Chapter 3

Socio-Economic Profile of the Electorates, their Voting Behaviour and its Impact on Emergence of Leadership

Democratic decentralization and the holding of periodic elections to the panchayat bodies have enlarged the role of rural masses in local governance. The rural people who happen to be the electorates at the panchayat elections play a key role in determining the pattern of leadership at the Panchayati Raj Institutions. This is because of the fact that they have to elect and send representatives to the PRIs from among themselves. Thus, the pattern of leadership at the PRIs, depends to a large extent, on the socio-economic conditions of the rural people and their way of making choice in elections. Against this backdrop, an attempt has been made in this chapter to understand the socio-economic profile of the rural electorates, their perception and voting behaviour in panchayat elections. For the purpose of convenient presentation, this chapter has been divided into three co-related sections. Section I deals with the socio-economic profile of the electorates who constitutes the support base of the elected representatives. Section II deals with the voting behaviour of the rural voters, as to how they make their choice in favour of a particular candidate and the hindrances they face in the way of exercising their franchise and Section III studies the opinion of the voters about panchayat leaders. The main Objective of this chapter is to investigate the voting behaviour and to study the opinion of the voters about the panchayat leaders. The study has been carried out on the basis of the following research questions:
• What are the factors that influence people's participation in panchayat election?
• Do people face any obstacle in the way of participation?
• Do people share good opinion about panchayat leaders?

The process of decentralization both in political and economic sphere has resulted in the beginning of a large scale socio-economic transformation at the village level. The age old concept of village has undergone change and many modern amenities of life have been introduced in rural societies. Spread of education and allied opportunities has brought a change in perception, income and occupational pattern of the villagers. Agriculture and animal husbandry is no more the principal occupation of the rural people, rather people belonging to different strata of rural society have been playing an active role in the process of development through their participation in different social and economic activities. Under such circumstances, it becomes important to take a stock of the socio-economic profile of the rural people to understand their perception and voting behaviour in panchayat elections as they constitute the key instrument of determining the pattern of leadership at the panchayat level. Thus, before going to the actual research questions an attempt has been made to survey the socio-economic conditions and political linkage of the rural people so as to understand its impact on their voting behaviour. As the sample was constituted of the respondents from each Gaon Panchayat with an equal proportion of man and woman, the foregoing analysis has been made with the help of gender wise cross-tabulation of data.

Age

Age plays an important role in moulding the behaviour and thinking of the people. Though the rural electorate is composed of the people belonging to all age groups, yet a majority of them were found to be within the age of 40 years.
Table: 3.01: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>18-30</th>
<th>31-40</th>
<th>41-50</th>
<th>51-60</th>
<th>Above 60</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>17.40%</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>6.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.90%</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>5.90%</td>
<td>3.30%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.40%</td>
<td>30.40%</td>
<td>15.50%</td>
<td>14.40%</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of data shows that out of 270 respondents, 82 (30.40 per cent) belong to the age group ‘18-30’ and among them the number of female is 59 (21.90 per cent) and male is 23 (8.50 per cent). A similar number (30.40 per cent) of respondents was also found from the age group ‘31-40’ consisting of 47 (17.40 per cent) males and 35 (13.00 per cent) females. The respondents belonging to the age groups of 41-50, 51-60 and above 60 were 42 (15.50 per cent), 39 (14.40 per cent) and 25 (9.30 per cent) respectively. The above figures show the dominance of youths in rural electorate as an overwhelming majority of respondents i.e., 164 (64.80 per cent) out of 270 were found to be within 40 years of age. Thus, it may be said that the introduction of the New Panchayati Raj has not only added to the number of youths in rural leadership (as revealed in Chapter 4) but also generated a sense of activism among young electorates to take more interest in rural politics.

