

## Chapter-III

### Panchayat Raj in practice – A Study of Cooch Behar District

#### Introduction:

The district of Cooch Behar is a backward district in West Bengal in many senses than one. It is absolutely rural in nature and agriculture based. Left front mainly CPI (M) has a strong political base in the district both in terms of popular support and organisational maturity. Their policies and programmes are generally seen as pro-people. This is specially the case in the countryside where land reform held much promise for large section of the under privileged. Under strong political stability of LF in the district, the Panchayat Raj or democratic decentralisation has been working as a state policy to usher a new social order for the socio-economic transformation of rural community of the district. Many observers feel that Panchayats have achieved much that is tangible, especially in land reform but also in rural development generally. They have brought about a churning of the submerged humanity in rural areas and created a high degree of political awareness among all sections. The concerted effort at the political level acts effectively to change rural power structure in favour of the marginalised or suppressed groups.

Our investigation into panchayat raj programme in a backward district Cooch Behar focussing on two gram panchayats in particular seeks to assess how far this programme has been successful to transform the rural economy of Cooch Behar by improving the socio-economic conditions of the rural poor in the light of wider aims of the panchayat raj programme under LFG. The present chapter will throw light on the political participation of the local leaders in respect to a backward district Cooch Behar.

## **a) Profile Analysis of the District.**

### **i) Location, Boundary & Administrative Units.**

**Location:** The district Cooch Behar geographically forms part of the Himalayan Terai of West Bengal. It lies between the parallel  $25^{\circ} 57' 40''$  and  $26^{\circ} 32' 20''$  north latitude in the Northern Hemisphere. The eastern - most extremity of the district is marked by  $89^{\circ} 54' 35''$  east longitude and its Western most extremity by  $88^{\circ} 47' 40''$  longitude. The Chief town bearing the same name is situated on the river Torsa by  $26^{\circ} 19' 86''$  north latitude and  $89^{\circ} 23' 53''$  east longitude.<sup>(1)</sup>

**Boundary:** The district is bounded on the north by the Western Dooars of the Jalpaiguri district. Its northern frontier is about 20 miles south of the Bhutan ranges of the Himalayas. On the east it is bounded by the Gama Duars and Pargana Ghurla of the Goalpara district of Assam and parganas Gaibari and Bhitambar of Rangpur, now in Bangladesh.<sup>(2)</sup> The Brahmaputra at the point where it turns out from its Western course a short way below Dhubri is about 20 miles from the eastern border of the district. The southern limit of the district's territory is determined by the international boundary between India and Bangladesh. According to the census report of 1991 the area of the district is 3387 sq. kms.<sup>(3)</sup>

**Administrative Unit:** The district of Cooch Behar has 9 Police Stations viz. Haldibari, Mekhliganj, mathabhanga, Sitalkuchi, Cooch Behar, Tufanganj, Dinhata and Sitai, Ghoksadanga. There are 5 Sub Divisions viz. Cooch Behar, Tufanganj, Dinhata, Mekhliganj, Mathabhanga. The district is divided into 12 C.D. Block and it has 128-Gram Panchayets, 12 Panchayet Samities, 1144 inhabited Villages and 6 Municipalities.

**Table – 3.1****Administrative units of the district Cooch Behar**

District	Sub Division	Police Station	Block	Panchayat Samiti	Gram Panchayat	Mouja	Inhabited Villages	Municipality
Cooch Behar	5	10	12	12	128	1168	1144	6
W.B	59	430	345	333	3248	40911	37910	110

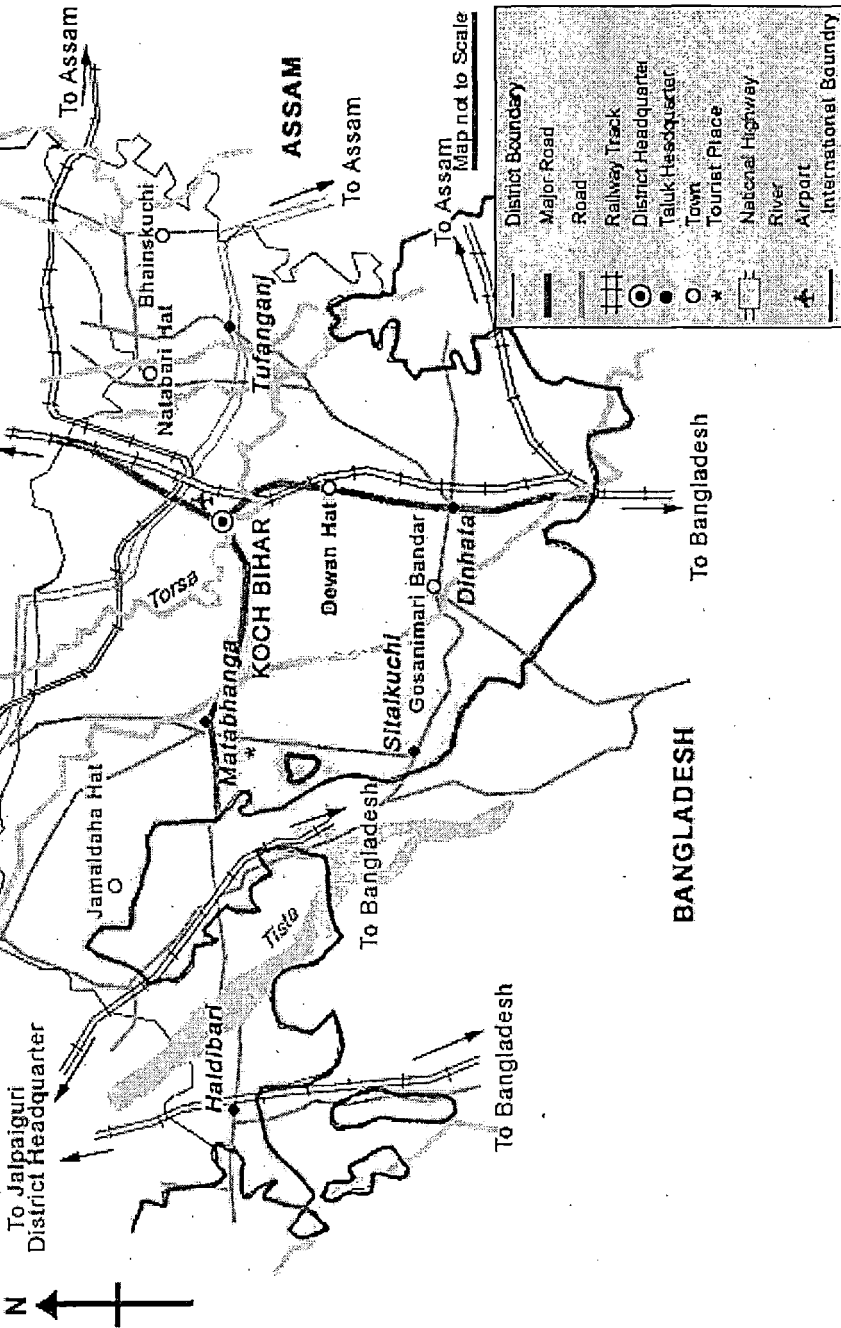
Source: District Statistical Hand Book, Cooch Behar, 1999-2000 (Combined)

