

CHAPTER-X : SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

The study aims at making an analysis of the emerging patterns of rural leadership following the institution of Panchayati Raj in West Bengal. Since it is not always valid to make generalisation based on field study of a single district, in this case Cooch Behar, however insights obtained from this study may well be applied to other areas of West Bengal where a similarity in the land tenure pattern in particular and the social system in general exists. Keeping this point in mind, a summary of the major findings of the study and conclusions have been discussed in this chapter.

10.1. Summary:

The terms rural leadership, rural development and equality in the distribution system are, in fact, the three facets of a system which fosters socio-economic development of our society. The three systems must work in harmony for their best individual performances. Any study of rural development must take into account the rural leadership and equality in the distribution system. In India since Independence, the Government has targeted the grass-root leadership as the main carriers of rural development. The Panchayati Raj system was introduced with a big hope that people's participation in the Panchayati Raj system will foster development from within the area. The people will learn to stand on their own feet and thereby help the nation to

bring overall rural development quickly. But, the success of the Panchayati Raj system is very much dependent on rural leadership itself. "The success of Panchayati Raj institution depends largely on the quality of leadership available at the grass-root, political development and democratic growth depend on the local leadership and its functioning in the Panchayati Raj institution"¹ Since so much is dependent on the rural leadership, the nature, identity, class character and motive of the rural leaders towards development become focal point of attention of the researchers to study the leadership pattern in India. With the reintroduction of Panchayati Raj system in West Bengal since 1977, a vibrant leadership has come up in rural West Bengal. The researcher wanted to study the identity of these rural leaders and their activity on rural development towards reducing inequality in the rural populace as it occurred in West Bengal with special reference to CoochBehar district, which was a feudatory state with different ethnic identity, land tenure pattern and social systems.

To identify the leaders, three Gram Panchayats in Cooch Behar were selected through sampling method. Three types of leaders, i.e., the formal, defeated and informal leaders of three Gram Panchayats areas were interviewed. In total, 67 leaders were taken into the study. The general people of the three Gram Panchayats were also taken into consideration for this study. Two hundred fifty of them were selected and interviewed. In addition to this, to give the study a much broader base, all the Panchayat functionaries of this district were supplied with a questionnaire for filling

up by themselves. In total, three hundred and sixteen questionnaires were returned for analysis.

The major hypothesis of the study are:

a) The emerging leadership pattern is not much different from the traditional leadership pattern, as

(1) The land continues to be the basis of leadership.

(2) Higher socio-economic status continues to be the basis of leadership.

(3) Education is still not a decisive factor of making leadership status.

b) Compared to traditional leadership pattern, the emerging leaders are mainly of younger age.

c) Emerging rural leaders of different political ideologies are mainly of same socio-economic status.

d) The emerging rural leaders are more interested in politics than rural development and equality in distribution, as

(1) The emerging rural leaders use their power to strengthen their position and serve their own interest.

(2) The emerging leaders exercise power to reward their followers and punish their opponents.

(3) The benefits of rural development is not always distributed to the poor and downtrodden people.

- e) The relationship between various institutional bureaucracy and the rural leaders are not always good.
- f) The role and functioning of the rural leaders are unsuited to become the catalytic agent of rural development in Cooch Behar district. (Chapter-II)

The Cooch Behar District is the focal point of the study. It is the north-eastern border district in the Jalpaiguri Division of West Bengal. The early history of the district is related with the history of 'Pragjyotishpura' and 'Kamrupa'. In early period the district formed the part 'Kamapitha'. After many centuries, the land came to be known as 'Kamatapura'. The invasion of 'Kamatapura' by a Muslim army in 1493 A.D. closed the history of Kamatapura. After a period of anarchy, the Koch kings gradually became powerful. The accession of Biswasingha in 1496 A.D. marks the beginning of a new era in the history of Cooch Behar. The dynasty adopted the title 'Narayan' with the beginning of the reign of Naranarayan, the son of Biwasingha. In 1773, the kingdom had to become a feudatory state under British rule. The dynasty with all upheavals continued till the merger with the Indian Union in 1st January, 1950. The district has five Subdivisions, twelve Blocks, one hundred twenty eight Gram Panchayats and one thousand one hundred sixty eight mouzas. The total population according to 1991 census reports is 21,71,145. The total population of Cooch Behar in 1901 census reports was 5,11,116. The reason for this massive increase in population may primarily be attributed to the fact of migration from

