


**Research Article**

# The Social Background of the People's Representatives at Panchayat Level in West Bengal

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**Abstract**

To feel the real taste of the West Bengal Panchayat system, there needs to be an interpretation of the socio-economic background of the representatives originating from rural politics. The socio-economic background of the representatives, as we call them, leaders, influences the work of any organisation. The leaders, regardless of the social background from which they have originated, however, their ideas, views and other responsibilities are responsible for the influence of lending to the organisation. Naturally, to understand the age, gender, education, profession and caste, everything depends on the nature of the leadership of those organisations. The socialists believe that it is possible to feel the leadership of any organisation through their determination; again, the background of the leaders provides a clear idea about the political culture of the organisation. Before the policy of reservation at the Panchayat level, there were few chances of representation from the backward class people. But after the implementation of reservation policy at Panchayat level, it creates the opportunity for the backward class leaders at the rural politics Through the 73rd Amendment Act, 1993 one-third of the seats are also reserved for the women in all stages of Panchayats, which lead a great change at the Panchayat system of West Bengal and also a great change evolved among the political elite. In this paper, I want to highlight the social background of the rural representatives in West Bengal and their contribution in rural development in a lucid manner.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

To understand the West Bengal Panchayat system, we need the judgment of socio-economic background of the leaders originated from the rural politics. The background of socio-economic of the leaders influences the work of any organization. The leaders from which social background they have arisen, their idea, view, responsibility, everything composed the influence of leading the organisation. At present any social, political structure is not discussed, only legally, structurally and functionary. Today political and social organization is discussed through different ingredients of the organization. Naturally to understand the age, gender, education, profession and caste everything depends on the nature of the leaders of organization. The socialists believe that it is possible to feel the leadership of any organization through the determination, again the background of the leaders provide the clear idea about the political culture of the organization.

After independence many researches were held on the rural representatives originated during the reign of congress. It was found through the research that the rural authority was especially handed over to the people of the higher caste during the rule of congress. The political powers of the Panchayats were concentrated on the village land lord. It has been clear from different researches that the Panchayats were totally dominated by male. After independence, there did not come much more changes in the structure of panchayat in India, as said by one research scholar named Ranjit. It has been clear from the different researches on the panchayat during the rule of congress that most of the members of the panchayat were from higher caste. Their average age was 40 years. In all the stages of panchayat there was very little participation of women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribe communities. In 1968-69 the number of women representative in gram panchayat was 469 and in Anchal panchayat was 105 during the first phase of the rule of congress party.

### Social Background of People's Representative during of Left Front Government

In 1977 the Left Front party promised the common people that if they become the ruling party they will decentralize the power in grass root level. According to this promise panchayat elections were held in 1978. Through election of 1978 and later, the concept of participation of common people is revealed. In the election of 1978 the common people of village participated in election. At the end of the party based election it has been possible that the simple farmers, labourers, ST and SC and even the women of the village participated in the election. In 1977 after coming in the ruling party the left was able to decrease the numbers of landlords through land reform programme. Through this land reform programme naturally the land started to come to the farmers. Later land reform programme was the main factor behind the people representatives. The new village people representative originated through the election of 1978, was in a word revolutionary. It has been proved in the research of different stages, national and international, that it was obviously the reflection of people representativeness of West

Bengal panchayat system. But in 1992, after the 73rd constitutional Amendment there comes a great change in West Bengal people representatives, particularly thorough the reservation of seat of ST/SC and women. For this reason, the social background of panchayat of the left is divided into part;

1. First Stage (from 1978 to 1992) is the previous stage of seat reservation of women of ST and SC.
2. Second Stage (from 1993 to 2011) there was a revolutionary change in the structure of panchayat common representative for reserving the seat of ST/SC and women.

### Social Background of the People's Representatives of Panchayat in the First Stage (1978-92):

First election was held in 1978 in the rule of left front. After the first election many researchers and research organizations made their research about the nature of people representatives of panchayat. Among these researches the research of village development organization was significant. It was known from the research of this organization that half of the representatives of panchayat were farmers and most of them were below 35 years. Atul Koholi commented on the nature of the people representative, "The new panchayat of West Bengal represent a break from the party political patterns in India. The panchayat in West Bengal or in most parts of India have seldom been so free of domination by land lords or by rich peasants". From Atul Koholi's research it has been found that small farmers and labourers took part in the panchayat election.

