

## CHAPTER VII

### I. Social Profiles of Elected Members of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar

The individuals as incumbents of positions perform specific functions and are one of the critical components of any organisation. The effectiveness with which they perform their functions and achieve goals of the organisation, is determined to a large extent, by their skills, knowledge, attitudes and values as individual members of the organisation. Moreover, one of the important means by which extraneous factors are brought to bear on any organisation is through the people who constitute the organisation. Though the behaviour of individual position holders in an organisation is largely influenced by the prevailing norms, there is a continuous interaction between organisation, and individuals as the individuals have their

own life histories and bring with them values, prejudices, experiences, skills and limitations of their upbringing which influence and mould the organisation. Hence, for a full understanding of the working of an organisation, it would be helpful to know the personal attributes and socio-economic background of the individuals who form its integral part.

To understand the background of the officials and elected members, the most important variables are age, education, social status, rural-urban upbringing and the family backgrounds.

Table 7.1  
Parental occupation (per cent)

Occupation	Jalpaiguri No. 22	Cocch Behar No. 22	Total No. 44
Agriculture	45.5 (10)	63.6 (14)	54.5 (24)
Govt. Service	13.6 (3)	0	6.8 (3)
Teaching	13.6 (3)	16.2 (4)	15.9 (7)
Lawyer	0	0	0
Business	18.2 (4)	13.6 (3)	15.9 (7)
Any other	9.1 (2)	4.5 (1)	6.8 (3)
Total	100.0	99.9	199.9

Note : (1) Figures in the parenthesis indicate number respondents in each category.

(2) Total may not add upto 100 per cent because of rounding.

We begin our discussion with the family background respondents and first of all deal with the occupation fathers of the respondents.

Occupation of the fathers of the respondents is an important social background variable as it enables us to find out the economic strata of society of our respondents. The data given in the Table 7.1 shows the spectrum of occupations followed by the fathers of the respondents. While agriculture, business and teaching account for larger per centage in case of respondents of the two districts. In the 'any other' category, father of one respondent was a homeopath medical practitioner, one was tea garden labour and the other was an employee of a village landlord.

Table 7.2  
Age group of the respondents (per cent)

Age group	Jaipalguri No. 22	Cooch Behar No. 22	Total No. 44
19-28	0	0	0
29-38	9.1 (2)	27.3 (6)	18.2 (8)
39-48	45.5 (10)	63.6 (14)	54.5 (24)
48 and above	45.5 (10)	9.1 (2)	27.3 (12)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

It is observed from Table 7.2 that 8 respondents from Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar -- 2 from Jalpaiguri and 6 from Cooch Behar -- belong to the age group of 29-38 with a percentage of 18.2. Majority of respondents (54.5 per cent) belong to the category of 39-48 age group of which 10 elected members were from Jalpaiguri (45.5 per cent) and 14 members (63.4 per cent) from Cooch Behar belonged to this category. 12 respondents (27.3 per cent) were in the category of 48 and above. It shows that 54.5 per cent of the respondents were below the age of 50 and 27.3 per cent of them were either 50 years or above. In Jalpaiguri, the respondents were relatively old in age. 12 respondents were within 29-48 age group with a percentage of 54.6. In contrast, 32 respondents of Cooch Behar district belonged to the age group of 29-48. With a percentage of 72.7. It is also remarkable that in both Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar no respondents belong to the age group of 18-28 category.

Table 7.3  
Sex of the respondents (per cent)

Sex	Jalpaiguri No. 22	Cooch Behar No. 22	Total No. 44
Male	100.0 (22)	100.0 (22)	100.0 (44)
Female	0	0	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

The Table 7.3 shows that women elected members to both the Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar Zilla Parisads are conspicuously absent. It can possibly be explained in this way that West Bengal does have a low participation of women in public life. Only a small number is supposed to be active in the outside-the-house work force, a percentage which is significantly below the 16 per cent all India average<sup>1</sup>. On being asked, about the non-representation of elected women members the two Sabhadhipatis of both Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar Zilla Parisads expressed an almost identical view. They explained :

In respect of the participation of women in public life, there are still many feudal leanings in our society and in the party as well. The lower level of education, isolation from public life and possibilities of slander play an important part<sup>2</sup>. Many of the elected members are aware of the necessity to have women elected members in the Zilla Parisads to represent issues and problems as one of eliminating gender discrimination<sup>3</sup>.