Caste

Caste composition of the rural leadership is, to a certain extent, determined by the caste composition of the rural electorate as caste plays an essential role in influencing voter’s choice. Thus, the study of the caste identity of the electorates is significant to understand its influence on leadership formation.
Table 3.02: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Caste

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Caste</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General</td>
<td>SC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.30%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.50%</td>
<td>6.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>148</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54.80%</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of data in the table above reveals that a majority of 54.80 per cent of the respondents belonged to the general category, while the remaining 45.20 per cent belonged to SC, ST and OBC at the rate of 13.00 per cent, 0.70 per cent and 31.50 per cent respectively. It is important to note in this context that out of 148 (54.80 per cent) respondents of general category a majority of 129 were Muslims, while only 19 were found to be Hindus. This is because there is no notable caste division in Muslim community as like Hindus.

**Religion**

In terms of religious composition of the rural electorates it is found that the entire rural society is divided between two major religions viz. Hinduism and Islam. Although a negligible percentage of people belonging to Jainism and Christianity also reside in the district of Hailakandi, but they reside mostly in urban locality of the district and thus not important in context of the present study.

Table 3.03: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Religion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hinduism</td>
<td>Islam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33.00%</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.20%</td>
<td>30.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>141</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>52.20%</td>
<td>47.80%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Data reveal that out of 270 respondents 141 (52.20 per cent) were found to belong to Hinduism, while the rest 129 (47.80 per cent) were found to belong to Islam. This roughly even polarization of the respondents into two religious groups often motivates them to make their choice in panchayat elections on religious considerations.

**Education**

Education is an instrument to lead people from darkness to light, from superstition to reason. It shapes the way of thinking of the people and enriches them with the power of decision-making. The educational attainment of the electorate is thus significant as it helps them decide what is best and appropriate. For the purpose of assessing the educational attainment of the electorates, they have been put into the groups viz. Illiterate, Primary, Secondary, Higher Secondary, Graduate and Post-Graduate.

**Table: 3.04: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Educational Qualification**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational Qualification</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Primary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>18 (6.70%)</td>
<td>76 (28.10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40 (14.80%)</td>
<td>22 (8.20%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58 (21.50%)</td>
<td>98 (36.30%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of data reveals that out of 270 respondents, 58 (21.50 per cent) were illiterates and among them 6.70 per cent were males and 14.80 per cent were females. The respondents having educational attainment up to primary were 98 (36.30 per cent) consisting 28.10 per cent of males and 8.20 per cent of females. 14.10 per cent (male 7.80 per cent and female 6.30 per cent) of respondents were
found having education up to secondary level. 17.00 per cent including 4.80 per cent of males and 12.20 per cent of females have been found with educational attainment up to higher secondary. Respondents found to be graduates were 7.40 per cent (male 2.60 per cent and female 4.80 per cent). Besides, 10 (3.70 per cent) respondents were also found with post-graduate degrees and interestingly all of them were found to be females. Thus, it is clear from the above analysis that there is a balanced representation of people of various educational categories in rural electorate. A good number of respondents from both man and woman have been found to be well educated. It is also important to note that women have been found to be more in number in the category of higher education. Though a good number of rural people have been found to be well educated, yet the bulk was found with low educational attainment.

**Income**

Income is an important factor that determines the standard of living of the people and also their attitude and thinking towards life including politics. In this context, an assessment of the income of the respondents was imperative and accordingly the respondents were distributed in to six income groups viz. ‘no income’, ‘up to 5000’, ‘5001 to 10000’, ‘10001 to 15000’, ‘15001 to 20000’ and ‘above 20000’.