Bangladesh (erstwhile East-Pakistan). The original inhabitants of the district are mainly Rajbanshis and Kochs with a considerable number of Muslims (Sunni sect) who have been living here from a very distant past. But the migration from 1951 onwards brought in caste Hindus from Bangladesh (erstwhile East-Pakistan) into this district. The racial structure of the district thus became a complex, heterogeneous type in place of a simple, homogeneous one. The literacy percentage of the district is not very commendable one (31.1 percent in 1981) lagging far behind the percentage of West Bengal. The district is mainly dependent on agriculture as the main occupation. There are some cottage and small scale industries whose products are consumed mainly by the people of the locality. The district has no big industrial set up and it is earmarked by the State Government as a 'no industry district'. The agriculture is mostly traditional type, though it is fast moving towards improved agriculture with the growing of potatoes, high-yielding paddy and vegetables. (Chapter-III).

To look into the old and traditional leadership pattern in the district, one has to understand the land-tenure pattern of the district in the pre-merger period. A close look into the land-tenure and leadership pattern of the different periods in rural Cooch Behar brings out the fact that in the pre-merger period the leadership was much based on land. It is this landed gentry who emerged as leaders by arranging settlements of their kinsmen. In the later period, it is this landed class that helped the migrants to settle in this district by selling land to them. After 1947, migrants from East Pakistan

purchased land from original settlers of CoochBehar. They also started taking part in the decision making process. At this turn of history, a qualitative change occurred in rural relationships. The leadership which was dominated by Rajbanshis previously now included non-Rajbanshi caste Hindus as well. The small but innovative rule of the United Front in West Bengal with an emphasis on land reforms has taken away the surplus land from the big landowners and kept a lasting impact in the social and economic relationships in the rural areas. So, the power structure in Cooch Behar has a long transitional history, from the homogeneous non-exploitative power structure to the recent ethnically heterogeneous one with an abiding interest in rural development and distributive justice. (Chapter-IV)

The rural leaders in Cooch Behar were studied at the macro-level by analysing 316 questionnaires. It revealed from the analysis that the rural power in Cooch Behar has been vested with the middle and high-middle groups of people in the regional socio-economic hierarchy. The power has yet to trickle down to the lowest ladder. In all attributes like education, land-holding, income, occupation, etc., the leaders mostly belonged to the middle and high-middle groups of socio-economic hierarchy. These leaders were the remnants of the old landed gentry who during the last two decades had to surrender their additional land and were forced to shift from rural to semi-urban or urban areas but keeping a hegemony in the rural areas by their family or relatives. They were also successful in occupying Government or

semi-Government services available in the fringe area (specially, the teaching of Primary Schools) because of their added advantage in education than that of the general people. (Chapter-V).

At the micro level of the study, the leaders of the three sampled Gram Panchayats and the general people were taken for an in depth analysis. A through comparison of the leaders and general people was made on demographic characteristics and economic position. The relational aspect of the leaders with the society in general and bureaucracy in particular was also considered. On the demographic aspect it transpires that:

- a) The rural leaders in Cooch Behar has been predominated by Scheduled Castes (mostly Rajbanshis). The caste factor appears to have been duly considered by all parties while nominating candidates.
- b) The informal leaders who were mostly engaged in looking after party organisation were significantly absent in Congress(I) and Forward Bloc parties while that for CPI(M) party their presence were recorded at considerably high level. This shows the stronger organisational set up of CPI(M) parties and it reveals that the organisations of Congress(I) and Forward Bloc parties were more election oriented.
- c) A younger generation of leaders with better educational background emerged in rural nexus.

d) The leaders and their family members had better educational background compared to general people.

