

CHAPTER-IX: PANCHAYAT LEADERS, ERADICATION OF INEQUALITY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT.

In the preceding chapters, attempts have been made to find out the socio-economic position of the rural leaders in Cooch Behar and to ascertain their position in the social ladder in contrast to that of the general people. It has emerged from the analysis of the previous chapters that the leaders formed a group which was different from that of the general people. And a lot of differences between leaders and the general people existed in the educational, economic, occupational and other related fields. It has been highlighted that the majority of leaders belonged to middle and higher stratum, while the general peoples mostly occupying middle and lower stratum. The Left Front Govt. in West Bengal immediately after coming into power in 1977 started channelling all Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development (PARA) programmes through Panchayati Raj institution with an objective to streamline rural development activities aiming at curbing inequality by making distributive justice. Now, the question comes to the fore whether the Panchayat functionaries in Cooch Behar, who bear a marked difference with the general people in many facets of life, have a pro-poor orientation in respect of selecting beneficiaries under various PARA programmes. And accordingly, whether the rural development programmes are being implemented in the desired direction as expressed by S.K.Mishra¹, the

Minister-In-Charge of Panchayat and Rural Development, that the basic philosophy underlying the rural development policy of West Bengal Left Front Govt. is the redistribution before growth to ensure growth with social justice with the plan process right from preparation of plan to the process of its monitoring and implementation and bringing about a change in the correlation of class forces in favour of the poor. The present chapter is designed to examine the development experience of rural CoochBehar in the light of the objective stipulated in order to detect deviation from desired objective, if any, and to identify the factors contributing thereto. Two hundred and fifty selected households as mentioned in chapter-VI have been taken as the sample for the purpose of present analysis.

9.1.: Panchayat, Leaders and Rural Development in West Bengal : A brief Review on past works.

A.Beteille² in his study observed the inequality as a social fact and that the patterns of inequality and stratification varies from one society to another and from one point of time to other. According to him, the nature of inequality may be termed as harmonic where no conflict is observed between the order and the normative order. And an inequality may be termed as disharmonic where the order and the normative order are in conflict. The persistent inequality observed in the past in rural CoochBehar between 'Jotedar' and his kinsmen (who also supposed to be his tenants) may plausibly be understood as harmonic in nature which was discerned in the

discussions in chapter-IV. The nature of inequality has, however, underwent changes with the passage of time. And the inequality that exists in rural Cooch Behar under recent panchayat system may be understood as disharmonic one. And accordingly, the rural development activities through Panchayati Raj Institution has been directed towards curbing inequality and making distributive justice. A few literature examining the role and performance of West Bengal Panchayat and its functionaries in the context of rural development have been available. The contrary observations between the researchers are visualised.

Neil Webster³ in his study on two Gram Panchayat (G.P.) came to the conclusion that the main programmes for which the Panchayats were responsible have been implemented both efficiently and according to the purpose for which they were designed. Benefits under the employment generation programme and from the IRDP loans went to the poor as it was improving their material condition. S.K.Pramanik and P.Dutta⁴ also expressed their satisfaction with the functioning of Panchayat set up and its distributive justice while analysing the performance of Panchayat in Midnapure district of West Bengal. Prodosh Nath⁵ in his study on rural leadership in Purulia, on the other hand, observed that the benefit had been diverted from the poor people who were badly in need of it and appropriated by the leaders and the social strata in which they were belonging. Ross Mallick⁶ also came to the similar conclusion so far as

distributive justice was in question. G.K.Lieten⁷ in his study on Panchayat leaders maintained the position in between. He observed that the limited number of benefits under various schemes put the Panchayats and the Samity Members in a powerful position and could provide ample scope for corruption . But the level of corruption he found to be minimal.

9.2.: Development experiance in rural Cooch Behar: issue of inequality and distributive Justice.

Above cited conflicting findings on functioning of Panchayat and its leaders keeping in view a detail comparison between the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries on various socio-economic and socio-political parameters has been made with an objective of finding out the differentiating parameters, if any, between themselves. Two hundred and fifty selected non-leader households were taken as sample for the present analysis. The sample households have been classified into beneficiary and non-beneficiary group. The households derived benefits from at least one of the following programmes are classified as beneficiaries. The programmes are:

- a) The PARD Programmes like IRDP (Intensive Rural Development Programme), S.C.P.(Special Component Plan) for Scheduled Castes. and S.D.P. (Special Development Programme) for Scheduled Tribes. The Programmes like N.R.E.P.(National Rural Employment Programme) and R.L.E.G.P.(Rural Landless Employment Guarantee Programme) which have

been reappeared as J.R.Y.(Jawahar Rojgar Yojona) in the latter are also included under PARD programmes;

b) Non-PARD Programmes include S.E.P.(Self Employment Programme); S.F.P.P.(Small Farmers Production Programme), S.E.S.R.U.(Self Employment Scheme for Rural Youth), etc.. The benefits which are provided from Block and Panchayat fund like fund for sinking of tube-well, distribution of minikits, fund for housing (mostly under Indira Abash Yojona), etc. have also been considered in identifying beneficiary.

The households who neither received any benefit in the past (from 1977 to 1989) nor they hoped to receive any benefit in the near future are classified as non-beneficiaries. Following the above defined criteria, the beneficiary group has been constituted by 120 households and the non-beneficiary group by 130 households which were surveyed through suitably framed schedule and questionnaire shown in Appendix-II.

