

## CHAPTER-V: PANCHAYAT LEADERS IN COOCHBEHAR : AN OVERVIEW.

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The most basic question before the panchayat set up everywhere in the country had been for long is that whether the Panchayat system is meant for the self government or for the development of the rural areas or for the both. The Article 40 of the Constitution visualises the Panchayat set up for self-governance and the Balwantray Mehta Committee Report, 1957 visualises a limited scope of rural development in it. Gradually, with the passage of time, the concept of rural development and self-governance have undergone some modifications and with these modified concepts, the experiments of Panchayati Raj have taken place in different parts of the country.

In West Bengal, The West Bengal Panchayat Act was passed in 1957. Subsequently, to complete the structure of the Panchayati Raj, the West Bengal Zilla Parisad Act was passed in 1963. Though the Panchayati Raj in West Bengal was ceremoniously inaugurated on 2nd October, 1964, it had been a non-starter at the beginning and the system became almost defunct. At last in 1973, the West Bengal Panchayat Act with provision of a three tier Panchayati Raj set-up was passed. The main difference between the two acts is that the former prescribes four tiers in the Panchayat set up, whereas the latter provided three tiers in the panchayat

Table 5.1: Subdivision wise and Party wise distribution of Panchayat leaders :

Name of the Sub-division	No. of Gram Panchayat	Panchayat at Samities	Gram Panchayat	P. Samity members	Total no. of Zilla Parisad members	Total members	Total member of CPI(M)				Total member of Congress				Total member of F. Bloc				Total other Party member			
							G	P	Z	T	G	P	Z	T	G	P	Z	T	G	P	Z	T
1. Cooch Behar	28	2	505	84	4	593	377	69	4	450	80	10	-	90	41	5	-	46	7	-	-	7
2. Tufanganj	25	2	350	66	4	420	324	63	4	391	15	1	-	16	10	2	-	12	1	-	-	1
3. Dinhat	33	3	492	89	6	587	52	5	-	57	161	31	1	193	275	53	5	333	4	-	-	4
4. Mathabhanga	28	3	496	82	6	584	415	78	6	499	51	3	-	54	27	1	-	28	3	-	-	3
5. Mekhliganj	14	2	190	35	4	229	43	6	-	49	51	9	-	60	93	20	4	117	3	-	-	3
Total :	128	12	2,033	356	24	2,413	1,211	221	14	1,446	358	54	1	413	446	81	9	536	18	-	-	18

N.B.: 1) G denotes - Gram Panchayat  
2) Z denotes - Zilla Parisad

2) P denotes - Panchayat Samity  
4) T denotes - Total

administration. This Act of 1973 clearly indicates that in developmental activities all elected bodies right from the Gram Panchayat should be involved. It also provides for direct election to all the three tiers. Thus, the Panchayat election in 1978 was held with a lot of enthusiasm among twenty five million rural voters. Since then, Panchayat election have been held twice - in 1983 and 1988 (till filed work of this study was conducted) and there are 62,346 newly elected Panchayat functionaries in 3227 Gram Panchayats, 329 Panchayat Samities and 15 Zilla Parisads in West Bengal (till 1988 panchayat election).<sup>1</sup>

Now, with the introduction of the new Panchayat Raj in Cooch Behar district after the Panchayat election in 1978, a large number of rural leaders have emerged to decide upon the mode of rural development in Cooch Behar . Due to the budget constraints, it seems that the direction of rural development largely hinge upon the attitudes of newly emerged rural leaders. It may also be assumed that the attitudes of rural leaders are determined to a considerable extent by their socio-economic backgrounds. The present chapter intends to examine the socio-economic backgrounds of newly emerged rural leaders. To look into the details of the socio-economic background of the emerging rural leaders, a suitably framed questionnaire was circulated to all the Panchayat functionaries through the Panchayat Department of Cooch Behar. The Subdivision-wise details of Panchayat functionaries who were elected in the 1988 election are shown in table 5.1. Out of

**Table 5.2: Distribution of the Panchayat leaders in three tiers according to caste and party affiliation.**

Caste	CONGRESS(I)			CPI(M)			FORWARD BLOC			OTHERS			ALL PARTIES		
	Sch. Caste	General	Total	Sch. Caste	General	Total	Sch. Caste	General	Total	Sch. Caste	General	Total	Sch. Caste	General	Total
Gram Panchayate	27 (67.5)	13 (32.5)	40 (100)	97 (65.54)	51 (34.46)	148 (100)	63 (69.23)	28 (30.77)	91 (100)	2 (37.0)	2 (63.0)	4 (100)	189 (66.78)	94 (33.22)	283 (100) (89.56)
Panchayate Samit	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	2 (100)	10 (55.55)	8 (44.45)	18 (100)	6 (75.0)	2 (25.0)	8 (100)	--	--	--	17 (60.71)	11 (39.29)	28 (100) 8.86)
Zilla Parisad	--	--	--	1 (50.0)	1 (50.0)	2 (100)	2 (66.67)	1 (33.33)	3 (100)	--	--	--	3 (60)	2 (40.0)	5 (100) (1.58)
TOTAL	28 (66.87)	14 (33.13)	42 (100) (13.3)	108 (64.28)	60 (35.72)	168 (100) (53.2)	71 (69.61)	31 (30.39)	102 (100) (32.3)	12 (50.0)	2 (50.0)	4 (100) (1.2)	209 (66.14)	107 (33.86)	316 (100) (100)

N.B.: 1) Figures in brackets indicate percentages on total.  
2) Figures in lower brackets indicate percentages on N=316.

total 2413, three hundred and sixteen Panchayat functionaries returned the filled-up questionnaire. Therefore, three hundred and sixteen panchayat functionaries have been taken as the statistical universe in the analysis of this chapter. Of the three hundred sixteen sample leaders 53.2 per cent belong to CPI(M), 32.3 percent to Forward Bloc and 13.3 per cent to Congress(I) as revealed from table 5.2.

### **5.1: Demographic dimensions of the Panchayat Leaders.**

To begin with the analysis on the demographic dimensions, the attention has primarily been concentrated upon the caste and political affiliation of the rural leaders.

#### **5.1.1: Panchayat leaders, caste and political affiliation:**

The distribution of Panchayat leaders in the three strata according to caste and party affiliation is presented in the table 5.2. It can be seen from the table 5.2 that the leaders belonging to Scheduled Castes constituted 66.78 per cent in comparison with those of general castes accounting for 33.22 per cent of total leaders. The percentage of leaders belonging to Scheduled Castes in all the three political parties also was commensurate with that at the aggregate level. And again, the proportion of Scheduled Caste leaders in each tier of panchayat structure also resembled with the percentage at the aggregate level. Based on the above findings one may assert that the Scheduled Castes have been enjoying a dominant role in the three tier panchayat system of the Cooch Behar District.

Table 5.3: Percentage distribution of leaders in three panchayat strata according to age and education.