**Table: 3.05: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Monthly Income**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Income group</th>
<th>No income</th>
<th>Up to 5000</th>
<th>5001 to 10000</th>
<th>10001 to 15000</th>
<th>15001 to 20000</th>
<th>Above 20000</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>37.40%</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
<td>93</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34.40%</td>
<td>12.20%</td>
<td>2.30%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>94</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>34.80%</td>
<td>49.60%</td>
<td>13.00%</td>
<td>0.80%</td>
<td>1.40%</td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data reveal that out of 270 respondents 94 constituting 34.80 per cent had no income of their own and they were mostly women. About half of the respondents...
constituting 49.60 per cent were found to belong to the group having income up to Rs. 5000/- per month and among them the male constituted 37.40 per cent and female 12.20 per cent. Besides, the respondents belonging to the income groups ‘5001-10000’, ‘10001-15000’, ‘15001-20000’ and ‘above 20000’ were found to be 13.00 per cent, 0.80 per cent, 1.40 per cent and 0.40 per cent respectively. This shows that an overwhelming majority of rural voters were either having no income or income up to Rs. 5000 per month. A handful of respondents were found with middle or high income. This is perhaps the result of the scarcity of employment avenues in the rural society. Most of the rural poor do not have any fixed source of earning and have to earn livelihood through seasonal employment. This is one of the reasons for which rural people migrate to urban settlements.

**Occupation**

Due to diversification of rural economy the traditional pattern of rural occupation has undergone a change in present days. The rural occupation, now-a-days, is no more centered to agriculture only, rather rural people have got themselves acquainted with other occupations like business, government job and so on also. Here an attempt has been made to understand the occupational pattern of the rural people with the help of following data.

**Table: 3.06: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Occupation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Agricu-ture</td>
<td>Busine-ss</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.10 %</td>
<td>14.10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.40 %</td>
<td>1.10 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>21.50 %</td>
<td>15.20 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in the table above people belonging to various occupational groups with almost an equal proportion is present in the sample under study. 21.50 per cent of the respondents were found to have agriculture as their principal occupation and except 1 (0.40 per cent) all of them were found to be males in this category. Businessmen were found to constitute 15.20 per cent of rural electorates comprising 14.10 per cent males and only 1.10 per cent females. Wage earners were found to constitute 19.20 per cent of rural electorates comprising 10.30 per cent and 8.90 per cent of men and women respectively. Housewives were found to be 13.00 per cent, students 12.20 per cent, government employees 6.30 per cent, professionals 3.70 per cent and people engaged in the activity of house maids were 8.90 per cent in rural electorate. Other than the category of housemaids, there was representation of both males and females in all other professions. It was only in the profession of housemaids, all were found to be women. The above data reflect the slow, yet steady change in rural economy and its effect on occupational pattern in which rural people have been getting themselves familiar with diverse economic activities.

**Landholdings**

Possession of landholding also determines to some extent a person’s socio-economic condition in rural society. Thus, it is important to study the landholding status of the respondents so as to understand their socio-economic condition in the society. Towards this end, the respondents were grouped according to the size of their landholdings.

**Table: 3.07: Distribution of Respondents on the basis Landholding**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th>Landholding group</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No land</td>
<td>Up to 3</td>
<td>4 to 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>23.70%</td>
<td>11.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.30%</td>
<td>17.00%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.60%</td>
<td>40.70%</td>
<td>15.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It was found that out of a total of 270 respondents, 88 (32.60 per cent) had no landholding of their own and they were mostly women. 110 (40.70 per cent) respondents were found to have land up to 3 bighas. 43 (15.90 per cent) were found having landholdings from 4 to 6 bighas. The respondents having 7 to 10 bighas of land were 25 i.e., 9.30 per cent, while only 4 (1.50 per cent) were found to have 11 to 15 bighas of land. Analysis of data reveals that in terms of possession of landholdings, men are enjoying a dominant position compared to women. It may be because of the traditional practice of transferring of ownership of ancestral landholdings to son instead of daughter.

**Social involvement**

Participation of rural people in socio-political activities reflects to some extent their involvement and interest towards society and politics. Involvement of people in community activities also shows their consciousness towards electoral politics as it matters a lot in ensuring the development of a community. Thus, to assess the social-political consciousness and participation of the rural voters, their involvement with community organizations was studied.