We now turn to the respondents' social origin. The Table 7.4 reveals that 41 (93.2 per cent) of the respondents are Hindu by religion and 3 (6.8 per cent) of the elected members belong to Islamic religion. In both the Zilla Parisads, the Hindus have overwhelming majority. Muslim have only 2 and 1 members respectively in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

Table 7.4

Religious affiliation of the respondents (per cent)

Religion	Jalpaiguri No.22	Cooch Behar No.22	Total No.44
Hindu	90.9 (20)	95.5 (21)	93.2 (41)
Muslim	9.1 (2)	4.5 (1)	6.8 (3)
Any other	0	0	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

Table 7.5

Caste Identification of the respondents (per cent)

Castes	Jalpaiguri No.22	Cooch Behar No.22	Total NO.44
Caste Hindu	50.0 (11)	40.9 (9)	45.5 (20)
Scheduled caste	31.8 (7)	54.5 (12)	43.2 (19)
Scheduled tribe	9.1 (2)	0	4.5 (2)
Total	90.9	95.4	93.2

Note : 1. Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

2. Since non-responses have been excluded, the distribution did not add upto 100.

In further classification of social origin of the elected respondents, Table 7.5 shows that 45.5 per cent belong to the higher caste group. Of which 11 (50.0 per cent) of respondents of Jalpaiguri and 9 (40.9 per cent) of Cooch Behar were from the higher caste group. While 43.2 per cent of the respondents belong to the lower caste group, 7 of them were from Jalpaiguri and 12 (54.6 per cent) members were from Cooch Behar Zilla Parishad. Only 2 members in Jalpaiguri Zilla Parishad belonged to category of scheduled tribe with 9.1 per cent. In our analysis we have not divided the caste Hindus in varna scheme of caste grouping. This is mainly because of the fact that our intention is to show whether the absolute domination of the caste Hindus still persists or not. The Table shows that particularly the scheduled castes have come up with a fairly good number in representation to the Zilla Parishads both in Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar.

Another important social background variable is the rural-urban exposure of an individual. In order to get this information we asked the respondents, 'where did you live most of your life? Their answers were classified in three categories, village, town and city are presented in Table 7.6. It is observed that 88.6 per cent of the respondents had lived in rural areas with 20 (90.9 per cent) and 19 (86.4 per cent) of the respondents belong to

Table 7.6

Urban/Rural exposure of the respondents (per cent.)

Nature of exposure	Jalpaiguri No.22	Cooch Behar No.22	Total No.22
Village	90.9 (20)	86.4 (19)	88.6 (39)
Town	9.1 (2)	13.6 (3)	11.4 (5)
City	0	0	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar respectively. On the other hand, only 11.4 per cent of the respondents had lived in towns and no elected member had the exposure of city life. It reveals that respondents were very close to the environment they work in.

We now consider the educational level of our respondents. Table 7.7 indicates that 50.00 per cent of the respondents had matriculation degree with 10 (45.5 per cent) and 12 (54.5 per cent) respondents from Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar respectively. A fairly good number of respondents were graduates with 40.9 per cent, of these 10 (45.5) respondents belonged to Jalpaiguri Zilla Parisad and 8 (35.7 per cent) members were from Cooch Behar Zilla Parisad.

Table 7.7

Educational level of the respondents (per cent)

Educational level	Jalpaiguri No. 22	Cooch Behar No. 22	Total No. 44
Non-matric	4.5 (1)	9.1 (2)	6.8 (3)
Matric	45.5 (10)	54.5 (12)	50.0 (22)
Graduate	45.5 (10)	36.4 (8)	40.9 (18)
Post Graduate	4.5 (1)	0	2.3 (1)
Others	0	0	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate the number of respondents in each category.

While 1 member of Jalpaiguri had post-graduate degree. The Table reveals that members of the Jalpaiguri Zilla Parishad had higher level of educational qualification than those of the respondents of the Cooch Behar.

We have dealt with parental background, personal attributes, socio-economic status of the respondents of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar Zilla Parishad members. An analysis of the above Tables reveal that the father of the respondents followed mainly the occupations of agriculture, teaching and business. The respondents were predominantly

rural with a fair degree of educational qualification. In respect of religion, almost 97 per cent belong to Hindu community. One aspect which is remarkable is that a young leadership has emerged within the organisational set up of zilla parisads of both Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. No less than 73 per cent of the total respondents belong to the age group of 29-48 category.