Panch. Strata	GRAM PANCHAYAT				PANCHAYAT SAMITY				ZILLA PARISAD				ALL PARTIES			
	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	TOTAL
Educational Classes																
Upto class-V	4.61 (16.67)	67.70 (19.19)	27.69 (4.91)	100.0 (22.97)	--	66.67 (8.33)	33.33 (50.0)	100.0 (10.71)	--	--	--	--	4.41 (15.0)	67.65 (18.4)	27.94 (41.31)	100.0 (21.52)
Class-VI to Class-X	5.04 (33.33)	75.63 (40.72)	19.39 (52.27)	100.0 (42.05)	9.09 (50.0)	81.82 (37.5)	9.09 (50.0)	100.0 (39.29)	--	--	--	--	5.38 (35.0)	76.15 (39.6)	18.47 (52.17)	100.0 (41.14)
Matric/HS/Secondary	8.00 (33.33)	88.0 (29.87)	4.00 (6.82)	100.0 (26.50)	--	100.0 (50.0)	--	100.0 (42.86)	--	100.0 (60.0)	--	100.0 (60.0)	6.67 (30.0)	90.0 (32.4)	3.33 (6.52)	100.0 (28.48)
Graduation and Above	12.50 (16.67)	85.50 (9.5)	--	100.0 (8.42)	50.0 (50.0)	50.0 (4.17)	--	100.0 (7.14)	--	100.0 (40.0)	--	100.0 (40.0)	14.29 (20.0)	85.71 (9.6)	-	100.0 (8.86)
TOTAL	6.36 (100)	78.09 (100)	15.55 (100)	100.0 (100)	7.14 (100)	85.72 (100)	7.14 (100)	100.0 (100)	--	100.0 (100)	--	100.0 (100)	6.33 (100)	79.11 (100)	14.56 (100)	100.0 (100)
N-value	18	221	44	283	2	24	2	28	--	5	--	5	20	250	46	316

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

**Table 5.4: Percentage distribution of leaders according to age and party affiliation.**

Pol. Parties	CONGRESS(I)				CPI(M)				FORWARD BLOC				OTHERS				ALL PARTIES			
	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total (N value)
Gram Panchayat	5	82.5	12.5	100	6.76	73.7	19.5	100	6.59	82.4	11	100	--	100	--	100	6.36	78.7	15.6	100.0 (283)
Panch. Samity	--	100	--	100	11.1	77.8	11.1	100	--	100	--	100	--	--	--	--	7.14	85.7	7.14	100.0 (28)
Zilla Parishad	--	--	--	--	--	100	--	100	--	100	--	100	--	--	--	--	--	100	--	100.0 (5)
TOTAL	4.76	83.3	11.9	100	7.14	74.4	18.4	100	5.88	84.3	9.81	100	--	100	--	100	6.33	79.1	14.6	100
N Value	2	35	5	42	12	125	31	168	6	86	10	102	--	4	--	4	20	250	46	316

**5.1.2: Panchayat leaders, age and education:**

The percentage distribution of panchayat leaders in each tier of panchayat structure according to age and education is presented in the table 5.3 . The table shows that the age group '30 to 50' constituted the most numerically dominant (79.11%) age group. The panchayat leaders of the other two age groups were insignificant in the sense that only 6.33 per cent and 14.56 percent panchayat leaders belonged to the age group 'Below 30' and 'Above 50' respectively. To see the panchayat strata separately , the same result can be seen in three strata - that most of the Panchayat leaders were in the age group '30 to 50'. The table 5.3 further shows that 39.6 percent of the panchayat leaders in the age group '30 to 50' were educated upto class-X and 32.4 percent panchayat functionaries of this age group passed the School Leaving Examination. The educational class of 'class-VI to class-X' was the numerically majority group and the leaders with higher educational qualification were significantly less in number and proportion.

The table 5.4 shows that in all parties the age group '30 to 50' was the numerically dominant group. But a notable difference among the parties is discerned by table 5.4. The proportions of Congress(I) and Forward Bloc panchayat functionaries in this age group were considerably higher (83.33 and 84.31 respectively) than that of the CPI(M) functionaries (74.41). While relatively high proportion of CPI(M) leaders belonged to the age group 'Above 50'(18.45%). One may aptly say that the CPI(M)

**Table 5.5: Percentage distribution of Panchayat functionaries according to age, education.**

Pol. Parties	CONGRESS(I)				CPI(M)				FORWARD BLOC				OTHERS				GRAND TOTAL
	Age group	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	Total	Below 30	30 to 50	Above 50	
Upto class-V	--	100.0 (22.86)	--	100.0 (19.05)	7.90 (25.0)	52.63 (16.0)	39.47 (48.39)	100.0 (22.62)	9.09 (33.33)	77.27 (19.77)	13.64 (30.0)	100.0 (21.57)	--	--	--	--	100.0 (21.52)
Class-VI to Class-X	5.26 (50.0)	73.68 (40.0)	21.06 (80.0)	100.0 (45.24)	8.33 (41.66)	70.0 (33.6)	21.67 (41.93)	100.0 (35.72)	4.17 (33.33)	81.25 (45.35)	14.58 (70.0)	100.0 (47.06)	--	100.0 (75.00)	--	100.0 (75.0)	100.0 (41.14)
Martic/HS/Secondary	--	91.67 (31.43)	8.33 (20.0)	100.0 (28.57)	3.70 (16.67)	90.74 (39.20)	5.56 (9.68)	100.0 (32.14)	4.17 (16.67)	95.87 (26.74)	--	100.0 (23.53)	--	--	--	--	100.0 (28.48)
Graduation and above	33.33 (50.0)	66.67 (5.71)	--	100.0 (7.14)	12.5 (16.67)	87.5 (11.20)	--	100.0 (9.52)	12.5 (16.67)	87.5 (8.14)	--	100.0 (7.84)	--	100.0 (25.0)	--	100.0 (25.0)	100.0 (8.86)
TOTAL	4.76	83.33	11.91	100.0	7.14	74.41	18.45	100.0	5.88	84.31	9.81	100.0	--	100.0	--	100.0	100.0
N value	2	35	5	42	12	125	31	168	6	86	10	102	--	4	--	4	316

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

Table 5.6 : Distribution of Panchayat leaders according to the literacy pattern of the family members (including the Panchayat leaders) :

Level of Panchayat leaders	No. of Panchayat leaders	Total no. of family members	No. of minors in the family	Educational Qualifications of the Adult Family Members					Total no. of literates in the family
				Illiterate	Up to Class-V	Class-VI to Class-X	Matric/HS/Secondary	Graduation and above	
Gram Panchayat	283	1638 (100.00)	257 (15.69)	401 (24.48)	691 (42.18)	132 (8.06)	110 (6.72)	47 (2.87)	980 (59.83)
Panchayat Samity	28	195 (100.00)	49 (25.13)	40 (20.51)	66 (33.85)	18 (9.23)	18 (9.23)	4 (2.05)	106 (54.36)
Zilla Parisad	5	23 (100.00)	7 (30.43)	4 (17.39)	5 (21.74)	1 (4.35)	4 (17.39)	2 (8.7)	12 (52.18)
Total :	316	1856 (100.00)	313 (16.86)	445 (23.98)	762 (41.06)	151 (8.13)	132 (7.11)	53 (2.86)	1098 (59.16)

N. B. : Figures in brackets indicate percentages.

party has given more weightage to seniority and experience while selecting their candidates.

The table 5.5 shows that educational background of the CPI(M) Panchayat functionaries was somewhat better than their counterparts in other parties. Another notable point is that among all party leaders, the higher educational status was discerned in lower age groups. In the discussion of the educational status of the panchayat leaders, the question of the educational background of the family members of the leaders obviously comes forward. To have an idea of the educational level of the leaders families, the table 5.6 is constructed. It shows that 59.16 percent of the family members (including leaders) were literate and most interestingly, the literacy rate was highest for the leaders' families at the Gram Panchayat level. But a relatively higher proportion of educated family members (Matriculation and above) was shown among the families of upper tier of Panchayati Raj leaders as compared to that of Gram Panchayat level. In comparison to 32 per cent of general literacy rate at the district level (as per 1991 Census) one can reasonably conclude that those who were elected in the panchayati system were not only better educated but they also came from an educated family background. There seems to be a positive correlation between educational level and position of the leader in the panchayati system. Higher educated persons found to have occupied the upper tiers of leadership in the panchayati system.