**Table: 3.08: Gender wise cross-tabulation of Respondents on the basis of their Social Involvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Membership of Community Organization</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.40%</td>
<td>35.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>44.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>19.60%</td>
<td>80.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in the above table an overwhelming majority of 217 (80.40 per cent) respondents were not found to be involved with any community organization, while only 53 constituting 19.60 per cent were found to be involved with some or other community organizations. The lower involvement of the people in community organizations is partly because of the dearth of such organizations in rural areas as well as due to the lack of consciousness of the rural voters about the benefits of taking part in community organizations.

Political Affiliation

Affiliation to political parties also affects to a great extent the voting behaviour of the people. People usually work and caste vote in favour of the party to which they belong even without judging the acceptability of the candidates. Here an attempt has been made to identify the party affiliation of the rural voters.

Table: 3.09: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Party Affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Membership of Political Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>24 (8.90%)</td>
<td>111 (41.10%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2 (0.70%)</td>
<td>133 (49.30%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26 (9.60%)</td>
<td>244 (90.40%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of data reveals that an overwhelming majority of rural people was not affiliated to any political party and they constituted 244 (90.40 per cent), while only 26 (9.60 per cent) were found to be members of some or other political party. As the political affiliation of women generally remains low in comparison to men, out of 26 respondents who had been found affiliated, only 2 were found to be women. This shows the low level of participation of women in politics.
Preference towards Political Parties

Though a large number of respondents were found not affiliated to any political party, yet that did not negate their preference for a political party. One may share liking and support for a political party without being its member. On this assumption, an attempt has been made to understand the preference of rural voters for political parties.

Table: 3.10: Distribution of Respondents according to their Party Preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Preference for Political Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Congress</td>
<td>BJP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>28.10%</td>
<td>4.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.00%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.10%</td>
<td>8.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As displayed in the table above, a majority of 119 respondents (44.10 per cent) in the present study expressed their preference for the Congress Party. The preference shown to other political parties by the rural voters was 8.90 per cent for the BJP, 27.40 per cent for the AUDF and 19.60 per cent for the AGP. These figures show that the Congress draws majority support from the rural masses. This higher inclination of the rural voters towards Congress may be the result of the fact that the organizational strength of the party is wider than other political parties and also it is the party in power at the state for more than a decade.

II

The study on the pattern of leadership at the local level does not only concern those who contest and win elections but also those who vote for them. It is thus equally
important to study the voting behaviour of the people to understand why do they vote, how do they vote and what is the implication of it in local politics. It necessitates the importance to study as to how the voters make up their minds to vote for a particular candidate and also the challenges they have to face in the way of exercising franchise. Thus, an attempt has been made in this section to identify the sources of individual voting behavior so as to understand the direction in which rural politics and leadership is moving. With this aim in mind, a few questions were asked to a sample of 270 respondents pertaining to their voting behaviour in panchayat elections.

**Voting Tendency**

Exercise of franchise is not only an indicator of political consciousness of a citizen but also considered to be a noble duty of a good citizen. But as politics, in present context, is a struggle for power, the influence of money and muscle power dominate, to a great extent, the election scenario and that makes elections highly chaotic and violent sometime in recent days. As a result, people feel afraid to exercise their right to franchise freely and prefer to remain aloof from elections. This affects the voting tendency of the electorates which, in turn, affects the emergence of leadership in local politics. Unless people vote freely and fearlessly, a right leadership can not emerge. Thus, an attempt has been made to understand the general voting tendency of the rural electorates with the help of the questions relating to that.

**Table: 3.11: Distribution of Respondents according to their Voting Tendency**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Casting of Vote</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.80%</td>
<td>5.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.60%</td>
<td>17.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>209</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77.40%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In regard to the voting tendency of the respondents it was found that most of them had been regular in exercising their right to franchise. Out of 270 respondents, an overwhelming majority of 209 (77.40 per cent) were found who did caste vote in elections on a regular basis, while a total of 61 (22.60 per cent) were found to be irregular. Among the respondents who did caste vote regularly, 121 (44.80 per cent) were found to be males, while 88 (32.60 per cent) were found to be females.