**ii) A Study of Population of the District.**

As per 1951 census total population of the district of the Cooch Behar was 668949. In 1961 it rose to 1019806. During this decade the growth in population of this district had been phenomenal. In fact during this decade Cooch Behar recorded the highest rate of growth in population (52.45 %). This was the result of immigrants from erstwhile East Pakistan (Now Bangladesh). In the year 1971 the population of the district again rose to 1414183. During this decade the percentage increase in population was recorded as 38.67 percent. This was partly for the influx of peoples from Bangladesh and partly from neighbouring State Assam. In the census year 1981 the district was inhabited by a population of 1771643. During this decade the percentage increase in population was recorded as 25.28 percent. This was because of natural growth of population on the one hand and inflow of peoples from Assam on the other hand. In the last census year of 1991 the district of Cooch Behar witnessed the population of 2171145. During this decade the percentage increase in population was recorded as 22.54 percent. This was partly responsible for natural growth in population and partly responsible for the influx of peoples still from Assam. During the census periods (1951-91) the district had a great bearing on the growth of population because of its strategic location - boarder of Assam and Bangladesh. Table 3.2 speaks for the truth.

# KOCH BIHAR (West Bengal)

Figure- 3.1



**Table-3.2**  
**Growth of Population during census periods (1951-1991)**

Year	Population	% Increase
1951	668949	-
1961	1019806	52.45
1971	14114183	38.67
1981	1771643	25.28
1991	2171145	22.54

Source : Census reports, India, 1951,1961,1971,1981,1991

**iii) Urban - Rural Composition:**

The district of Cooch Behar is regarded as rural district. The degree of urbanisation is almost absent in the district. From the census reports it is evident that there is heavy concentration of population in rural areas of the district. During census years (1951 to 1991) on an average 92.80 percent population is earmarked as rural population. In 1951 percentage of rural population to total population was recorded as 92.50 percent. In the last census year 1991 similar picture was obtained i.e. percentages of rural population to total population was recorded as 91.19 percent which is much higher than the percentages of State as a whole (73.43%). The percentage of urban population to total population in the year 1991 was recorded as 7.81 percent. Table 3.3 shows the urban rural composition in different census year of the district.

**Table-3.3**  
**Urban Rural Composition of the District (1951-1991)**

Year	Total population	Urban population	Rural population	% to total Population		
				Urban	Rural	Total
1951	668949	50180	618769	7.50	92.50	100.00
1961	1019806	71446	948360	7.01	92.99	100.00
1971	1414183	96652	1317531	6.83	93.17	100.00
1981	1771643	122260	1649383	6.90	93.10	100.00
1991	2171145	169497	2001648	7.81	92.19	100.00

Source: District Census reports, 1951,1961,1971,1981,1991

**iv) Scheduled Caste & Tribe population:**

In order to understand the structure of population, analysis of SC/ST population are very important. There is a high concentration of SC population in the district of Cooch Behar. On the other hand ST

population is very negligible in the district. During the census years of 1961 to 1991, Scheduled Caste population exhibits a rising trend. In 1961 census SC population was 478340 which accounted 46.90 percent of total population. ST population in that year accounted only as 0.86 percent and in the year 1971 the percentage of SC population rose to 47.02 percent. The percentage of ST population to total population was recorded only as 0.75 percent. In the census year 1981 total Scheduled Caste population was 883084 which accounted 49.84 percent of total population of the district. The percentage of ST population was further reduced to 0.57 percent. In the census year 1991 the percentage of ST population to total population of the district rose to 51.76 percent. This percentage is much higher than the percentages of state as a whole (23.62 %). The percentage of Tribal population again was reduced to 0.60 percent. It is worthwhile to mention here that in the rural sector of the district every alternate person is a Scheduled Caste person. Police Station wise Scheduled Caste population is mostly found in Mekhliganj, Mathabhanga, Sitai, Haldibari and Sitalkuchi. Table 3.4 will speak for the truth.

**Table-3.4**  
**Composition of Scheduled Caste & Scheduled Tribe Population of the District (1961-1991)**

Year	Total population	SC population	ST population	% of SC population	% of ST population
1961	1019806	478340	8809	46.90	0.86
1971	1414183	665020	10611	47.02	0.75
1981	1771643	883084	10105	49.84	0.57
1991	2171145	1123719	13275	51.76	0.60

Source: District Census reports, 1961,1971,1981,1991

**v) Occupational Distribution:**

The district of Cooch Behar is entirely dependent on agriculture and allied activities. This dependency had been marked by the census reports. Near about 75.21percent of main workers are engaged in agricultural sector but the methods of cultivation are still primitive and

orthodox. Farmers are still obliged to pursue subsistence farming which is retarding not only the agricultural productivity but also breeding unemployment and poverty. Although Tobacco and Jute are produced in appreciable quantity, there is no carrying factor for Tobacco and the little carrying done is intended for local use. Naturally the economic condition of the people of the district is backward and the standard of living is very low. It has been observed that the population of workers engaged in agricultural sector has been reduced during the last inter-census decades 1971-81 and 1981-91 from 81.90 percent to 79.26 percent and from 79.26 percent to 75.22 percent. It has also been observed that total number of workers engaged in household Industry, manufacturing, repairing, and selling have been increased during the inter-census period. Table 3.5 shows a comparative picture of the sectoral distribution of workers in the last three census years.

