

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 work 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 at 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 paper 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. Henry 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 to middle income groups.

According to the report on the working of the Panchayat Raj in Rajasthan (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 district panchayat 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 dominated 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 came 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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