

CHAPTER-II: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN.

This chapter describes the procedure adopted and the techniques employed in the collection of data in studying the patterns of rural leadership in the Cooch Behar District of West Bengal. To study the nature of rural development, the mobility of rural leaders in socio-economic parameters and their collateral relation between the rural development and rural inequality, a micro level study consisting of field survey has been conducted.

2.1: Stages of sampling:

For these purpose, a four stage random sampling procedure has been adopted. The stage-I being the selection of Blocks in the district, stage-II being the selection of Gram Panchayats from the selected Blocks and the stage-III being the selection of general people and stage-IV being the selection of leaders from the selected Gram Panchayat area. In the first stage, twelve Blocks in the district were classified into three categories according to the nature of party in power of the block, namely, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) dominated blocks, Forward Bloc dominated blocks and the Congress party dominated blocks. Then one Development Block from each category was selected randomly. Dinhata-I Block being the only Congress

dominated block of the district, was selected automatically. In other two categories, Tufanganj-I and Mekhliganj were selected from the CPI(M) and Forward Block dominated blocks of the district respectively.

In the second stage, one Gram Panchayat from each of the three selected blocks were selected randomly. The Gram Panchayats Bhetaguri-I, Andaranfulbari-I and Bagdogra Fulkadabri were selected from Dinhata-I, Tufanganj-I and Mekhliganj blocks respectively.

In the third stage, one '*Mouza*'¹ or ward was selected in each Gram Panchayat area at random. Then all the households of the particular mouza (revenue block) or ward was enumerated totally by a schedule. Thus, the total households of mouza Khorarpar of Andaranfulbari-I Gram Panchayat, mouza 112, Fulkadabri of Bagdogra Fulkadabri Gram Panchayat and ward no-I of Bhetaguri-I Gram Panchayat were enumerated by the survey schedule prepared for the common people.

In the fourth stage, a list of all defeated and informal leaders of the three Gram Panchayats were prepared on the basis of the information given by the villagers. The list was prepared in addition to the formal elected leaders. In total, thirty-two leaders were selected from the list. All the formal Panchayat leaders in the three Gram Panchayats (thirty-five) were listed. In total sixty-seven leaders of the three Gram

Panchayats were interviewed intensively with a survey schedule specially devised for interviewing leaders. The two survey schedules (one for the commoners and the other for the leaders) are given in the appendix.

2.2: Macro study:

To test the data gathered so far from the micro level study, in the context of the district as a whole, all the Panchayat functionaries of the district were supplied with a printed Bengali questionnaire to be filled up by themselves. In all three hundred sixteen questionnaires were returned by the Panchayats to the researcher of the study. The data so gathered were tabulated and analysed and used to depict the general leadership pattern of the district.

The main focus of the survey is centred around the study of Panchayati Raj leadership in particular and the members of other elites in general. In West Bengal, especially after 1978 onwards, the reputational elite and elected representatives of the Panchayats constitute the rural elites of the area. They were all interviewed keeping in mind the developmental variable as the study centred on the emerging pattern of the rural leaders and development.

2.3: Collection of Secondary data.

For the purposes of the study, the researcher has to collect some secondary data from the census reports of Cooch Behar and West Bengal(1951 to 1991), Annual

Reports, official records and accounts from the District Planning Department, Annual Action Plans of Agriculture Department and Annual Action Plans of the District Rural Development Agency were used extensively for collection of secondary data on rural development of the district. Some data were also collected from the four Bank Branches, Uttarbanga Kshetriya Gramin Bank-Bhetaguri, Central Bank of India-Mekhliganj, Uttarbanga Kshetriya Gramin Bank-Andaranfulbari and Central Bank of India-Tufanganj and they were also of immense help for this study. Data were also collected from the interviews of Panchayat officials (like Panchayat Secretary, Job Assistant, etc.) and the elderly people of the villages.

The field-work of the study was spread over eleven months (February 1989 to December, 1990). The completion of the interviews of leaders took more time as the schedule was quite big containing many questions on many aspects of life and activities of leaders. The Panchayat functionaries interviewed for the present study were elected in 1988 and they were in power until 1993.

2.4: Nature of the survey schedule and questionnaire.

As stated in the earlier discussion that there are two types of survey schedules used, one for the leaders and the other for the common men. The survey-schedule for leaders consists of three parts. In the Part-A of the schedule, the number of family members, literacy and occupational pattern, cropping pattern and as a whole the social

and economic position of the family of the leaders were enumerated. In the Part-B, the parameters on political and organisational aspect is devised in details, it also includes question on the migrational aspect of the leaders' life and on the aspect of politics as a process of socialisation of other family members. In the Part-C, the aspects of economic development and equity in distribution were enumerated.