**Table-3.5**  
**Number and Percentage of Workers in Industrial Categories of the District, Cooch Behar (1971-1991)**

Category	1971		1981		1991	
	No. of Workers	% of Workers to total main works	No. of Workers	% of Workers to total main works	No. of Workers	% of Workers to total main works
Cultivators	261942	67.07	267173	52.02	306789	51.31
Agri. Labour	57915	14.83	139914	27.24	142935	23.90
Household Industry, Manufacturing, Repairing works	14906	3.32	10356	2.01	35383	5.92
Other works Including Services.	64237	16.45	96147	18.73	112716	18.85

Note: Total men workers were 390502 in 1971, 513590 in 1981 and 597823 in 1991.

Source : District Statistical Hand Book, Cooch Behar, 1975-76 (Combined), 1994 P-24, P-21

#### vi) Literacy Level:

The progress of literacy in the district of Cooch Behar has been viewed more rationally from the study of the census figures. During census years (1951-91) level of literacy exhibits a raising trend.

Percentage of male literacy although shows to some extent a satisfactory level but the female literacy shows a dissatisfactory scene in the district of Cooch Behar. Among the North Bengal districts, Darjeeling has registered the higher percentage of state literacy level. Other district's literacy level is much lower than the state average. This is because the district of Darjeeling had certain Anglo Indian School from the past. In the year 1951 the percentage of literacy in the district was only 15 percent of which percentage of male literacy was recorded to 23.20 percent and female literacy rate was is 5.3 percent. In the last census year, 1991, percentage of total literacy in the district was 45.78 percent of which male literacy rate was 57.25 percent and female literacy rate was 33.31 percent. This increase in literacy level was due to expansion of elementary primary education in the district on the one hand and some special literacy programmes undertaken by the district authority as directed by the Govt. policies on the other hand. Table 3.6 will speak for the truth.

**Table-3.6**  
**Percentage of Literacy of the District, Cooch Behar (1951-91)**

<b>Census Year</b>	<b>% of total literacy</b>	<b>% of male literacy</b>	<b>% of Female literacy</b>
1951	15.00	23.20	5.30
1961	21.00	31.40	9.30
1971	21.92	31.08	11.93
1981	30.10	40.09	19.43
1991	45.78	57.35	33.31

Source: District Census reports 1951,1961,1971,1981,1991

**vii) Cropping Pattern.**

The proportion of agricultural land devoted to different crops at a particular period of time is known as cropping pattern. In the district of Cooch Behar larger proportion of land is available for cultivation. Table 3.7 gives an account of the area under different crops in the district for the period 1995-96 to 1999-2000. Table discloses the preponderance of food crops and the entire agricultural economy largely depends on



Paddy, Wheat, Jute, Tobacco and Potato. Over the periods 1995-96 to 1999-2000, on an average 66 percent of the total gross cropped area are under Paddy Cultivation. Proportion of area under Amon paddy to total Paddy over the period remains more or less stable. Aus paddy seems to be decline trend. The proportion of area under Boro paddy seems to rise steadily. The proportion of area under wheat cultivation remains more or less stable. Proportion of area under mustard cultivation exhibits a decline trend. In case of the cash crops like Jute and Tobacco proportion of area under cultivation seems to have a decline trend. Although in the past Tobacco was the most profitable cash crops of the district. On the other hand Potato (a commercial cash crop) seems to occupy an important position in the district. In the year 1995-96 proportion of area under potato cultivation to gross cropped area was 1.96 percent. It rose to 5.95 percent in the year 1998-99. Although the proportion of area under potato cultivation was reduced to 3.31 percent in the year 1999-2000 but the overall picture of area under potato cultivation seems to have a rising trend. It is the emergent cash crops of the district.

**Table-3.7**  
**Cropping Pattern in the district, Cooch Behar over the periods 1995-96 to 1999-2000**

Percentage of cropped area under principal crops.												
Year	Amon	Aus	Boro	Total Paddy	Wheat	Mustered	Lin seeds	Other Oil seeds	Jute	Potato	Tobacco	Total
1995-96	53.27	12.34	3.99	69.60	4.18	1.73	0.39	0.95	18.85	1.99	2.31	100.00
1996-97	51.49	11.13	3.75	66.37	4.81	1.38	0.54	3.11	19.32	2.42	2.05	100.00
1997-98	51.34	8.08	3.76	63.18	3.01	1.80	0.46	0.97	23.45	3.28	1.85	100.00
1998-99	52.45	7.79	6.38	66.62	4.54	1.68	0.43	0.94	17.55	6.07	2.17	100.00
1999-2000	53.65	7.95	6.91	68.51	3.77	1.78	0.64	0.87	19.02	3.35	2.06	100.00

Note: Area under principal crops is taken as grossed cropped area Source: i) District Statistical Hand Book, Cooch Behar, 1999-2000.  
 ii) Personal Computation.

### viii) Fertiliser Consumption:

Although Cooch Behar is an agricultural district still now agriculture in the district is backward in nature with low productivity. Among many factors the inability of the farmers to use more chemical fertiliser is responsible for this low productivity. Most of the farmers of the district still are dependent mainly on animal dung as manure. The application of high yielding variety programme has not been seen in a wide scale due to the lack of use of chemical fertiliser. Consumption of fertiliser is highly insufficient and plays a very negligible role in the agricultural development of Cooch Behar. Table 3.8 shows the fertiliser consumption per hectare of the gross cropped area of the district for the years 1995-96 to 1999-2000.

**Table- 3.8**  
**Consumption of Fertilizer in the District, Cooch Behar, over the period 1995-96 to 1999-2000**

Year	Name of the Fertilizer			Total	Fertilizer Consumption per hector of gross Cropped Area
	N	P	K	N+P+K	
1995-96	24600	7500	6200	38300	85.07
1996-97	25100	10800	6700	42600	92.54
1997-98	26500	13900	7300	477700	106.04
1998-99	28100	16500	8900	53500	120.68
1999-2000	31300	19500	10600	61400	138.28

Source : i) District Statistical Hand Book, Cooch Behar, 1998,1999-2000 (Combined)  
ii) Personal Computation.

