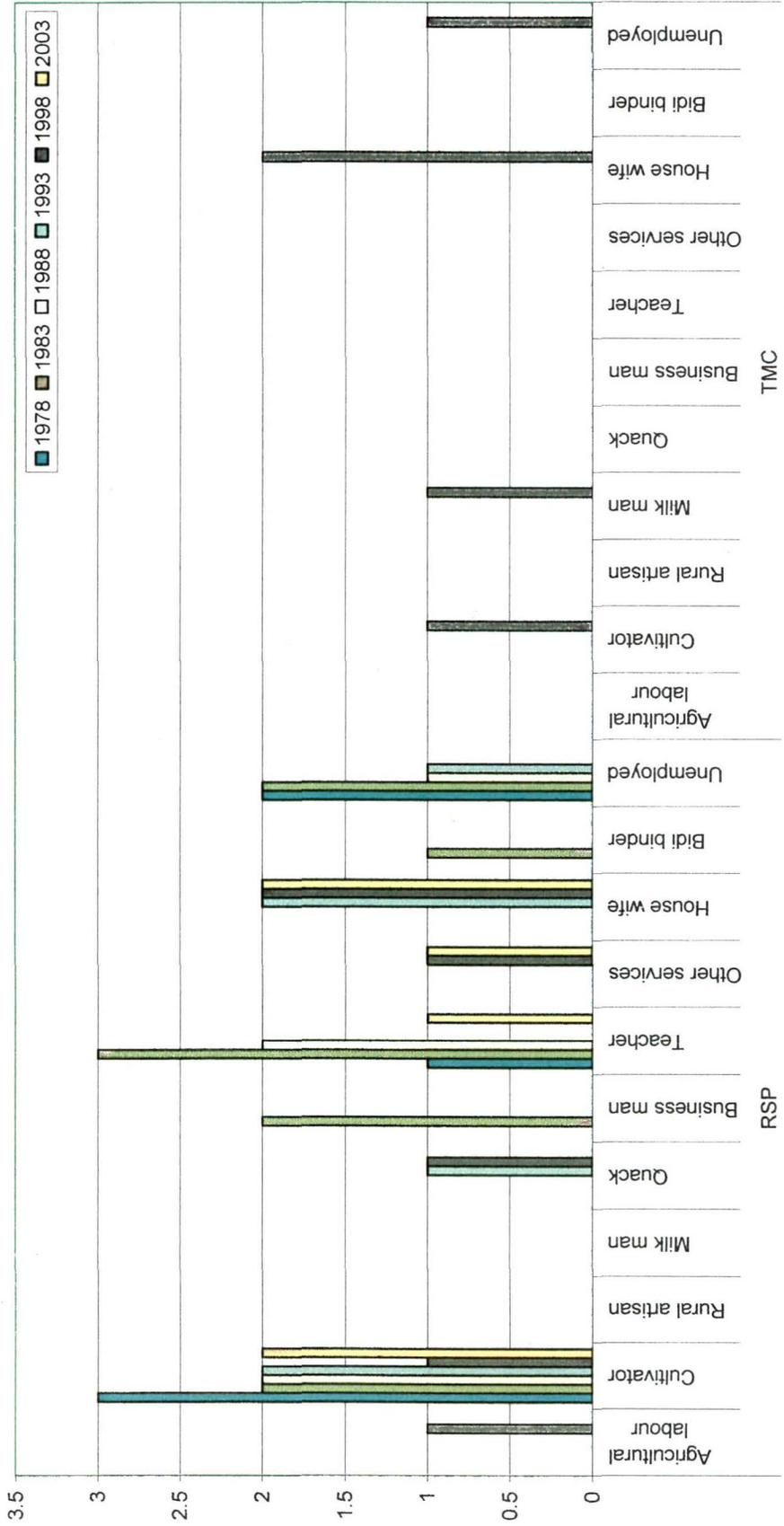
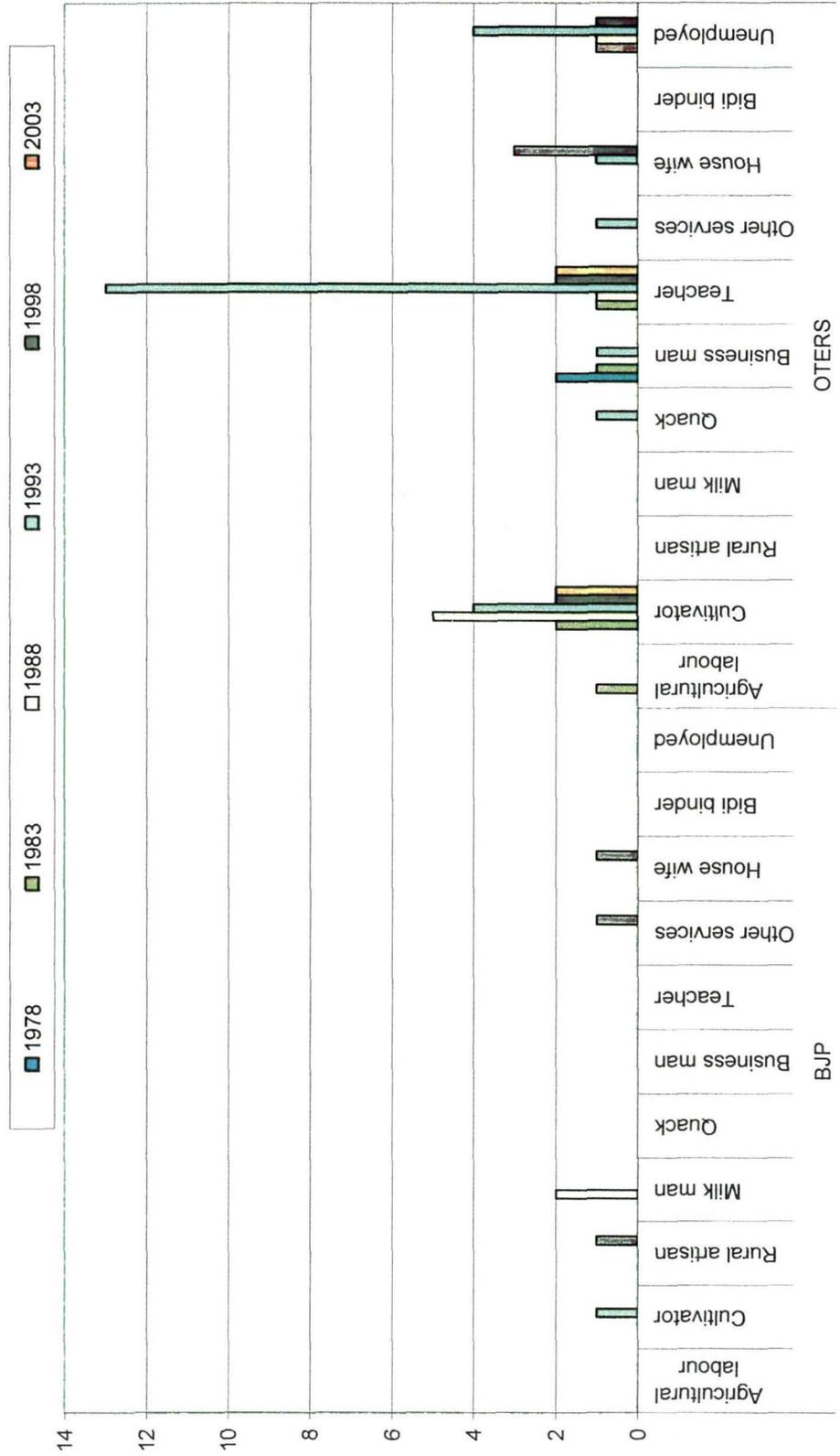


FIG 5 A Page-4/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



Land holding:

The basic foundation of agrarian social structure in India is constituted with land. Land is the most important possession which is linked with power over man. Land ownership is a crucial factor in establishing dominance. Possession of land determines the socio-economic status of an individual and subsequently on the emergence of leadership.²²

Regarding the classification of cultivators we can mention that in the most third world countries there is class of people called land lords who do not labour on land and often do not manage it, but nonetheless derive income from the land. There are some persons in rural area who only sale their labour in cultivation, called land labour. And they are landless labour. Between the two classes, we find that there are many families who have some right to the fruits of the land as owners, managers and tenants etc.²³

In the context of India Ashok Rudra recognized two well developed classes in Indian agriculture. These two classes are: the class of big land owners and the class of agricultural workers. He also mentioned third as subsistence farmers. In the class of big land owners he includes all these members of the rural society who derive a certain economic and social power from the ownership of relatively large quantities of land with the help of which they dominate the rural society. Rudra's class of agricultural workers not only agricultural labourers but also small farmers, marginal farmers etc. many of whom might be tenants.²⁴

In going to discuss about the classification of land ownership in West Bengal, it is essential to mention some land reforms acts. At first the Estate Acquisition Act, 1953 abolished the Zamindari system and the West Bengal Land Reforms Act, 1955 initiated a series of land reforms in the State. The new legislation of the early 1970's sought to enforce the ceiling on the basis of family. The distribution of the vested land among the landless and land poor families of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes was to receive top priority.²⁵

However, Sonali Chakravarti Banerjee mentioned in her writings about the classification of farmers in West Bengal into two categories: a) cultivating raiyat, i.e. one who cultivates his land either by his own labour or by the labour of the members of his families, and b) non- cultivating raiyat, i.e. one who cultivates land by engaging hired agricultural labourers. She also mentioned about the classification of Ramakrishna Mukherjee. Mr. Mukherjee in his classification of rural class structure in West Bengal mentioned: class-I which is composed of the land lords and supervisory farmers; class-II which is composed of the real cultivators and the class-III is composed of the sharecroppers and agricultural labourers etc.²⁶

The present study seeks to define the year wise leadership pattern on the basis of land holding. This will be analyzed through categorization of land holding, like landless, patta holder, share-cropper, land up to 2.5 acres, 2.51 to 5 acres, 5.01 to 10 acres.

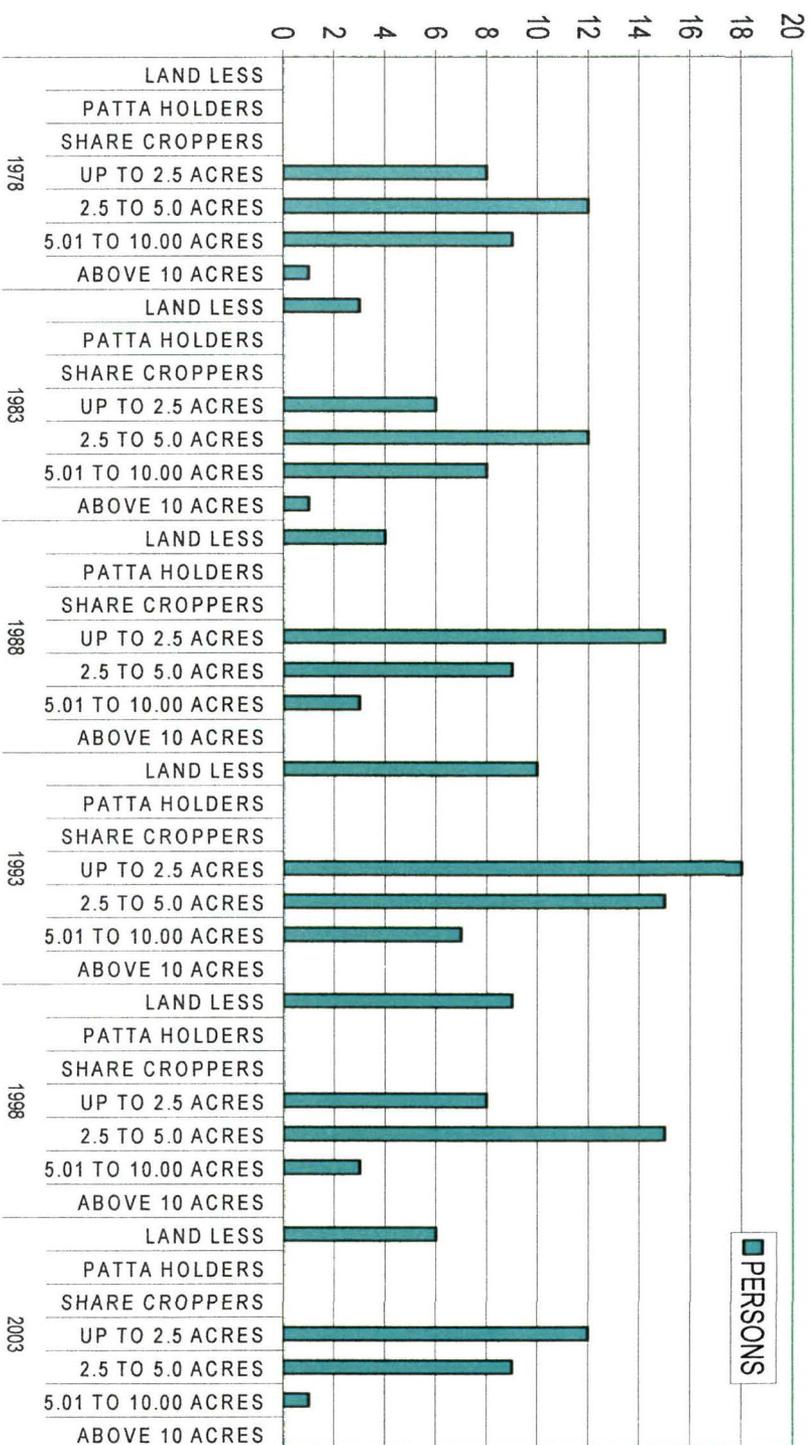
TABLE 6				
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT				
YEAR	LAND HOLDING	PERSONS	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL
1978	LAND LESS	0	0.00	30
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	8	26.67	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	12	40.00	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	9	30.00	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	1	3.33	
1983	LAND LESS	3	10.00	30
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	6	20.00	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	12	40.00	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	8	26.67	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	1	3.33	

Contd.

1988	LAND LESS	4	12.90	31
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	15	48.39	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	9	29.03	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	3	9.68	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	
1993	LAND LESS	10	20.00	50
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	18	36.00	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	15	30.00	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	7	14.00	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	
1998	LAND LESS	9	25.71	35
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	8	22.86	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	15	42.86	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	3	8.57	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	
2003	LAND LESS	6	21.43	28
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	12	42.86	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	9	32.14	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	1	3.57	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	

Table – 6 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of land holding in Murshidabad district. It is reflected from the table that in 1978 panchayat election, 40% leaders i.e. contesting candidates had land up to 2.50 acres; 30% leaders had land between 2.51 acres and 5.00 acres; only 3.33% leaders had land above 10 acres. There was no landless, patta holder and share cropper who contested the election. In 1983 like 1978, 40% leaders had land between 2.51 acres and 5.00 acres and 3.33% leaders had land above 10 acres. There was no landless, patta holder and share cropper who contested the election. In 1983, like 1978, 40% leaders had land between 2.51 acres and 5.00 acres; only 3.33% leaders had land above 10 acres. In 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003 panchayat elections 48.38%, 36.00%, 22.85% and 42.85% leaders had land up to 2.50 acres respectively; 29.03%, 30%, 42.85% and 32.14% leaders had land between 2.51 acres and 5 acres. From 1978 to 2003 panchayat election,

FIG 6
 YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND
 HOLDING IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



persons.
 30%, 26.66% 9.67%, 14%, 8.57% and 3.57% leaders had land between 5.01 and 10 acres respective for six consecutive five years – interval elections. From 1993 to 2003 panchayat election 20.00% to 25.71% panchayat leaders were landless

TABLE 6A																				
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT																				
PARTY	LAND HOLDING In Acre	1978			1983			1988			1993			1998			2003			
		NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	
INC	LAND LESS	0	0	11	0	0	10	0	0	11	2	16.6	12	1	11.11	9	3	30	10	
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		2	20		3	27.27		4	33.3		2	22.22		4	40		
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	5	45.45		4	40		5	45.45		0	0		4	44.44		2	20		
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	5	45.45		4	40		3	27.27		6	50		2	22.22		1	10		
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	1	9.09		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
CPIM	LAND LESS	0	0	11	0	0	4	1	16.66	6	2	33.3	6	0	0	4	3	37.5	8	
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	3	27.27		0	0		5	83.33		2	33.3		2	50		3	37.5		
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	5	45.45		3	75		0	0		2	33.3		2	50		2	25		
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	3	27.27		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		1	25		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
CPI	LAND LESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
FB	LAND LESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
RSP	LAND LESS	0	0	6	2	20	10	1	20	5	2	33.33	6	3	50	6	0	0	6	
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	3	50		4	40		4	80		3	50		1	16.66		3	50		
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	2	33.33		2	20		0	0		1	16.66		1	16.66		3	50		
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	1	16.66		2	20		0	0		0	0		1	16.66		0	0		
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			

Countd.

TMC	LAND LESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	40	5	0	0	0						
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		2	40	0	0	0	
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	20	0	0	0	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
BJP	LAND LESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	50	2	0	0	1	2	66.66	3	0	0	0						
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	50		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	33.33	0	0	0	0
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	100		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0
OTHERS	LAND LESS	0	0	2	1	33.33	6	1	14.28	7	4	16	25	1	12.5	8	0	0	4						
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0.00		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0.00		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	2	100		0	66.67		2	28.57		9	36		1	12.5		2	50		1	12.5	2	50	4	
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		3	33.33		4	57.14		12	48		6	75		2	50		6	75	2	50	4	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		2	33.33		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0.00		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	

Table: 6A shows party wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of land holding. It is reflected from the above table that both INC and CPI (M) nominated their candidates in panchayat election more or less from equal land holding status. In 1978 panchayat election there was no contesting candidate of any party from landless group. In 1978 panchayat election it is found from the table that only INC nominated 1(one) leader had land above 10.00 acres. This was happened in case CPI (M) nominated one leader in 1983. In 1978 and 1993 45.45% and 50% leaders from INC had land of 5.01 – 10.00 acres land holding group respectively; whereas in 2003 only 10% leaders from INC had land of that holding group; naturally the land holding status of INC nominated candidates had been decreased. In 1978 and 1998 panchayat elections RSP nominated 16.66% contesting candidates had land of 5.01 – 10.00 acres land holding group. From 1988 to 2003 panchayat elections more or less all parties nominated their contesting candidates from landless group. And from 1978 to 2003 there was no contesting candidate of any political party from patta holders and share croppers.

