

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this Chapter, details of Methodology such as selection of sample, field techniques and tools are discussed in Section 1 and certain limitations of this study are provided in Section 2.

1. SAMPLE

1.1 Universe. For the purpose of the study only those women panchayats elected in 1993 PR election in Cooch Behar district of West Bengal are to comprise our universe. The selection of this universe is based on following considerations. Being resident of the district we have some networks and knowledge about its local languages (Bengali and Rajbansi, the local dialect) and social milieu.

Residential advantages have later on proved crucial factor in convincing respondents, particularly of GP, about the intention of the investigator. In many instances we have to assure that we are working and residing here and in case of misuse or disclosure of names/information etc. they may locate and hold the investigator responsible for the breach of secrecy.

From women standpoint they have had very dismal representation in PR with below 10% in GP and PS before 1993 election (Table 4:1). But now they hold 35% and 34% of total seats in GP and PS and 34.9% of total seats in West Bengal (Table 4:2). Similarly, in the district Cooch Behar only 11 women could be found¹ after 1988 PR election but now their total strength is 35% (989 out of 2817 seats) (Table 4:3). Accordingly from the position of clear debasement women have now received elevation both in West Bengal and Cooch Behar. Absorbing magnitude may thus be imminent for integration of so large number of women members. Unfortunately no study (except a brief study by Banerjee; 1995, in ISST) has so far been undertaken as to women's participation in West Bengal even after 1/3 statutory reservation. Thus it is felt extremely desirable to examine the nature of panchayat women's participation in this district.

1. No Sex based information is available and only by examining nature of names from Gazette Extraordinary, 20 th May 1988, Government of West Bengal this information is deduced and it is very tentative indeed .

Table No 4.1
Women in Panchayats after 1988 election in West Bengal²

Tier/ Total Seats	Nominated	Elected	Total Number
GP /49828	4588 (9%)	223 (0.4%)	4811 (9.6%)
PS / 8621	386 (4%)	61 (0.7%)	447 (5.1%)
ZP / 637	107 (16%)	26 (4%)	133 (20.8%)

Source; PR – A Status Report. ISS. New Delhi. 1997.p.26

Table No 4 :2
Women in Panchayats in West Bengal as on April 1996

Tier/Total Seats /Total Number of Institutions	Total Women Elected	Total Women Chairperson	Total Women Vice Chairperson
GP* / 61785 /3301	21701 (35.1%)	212	601
PS / 9516 / 328	3202 (33.64%)	08	84
ZP** / 658 / 16	219 (33.3%)	--	02
Total	25112 (34.9%)	220	687

Source; Compiled from various issues of *Panchayati Raj*, SIP. Govt. of West Bengal. Kalyani.

* Excluding 3 GP of Darjeeling where no election was held as on December 1995.

** Excluding Darjeeling where there is Hill Council.

Table No 4:3
Total Seat Held by Women in Cooch Behar in 1997 by Sex and Community.

Tier	Total Seats	Total Women	Total SC Women	Total ST Women	Total Reserved Seats SC/ST/Women
GP	2418	853 (35.27%)	490 (20.26%)	4	1358 (56.16%)
PS	375	128 (34.13%)	73 (19.45%)	1	212 (56.53%)
ZP	24	8 (33.3%)	7 (29.1%)	--	18 (75%)
Total	2817	989 (35.1%)	570 (20.2%)	5	1588 (56.4%)

Source; District Panchayat Office . Cooch Behar.

1.2 Selection of Sample. The district has 128 GP and 12 PS. The area of each GP is several square K.M. and very often inaccessible in terms of transportation. Each GP has roughly 20 members, each representing about 500 electorate. Each PS has approximately 34-40 members in total and each representing about 3000 electorate. Thus to locate respective PR members one has to come across wide geographical areas and to face hazards like inaccessibility and rigorous strains. Conveniently thus, only a representative portion is selected for the study from which to draw conclusion.

2. No unanimity as to the exact figure. See Bera Chhaya (1991; 5). *Women and left Front Government*. National Book. Calcutta.. Dutta Prabhat (no Date; 16). *Revitalisation of Panchayats- the West Bengal Experiment*. SIP Kalyani.. Bondopadhyaya(1994; 15). Fourth General Election of Panchayats. *Mainstream*, 26th June. Gosh (1995; 358). Women Panchayat Members as Heads of Office. *Journal of Rural Development*. Vol.14(4)

We propose to select as sample all elected women panchayat members of one GP and PS each of the five Subdivision of the district to make it as broad based and representative as possible.

When Subdivision has more than one PS we opt for PS no.1. But for Cooch Behar Subdivision we could not adhere to this uniform pattern mainly for geographical inaccessibility. And we select Cooch Behar PS no.2. Another deflection is purposively contemplated for Mekliganj Subdivision for its exclusivity. Situated in western extremity, its remoteness from the district headquarter with hazardous communication, vast troublesome international border and its proximity to Jalpaiguri and Town (particularly Haldibari PS which is just 16 K.M. from Jalpaiguri while 160 K.M. from CoochBehar Town), all make it exclusive both in term of geography and culture. To give it sufficient representation, both PSs of Mekliganj are included in the sample. Thus total number of PS is six instead of five .

