

Chapter-3

Summary

In chapter I, the history, background and development of the panchayati raj in India in general and in West Bengal in particular have been discussed.

The 2nd chapter deals with the research methodology of the present-study where the objective, hypothesis and approach to the problem.

The 3rd Chapter, the socio-economic background of the district and the region has been discussed.

In the next chapter, the caste/communities of the region, pattern of social hierarchy, agrarian class structure of the area, nature of land-use, methods of cultivation, nature of socio-political movements in the area have been discussed.

In the 5th chapter, the background of the traditional leaders and candidates of the panchayat election, their caste/community and class background have been discussed.

In the 6th chapter, election of members-mauza-wide and with reference to Caste/community and class background have been discussed.

In the next chapter, the activities of the panchayat, the role of members in development process and such other factors have been discussed with reference to the various rural development programmes. The problems have also been identified.

The last chapter deals with the summary and conclusion of the present study.

The Major findings are as follows :

1. Panchayat institution is dominated by male members belonging to younger and middle age groups.
2. They mainly belong to clean castes or dominant groups of the villages.
3. Past association with village development activities is the major reason for involvement in panchayat activities.
4. Work performance of panchayat functionaries is dependent on social participation, linkage with development agencies etc.
5. Leadership behaviour is dependent on socio-economic status.
6. There is scope to improve upon the self-involvement of panchayat members in rural development programmes.

Conclusion

The Panchayati Raj came into existence with a view to decentralizing power and to involve the rural people in the development processes. Political development and democratic

growth largely depend on this local leadership and its functioning in the Panchayati Raj institutions. A study on the emerging leadership pattern in the perspective of Panchayati Raj is all the more important in West Bengal due to diametrically opposite views about its relative with political parties. Some parties are of the opinion that it should be above politics while some strongly feel that without ideological commitment, there cannot be any real success in the development works especially when it is connected with the poorer sections of the Society. It is pertinent, to inquire whether the political commitment and ideologies have, in any way, influenced the formulation of the various development programmes and their implementation.

The main objectives of this study were twofold:

1. To examine, if there is any relationships between socio-economic status and leadership and to find out, whether panchayati raj which was advocated to encourage new talents has been successful in the recruitment of new leaders.
2. To critically examine if the programmes and activities of panchayati raj which were introduced to accelerate decentralization, self-sufficiency, and reorganization of rural society have been successful.

The studied region is a predominantly rural area where villagers mostly depend on cultivation. As such, land plays a crucial role in the local economy and the landless people depend on the landowners for mere subsistence as only a few other alternative occupations are available. Among the communities that live in this region, the Hindus, with a number of castes, form the majority. The Muslims also live in a number of villages. Besides these two religious groups, a number of tribal communities also live here. At the interactional level, the different castes operate under certain constraints and reflect a ~~strict~~ hierarchy symbolically represented by different factors like inter-dining, acceptance of food and water, seating arrangements, marriage rules, etc. As the traditional norms are appreciably maintained, certain castes come closer and some live apart at least in some situations. Class is another factor which is to be considered and ownership and non-ownership of land forms the basic differences in this predominantly agrarian society. Again it has been noted that some castes and communities, which form a sizeable proportion of the local population own very small amount of land, while some castes own the major amount of land and constitute the bulk of the big farmers of this locality. As caste-hierarchy and landownership go together to an appreciable extent, those who are socially low are also economically poor and who are well-to-do also enjoy a high social status.

In the studied area, the Kargari Anchal, there are as many as 35 mauzas including some uninhabited ones. At present there are 11 members in the gram panchayat,

2 members in the panchayat samiti and one member in the zilla parishad. Though at present we have a different structure of the panchayat, still it can be compared with the earlier phase. It can be compared whether they are definitely different, especially in the context of caste-class background. A study of the old panchayat members of this area indicates that most of them were aged and belonged to the high clean castes, santals, and the Muslims. If the class background is considered, the members who belonging to the small or big farmer category had better access to institutional facilities. All of them have had some formal education and considering the backwardness of the area, their family members had good educational background. This clearly indicates the relatively high socio-economic status of the ex-panchayat members.