However, it could be defined that INC nominated candidates had better land holding position in respect of quality of land and also quantity.

FIG - 6A 1/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

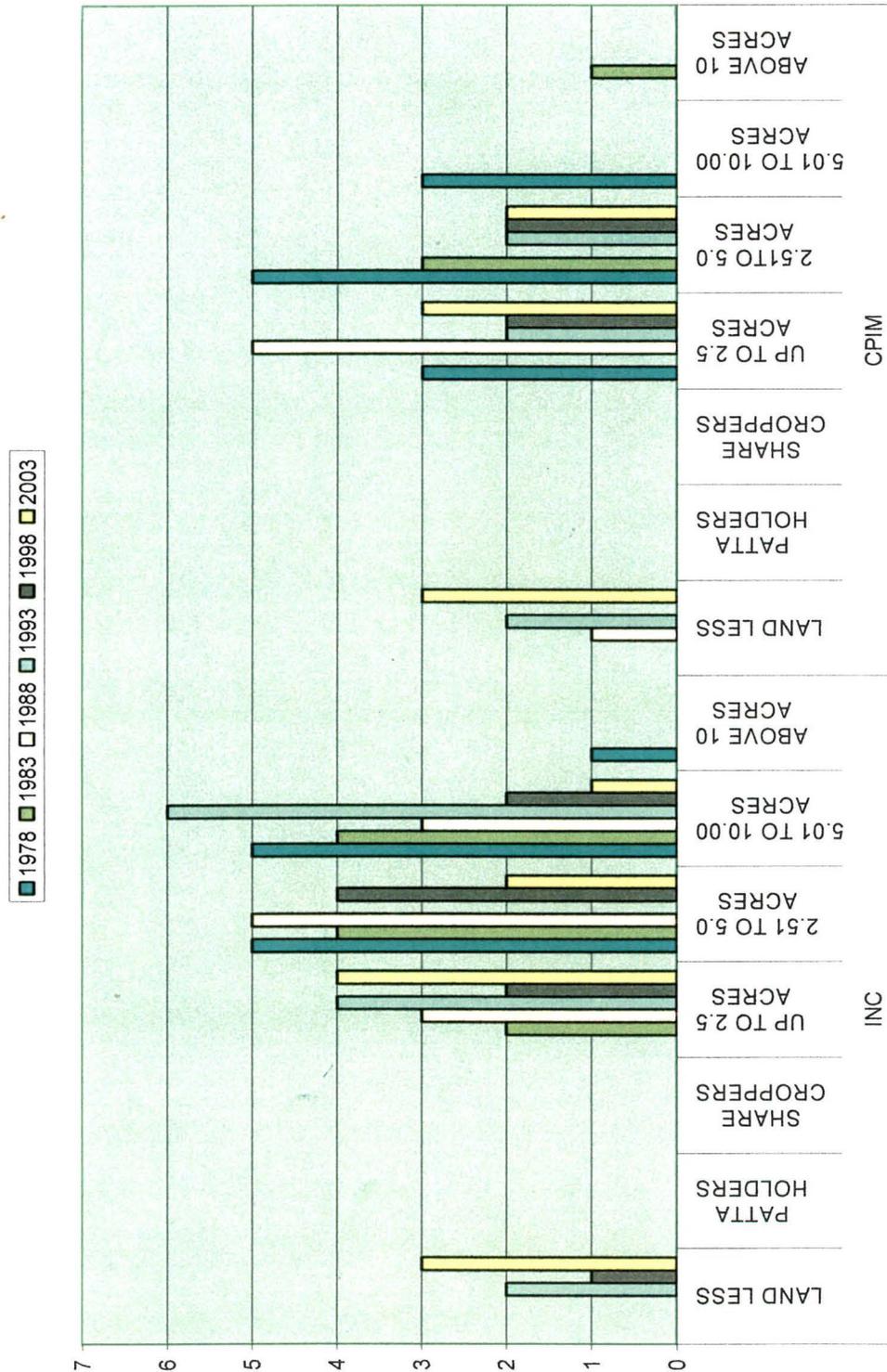


FIG - 6A 2/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

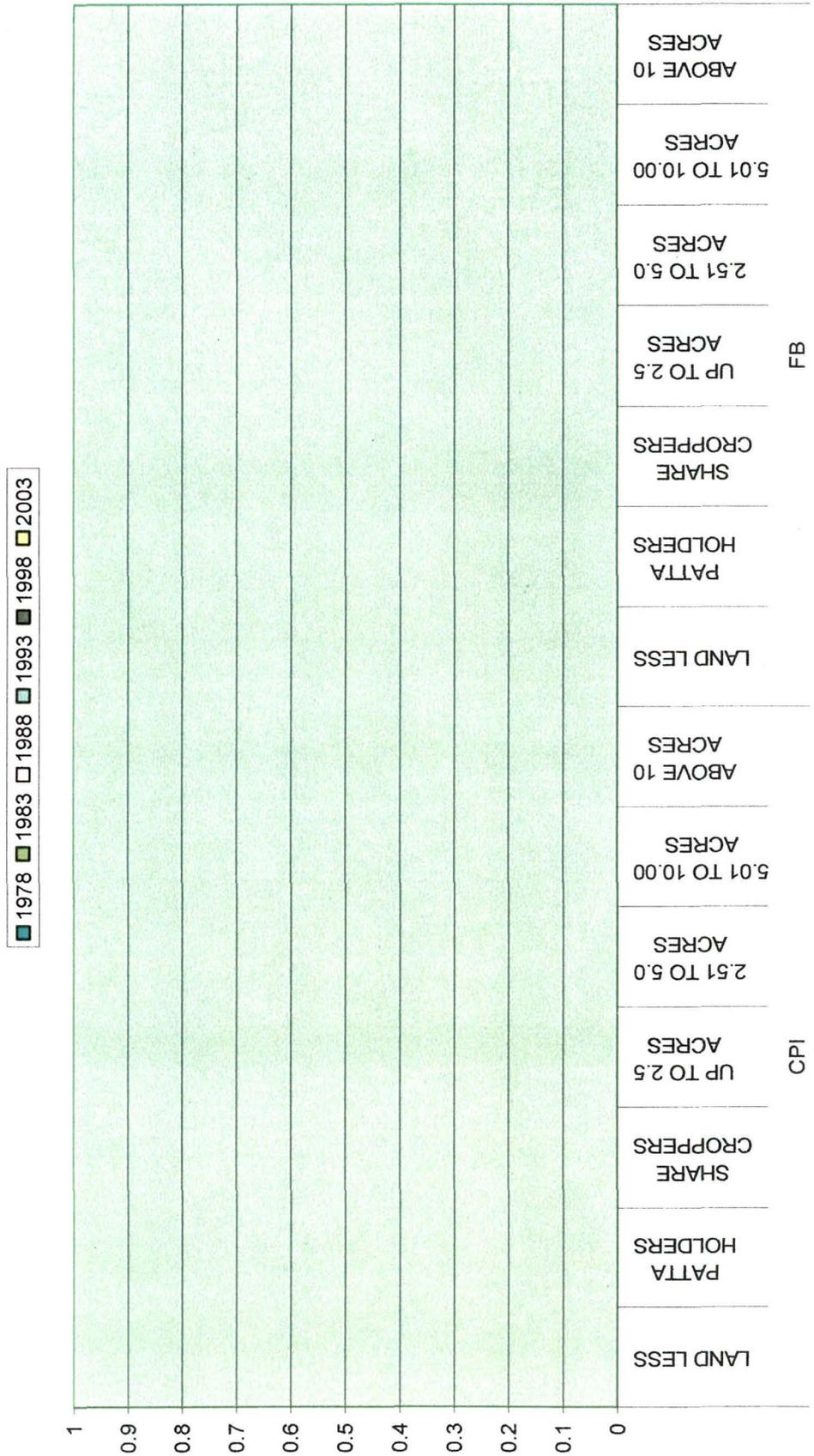


FIG - 6A 3/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

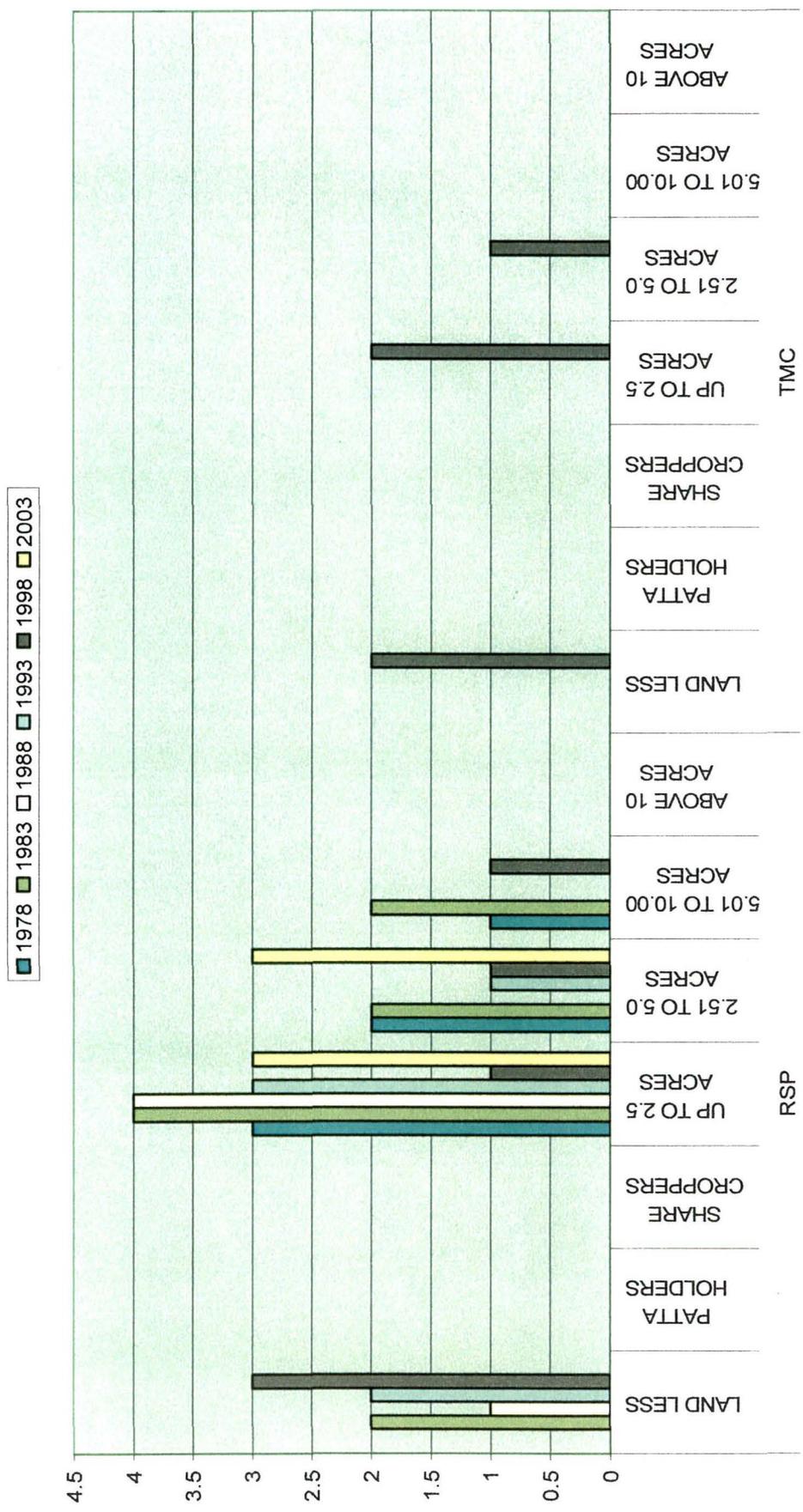
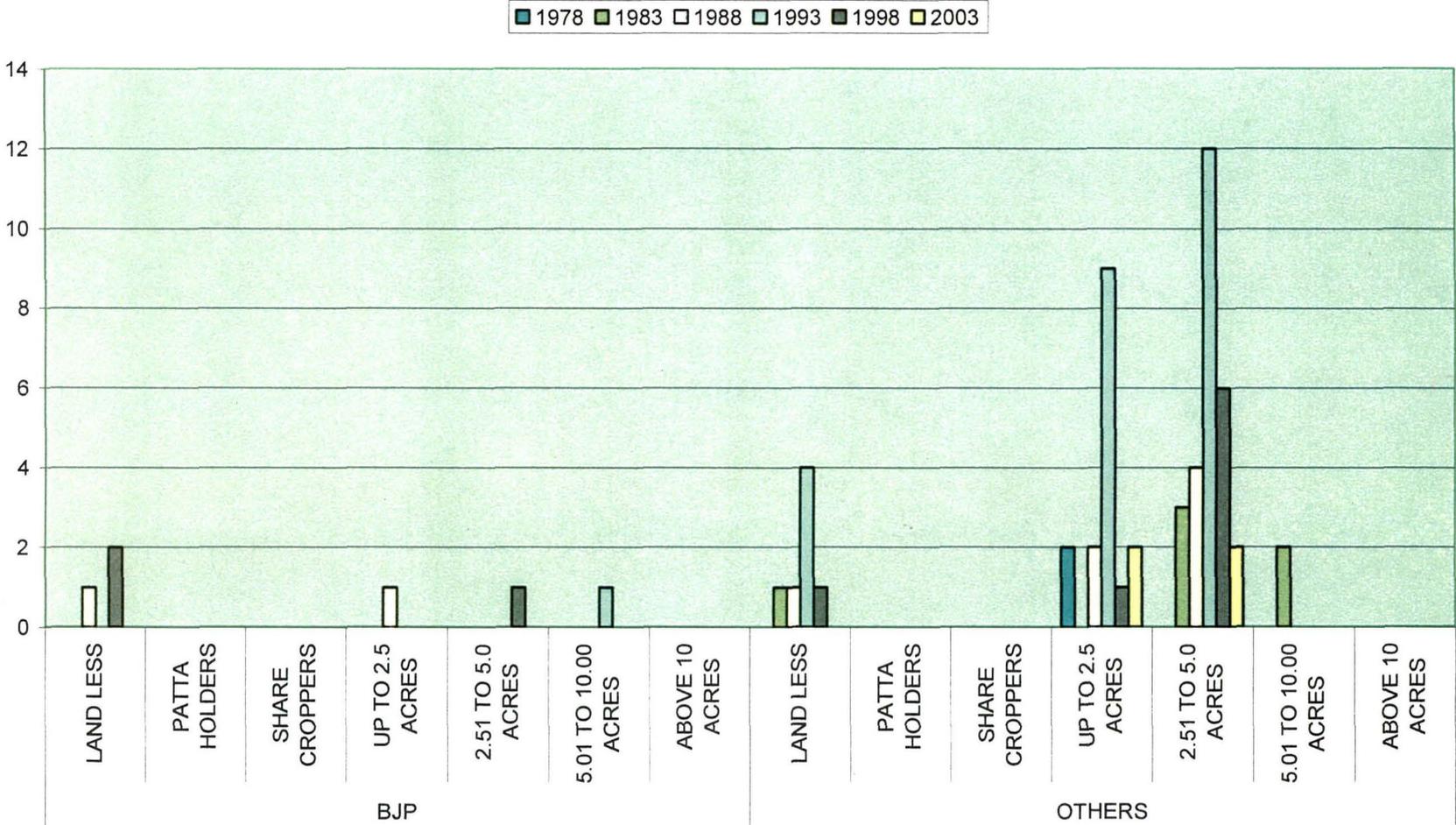


FIG - 6A 4/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN
MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



Income:

The study of land holding does not reveal the real economic status of rural leaders. Land is not only one source of income of leaders. Some one prefers to cultivate their land, some one not. And the size of land does not indicate the income of land holder. Because, income from land depends on several variables, e.g., the nature of land, the number of crops, availability of irrigation facilities etc. For avoiding pitfalls, it is advisable to study the actual income of leader which happens to be the most precise quantified index of his economic status.²⁷

The study of income background is not free from some shortcomings, because, the respondent does not like to speak the real income of him. However, in rural India, it is seen that those possessing high income, are generally respected by the villagers. They become the informal leaders by virtue of their income. So, there is no doubt that money is one of the important factors contributing to the emergence of a leader. Still now, it is believed in rural Bengal that money power influences the voting behaviour of rural poor people. From the field study, it can be analyzed that what income group of leader contests in the Gram Panchayat election in various years.