On the economic aspects it emerges that:

a) The Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders had better landholding than CPI(M) leaders, though land alone did not establish one's position in the higher strata of economic hierarchy.

b) The CPI(M) leaders were less dependant on agriculture in comparison with the leaders of Congress(I) and Forward Bloc. It also emerges that lower the dependence on agriculture, higher was the chance of remaining in the higher strata of income for these leaders.

c) The leaders who are dependent on more than one occupation are better placed in the economic hierarchy.

d) The dependence on agriculture as a single occupation has weakened and the leaders now depending on more than one occupation to keep their socio-economic dominance.

e) The general people were placed in relatively inferior position compared to leaders in landholding pattern, occupational pattern (all most 70 percent of the general people had to utilise their own family labour in agriculture for livelihood) and family income.

f) A considerable percentage of leaders' families (almost 40 Per cent) has still followed traditional cultivation, 38 per cent follow mixed methods of

cultivation and a small percentage (22 per cent) follow modern methods of farming. The CPI(M) families were numerically dominant in the modern group.

From the analysis of the relational aspect of the leaders and their families, it transpires

that: a) The leader had good outside contact but mostly within the district.

b) The leaders often maintain personal relations with Block Development Officers and bank officials.

c) Publicly, the leaders were involved with educational institutions, party organisations, labour / farmer organisations, Co-operative Societies and youth clubs.

d) Mostly, the leaders were influenced by a person or by their family to enter into direct politics.

e) Party position has been the most conducive factor for getting his leadership status.

f) They had some sort of migration background.

g) Though, the leaders were positive towards participation of their children in politics and in favour of political discussion in his family, in practice, his family members did not participated in political programmes and activities frequently. (Chapter-VI)

To enunciate the comparison between the leaders and the non-leaders (i.e., general people), and to find out the parameters which brings the difference between the two groups of people, the 67 leaders and families of the three Gram Panchayats and 62 (chosen out of 250 general families of the three Gram Panchayats) general families were compared by a classificatory statistical analysis 'discriminant function'. Two groups were quantified in the sixteen variables' scores and fitted into computer programme of 'Discriminant function'. It revealed from the analysis that the factors, a) occupation of the family, b) family type (nuclear or joint), c) extent of cosmopolitaness (i.e., contact with outside village), d) information awareness, e) total landholding of the family and f) number of adult family members were the main factors which makes discrimination between the leaders and the non-leaders possible in the rural Cooch Behar. (Chapter-VII)

To find out a possible difference among the different party leaders, namely, CPI(M), Congress(I) and Forward Bloc, the same statistical model was used. Forty-six Forward Bloc leaders, forty-nine CPI(M) leaders and forty Congress(I) leaders who were statistically chosen from three hundred sixteen leaders had returned the filled up questionnaire supplied to them. The leaders of each and every group were compared with the leaders of other two groups on the basis of their quantification on sixteen variables. The three discriminant functions between Forward Bloc and CPI(M), CPI(M) and Congress(I), Forward Bloc and Congress(I) brings out

the fact that:

- a) The factors 'percentage engagement of hired labourers in agriculture' and 'possession of agricultural implements' have successfully discriminated the CPI(M) leaders from Forward Bloc and Congress(I) leaders.
- b) Though 'per capita income' is recorded as one of the significant discriminant factor between Forward Bloc and Congress(I), it had a very limited role in practice. 'Occupation' also has played a very limited role in the total discriminant function.
- c) From the above discussion, it may not be wrong to suggest that the leaders of three parties belonged to the same socio-economic strata and did not have much difference within themselves. (Chapter-VIII).

To enquire into the performance of the leaders in bringing rural development and curbing of inequality in rural Cooch Behar, the general peoples were divided into two groups, beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, on the basis of their individual access to developmental benefits. The analysis reveals that:

- a) The benefits of rural development failed to curb the present inequality in rural areas. A negligible percentage of beneficiaries belonged to the target group.
- b) Most of the beneficiary families were in the middle and upper-middle ladder of socio-economic hierarchy.