**Table 5.7: Percentage distribution of Panchayat leaders according to occupation and party affiliation.**

**PART-A:**

Occupation- al classes	ALL		PARTIES			COMBINED	Total
	Agril Labour	Unem- ployed	Agricul- ture	Business	Indus -try	Service	
Gram Panchayat	1.06	1.76	70.68	5.3	2.11	19.09	100.0 (89.56)
Pauchayat Samity	--	3.57	60.72	7.14	3.57	25	100.0 (8.86)
Zilla Paridas	--	--	40	--	--	60	100.0 (1.58)
Total (N value)	0.95 (N=3)	1.9 (N=6)	69.31 (N=219)	5.37 (N=17)	2.22 (N=7)	20.25 (N=64)	100.0 (N=316)

**PART-B:**

Occupation -al classes	Agril. Labour	Unem- ployed	Agricul- ture	Business	Indus -try	Service	Total
Congress (I)	--	--	73.01	7.14	2.38	16.67	100.0 (13.29)
CPI (M)	1.78	3.57	65.48	5.36	2.98	20.83	100.0 (53.16)
Forward Bloc	--	--	72.55	4.9	0.98	21.57	100.0 (32.28)
Others	--	--	100	--	--	--	100.0 (1.27)
TOTAL (N value)	0.95 (N=3)	1.9 (N=6)	69.31 (N=219)	5.37 (N=17)	2.22 (N=7)	20.25 (N=64)	100.0 (N=316)

To sum up the above discussion the following points seem to be relevant.

- a) The Scheduled Castes were properly represented in the panchayati system commensurate to their relative strength in the total population of the district.
- b) The leaders in middle age group (30 to 50) were the most dominant age group in Panchayat structure of Cooch Behar and this was true for all political parties.
- c) Older leaders at the lower strata (Gram Panchayat) level were mostly marginally educated and leaders with higher educational background belonged to the younger age groups.
- d) The literacy rate of the Panchayat leaders' families was far better than the general literacy rate of Cooch Behar District.

## **5.2: Socio-economic characteristics of the Panchayat leaders:**

To comprehend the position of the panchayat leaders in the social hierarchy, it is necessary to understand their position in the occupational and landholding structure of the society - which occupational groups the Panchayat leaders mostly belonged to and whether any partywise differentiation existed or not. Their income structure should also be taken into account. Because, there is no denying fact that the income is one of the main determinants of the position of one individual in social hierarchy. To start with, the discussion may be started with the occupational pattern of the panchayat leaders.

### **5.2.1: Occupational pattern:**

The table 5.7 is given here to examine the main occupations vis-a-vis party

affiliation of the leaders. The table 5.7 reveals that 69.31 percent of the panchayat leaders declared 'agriculture' as their main occupation. Next in order of importance came 'service'(20.25%) followed by 'business'(5.39%), 'industry'(2.22%), 'unemployed'(1.9%) and 'agril.Labour'(0.95) respectively. Difference in percentages was discerned between leaders of three panchayat strata. What is more interesting is that 'agriculture' as the principal occupation occupied almost 71 per cent at Gram Panchayat level, but it decreased to 60.72 percent and 40 percent at the Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parisad level respectively. Contrarily, service as an occupation occupied an insignificant place at the Gram Panchayat level. But it gained more prominence while moving to upper stratum of Panchayat. At the Zilla Parisad level, it emerged as most significant. Thus, a contrasting difference concerning occupational structure existed between the leaders of Gram Panchayat and Zilla Parisad; the occupational structure of Panchayat Samity members lied in between. Higher educational background of the upper tier leaders corroborated with the higher proportion of them dependent on service.

A variation in the occupational structure of leaders can also be visualised among the parties in the Part-B of the table. Dependence on agriculture among CPI(M) leaders was noted lower (65.48%) as compared to the leaders of Congress(I) (73.81%) and Forward Bloc (72.55%). Moreover, 1.78 percent and 3.57 percent Panchayat leaders of CPI(M) were Agricultural Labourers and unemployed

**Table 5.8: Percentage distribution of leaders according to occupational status of family**

Pol. Party/ Panch. Strata	Exclusivel Dep. on Agril	Exclusiv- ely Dep. on Business	Exclusivel dep. on Industry	Exclusivel dep. on Service	Dep. on Agril & Business	Dep. on Agril & Industry	Dep. on Agril & Service	Dep. on Indus. & Service	Dep. on Agril Busines & Service	Dep. on Agril. Indus & Business	TOTAL	DEPEND- FAMILIE	ANCE OF ON	LEADER
											Agril	Business	Industry	Service
A:														
Cong (I)	61.9	--	4.76	7.14	9.53	2.38	9.53	--	4.76	--	88.1	14.29	7.14	21.43
CP (M)	56.55 Agl. lab 0.60	1.78	2.98	7.14	7.14	--	19.64	1.2	2.38	0.59	86.9	11.3	4.77	30.36
Forward Bloc	61.75	--	--	3.92	13.72	--	17.65	--	2.94	--	96.08	16.66	--	24.51
Others	100	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	100	--	--	--
Total	59.50 Agl. lab. 0.32	0.95	2.21	6.01	9.5	0.32	17.4	0.63	2.84	0.32	90.2	13.61	3.48	26.88
B:														
Gram Panchayat	60.07 Agl. lab. 0.35	1.06	2.12	5.3	9.2	0.35	17.31	0.71	3.18	0.35	91.41	13.79	3.53	26.5
Panchayat Samity	57.15	--	3.57	7.14	14.28	--	17.86	--	--	--	89.29	14.28	3.57	25
Zilla Parisad	40	--	--	40	--	--	20	--	--	--	60	--	--	60
Total	59.50 Agl. lab. 0.32	0.95	2.21	6.01	9.5	0.32	17.4	0.63	2.84	0.32	90.2	13.61	3.48	26.88
N value	188 Agl. lab 1	3	7	19	30	1	55	2	9	1	285	43	11	85

respectively, and these two categories were found absent in other parties.

The table 5.8 depicts the occupational status of the families of panchayat leaders in detail. It is seen from the above table that around 60 percent of the families (including 0.32 percent agriculture labourers) still depended on agriculture as their main source of sustenance. Occupations like business and industry have little significance when they were counted exclusively. They had some importance when they were considered as subsidiary occupations to agriculture. The table 5.8 has also shown that 'service' as an occupation occupied a place both in exclusive field and in league with agriculture. In totality, 26.88 percent of leaders' families were related with 'service' and 90.20 percent of them were related with agriculture. So, it can be said that the leaders were mostly chosen from the two occupations mainly - agriculture and service. In other words, the persons with occupations of agriculture and service were found to be the main power blocks in the rural Cooch Behar.