What led people not to exercise their franchise? In response to this question, it was found that out of the total of 61 (22.60 per cent) respondents who did not caste their vote routinely, 7 (2.60 per cent) comprising 5 men and 2 women did not caste vote due to the lack of interest in politics and 11 (4.10 per cent) comprising 7 men and 4 women did not caste due to the absence of faith on our electoral system. 20 (7.40 per cent) comprising 2 (0.70 per cent) men and 18 (6.70 per cent) women did not caste vote due to the fear of violence in polling booths, while 23 (8.50 per cent) comprising only females cited some personal reasons like family problem, illness, absence from station and so on as the cause of their default from casting vote.

Table: 3.12: Distribution of Respondents according to the Reasons behind their Non-Participation in Electoral System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Reasons for Abstaining from Voting</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of interest</td>
<td>Lack of faith on electoral System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.90%</td>
<td>2.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.70%</td>
<td>1.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>4.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It may be noted in this context that the main reasons behind the non-participation of men in electoral system are lack of interest and absence of faith on electoral system,
while in case of women, the major constraints are fear of violence in polling booths and other personal problems.

On the other hand, a high percentage of respondents in the habit of exercising their right to franchise were found largely due to the result of the moral and material support that is provided in local elections. The limited area and population give the candidates the opportunity to persuade even the unwilling or physically incapable people to come and cast their votes.

Although 77.40 per cent of rural voters were found to be habitual voters who usually caste their vote in all elections, in case of panchayat election 2008, the number of voter was found to be still higher. 91.50 per cent of the respondents were found to have voted in this election. A single male respondent was not found to have defaulted from voting, while only a handful of 23 (8.50 per cent) female respondents were found to be defaulters.

Table: 3.13: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of their Voting in 2008 Election

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Participation in Panchayat Election 2008</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voted</td>
<td>Not Voted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.50%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>247</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>91.50%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above finding shows that people have taken serious interest in the Panchayat election 2008 and even habitual abstainers have voted in this election. This may be the result of the importance that the PRIs have gained in context of rural development after the introduction of the 73rd Amendment Act.
Participation in election or casting of vote does not often indicate one’s consciousness and interest in politics. It only reflects one’s partial concern in politics. As a result, most of the voters have been found to have least interest in other electoral activities like attending party meetings, campaigning, fund raising, motivating and so on. As party affiliation of the voters was found to be negligible, no remarkable number of respondents was found to have worked either for any candidate in Panchayat Election 2008 or for any political party in particular.

Table: 3.14: Distribution of Respondents according to their Political Activity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Participation in Party Meeting/ Motivation/ Fund Raising/ other Activity</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.80%</td>
<td>35.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.60%</td>
<td>47.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17.40%</td>
<td>82.60%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above figures show that out of 270 respondents, a handful of 47 (17.40 per cent) comprising 40 (14.80 per cent) males and 7 females (2.60 per cent) were found to have worked for some or other candidate in the last panchayat election, while the rest 223 (82.60 per cent) did not do any such activity relating to the election. It shows that the rural people who are not directly in electoral battle do not take much interest in active politics except casting of their vote. This is partly because of the hardship in the personal lives of ordinary rural people and partly due to the rural political atmosphere. Revengeful attitude among the rival candidates often retard common people from taking active interest in politics.

Factors that Influence Voters’ Choice

There are many factors that influence a voter to make up his mind to vote for a particular candidate in panchayat election. Rural people generally attach importance
on different factors like personal familiarity, caste, religion, age, party affiliation and so on according to their priority and relevance in local context.