To start with, the discussion is subdivided into two groups of variables, one is socio-demographic and another is socio-economic. The efforts has been made to find the out any probable discrimination between the beneficiaries and the

Table 9.1 : Distribution of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries according to caste and Gram Panchayat

Name of the Gram Panchayat	Beneficiaries			Non-Beneficiaries			Grand Total
	Sch. Caste	General	Total	Sch. Caste	General	Total	
Andaran Fulbari-I	18 (31.58)	7 (12.28)	25 (43.86)	15 (26.32)	17 (29.82)	32 (56.14)	57 (100.00)
Bagdokra Fulkadabri	25 (62.50)	- (-)	25 (62.50)	15 (37.50)	- (-)	15 (37.50)	40 (100.00)
Bhetaguri-I	42 (27.45)	28 (18.30)	70 (45.75)	47 (30.72)	36 (23.53)	83 (54.25)	153 (100.00)
Total	85 (34.00)	35 (14.00)	120 (48.00)	77 (30.80)	53 (21.20)	130 (52.00)	250 (100.00)

N.B.: Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

non-beneficiaries on these two broad aspects. After that, the beneficiary families are singled out for more close analysis on the points of mode of availability of loan, amount of loan, implementation and repayment thereof to find out any probable discrimination on the basis of income or some other factors. The benefit structure of the leaders themselves has also been considered to make a comparison with that of the general people so that actual benefit structure in rural Cooch Behar in totality can be made out for analysis. In addition to that, the views of the general people about the rural development and the working of the Panchayati Raj as recorded by the 'Schedule for the Commoners'⁸ has also been enunciated in detail. Efforts were made to find out any differences of attitudes between the beneficiary families and that of the non-beneficiaries.

9.3.: Socio-demographic variables:

9.3.1: Race/castewise distribution and discrimination thereof:

To start with the comparisons in the socio-demographic fields, the discussion on the caste / racewise distribution of the two groups may be considered as the starting point and the table 9.1 has been prepared for the purpose. The table shows that no caste / race-wise discrimination occurred in the study universe. This is not surprising at all, since this district is numerically dominated by the Scheduled Castes and the majority of the Panchayat functionaries are Scheduled Castes as a consequence. In the

Table 9.2 : Percentage distribution of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries according to educational pattern of families

Name of the Gram Panchayat area	Beneficiaries							Non-Beneficiaries						
	Minor	Illiterate	Upto Class-V	Class-VI to Class-X	Matric/HS/Secondary	Graduate and above	Total	Minor	Illiterate	Upto Class-V	Class-VI to Class-X	Matric/HS/Secondary	Graduate and above	Total
Andaran Fulbari-I	9.15	52.11	23.95	11.27	2.82	0.7	100 (142)	11.61	48.4	29.68	7.74	1.93	0.64	100 (155)
Bagdokra Fulkadabri	11.2	55.22	27.61	5.97	-	-	100 (134)	1.27	70.88	22.79	5.06	-	-	100 (79)
Bhetaguri-I	7.23	34.91	21.94	22.44	9.74	3.74	100 (401)	7.77	36.16	20.15	21.6	9.95	4.37	100 (412)
Total	8.42	42.54	23.48	16.85	6.35	2.36	100 (677)	7.9	43.34	22.76	16.25	6.81	2.94	100 (646)

N.B. : Figures in brackets indicate total family members of the respective group.

Table 9.3 : Percentage distribution of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries according to their political background

Name of the Gram Panchayat area	Beneficiaries							Non-beneficiaries						
	Congress (I)	CPI(M)	Forward Block	Others	Not to any party	Declined to express identity	Total	Congress (I)	CPI(M)	Forward Block	Others	Not to any party	Declined to express identity	Total
Andaran Fulbari-I	4	60	4	-	32	-	100 (25)	-	46.87	-	-	45.13	-	100 (32)
Bagdokra Fulkadabari	-	16	52	-	32	-	100 (25)	-	20	26.67	-	53.33	-	100 (15)
Bhetaguri-I	22.86	10	34.28	-	32.86	-	100 (70)	21.78	12.5	24.1	-	40.96	1.2	100 (83)
Total	14.17	21.66	31.67	-	32.5	-	100 (120)	13.85	21.54	18.46	-	45.38	0.77	100 (130)

N.B.: Figures in brackets indicate total numbers of families of the respective group.

Fifth and Sixth chapter, the dominance of Scheduled caste leaders was discerned. The tabulation results of the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries in the three Gram Panchayat areas also displayed no discrimination in this respect and due weightage has been given to Scheduled castes as per the Government guidelines. Thus, contradicting Ross Mallick,⁹ it can be said with much certainty that Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in Cooch Behar are not discriminated against at the time of giving benefit to the general people.

9.3.2: Distribution according to educational pattern.

The educational pattern of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries- are tabulated separately and compiled into table 9.2. This table has also shown that educational level of the beneficiaries and the non-beneficiaries were almost same and there was no virtual differentiation existed between the two. So, it can be said with some amount of certainty that the education was not at all one of the factors which were considered at the time of giving benefit to the beneficiaries.

9.3.3: Distribution of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries according to political affiliation.

The political background of the beneficiaries and the non-beneficiaries were considered and accordingly, table 9.3 has been designed. From the table it is discerned that among the beneficiaries, 67.5 percent were involved or supporters of

the major parties in rural Cooch Behar, whereas the corresponding percentage of the non-beneficiaries was 53.85 per cent. So, it can be said with certainty that the political affiliation had played a distinctive role towards getting benefit. The absence of supporters / sympathiser of 'other' parties also proves the assumption that the rural peoples had no faith in parties other than the major parties, as no benefit can be accrued from being members of it. Gram Panchayat-wise analysis also proves that in each Gram Panchayat, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries inclined to support the party in power in enmass. Though the position of Bhetaguri-I Gram Panchayat was different in the overt analysis where the allegiance of the people was noted to be divided among the three major parties. One of the major reason of it is that all the three parties have been very much active here and they captured Gram Panchayat in alternative elections. But in other Gram Panchayats, the party in power have monopoly of power through the elections.

9.4.: Socio-economic variables:

9.4.1: Distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to occupation.

The discussion and comparison on economic variables between beneficiary and non-beneficiary families starts with the occupational structure. The occupation of both agricultural labourer and non-agricultural labourer (like worker of kiln, blacksmith, etc.) were all clubbed together in the occupation "Solely labourer hiring

Table 9.4 : Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to occupational pattern.

