

Chapter-II

Research Methodology

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 the 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 relation 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 as follows :

1. To examine, if there is any relationship between socio-economic status and relationship and to find out, whether panchayati raj which was advocated to encourage new talents has been successful on 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.
3. To determine the nature and extent of self-involvement and leadership behaviour of panchayat leaders.
4. To explore the problems of effective panchayat functioning for rural development and the suggestions for improvement of such functioning.

A number of hypotheses were put forward on the basis of these objectives :

1. Panchayat is governed by members having large-size holding, higher income, considerable education and belonging to high socio-economic status.
2. The panchayat institution is dominated by aged members, male, belonging to dominant caste and community.
3. Past association with village development activities is the main reason for which people come forward to panchayat members.
4. Involvement of panchayat members in rural development is commendable.

The data were collected with the help of an interview schedule. The schedule was divided into three parts. In the first part, data on different household of the village with reference to sex-wise population, caste/community background and class structure were collected. The second part was intended to have data about socio-economic background of panchayat members with reference to age, sex caste, occupation, land holding, education, social participation and interaction. The 3rd part dealt with work performance, duration of membership, involvement in panchayat, political affiliation etc. and also about the problems of panchayat functioning.

Classification of data was made on the basis of following factors.

1. Age -
2. Sex - male/female
3. Occupation - cultivation, business, day labour, service, others
4. Landholding - landless, marginal, small, large, very large.
5. Income - upto 300/-, 501-1000/-, 1001-1500/-, 1500+
6. Education - Illiterate, primary, secondary, graduate, hi

The present study on panchayati raj and rural development was conducted in one of the backyard regions of West Bengal. It was conducted in the Kargari anchal of Jhargram sub-division, Midnapur District, West Bengal. The Kargari gram panchayat, covering all the 29 inhabited mauzas and the different elected members for the gram panchayat and some members of the higher bodies were studied.

Besides, considering the general ethnic composition of the villagers covered in this gram panchayat, the socio-economic status of the different groups was also ascertained to locate if there was any relation between socio-economic status and leadership. It may indicate whether these institutions run along the existing social system and social inequalities or help to minimize the socio-economic inequalities, and differences. Besides focusing attention on social determinants of leadership like caste, class, kinship, and the nature of political support, it has also been tried to find out, how far the panchayati raj which was advocated to encourage new talents, has been successful in the recruitment of new leaders.

Besides making a detailed study on the leadership pattern, their socio-economic background, attitude of villagers towards panchayat with reference to a specific gram panchayat Kargari in Midnapur District, a comparative study has also been made on data available for 100 gram panchayats selected at random from 3,242 gram panchayat of West Bengal. The back-

ground of the leaders, the attitude of randomly selected villagers representing the different class categories from the above mentioned 100 gram panchayats towards the panchayats, and the different activities of these gram panchayats have been critically analysed. Besides these, an over all study on the allotment of the funds by the various Government departments and other agencies to the various levels of the panchayat through out West Bengal has been made in order to understand the nature of flow of resources in the villages from different sources and the different programmes for which these funds are made available.

In the context of Kaggari panchayat which has been studied in details, the traditional, informal, self-appointed leadership pattern has been studied and compared with the formal, elected type and the political socialisation and recruitment of the panchayat leaders and their connection with local, regional, and national level leadership have also been ascertained. The study would also indicate, how far the local political system is originally related to the state and federal political system. There seems to be a close relationship between the local power structure and the power structure at the state level since (1) in a modern society, the local community is basically non-autonomous system and it is economically, socially, and politically interwoven into the more complex setting of the broader system and (2) the local political system constitutes one of the levels of the political organization of the state and as such, it comprises several elements common to all levels of political organization and is typical of the functioning of the national political system as a whole. Besides studying the background of the emerging panchayat leaders in the context of the caste and communities, pattern of social hierarchy and class group of each mauza, the ideas and aspirations of these leaders have been studied; some of the development programmes have been analysed; and the ideas and expectations of the local population covering different castes and communities and class categories have been studied. So in addition to making a number of case studies on panchayat leaders and local villagers, considerable ethnographic data were also collected.

Presentation of data

Analysis and results of the study are presented in eight chapters. The study starts with the Introduction chapter where the history and background of panchayat have been discussed. The second chapter describes the research methodology. The 3rd chapter gives a general picture about the Midnapur District of W.B. and the Jhangram sub-division. The 4th chapter covers the caste/community, agrarian structure and socio-political movements

of the studied area have been discussed. In the 5th chapter, the socio-economic background of traditional leaders and candidates of panchayat has been discussed. In the 6th chapter, the election of members with reference to the caste-community and class categories of the studied villages have been discussed. In the 7th chapter, the functioning of panchayats has been discussed. The last chapter gives the summary and conclusion of the present study.