From the table it appears that fertiliser consumption per hector of the gross cropped area was 85.07 Kg. in the year 1995-96. During 1999-2000 it increased to 138.28 Kg. for the overall period of five years. Fertiliser consumption per hector of the gross cropped area shows an increasing trend, although it is much lower than South Bengal district.

### **ix) Nature of irrigation:**

Irrigation facility is an essential pre-requisite for agricultural development. This facility is very much limited in this district. Farmers still are dependent on the grace of favourable monsoon. The present sources of irrigation are Govt. Cannel's, Private Cannel's, Tanks, Wells, Deep Tube-well, Shallow Tube and R.L.I Pump etc. The district has got rich deposit of Sub-Soil water and it is channelled into fields by Shallow and Deep Tube-wells. The surface water in the district from different sources is not exploited at all. The percentage of irrigated area to the gross cropped area for the year 1995-96 to 1999-2000 is given in table 3.9

**Table-3.9**  
**Area irrigated by different sources in the District, Cooch Behar over the period 1995-96 to 1999-2000**

(Area in hectores)

Year	Govt. Cannels	Private			Deep Tube Wells	Other Sources	Total Area Irrigated (area in hector)	Percentage of irrigated area to Gross cropped area
		Cannels	Tanks	Wells				
1995-96	500	1700	1920	-	-	21810	25930	5.76
1996-97	500	1800	2030	-	-	22040	26370	5.73
1997-98	500	1870	3380	-	-	37600	43350	9.63
1998-99	500	-	5750	-	-	53640	59890	13.52
1999-2000	750	-	5750	-	-	53790	60290	13.58

Source :i) District Statistical Hand Book, Cooch Behar, 1998,1999-2000 (Combined).  
 ii) Personal computation.

From the above table it is evident that irrigation facilities are very negligible in comparison to the gross cropped area. In the year 1995-96 percentage of irrigated area to the gross cropped area was 5.76 percent. It rose to 13.58 percent in the year 199-2000.

## **b) Results of Panchayat Elections in the District, Cooch Behar.**

### **(1978-1998 )**

Like the State of West Bengal, the last five panchayat elections (1978-1998) in the district of Cooch Behar gave the Left Front mainly CPI (M) an overwhelming majority. In the district of Cooch Behar, Left Front particularly CPI (M) has one of its strongest bases, both in terms of popular support and organisational maturity. In the selection of suitable candidates, the Left Front, specifically CPI (M) would not expect difficulties. The devolution of power to the panchayats gives many people easy access to government and the opportunity to participate directly in the formal political process. The system of Panchayat Raj has created a high degree of Political and Social awareness among all sections of villagers. Those elected have had undreamed opportunities to develop into leaders. The panchayats have helped in strengthening the grass-root level democracy. In 1978 Panchayat election at the village level, the left front got 1317 seats (75.43 %) out of 1746 seats. CPI (M) alone got 778 seats (44.56%). The main opposition Cong(I) got only 247 seats (14.15%). At Panchayat Samity, Left Front got 265 seats (86.88%) out of 305 seats. CPI (M) alone occupied 157 seats (51.47%). The Con (I) got only 38 seats (12.46%). At Zilla Parishad, Left Front won 100 percent seats (22 out of 22). In subsequent Panchayat Elections of 1983, 1988, 1993 and 1998, the left front headed by CPI (M) got overwhelming mandate. The detailed result of last five Panchayat elections in the district of Cooch Behar (1978-98) is depicted in table 3.10.

Table 3.10

## LAST FIVE PANCHAYAT ELECTION IN THE DISTRICT OF COOCH BEHAR (1978-98).

PARTY	YEAR	PANCHAYAT		PANCHAYAT SAMITI		ZILLA PARISHAD		THRE TIRES TOTAL	
		Seat	%	Seat	%	Seat	%	Seat	%
CPI(M)	1998	954	50.77	199	58.71	18	66.67	1171	52.16
	1993	1381	57.11	234	62.40	15	62.50	1630	57.86
	1988	1210	59.49	221	62.08	14	58.33	1445	59.86
	1983	734	42.03	155	46.41	12	50.00	901	42.82
	1978	778	44.56	157	51.47	10	45.45	945	45.59
AIFB	1998	101	5.38	20	5.89	2	7.41	123	5.48
	1993	92	3.80	9	2.40	3	12.50	104	3.69
	1988	446	21.93	80	22.47	9	37.50	535	22.16
	1983	345	19.76	63	18.86	7	29.17	415	19.72
	1978	531	30.41	107	35.08	12	54.55	650	31.82
CPI	1998	12	0.64	1	0.29	-	-	13	0.58
	1993	1	0.05	-	-	-	-	1	0.04
	1988	9	0.45	-	-	-	-	9	0.37
	1983	2	0.12	-	-	-	-	2	0.09
	1978	7	0.40	1	0.33	-	-	8	0.39
RSP	1998	1	0.05	-	-	-	-	1	0.05
	1993	3	0.12	-	-	-	-	3	1.11
	1988	2	0.09	-	-	-	-	2	0.08
	1983	3	0.17	-	-	-	-	3	0.15
	1978	1	0.06	-	-	-	-	1	0.05
LF	1998	1068	56.84	220	64.89	20	74.08	1308	58.27
	1993	1477	61.08	243	64.80	18	75.00	1738	61.70
	1988	1667	62.08	301	84.55	23	95.83	1991	82.47
	1983	1084	75.43	218	65.27	19	79.17	1321	62.78
	1978	1317	75.43	265	86.88	22	100.00	1604	77.38

Continued

Table 3.10

LAST FIVE PANCHAYAT ELECTION IN THE DISTRICT OF COOCH BEHAR (1978-98).