Gram Panchayat	Occupation																			
	Solely labour hiring out		Self cultiv. cum labour hiring out		Self cultivation		Business only		Services only		Agril. & Business		Agril. & Services		Business & Service		Agril. & Services		Total	
	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.	Benf.	Non-Benef.
Andaran Fulbari-I	40	50	16	6.25	36	34.38	-	-	-	3.12	8	6.25	-	-	-	-	-	-	100.00	100.00
																			(25)	(32)
Bagdokra Fulkadabri	56	60	8	-	32	20	-	-	-	-	4	6.67	-	13.33	-	-	-	-	100.00	100.00
																			(25)	(15)
Bhetaguri-I	20	18.07	8.57	16.87	24.28	24.1	20	15.67	7.14	13.25	12.87	-	7.14	4.82	-	6.02	-	1.2	100.00	100.00
																			(70)	(83)
Total	31.67	30.78	10	12.31	28.33	26.15	11.67	10	4.17	9.23	10	2.3	4.17	4.61	-	3.85	-	0.77	100.00	100.00
																			(120)	(130)

N.B. : Figures in brackets indicate total number of families of the respective group.

out". Likewise, the occupation "Self cultivation" included, in addition to "Owner cultivators" 4.17 percent "Sharecroppers cum owner cultivators" among the beneficiary and 3.85 percent among the non-beneficiaries. Taking all these in consideration, the table 9.4 has been prepared. A close look in the table shows that no striking difference between the occupational pattern of the leaders and the non-leaders existed as such excepting the occupations of 'Agriculture and business', and 'Service only' where a considerable difference existed. A greater percentage of the non-beneficiaries is understandable in the light of the fact that the service holders were forbidden to receive most of the benefits as per the Government guideline.¹⁰ In this connection, one may justifiably point out that whether 4.17 percent beneficiaries who have been included in the occupation of service were eligible to get benefits from the Panchayati Raj Institution or not. The greater percentage of beneficiaries in the 'Agriculture and Business' occupation was also noteworthy in this respect. This point may be analysed in more details and fruitfully in the analysis of income and occupation. For the time being, it may be concluded that the occupationwise distribution of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries was almost equal, though among beneficiaries much tilt was expected in the categories of 'Solely labour hiring out' and 'Self cultivation cum labour hiring out'. In the following discussion of income and occupation, the points may be sorted out more clearly.

Table 9.5 : Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to land holding pattern.

Land Classes	Beneficiary Families				Non-Beneficiary Families			
	Andaran Fulbari-I	Bagdokra Fulkadabri	Bhetaguri-I	Total	Andaran Fulbari-I	Bagdokra Fulkadabri	Bhetaguri-I	Total
Land less	20.83 (20.00)	16.67 (16.00)	62.5 (21.13)	100 (20.00)	25.00 (25.00)	15.63 (33.33)	59.37 (22.90)	100.00 (24.61)
Upto 1 acre	19.44 (20.00)	16.67 (24.00)	63.89 (32.86)	100.00 (30.00)	16.89 (28.12)	9.43 (33.33)	73.58 (46.98)	100.00 (40.77)
1 to 3 acre	33.33 (44.00)	15.15 (20.00)	51.52 (24.28)	100.00 (27.49)	36.36 (37.50)	9.10 (20.00)	54.55 (21.69)	100.00 (25.38)
3 to 5 acre	- (-)	14.28 (8.00)	85.72 (17.14)	100.00 (11.66)	33.33 (3.13)	- (-)	66.67 (2.41)	100.00 (2.31)
5 to 7 acre	14.28 (4.00)	71.43 (20.00)	14.28 (1.43)	100.00 (5.83)	33.33 (6.25)	33.33 (13.33)	33.34 (2.41)	100.00 (4.62)
7 to 10 acre	20.00 (4.00)	60.00 (12.00)	20.00 (1.43)	100.00 (4.17)	- (-)	- (-)	100.00 (1.20)	100.00 (0.77)
More than 10 acre	- (-)	- (-)	100.00 (1.43)	100.00 (0.83)	- (-)	- (-)	100.00 (2.41)	100.00 (1.54)
Total :	20.83 (100.00)	20.83 (100.00)	58.34 (100.00)	100.00 (100.00)	24.61 (100.00)	11.54 (100.00)	63.85 (100.00)	100.00 (100.00)

N.B. : Figures in brackets indicate percentages of column total.

Table 9.6: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to family income.

Gram Panchayat	Beneficiary families						Non-beneficiary families					
	Upto Rs.4800	Rs.4801 to Rs.10000	Rs.10001 to Rs.20000	Rs.20001 to Rs.30000	More than Rs. 30000	TOTAL	Upto Rs.4800	Rs.4801 to Rs.10000	Rs.10001 to Rs.20000	Rs.20001 to Rs.30000	More than Rs.30000	TOTAL
Andaran Fulbari-I	4	20	60	8	8	100.00 (25)	50	28.12	15.62	3.12	3.12	100.00 (32)
Bagdokra Fulka -dabri	48	20	32	--	--	100.00 (25)	60	20	20	--	--	100.00 (15)
Bheta -guri-I	28.57	32.86	27.14	7.14	4.28	100.00 (70)	56.63	26.51	12.05	3.61	1.2	100.00 (83)
TOTAL	27.5	27.5	35	5.83	4.17	100.00 (120)	55.38	26.15	13.85	3.08	1.54	100.00 (130)

N.B.: Figures in brackets indicate total number of families in the respective group.

9.4.2: Landholding pattern, income and occupation.

The landholding patterns of the general people of each Gram Panchayats are subdivided into beneficiary and non-beneficiary families and have been further classified into some land classes which ultimately culminated into framing of table 9.5. It emerges from the table that the majority of the landless among both the beneficiary and non-beneficiary families belonged to 'Upto 1 acre' group, though their percentage on their respective total differed strikingly. Whereas, the 40.77 percent of the non-beneficiaries belonged to this group, only 30 percent of the beneficiary families had 'Upto one acre' land. A noticeable difference in percentage of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries is also discerned in '3 to 5 acre' category. It emerges from the table that the beneficiary families possessed a better landholding pattern than that of the non-beneficiary families.