- c) Non-poor gained packages of poverty alleviation and rural development programmes.
- d) The emerging rural leadership pattern of Cooch Behar has not been much conducive for the distributive justice; poorest of the poor has been left out of the developmental plans.
- e) The curbing of inequality as a principle has not been followed at the time of implementation of the developmental programmes.
- f) The non-beneficiaries belong to the lower strata of socio-economic hierarchy compared to the beneficiary group.
- g) Political affiliation played a very distinctive role towards getting benefits.
- h) Beneficiaries with higher income received more financial benefit compared to the beneficiaries with lower income.
- i) Leaders, being much above the target group people, availed benefits under poverty Alleviation Programme.
- j) The implementation and recovery levels of the rural advance were not good and those have contributed to the failure of the Co-operative movement in particular and Government sponsored PARD and non-PARD programmes in general.
- k) The general people in rural Cooch Behar have grievances on the mode of working of the Panchayat functionaries. The beneficiaries of the system were also less sympathetic to the system itself as they were expected to be.

- l) The per family benefit was very low which generates regressive effect on the economy.
- m) There was, more or less, a resentment against the modalities of distribution of benefit. (Chapter-IX).

10.2: Conclusion.

The much quoted adage goes "men are born equal, but some men are born more equal than others". This may well sum up the social position of the emerging leaders in the rural setting of Cooch Behar. Viewed in this perspective, the conclusive analysis of the study is subdivided into two issues: a) structure of the emerging rural leaders and b) the orientation of the rural leaders towards curbing of inequality and rural development which together constitute the main focus of attention of the rural leaders, specially after the reintroduction of Panchayati Raj in West Bengal in 1978. The major hypothesis of the study has been subdivided into these two groups and tested in the perspective of the major findings of the study.

10.2.1: Structure of emerging rural leaders.

It was hypothesized that "the emerging leadership pattern is not much different from the traditional leadership pattern" as

- a) the land continues to be the basis of leadership.
- b) higher socio-economic status continues to be the basis of leadership, and
- c) education is still not a decisive factor of making leadership status.

On the issue of the place of landholding in determining the leadership pattern, it is seen (table 5.9, 5.10, 6.6, 6.7 and 6.14) that the leaders' families were placed in much exalted position than the non-leaders, i.e., the general people. Land still formed the bedrock of the financial position of the leaders' families, though it transpires from the tables noted above that leaders' families, in general, belonged to middle and higher middle size classes of land tenure pattern. In that sense, land-tenure pattern of the leaders underwent a subtle change from the big landowners in the pre-merger period (chapter-IV) to the present moderate landowners. However, in the chapter-VII (table-7.4), the discriminant function analysis of leaders and the non-leaders shows that the variable 'total landholding of the family' has been a significant factor to differentiate between leaders and non-leader families. So, considering all the facts, it may be derived that land continued to be a factor of leadership, though it has lost its weightage a bit.

The higher socio-economic status of leaders and their families obviously played a key role in making the leaders. This is evident from the analysis of the tables in chapter-V, chapter-VI, and chapter-VII. In chapter-VII, the discriminant function analysis suggested that the factor 'occupation of the family alone account for 30.38 percent contribution to the total distance measured between the leaders and the non-leaders families. Even in chapter-V (table-5.14), it is revealed that the per capita family income position of Panchayat members in each higher strata was better than

the per capita income position of Panchayat members in the immediate lower strata. In chapter-VI, a comparison between leaders' and non-leaders' families on economic position (table-6.6 and 6.14, table-6.9 and 6.15, table 6.10 and 6.16, and 6.17) showed clearly that leaders hailed from an economically advantageous group in rural society. There has been no virtual representation in leadership from the population belonging to 'below poverty line' group. As such, the fate of those downtrodden people remained in the hands of the leaders who were economically much better off than their supplicants.