PARTY	YEAR	PANCHAYAT		PANCHAYAT SAMITI		ZILLA PARISHAD		THREESTIRES TOTAL	
		Seat	%	Seat	%	Seat	%	Seat	%
CONG(I)	1998	221	11.76	43	12.68	4	14.81	268	11.94
	1993	535	22.13	81	21.60	2	8.33	618	21.94
	1988	358	17.60	55	15.45	1	4.17	414	17.15
	1983	638	36.54	116	34.73	5	20.83	759	36.07
	1978	247	14.15	38	12.46	-	-	285	13.75
CONG(R)	1998	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1993	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1983	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1978	17	0.97	2	0.66	-	-	19	.92
WBTMC	1998	176	9.37	24	7.08	-	-	200	8.90
	1993	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1983	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1978	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
FB(S)	1998	211	11.23	29	8.56	3	11.11	-	-
	1993	302	12.49	45	12.00	2	8.33	-	-
	1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1983	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1978	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
BJP	1998	159	8.46	19	5.60	-	-	178	7.93
	1993	79	3.27	6	1.60	-	-	85	3.02
	1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1983	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1978	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

Continued



**Table 3.10**

**LAST FIVE PANCHAYAT ELECTION IN THE DISTRICT OF COOCH BEHAR (1978-98).**

PARTY	YEAR	PANCHAYAT		PANCHAYAT SAMITI		ZILLA PARISHAD		THRE TIRES TOTAL	
		Seat	%	Seat	%	Seat	%	Seat	%
SUCI	1998	3	0.16	-	-	-	-	3	.01
	1993	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1988	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1983	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	1978	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
INDEPENDENT & OTHERS	1998	41	2.18	4	1.18	-	-	45	2.00
	1993	25	1.03	-	-	2	8.33	27	.96
	1988	9	0.44	-	-	-	-	9	.37
	1983	24	1.38	-	-	-	-	24	1.14
	1978	165	9.45	-	-	-	-	165	7.96
TOTAL	1998	1879	100.00	339	100.00	27	100.00	2245	100.00
	1993	2418	100.00	375	100.00	24	100.00	2817	100.00
	1988	2034	100.00	356	100.00	24	100.00	2414	100.00
	1983	1746	100.00	334	100.00	24	100.00	2104	100.00
	1978	1746	100.00	305	100.00	22	100.00	2073	100.00

Source: Official records, District Panchayat Office, Cooch Behar, 1978,1983,1988,1993,1998.

### c) The Socio-Economic Profile of the Two Gram Panchayat.

#### i) Khagrabari Gram Panchayat:

Khagrabari gram panchayat is under Cooch Behar Block-II and covers six revenue villages. It has an area of 3495.68 acres and a population of 23703<sup>(4)</sup> out of total population, male and female populations are 12562 and 11141 respectively. The scheduled caste and tribe population accounted 37 percent & 0.23 percent respectively. The number of literate and illiterate persons are 14221 (60 percent) and 9482 (40 percent) respectively. The literacy rate in this G.P. is comparatively higher than Sikarpur G.P. because it is adjacent to the district town on the one hand and better educational facilities are available on the other hand. There are 13 Primary, 2 Secondary & 2 Higher Secondary Schools under the area of this G.P.<sup>(5)</sup>

The main crops grown in the villages under this G.P. are Aman, Aus & Boro Paddy, Jute, Wheat, Mustard, Potato. Different kinds of vegetables are largely grown in this area. Total cultivable land is 2026 Acre (57.91 percent) and non-agricultural area accounted for 1469.08 acre (42.02 percent). Table 3.11 shows the area under principal crops on gross crop basis.

**Table-3.11**  
**Area under Principal Crops**

Sl. No.	Name of the Crop	Area (in acres)	Percentage to Cultivable Land
1.	Aman Paddy	1870	46.02
2.	Aus Paddy	485	11.94
3.	Boro Paddy	100	2.46
4.	Jute	495	12.18
5.	Wheat	178	4.38
6.	Potato	310	7.63
7.	Mustard	117	2.88
8.	Others (All Vegetables)	508	12.50

Source: Official records, Agricultural Extension Office, Cooch Behar Block-II.

Total irrigated area under the gram panchayat is 1601 acre (45.79 percent) and non-irrigated area accounted for 1884 acre (53.89 percent). The main sources of irrigation are Shallow Tube wells, Deep