The table 9.6 enunciates the income of the families of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of the three Gram Panchayat. It emerges from the table that whereas 55.38 percent of the non-beneficiary families were in the 'Upto Rs.4800/-' class, only 27.5 percent of the beneficiaries belonged to this class. Striking differences between the two groups are also discerned in higher income classes. Without going further into the study, it can be said that the table 9.6 has clearly pointed out that as good as 35 percent of the beneficiary families belonged to 'Rs.1000/- to Rs.2000/-' category

Table 9.7: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to income and landholding patterns.

Beneficiary families							Non-beneficiary families					
Land Classes	Upto Rs.4800	Rs.4801 to Rs.10000	Rs.10001 to Rs.20000	Rs.20001 to Rs.30000	More than Rs. 30000	TOTAL	Upto Rs.4800	Rs.4801 to Rs.10000	Rs.10001 to Rs.20000	Rs.20001 to Rs.30000	More than Rs.30000	TOTAL
Landless	54.17 (39.40)	25.00 (18.18)	20.83 (11.90)	--	--	100.0 (20.0)	65.63 (29.17)	34.38 (32.35)	--	--	--	100.0 (24.62)
Upto 1 acre	27.78 (30.30)	50.00 (54.55)	19.44 (16.67)	--	2.78 (20.0)	100.0 (30.0)	71.70 (52.78)	18.86 (29.41)	7.56 (22.22)	1.88 (25.00)	--	100.0 (40.76)
1 to 3 acre	30.30 (30.30)	24.24 (24.24)	45.46 (35.71)	--	--	100.0 (27.5)	39.40 (18.05)	39.40 (38.24)	21.21 (38.89)	--	--	100.0 (25.00)
3 to 5 acre	--	7.14 (3.03)	78.50 (26.20)	14.29 (28.57)	--	100.0 (11.67)	--	--	66.67 (11.11)	33.33 (25.00)	--	100.0 (2.31)
5 to 7 acre	--	--	57.14 (9.52)	42.86 (42.86)	--	100.0 (5.83)	--	--	83.33 (27.78)	16.67 (25.00)	--	100.0 (4.62)
7 to 10 acre	--	--	--	40.00 (28.57)	60.00 (60.0)	100.00 (4.17)	--	--	--	100.00 (25.0)	--	100.0 (0.77)
More than 10 acre	--	--	--	--	100.0 (20.0)	100.0 (0.83)	--	--	--	--	100.0 (100.0)	100.0 (1.54)
TOTAL	27.50 (100.0)	27.50 (100.0)	35.00 (100.0)	5.83 (100.0)	4.17 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)	55.38 (100.0)	26.15 (100.0)	13.85 (100.0)	3.08 (100.0)	1.54 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)

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N.B.: 1) Figures in brackets indicate percentages on column total.

2) N (benef.)= 120

3) N (non-benef)= 130.

which eventually also happened to be the majority income class among the beneficiary families. To proceed further on the same line, the table 9.7 has been formulated wherein the income structure and the landholding pattern of the beneficiary and non-beneficiary families were compared side by side. The table proves very well the old theory that higher the landholding class, there is higher chance of elevating into the higher income class and vice-versa. It also proves very well that the beneficiary families were in a favourable position in both income pattern and the landholding classes compared to the non-beneficiary families. In the table 9.8, wherein the income and occupational structures of the beneficiary and the non-beneficiary families are shown, it has been discerned clearly that the percentage of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families 'solely engaged in labour hiring-out' activities differed widely in regard to their percentage in the lowest income class. Whereas, 57.90 percent of the beneficiary families of the occupational group belonged to 'Upto Rs.4800/-' income class, the corresponding percentage of the non-beneficiary families was 72.50. The percentages of the two groups of general people engaged in 'Self cultivation cum labour hiring-out' occupation also differed strikingly in the lowest income class where 81.25 percent of the non-beneficiary families belong; the corresponding figure of the beneficiary families being only 25 percent. The same discrimination in the lowest income class may be noted in the occupation like 'Self cultivation' and 'business only'. The table thus has shown that

Table 9.8: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to family size.

Gram Panchayat	Family-size of beneficiary families					Family-size of non-beneficiary families				
	Upto 4	5 to 8	9 to 12	13 and above	Total	upto 4	5 to 8	9 to 12	13 and above	Total
Andapan Fulbari-I	24	64	12	--	100.0 (20.83)	46.9	40.6	12.5	--	100.0 (24.61)
Bagdora Fulkadabri	48	36	12	4	100.0 (20.83)	60	33.3	6.67	--	100.0 (11.54)
Bheta-guri-I	22.9	68.6	4.29	4.28	100.0 (58.34)	44.6	51.8	3.61	--	100.0 (63.85)
Total	28.3	60.8	7.5	3.33	100.0 (100.0)	46.9	46.9	6.16	--	100.0 (100.0)

N.B.: 1) N (beneficiary) = 120
2) N (non-beneficiary) = 130

Table 9.9: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to per capita income.

Gram Panchayat	Per capita income class of benef. families					Per capita income class of non-benef. families				
	Below Rs.1000	Rs.1001 to Rs.3000	Rs.3001 to Rs.5000	Above Rs.5000	Total	Below Rs.1000	Rs.1001 to Rs.3000	Rs.3001 to Rs.5000	Above Rs.5000	Total
Andapan Fulbari-I	16	68	12	4	100	31.25	56.25	6.25	6.25	100
Bagdora Fulkadabri	36	64	--	--	100	40	53.33	6.67	--	100
Bheta-guri-I	28.57	57.15	7.14	7.14	100	45.78	49.4	1.21	3.21	100
Total	27.5	60.83	6.67	5	100	41.54	51.54	3.08	3.85	100

N.B.: 1) N (beneficiary) = 120
2) N (non-beneficiary) = 130

in addition to choosing the labourer class, a considerable number of beneficiaries were chosen from the moderate income group (Rs.10,000/- to Rs.20,000/-) doing 'Self-cultivation only' (64.70 Percent). The table also pointed out clearly that the criterion of occupation 'Solely labour hiring-out' may not be a very dependent one. Because as good as 18.42 percent of this occupational group among the beneficiary families were in the income class 'Rs.10,000/- to Rs.20,000/-'. It may be noteworthy here that a large number of labourers of Cooch Behar regularly go to Assam, where they grow vegetables on contractual basis and get a considerable earning in each year.