**Table: 3.15: Distribution of Respondents according to their Preference for various Factors in Elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Caste identity</th>
<th>Religious identity</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Family status</th>
<th>Educational attainment</th>
<th>Party affiliation</th>
<th>Personal familiarity</th>
<th>Any other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>41 (15.20%)</td>
<td>72 (26.70%)</td>
<td>7 (5.90%)</td>
<td>16 (2.60%)</td>
<td>13 (4.80%)</td>
<td>45 (16.70%)</td>
<td>40 (14.80%)</td>
<td>2 (0.70%)</td>
<td>135 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19 (7.00%)</td>
<td>78 (28.90%)</td>
<td>11 (6.30%)</td>
<td>17 (4.10%)</td>
<td>11 (4.10%)</td>
<td>50 (18.50%)</td>
<td>52 (19.30%)</td>
<td>4 (1.50%)</td>
<td>135 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>60 (22.20%)</td>
<td>150 (55.60%)</td>
<td>18 (12.20%)</td>
<td>33 (6.70%)</td>
<td>24 (8.90%)</td>
<td>95 (35.20%)</td>
<td>92 (34.10%)</td>
<td>6 (2.20%)</td>
<td>270 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of above figures shows that a majority of 150 (55.60 per cent) rural voters have shown priority to religious identity of the candidate while voting. 95 (35.20 per cent) have given priority to party affiliation of the candidate, while 92 (34.10 per cent) have stressed on personal familiarity as a factor to determine their choice for the candidate at PRI. Other factors like caste identity, age, family status and educational attainment received priority of the electorates at the rate of 22.20 per cent, 6.70 per cent, 12.20 per cent and 8.90 per cent respectively.

It is important to note that the maximum bias on the part of the rural voters towards religious identity is due to the almost even polarization of the district into two religious groups, viz., Hinduism and Islam. Majority of the rural voters usually take note of the religious identity of the candidate while making choice. Other factors like caste, political affiliation and so on matter mostly when there is no religious dichotomy between the contesting candidates. In case of constituencies reserved for SC or ST, the same phenomenon is observed. The question of religion and caste disappears and other factors like party affiliation, personal familiarity and family status gain importance. It is also worth mentioning that the educational attainment
received very low priority from the rural voters. This may be because that the bulk of the rural voters themselves are too poorly educated to understand the importance of education in politics.

**Means of Winning Election**

As panchayat is a common rural forum, every man wants to have the candidates of their choice in it. Towards this end, they adopt different measures to get their candidates win in panchayat elections. Thus, to understand the actual game of politics, a gender wise cross tabulation is made to reflect the voters’ priority for various means of winning elections.

**Table: 3.16: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of their Preference for Means to Win**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Preference for Factors that Influence Victory in Elections</th>
<th>Resisting voters who are not likely to caste vote for your candidate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Peaceful voting</td>
<td>Heavy campaigning</td>
<td>Booth capturing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.40%</td>
<td>19.60%</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47.80%</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>78.20%</td>
<td>21.80%</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of data reveals that an overwhelming majority of 211 respondents (78.20 per cent) preferred to get their candidate elected by fair and peaceful means, while the remaining 59 respondents (21.80 per cent) have preferred heavy campaigning in favour of their candidates as means of winning election. Of the people who preferred win through just and peaceful means, 129 (47.80 per cent) were found to be women and 82 constituting 30.40 per cent were found to be men. As regards heavy campaigning, only 6 (2.20 per cent) women were found to have considered it
as a viable means of winning elections, while the number of men expressed faith on it was 53 i.e., 19.60 per cent. Though rigging, booth capturing and other malpractices are regular features of our electoral process, particularly in rural set up, surprisingly a single respondent was not found to have expressed reliance in any such means.

As maximum number of respondents was found to be in favour of adopting peaceful means for winning elections, it became important to know whether they had succeeded in getting their candidates win in 2008 election. This is also important to understand the actual game of politics in our society.