In the second schedule, i.e., the schedule devised for interviewing commoners, there were three parts in it. In the first part, the social and economic life of the respondent was highlighted along with the literacy pattern and occupational pattern of the family. The debt structure of the family was also considered. In the second part, the relationship of the respondent with the leader in particular and the leadership structure in general was focussed. In the third part, the researcher wanted to find out and measure the comprehension of the respondent regarding the process and structure of the rural development, the benefits accrued from it and benefits of rural development availed by them

In the questionnaire, supplied to the Panchayat Members of the District, the researcher tried to find out the number of family members, occupational pattern, literacy pattern, nature of landholding of the household - summation of social and economic aspect of the family along with their political perspective. The survey schedules and questionnaires were prepared keeping in mind the objectives and

hypothesis of the study.

Apart from the questionnaires and schedules, the researcher gathered information from the informal conversations. By studying in the Gram Panchayat offices and maintaining a good and informal relations with the Panchayat members, informal and defeated leaders along with the general people, the researcher could gather many valuable insight from the informal discussion with them.

2.5: Major Hypothesis.

In course of the study, some hypotheses were formulated and tested. The hypotheses are made on the basis of the main research questions². They are listed below.

- 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.

2.6: Approaches for identification of leaders.

There are three facets of leadership, so far as the theory of leadership is concerned. These three facets are: a) leader, b) followers or the led and c) the setting or situation. There is less confusion in comprehending the term 'follower' and the 'situation'. But the term 'leader' has brought with it much confusion as to who are the leaders.

There are three basic approaches for identifying leaders or elites, namely, a) the positional approach, b) the reputational approach and c) the decision making approach.

a) **The positional approach:** The determination of elites on the basis of position is done by selecting persons who are occupying the top formal offices. The persons

holding these positions are supposed to wield influence.

b) **The reputational approach:** To identify the leaders or elites through the reputational approach, different variables are taken into account. Generally, the nominations are sought from different panels of knowledgeable.

c) **The decision-making approach:** This approach is based on the assumption that those who actually participate in the decision making process are the elites because they have shown their influence in the actual situation. At first, the vital decisions of a community is identified, then the persons who have taken the decisions are identified as leaders³.

For the purpose of present study, the formal leaders of the Gram Panchayat, i.e., the Pradhans, Upa-Pradhans and the members of the Gram Panchayats were identified quite easily. But two other types of leaders were also to be identified for making successful contrast and comparison with the formal leaders. One of type was the defeated leaders and the other was the leader who did not contest the Panchayat election but possessed a considerable influence in the rural society.

Thus, three types of leaders were identified for the purpose of the present study.

- a) The Panchayat leaders, i.e., the leaders who are Panchayat members.
- b) The defeated leaders, i.e., the leaders who contested in the Panchayat Election, but emerged defeated.

c) The informal leaders, i.e., the leaders who have not contested in the Panchayat elections but possess considerable influence in the locality.

There is no difficulty in identifying the Panchayat leaders, i.e., the formal leaders and the defeated leaders. The main difficulty lies in identifying the informal leaders.

There may be three ways to identify the informal leaders:

a) On the basis of their adeptness to a particular activity like litigation, agriculture, organising the festivals, etc.

b) On the basis of their leadership of family, neighbourhood, village, caste, etc.

c) Simply by asking villagers who are the respectable and influential persons in the village in the field of caste, age, wealth, agriculture, speaking ability, etc.⁴.

In this study, the last method is resorted to identify the informal leaders, because this is the most simple method for identification.

2.7: Limitation of the study:

The present study suffers from some limitations like paucity of resources, limited time, non-availability of time of some of the leaders, etc. Moreover, the researcher was alone in conducting the interview. The village settlements in Cooch Behar are all 'dispersed cluster type', i.e., the settlements of four/ five households lying far apart from another settlement consisting of four/ five households. Thus, the researcher had to cover a long way for the next interview. The rural peoples generally have a tendency to hide their economic position; it also posed problems to the researcher.

Some formal leaders are too busy with their personal work which is also a great obstacle for the good field research. And lastly, the secretary of the Gram Panchayat Offices and the bank officials were not always cooperative with the researcher in conducting the study, sometimes the researcher had to resort to some false reasons to gather information.

In this backdrop of social constraints, the researcher was keen to probe as thoroughly as possible the socio-economic background of the respondents in the social, political and economic set-up of the Cooch Behar District.

NOTES AND REFERENCES:

1. Mouza is the lowest divisible village level unit of the land revenue department. In some areas of Cooch Behar, it directly overlaps the area of a particular village; but in some areas, a village comprises more than one Mouza.
2. Chapter-I, P- 8.
3. S.K.Lal, Approaches To The Identification Of Elites in Sachhidananda & A.K.Lal (Ed.), Elite and Development, New Delhi, PP.29-33.
4. S.N.Mishra, Pattern Of Emerging Rural Leaders, Patna, 1977, P.32.