The per capita income structure of the beneficiary and non-beneficiary families, as shown in the table 9.9, also supports the above connotation that all the beneficiary families were not in the lower income classes. On the other hand, a huge percentage of them (60 percent) were lying in the middle per capita income group. Corresponding percentage of the non-beneficiary families has shown that the per capita income structure of the non-beneficiary families was somewhat lower in comparison to that of the beneficiary families.

To summarise the above discussion, the following points may be put forward to comprehend the implications of the discussion fully:

- a) That the benefit was not confined for the poorest of the poor only.

- b) In addition to the poor, the benefits were extended to the higher income and landholding groups.
- c) Most of the beneficiary families were in the middle and upper-middle ladder of socio-economic hierarchy.
- d) The beneficiaries were mostly chosen from the group who depend on self cultivation.
- e) So far the majority was concerned, the beneficiary families belonged to a fairly higher ladder of economic stratification than the non-beneficiaries.
- f) The non-beneficiary families which belonged to the lower economic hierarchy were deprived in the sense that they were not chosen for any benefit whatsoever.

9.5.1.: The beneficiary and the benefits: nature and uses.

Any discussion on the beneficiary and the benefits they availed requires some further discussion on the nature and types of benefits, their uses and number of times the benefits were availed by the beneficiaries. The table 9.10 was framed for this purpose. The benefits were categorised into four groups. In addition to benefits under PARD and non-PARD Bank linked schemes, two other categories were formulated. One of categories was the benefits in the form of loans from the Co-operative Societies and the other was the residual financial helps from the Government sources

Table 9.10: Distribution of beneficiary families according to purposes, sources, utilisation and repayment of loan.

PURPOSES OF LOAN										
Nature of sources of benefit	No. of family (benefitted)	Frequency of loan	Percentage of frequency to no. of family involved	Agril. & allied	Business & industry	Domestic consumption	House building	Others	Percentage utilisation of benefit	Percentage of loan repayment
Bank Loan (in PARD) schemes	94	119 (100.0) {68.79}	126.6	84 (70.59)	35 (29.41)	--	--	--	13.45	11.76
Bank Loan (in non-PARD) Schemes	11	11 (100.0) {6.36}	100	7 (63.64)	4 (36.36)	--	--	--	63.64	9.09
Loan from Co-operative society	3	3 (100.0) {1.73}	100	3 (100.0)	--	--	--	--	33.33	33.33
Financial help from other Govt. sources	34	40 (100.0) {23.12}	117.65	23 (57.50)	--	14 (35.00)	1 (2.50)	2 (5.00)	2.94	--
TOTAL	120	173 (100.0) {100.0}	144.17	117 (67.63)	39 (22.54)	14 (8.09)	1 (0.58)	2 (1.16)	17.34	9.25

- N.B.: 1) PARD schemes denote Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development schemes
 2) As the same families availed benefit from different sources, the sum of the column 'No. of family' exceeds the total number of families receiving benefit.
 3) Figures in second brackets indicate percentages of column total.

like NREP, RLEGP, JRY, Indira Aabash Yojana, supply of fertiliser and minikits, etc. which had been supplied to the villagers directly from the government (not through Banks). It emerges from the table that 120 benefitted families availed benefits 173 times. Thus, the percentage of frequency of benefit to the benefitted population appears to be 144.17 percent. Only 94 families availed PARD loans 119 times (the percentage of frequency of benefit to the benefitted families thus comes to 126.60 percent). The table has also shown the excessive dependence of rural debt structure on PARD schemes, 68.79 percent of the frequency was shared by the PARD schemes.

Only eleven families availed the benefits of non-PARD schemes. The very moribund condition of the Co-operative movement in rural Cooch Behar is shown by the table 9.10; only 1.73 percent of the total frequency was dependent on Co-operative Societies in this study. It may be due to the very poor recovery condition of the Co-operative Societies in particular and the rural debt structure in general, as exemplified in the table 9.10. It may be presumed here that for the failure of the Co-operative movement, the rural peoples had to depend exclusively on PARD schemes, which also suffered from the phenomena of poor repayment, though it was fortunate enough to have the Government patronage to run it.

The financial benefit from other Government sources also covered a

considerable percentage of frequency (23.12 percent). One interesting feature of those benefits is that they are not to be repaid, as such the rural peoples generally feel tempted to avail these benefits.

The repayment scenario was very gloomy, as it is made clear in the above table. The utilisation of the benefits for the purposes they had been given was not also very praiseworthy. Only 17.34 percent of beneficiaries in this study universe utilised the money properly and for the purpose it was given. As a natural corollary, the recovery suffered a lot as the fund was misutilised.

Finally, another point may be noted from the table 9.10 that the 'agriculture and allied sector' was the most widely favourite sector of taking advantage. It may be noteworthy here that the 'animal husbandry' schemes specially, 'milch cow' being the part of the 'agriculture and allied sector', were the most grossly abused schemes. The corresponding percentages of utilisation of the schemes has shown that the schemes were chosen only to facilitate misutilisation. It may be apprehended that the animals were borrowed from someone else to show to the Bank officials and the cash thus misutilised directly in connivance with the leaders.

From the table 9.10, it has appeared that the same families availed benefits from

more than one sources, as the total number of benefitted families in each categories exceeded the number of total benefitted families.