The degree of dependence of leaders on occupations like agriculture and service, however, varied with respect to party as shown in table 5.8. Dependence on agriculture was noted relatively less for CPI(M) leaders' families as compared to that of the Congress(I) and Forward Bloc. But on the question of dependence on service, the situation just reversed. So, it can be said that Congress and Forward Bloc leaders' families had more or less similar occupational background in contrast to that of

**Table 5.9: Percentage distribution of leaders according to holding size and party affiliation**

<b>Land Classes</b>	<b>Congress(I)</b>	<b>CPI(M)</b>	<b>Forward Block</b>	<b>Others</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Landless</b>	46.15 (14.29)	46.15 (3.57)	7.7 (0.98)	--	100.0 (4.11)
<b>Upto 1 acre</b>	11.36 (11.91)	63.64 (16.67)	25.0 (10.78)	--	100.0 (13.92)
<b>1 to 3 acre</b>	11.4 (30.95)	53.52 (36.31)	33.33 (37.26)	1.75 (50.00)	100.0 (36.08)
<b>3 to 5 acre</b>	11.27 (19.05)	54.93 (23.21)	30.98 (21.57)	2.82 (50.00)	100.0 (22.47)
<b>5 to 7 acre</b>	7.14 (4.76)	60.72 (10.12)	32.14 (8.82)	--	100.0 (8.86)
<b>7 to 10 acre</b>	15.38 (9.52)	38.47 (5.95)	46.15 (11.77)	--	100.0 (8.23)
<b>More than 10 acre</b>	20.00 (9.52)	35.0 (4.17)	45.0 (8.82)	--	100.0 (6.33)
<b>Total</b>	13.29 (100.0)	53.17 (100.0)	32.28 (100.0)	1.26 (100.0)	100.0 (100.0)
<b>N value</b>	42	168	102	4	316

CPI(M) party leaders. The reason for this was obviously due to the fact that the CPI(M) being the major party in power in the State, its leaders have been successful in cornering higher proportion of Government or semi-Government jobs. On the other hand, greater dependence of Congress(I) and Forward Bloc on agriculture had roots in the pre-merger land tenure system when most of the leaders' families were big land owners. This diagonally opposite relationship between agriculture and service is also visible in Section-B of table 5.8, which shows the dependence on agriculture was very high in case of families of the Gram Panchayat level leaders both in respect of exclusive dependence and total dependence. The degree of dependence of leaders' families on agriculture gradually declined and that on service increases while moving from lower to upper tier of panchayat set-up. So, it may be said very well that the service-holder party cadets / supporters were duly considered at the time of giving nominations to the higher levels of panchayat hierarchy - the Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad.

### **5.2.2: Landholding, income and occupational patterns of the Panchayat leaders:**

The table 5.9 shows the landholding pattern of the rural leaders belonging to different political parties. It appears from the tables that the most of the leaders belonged to the middle size-classes ('1 to 3 acre' and '5 to 7 acre'). About 18 percent of the leaders in general were in the 'Landless' and 'Upto 1 acre' groups, whereas, about 15 percent of the leaders were in '7 to 10 acre' and 'more than 10 acre' groups.

**Table 5.10 : Percentage distribution of leaders according to holding size, income of the family and party affiliation.**

Land classes	Upto Rs.4800/-					Rs.4801/- to Rs.10000/-					Rs.10001/- to Rs.20000/-					Rs.20001/- to Rs.30000/-					More than Rs.30000/-					Grand Total
	cong(I)	CPI (M)	F.B loc	Oth ers	Total	Co ng(I)	CPI (M)	F.B loc	Oth ers	Total	Co ng(I)	CPI (M)	F.B loc	Oth ers	Total	Co ng(I)	CPI (M)	F.B loc	Oth ers	Total	Co ng(I)	CPI (M)	F.B loc	Oth ers	Total	
Land less	7.69	23.08	--	--	30.77	--	--	--	--	--	7.69	--	7.69	--	15.38	23.08	30.77	--	--	53.85	--	--	--	--	--	100.0
Upto 1 acre	9.09	22.73	11.36	--	43.18	--	18.11	2.27	--	20.45	2.27(9)	11.37	--	--	13.67	--	13.64	2.27	--	15.91	--	2.27	4.55	--	6.82	100.0
1 to 3 acre	0.88	5.26	1.75	--	7.89	7.02	24.56	14.91	1.76	48.25	2.63	11.4	8.87	--	22.81	1.75	6.14	5.26	--	13.16	--	5.27	2.63	--	7.9	100.0
3 to 5 acre	--	--	--	--	--	1.41	5.64	1.41	--	8.46	7.04	26.76	19.72	1.41	54.93	--	7.04	8.45	--	15.44	4.23	11.26	5.64	--	21.13	100.0
5 to 7 acre	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	3.57	21.43	32.14	3.57	60.71	3.57	14.29	--	--	17.86	--	21.43	--	--	21.43	100.0
7 to 10 acre	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	11.54	--	11.54	7.69	30.77	26.92	--	65.38	--	19.23	3.85	--	23.08	100.0
Above 10 acre	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	10.0	--	5.00	--	--	15.00	15.00	30.00	40.00	--	85.00	100.0
Total	1.9	6.01	2.22	--	10.13	2.85	12.66	6.01	0.63	22.15	3.48	13.61	11.71	0.63	29.43	3.16	10.76	6.65	--	20.57	1.9	10.12	5.7	--	17.72	100.0
Number	6	19	7	--	32	9	40	19	2	70	11	43	37	2	93	10	34	21	--	65	6	32	18	--	56	316

The table also shows that the percentage of CPI(M) leaders was more concentrated to lower and middle size-classes as compared to their counterparts in Congress(I) and Forward Bloc. The percentage of CPI(M) leaders holding land 5 acres or less was found 76 per cent as against a little less than 70 percent for Forward Bloc and 62 percent for Congress(I). In comparison, the proportion of leaders belonging to highest two classes (7 to 10 acres and above 10 acres) was 20.6 percent for Forward Bloc and 19 percent for Congress(I) while that for CPI(M) was only 10 percent.

Table 5.10 shows the relationship between landholding and family income of the panchayat leaders. A strong correlation between the size of holding and family income has been revealed from the table. Some exceptions were, however, observed. Table 5.10 reveals that the leaders who belonged to the most economically insolvent group were in the size-class of 'Upto 1 acre', 43.18 percent of this landed group belonged to the poor income class of 'Upto Rs.4800/-'. Surprisingly, the leaders who belonged to landless group were thinly represented (30.77%) in the poorest class ('Upto Rs.4800/-'); majority of this group having income more than Rs.10000/-, which may be considered as a fairly good income range. The table 5.10 further demonstrates that though Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders had better landholding pattern in the upper two strata than the CPI(M) leaders, the income structure of the CPI(M) leaders was far better than that of the others. The table 5.8 may be recalled in this context to highlight the fact that as the CPI(M) leaders were

**Table 5.11: Percentage distribution of leaders according to occupational status and income of family.**

Income Classes	Exclusive Dep. on Agril	Exclusively Dep. on Business	Exclusive dep. on Industry	Exclusive dep. on Service	Dep. on Agril & Business	Dep. on Agril & Industry	Dep. on Agril & Service	Dep. on Indus. & Service	Dep. on Agril Business & Service	Dep. on Agril, Indus & Business	TOTAL
Upto Rs.4800/	84.37 (14.36)	3.12 (33.33)	9.38 (47.86)	--	--	--	3.13 (1.8)	--	--	--	100.00 (10.13)
Rs.4800/ to Rs.10000	85.71 (31.91)	1.43 (33.33)	4.28 (42.86)	1.43 (5.26)	2.86 (6.66)	--	2.86 (3.64)	--	1.43 (11.11)	--	100.00 (22.15)
Rs.1000 to Rs.20000	64.52 (31.91)	1.07 (33.34)	1.07 (14.28)	2.15 (10.53)	15.05 (46.67)	1.07 (100.00)	10.75 (18.18)	1.07 (50.0)	2.15 (22.22)	--	100.00 (29.43)
Rs.20001 to Rs.30000	47.7 (16.50)	--	--	20.00 (68.42)	4.62 (10.0)	--	23.07 (27.27)	1.53 (50.0)	3.08 (22.22)	--	100.00 (20.57)
More than Rs.30000	17.86 (5.32)	--	--	5.36 (15.79)	19.64 (36.67)	--	48.21 (49.11)	--	7.14 (44.45)	1.78 (100.0)	100.00 (17.72)
TOTAL	59.82 (100.0)	0.95 (100.0)	2.21 (100.0)	6.01 (100.0)	9.50 (100.0)	0.32 (100.0)	17.4 (100.0)	0.63 (100.0)	2.84 (100.0)	0.32 (100.0)	100.00 (100.0)
N value	189	3	7	19	30	1	55	2	9	1	316

