

## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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 interest<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

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.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup> 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."<sup>14</sup>

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.<sup>15</sup> 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.<sup>16</sup>

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.<sup>17</sup>

According to "Tathya O Samiksha" (data and survey),<sup>18</sup> 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"<sup>19</sup> 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),<sup>20</sup> 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"<sup>21</sup> 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."<sup>22</sup>

According to the report of West Bengal Government about Gram Panchayats and their activities: survey and evaluation (1980),<sup>23</sup> 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.<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup>

From the study of socio-economic background of panchayat leaders in West Bengal, in 1992, G.K. Lietaen 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.<sup>26</sup>

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.<sup>27</sup> 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.<sup>28</sup>

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.<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> When the 73<sup>rd</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup>

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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup>

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.<sup>36</sup>

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.<sup>37</sup>

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.<sup>38</sup> 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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