**KHAGRABARI GRAM PANCHAYAT  
KOCHBIHAR BLOCK II  
P.S. KOCH BEHAR  
DT KOCH BEHAR**

GOPALPUR GRAMPANCHAYAT

SCALE 4" = 1 Mile

Amendment No. 449114, Parish  
Date - 23rd March 1974

DHANGDHINGGUR GRAMPANCHAYAT

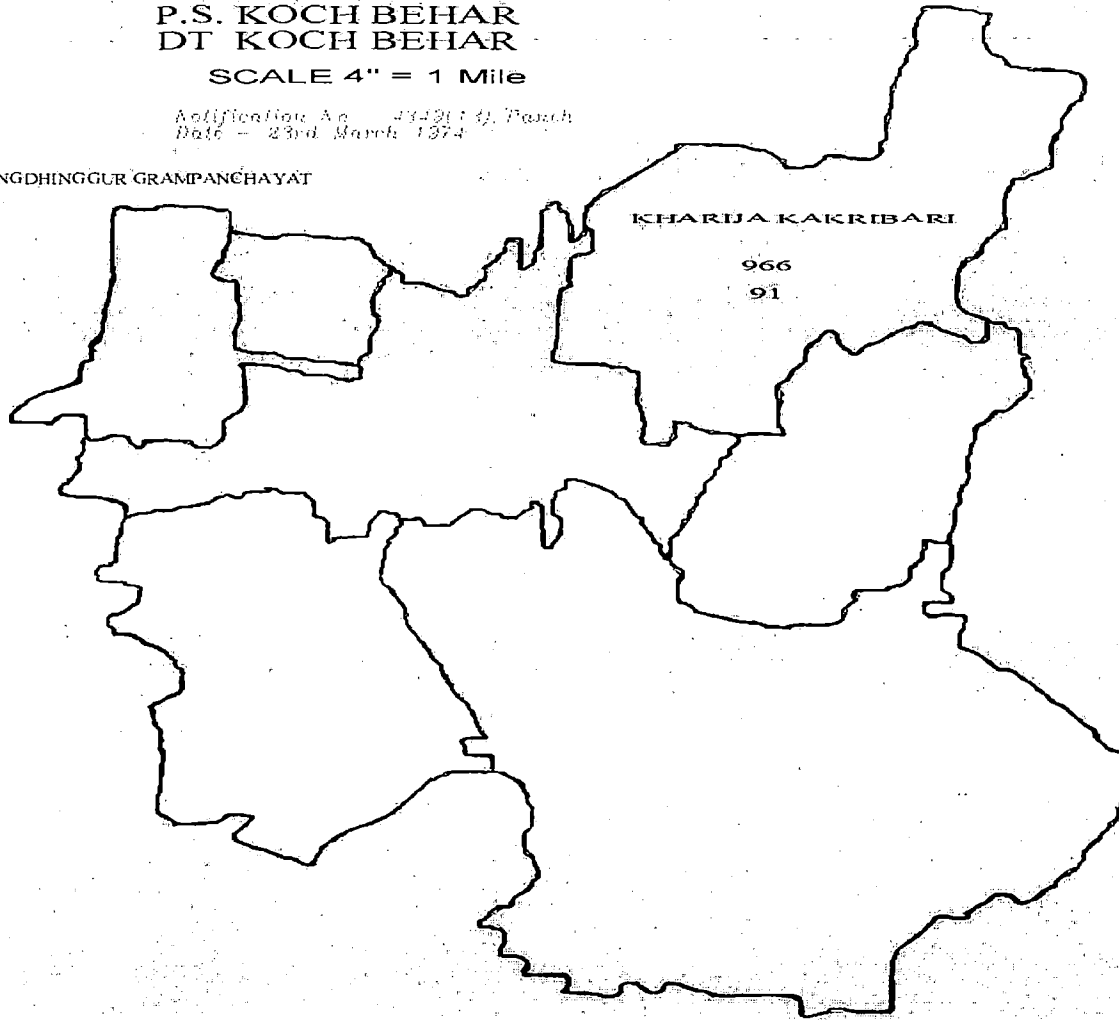


Fig 3.2

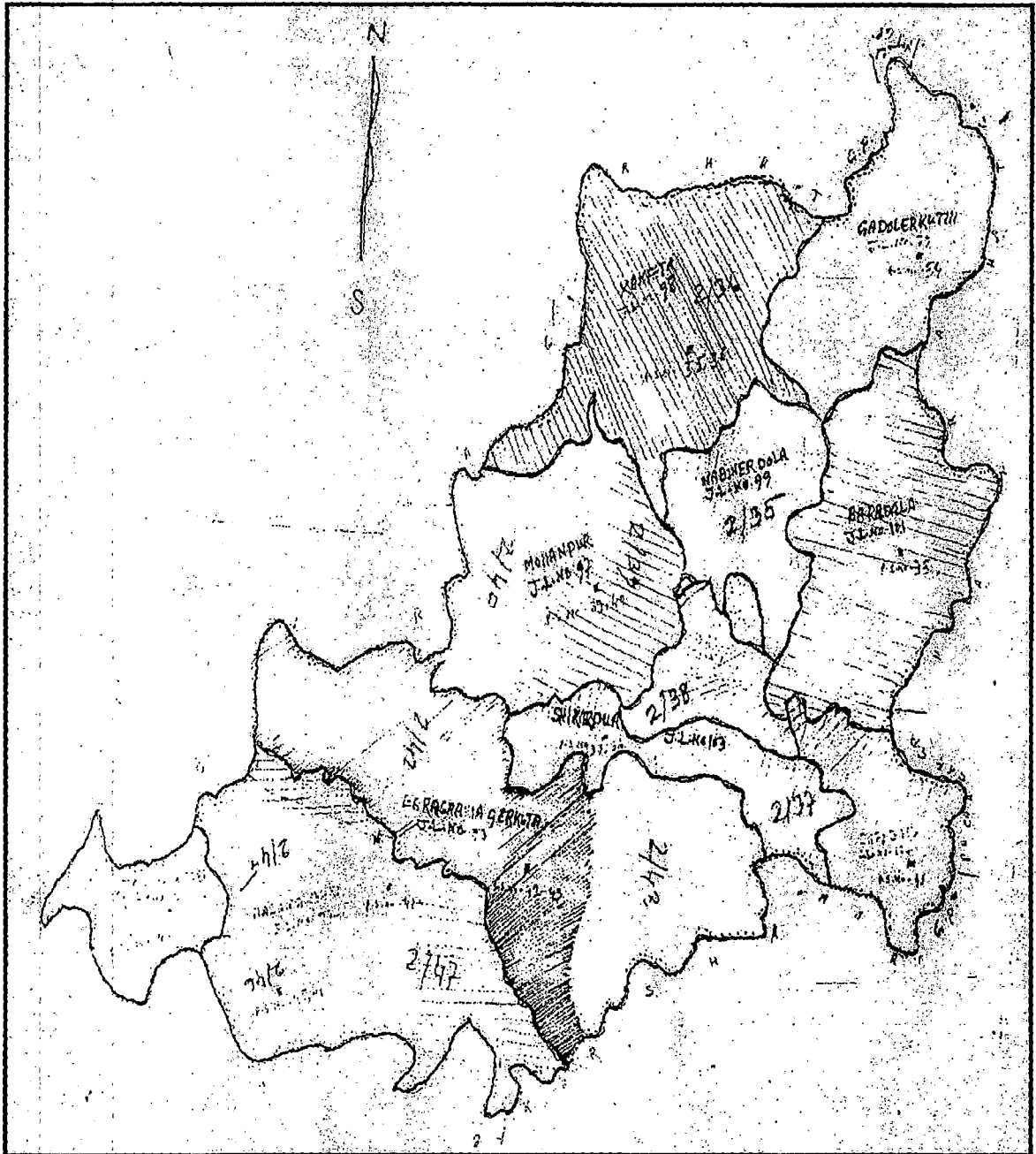
Tube wells, R.L.I. Ponds, Sub marginal Pumps, Hand Pump Tube wells etc. Cropping intensity is 200 percent. Most of the agricultural families belong to small and marginal farmers. Under the area of this Panchayat, there are 2 Health Centres, 2 Nationalised Bank Branches, 1 Co-operative Society, 1 pure drinking Water Project, 1 hut<sup>(6)</sup> managed by Marketing Society and another daily market managed by Gram Panchayat. Industrial activities are almost absent. As a result, employment opportunities are highly limited.