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

Table 5.12: Percentage distribution of leaders by family size and party affiliation

## FAMILY SIZE CLASSES

Party	upto 4 nos	Between 5 to 8 nos.	Between 9 to 12 nos.	13 and above members	Total
Cong (I)	2.53	7.28	2.85	0.63	13.29
CPI (M)	11.39	31.65	7.91	2.22	53.17
Forward Bloc	2.53	22.78	5.38	1.58	32.28
Others	0.63	0.63	-	-	1.26
Total (N value)	13.08 (N=41)	62.34 (N=197)	16.15 (N=51)	4.43 (N=14)	100.00 (N=316)

relatively more related with service, and less dependent on agriculture their major earnings came from non-agricultural sources which ultimately helped them to improve their financial thus differentiating them with other party leaders.

The leaders in the lower income classes were more dependent on one exclusive occupation, especially agriculture, which is evident from table 5.11. About 85 per cent of leaders falling under lower family income group (less than Rs.10,000/-) were found to have their absolute dependence on agriculture as revealed in table 5.11. It is also seen that the dependence on agriculture decreased with the increase in family income. And with the increase in family income dependence on agriculture along with service increased. Thus, though the Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders' families were more dependent on agriculture and have higher landed property (as shown in the table 5.8) than the CPI(M) leaders, they failed to dislodge the dominance of CPI(M) leaders in the higher strata of income classes.

Above comparisons between size of holding and family income and between family income and occupational structure are made keeping aside the size of families. To make the comparison meaningful, the size of leaders' families have been taken into consideration and on that basis the distributional pattern of leaders according to holding size and per capita income has also been examined. The percentage distribution of leaders by family size and party affiliation is presented in table 5.12 and that according to size of holding, per capita income and party affiliation are shown in table 5.13. About 49 per cent of leaders' families belonged to the per capita

**Table 5.13: Percentage distribution of leaders according to holding size, per capita income of their families and party affiliation.**

PER CAPITA INCOME CLASSES

Land Classes	Upto Rs. 1000/-					Rs.1001/- to Rs3000/-					Rs.3001 to Rs.5000/-					Above Rs.5000/-					Gr. Total
	Con (I)	CPI (M)	F. Bloc	Othe-rs	Total	Con (I)	CPI (M)	F. Bloc	Othe-rs	Total	Con (I)	CPI (M)	F. Bloc	Othe-rs	Total	Con (I)	CPI (M)	F. Bloc	Othe-rs	Total	
Land less	7.7	15.38	--	--	23.08	23.06	--	7.7	--	30.76	7.7	15.38	--	--	23.08	7.7	15.30	--	--	23.08	100 (4.11)
Upto 1 acre	9.09	13.64	4.54	--	27.27	2.27	27.27	13.64	--	43.18	--	9.09	4.55	--	13.64	--	13.64	2.27	--	15.91	100 (13.92)
1 to 3 acre	4.38	15.79	7.02	0.88	28.07	6.14	27.19	17.54	0.88	51.75	0.88	7.02	1.02	--	14.92	--	3.51	1.75	--	5.26	100 (36.08)
3 to 5 acre	--	--	--	--	--	9.86	28.17	16.9	2.82	57.75	--	8.45	9.86	--	18.91	1.41	18.31	4.22	--	23.94	100 (22.47)
5 to 7 acre	--	--	--	--	--	3.57	32.14	28.57	--	64.28	3.57	17.86	3.57	--	25.0	--	10.72	--	--	10.72	100 (8.86)
7 to 10 acre	--	--	3.85	--	3.85	3.85	15.38	19.23	--	38.46	7.7	15.38	19.23	--	42.31	3.84	7.7	3.84	--	15.38	100 (8.23)
More than 10 acre	--	--	--	--	--	--	10.0	5.0	--	15.0	10.0	10.0	30.0	--	50.0	10.0	15.0	10.0	--	35.0	100 (6.33)
Total	3.16	8.23	3.48	0.32	15.19	6.33	24.68	16.77	0.95	48.73	2.21	9.81	9.18	--	21.2	1.58	10.45	2.85	--	14.88	100
N values	10	26	11	1	48	20	78	53	3	154	7	31	29	--	67	5	33	9	--	47	316

income group 'Rs.1001/- to Rs.3000/-'. A little over 36 per cent of leaders' families had per capita income of 'Rs.3001/- and above'. And out of the 36 per cent, the CPI(M) leaders accounted for 20.3 per cent. Moreover, out of 14.88 per cent of total leaders' families falling under per capita income group of 'Above Rs.5000/-', the CPI(M) leaders' families alone occupied 10.45 per cent as compared to below 2 per cent for the other two political parties. It is therefore obvious that the CPI(M) leaders' families were somewhat placed to a relatively better economic position, though marginally, in so far as family income is calculated on per capita basis.

The table 5.14 delineates the distributional pattern of leaders of different panchayat strata according to per capita income of their families. It shows that in Gram Panchayat level, as good as 16.95 per cent leaders were in the lowest per capita income group of 'Upto Rs.1000/-'. But this group was absent in the two higher panchayat strata. A significant difference of the distributional pattern in the highest per capita income group (Above Rs.5000/-) was also discernable. Proportion of total leaders falling under highest per capita income group was recorded nearly 15 per cent while that of Zilla Parisad and Panchayat Samity leaders was noticed as high as 40 per cent and 21.43 per cent respectively. So, the findings may lead one to the contention that the per capita income structure of the leaders' families belonging to each higher panchayat stratum was better than that in the immediate lower stratum and vice versa.

**Table 5.14: Percentage distribution of leaders of the three strata according to the per capita income.**

Per Capita Income					
Panchayat Tiers	Upto Rs.1000/-	Rs.1001/- to Rs.3000/-	Rs.3001/- to Rs.5000/-	Above Rs.5000/-	TOTAL
Gram Panchayat	16.95	48.06	21.2	13.79	100.0 N=283
Panchayat Samity	--	57.15	21.42	21.43	100.0 N=28
Zilla Parishad	--	40	20	40	100.0 N=5
<b>TOTAL</b>	15.19	48.74	21.2	14.87	100
<b>N Value</b>	48	154	67	47	316

The foregoing discussion on the landholding and income patterns and the occupational status of the panchayat leaders may be summarised as in the following:

- a) The landholding sizes of the Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders were much better than that of the CPI(M) leaders.
- b) The higher landholding of the Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders did not necessarily generate higher income when compared with the income structure of the CPI(M) leaders. More dependence of Congress(I) and Forward Bloc leaders' families on agriculture was found to be one of the reasons for their relatively low income despite of having bigger landed property.
- c) The CPI(M) leaders had better income position than the other party leaders both in regard to total familial income as well as per capita income, the reason

for which may be ascribed to the fact of their greater dependence on service as an occupation.