It emerged from the findings of chapter-V (table 5.3, 5.5, and 5.6) that those who were elected in the Panchayat system were not only better educated but they also came from the educated family background. There seems to be a positive correlation between education level and position of the leader in the Panchayat system. Higher educated persons seem to have occupied the upper tiers of leadership in the Panchayat strata. It also transpires that older leaders at the lower strata (Gram Panchayat) were mostly marginally educated but leaders with higher educational background belonged to younger age groups. These findings have been supported by the micro-analysis in chapter-VI (table 6.3, 6.4, and 6.5) where it revealed that the younger generation of rural leaders with better educational background of themselves and their families have emerged in the rural nexus of Cooch Behar district. But in the discriminant function analysis of chapter-VII (table 7.1 and 7.4) it revealed that the

variable 'education of the leader' and 'education of the family' could not be graded as the statistically significant factors to discriminate leaders and the led. All these findings prompt one to conclude that with the growing importance of Panchayati Raj in West Bengal, the importance of education as a factor has no doubt increased. The Panchayat functionaries from the Pradhans and Upa-Pradhans, by dint of their official position, have to interact with the bureaucrats like Block Development Officer, and other heads of development departments and bank officials. As such, the necessity of a minimum education was obviously felt by everyone and keeping an eye on this point, the selection among the elected Panchayat functionaries was made for important portfolios. The educational level of younger generation of leaders has increased no doubt, but general educational level of leaders (covering formal Panchayat leaders, defeated leaders and informal leaders) ought to increase further to fulfill the expected role of the rural leaders properly.

It was hypothesized that "compared to traditional leadership pattern, the emerging leaders are mainly of younger age".

It appeared from the discussion in the chapter-IV that the leaders, in both pre-merger and post-merger periods (till the reintroduction of three tier Panchayati Raj in West Bengal in 1978) were mostly of older age group. The people put faith and relied on experience and age of leaders for settlement of any problem or for consultation. But in chapter-V, it is seen (table 5.3) that the emerging leaders mostly

(79.11%) belong to the age group '30 to 50'. The same finding was obtained when age groups were arranged in different strata of Panchayati Raj. But, partywise analysis (table-5.4) shows that though in all parties '30 to 50' age group is numerically dominant, comparatively higher percentage of leaders in CPI(M) party belong to 'above 50' age group. In chapter-VI, when leaders were viewed at the micro level, the findings not only corroborated the findings of the previous chapter but showed clearly that the distribution of CPI(M) leaders according to age was observed to be more skewed towards higher age-group than that of other two parties. Relatively high proportion of CPI(M) leaders to higher age-groups was more pronounced for formal leaders which implied that the CPI(M) generally offered nomination to the candidates of relatively higher age-group. Considering all the facts, it can be concluded that the emerging leaders were mostly of younger age in comparison with the traditional leadership pattern, though among the CPI(M) party leaders, more weightage had been given on the old leaders compared to the other party leaders.

It was hypothesized that "emerging rural leaders of different political ideologies are mainly of same economic status."

In the discussion on economic aspects in chapter-V (tables 5.7 to 5.14), it revealed that though CPI(M) party leaders were placed in the lower strata of land tenure pattern compared to Forward Bloc and Congress(I) leaders, they had better income than the other party leaders in regard to total family income as well as per

capita income; the reason for which may be ascribed to the fact that the CPI(M) leaders were more dependant on service as occupation. Reversely, higher landholding of the Congress(I) and forward Bloc leaders did not necessarily generate higher income when compared with the income structure of CPI(M) leaders. More dependence of Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders on agriculture was found to be one of the reasons for their relatively low income despite having bigger landed property. The micro-analysis of the leaders in chapter-VI also depicted the same picture (table 6.6,6.7,6.9,and 6.10).