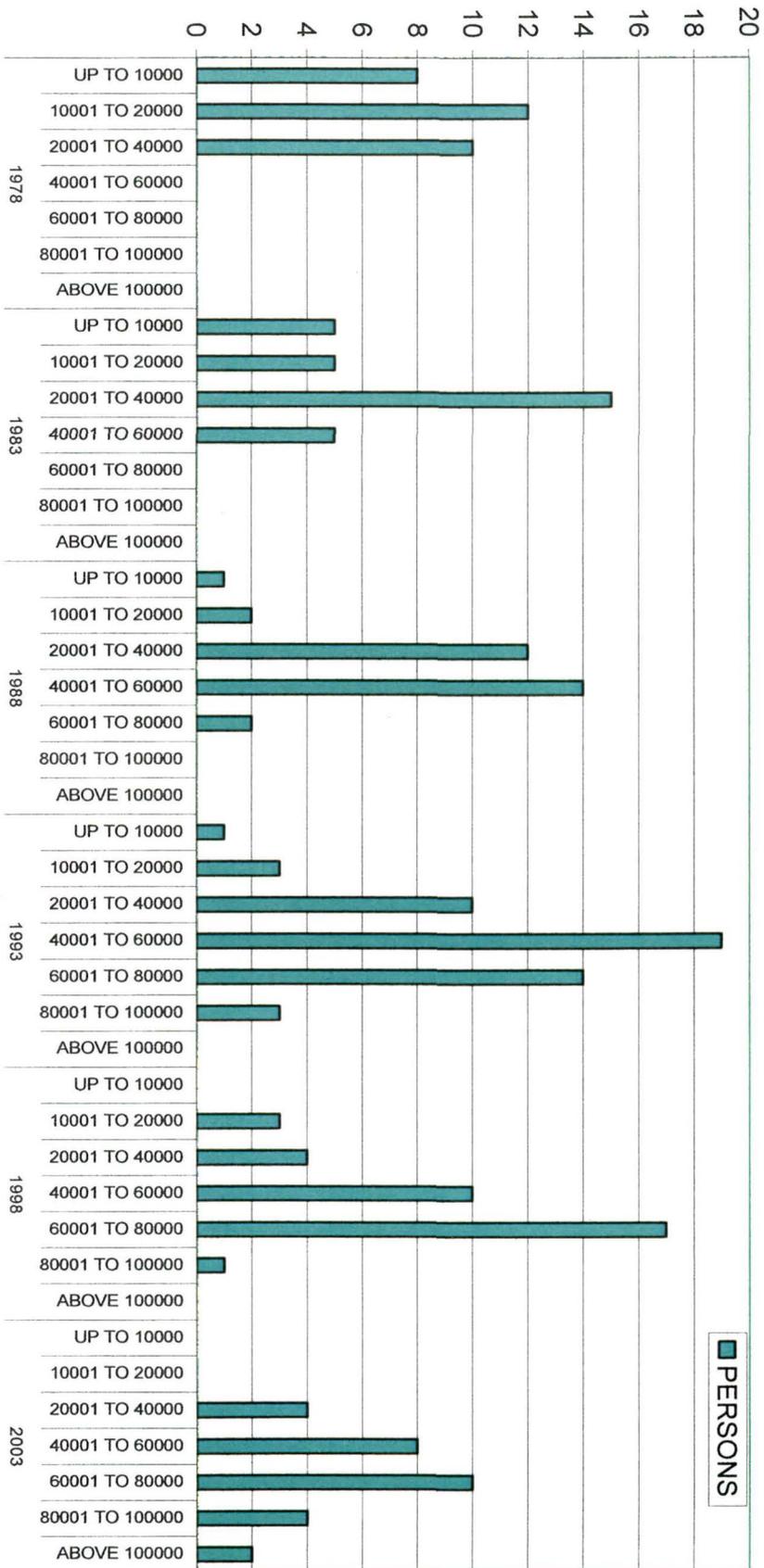
YEAR	AGE	PERSONS	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL
1978	UP TO 10000	8	26.67	30
	10001 TO 20000	12	40.00	
	20001 TO 40000	10	33.33	
	40001 TO 60000	0	0.00	
	60001 TO 80000	0	0.00	
	80001 TO 100000	0	0.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
1983	UP TO 10000	5	16.67	30
	10001 TO 20000	5	16.67	
	20001 TO 40000	15	50.00	
	40001 TO 60000	5	16.67	
	60001 TO 80000	0	0.00	
	80001 TO 100000	0	0.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	

Contd.

1988	UP TO 10000	1	3.23	31
	10001 TO 20000	2	6.45	
	20001 TO 40000	12	38.71	
	40001 TO 60000	14	45.16	
	60001 TO 80000	2	6.45	
	80001 TO 100000	0	0.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
1993	UP TO 10000	1	2.00	50
	10001 TO 20000	3	6.00	
	20001 TO 40000	10	20.00	
	40001 TO 60000	19	38.00	
	60001 TO 80000	14	28.00	
	80001 TO 100000	3	6.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
1998	UP TO 10000	0	0.00	35
	10001 TO 20000	3	8.57	
	20001 TO 40000	4	11.43	
	40001 TO 60000	10	28.57	
	60001 TO 80000	17	48.57	
	80001 TO 100000	1	2.86	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
2003	UP TO 10000	0	0.00	28
	10001 TO 20000	0	0.00	
	20001 TO 40000	4	14.29	
	40001 TO 60000	8	28.57	
	60001 TO 80000	10	35.71	
	80001 TO 100000	4	14.29	
	ABOVE 100000	2	7.14	

Table: 7 show the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of income in Murshidabad district. From the table it is clear that in 1978 panchayat election most of the candidates come from the income group Rs.10001 – 20000 and Rs. 20001 – 40000(per year). In 1983, 50% contesting candidates had economic status of the Rs. 20000 – 40000 income group. In 1988, economic status of the contesting candidates showed the better position, because 45% candidates came from the Rs. 40001 – 60000 income groups. In 1993 and 1998 panchayat elections, the per year income of the contesting candidates increased; 28% came from 60001 – 80000, 6% from Rs. 80001 – 100000 income group and 48.57% from 60001 – 80000 income group, 2.85% from Rs 80001 – 100000 income group respectively. In 2003 panchayat election, it is shown from the table that the contesting candidates came from the better economic status group, 14.28% leaders came from Rs. 80001- 100000 income group and 7.14% leaders came from above Rs.100000 income group.

FIG 7
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF INCOME IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



Life style:

In terms of life style, one principal index of a person's economic status in a village happens to be the type of his dwelling house. House not only signifies shelter and security against natural calamities, but also promotes the psychological gratification and social status of the dweller.²⁸ In our rural society the type of dwelling house signifies social status. And the use of Motor Cycle, Radio, Television and reading of News Paper indicate the living standard of rural leaders. Those who possess these things are respected by the rural people. In the questionnaire the respondent was asked whether he/she owned Kutcha (mud) house/Pucca (brick) house or mixed (kutcha & pucca) house and milch cow/bullock. The respondent was also asked whether he/she owned Radio/TV and read news paper. Through the following Table no -8 year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of life style will be analyzed.

TABLE 8				
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LIFE STYLE IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT				
YEAR	AGE	PERSONS	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL CONTESTING CANDIDATES
1978	MUD HOUSE	26	86.67	30
	BRICK HOUSE	2	6.67	
	MUD& BRICK HOUSE	2	6.67	
	SANITATION	5	16.67	
	TV	0	0.00	
	RADIO	9	30.00	
	NEWS PAPER READING	7	23.33	
	CYCLE	15	50.00	
	MOTOR CYCLE	0	0.00	
	MILCH COW / BULLOCK	22	73.33	
1983	MUD HOUSE	25	83.33	30
	BRICK HOUSE	2	6.67	
	BRICK & MUD HOUSE	3	10.00	
	SANITATION	6	20.00	
	TV	0	0.00	
	RADIO	12	40.00	
	NEWS PAPER READING	10	33.33	
	CYCLE	20	66.67	
	MOTOR CYCLE	0	0.00	
	MILCH COW / BULLOCK	27	90.00	

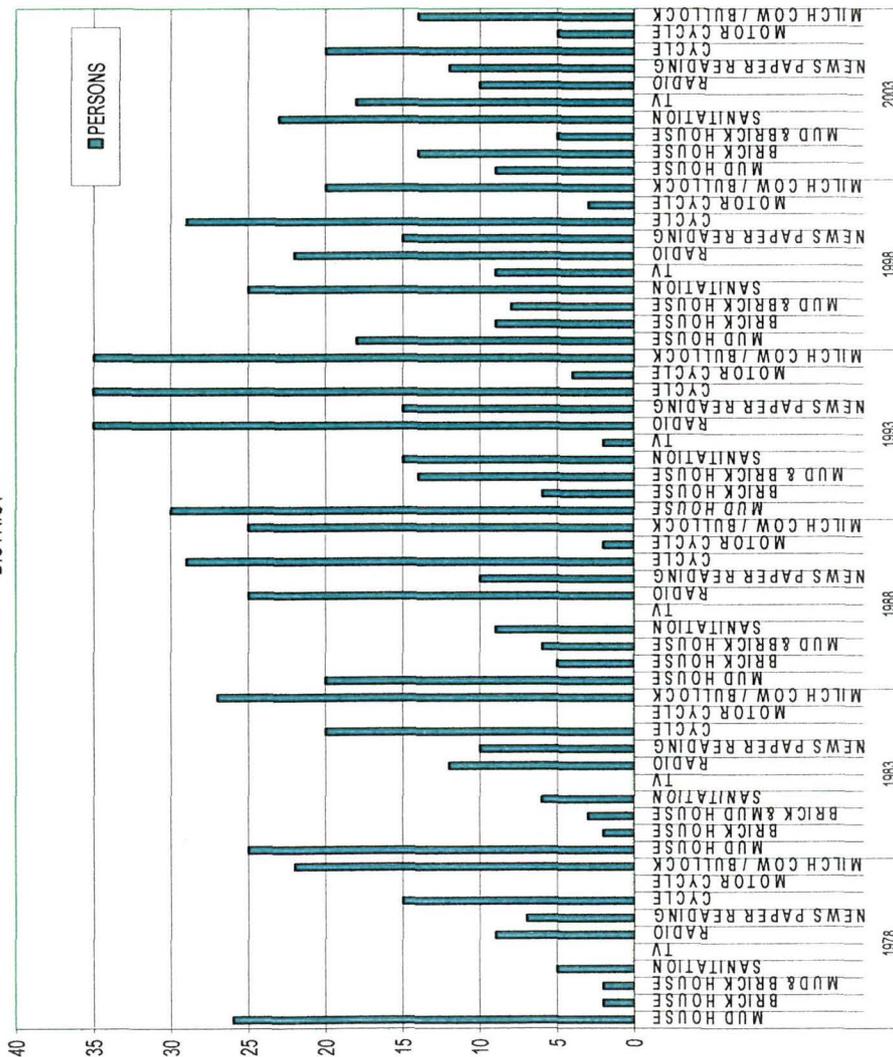
Contd.

1988	MUD HOUSE	20	64.52	31
	BRICK HOUSE	5	16.13	
	MUD & BRICK HOUSE	6	19.35	
	SANITATION	9	29.03	
	TV	0	0.00	
	RADIO	25	80.65	
	NEWS PAPER READING	10	32.26	
	CYCLE	29	93.55	
	MOTOR CYCLE	2	6.45	
	MILCH COW / BULLOCK	25	80.65	
	1993	MUD HOUSE	30	
BRICK HOUSE		6	12.00	
MUD & BRICK HOUSE		14	28.00	
SANITATION		15	30.00	
TV		2	4.00	
RADIO		35	70.00	
NEWS PAPER READING		15	30.00	
CYCLE		35	70.00	
MOTOR CYCLE		4	8.00	
MILCH COW / BULLOCK		35	70.00	
1998		MUD HOUSE	18	51.43
	BRICK HOUSE	9	25.71	
	MUD & BRICK HOUSE	8	22.86	
	SANITATION	25	71.43	
	TV	9	25.71	
	RADIO	22	62.86	
	NEWS PAPER READING	15	42.86	
	CYCLE	29	82.86	
	MOTOR CYCLE	3	8.57	
	MILCH COW / BULLOCK	20	57.14	
	2003	MUD HOUSE	9	32.14
BRICK HOUSE		14	50.00	
MUD & BRICK HOUSE		5	17.86	
SANITATION		23	82.14	
TV		18	64.29	
RADIO		10	35.71	
NEWS PAPER READING		12	42.86	
CYCLE		20	71.43	
MOTOR CYCLE		5	17.86	
MILCH COW / BULLOCK		14	50.00	

Table: 8 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of life style in Murshidabad district. It is reflected from the table that from 1978 to 1998 more than 50% leaders had mud house; though in 2003 panchayat election 50% leaders had their brick house. From 1978 to 1993 panchayat election, it is found

that 16.66% to 30.00% contesting candidates had their own sanitation; though in 2003 it is found that 82.14% leaders had their own sanitation. From 1978 to 1988 panchayat election, the contesting i.e. rural leaders had no Television set in their house; though 80.64% leaders had Radio set in 1988. In 2003, 64.28% leaders had their own Television sets. In this year the use of Radio had decreased remarkably, only 35.71% leaders had their Radio sets. The practice of News paper reading is not in good number, in 1978 23.33% leaders read news paper and in 2003, it slightly increased the number reached to 42.85%. The use of bi-cycle in number is stable from 1978 to 2003; it varied from 50% to 71.42%. In 2003, 17.85% leaders had their own motor cycle. From 1978 to 1993, 70% to more than 70% leaders had their milch cow/ bullock; but from 1998 to 2003 the number decreased to 57.14% to 50%.

FIG 8
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LIFE STYLE IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



Party affiliation:

Open participation of political parties in panchayat election was supported by the Asoke Mehta Committee Report, 1978. West Bengal opted for it since 1978 panchayat election. Originally it was thought by the framers of the constitution that panchayat should be free from party politics as well as party less democracy and should be based on consensus. Later on, a new opinion evolved which considered this view untenable. Village governance which tied up with the total administrative set up of the country cannot be kept away from the influence of political parties. In earlier, it was found that although representatives were not allowed to fight elections with the symbols, they were associated with different political parties. So, when the Asoke Mehta report was published, West Bengal Government with no late chose for party-based election.²⁹

Since 1978, the Left Front has been dominating the panchayat raj institutions. But prior 1978, the election between 1957-64 at the Gram Panchayat and block level and in 1964 at Zilla Parishad level showed the overwhelming presence of Indian National Congress.³⁰ The present study seeks to know the year wise distribution of Gram Panchayat leaders in terms of party affiliation from 1978 to 2003.

YEAR	AGE	TOTAL	ELECTED	PERCENTAGE OF ELECTED MEMEBR ON TOTAL SEATS	TOTAL NO OF SEAT
1978	INC	11	3	27.27	11
	CPIM	11	5	45.45	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	0	0	0.00	
	RSP	6	3	27.27	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	0	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	2	0	0.00	

Contd.

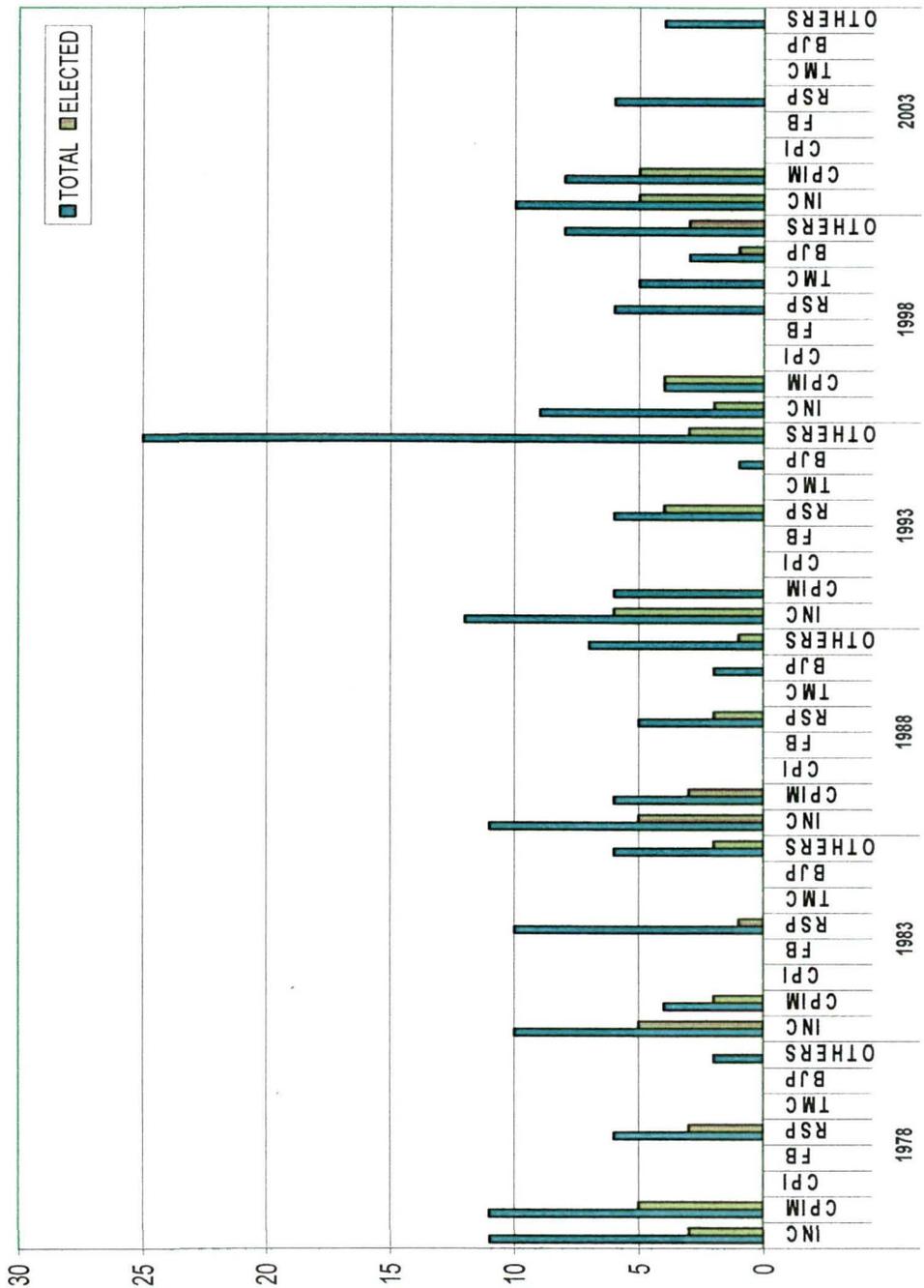
1983	INC	10	5	50.00	10
	CPIM	4	2	20.00	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	0	0	0.00	
	RSP	10	1	10.00	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	0	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	6	2	20.00	
1988	INC	11	5	45.45	11
	CPIM	6	3	27.27	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	0	0	0.00	
	RSP	5	2	18.18	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	2	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	7	1	9.09	
1993	INC	12	6	46.15	13
	CPIM	6	0	0.00	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	0	0	0.00	
	RSP	6	4	30.77	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	1	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	25	3	23.08	
1998	INC	9	2	20.00	10
	CPIM	4	4	40.00	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	0	0	0.00	
	RSP	6	0	0.00	
	TMC	5	0	0.00	
	BJP	3	1	10.00	
	OTHERS	8	3	30.00	
2003	INC	10	5	50.00	10
	CPIM	8	5	50.00	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	0	0	0.00	
	RSP	6	0	0.00	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	0	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	4	0	0.00	

Table: 9 shows the distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of success in election in Murshidabad district. It is reflected from the table that in 1978 panchayat election INC bagged 27.27% seats, CPI(M)- 45.45% seats and RSP 27.27% seats; in 1983 - INC 50.00% seats, CPI(M) - 20.00% seats, RSP - 10.005 seats and other 20.00% seats; in 1988 – INC 45.45% seats, CPI(M) - 27.27% seats, RSP - 18.18% seats and other 9.09% seats, in 1993 INC 46.15% seats,

CPI(M)- 0, RSP- 30.76%, BJP- 0 and others - 23.07%, in 1998, - INC – 20.00%, CPI(M) – 40.00%, RSP – 0, TMC – 0, BJP – 10.00% and others- 30.00%; in 2003 INC – 50.00%, CPI(M)- 50.00% seats, RSP – 0 and others – 0.

From the above table it is clear that INC and left parties both were more or less familiar in the said Gram Panchayat. It is interesting to mention that in 1998 panchayat election BJP got 01 seat (10.00%) of the said gram panchayat.