From the research of Sonali Chakraborty Banerjee it was found that most of the members of the Gram Panchayat were not much aged. On the other hand the members of Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad were aged in comparison to Gram Panchayat. Again there was enough reservation of the Muslim community in the Gram Panchayat in comparison to the Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad. But there were enough representatives in the Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad from the Hindu community. In the Gram Panchayat, most of the representatives were farmers and labourers. On the whole, the number of representatives of farmers was 90%. In the Gram Panchayat, there were enough reservations for women but in Panchayat Samity and Zilla Parishad, there were very little women representatives.

### The Social Background of People Representatives of West Bengal Panchayat System after Reservation of Seats (from 1993 to 2011)

In the election of 1993 one-third seats were reserved for the women in all stages of West Bengal. With it the seats of SC and ST were reserved in proportionate to population. For the reservation of seats of SC, ST and women there has come a qualitative change in the structure of Panchayat system. All the political parties were bound to reserve the seats for these communities. After this election it was seen that literate, illiterate, higher caste and lower caste, male and female, ST and SC experienced and inexperienced poor and rich all got chance to participate in the election. After the Panchayat election of

1993, there came a great change in the elite group. According to the research of Moitreee Bhattacharya and Sukanta Bhattacharya, before the reservation of seats, there was not enough representation of SC and ST in the Panchayat election in proportionate to population. But after the reservation of seats in all stages, they have increased enough. After the amendment of the constitution enough difference in the status of women of SC and ST has emerged.

### **Nature and Characteristics of the Representatives of the Panchayat System in West Bengal according to Age, Gender, Nation, Education and Occupation:**

Panchayat and rural development organisation of West Bengal conducted research on age, nation, education, gender and occupation of the representatives of each district, which helps to analyse the nature and characteristics of each representative according to age, gender, nation, education and occupation.

#### **Age of Panchayat Representatives**

Age is very significant element to determine the nature of panchayat representatives. In the ancient history of India we find that the elder persons were the leading representatives of rural development organization. But at the time of Left Front ruling party young generation was given more advantages than elders. They were given the leadership. Then it can be seen by the data of panchayat and rural development organization of West Bengal that each step of three-tier panchayat system set up the middle-aged person (30-45 years) as the leading representative. Nevertheless now at present we find that person less than 30 years are also the representatives of panchayat. Thus it is clear according to the result of the research of panchayat raj of W.B. and Rural Development Organization of district that rural society is dominated by the young generation of panchayat and it is also clear that the membership of young female representatives is well-organized better than male representatives. Approximately 95% of female representatives are less than 45 years and 50% female are less than 30 years. On the other side 81% male representatives are less than 45 years and less than 30 years, male are 18.91%. Finally it can be said that comparatively young generations lead the panchayat system today.

#### **Status of Gender of Rural Representatives**

The presence of female representatives in the total continent of South Asia is not much. At the post- independent the presence of female representatives in the total sub-India parliament and state assembly also showed a little number of female representatives. Since 1952 to present day the percentage of female representatives is 8.8% (12th Loksabha). And at the same time in the state assembly of West Bengal, the percentage of female was 7.1 in the survey of year 1989-1992. Then at the 73rd constitutional amendment of 1992 panchayat system got reserved one-third seats for female. Thus it can be mentioned that before amendment panchayat built the reservation of positional seat the reservation of female, male representatives were authorized on everything. On that time there was an only

2% seat for female in panchayat. In 1993 though the panchayat commission kept reserve seats for female, they were not given opportunity to take these. In 1993 after the panchayat commission they reserved seats for female approximately 35.39% in Gram Panchayat, 33.65% in Panchayat Samity, and 34.19% in Zilla Parishad. But the female got a little opportunity to take these seats. In 1998 there were again one-third seats reserved for female in three-tier panchayat system. That's why 33% female have taken advantage for positional seats in panchayats today. And the result of the research of panchayat and rural development organization of West Bengal shows the same condition.

In 2003 after the panchayat election we can see the percentage of female in Gram Panchayat 36.63%, Panchayat Samity 34.38% and Zilla Parishad 34.44%. But sometimes it can be seen that these female representatives are directed by their husbands, family and relatives also.