- d) The per capita income position of panchayats in each higher stratum was better than the per capita income position of panchayats in the immediate lower stratum. Thus, the income position of panchayat functionaries at Zilla Parisad level was quantitatively better than the panchayat functionaries at the Gram Panchayat level. It corroborates the earlier finding that the higher educational qualification along with better accessibility to service got priority while filing nominations to higher strata of the panchayat set-up. To say in terms of Ross Mallick, "It was this occupational and educational elite which controlled the Panchayat government in these villages".<sup>3</sup>

### **5.3: Panchayat leaders and their material possession:**

So far the emphasis has been on analysing the income and occupational structures of the rural panchayat leaders; their landholding pattern and educational status have also taken into account. All these discussions may justifiably lead one to the conclusion that the panchayat leaders, by and large, constituted a differentiated group of rural people who had a considerably high social and economic position in the society. A discussion on the material possession of the rural leaders appears to have some relevance in this context because if the landholding, income and occupational patterns are considered to be the inputs, the obvious output of the system

is the living conditions expressed through the material possession of movable and immovable properties other than land. The table 5.15 has been constructed to reveal the position of leaders families in this respect.

A suitable starting point in our analysis of material possession of the rural leaders may be the nature of the house in which the leader lived. By analysing the house type of the panchayat leaders, an endeavour was made to understand the life-style of the leaders. To say in terms of Andre Beteille, the distinctive styles of life are manifested through differences in material traits like dress and housing. According to him, in the Indian village, it is usually the landowners who have pacca houses built of bricks and tiles and the bigger zamindars lived in mansions. By contrast, sharecroppers and agricultural labourers almost always live in huts made of mud and thatch.<sup>4</sup>

**Table 5.15: House type pattern of the Panchayat leaders.**

HOUSE TYPE				
Different Strata of Panchayati Raj.	BRICK	MIXED	BAMBOO	TOTAL
Gram Panchayat	10.95 (83.78)	57.24 (90.0)	31.80 (90.56)	100.00 (89.56)
Panchayat Samity	14.28 (10.81)	57.14 (8.88)	28.57 (8.08)	100.00 (8.86)
Zilla Parisad	40.00 (5.40)	40.00 (1.12)	20.00 (1.02)	100.00 (1.58)
<b>TOTAL</b>	11.71 (100.0)	56.98 (100.0)	31.33 (100.0)	100.00 (100.0)

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

Table 5.15 shows that 11.71 per cent and 56.98 per cent of the leaders have been living in the house made of brick and 'mixed' house, respectively. The term 'mixed' here denotes the house consisting of rooms made by both of bricks and bamboo. On the other hand, 31.33 per cent of the leaders have been living in houses made of bamboo. So, it emerges that mixed house has been the predominant pattern of house type among the rural leaders in Cooch Behar. But among the different strata of Panchayati Raj, it is revealed from the table that the percentage of leaders living in brick houses increased with the rise in Panchayat hierarchy, whereas the percentage of leaders living in bamboo houses decreased with the rise in strata. Thus, it may be assumed that the majority of the panchayat leaders were better established materially than an ordinary villager and that the higher level panchayat leaders lived in better houses than the leaders of the immediate lower stratum. The other factors of material possession (excluding agriculture implements) have also been considered with due weightage. The table 5.16 is prepared for this purpose.

It is seen that as good as 16.14, 12.03 and 9.81 per cent of the leaders' households managed to possess electricity, television and motor-cycle/scooter respectively which are considered as a mark of being well-off in the socio-economic milieu of rural Cooch Behar. Quite a high percentage of rural leaders were found to have bi-cycle as this item is very much necessary for rural transportation. But of course a bi-cycle is a common item in many households in rural areas. By the same reasoning it can be contended that 13.29 per cent of leaders families who did not own even a bi-cycle

seems to be financially very weak. This conforms to the findings of table 5.10 wherein 10.13 percent leaders declared their family income around Rs.4800/- per annum. It is also demonstrated in table 5.16 that the proportion of leaders' households possessing each item exalted in each higher panchayat stratum as compared to that of the preceding lower stratum, the difference became more distinguishable in case of goods like T.V. and motor-cycle/ scooter. It establishes the previous finding (Section 5.2.2) that most of the leaders' households starting from the Panchayat Samity level had, on an average, a better financial position to afford such goods as electricity, T.V., scooter, etc than that of the leaders' households in the immediately below stratum.

**Table 5.16: Percentage variation of material possession by the households of Panchayat Leaders.**

Possession of Household Items					
Strata of Panchayati Raj	Electricity	Bi-cycle only	Radio only	Television	Motor Cycle / Scooter
Gram Panchayat	14.49	77.74	56.9	11.66	8.83
Panchayat Samity	28.57	82.14	67.86	10.71	17.86
Zilla Parisad	60	80	80	40	40
<b>TOTAL</b>	16.14	86.71	58.23	12.03	9.81

The socio-economic position of the rural panchayat leaders could have been better comprehended if it is possible to compare our findings with an established socio-economic report on panchayats brought out by the Government. The only available measuring scale is the IRDP<sup>5</sup> survey list which enunciates that seventy five percent of the people in rural areas were living below the poverty line during the study period.<sup>6</sup> So, it may be concluded, from our study that the Panchayat leaders were placed financially much above the general rural people.

#### **5.4: Utilisation of family labour vis-a-vis employing hired agricultural labourers - an alternative approach to determine economic position of panchayat leaders.**

In the discussion following the table 5.8, it was revealed that the agriculture played the key role in the rural power structure in the sense that it formed the main source of sustenance for most of the political leaders. As such, their participation in this activity became almost mandatory. So, to describe the involvement in agricultural activities in more detail, the table 5.17 has been formulated. It may be seen that only 26.98 percent of the leaders' family members (who were related with agriculture) engaged in supervisory activity of agriculture, whereas 25.27 percent were physically engaged in agriculture. On the average, 84.81 percent of the physical work of cultivation was done by the hired agricultural labourers.

**Table 5.17: Percentage utilisation of family labour and hired agricultural labourers in the household of Panchayat leaders.**

Panchayat Strata	Political Party	Total Panchayat Families	Total family members	Families related with agriculture	No. of family members involved	No. of members engaged in supervision	No. of family members engaged in physical labour	Average percent age of work done by agril. labour
	Cong(I)	40	263	36	244	67(27.46)	58(23.77)	71.66
Gram	CPI(M)	148	976	129	872	250(28.67)	249(28.55)	65.73
Panch-ayat	F.Bloc	91	665	89	653	168(25.73)	158(24.02)	72.59
	Others	4	27	4	27	7(25.93)	6(22.22)	69.5
	TOTAL	283	1931	258	1796	492(27.39)	471(26.22)	69.87
	Cong(I)	2	20	1	11	5(45.45)	2(18.18)	86
Panch-ayat	CPI(M)	18	125	16	112	24(21.43)	20(17.86)	85.18
	F.Bloc	8	61	8	61	15(24.60)	10(16.40)	90
Samity	Others	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	TOTAL	28	206	25	184	44(23.91)	32(17.40)	87.06
	Cong(I)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Zilla	CPI(M)	2	10	2	10	2(20.0)	1(10.0)	95
Parisad	F.Bloc	3	13	1	4	--	--	100
	Others	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	Total	5	23	3	14	2(14.28)	1(7.14)	97.5
Grand	Total	316	2160	286	1994	538(26.98)	504(25.27)	84.81

**N.B.:** Figures in brackets indicate percentages of respective total.

The table further shows that the proportion of family members engaged physically in agricultural activity was higher among the families in the lower tier of

panchayat set-up and this proportion gradually decreased as one moves up in the panchayat hierarchy until it became almost negligible at the Zilla Parishad level where the agricultural work was almost entirely done by hired labourer.