## ii) Sikarpur Gram Panchayat.

Sikarpur gram panchayat is under Mathabhanga Block-II and covers 12 revenue villages. It has an area of 8363 acres and a population of 17372<sup>(7)</sup>. Male and female population are 8981 and 8391 (51.69 and 48.30 percent respectively). There has been marked a high concentration of Scheduled Caste population in this area (75.70 percent). The literacy rate in this G.P. is much lower than that of Khagrabari G.P. because of non-availability of educational facilities. The rate of literacy is only 30.75 percent. Women literacy is miserable (only 9.3 percent). "Momonpur Sabitry Vidyamandir" is only the Higher Secondary School of the locality. Other than this there are 1 Junior High School, 15 Primary Schools in the area of this G.P.<sup>(8)</sup> Recently much emphasis has been given on literacy program to make the villagers literate.

The area of the Panchayat is 8363 acres. The net cultivated area is 6690 acres (80.00 percent). The rest 1673 acres (nearly 20.00 percent) are used as homestead roads and canals. Lack of assured irrigation facilities are the main constrains that stands on the way of agricultural development. Irrigation land is accounted only 1100 acres (16.44 percent). The main source of irrigation are shallow tube wells, Deep-tube wells, R.L.I., sub marginal pumps, hand pumps tube wells, ponds etc. Paddy namely Amon is the main crop of this G.P. There has been marked the preponderance of food crops other than cash crops in the area. As cash crops farmers are interested to produce potato, tobacco, mustered and other different kinds of vegetables. The cropping

Fig 3.3  
Sikarour Gram Panchavat.



intensity is 186 percent. The main crops grown in this G.P. are Aman, Aus and Boro paddy, wheat, Jute, potato, mustard, tobacco and different other vegetables. Table 3.12 shows the gross cropped area under principal crops.

**Table-3.12**

**Table 3.13 shows the gross cropped area under principal crops**

Name of the Crops	Area in Acres	Percentage of the gross Cropped Area
Aman Paddy	5721	45.95
Aus Paddy	2207	17.73
Boro Paddy	773	6.21
Jute	1676	13.46
Wheat	451	3.63
Potato	391	3.15
Mustard	321	2.58
Tobacco	412	3.31
Other Vegetables	497	3.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>12449</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Official records, Agricultural Extension Office, Mathabhanga Block-II, Cooch Behar.

In the area of the Panchayat there are 4 health centres, 2 Co-operative Societies, 1 branch post office, 4 hats, 1 branch of gram bank, 1 open stage, 1 cultivating centre<sup>(9)</sup>. Industrial activity is totally absent in this G.P. Agriculture is the main pursuit of the villagers.

#### **d) Political Representation in the Sample Gram Panchayats:**

##### **i) Khagrabari Gram Panchayat-Party representation:**

Khagrabari gram panchayat is under the block Cooch Behar-II. It is 4 Km. away from the district town Cooch Behar. All six villages under this G.P. are situated within the distance of 5 to 6 Km. from the office of the G.P. In every panchayat election, left front mainly CPI (M) has proved its strong political control over the electorates. The electoral growth of CPI (M) is mainly for the work of its three mass front active in the area - Krishak Samiti, the DYFI and Ganatrantik Mahila Samiti. Left

front's agrarian policy mainly land reform gave larger security to the sharecroppers, agricultural labourers and marginal farmers among the Villagers of the G.P. Moreover, they have the strong feeling that the Party CPI (M) is a Pro-people Party. The electorates of this area are highly conscious politically. In spite of pre-dominance of agriculture this G.P. is comparatively developed than that of Sikarpur in respect of infrastructure facilities, educational facilities and basic amenities. Prior to panchayat election in the year 1978 the party Cong(I) had a good control over the villages of this area. After launching Panchayat election, lack of fair and dynamic leadership as well as organisational immaturity was proved vividly. Presently the organisational base of the party Cong. (I) is eroded largely. On the other hand Left Front mainly CPI (M) has proved its political control strongly. The picture is delineated in table 3.13

**Table-3.13**  
**Khagrabari Gram Panchayat – Party representation**

Year	Party	CPI(M)	FB	INC	BJP	Total
1998		14	4	3	2	23
1993		12	2	8	3	25
1988		18	-	4	-	22
1983		10	2	8	-	20
1978		8	5	1	-	14

Source: Office of the Khagrabari Gram Panchayat.

It is evident from the table that in 1978 panchayat election only 1 seat was owned by the opposition party Cong(I). Reflecting organisational maturity it won 8 seats in 1983 election. For organisational disintegration Cong(I) lost 4 seats in 1988 panchayat election. In 1993 panchayat election the main opposition party Cong(I) gained 8 seats again for their popular and honest candidates. The last panchayat election in year 1998 again saw the hopeless and disappointing results of the party Cong(I). The party only won 3 seats and most of the candidates of the party Cong(I) were defeated in election battle for the strong allegation of corruption against them. As a

new emergent party BJP had secured 3 seats in 1993-panchayat election followed by 2 in the year 1998. It is worthwhile to mention here that the occupancy of 3 seats by BJP in the year 1993 and 2 seats in the year 1998 were largely due to some organisational network in the villages of this area and the wave of BJP Govt. at the Centre. Presently both have been disappeared mostly. On the other hand in the year 1978 panchayat election LF secured 13 seats followed by 12 in the year 1983, followed by 18 in the year 1988, followed by 14 in the year 1993 and 18 in the year 1998. As a reflection of strong organisational base CPI (M) alone secured 8 seats in the year 1978, followed by 10 in the year 1983, 18 in the year 1988, 12 in the year 1993 and 14 in the year 1998. Thus Khagrabari gram panchayat is absolutely dominated by the CPI (M) members.