#### **Caste System of Rural Representatives**

Caste system is important to determine the leading capability. In the ancient time higher caste people were the leading representatives. By the research of the social scientists like M.N Srinivas and Eqbal Narayan we can find that the authority was headed by the higher caste people. They were higher in economic condition and advance in culture.

In 1973, 2 seats were reserved for SC and ST. Thus it was seen from the experiences that the reservation had a little impact on them. And at the time of Left Front ruling party there was little influence of SC and ST. In 1993 the reservation for SC and ST was increased a little. For it the importance of these two castes had a certain influence. Besides it the positional seats were also given to them. For the reservation the interest of SC and ST is developed enough. Though reservation was determined but in the political system they were given little advantages or authority according to the social critic. So the critic comment on the CPI (M) as it was leading then. The party of CPI (M) provided rules and regulation. Therefore the authority was not much at the hand of the representatives of SC and ST. Now-a-days we can see the same system.

#### **Educational Condition of Representatives at Panchayat Level**

Education expresses the quality of anything. So in the judgment of quality of a representative education takes important part. At the time of Congress ruling party educated representative took part in panchayat raj. But in the regime of Left Front all kinds of people like literate, illiterate and people of primary level joined the panchayat raj. The research data of panchayat of West Bengal and rural development organization has expressed the participation of Madhyamik level person in the Gram panchayat of district election commission. And also there are enough qualified persons who joined in the Gram panchayat as the leading representatives. But on the other hand 40% graduate and post graduate persons take part in Zilla Parishad. Though persons of primary level in Gram panchayat were given the position, panchayat samity represents enough number of

Madhyamik level representatives. We find the difference between panchayat of West Bengal and rural development organization and zilla parishad in order to the qualified representatives like the new learners and primary learners joined in panchayat and rural development organization. But higher educated persons like graduate and post graduate representatives joined in zilla parishad. But there are little number of new learner and primary learners in panchayat samity.

It can be noticed by the data of panchayat of state and rural development organization that the number of SC and ST female representatives are less than SC and ST male representatives. Otherwise it is also clear that the education of female representatives is not equal to the education of male representatives so that the explanation of educational qualification can improve the backward class like SC and ST female representatives to lead the political power.

### Nature of Occupation of Panchayat Representatives

Occupation is the important element to determine the Trinamul ruling party. We can find that at the time of Congress ruling party generally village rich persons, middle class farmers and teachers were the main representatives of panchayat system. But at the time of Left Front ruling party this system had been changed. Since the time of Left Front farmers, social workers, cottage industrialists, artists, small businessmen, unemployed persons and teachers entered into the politics. But after the year of 1998 the number of teachers at the position of representative has decreased enough.

But from the results of panchayat of state and rural development organization, we can see the presence of lower and middle farmers enough. Then we can find the popularity of labour class also. On the other hand at the upper level of panchayat we can see the participation of small farmers and labour class are decreasing day by day. With the reduction of farmers the number of teacher representative is influential. With the above discussion we can conclude some important elements in the leading of panchayat raj of West Bengal.

- A. By the nature of panchayat representatives at the time of Left Front ruling party it is seen clearly that the numbers of big farmers, higher class representatives have reduced. But the number of small farmers, labour class, lease-holders, cottage industrialists and teachers has increased their authority on politics. Besides them, unemployed persons and persons of small occupations also got the authority in panchayat raj.
- B. Under the nature of panchayat raj we are going to analyze the importance of caste then we find that the backward class female representatives like SC and ST have gained the authority in politics now.
- C. At the time of Left Front ruling party the rising of young generation has taken the leadership in politics. Therefore the survey shows in the comparison between male

representatives and female representatives in accordance to the age.

- D. The membership of female representatives in panchayat raj has not only gained certain authority but also one-third reservation seats for female representatives.
- E. If we say about the importance of caste in panchayat see the increased number of female of SC and ST achieved the same authority in politics.

With the association of rural politics Professor Daipayan Bhattacharya comments that the CPI (M) party amended the rural politics for the success of election. And the reality of the election came close to the middle class people of village. By the research of Maitreesh Ghatok and Maitryee Ghatok we can find that middle class people and labour class have expressed the political desire. Finally we can conclude by saying that the democracy really comes close by the participation of the representatives from various fields.

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