A sizeable part of this chapter has been devoted to the discussion of land holding pattern of the leaders which to some extent reflected the economic position of the panchayat leaders. S.K.Pal,<sup>7</sup> in his study of a village in Cooch Behar, classified the rural society in six agricultural classes, namely, the non-cultivating owner, cultivating owner-Supervisor, owner-cultivator, sharecropper, agricultural labourer -cum- sharecroppers, and agricultural labourers. The non-cultivating owners were found engaged in occupations like teaching, government services, business, etc. But it is well known that in villages well-off persons hardly disclose their actual amount of land held by them. Usually a much reduced account is furnished. This makes the work of determining their actual economic position considerably difficult.

An alternative method can be developed from a document of 1948 by Yen Pi-shi, the then Central Committee Member, Chinese Communist Party.<sup>8</sup> The basis of his theory lies in taking the possession of means of production by the family and utilising it in actuality. The means of production, according to him, includes land and bullocks, agricultural implements and other means of production like family labour. With the help of these factors, he classified five classes like landlord, rich peasant,

middle peasant, poor peasant and agricultural labourer on the basis of the degree of utilisation of family property including family labour.

While summing up the classification theories of Lenin, Mao- Tse-Tung and their followers, A. Rudra <sup>9</sup>has also enunciated five classes: 1) Landlords, 2) Rich Peasants, 3) Middle Peasants, 4) Poor Peasants and 5) Agricultural Labourers. Landlords are, according to Rudra, defined as those who do not at all participate in manual labour in any production process in agriculture. They get their land cultivated by labourers or tenants whom they may supervise themselves or with the help of agents. They also produce largely for the market and only to a small extent for their family consumption. Rich peasants are very much alike to landlords except that they participate to some limited extent in the manual labour of cultivation while mostly depending on the wage labourers and tenants for their production; they are also significant suppliers of products to the market. Middle peasants are those who cultivate their land themselves, who do not work for others for wages, and who employ hired laborers on their own farms only marginally. Poor peasants are those whose main source of income is cultivation of land possessed by them but who earn a substantial amount of subsidiary income by working as wage laborers. Finally, agricultural laborers are those whose primary source of income is wage labour; some of them might be owners or possessors of small bits of land that they use for family cultivation". But in further discussion, he refutes the class distinction between the

landlords and rich peasants on the one hand and the poor peasants and the agricultural labourers as untenable in Indian condition. He further refutes the idea of middle peasants as non-existent and forwarded his two class theory, one is big landowners and the other is agricultural workers.<sup>10</sup>

For the present study, the utilisation of family labour and that of hired agricultural labour (which is in fact the counterpart of family labour) are taken as the focal point of discussion and based on these twin factor following postulations are made:

- a) The agricultural pattern prevalent in Cooch Behar District is most labour-intensive and physically arduous type. It is typically traditional and mechanisation has not been initiated so far as pointed out by Beteille.<sup>11</sup>
- b) Moreover, one who works physically in the field are often placed in the lower strata of stratification on social prestige.
- c) Those who have the capability to purchase hired labour, do not utilise the family labour in any way. If one is not capable to purchase full labour, he obviously tries to save as much family labour as he is capable.
- d) Thus the twin factor of family labour and hired labour may justifiably be taken as the measuring rod for determining ones economic position in the society, if not the class position.

Thus, closely following Yan-Pi-Shi and keeping in mind the classification of

Rudra, an effort has been made to present a classification on the basis of the criterion of hiring of labour, which is the main point of attention in this model for classifying the leaders' families into the following five classes. But the families which were not related with agriculture in any way, are kept outside the purview of this classification.

The details of the classification are given below:

- 1) Landlords: The leaders' families who possessed land and employed cent per cent hired agricultural labourer to perform the agricultural work and they did not utilise family labour for this purpose.
- 2) Rich Peasants: The leaders' families who possessed land and mostly employed hired agricultural labourers and simultaneously utilised family labour to a very negligible extent ( say upto 80 Percent of agricultural work was done by hired labourers).
- 3) Middle peasants: The leaders' families who possessed land and employed hired agricultural labourers for doing less than 80 percent and more than 20 percent of their agricultural work. The rest workload was performed by the family labour.
- 4) Poor peasants: In this group, belong the leaders families who mostly arranged their own agricultural work by themselves. Occasionally, they employed a very negligible percentage of hired labourers (say less than 20 percent) for some labour intensive work. Mostly, they possessed a very negligible quantum of land.

Table 5.18: Percentage engagement of agricultural labourers in leaders' families

Percentage engagement of hired agricultural labourer in leaders' families							
Family Type	100%	>=80% to <100%	>=60% to <80%	>=40% to <60%	>=20% to <40%	Less than 20%	No utilis- -ation of hired lab.
Panch. Strata	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Gram Panchayat	72 (27.91)	10 (3.86)	36 (13.95)	60 (23.26)	57 (22.10)	17 (6.59)	6 (2.33)
Panchayat Samity	9 (36.0)	4 (16.0)	6 (24.0)	3 (12.0)	2 (8.0)	1 (4.0)	--
Zilla Parisad	2 (66.67)	1 (33.33)	--	--	--	--	--
<b>TOTAL</b>	83 (29.02)	15 (5.24)	42 (14.68)	63 (22.03)	59 (20.63)	18 (6.30)	6 (2.10)

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

**Table 5.19: Percentage engagement of agricultural labourers vis-a-vis landholding pattern of the leaders' families related with agriculture.**

Percentage engagement of hired agricultural labour in leaders' families									
Family Type	100%	>=80% to <100%	>=60% to <80%	>=40% to <60%	>=20% to <40%	Less than 20%	No use of hired lab. (i.e., 100% family lab.)	Total leaders' families related with agriculture	Total leaders' families not related with agriculture
----- Land classes	A	B	C	D	E	F	G		
Landless	--	--	--	--	--	--	3 (100.0)	3 (100.0)	10
Upto 1 acre	11 (42.31)	--	2 (7.7)	2 (7.69)	5 (19.23)	4 (15.38)	2 (7.69)	26 (100.0)	18
1 to 3 acre	30 (26.78)	5 (4.46)	12 (10.71)	20 (17.86)	35 (31.25)	9 (8.04)	1 (0.9)	112 (100.0)	2
3 to 5 acre	23 (32.4)	2 (2.82)	10 (14.08)	20 (28.17)	14 (19.71)	2 (2.82)	--	71 (100.0)	--
5 to 7 acre	6 (21.43)	3 (10.71)	5 (17.86)	11 (39.29)	1 (3.57)	2 (7.14)	--	28 (100.0)	--
7 to 10 acre	6 (23.08)	1 (3.85)	5 (19.23)	9 (34.61)	4 (15.38)	1 (3.85)	--	26 (100.0)	--
More than 10 acre	7 (35.0)	4 (20.0)	8 (40.0)	1 (5.0)	--	--	--	20 (100.0)	--
<b>TOTAL</b>	83 (29.02)	15 (5.24)	42 (14.68)	63 (22.03)	59 (20.63)	18 (6.30)	6 (2.1)	286 (100.0)	30

**N.B.:** Figures in brackets indicate percentages of respective total.

- 5) Agricultural labourers: The leaders' families who did not possess any land but they utilised their family labour in others land to earn livelihood.

This classification has one major difference with the Chinese model. According to Mao and his followers, the middle peasants neither hire labour nor they work for others. But in Indian climate and crop system (especially in Cooch Behar) each and every peasant is required to hire labour because of seasonal nature of crops particularly in paddy cultivation which is very arduous work and requires considerable labour at the time of ploughing, reaping and harvesting.