Thus, the table 9.11 points out that the beneficiaries (18.33) who availed the benefits from both the PARD and other Government sources, were the most benefitted group among the benefitted peoples in the study universe. From the table it is also evident that the beneficiaries who availed PARD schemes and loan from Co-operative Societies could not avail the benefits from other sources. It may be presumed that the beneficiaries being unable to open the avenues of PARD schemes and financial help of other Government sources, were forced to avail benefits from these remaining less competitive, less subsidised and more arduous-in-getting schemes.

Table 9.11: Distribution of beneficiary families according to sources of benefit.

BENEFICIARY GROUPS	Availed benefit of PARD schemes and financial help from other Govt. sources, both.	Availed benefit of PARD schemes only.	Availed benefit of non-PARD schemes only	Availed benefit of Co-operative society only.	Availed financial help from other Govt. sources only.	Total no. of benefitted families.
NUMBER	22	72	11	3	12	120
PERCENTAGE	18.33	60.00	9.17	2.50	10.00	100.00

Table 9.12: Percentage distribution of beneficiary families according to income and amount of benefit.

AMOUNT OF BENEFIT									
Income Classes	Below Rs.1000/-	Rs.1000/- to Rs.2000/-	Rs.2001/- to Rs.5000/-	Rs.5001/- to Rs.7000/-	Rs.7001/- to Rs.10000/-	Rs.10001/- to Rs.15000/-	Rs.15001/- to Rs.20000/-	More than Rs.20000/-	TOTAL
Upto Rs.4800/-	57.57 (57.58)	30.30 (40.00)	9.10 (9.10)	3.03 (6.67)	--	--	--	--	100.00 (27.50)
Rs.4800/- to Rs.10000/-	30.30 (30.30)	24.24 (32.00)	27.27 (27.27)	12.12 (26.67)	3.03 (11.11)	3.03 (33.33)	--	--	100.00 (27.50)
Rs.10001/- to Rs.20000/-	9.52 (12.12)	16.67 (28.00)	40.78 (51.52)	19.05 (53.33)	9.5 (44.44)	2.38 (33.34)	--	2.38 (100.00)	100.00 (35.00)
Rs.20001/- to Rs.30000/-	--	--	57.14 (12.12)	--	28.57 (22.22)	14.28 (33.34)	--	--	100.00 (5.83)
More than Rs.30000/-	--	--	--	40.00 (13.33)	40.00 (22.22)	--	20.00 (100.00)	--	100.00 (4.17)
TOTAL	27.50 (100.0)	20.83 (100.00)	27.50 (100.00)	12.50 (100.00)	7.50 (100.00)	2.50 (100.00)	0.83 (100.00)	0.83	100.00 (100.00)

N.B.: 1) Figures in brackets indicate percentages of column total

2) N value = 120

2.25

Now, the question obviously comes to the fore whether the benefits amongst the beneficiaries were distributed justifiably. The table 9.12 has been prepared for this purpose. The table shows clearly that a converse relationship between the income and amount of benefit existed in the study universe. Whereas 57.57 percent of the beneficiaries in the 'Below Rs.4800/-' income group received benefit 'Below Rs.1000/-', the majority of beneficiaries in the higher income groups steadily has risen in the higher benefit strata. Thus, in 'Rs.4801/- to Rs.10,000/-' income class, majority were benefitted 'Below Rs.1000/-'. In 'Rs.10,001/- to Rs.20,000/-' and 'Rs.20,001/- to Rs.30,000/-' income classes, though the majority of the beneficiaries (40.78 and 57.14 per cent respectively) received benefit between Rs.2001/- to Rs.5000/-, a considerable number (33.76 and 42.86 per cent respectively) received benefits more than Rs.5000/-. In 'more than Rs.30,000/-' income class, the majority beneficiaries were equally divided in both 'Rs.5000/- to Rs.7000/-' and 'Rs.7001/- to Rs.10,000/-' beneficiary class. Thus it may be said with much certainty that instead of giving adequate quantum of benefit to the beneficiaries living below poverty line (Rs.4800/-) to cross it, they were very meagrely benefitted ultimately rendering the very purpose of PARD schemes into jeopardy.

As a natural corollary to the earlier question that whether beneficiaries with higher income strata were enjoying weightage in the distribution of benefits, another

Table 9.13: Percentage distribution of beneficiaries according to income and frequency of benefit.

Income Classes	Frequency		Total
	Once	More than once	
Upto Rs.4800/-	90.91 (36.58)	9.09 (7.89)	100.0 (27.50)
Rs.4800/- to Rs.10000/-	69.70 (28.05)	30.30 (26.32)	100.0 (27.50)
Rs.10001/- to Rs.20000/-	59.52 (30.49)	40.48 (44.74)	100.0 (35.00)
Rs.20001/- to Rs.30000/-	28.57 (2.44)	71.43 (13.16)	100.0 (5.83)
More than Rs.30000/-	40.00 (2.44)	60.00 (7.89)	100.0 (4.17)
TOTAL	68.33 (100.0)	31.67 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)

N.B.: 1) Figures in brackets indicate percentages on column total.

2) N=120.

Table 9.14: Distribution of leaders according to party and frequency of benefit under PARD programmes.

Total Leaders	No. of leaders availing loan	Frequency of availing loan		Total	No. of times utilised loan
		When party in power	When party not in power		
67 (100.0)	45 (67.16)	53 (63.86)	30 (36.14)	83 (100.0)	32 (38.55)

N.B.: 1) Forty-five leaders availed loan eighty-three times; thus the percentage of frequency is calculated to be 184.44

2) Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

question may arise whether benefits were extended more than once to the beneficiaries with higher income range. In the tables 9.10 and 9.11, it has been discerned clearly that some beneficiaries were extended with benefits more than once. To analyse the question in a systematic way, the table 9.13 is prepared.

The table shows clearly that the positive relations between the income and the frequency has been a social fact. Lower the income level, there was lower chance of getting the benefit more than once and vice-versa. The table establishes the assumption that the distribution of benefits have been done with a clear favouritism towards middle and higher income groups.

9.5.2.: Leaders and benefits: an overview.