FIG 9
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF SUCCESS IN
ELECTION IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT



During field survey some questions were asked about the perception of leadership to the contesting candidates of Manikchak Gram Panchayat. In a question like – who is a leader? Most of the CPI (M) and RSP nominated contesting candidates responded that our party organization member was the leader, like LCS (Local Committee Secretary), DCS (District Committee Secretary) etc. Whereas INC and TMC nominated contesting candidates believed themselves as leader. But CPI (M) nominated a female contesting candidate responded in another way, she responded without any hesitation that she did not know who party leader was; it was up to her husband who knew all this matter. Like left party nominated candidates BJP candidates also believed that they were not leaders; party organization members were leaders. This type of party culture of all political parties' contesting candidates was same more or less throughout the six consecutive panchayat elections.

Another question like - what a leader should possess? was asked to the above respondents. Most of the leaders irrespective of all party affiliation gave their answer in this way that a leader should be honest, educated, brave and able and also social worker. Most of the respondents responded that they possessed these leader's qualities. In this connection, it is worth to mention that regarding the question of leader's quality old panchayat leaders believed that they were more honest efficient and accountable to the public interest than the present panchayat leaders. They perceived various corruptions in the role of panchayat leaders irrespective of all party affiliated leaders. A long term experienced Pradhan of CPI (M) party did not believe in the present leadership. He had some reservation to say that present panchayat leaders had some lacuna in good leadership.

Lastly, a question was asked to the respondents as – Do you think you qualify to be a leader? Most of the respondents irrespective of party affiliation gave their answer in a way that people would say whether they qualified to be a leader or not. From this type of answer it is clear that the leaders have democratic value as well as they believe that the basis of legitimacy of leadership is popular support.

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Chapter – V

Changing Pattern of Rural Leadership in Cooch Behar District.

Cooch Behar District Profile:

Geographical Location:

Cooch Behar district is situated on the north – east border of India and it is under Jalpaiguri division. The district lies between $26^{\circ} 32' 46''$ and $25^{\circ} 57' 56''$ north latitude. The longitude of western most point is $89^{\circ} 52' 00''$ east and the longitude of the western most point is $88^{\circ} 45' 02''$ east.¹ The district is bounded on the east by the Goal Para district of Assam state and neighbouring country Bangladesh, on the South side also Bangladesh, on the north side Jalpaiguri district and on the west side this district is bounded by Bangladesh and Jalpaiguri. There are also various enclaves or chittis in this district of Bangladesh border which are not found in other districts and states of India.

Area, Population & Literacy:

The area of the district is 3387 square kilometers and it contains 24, 79,155 population as per census report of 2001. Out of this 12, 72,094 (51.31%) male and 12, 07,061 (48.68%) female. The number of SC persons was 12, 42,374 (50.11%) and ST 14246 (0.57%) as per census report, 2001. According to the census report, 1991, Muslim population was 506728 (23.33%). In the Haldibari block, the total population was 93867 as per 2001 census report; out of this 48468 were male and 45399 female. The number of SC persons was 58070 (61.86%) and ST persons was 254 (0.27%).² In terms of literacy the rank of Cooch Behar district was 09(nine) and rate was 67.20% as per census report 2001. The rate of literacy of Haldibari block was 60.2%, when the state literacy rate was 68.21%.³

History of Cooch Behar:

The name of Cooch Behar is compounded of two words i.e. Cooch and Behar. The word Cooch has derived from 'Koch', the name of the race which

established domination in that area for long time. The word 'Behar' denotes the abode of the land. Thus, Cooch Behar means the land of the Koches.

However, the name Koch Behar is not ancient in origin. Previously, a tract of land now forming the district of Koch Behar was a part of much bigger kingdom of Kamrup. Later on, the kingdom of Kamrup was split into two parts, the western part was known as Kamata which contained Koch Bihar. The name Koch Behar appears to have been first used in relation to this country in 'Shahjahan Nama' about the middle of the 17th century. In 1773, a treaty was done between East India Company and the ruler of the Koch Behar. In the writings of the treaty the kingdom was referred to as Koch Behar and the capital was referred to as Behar Fort.⁵

Before 28th August, 1949, Koch Behar was an Indian state which was ruled by the Maharaja who had been a Feudatory Prince under the British Government. On 28th August, 1949, Maharaja Jagaddipendra Narayan of Koch Behar handed over his territory to the dominion government of India. The transfer of administration to the hand of government of India came into effect from 12th September, 1949. Under section 290A of the government of India Act of 1935, an order was issued for the transfer of Koch Behar. Accordingly, Koch Behar was transferred and merged with the province of West Bengal on Jan 01, 1950. Since then Koch Behar is being administered as a district of West Bengal state.⁶

Weather:

The nature of weather of Cooch Behar district is highly humid through out the year. There is seldom excessive temperature in Cooch Behar. The average annual rainfall in the district is 3201.3 mm. The climate of the district is characterized into four seasons; they are: Hot season from March to May; the Cold season is from November to the end of February; South-West Monsoon season is from June to the beginning of October and Post- Monsoon season is from October to mid- November.

Land Reforms: Being an administrative part of India from 12 September, 1949 and a district of West Bengal from 01.01.1950, Cooch Behar district came under the purview of Indian Acts as well as West Bengal Acts. Naturally, Cooch Behar district took step, under land reforms act, for abolishing zamindar class and other subordinate classes which were created by Permanent Settlement Act during British period. According to West Bengal Zamindar Acquisition Act, 1953, all small and big zamindari and all intermediaries were abolished. With the initiative of land reforms administration and panchayats in Cooch Behar the following area vested agricultural land distributed among the beneficiaries as on 30.09.1998.⁷

<u>Area of land distributed</u>	<u>No of beneficiaries (persons)</u>			
	SC	ST	Other Castes	Total
24, 976 .97 hectares	80,775	4,730	35,357	1, 20,862

Recording Bargadars (Sharecropper) in Cooch Behar district as on 30.09.1998.⁸

SC		ST		OTHERS		TOTAL	
No	Area in hectares	No	Area	No	Area in hectares	No	Area in hectares
49,970	19,598.99	939	501.52	32,996	13,531.49	83,905	33,632.00

Nature of Land:

The soil of Cooch Behar district is of alluvial and has a large admixture of sand and what in common parlance is known as sandy loam. The proportion of sand, silt and clay, however varies from place to place. The soil is of light texture and can retain moisture and easily give it up. The soil is very soft and ploughing is thus not difficult.⁹ The soil of this district is conducive for the production of best quality Jute and Tobacco. However, the principal crops of this district are: i) Paddy of two kinds, the aus and aman; ii) Jute of two varieties, the capsularis and the oliotaris; iii) Tobacco; iv) Rape and Mustard seed; v) Pulses i.e. Khesari, Arahara, Mug; vi) Wheat and Barley etc.¹⁰

Administrative Units:

There are five Sub-divisions in Cooch Behar district, i.e. Mekhliganj, Mathabhanga, Cooch Behar (Sadar), Tufanganj and Dinhata. There are eleven Police Stations and twelve blocks in Cooch Behar district, the name of the police stations are: Mekhliganj, Kuchlibari, Haldibari, Mathabhanga, Ghoksadang, Sitalkuchi, Cooch Behar, Tufanganj, Bakshirhat, Dinhata and Sitai; twelve blocks are: Mekhliganj, Haldibari, Mathabhanga – I, Mathabhanga – II, Sitalkuchi, Cooch Behar – I, Cooch Behar – II, Tufanganj – I, Tufanganj – II, Dinhata – I, Dinhata – II and Sitai. Under the Cooch Behar Zilla Parishad there are 12 Panchayat Samitis, 128 Gram Panchayats and 1714 Gram Sansads. ¹¹

Local Self Government:

Prior to 1864, we cannot find sufficient information about the rural administration of Cooch Behar district. Though there was an institution known as "Dewania" which was constituted with Jotedars. The Dewania reigned as the civil heads of the community and arbitrated in all disputes among their tenants and dependents. Cooch Behar village chowkidari act was passed in 1893-94 on the model of Bengal Act of the same name of 1891. It was partially known as rural self governing institution and it was replaced by the creation of Gram and Anchal Panchayats under the West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957. ¹²

The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 came into force through various stages from 7 June 1958 to 8 June 1960. There were 582 Gram Panchayats, 105 Anchal Panchayats in Cooch Behar district in 1968 – 69. Under the Zilla Parishad Act, 1963, there were 11 Anchalik Parishads in Cooch Behar district and the Zilla Parishad started functioning in 1964. ¹³ Later on, according to the Panchayat Act of 1973, three tier panchayat elections took place in 1978 during the left front rule.

Changing Pattern of Rural Leadership:

Like the field survey of a Gram Panchayat of Murshidabad District, Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat of Cooch Behar district was chosen for field survey. The purpose for choosing two Gram Panchayats of two districts is to compare the

changing pattern of rural leadership of two districts of West Bengal. Murshidabad is Muslim population dominated district, whereas the Cooch Behar district is a Hindu population dominated as well as Scheduled Caste population dominated district. It is interesting to note that both the said district of West Bengal is situated on the Indo - Bangladesh border. The historical background of the two districts is significant, because, Murshidabad was the capital of Bangala – Bihar – Orissa during the regime of Nawabab in the eighteenth century. On the other hand, Cooch Behar was a princely state under the British rule and previously it was a part of Kamrupa kingdom. Besides, Murshidabad is a district of South Bengal and Cooch Behar is a district of North Bengal; though according to Human Development Report of 2004, there is no major differences between two districts in respect literacy, per capita income etc. As per the Human Development Report, 2004, the human development index rank of Cooch Behar was 11 and Murshidabad was 15.¹⁴

Before going to analyze the data which have been found from the field survey from Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat, it is fruitful to give an introduction of Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat. Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat is under the Haldibari Block of Cooch Behar district. It is situated near the border of Bangladesh and it is close to the Jalpaiguri district. Uttar Haldibari Gram Panchayat is composed with the following mouzas: Barah Haldibari part – I, 27 – Chotto Haldibari and Banikanta. As per census report, 2001, the total population of Uttar Haldibari Gram panchayat is 19601. Out of this male is 10181 and female is 9420; and total number of SC persons is 13878 .¹⁵

Data analysis:

In this part only analysis of data will be made because the explanation of different variables has been done in the part of data analysis of Murshidabad district.

TABLE - 1

**YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF AGE & SEX IN
COOCHBEHAR DISTRICT**

YEAR	AGE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	TOTAL (AGE WISE)	%	GRAND TOTAL (YEAR WISE)		
								MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL (M+F)
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1978	UP TO 30YR	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00	45	0	45
	31 TO 45 YR	8	17.78	0	0	8	17.78			
	46 TO 60 YR	37	82.22	0	0	37	82.22			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
1983	UP TO 30YR	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00	49	0	49
	31 TO 45 YR	23	46.94	0	0	23	46.94			
	46 TO 60 YR	26	53.06	0	0	26	53.06			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
1988	UP TO 30YR	2	3.57	0	0	2	3.57	56	0	56
	31 TO 45 YR	25	44.64	0	0	25	44.64			
	46 TO 60 YR	29	51.79	0	0	29	51.79			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
1993	UP TO 30YR	6	11.76	16	50.00	22	26.51	51	32	83
	31 TO 45 YR	20	39.22	10	31.25	30	36.14			
	46 TO 60 YR	25	49.02	6	18.75	31	37.35			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
1998	UP TO 30YR	6	12.24	8	29.63	14	18.42	49	27	76
	31 TO 45 YR	27	55.10	16	59.26	43	56.58			
	46 TO 60 YR	16	32.65	3	11.11	19	25.00			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
2003	UP TO 30YR	5	11.90	5	27.78	10	16.67	42	18	60
	31 TO 45 YR	23	54.76	9	50.00	32	53.33			
	46 TO 60 YR	14	33.33	4	22.22	18	30.00			
	61 YR & ABO	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			

COL.4 = (COL.3 / COL.9)x100; COL.6 = (COL.5 / COL.10)x100; COL.8 = (COL.7 / COL.11)x100

Table: 1 shows the year wise distribution of rural leaders in terms of age & sex in Cooch Behar district. From the table it is reflected that in 1978 panchayat election there is a concentration of leaders of 46 to 60 yrs age group, 82.22% contesting candidates belonged to the age group of 46 to 60 yrs. In the 1983 and 1988 panchayat election more than 50% leaders belonged to the age group of 46 to 60 yrs. In 1978 and 1983 panchayat elections, there was no contesting candidate who belonged to the age group of up to 30 yrs. In 1993 panchayat election, it is found that 26.50%, 36.14% and 37.34% contesting candidates belonged to the age group of up to 30 yrs, 31 – 45 yrs and 46 – 60 yrs respectively. In 1998,

56.57% contesting candidates i.e. rural leaders concentrated to the age group of 31 – 45 yrs. In 2003 panchayat election, 53.33% leaders belonged to the age group 31 – 45 yrs.

From this table it is clear that younger leadership came into existence from 1993 panchayat election. Besides, it is found from the table that from 1978 to 2003 panchayat election, there was no leader who belonged to the age group of above 60 yrs.

From the above table it is also indicated that from 1978 to 1988 panchayat elections there was no female contesting candidate. Only female candidates came into existence from 1993 panchayat election. So, from 1993 to 2003 we found more than 1/3 female contesting candidates took part in panchayat election. In 1993, 50% female leaders had their age group of up to 30 yrs. But in 1998, 59.25% and in 2003, 50% female contesting candidates belonged to the age group of 31 – 45 yrs each.

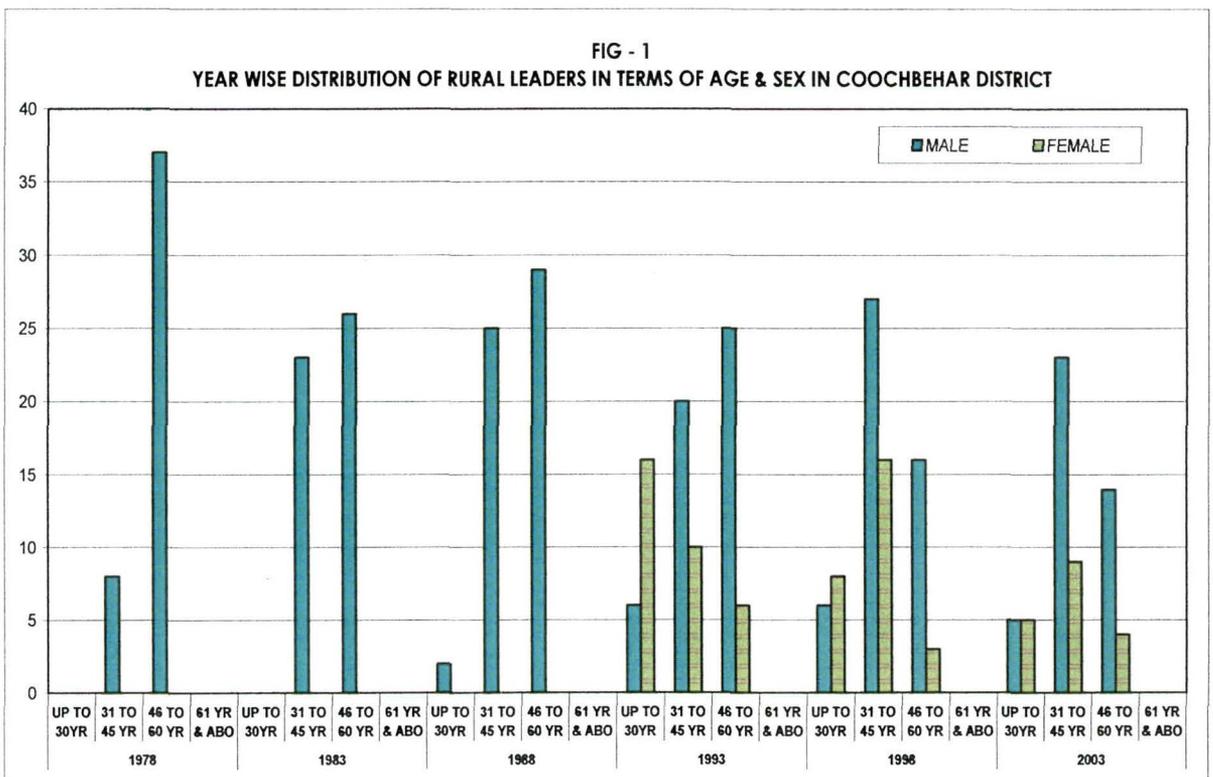


TABLE - 2										
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF CASTE & SEX IN COOCHBEHAR DISTRICT										
YEAR	CASTE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	SUB-TOTAL	%	GRAND TOTAL		
								MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11
1978	SC	41	91.11	0	0	41	91.11	45	0	45
	ST	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	4	8.89	0	0	4	8.89			
1983	SC	43	87.76	0	0	43	87.76	49	0	49
	ST	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	6	12.24	0	0	6	12.24			
1988	SC	48	85.71	0	0	48	85.71	56	0	56
	ST	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	8	14.29	0	0	8	14.29			
1993	SC	46	90.20	27	84.38	73	87.95	51	32	83
	ST	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	5	9.80	5	15.63	10	12.05			
1998	SC	45	91.84	24	88.89	69	90.79	49	27	76
	ST	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	4	8.16	3	11.11	7	9.21			
2003	SC	42	100.00	17	94.44	59	98.33	42	18	60
	ST	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	OTHERS	0	0.00	1	5.56	1	1.67			
C4 = (C3/C9)*100; C6 = (C5/C10)*100; C7 = C3 + C5; C8 = (C7/C11)*100										

Table: 2 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms caste and sex in Cooch Behar district. From 1978 to 1988 panchayat election all contesting candidates were male and more than 85% contesting candidates belonged to Scheduled Caste. From 1993 to 1998 more than 90% rural leaders came from Scheduled Caste and in 2003, 100% rural male leaders were from Scheduled Caste. From 1993 to 2003 more than 80% female leaders belonged to the Scheduled Caste. Due to Scheduled Caste population dominated area the leadership concentrated to the hands of Scheduled Caste.

During field survey an interesting fact was known that some scheduled caste leaders had title like 'Maitra'. It is commonly known to us that 'Maitra' title belongs to the Brahmin class. A School teacher, who has Maitra title, explained

that they took 'Maitra' only for exempting from social exploitation by Brahmin class.

