

Preface

From the very childhood a question haunted me why poor and lower class people in the rural areas could not settle any dispute in an arbitration meeting; only rich and upper class people played the role of arbitrator. This is indeed related with the question of leadership. Prior to panchayat raj through democratic decentralization, the rural leadership concentrated to hands of rich and upper class. Democratic decentralization has ushered in the beginning of a new era of the poor and lower class people assuming the role of rural leadership. So, the present research deals with the question – how far the pattern of rural leadership has been changed under the umbrella of democratic decentralization.

The process of decentralization and, consequent upon this, the introduction of Panchayat Raj has resulted some important social changes. It has created new centres of power in rural society. Before the implementation of Panchayat Raj in West Bengal, as in India, one finds non - political rural leaders who were land lords, money lenders and businessmen who ruled the rural people. Actually, the privileged and influential class dominated the rural people. It also continues with certain changes after the implementation of Panchayat Raj. After 1978, a new generation of leadership in rural West Bengal has emerged, but the caste and class background of the new leadership have not changed much. It has developed new institutional structure, decentralized in form, the poor, lower caste, non-educated persons and the women represent the panchayat bodies but their influence in decision making process is still a far cry.

Given this background, the present study seeks to find out the changing pattern of rural leadership in West Bengal on the basis of intensive study of two districts of West Bengal – Murshidabad and Cooch Behar. The changing pattern of rural leadership has been measured in terms of caste, class, gender, land holding, occupation and income like key variables.

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Despite my best intensions, it was not possible to avoid all limitations of my research work. There may be some deficiencies for which I alone am responsible.


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