For explaining this theoretical classification as it existed in our area of study, tables 5.18 and 5.19 have been prepared. In table 5.18, the leaders' families have been analysed with reference to each strata of Panchayati Raj. It is seen that the leaders' families, who were landlords, form a single numerically dominant group in each level of panchayat hierarchy (Group-A). The percentage of dominance increased while moving from lower to higher stratum of Panchayat hierarchy until it became highest (66.67 percent) in the families of Zilla Parishad leaders. It implies that the Zilla Parishad members had comparatively better economic position than the other two types of members. The rich peasants (Group-B) did not form a significant group. The middle peasants consisting of the Group C, D, E were the most significant group according to the table 5.18. The poor peasants, belong to F and G Group (excluding landless in 'G' Group) which was also not a very important group. Moreover, the agricultural labourer group was included in Group-G (the landless category in

G-Group) which is shown in the table 5.19. Higher the stratum of a panchayat leader better was the economic position of his family (table 5.18).

From table 5.19, it is evident that the three leaders' families which belonged to landless group and at the same time related with agriculture utilise their family labour to earn their livelihood. So, this was the tiny agricultural labourer group ( 1.05 percent of the total families related with agriculture ) available in the study universe. Another notable point that has emerged from the table 5.19 is that among the landlords (Group-A), a sizeable proportion of families was found to have less landed property, about 50 per cent of them belong to the less than 3 acre group. A careful examination of the filled-in questionnaire of the these less landed landlords' families revealed that they had sufficient income from non-agricultural sources particularly from service. And a part thereof was spent on agriculture on commercial basis. Thus, holding of sufficient quantum of land as necessary parameter to be known as a rich landlord (as defined for the present study) was not a sufficient condition. So, before concluding the analysis, a line of continuum may be drawn to express the classification graphically. The continuum is as follows:

Table 5.20: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF LEADERS' FAMILIES ACCORDING TO PATTERNS OF USING HIRED LABOUR VIS-A-VIS FAMILY LABOUR.

1	2	3	4	5
(Landlord)	(Rich Peasant)	(Middle Peasant)	(Poor Peasants)	(Agl.Lab)
29.02%	5.24%	57.34%	7.35%	1.05%

The continuum as shown in table 5.20 is drawn on the criterion of employing hired agricultural labourers vis-a-vis utilising family labour. The two ends of the continuum is occupied by landlords and agricultural labourers respectively. It may be conceived from continuum that the two groups mainly dominant in the study were the landlords and middle Peasants. The other three groups were not so numerically significant among the panchayat leaders.

In view of above findings, Rudra's rich peasant class in his two-class stratification of Indian agriculture based on labour hiring criterion, as explained earlier, appears to be unfounded for the families of rural leaders in an agriculturally less developed areas like CoochBehar district of West Bengal. Instead of rich peasant singly, both landlord and middle peasants were found to be predominant. Thus the rural leaders may be classified in three groups- the rich peasants, middle peasants and the agricultural labourers. The continuum shows that the former two groups were the most dominant among the leaders and that the representation from the lower classes was very low as conceived by the proportional representation of agricultural labourers. This further confirms the contention of Ross Mallick that, "... in the political sphere power has shifted from the traditional Pro-Congress elite to a new middle landed class. This class, while lacking the wealth of the traditional elite, is more numerous, and now with state patronage more powerful.."<sup>12</sup> A. Beteille also in the same tune said, "power has very rarely gone to the landless, however large their number....."<sup>13</sup>

From the foregoing discussion, the following points may be noted to summarise the total discussion.

- a) That the base of rural power and authority was not land alone, occupation and income obviously played a positive role in it.
- b) That the main powerholders in rural areas were the people who belonged to service sector combined with agriculture.
- c) That the middle peasants were the most numerically dominant group in the power structure of rural Cooch Behar.

### **5.5: Conclusion:**

The discussions in this chapter reveal clearly that the rural power in Cooch Behar has been vested with middle and higher-strata groups of people in the socio-economic hierarchy. The power is yet to trickle down to the lowest ladder. The people in the power structure are placed in high-middle and middle category with all attributes like education, landholding, income, occupation, etc. Possibly this category of people are the remnants of old landed gentry who during the last two decades, had to give up their additional land and were forced to change their mainstay of income from agriculture to non-agricultural. They were also successful in occupying all the Government and semi-Government services available in the fringe area (especially teacher of primary school) by dint of their added advantage in education than that of

the general people. To speak in terms of Bandyopadhyay and Mukherji, "The newcomers who displaced the traditionally dominant landowners belonged to middle category of society. It was they who, therefore, came into Panchayats and went on to occupy the key positions of heads of the GPs, PSs and ZPs as well as heads of the standing committees in PS and ZPs many of these were school teachers. .... It seems, however, that the downward movement of power that these events represent has arrested. Power has yet to travel down to lower levels....The middle category, it looks, remains in firm control of the Panchayats".<sup>14</sup> In the next Chapter, when the rural leaders will be analysed more closely, more details may well be highlighted in this respect.

Before closing, one point need to be stressed that the Scheduled Castes have gained their due share in the power structure (table 5.2). But it may be kept in mind that this is quite natural in the sense that Cooch Behar is numerically dominated by the Scheduled Castes and the recent Panchayati Raj legislations with proportional representation of Scheduled Castes/ Tribes have nothing to do in Cooch Behar, since Scheduled Castes/Tribes are numerically dominant in all Panchayat Strata. This feature of demographic situation in Cooch Behar may not be repeated in other districts ( specially in South Bengal districts) as revealed in the study of Swapan Kr.Pramanik and Prabhat Dutta.<sup>15</sup>

The position of the leaders in the educational, economic and other social ladders may be comprehended better if a comparison can be drawn between the leaders and the general people. In the next Chapter, when the rural set-up will be reviewed more closely, the necessary comparison will be drawn to show the position of the leaders vis-a-vis general people in the social ladder.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES:

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3. Ross Mallick, Development Policy of a Communist Government: West Bengal Since 1971; Cambridge, 1993;P-137.
4. A.Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure; Oxford; 1974, P.2
5. IRDP is the abbreviation of Integrated Rural Development Programme. This is a Govt. Of India Programme for the upliftment of the families living below poverty line. At the district level, the District Rural Development Agency with the Sabhadhipati and District Magistrate at its apex looks after the implementation of the programme.
6. Source: District Rural Development Agency, Cooch Behar.
7. S.K. Pal, Agrarian Relations in a village in CoochBehar District, West Bengal in Agrarian Situation in India(vol-II) ed.by Chakraborty, Ghosh and Danda, Calcutta, 1985, P.92.
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9. A.Rudra, Emerging Class Structure in Indian Agriculture; Rural Poverty in South Asia, ed. by T.N.Srinivasan, P.K.Bardhan; Oxford, 1988; PP.487,488.
10. Ibid. PP. 491, 492.

11. A.Beteille, Studies in Agrarian Social Structure; Oxford; 1974; P.29.
12. Ross Mallick, Development Policy Of A Communist Government: West Bengal since 1977; Cambridge; 1993; P.29.
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14. Nirmal Mukharji and D. Bandyopadhyay, New Horizons For West Bengal Panchayats; Government of West Bengal, Deptt.of Panchayats;1994; P.15.
15. Swapan Kr. Pramanik and Prabhat Dutta, Panchayats And People; the West Bengal Experiance; Sarat Book House, Calcutta; 1994; P.106 (Table-5.6).