FIG - 2
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF CASTE & SEX IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

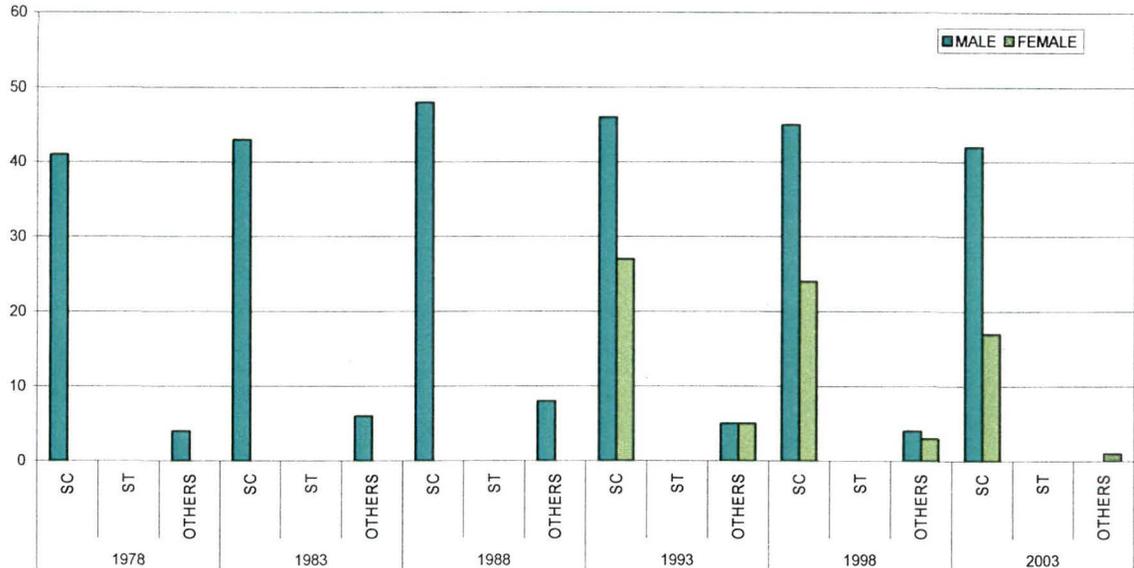


TABLE - 3

YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF RELIGION AND SEX IN COOH BEHAR DISTRICT

YEAR	RELIGION	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	SUB-TOTAL	%	GRAND TOTAL		
								MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1978	HINDU	43	95.56	0	0.00	43	95.56	45	0	45
	MUSLIM	2	4.44	0	0.00	2	4.44			
1983	HINDU	45	91.83	0	0.00	45	91.83	49	0	49
	MUSLIM	4	8.17	0	0.00	4	8.17			
1988	HINDU	52	92.86	0	0.00	52	92.86	56	0	56
	MUSLIM	4	7.14	0	0.00	4	7.14			
1993	HINDU	49	96.08	30	93.75	79	95.18	51	32	83
	MUSLIM	2	3.92	2	6.25	4	4.82			
1998	HINDU	47	95.92	27	100.00	74	97.36	49	27	76
	MUSLIM	2	4.08	0	0.00	2	2.64			
2003	HINDU	42	100.00	17	94.44	59	98.33	42	18	60
	MUSLIM	0	0.00	1	5.56	1	1.67			

C4 = (C3/C9)*100; C6 = (C5/C10)*100; C7 = C3 + C5; C8 = (C7/C11)*100

Table: 3 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of religion and sex in Cooch Behar district. From 1978 to 2003 panchayat elections more than 90% Hindu leaders contested the panchayat election. From 1978 to 1998 panchayat elections 4% to 7% Muslim leaders contested the panchayat election. In 2003 Panchayat election, only one Muslim female leaders contested the panchayat election. From the table it is clear that communal polarization played a vital role in selecting the rural leadership.

FIG - 3
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF RELIGION & SEX IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

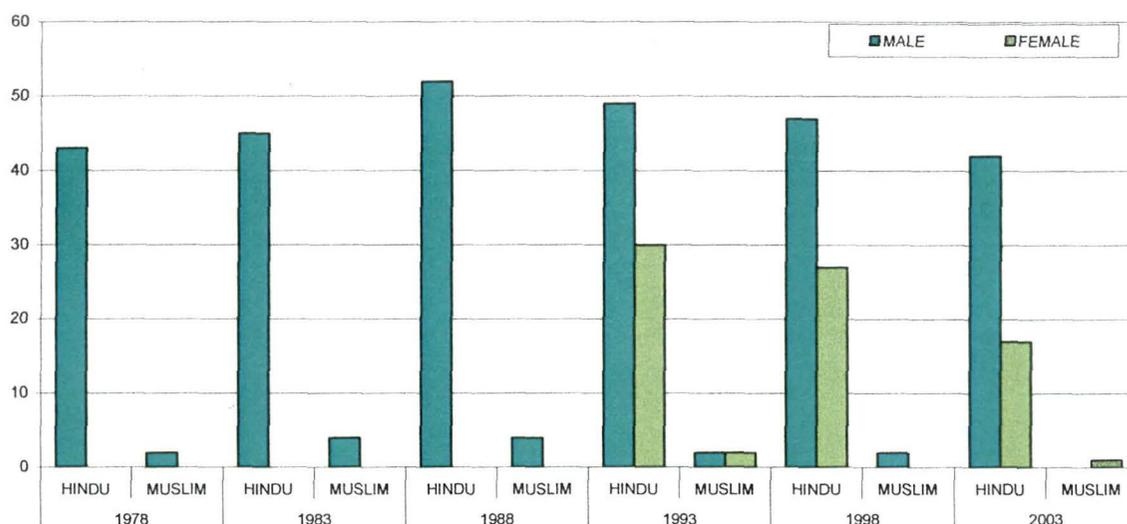


TABLE - 4

YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF EDUCATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

YEAR	AGE	MALE	%	FEMALE	%	SUB-TOTAL	%	MALE	FEMALE	TOTAL (M+F)
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	10
1978	ILLITERATE	2	4.44	0	0.00	2	4.44	45	0	45
	LITERATE	5	11.11	0	0.00	5	11.11			
	PRIMARY	14	31.11	0	0.00	14	31.11			
	SECONDARY	18	40.00	0	0.00	18	40.00			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	6	13.33	0	0.00	6	13.33			
	GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00				

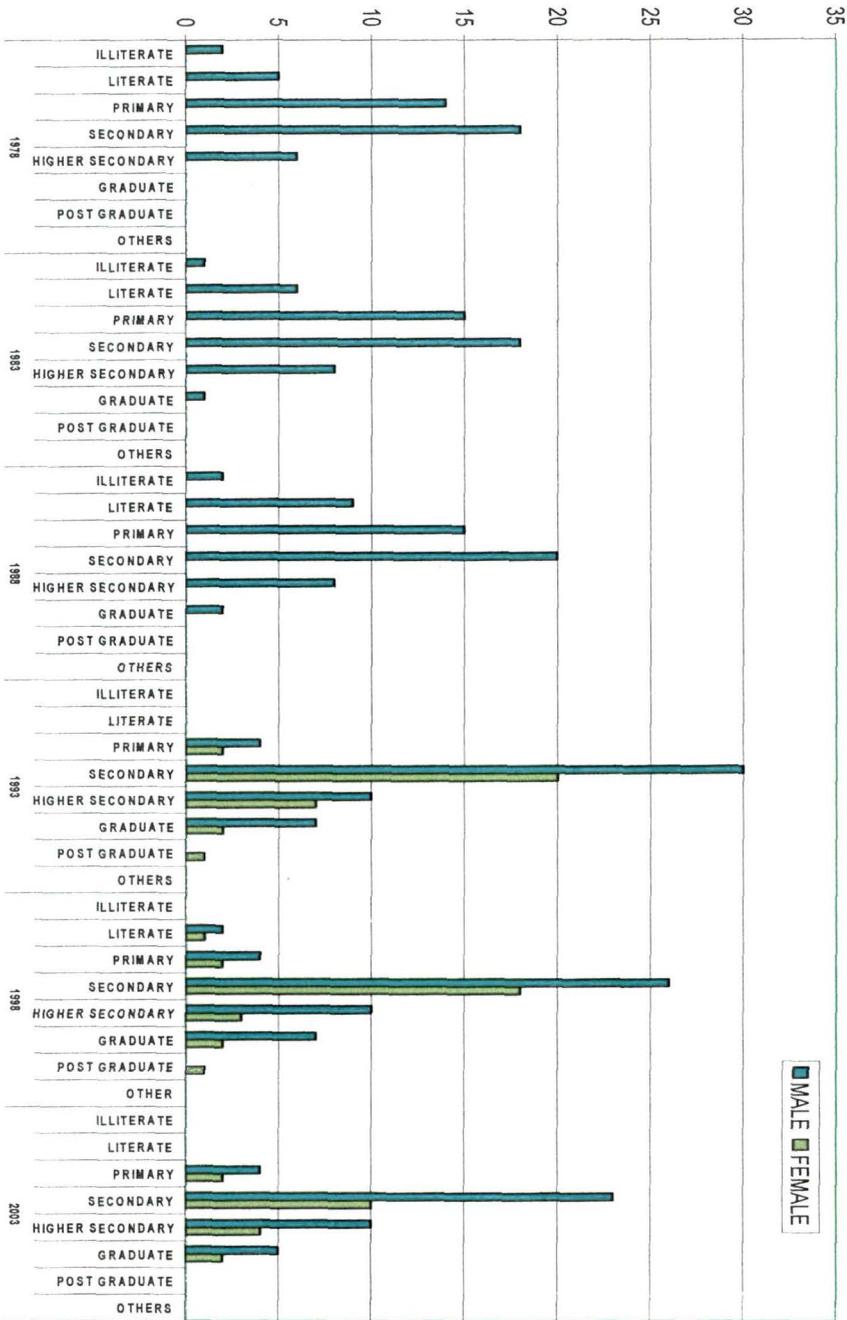
Contd.

1983	ILLITERATE	1	2.04	0	0.00	1	2.04	49	0	49
	LITERATE	6	12.24	0	0.00	6	12.24			
	PRIMARY	15	30.61	0	0.00	15	30.61			
	SECONDARY	18	36.73	0	0.00	18	36.73			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	8	16.33	0	0.00	8	16.33			
	GRADUATE	1	2.04	0	0.00	1	2.04			
	POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
1988	OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	56	0	56
	ILLITERATE	2	3.57	0	0	2	3.57			
	LITERATE	9	16.07	0	0	9	16.07			
	PRIMARY	15	26.79	0	0	15	26.79			
	SECONDARY	20	35.71	0	0	20	35.71			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	8	14.29	0	0	8	14.29			
	GRADUATE	2	3.57	0	0	2	3.57			
POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00				
1993	OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0	0	0.00	51	32	83
	ILLITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	LITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	PRIMARY	4	7.84	2	6.25	6	7.22			
	SECONDARY	30	58.82	20	62.50	50	60.24			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	10	19.61	7	21.87	17	20.48			
	GRADUATE	7	13.73	2	6.25	9	10.84			
POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	1	3.12	1	1.20				
1998	OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	49	27	76
	ILLITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	LITERATE	2	4.08	1	3.70	3	3.94			
	PRIMARY	4	8.16	2	7.40	6	7.89			
	SECONDARY	26	53.06	18	66.66	44	57.89			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	10	20.41	3	11.11	13	17.10			
	GRADUATE	7	14.29	2	7.40	9	11.84			
POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	1	3.70	1	1.31				
2003	OTHER	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	42	18	60
	ILLITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	LITERATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00			
	PRIMARY	4	9.52	2	11.11	6	10.00			
	SECONDARY	23	54.76	10	55.55	33	55.00			
	HIGHER SECONDARY	10	23.81	4	22.22	14	23.33			
	GRADUATE	5	11.90	2	11.11	7	11.66			
POST GRADUATE	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00				
OTHERS	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00				

Table: 4 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of education and sex in Cooch Behar district. It is reflected from the table that in 1978 panchayat election, not a single graduate leader contested the panchayat election, 40% leaders had secondary education and 31% leaders had primary education. In 1983 and 1988 panchayat election, the figure was more or less same in respect of education; only one and two graduate leaders contested the panchayat election respectively for the above two years

From 1993 to 2003 panchayat elections, the educational qualification of leaders concentrated to secondary level; more than 50% leaders had secondary

Fig - 4
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF EDUCATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT



education of the above three years' panchayat contesting candidates. From 1993 to 2003 panchayat election, most of the female leaders had secondary level education; though we find one post-graduate female leader contested the 1998 and 2003 panchayat election respectively. From 1993 to 2003 panchayat election, it is found that the number graduate leaders were increasing more. However, the dominance of secondary level qualified leaders remained unchanged.

TABLE 5

YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

YEAR	OCCUPATION	NO	%	TOTAL
1978	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	45
	Cultivator	30	66.67	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	3	6.67	
	Teacher	3	6.67	
	Other services	2	4.44	
	House wife	0	0.00	
	Unemployed	7	15.56	
1983	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	49
	Cultivator	37	75.51	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	4	8.16	
	Teacher	2	4.08	
	Other services	1	2.04	
	House wife	0	0.00	
	Unemployed	5	10.20	
1988	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	56
	Cultivator	42	75.00	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	4	7.14	
	Teacher	4	7.14	
	Other services	1	1.79	
	House wife	0	0.00	
	Unemployed	5	8.93	
1993	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	83
	Cultivator	34	40.96	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	3	3.61	
	Teacher	9	10.84	
	Other services	3	3.61	
	House wife	30	36.14	
	Unemployed	4	4.82	
1998	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	76
	Cultivator	37	48.68	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	3	3.95	
	Teacher	6	7.89	
	Other services	5	6.58	
	House wife	23	30.26	
	Unemployed	2	2.63	
2003	Agricultural labour	0	0.00	60
	Cultivator	27	45.00	
	Rural artisan	0	0.00	
	Milk man	0	0.00	
	Quack	0	0.00	
	Business man	5	8.33	
	Teacher	5	8.33	
	Other services	3	5.00	
	House wife	16	26.67	
	Unemployed	4	6.67	

Table: 5 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of occupation in Cooch Behar district. From 1978 to 1988 panchayat election, it is reflected from the table that more than 60% came from the cultivating class. This percentage decreased from 1993 for 33% reservation of seats for woman in gram panchayat. From 1993 to 2003 panchayat election it is found that 27% to 36% leaders were occupationally house wives. The participation of teachers, business men and unemployed persons in panchayat elections was not in a good number. The participation of teacher in panchayat election from 1978 to 2003 was between 4.08% and 10.84%. From 1998 panchayat election, it is found the participation of ICDS workers in panchayat election which have mentioned in other services headings.

FIG-5
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OCCUPATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

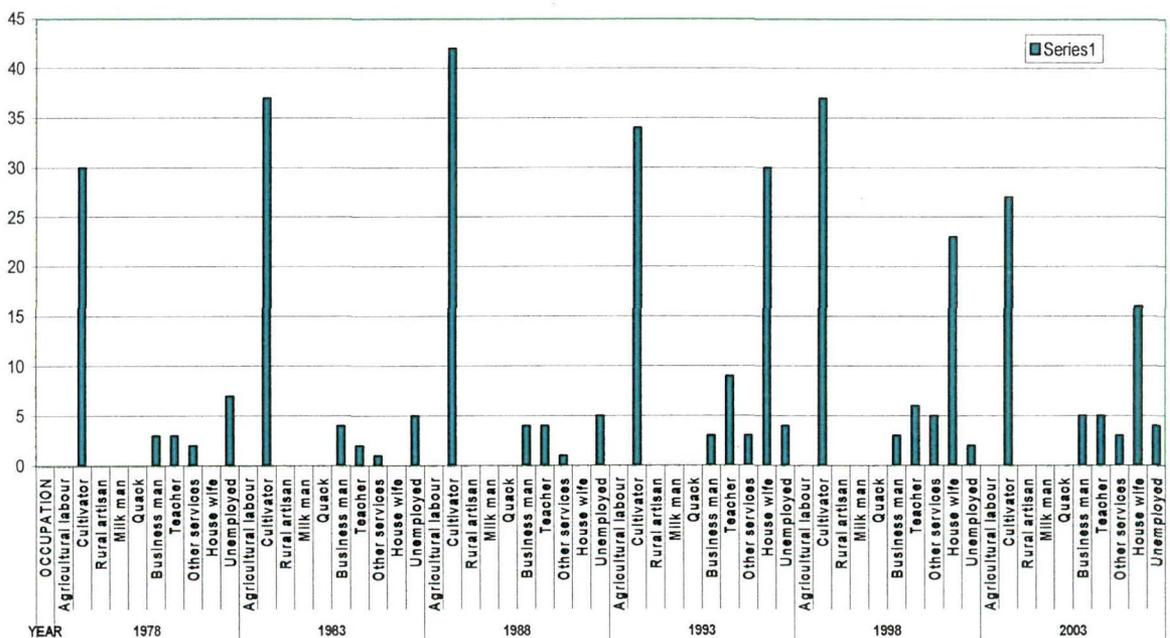


TABLE 5-A																			
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN COCH BEHAR FROM-1978 TO 2003																			
	OCCUPATIONS	1978			1983			1988			1993			1998			2003		
		NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL	NO	%	TOTAL
INC	Agri. labour	0	0	13	0	0	14	0	0	15	0	0	19	0	0	10	0	0	12
	Cultivator	10	76.92		11	78.57		12	80		10	52.63		3	30		6	50	
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	2	15.38		2	14.28		2	13.33		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Teacher	1	7.69		0	0		1	6.66		2	10.52		2	20		1	8.33	
	Other services	0	0		1	7.14		0	0		1	5.26		4	40		0	0	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		6	31.57		1	10		3	25	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
Unemployed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	16.66							
CPIM	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	5	0	0	10	0	0	10	0	0	6	0	0	10
	Cultivator	0	0		2	40		6	60		4	40		2	33.33		4	40	
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		0	0		2	20		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Teacher	0	0		1	20		2	20		1	10		0	0		2	20	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	16.66		2	20	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		4	40		2	33.33		2	20	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
Unemployed	0	0	2	40	0	0	1	10	1	16.66	0	0							
CPI	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Cultivator	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Teacher	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
Unemployed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
FB	Agri. labour	0	0	13	0	0	14	0	0	15	0	0	14	0	0	9	0	0	14
	Cultivator	10	76.92		11	78.57		10	66.66		8	57.14		5	55.55		8	57.14	
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Teacher	1	7.69		1	7.14		1	6.66		0	0		0	0		1	7.14	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		1	6.66		0	0		0	0		1	7.14	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		6	42.85		3	33.33		4	28.57	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
Unemployed	2	15.38	2	14.28	3	20	0	0	1	11.11	0	0							
SUCI	Agri. labour	0	0	7	0	0	8	0	0	6	0	0	10	0	0	10	0	0	8
	Cultivator	6	85.71		5	62.5		4	66.66		2	20		6	60		5	62.5	
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	10		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		2	25		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	12.5	
	Teacher	1	14.28		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	10		0	0		0	0	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		3	30		3	30		2	25	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
Unemployed	0	0	1	12.5	2	33.33	3	30	0	0	0	0							
TMC	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	11	0	0	7
	Cultivator	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		6	54.54		2	28.57	
	Rural artisan	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Milk man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Quack	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	Business man	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	9.09		0	0	
	Teacher	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		1	14.28	
	Other services	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
	House wife	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		4	36.36		2	28.57	
	Bidi binder	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	
Unemployed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	28.57							

Contd.