In the discriminate function analysis among different party leaders (chapter-VIII), it is revealed that the factors 'percentage engagement of hired labourers in agriculture' and 'possession of agricultural implements' had successfully discriminated the CPI(M) leaders from the forward Bloc and Congress(I) leaders. These may ultimately lead one to the conclusion the Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders have more or less same 'non-cultivating owner' background compared with CPI(M) leaders who were on their way to become 'cultivating owners'. They have comparatively less quantum of land and as such forced to adopt 'modern' or 'mixed' agricultural techniques (table 6.20) to earn their livelihood. The significant point of discrimination between CPI(M) and other party leaders on 'possession of agricultural implements' in chapter-VIII is the transition from non-cultivating owner to cultivating owner class which may be considered as one of the major contribution of adopting

modern methods of cultivation. It also emerged that though 'per capita income' had a significant contribution towards discrimination between Forward Bloc and Congress(I) leaders, it may not be so significant so far the analysis of the chapter-V, chapter-VI and chapter-VIII are concerned. Occupation as a factor also had a limited role of significance. Thus, it can be said with much certainty that the leaders of the three parties were not much different so far as the economic variables are concerned. That is, they all had the same economic base in the rural society of Cooch Behar.

10.2.2: Orientation of the rural leaders towards curbing of inequality and rural development.

It was hypothesized that "the emerging rural leaders are more interested in politics than rural development and equality in distribution", as

- a) the emerging rural leaders use their power to strengthen their position and serve their own interest.
- b) the emerging leaders exercise power to reward their followers and punish their opponents.
- c) the benefits of rural development is not always distributed to the poor and downtrodden people.

Throughout discussion in chapter-IX in various tables, specially table 9.14, delineates that the rural leaders in Cooch Behar had the covert goal of serving their own class interest. The table shows that the leaders, though none of them belonged

to below 'poverty line' (Rs.4800/-), enjoyed the benefits of Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development (PARD) programmes. The rural leaders who were not in power and not belonged to party-in-power had faced no difficulty in receiving the financial benefit at the behest of their peers in other parties. The probable reason of this may be attributed to the fact that the leaders of all parties mostly belonged to the same economic strata. In the process of allotting benefits for themselves, the leaders did not face any problem from the bureaucracy (B.D.O. or bank manager) either who generally have a habit of playing negative role in arranging financial benefits to the poorest of the poor.

In the table 9.19, it is revealed that the party belongingness was the major guiding factor towards distribution of benefits as has been felt by the beneficiary group. This has been supported by the table 9.3, where it is viewed that beneficiaries were more inclined to the major parties in rural areas. The absence of supporters / sympathizers of 'other' parties also proved the assumption that the rural people had no faith in parties other than the major parties, as no benefit could be obtained from being member of them. The table also shows that in Gram Panchayat level, the people generally supported the party in power enmasse.

It is viewed in chapter-IX (table-9.4, 9.5, 9.6, 9.7, 9.8, and 9.9) that the benefits of rural development was not confined to the poorest of the poor only. On the

contrary, it can be said that most of the beneficiary families were in the middle and upper-middle strata of socio-economic hierarchy in the rural society. The non-beneficiary families often belonged to economically inferior group compared with the beneficiaries. Moreover, it is revealed that the poorest of the poor section of the people mostly did not receive any financial benefit whatsoever and they were easily sidelined in the competition of getting benefit. Furthermore, in table-9.12 it emanates that the persons living below poverty line (for whom the PARD programmes are formulated) were not only deprived of their due share in poverty alleviation programmes which were often shared by the more propertied class than by those who were in the 'below-povertyline' group. Even when such poor families received some benefits, they were meagrely benefitted compared to that received by propertied class beneficiaries. The quantum and frequency of benefit was directly related with gradation of income class. More income obviously brought more quantum and frequency of benefits (table 9.12 and 9.13). In addition to that, the majority (67.16%) of leader families, though they were virtually ineligible for the benefit for being in the higher income range, nonetheless availed the benefits of PARD programmes (table 9.14). All these findings obviously prompt one to conclude that the benefits of rural development have not been going to the right persons and families and to the downtrodden people of the rural society as envisaged by the planners and policy makers. The benefits have not trickled down to the poorest of the poor sections of the rural society.