To examine variation, if any, in terms of political parties, nature of socio - economic conditions and rural urban differences, selection of GP was scrupulously done. We take two GP each of CPM and Congress and one lead by Coalition. Also we select two GP which may loosely be termed as urban fringe; one is Guriahati which was regarded as urban agglomeration by 1971 Census and other is Andaran Fulbari which is contiguous to Tufanganj Sub-divisional Town. These two GPs have total 17 members. Thus one half of total GP respondents may be regarded as of forward GP's and other half of comparatively backward GP's. Moreover, for PS we have included the lone PS controlled by Congress Party, two led by Coalition and remaining three manned by CPM or Left Front.

PR election 1993 was held by the West Bengal Panchayat Act as amended up to September 1992 where only seats, not posts, were reserved for women. Still then the district has 2 women GP Chairperson, 19 GP Vice Chairpersons, 2 women Vice Chairperson for PS, 23 Karmadhyakhas for PS and 5 Karmadhyakha for ZP (total 51 executive posts are held by women).

Significantly women Chairpersons (CP hereafter) have not only been entrusted but also have in depth understanding of the intricacies of panchayat process. In the selected sample we have already found 9 such CP members. It was thought desirable to incorporate CPs in addition to sample whenever possible with least efforts – that is nearer to residence of sampled respondents.

Altogether 10 such additional respondents are included – one from GP, five from PS and four from ZP. Thus adding these 10 to already 9, total number of Chairpersons become 19. And we intend to analyse their response in a separate category as Chairpersons (CP) and include them as a separate Tier in Tables 4.4. In this way we cover all women GP Chairpersons, 12 out of total 23 PS women Karmadhyakhas and ZP with 8 women members does get representation with 4 (out of 5) women Karmadhyakhas (Table 4:4 for details of the sample).

Table No. 4 : 4
Distribution of Women Respondents.

GP/PS	Block/Subdivision	Total Women	Actual Sample taken	Official Position	Party in Power
GP					
Andaran Fulbari No.2	Tufanganj 1	10	9	1	CPM
Dakshin Bara Haldibari	Haldibari/Mekliganj	4	4	1	CPM+AIF-B(S)+ BJP
Guriahati	Cooch Behar 1	8	8	--	Congress
Pachagarh	Mathabangha 1	8	7	--	CPM
Putimari	Dinhata 1	7	6	--	Congress
PS					
Changrabandha	Mekhliganj	6	5	--	CPM+AIF-B(S)
Cooch Behar 11	Cooch Behar	13	9	1	CPM
Dinhata 1	Dinhata	16	10	--	Congress
Mathabangha 1	Mathabangha	6	4	--	CPM
Haldibari	Mekliganj	6	6	4	CPM+AIF-B(S)
Tufanganj 1	Tufanganj	13	12	2	CPM
Total		97	80	9	
CP (Chairperson) *					
GP			1	1	CPM
PS			5	5	CPM
ZP			4	4	CPM
Grand Total			90	19	

* They are Chairpersons either of GP or Convenor of respective Standing Committees of PS and ZP. Administratively PR has three Tiers – GP, PS, ZP. And CP as a group is not definitely a PR Tier. But we have throughout used this group of respondents as a PR Tier mainly to isolate their responses from others to analyse their distinctive participation

Table No. 4 : 5.
Women Respondents by Party

Tier	Parties					Total
	CPM	Congress	AIFB	AIFB(S)*	BJP	
GP	17	12	1	1	1	32
PS	21	13	2	2	1	39
CP	17	--	--	2	--	19
Total	55	25	3	5	2	90

*AIFB(S)- a break way group from AIFB (and Left Front) since 18 th July, 1992 but merged again on 24 th May, 1999

Due to various reasons, there are discrepancy between proposed and actual sample taken. The proposed sample comprised of 97 women from GP and PS but we could contact with total 80 women from 5 GPs and 6 PSs (Table 4 : 4). Then we have excluded 9 respondents who are Chairpersons and included them into the separate category of Chairperson with 10 other such members.

Moreover we have tried to comprehend views and assessment of general males regarding the women's role. Males do provide the immediate setting in which women are to perform. As such 42 general or male respondents are also included in the sample. They are mainly from geographical areas of women respondents. Among them there are 8 Chairpersons of PR bodies (Table No. 4 : 6 for detail).

Table No. 4.6
Distribution of Male Respondents

Block	Number of Sample Taken	Official Position
Cooch Behar 1	8 (3 from Guriahati GP)	3
Cooch Behar 11	9 (6 from Takagach GP)	1
Dinhata 1	3 (2 from Putimari GP)	1
Haldibari	2 (1 from Dakshin Bara Haldibari GP)	1
Mathabangha 1	7 (3 from Pachagarh GP)	1
Mekliganj	2	--
Tufanganj	11 (6 from Andaran Fulbari GP)	1
Total	42	8

Thus we have selected as actual sample altogether 90 women panchayat members of the district – 32 from 5 GP of five separate Subdivisions, 39 from 6 PS of five Subdivisions and 19 from CP. For the CP group 9 are from earlier sampled GP and PSs and 10 additionally included. Party affiliations of those women are – 55 from CPM, 25 . . .

from Congress and 10 from other Parties. And total 42 male respondents are from 7 GP and PS areas.