Party	Occupation	1978		1983		1988		1993		1998		2003	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
BJP	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Cultivator	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	55.55	0	0
	Rural artisan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Milk man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Quack	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Business man	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	40	1	11.11	1	50
	Teacher	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Other services	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	House wife	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	60	3	33.33	1	50
	Bidi binder	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unemployed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
OTERS	Agri. labour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Cultivator	4	33.33	8	100	10	100	10	40	10	47.61	2	28.57
	Rural artisan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Milk man	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Quack	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Business man	1	8.33	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	42.85
	Teacher	0	0	0	0	0	0	6	24	4	19.04	0	0
	Other services	2	16.66	0	0	0	0	1	4	0	0	0	0
	House wife	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	32	7	33.33	2	28.57
	Bidi binder	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unemployed	5	41.66	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Table: 5A shows the party wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of occupation in Cooch Behar district. It is reflected from the above tables that from 1978 to 1988 panchayat election, INC nominated 76.92% to 80% cultivators as their party contesting candidates. FB nominated 76.92% to 66.66% cultivators as contesting candidates. SUCI nominated 85.71% to 66.66% cultivators as their party candidates. In 1983, CPI(M) nominated 40% cultivators and 40% unemployed persons as their party candidates, in 1988 panchayat election 60% cultivators were nominated as contesting candidates by CPI(M). From 1993 to 2003 panchayat election, more or less all parties nominated their contesting candidates from cultivators, house wives, teachers and unemployed persons. But concentration of choice of all parties was to the cultivators and house wives.

FIG 5A Page-1/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

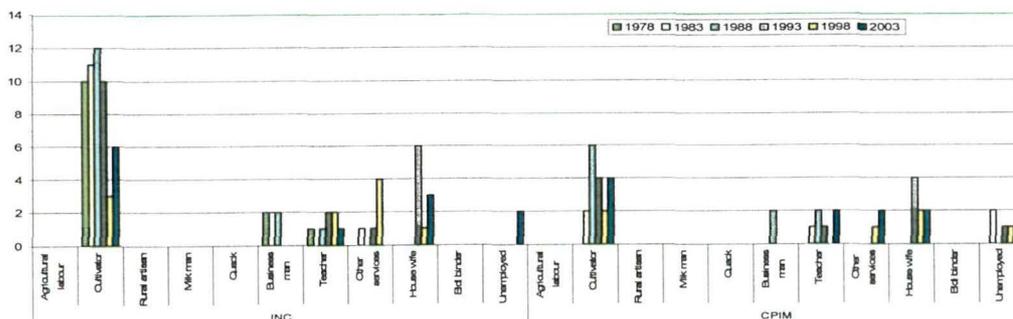


FIG 5A Page-2/4
 PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

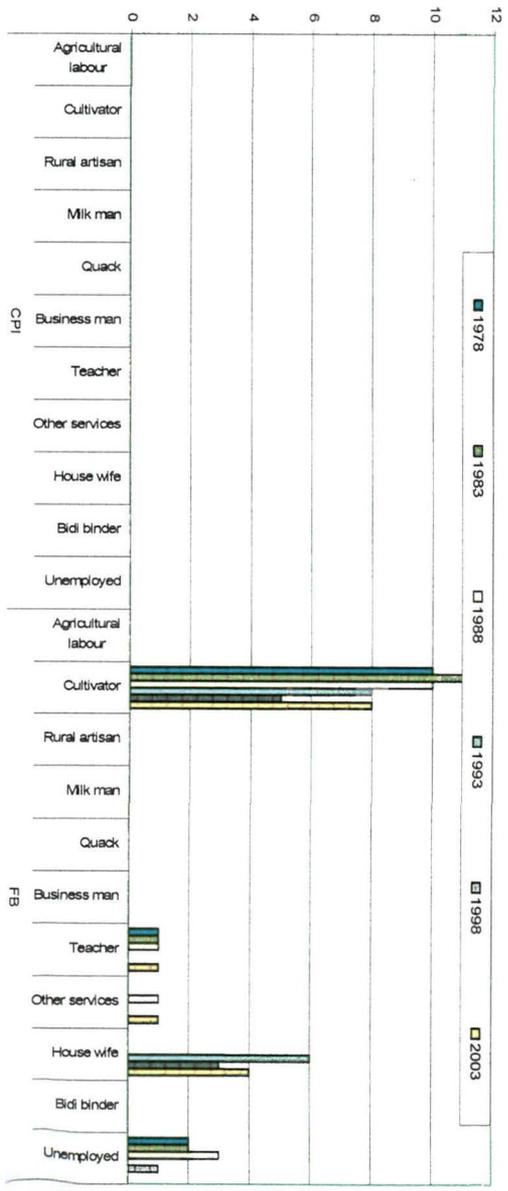


FIG 5A Page-3/4
 PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

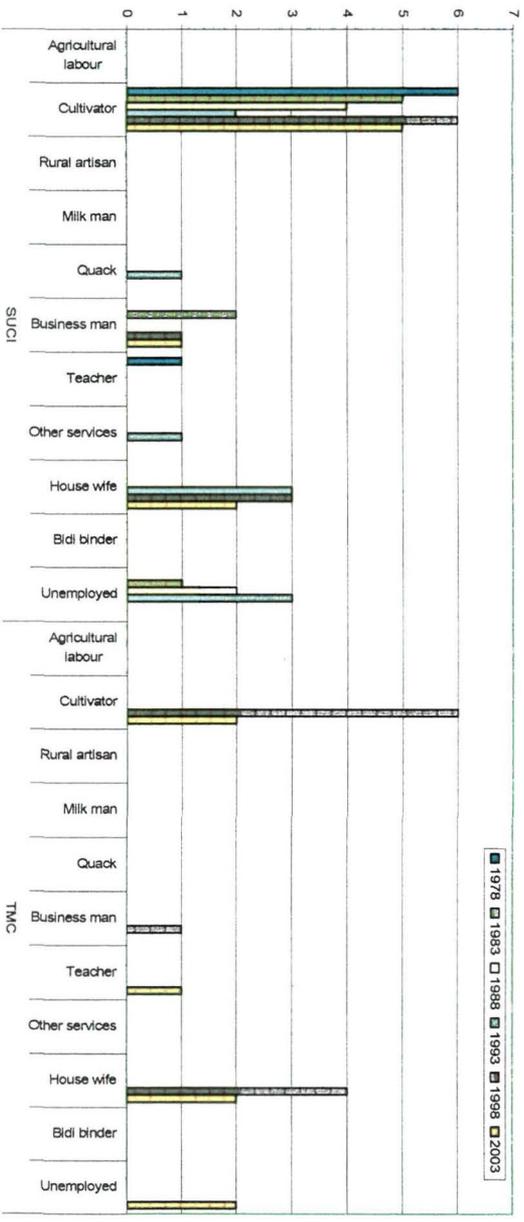
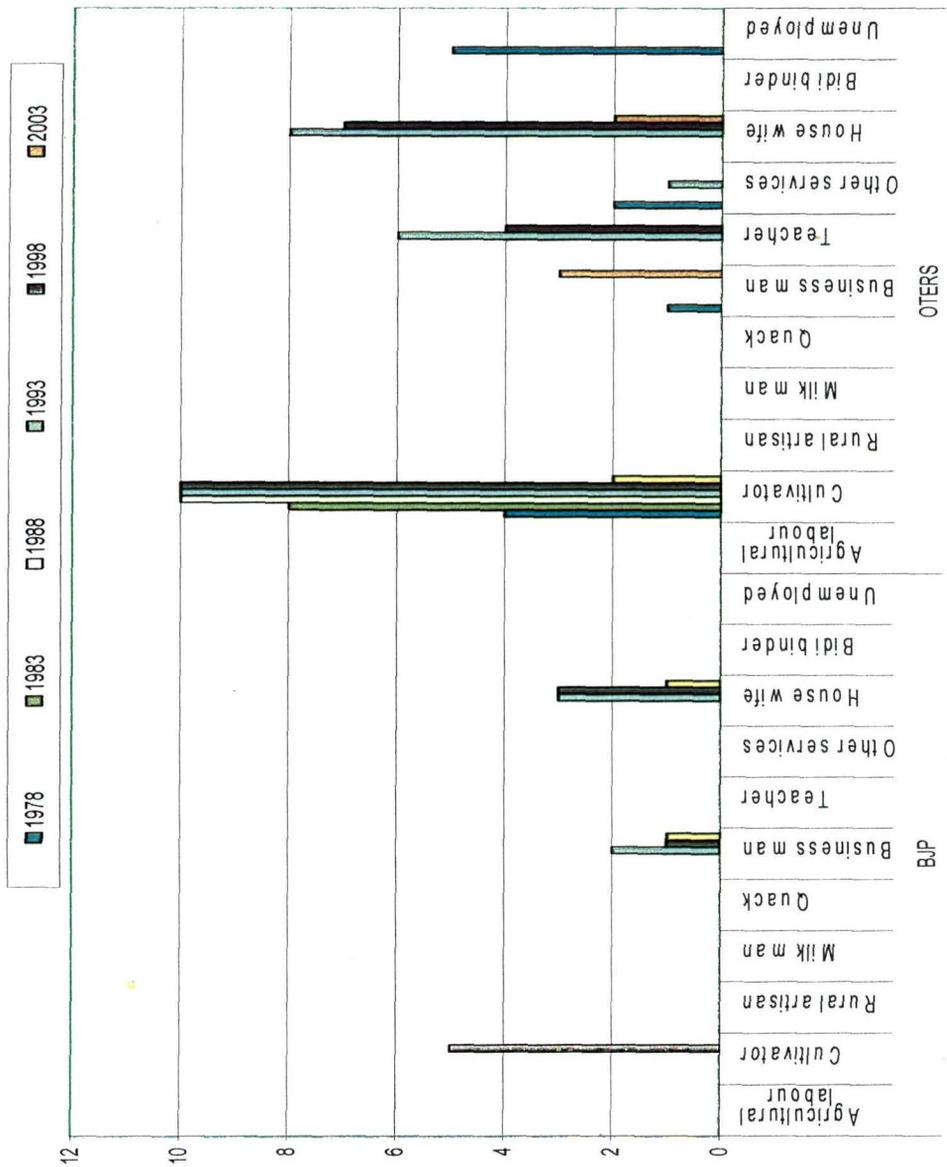


FIG 5A Page-4/4
 PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF OCCUPATION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT



YEAR	LAND HOLDING	PERSONS	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL
1978	LAND LESS	2	4.44	45
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	25	55.56	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	15	33.33	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	3	6.67	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	

1983	LAND LESS	2	4.08	49
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	28	57.14	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	15	30.61	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	4	8.16	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	
1988	LAND LESS	3	5.36	56
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	40	71.43	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	10	17.86	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	3	5.36	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	
1993	LAND LESS	7	8.43	83
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	45	54.22	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	25	30.12	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	6	7.23	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	
1998	LAND LESS	4	5.26	76
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	40	52.63	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	23	30.26	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	9	11.84	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	
2003	LAND LESS	2	3.33	60
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0.00	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0.00	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	38	63.33	
	2.5 TO 5.0 ACRES	18	30.00	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	2	3.33	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0.00	

Table: 6 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leader in terms of land holding in Cooch Behar district. It is reflected from the table that from 1978 to 2003 panchayat elections more than 50% contesting candidates of panchayat election had land up to 2.5 acres. There was no contesting candidate from 1978 to 2003 panchayat elections who had land above 10 acres. Less than 10% contesting candidates were land less and less than 15% contesting had land from 5.01 to 10 acres in the six consecutive panchayat elections.

FIG 6
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN MURSHIDABAD DISTRICT

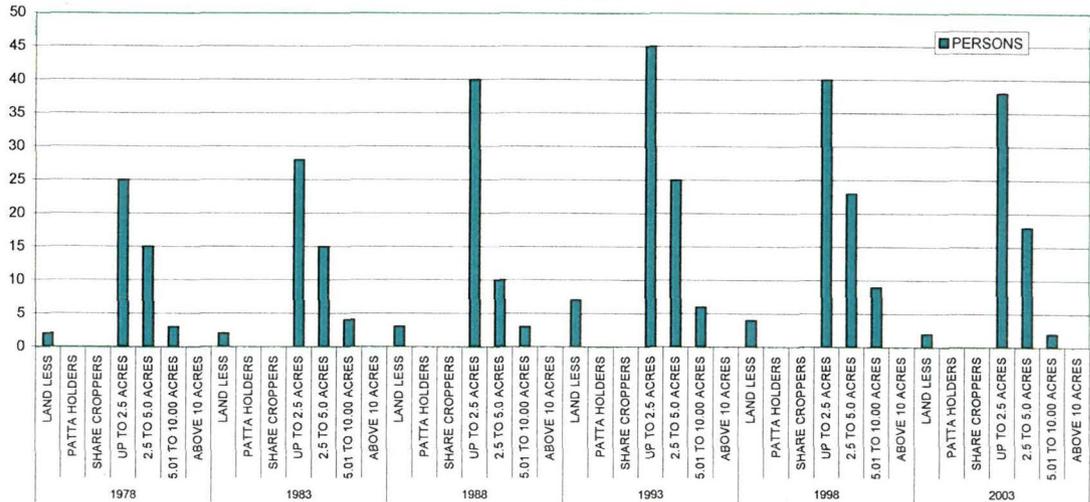


TABLE 6A

PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

PARTY	LAND HOLDING	1978			1983			1988			1993			1998			2003			
		NO	%	TOTAL																
INC	LAND LESS	0	0	13	0	0	14	0	0	15	1	5.26	19	0	0	10	0	0	12	
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	1	7.69		1	7.14		5	33.33		10	52.63		4	40		10	83.33		
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	10	76.92		10	71.42		8	53.33		7	36.84		6	60		2	16.66		
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	2	15.38		3	21.42		2	13.33		1	5.26		0	0		0	0		
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		
CPIM	LAND LESS	0	0	0	1	20	5	1	10	10	3	30	10	0	0	6	0	0	10	
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0			
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		1	20		9	90		1	10		0	0		0	0		
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		3	60		0	0		6	60		1	16.66		10	100		
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		5	83.33		0	0		
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		

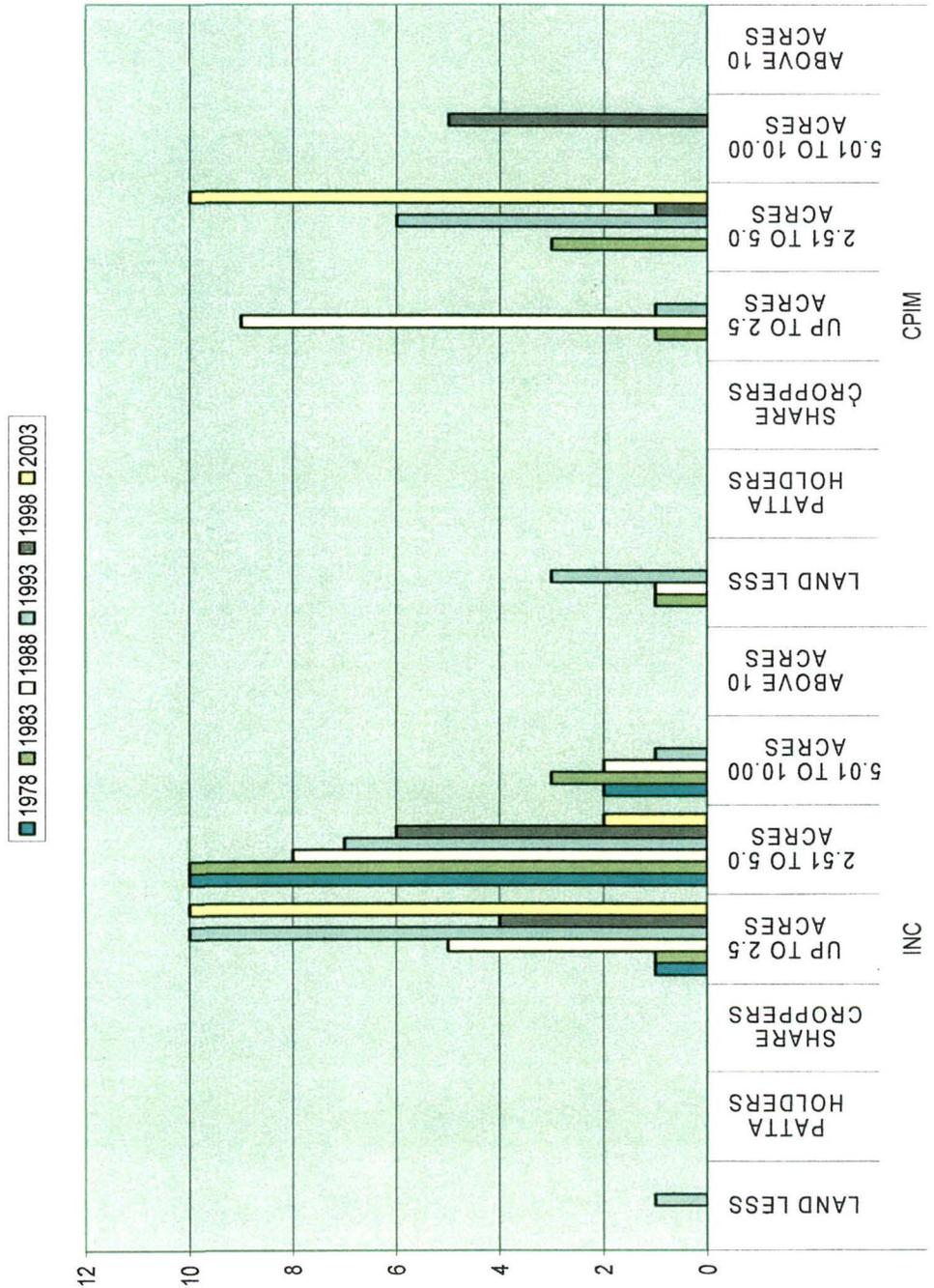
Contd.