Another redeeming feature about the respondents is that there is a fair number of scheduled caste representation in the zilla parisads of both Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar. It seems that an absolute domination of a single caste group is steadily on the wane.

## II. Social Profile of the Officials of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar Districts

In this section, as in the previous one, we would analyse the social composition of the official respondents of both the Jalpaiguri and the Cooch Behar districts. Social composition is an important factor which moulds, to a large extent, the attitudes and approaches of the functionaries towards the goals of the organisation and the work-culture of the respondents.

In order to understand the nature of the respondents who are engaged in rural development work, a study of the

Table 7.8

Parental occupation of the respondents (Per cent)

Occupation	Jalpaiguri No.14	Cooch Behar No.14	Total No.28
Agriculture	0	0	0
Govt. Service	71.4 (10)	57.1 (8)	64.3 (18)
Teaching	14.4 (2)	28.6 (4)	21.4 (6)
Lawyer	0	7.1 (1)	3.6 (1)
Business	7.1 (1)	0	3.6 (1)
Others	7.1 (1)	7.1 (1)	7.1 (2)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate respondents in each category.

social background was undertaken. Under this parental occupation, age, religion, caste, rural-urban upbringing and their education were studied.

in table 7.8.

This variable is important to determine the social strata to which the respondents belong. So far the Table 7.8 is concerned, it reveals that a large number of respondents' fathers were in Government service which constitutes 64.3 per cent. 71.4 per cent of respondents of the Jalpaiguri district and 51.1 per cent from the Cooch

Table 7.9  
Age Group (per cent)

Age groups	Jalpaiguri N=14	Cooch Behar N=14	Total N=28
21-31	14.3 (2)	7.1 (1)	10.7 (3)
32-42	50.0 (7)	42.9 (6)	46.4 (13)
43-53	35.7 (5)	42.9 (6)	39.3 (11)
Above	0	7.1 (1)	3.6 (1)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

Behar District belong to this category. Teaching profession occupies the second position with 21.4 per cent. One remarkable feature of this Table is that none of the respondents came from the agricultural family.

Table 7.9 shows that the respondents are of middle age mostly 46.4 per cent belong to the category of 32-42 age -group, of which 50.00 per cent are from Jalpaiguri and 42.85 per cent from Cooch Behar district. 39.3 per cent of the respondents belong to the age group 43.5. In the district of Cooch Behar one respondent was in the category of 54 and above.

Table 7.10

Religious affiliation of the respondents (per cent)

Religion	Jalpaiguri N=14	Cooch Behar N=14	Total N=28
Hindu	85.7 (12)	92.9 (13)	89.3 (25)
Muslim	14.3 (2)	7.1 (1)	10.7 (3)
Any other	0	0	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

Table 7.10 shows that 89.3 per cent of the respondents are from the Hindu community of which 12 (85.7 per cent) are from Jalpaiguri and 13 (92.9 per cent) are from Cooch Behar district. Muslims constitute only 10.7 per cent. 2 (14.3 per cent) from Jalpaiguri and 1 (7.1 per cent) from Cooch Behar district.

Caste is considered an important variable to determine the respondents' social origin. Table 7.11 reveals that 50.7 per cent of the total respondents are from higher caste group. Of the 17 officials, 57.1 per cent are in Jalpaiguri and 54.3 per cent are from Cooch Behar. Scheduled caste respondents constitute only 21.4 per cent. Jalpaiguri

Table 7.11

Caste identification of the respondents (per cent)

Castes	Jalpaiguri No. 14	Cooch Behar No. 14	Total No. 28
Caste Hindu	57.1 (3)	54.3 (9)	50.7 (17)
Scheduled caste	21.5 (3)	21.4 (3)	21.4 (6)
Scheduled tribe	7.1 (1)	7.1 (1)	7.1 (2)
Total	85.7	92.5	89.2

Note : 1. Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

2. Since non-responses have been excluded the the distribution did not add upto 100.

represents 21.6 per cent and Cooch Behar represents 21.4 per cent. In both the districts Scheduled Tribe has 1 member each with 7.2 per cent.