It was hypothesized that "the relationship between various institutional bureaucracy and the rural leaders are not always good".

In the chapter-VI, a detailed discussion of outside contacts and personal relation of outsiders with the leaders was attempted (table 6.21, 6.22 and 6.23). The related tables show that formal leaders had more outside contact and personal relation with outsiders than the defeated and informal leaders. The table 6.23 further shows that all types of leaders were personally interested to maintain personal contact with the next-door bureaucracy with which the leaders were related most, like B.D.O., bank manager and Village Level Worker (an extension worker under Agriculture Development Officer of each block has been earmarked to look after and for technical suggestion towards better agriculture pattern of each village). This part of the bureaucracy has been considered as the channel to bring immediate benefit to the people of their choice. So, from the above observation, it may be deduced that the leaders, especially the formal leaders, wanted to be in a very close position with the immediate bureaucracy to enjoy the aura of power in the rural development process. But, in the chapter-VII, it has been observed that the factor 'personal relation with outsiders' (i.e., high officials and resource persons) was not a significant factor to discriminate leaders and the non-leaders, that is, the general people, though 'extent of cosmopolitaness' (i.e., the contacts of leaders to places outside the village) had been a significant factor for discrimination between leaders and non-leaders.

In chapter-II, the hypothesis was made as "the role and functioning of the rural leaders are unsuited to become the catalytic agent of rural development in Cooch Behar district".

In the foregoing discussion, it appeared clearly that the emerging leaders in Cooch Behar could not play the role as desired by planners in India. They failed miserably, consciously or unconsciously, to select the proper beneficiaries for the development schemes on the one hand, nor they can plug the leakages of absorption of benefit by the well-to-do section of the rural society. They failed miserably in another count also, they can not project themselves as the true catalyst of development process. They have appropriated the benefits of development illegally and unethically on the one hand, and misused the money by not implementing the schemes (table 9.14) and thereby setting examples of non-utilisation of schemes on the other hand. All these actions on the part of the leaders have proceduced a callous attitude on the mind of the general people who have a little faith for rural development and programmes (table 9. to 9.). As a result, curbing of inequality remained a myth. The poor sections of the society being unable to have the benefits of development were relegated to more inferior socio-economic strata. On the other hand, the comparatively rich sections of the society, by availing the benefits of rural development and somehow grabbing the scientific developments in agricultural practice, exalted their position in socio-economic hierarchy. The inequality between the poor and rich in the rural areas of Cooch Behar has thus widened. Moreover, class

interest of the leaders also dictates the leaders to deprive the poor of the benefits and corner those in favour of their own class.

So, it may be worthwhile to say that the emerging leadership pattern in CoochBehar has not been not very suitable to become the catalytic agent of rural development and eradication of inequality contrary to what is claimed in Government records and information booklets. In view of the difficult task confronting the Panchayat functionaries in rural development programmes, the socio-economic position of leaders should be considered for a comprehensive development of rural areas and also for avoiding any probable diversion of the benefits of the development programmes meant for eradication of poverty and curbing of inequality. Unless the poor are put in charge of rural development and implementation of poverty alleviation programmes, progress in respect of curbing of inequality in rural Cooch Behar will remain as a dream.

The study presented in the foregoing pages is a modest attempt to understand the nature of the emerging pattern of rural leadership and to examine its suitability to carry on the various development programmes for the benefit of the poor. The conclusions of this micro-level study are however very dismal. It shows that the elected leaders of the Panchayati Raj institution have utterly failed in their task - the poor has become poorer and the rich has become richer. The gap between the two

sections has, in fact, widened. This raises a serious question - does the present form of Panchayati Raj system need modification and evolve such checks and balances to counteract the misuse of powers by the functionaries ? But this question can only be properly answered after the study of the leadership pattern and their role in development programmes in other rural areas of West Bengal is completed.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. V.M.Sirsikar, The Rural Elite In A Developing Society, Orient Longman, 1970, P.1.