#### **ii) Sikarpur Gram Panchayat-Party Representation:**

Sikarpur gram panchayat is under the block Mathabhanga-II. It is 42 K.M. away from the district town, Cooch Behar and 10 K.M. away from Subdivision town, Mathabhanga. Sikarpur G.P. is different in number of ways from that of Khagrabari. Most of the Villages under this G.P. are highly dominated and concentrated by scheduled caste people. This G.P. is backward in comparison to Khagrabari in respect of education, basic amenities, and infrastructure advantages. Pre-dominance of agriculture is the main attribute of this G.P. LF's agrarian policy to a larger extent is implemented in this area to give security to the economically backward classes. The C.P.I.(M) party has the strongest hold in all the villages under this G.P. The Krisak Sava, D.Y.F., Mahila Ganatrantrik Samiti are also the prominent branch institutions of C.P.I.(M), party. It is worthwhile to mention here that the main opposition party Cong(I) has no any organisation in this area. As a new emergent party, B.J.P. & T.M.C. have extended some organisational strength in the villages of Sikarpur G.P. recently. As its reflection in 1998 panchayat election, both B.J.P. & T.M.C. secured 6 seats out of total 16 seats. Not only the wave of those parties help to secure such number of seats but also there were strong complaints against the contesting candidates of C.P.I.(M). Thus in 1998 panchayat



election the electorate of Sikarpur G.P. voted for B.J.P. and Trinamul candidates. Forward Block has no organisational base and was unable to send any representative since the birth of three tiers panchayati raj system in the year 1978. CPI (M) occupied 15 seats out of a total of 15 seats in 1978. In 1983 CPI (M) occupied 13 seats whereas 2 went to Con (I). In 1988 CPI (M) got 16 seats whereas Cong(I) got only one seat. In 1993 out of 21 seats one went to BJP and 20 was occupied by CPI (M). In 1998 Panchayat election organisational maturity of CPI (M) was dislocated and won 10 seats, 3 went to BJP and 3 went to TMC. From the overall picture it appears that Sikarpur gram panchayat is absolutely dominated by CPI (M) party. Table 3.14 will speak the truth.

**Table-3.14**  
**Political Representation of Sikarpur Gram Panchayat**

Year	Party	CPI(M)	INC	FB	BJP	TMC	Total
1998		10	-	-	3	3	16
1993		20	-	-	1	-	21
1988		16	1	-	-	-	17
1983		13	2	-	-	-	15
1978		15	-	-	-	-	15

Source: Office of the Sikarpur Gram Panchayat.

**Summary:**

Cooch Behar is the northeastern district of Jalpaiguri division and forms a part of Himalayan Terai of West Bengal. It lies between the parallel 25°57'40" and 26°32'20"-north latitude in the Northern Hemisphere. The eastern most extremity of the district is marked by 89°54'35" east longitude and its western most extremity is by 88°47'40" east longitude. The area of the district is 3387sq. Kms. The district consists of five sub-divisions, 10 police stations, 12 blocks, 12 Panchayat Samities, 128-gram panchayats and 6 municipalities.

The district shows steady increase in population over census periods, 1951-1991 (Table 3.2) As per 1991 census total population of the district is 2171145 of which rural population is 2001648 (92.18%)

and urban population is 169497 (7.81%). There is a high concentration of Scheduled Caste population in the district 51.76 percent (Table 3.4) and percentage of Tribe population is very negligible (0.60%). Occupational distribution exhibits that 75.21 percent of main workers in the district are engaged in agricultural sector. Only 5.92 are engaged in household industry, manufacturing & repairing works. Other workers including services accounted to 18.85 percent. In census year 1991, percentage of literacy in the district is 45.78 percent of which male literacy rate is a sharp increase in the literacy rate in the district.

Regarding cropping pattern table 3.7 discloses the preponderance of food crops and the entire agricultural economy largely depends on paddy, wheat, Jute, Tobacco and Potato. On an average 66 percent of the gross cropped area are under Aman paddy to total cultivation. Proportion of area under cultivation seems to have a declining trend. Potato, a profitable commercial crop occupies an important position in the district. Agriculture development of Cooch Behar is handicapped by the inadequate irrigation facilities. Only 13.58 percent of the gross cropped area can avail irrigation facilities. Fertiliser consumption per hectare of the gross cropped area exhibits a rising trend (138.28 Kg.) but it is much lower than the south Bengal average.

Regarding socio-economic profile of the two select gram panchayats viz Khagrabari & Sikarpur of the district we see that Khagrabari G.P is comparatively more developed than that of Sikarpur. Khagrabari G.P. consists of six revenue villages having population, 23703 of which 37 percent are scheduled caste population. The number of literate persons is 14221 (60%). Better educational facilities are available here. There are 13 Primary, 2 Secondary, and 2 Higher Secondary Schools. The main crops grown in the villages of the G.P are Aman, Aus, Boro, Jute, wheat Potato, vegetables are largely grown here. Total cultivation is 57.91 percent of which irrigation areas is 45.79 percent. On the other hand Sikarpur G.P. consists of 12 revenue blocks

having population of 17372 of which SC population accounted to 75.70 percent. The rate of the literacy is 30.75 percent of which women literacy is only 9.3 percent. There are 15 Primary, 1 Junior and 1 Higher Secondary School in the locality. The main crops grown in this G.P. are – Aman, Aus, Boro, Wheat, Jute, Potato, Tobacco and other different vegetales. Net cultivated area is 80 percent of which irrigated area accounted to only 16.44 percent.

In the district of Cooch Behar, left front particularly CPI (M) has one of its strongest bases both in terms of popular support and in terms of organisational maturity which has been reflected in last five panchayat elections 1978-1998 (Table-3.10). In 1978 panchayat election LF got 75.43 percent seats in gram panchayat, 88.88 percent, seats in panchayat samiti and 100 percent seats in Zilla Parishad. In the subsequent panchayat elections, same picture was reflected.

CPI (M) has also proved its strongest political control in the selected gram panchayats viz Khagrabari & Sikarpur over last five panchayat elections. Both the gram panchayats are absolutely dominated by the CPI (M) panchayat members (Table-3.13 & 3.14). It is mainly for the work of its three mass front active in the area- Krishak Samiti, the DYFI, Ganatrantik Mahila Samiti. Moreover, LF's agrarian policy gave large security to the sharecroppers, agricultural laboures and marginal farmer of the villages. Downtrodden villagers have the strong belief that party CPI (M) is a pro-people party.

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