CPI	LAND LESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0							
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0						
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0						
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0						
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0						
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0						
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0						
FB	LAND LESS	1	7.69	13	1	7.14	14	1	6.66	15	2	14.28	14	1	11.11	9	0	0					
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	9	69.23		10	71.42		14	14		93.33	7		50	14		0	0	9	9	64.28	14	
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	2	15.38		2	14.28		0	0		0	1		7.14	4		44.44	4	44.44	5	35.71	0	0
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	1	7.69		1	7.14		0	0		0	4		28.57	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SUCI	LAND LESS	1	14.28	7	0	0	8	1	16.66	6	0	0	10	0	0	10	0	0					
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	3	42.85		8	100		5	83.33		7	70		10	10		100	7	87.5	8			
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	3	42.85		0	0		0	0		2	20		0	0		0	1	12.5	0	0		
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		1	10		0	0		0	0	0	0	0		
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0		
TMC	LAND LESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	9.09	11	1	14.28					
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	10	90.90	6	85.71	7	
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
BJP	LAND LESS	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	20	5	2	22.22	9	1	50					
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	3		60	6		66.66	0	0	0	0	0	
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	1		20	1		11.11	0	0	0	0	0	
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	1	50	0	0
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
OTHERS	LAND LESS	0	0	12	0	0.00	8	0	0	10	0	0	25	0	0	21	0	0					
	PATTA HOLDERS	0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	SHARE CROPPERS	0	0		0	0.00		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	
	UP TO 2.5 ACRES	12	100		8	100.00		7	70		17	68		10	10		47.61	6	85.71	7			
	2.51 TO 5.0 ACRES	0	0		0	0.00		2	20		8	32		11	52.38		0	0	0	0			
	5.01 TO 10.00 ACRES	0	0		0	0.00		1	10		0	0		0	0		0	1	14.28	0	0		
	ABOVE 10 ACRES	0	0		0	0.00		0	0		0	0		0	0		0	0	0	0	0		

Table: 6A shows the party wise distribution of panchayat leaders in Cooch Behar district. From 1978 to 2003 panchayat election INC nominated contesting candidates concentrated to the landing group of 2.51 – 5.00 acres; FB candidates

concentrated to the land holding group up to 2.5 acres. In 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2003 panchayat election most of the CPI (M) nominated contesting candidates had their land of 2.51 to 5.00 acres, up to 2.5 acres, 2.51 to 5.00 acres, 5.01 to 10.00 acres and 2.51 to 5.00 acres land holding group respectively. SUCI basically nominated their party candidates for the six consecutive years from the land holding group of up to 2.5 acres.

FIG-6A 1/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS LAND HOLDING IN
COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT



**6A 2/4
PATY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF LEADERS IN TERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN COOCH BEHAR
DISTRICT**

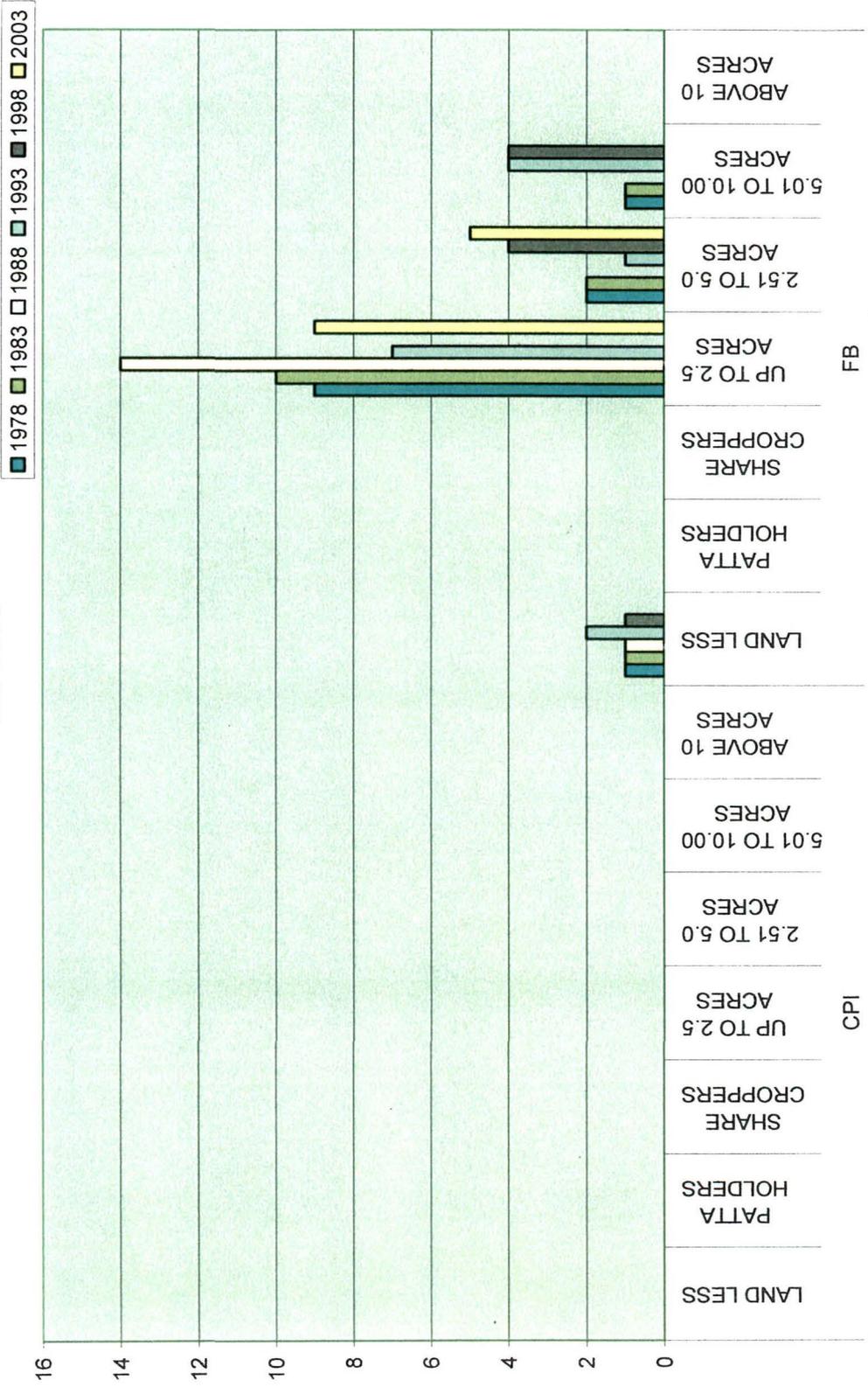


FIG-6A 3/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS INTERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN
COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

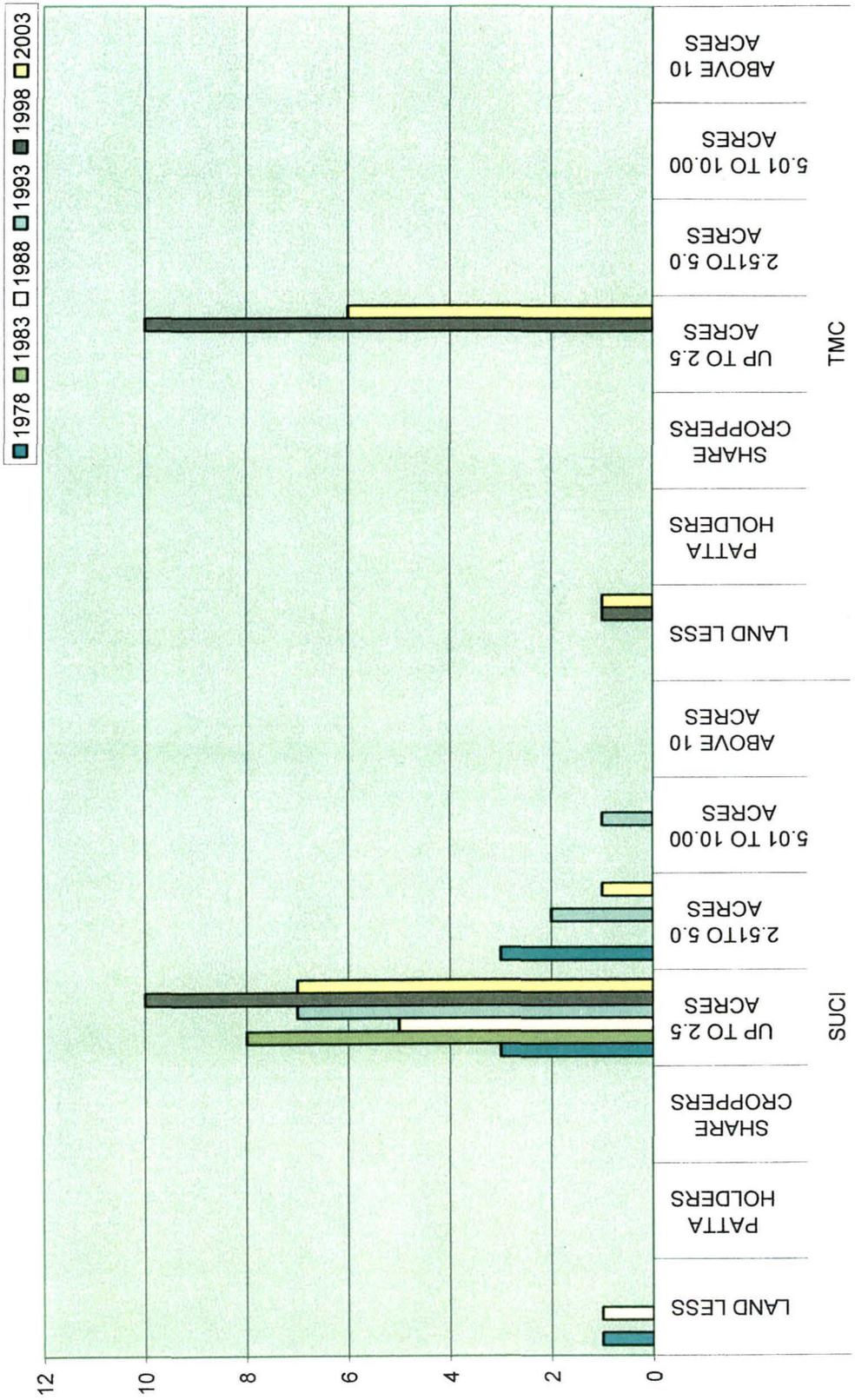


FIG-6A 4/4
PARTY WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS INTERMS OF LAND HOLDING IN
COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

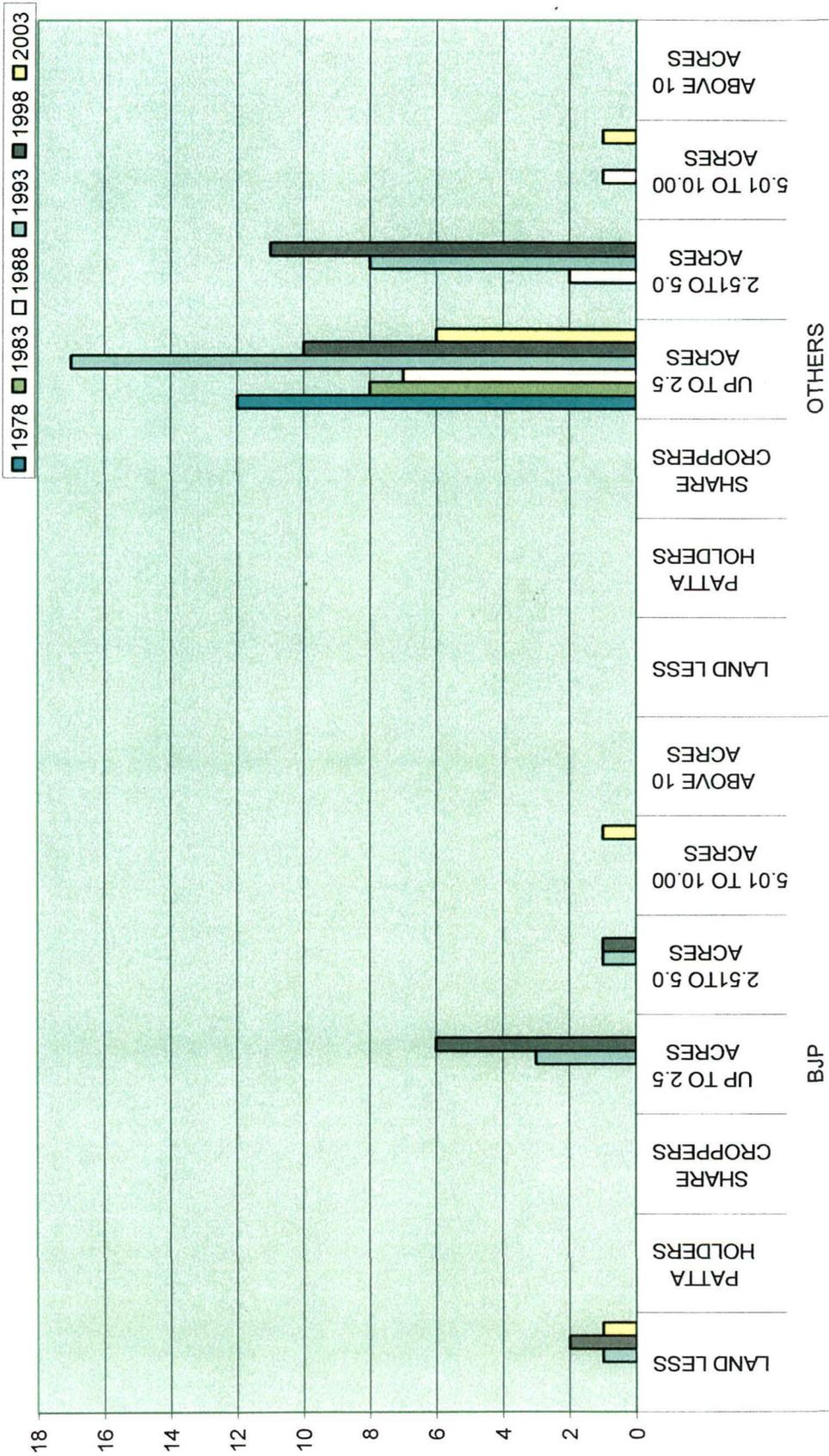


TABLE - 7				
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF INCOME IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT				
YEAR	AGE	PERSONS	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL
1978	UP TO 10000	15	33.33	45
	10001 TO 20000	20	44.44	
	20001 TO 40000	10	22.22	
	40001 TO 60000	0	0.00	
	60001 TO 80000	0	0.00	
	80001 TO 100000	0	0.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
1983	UP TO 10000	9	18.37	49
	10001 TO 20000	30	61.22	
	20001 TO 40000	5	10.20	
	40001 TO 60000	5	10.20	
	60001 TO 80000	0	0.00	
	80001 TO 100000	0	0.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
1988	UP TO 10000	3	5.36	56
	10001 TO 20000	30	53.57	
	20001 TO 40000	20	35.71	
	40001 TO 60000	3	5.36	
	60001 TO 80000	0	0.00	
	80001 TO 100000	0	0.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
1993	UP TO 10000	0	0.00	83
	10001 TO 20000	30	36.14	
	20001 TO 40000	20	24.10	
	40001 TO 60000	20	24.10	
	60001 TO 80000	13	15.66	
	80001 TO 100000	0	0.00	
	ABOVE 100000	0	0.00	
1998	UP TO 10000	0	0.00	76
	10001 TO 20000	20	26.32	
	20001 TO 40000	20	26.32	
	40001 TO 60000	27	35.53	
	60001 TO 80000	6	7.89	
	80001 TO 100000	2	2.63	
	ABOVE 100000	1	1.32	
2003	UP TO 10000	0	0.00	60
	10001 TO 20000	2	3.33	
	20001 TO 40000	10	16.67	
	40001 TO 60000	16	26.67	
	60001 TO 80000	21	35.00	
	80001 TO 100000	7	11.67	
	ABOVE 100000	4	6.67	

Table: 7 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of income in Cooch Behar district. From 1978 to 1988 panchayat election, 44.44% to 53.57% panchayat leaders had income status in 10001 to 20000 income group. From 1993 to 1998 panchayat elections, it is found that from the table that more or less panchayat leaders came from the income group of 10001 to 20000, 40001 to 60000 equally. In 2003 panchayat election, 26.66% leaders came from 40001 to 60000 income group and 35% leaders came from 60001 to 80000 income group.

In 2003 panchayat election 6.66% panchayat leaders came from above 100000 income group. It is reflected from the table that the income status of panchayat leaders had been gradually increasing. Economic status of some persons, who had contested two or three panchayat elections consecutively, had increased remarkably.