Table 7.12

Educational qualification of the respondents (per cent)

Qualification	Jalpaiguri No. 14	Cooch Behar No. 14	Total No. 28
Graduate	54.3 (9)	42.9 (6)	53.6 (15)
Post Graduate	35.7 (5)	57.1 (8)	46.4 (13)
Others	0	0	0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

Education plays an important part as a variable to mould the attitudes of the respondents in respect of organisation they work in. Table 7.12 shows that respondents from Cooch Behar have more Masters' degree holders than those of Jalpaiguri, Cooch Behar has 8 respondents with 57.1 and Jalpaiguri district has 5 respondents with 35.7. But 15 (53.6 per cent) of the total respondents are graduates, and 13 (46.4 per cent) are post graduates.

Table 7.13

Urban/rural exposure of the respondents (per cent)

Place	Jalpaiguri N=14	Cooch Behar N=14	Total N=28
Village	14.3 (2)	7.1 (1)	10.7 (3)
Town	64.3 (9)	78.6 (11)	71.4 (20)
City	21.4 (3)	14.3 (2)	17.9 (5)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents in each category.

Urban/rural exposure is another important variable to ascertain the social background of the respondents. Table 7.13 reveals that 71.4 per cent of the total respondents are from towns and 17.9 from city areas. This means that

25 of the total respondents with 89.3 are from urban areas. Only 10.7 per cent are from village areas. It further suggests that the officials ~~were~~ brought into an work situation to which they actually ~~did~~ not belong. 3 (10.7 per cent), out of 28 respondents taken from Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar districts ~~were~~ close to their environment i.e., they ~~were~~ from rural areas.

We have dealt with the social profile of both the elected and official respondents of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar district respectively.

It is observed, while making an attempt to make a comparative estimate of personal and social attributes, that fathers of the official respondents ~~were~~ more urban-oriented and followed the occupations of service. From this it can be inferred that fathers of officials ~~were~~ more educated and economically better in status. The elected representatives are mostly of rural origin, older and less educated compared to the official respondents.

In respect of religion and caste affiliation, in both the categories, Hindus ~~were~~ dominant and in caste affiliation caste Hindus had precedence over the other caste. But lower castes has emerged as an important members of the Pilla Parisads. On the question of leadership, it is quite evident that a comparatively young and dynamic leadership

has emerged in the organisation of Zilla Parishad to carry forward the goals of Panchayati Raj and rural development.

### III. Performance of Panchayati Raj

With the rejuvenation of Panchayati Raj in West Bengal, vast areas of statutory functions along with large areas of development functions have been entrusted to the Panchayati Raj Institutions. The activities of the Institution relate to the planning of development and infra structural works, the execution of centrally sponsored poverty alleviation programmes and implementation of state initiated reforms programme like land reforms and bargadar registration.

In addition, the panchayats have decisive role in the distribution of bank loans. Panchayats take responsibility for formulation of schemes under Integrated Rural Development Programme and implementation of the same in collaboration with the nationalised banks.

In 1977-78, the panchayats in West Bengal had direct spending authority over 320 crores. In a new major development, the State Government has decided to make Panchayats directly responsible for various development programmes which were hitherto looked after by the respective

departments from Writers' Buildings in Calcutta. The total amount to be handled by the Panchayati Raj Institution which would go upto 700 crores. In the district of Jalpaiguri, the total development plan involved 36 crores in 1988-89<sup>4</sup>.

Against this back drop, the respondents were asked to indicate the degree of success of Panchayati Raj Institution in the districts in respect to the performance. Besides our discussion on this issue with the respondents, we put a specific question to both the categories of respondents and is placed below in the Table 7.14.

Table 7.14

Performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions (Per cent)						
Degree of success	Elected members		Officials		Total	
	Jalpai -guri N=22	Cooch Behar N=22	Jalpai -guri N=14	Cooch Behar N=14	Elected members N=44	Offi-als N=28
Completely successful	81.8 (18)	68.2 (15)	35.7 (5)	14.3 (2)	75.0 (33)	25.0 (7)
To a large extent successful	18.2 (4)	31.8 (7)	50.0 (7)	78.6 (11)	25.0 (11)	74.3 (18)
To some extent successful	0	0	14.3 (2)	7.1 (1)	-	10.7 (3)
Failure	0	0	0	0	-	-
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : Figures in the parenthesis indicate respondents in each category.