The debt structure of the leaders can well be referred to here to make a fruitful analysis in this context. The table 6.7 in the chapter-VI shows the income classes of the leaders wherein only 10.45 percent leaders belonged to the income class of 'Above Rs.4800/- to Rs.10,000/-' and all the other leaders were in the higher income ranges. No leader lives within poverty line (Poverty-line in the study reference period was Rs.4800/- as mentioned in the Manual of IRDP and Allied Programmes) ¹¹. With having such a higher income ranges, the leaders enjoyed the benefits of the PARD programmes. The table 9.14 has been prepared to analyse the economic benefit structure of the leaders of the three Gram Panchayats.

It may be seen from the above table that the leaders appropriated the benefits of PARD programmes for their own benefits and it is in spite of the fact that they were not virtually eligible for it. The percentage of utilisation also depicted a very gloomy picture here. The leaders being the path-makers of rural areas thus failed to depict a very positive example of utilisation of the schemes under PARD programmes. The table also shows that though they generally availed benefit when their party was in power, they faced no difficulty in this regard even when they were not in power. This aspect may lead one to the assumption that since the leaders belonged to same privileged class in the rural society, the very sense of belonging to the same class acted as the guiding factor to the 'governing leaders' towards extending their helping hand to their peers when they were not in power. The above discussion, on its part, obviously generates some broad points on the issue.

- a) The benefits were not trickled down to the most needed and poor peoples in the rural areas.
- b) The benefits, on the other hand, were shared by comparatively privileged group in the rural areas.
- c) The leaders, through whom the beneficiaries were chosen, could not check the temptation to corner the benefits in their own favour.
- d) The collateral relationship between quantum of benefit and income structure existed; that is, families with higher income had the higher chance to get.

Table 9.15: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to their view on the working of the panchayati Raj institution.

Gram Panchayat	Beneficiary families					Non-beneficiary families				
	Good	So-so	Bad	No comment	Total	Good	So-so	Bad	No comment	Total
Andara Fulbari-I	64.0	20.0	12.0	4.0	100.0	21.87	34.38	31.25	12.50	100.0
Bagdora Fulkadabri	52.0	24.0	24.0	--	100.0	13.33	13.33	46.67	26.67	100.0
Bhetaguri-I	62.86	21.43	12.86	2.85	100.0	22.89	33.73	37.36	6.02	100.0
Total	60.83	21.67	15.0	2.50	100.0	21.54	31.54	36.92	10.0	100.0

Table: 9.16: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to their view on the issue that "Much was done on rural development".

Gram Panchayat	Beneficiary families				Non-beneficiary families			
	Yes	No	No comment	Total	Yes	No	No comment	Total
Andaman Fulbari-I	72.0	24.0	4.00	100.0	25.0	62.50	12.50	100.0
Bagdora Fulkadabri	40.0	60.0	--	100.0	13.33	60.00	26.67	100.0
Bhetaguri-I	68.57	25.71	5.71	100.0	36.14	54.22	9.64	100.0
Total	63.33	32.50	4.17	100.0	30.77	56.92	12.31	100.0

N.B.: 1) N value (beneficiary families) = 120

2) N value(Non-beneficiary families) = 130

Table 9.17: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to their view on the performance of the leaders.

Gram Panchayat	Beneficiary families					Non-beneficiary families				
	Good	So-so	Bad	No comment	Total	Good	So-so	Bad	No comment	Total
Andaman Fulbari-I	56.0	28.0	12.0	4.0	100.0	15.6	28.1	46.9	9.38	100.0
Bagdora Fulkadabri	28.0	24.0	48.0	--	100.0	13.3	20.0	40.0	26.7	100.0
Bhetaguri-I	60.0	24.3	8.57	7.14	100.0	21.7	32.5	37.4	8.43	100.0
Total	53.0	25.0	17.5	5.0	100.0	19.2	30.0	40.0	10.8	100.0

Table 9.18: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families according to their view on the issue that the benefits were distributed justiciably.

Gram Panchayat	Beneficiary families				Non-beneficiary families			
	Yes	No	No comment	Total	Yes	No	No comment	Total
Andaman Fulbari-I	60.00	36.00	4.00	100.00	15.62	71.88	12.50	100.00
Bagdora Fulkadabri	24.00	76.00	--	100.00	20.00	53.33	26.67	100.00
Bhetaguri-I	50.00	41.43	8.57	100.00	21.69	66.26	12.05	100.00
Total	46.67	47.50	5.83	100.00	20.00	66.15	13.85	100.00

N.B.: 1) N value (beneficiary families) = 120

2) N value(Non-beneficiary families) = 130

higher quantum of benefits and vice-versa.

- e) The implementation and recovery level of the rural advance has not been very commendable which ultimately contributed to the failure of the co-operative movement in particular and Government sponsored PARD and Non-PARD schemes in general.

9.6: Working of the Panchayati Raj: Views of the general people.

In the 'Schedule for commoners'¹², the views of the general people on the working of the Panchayati Raj, Panchayat functionaries, and their mode of selection of beneficiaries were noted with due weightage. The tables 9.15, 9.16, 9.17, 9.18 and 9.19 have shown the amalgamated figures of the views of the general peoples in this regard. Keeping aside the Gram Panchayatwise variation and noting the total of all the tables into consideration, it may be pointed out that in general the beneficiaries were more positive than the non-beneficiaries. This is more or less understandable in consideration of the patronage in the form of economic benefit they received or not received. Only on the issue of distributive justice (table 9.18), some amount of grievances were discerned among the beneficiaries also in the sense that only 46.67 of them replied in the affirmative. To enquire this aspect more deeply, table 9.19 shows that the party belongingness was the major guiding factor towards distribution of benefits as has been felt by the beneficiaries. Whereas, the majority of the non-beneficiaries felt that the benefits were appropriated by the middle and rich

Table 9.19: Percentage distribution of beneficiary and non-beneficiary families (who said 'no' to the question of distributive justice) according to their view of actual recipient of rural benefit.