FIG 7
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF INCOME IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

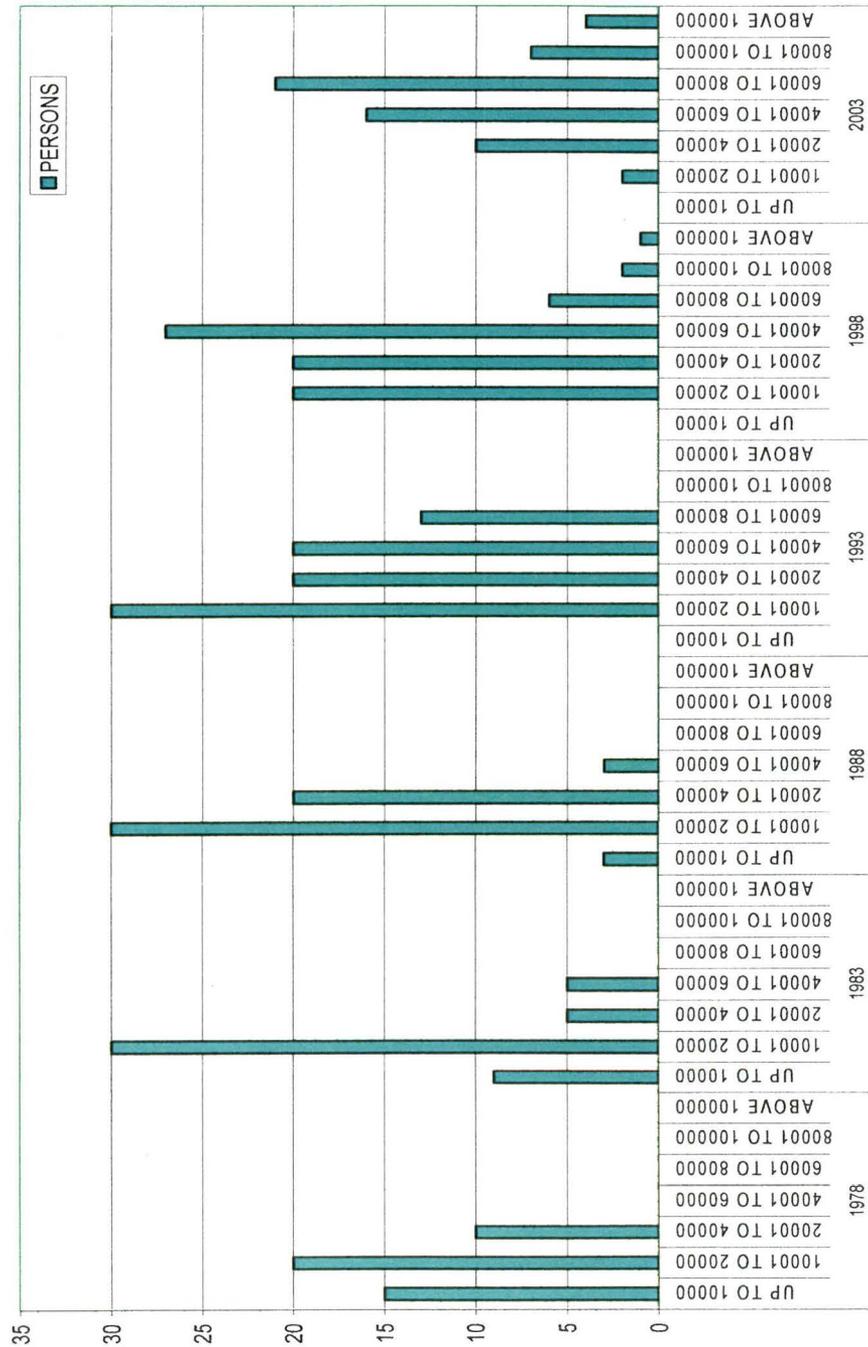


TABLE 8				
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LIFE STYLE IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT				
YEAR	AGE	PERSONS	PERCENTAGE	TOTAL CONTESTING CANDIDATES
1978	MUD HOUSE	40	88.89	45
	BRICK HOUSE	3	6.67	
	MUD & BRICK HOUSE	2	4.44	
	SANITATION	5	11.11	
	TV	0	0.00	
	RADIO	38	84.44	
	NEWS PAPER READING	9	20.00	
	CYCLE	30	66.67	
	MOTOR CYCLE	0	0.00	
MILCH COW / BULLOCK	42	93.33		
1983	MUD HOUSE	33	67.35	49
	BRICK HOUSE	7	14.29	
	BRICK & MUD HOUSE	9	18.37	
	SANITATION	10	20.41	
	TV	0	0.00	
	RADIO	42	85.71	
	NEWS PAPER READING	15	30.61	
	CYCLE	40	81.63	
	MOTOR CYCLE	0	0.00	
MILCH COW / BULLOCK	45	91.84		
1988	MUD HOUSE	40	71.43	56
	BRICK HOUSE	9	16.07	
	MUD & BRICK HOUSE	7	12.50	
	SANITATION	15	26.79	
	TV	0	0.00	
	RADIO	52	92.86	
	NEWS PAPER READING	20	35.71	
	CYCLE	52	92.86	
	MOTOR CYCLE	2	3.57	
MILCH COW / BULLOCK	50	89.29		
1993	MUD HOUSE	55	66.27	83
	BRICK HOUSE	20	24.10	
	MUD & BRICK HOUSE	8	9.64	
	SANITATION	25	30.12	
	TV	4	4.82	
	RADIO	72	86.75	
	NEWS PAPER READING	25	30.12	
	CYCLE	68	81.93	
	MOTOR CYCLE	5	6.02	
MILCH COW / BULLOCK	80	96.39		
1998	MUD HOUSE	46	60.53	76
	BRICK HOUSE	22	28.95	
	MUD & BRICK HOUSE	8	10.53	
	SANITATION	40	52.63	
	TV	9	11.84	
	RADIO	62	81.58	
	NEWS PAPER READING	50	65.79	
	CYCLE	63	82.89	
	MOTOR CYCLE	7	9.21	
MILCH COW / BULLOCK	70	92.11		

Contd.

2003	MUD HOUSE	30	50.00	60
	BRICK HOUSE	25	41.67	
	MUD & BRICK HOUSE	5	8.33	
	SANITATION	48	80.00	
	TV	25	41.67	
	RADIO	52	86.67	
	NEWS PAPER READING	50	83.33	
	CYCLE	55	91.67	
	MOTOR CYCLE	9	15.00	
	MILCH COW / BULLOCK	56	93.33	

Table: 8 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of life style in Cooch Behar district. From 1978 to 1998 more than 60% contesting candidates lived in mud house; in 2003 panchayat election 50% leaders contested the panchayat election who had mud house; in this year 41.66% leaders had brick house. In 2003, 80.00% panchayat leaders had sanitation facility in their house, whereas this number was 11.11% in 1978 panchayat election. This signifies the health consciousness of panchayat leaders had been increased more than ago. The importance of mass media like radio remained unchanged from 1978 to 2003 to the panchayat leaders; more than 83.33% leaders used radio throughout the said period. In 2003, 41.00% leaders had their TV set; whereas from 1978 to 1988, not a single leader had TV set in their house. The tendency of news paper reading had been gradually increasing from 1978 to 2003; in 2003, 80% leaders read news paper. From 1978 to 2003 panchayat elections we found in a good number of leaders used cycle for their traveling; very few numbers of leaders had motor cycle from 1988 to 2003. From 1978 to 2003 panchayat elections, more than 90.00% contesting candidates had milch cows/bullocks except 1988 year.

From the data of table-8 it is reflected that the life style pattern of rural leaders had developed more than before. Specially in respect of brick house dwelling, sanitation, news paper reading, radio, TV set, it could be concluded that the rural leaders' life style had been developed.

FIG 8
 YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF LIFE STYLE IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT

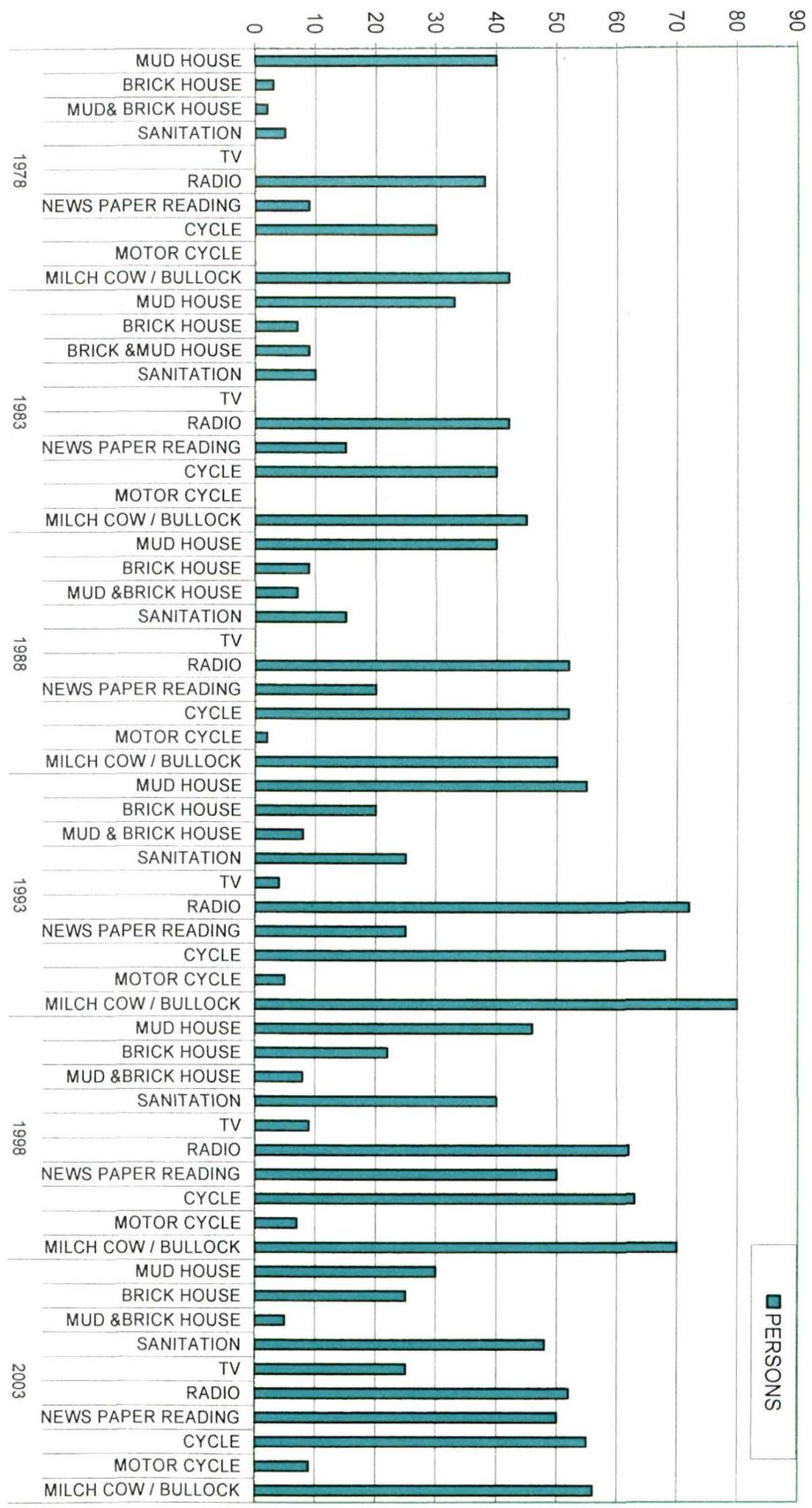
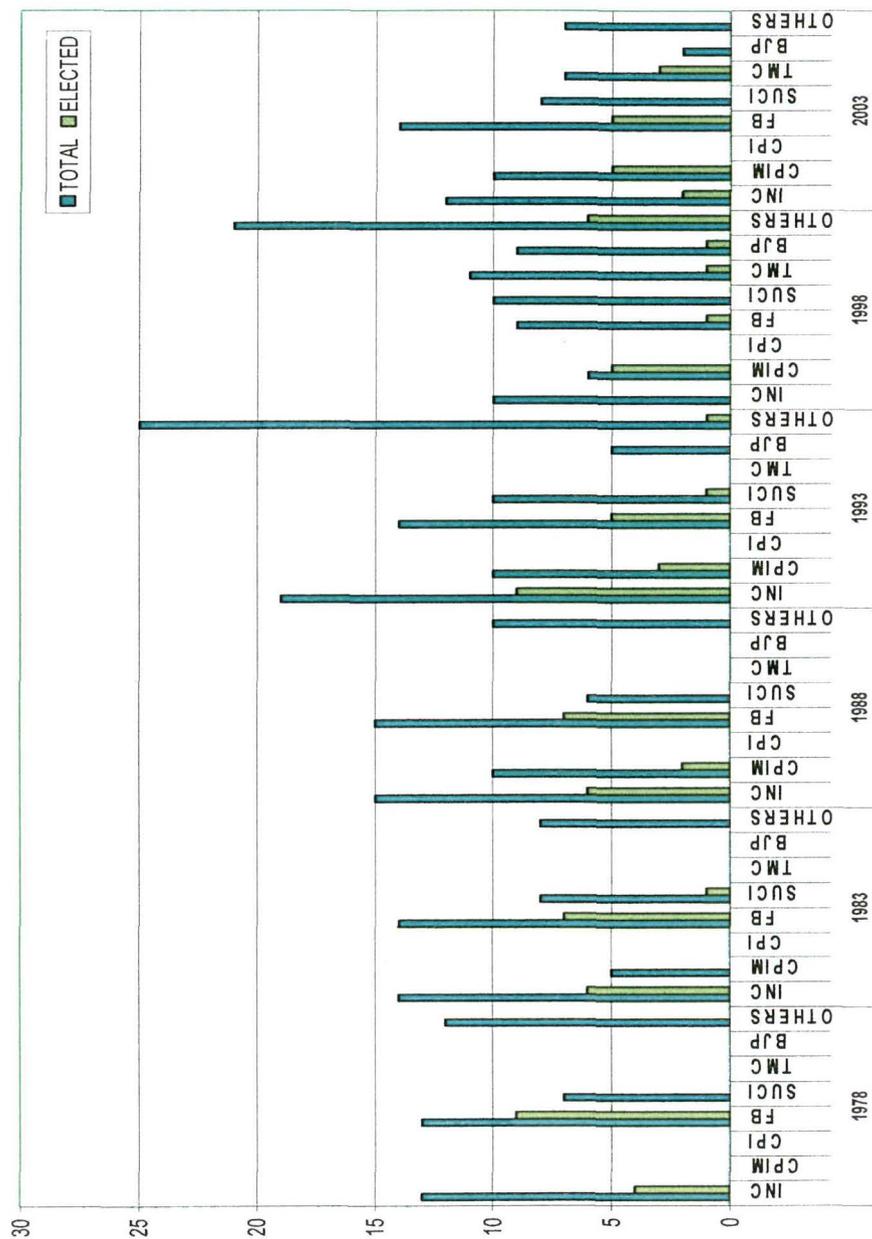


TABLE 9					
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF SUCCESS IN ELECTION IN COOCH BEHAR DISTRICT					
YEAR	AGE	TOTAL	ELECTED	PERCENTAGE OF ELECTED MEMEBR ON TOTAL SEATS	TOTAL NO OF SEAT
1978	INC	13	4	30.76	13
	CPIM	0	0	0.00	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	13	9	69.23	
	SUCI	7	0	0.00	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	0	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	12	0	0.00	
1983	INC	14	6	42.85	14
	CPIM	5	0	0.00	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	14	7	50.00	
	SUCI	8	1	7.14	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	0	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	8	0	0.00	
1988	INC	15	6	40.00	15
	CPIM	10	2	13.33	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	15	7	46.67	
	SUCI	6	0	0.00	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	0	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	10	0	0.00	
1993	INC	19	9	47.37	19
	CPIM	10	3	15.79	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	14	5	26.32	
	SUCI	10	1	5.26	
	TMC	0	0	0.00	
	BJP	5	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	25	1	5.26	
1998	INC	10	0	0.00	14
	CPIM	6	5	35.71	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	9	1	7.14	
	SUCI	10	0	0.00	
	TMC	11	1	7.14	
	BJP	9	1	7.14	
	OTHERS	21	6	42.86	
2003	INC	12	2	13.33	15
	CPIM	10	5	33.33	
	CPI	0	0	0.00	
	FB	14	5	33.33	
	SUCI	8	0	0.00	
	TMC	7	3	20.00	
	BJP	2	0	0.00	
	OTHERS	7	0	0.00	

Table: 9 shows the year wise distribution of panchayat leaders in terms of success in panchayat elections in Cooch Behar district. It is found from the table that in 1978 panchayat election, INC won 30.76% seats and FB won 69.23% seats; in

1983 panchayat election INC won 42.85% seats, FB-50.00 %and SUCI – 7.14% seats. In 1988, INC won 40.00% seats, CPI (M) -13.33% and FB – won 46.66% seats. In 1993 –INC got 47.36% seats and rests were bagged by left parties and independent candidate. In 1998 INC did not get any seat, both FB and BJP won one seat each; CPI(M) – 35.71%.Dissident FB named as Socialist Forward Block led by Sri Kamal Guha(Ex –Minister of Left Front Government) bagged 42.85% seats, which has been mentioned in others heading. In 2003 panchayat election, Socialist FB came back to FB, so, FB won 33.33% and CPI (M) and INC won 33.33% and 13.33% seats respectively.

FIG 9
YEAR WISE DISTRIBUTION OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN TERMS OF SUCCESS IN ELECTION IN COOCH
BEHAR DISTRICT



From field survey it is found that the Uttar Haldibari gram panchayat is FB dominated area and in local politics CPI (M) and FB did not make any alliance to capture the village power centre, rather both parties compete with each other in panchayat election in spite of being partners of Left Front.

Like Murshidabad district in Cooch Behar same questions were asked to the contesting candidates about the perception of leadership. We do not know whether due to the same political culture of Bengal or not, but interestingly the answer of the respondents of the two districts are same. So, it is not essential to discuss separately about the responses of the respondents of Cooch Behar district. Previously it has been defined in the part of Murshidabad district.

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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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APPENDIX

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. YEAR OF ELECTION:

2. NAME OF THE TIER:

3. NAME OF THE CONTESTING CANDIDATE:

4. AGE:

5. SEX:

6. RELIGION:

7. CASTE:

8. EDUCATION:

9. OCCUPATION: A) MAIN:

B) SECONDARY:

THEN:

NOW:

10. LAND HOLDING PATTERN: A) QUANTITY:

I) OWN:

II) PATTA HOLDER:

B) SHARE CROPPER:

(QUANTITY:)

(THEN:

NOW:

)

11. MONTHLY INCOME:

12. LIFE STYLE: A) HOUSE – KUTCHA/PUCCA (MUD/BRICK):

B) SANITATION:

C) TV/RADIO:

D) CYCLE/MOTOR

CYCLE:

E) MILCH COW/BULLOCK:

F) OTHERS:

3. NEWS PAPER READING: A) DAILY/OCCASIONALLY:

B) BY SUBSCRIBING/ IN SHOPS/OTHER SOURCES:

14. PARTY AFFILIATION:



15. WHETHER THE CONTESTING CANDIDATE ELECTED IN ELECTION:

16. WHETHER HE/SHE BECAME PRADHAN/UPA-PRADHAN:

17. PERCEPTION OF LEADERSHIP:

A) ACCORDING TO YOU WHO IS A LEADER?

B) ACCORDING TO YOU WHAT A LEADER SHOULD POSSES?

C) DO YOU THINK YOU QUALIFY TO BE A LEADER?