Our data in the (Table 7.14) suggests that 75.0 per cent of the elected members feel that the performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions were completely successful in their objectives. While only 25.0 per cent of the Government officials said Panchayati Raj Institutions were completely successful. This trend of attitude was completely reversed and only 25.0 per cent of the elected members pointed out that Panchayati Raj Institutions were successful to a large extent. This very sentiment received an overwhelming support from the Government officials and was endorsed by 74.2 per cent. While no elected members pointed out that Panchayati Raj Institutions were either 'to some extent successful' or a 'failure'. But only 10.7 per cent of the Government Officials felt that Panchayati Raj Institutions were successful to some extent.

Those who said that it was completely successful and to a large extent successful, pointed out that there was a district improvement in the amenities provided in the rural areas and there was greater public enlightenment. Those who said that it was to some extent successful felt that there was not expected improvement in the rural areas. They pointed out the reasons such as lack of cooperation, over politicization and lack of vision on the part of elected members.

While having discussion with the respondents about the reasons for the successful working of Panchayati Raj Institutions, the respondents pointed out the factors such as availability of finance, greater awareness among the people, greater powers to the Panchayati Raj Institutions, committed and dynamic leadership and cooperation from the government departments. All these factors taken together made the institutions a success.

We have argued that Panchayati Raj in West Bengal has opened up a new possibilities so far the democratisation of administration of rural development is concerned. It is also argued that this was made possible by the changed attitude of the officialdom towards the democratic management of development affairs at the districts and down below over a period of time, it is, therefore, essential to see whether, given a chance, <sup>the officials</sup> would like to work under Panchayati Raj administration. This question was directed to them in order to gauge their attitude towards the democratisation of administration introduced through Panchayati Raj in West Bengal.

The data is presented below in the Table 7.15.

Table 7.15

Willingness of the government officials to work under  
Panchayati Raj (per cent)

Item	Response	Govt. officials		
		Jalpaiguri	Cooch Behar	Total
Would you like to work under Panchayati Raj	Yes	64.3 (9)	42.9 (6)	53.6 (15)
	No	35.7 (5)	57.1 (8)	46.4 (13)
	Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Note : 1. Total No= 28 (14 from Jalpaiguri and 14 from Cooch Behar.

2. Figures in the parenthesis indicate number of respondents.

The above table indicates that majority of the respondents from Jalpaiguri (64.3 per cent) did feel like working under Panchayati Raj system. While the officials from Cooch Behar (57.1 per cent) did not like to work under the Panchayati Raj system. But majority of the respondents taken together 53.6 per cent liked to work under Panchayati Raj Raj. It is interesting to note that a significant number of respondents (46.4 per cent) did not like to work under Panchayati Raj system. From our data, we can say that the officials working in association with the Jalpaiguri

Zilla Parisad was more democratic than their counterpart in Cooch Behar.

It would be important to point out the reasons the respondents put forward in favour of Panchayati Raj system. They indicated that under a democratic process, the powers and responsibilities are to be shared between people's representatives and government officials. They felt that if this axiom was realised there would not be any problem in the system.

But on the other hand, the officials who did not like to work under the Panchayati Raj system, mentioned that elected representatives always try to aggrandise power and are very much reluctant to part with it. This very attitude on the part of the elected members, vitiated the democratic environment at the sub-state level and down below.

In conclusion we can say that the performance of Panchayati Raj Institution in the districts of Jalpaiguri and Cooch Behar was impressive in implementing development programmes at the grass-root level and creating a consciousness among the rural mass. The Panchayati Raj system in the districts in particular and in the state in general created an administration which is both responsible and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the people.

It can also be said that the bureaucracy, associated with the democratic system is gradually realizing the process of democratisation in the district administration and has been able to shake off the initial inhibition to work under the leadership of the elected representatives of the system. Our study also proved that the process of democratisation at its initial stage produces dysfunctionalities in the system in the form of maladjustments between the actors but continuous working of the two sets of functionaries produces a harmonious and co-operative attitude among them and help strengthening the democratic institutions.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Government of West Bengal, Economic Review 1987-1988. Statistical Appendix, Calcutta, 1988, p.6.
2. Data obtained from field investigation.
3. Ibid.
4. Annual Action Plan, Jalpaiguri.