Gram Panchayat	Beneficiary families						Non-beneficiary families					
	Middle class only	Middle and rich class	Rich only	Party workers only	Families benefitted earlier	Total	Middle class only	Middle and rich class	Rich only	Party workers only	Families benefitted earlier	Total
Andaran Fulbari-I	22.22	11.11	--	55.56	11.11	100.00 (15.79)	21.7	21.74	4.35	43.48	8.69	100.00 (26.75)
Bagdogra Fulka-dabri	--	21.05	5.26	57.9	15.79	100.00 (33.33)	25	37.5	--	25	12.5	100.00 (9.30)
Bhetaguri-I	17.24	24.14	6.9	34.48	17.24	100.00 (50.88)	20	32.73	18.18	16.36	12.73	100.00 (63.85)
Total	12.28	21.05	5.26	45.61	15.79	100.00 (100.0)	20.9	30.23	12.79	24.42	11.63	100.00 (100.0)

N.B.: 1) Figures in brackets indicate percentages on column total.

2) N value (beneficiary)= 57

3) N value (non-beneficiary)= 86

people in the rural areas, a considerable number of beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries felt that the benefits were also appropriated by the middle class, rich and the families which had received the benefits earlier.

Regarding the Gram Panchayatwise variation on the question, the above tables show that the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries of Bagdokra Fulkadabri Gram Panchayat displayed their most negative attitude towards working of the Panchayati Raj and the Panchayats compared to those of the Andaranfulbari-I and Bhetaguri-I Gram Panchayats. The benefitted peoples of Bagdokra-fulkadabri Gram Panchayat area also displayed their most negative attitude in regards to the issue of distributive justice. Only 24 percent of them stood in favour. To probe deep into the issue, the per family economic benefit of the beneficiaries in the three Gram Panchayat areas were calculated and the table 9.20 was made to show the comparative financial help of the three Gram Panchayats.

Table 9.20: Per family financial help to the beneficiaries of the three Gram Panchayat area.

Name of the Gram Panchayat area	Andaranfulbari-I	Bagdogra-fulkadabri	Bhetaguri-I
Per family benefit	Rs.3307.60	Rs.1670.00	Rs.4823.36

The table thus shows that the beneficiaries of Bagdokra-fulkadabri Gram Panchayat area were very meagrely benefitted, compared to the beneficiary families of other two Gram Panchayats. This factor played a covert and underlying discontent in their reply to the question on the performance of the Panchayati Raj and the Panchayats. It may be pointed out here that the per family average benefit of this Gram Panchayat was very low and this may proved to be counter productive for economic development.

To summarise the above discussion, the following points may be stated to make the discussion more systematic.

- a) There was, in general, a comparatively less acceptability of the Panchayat set-up in rural Cooch Behar.
- b) The beneficiaries of the system were also less sympathetic to the institution itself than they are expected to be.
- c) The per family benefit of the distributive system was very low which might have a regressive effect on the rural economy of Cooch Behar.
- d) There was, more or less in general, a greater resentment against the modalities of distribution of benefit.

9.7: Conclusion.

The main purpose of this chapter is not only to present a dichotomous relationship

between the beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, but to find out the socio-economic gradations of the beneficiaries in general and the role of the rural leaders in bringing down the inequality in rural Cooch Behar.

The foregoing analysis pointed out clearly that the benefits of rural development failed to curb the present inequality in rural areas in the sense that a negligible percentage of the beneficiaries, in actuality, belonged to the target group. On the other hand, it emerged from the above analysis and tables that the households which were placed in a comparatively favourable socio-economic hierarchy had a better chance of access to the benefits. In short, it can be said that the non-poor gained leakages of rural development programmes. Thus following Indira Hirway,¹³ it may be pointed out that the process of percolation of benefit of rural development has not been moving in the desired direction of poorest of the poor and curbing of inequality. The rural development programme as it has been implemented through the panchayat functionaries in CoochBehar mostly benefited the non-targeted people. As the findings of the previous chapters show that the rural leaders, in most cases, were not poor. They, on the other hand, had a much elevated place in the socio-economic stratification. So, as a natural consequence, their chosen beneficiaries were mostly close to their strata. "Those who were not born poor were traditionally told to look after the poor".¹⁴ To evade the government policy of helping the poor, the leaders managed different ways. On the first place, they selected non-poor who can be

covered under the definition of poor. Secondly, they selected those poors (as per the Government definition) who were very loyal as well as reliable and very much dependent on the leaders. Thirdly, the poors were debarred from getting benefit.¹⁵

It will be too much to say that the general peoples were not aware of the PARD programmes. On the other hand, the general peoples knew all the schemes which had been undertaken in rural areas and throughout the study it was understood that the communicative aspect of the Panchayati Raj has been quite praiseworthy. But it is also a fact that rural people were also aware of the limitations of the programme. They generally approached their panchayat for favour. This has been evident from a careful scrutiny of the filled-up schedules for general peoples, where most of them approached their panchayat for some favour in the form of bank loan or minikits from the B.D.O. office, or others. Though, majority of them became unsuccessful in getting anyone of the facilities. "Access to those provisions is possible without the intermediary of the village elites, but it is often not worthwhile trying, except for agricultural minikits; applications for loans under the self-employment programmes are comparable to lottery tickets, with the difference that the winners are not randomly spread over the rich and poor. The poor do have a distinct advantage under the new constellation although banks do not in all cases cooperate."¹⁶

To summarise the discussion of this section, it may be said with a considerable

justification that the emerging leadership pattern of the rural Cooch Behar has not been not very much conducive for the distributive justice and ,as a result, for the eradication of inequality in the truest sense of the term. The class structure of the leaders obviously played a distinctive role in this context. In the light of the monumental emphasis given to the panchayat structure for the different rural development programmes, this aspect may be considered with due weightage to avoid future doldrums in rural development scenario. As long as the rural leaders continue to emerge from the old land based, power mongering and prosperous economic background, the rural poor may not be served with the proper distributive justice as they desire to have.

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