1.3 Field Technique and Tools. Since women and male respondents form our primary source of information, two separate comprehensive interview schedules were prepared. The schedules were pre tested in one GP nearer to our residence and all necessary modifications were made. While preparing schedule utmost care was taken to a) frame questions in simple, unambiguous language, b) write in local language (Bengali and Rajbansi) c) arrange questions in logical sequence to allow smooth progress of interview. The schedule was often given beforehand specifically to the women mainly to win confidence We believe that all these helped to perceive questions and get true responses.

We have tried earnestly to contact each and every respondent to administer structured interview schedule personally and individually. Before administration of schedule we also gave assurance of anonymity and strict confidence in the use of information. The commitment that all information will be used only for academic purpose was also given.

Thus interview with the sampled respondents has been our primary technique to gather necessary information as to women's induction and role performance. Moreover, we have tried to collect relevant information through informal discussion with both women and male respondents and somewhere with villagers as to the women's role performance and problems. All data of the interview schedules have been tabulated manually where analytical tools are simple percentage calculation and description. In arranging data in Tables too much statistical design and sophistication have deliberately been avoided as far as possible. Tables are presented in terms of PR Tiers and Parties. All information gathered from informal levels are descriptively used wherever possible.

1.4 Basic Assumption. We have started the enquiry with the following assumptions :

- a) Statutory reservation is the gateway for women in political process of panchayat and by now women participation has by and large won social approval.
- b) Family domination over participation and performance of women members is quite domineering.

- c) There are remarkable variances in background, perception and performance of women in terms of PR Tiers and Parties.
- d) Those who have been members of parties for long time ,thus having more matured political background, are more successful in role performance.
- e) More educated members are more efficacious.

With these assumptions we have pursued the specific objectives of the study as stated in Chapter 1.

2. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.

We believe that any worthwhile study definitely requires long time to allow investigator acclimatised to read the pulse properly. Though interview may be time tested method for social inquiry, it does not help to grasp the complex interplay of various factors as we tend to limit attention only to questions and answers.

Our analysis and exposition are mainly based on responses of respondents who may have their own limitations. It is quite possible that responses are instantly given without sufficient pondering or merely to comply the interviewer. Equally it may not be surprising that certain information are suppressed or wrongly given on account of cultural stigma or for perception gaps between them and the investigator.

In the present 'political panchayats' women are elected by and for the party and correspondingly their responses may have political overtone. Or their perceptions may have been moulded after participation in election, party and panchayat meetings.

Also women respondents seem to be 'vanguard' of rural women. They may either be enlightened section or have become so after panchayat exposure. Therefore, their perceptions do not necessarily reflect general standing of rural womenfolk and any attempt to generalise or even foresee any change in rural scene may be fraught with inaccuracy.

"It is also probable that educated young men (also women) like to be looked upon as progressive and would not prove themselves orthodox – they would choose to opine

for the trends that are in the air”³. This may have its bearings on responses of male respondents in particular. Taking informal discussion with them into account, it seems that male respondents are quite pragmatic to realise that it would only tarnish own image if they publicly refute political reality of reservation. (We would note later on that gender discrimination has its ugly form in two PSs. But in the responses of two members of these PSs we would find no such glimpse.) Ambivalence in overt and covert behaviour is still widespread.

All interpretation and conclusions are entirely based on findings/ understanding in this district. Given the socio cultural, economic and political conditions of the setting any extrapolation for other area has to be made cautiously⁴.

Analysis of sex role is fundamentally different in the sense that to either sex certain behaviour are simply engrossing. Information and interpretation of sex roles may be influenced by sex of respondents and the investigator because certain deeply entrenched value may cloud oneself (Elcher;1980; 20).

Lastly we would note a few problems and worth of the study. Any field work is a journey to unknown and infused with thrill and tension. Somewhere we had to encounter tough task of approaching and establishing rapport with women respondents. It was difficult for a male investigator to seek candid response. It may be somewhat true that “so far men did not and could hardly get in touch with women”.⁵ The baffling problem was to convince them about the intention of investigator when majority have not heard about research purpose at all. Sometimes with repeated attempts and sometimes with active gesture of Chairpersons interview could be taken.

Nevertheless, in most cases, at the end of interview we were humbled for their comment that at least some one is here “to share our concern and problems”. Perhaps it indicates the attitude of others towards women. The greatest worth of the study is believed to lie in the fact that we have been able through interview and informal discussion to stir majority of women as to their role performance. If someone, as we believe, is convinced and motivated to perform roles and overcome problems we feel that we have been able to do worthwhile work, besides contributing to growing social research.

3. Kapadia. Cited in *Mies*; (1980; 20)

4. When conclusions are based on sample “we can never be totally certain of them”. Manheim & Rich (1986; 11). *Empirical Political Analysis*. Longman. New York

5. Sandberger (1995 ;ws 41). Gender in Field Research. *Economic & Political Weekly*. Vol. 30(17)