In the basically agricultural region, land plays a crucial role in economy and landowners, specially the big farmers have more power and control. Again since caste rigidity is also maintained, the higher castes have obviously more advantages. Naturally, the higher castes and big farmers enjoy better socio-economic status and have more control and influence in this region. This happens to be the traditional congress base and Congress (i) depended more on them. But as Congress was not in power at the time of elections, either in the state or in the centre, many of these so-called supporters decided to withdraw themselves or tried to align with any of the ruling parties or contested as independents. The CPI and RSP the two partners of the ruling Left Front Government of the state, on the other hand, are ideologically more committed to the poor. However, they made some changes and adjustments in their strategy and give nominations even to small/big farmers. Thus at the class level, Congress (I) depended on its traditional base while the leftists, besides depending on their traditional strong base among the village poor, were interested in the support of other classes particularly the small farmers. The caste background of the candidates in the region gives more insight the selection of candidates by the different parties. Candidates were mostly selected from the major castes/communities living in the area. Some of the present candidates were also members in the earlier panchayat and a number of present candidates were relatives of earlier members, often a congress supporter. In the case of the Left parties, the candidates selected for higher bodies were associated with the party activities for a long time, but most of the candidates at the gram panchayat level had little political background and participation.

The socio-economic background of the elected leaders indicate that most of them belong to below 30 years of age, have good educational background considering the backwardness of the area and follow a number of occupations. Most of them have access to institutional finance. Majority of the candidates elected belonged to the castes/communities numerically dominant in the region. The class category of the elected members indicate that the big farmers were not always elected. In fact, if the number of candidates and elected candidates is considered class-wise, the performance of the small-marginal farmers is better. This may be ascribed due to the support of the ruling left parties to these classes. However, this does not necessarily indicate that there was less number of members from the big farmers. The win of the Left parties indicate how state politics articulate even with the village politics. All the Congress(I) candidates were landowners, but many of them did not receive support from the landowning class. But the Left parties received more support from all classes. Many of the elected leader were also socially related to the earlier panchayat members. It implies that though new leaders have emerged, it is often confined to certain families and in such situations, is quite likely that the leadership pattern has not changed significantly so far as caste-class background is concerned. That is, so far as democratic decentralization and nature of emerging leadership pattern is concerned.

A number of programmes were initiated by the panchayat. These programmes can be classified under two categories, one those programmes which are planned and initiated by the panchayat or in other words, the panchayat's own programmes, and second the programmes implemented by the panchayat and initiated by the Government and other agencies or the assigned programmes. These programmes can be again, development type, welfare type or both. Since the majority of the panchayat at all the three levels were controlled by the Leftist parties, which are ideologically more committed to the poor, it is pertinent to examine the beneficiaries of these various programmes and the attitude of the different classes towards the activities of the panchayats.

The study indicates that the poorer sections in the village society particularly the agricultural labourers, marginal farmers, and small shop owners are more aware of the different development activities. It obviously indicates that the different development programmes executed by the panchayats have benefited these categories of villagers. The different categories have noted differences in the present and the past panchayat which also speaks positively of activities of the present panchayat.

The activities of the panchayats are expected to help in the preservation and development of local resources and initiate plans for proper utilization of local resources for the betterment of the local population. Panchayat supposed to initiate

local level development plans with the help of outside experts. Thus plans and programmes which were so long made at the top and later on implemented often without getting the real or optimum benefit for not considering the local needs and resources, would be changed as they will be initiated from below at the local level by the village panchayats. But the different activities done by the studies on Panchayat reveal a somewhat different aspect. Though most of the programme initiated or implemented by the studied gram panchayat were very important, they reveal a little sign of local level development planning. The programme for improvement or proper utilization of local resources for development of local economy undoubtedly received less importance. Thus many of these programmes are not economic programmes which in future, can stabilise or improve the local economy. It is true that the panchayats have tremendous potentialities for local or regional development but the planning should be made accordingly and panchayats should not be considered as another governmental agency to implement the different government programmes. Quite often the panchayat leaders are so busy to implement the assigned duties that they find almost no time to plan or implement their own programmes. This unfortunately is curbing the real strength or potentiality of the panchayats. In spite of all this limitation, there is no doubt that the panchayats have initiated a number of development programmes in the villages of West Bengal.

All these above mentioned activities have had an impact on the process of diversification of rural economy to enable benefits to accrue to the rural underprivileged. Panchayats are still in the formative stage but there are unmistakable signs of the capability of the new panchayats to manage and guide the change in the desired direction.