Table: 3.17: Distribution of Respondents who got their Candidate Win in Panchayat Election, 2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Voter’s Response to the Victory of Preferred Candidate</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.40%</td>
<td>29.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>35.20%</td>
<td>14.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.60%</td>
<td>44.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of data reveals that out of the total of 270 respondents, a majority of 55.60 per cent have got the candidate win for whom they did caste vote, while 44.40 per cent of respondents could not get their candidate win in the election of 2008.

The reason that was cited by the electorates who had voted for the defeated candidates was mainly the division of vote between candidates of same religion or caste.

Causes Responsible for Chaos in Elections

Violence and disorder have now become the order of the election process. In case of panchayat elections it becomes further acute due to the ignorance of the people, race
for power among the rural elites, party involvement, personal rivalry of the candidates and absence of goodwill on the part of the local administration.

**Table: 3.18: Distribution of Respondents’ Opinion regarding the Causes Responsible for Chaos in Elections**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Ignorance of the people</th>
<th>Blind power race among the rural elites</th>
<th>Involvement of political parties</th>
<th>Lack of administrative concern</th>
<th>Any other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.60%</td>
<td>29.60%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>25.90%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.60%</td>
<td>21.90%</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>32.60%</td>
<td>2.20%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>158</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.20%</td>
<td>51.50%</td>
<td>15.60%</td>
<td>58.50%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data reveal that majority of the respondents think that the absence of adequate concern on the part of the local administration and blind power race among the rural elites are the two most important factors responsible for chaos in panchayat elections. Absence of administrative goodwill and concern converts the race for power into a struggle for power in local arena. As shown in the above table, out of 270 respondents a majority of 158 (58.50 per cent) considers absence of concern on the part of the local administration as the main cause of chaos in local elections. 139 (51.50 per cent) respondents consider power race among the rural elites as the cause of chaos in elections. Besides, ignorance of the rural people, involvement of political parties and other reasons like personal rivalry of the candidates and intolerance to dissent have also been held responsible for disorder in election by the rural people at the rate of 25.20 per cent, 15.60 per cent and 8.50 per cent respectively.
Challenges in Voting

As the election at PRIs is generally chaotic and violent in nature, it becomes a challenge for the common voters to exercise their franchise. Due to the lack of full-fledged administrative support and management, most of the voters were found to have experienced some challenges in exercising their franchise in panchayat elections.

Table: 3.19: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Challenges they have Faced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faced</td>
<td>Not faced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.10%</td>
<td>8.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>43.00%</td>
<td>7.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>227</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84.10%</td>
<td>15.90%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data reveal that out of 270 respondents, an overwhelming majority of 227 (84.10 per cent) have faced some or other challenges in exercising their franchise, while only a handful of 43 (15.90 per cent) did not face any difficulty while exercising their right to franchise.

Nature of Challenge

Of the respondents who have faced challenges in exercising franchise, a majority of 61.10 per cent referred inadequate security measures as the major threat before the free exercise of franchise. The presence of four ballots at a time in panchayat election was also considered to be a challenge.
Table: 3.20: Distribution of Respondents’ Opinion about the Type of Challenges

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Inadequate security measures</th>
<th>Disclosure of choice of candidate</th>
<th>Threat from rival groups</th>
<th>Confusion over the presence of four ballots at a time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.00%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
<td>9.60%</td>
<td>23.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34.10%</td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
<td>22.60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>61.10%</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
<td>15.90%</td>
<td>46.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

46.30 per cent of the respondents have identified it as an obstacle towards making an appropriate choice. The presence of four ballots for the post of Gaon Panchayat member, Gaon Panchayat president, Anchalik Panchayat member and Zilla Parishad member with almost similar symbols confuses the rural masses as rural people generally caste their vote on the basis of symbol without taking note of the name of the candidate. Further, disclosure of one’s choice for the candidate also causes problem for the electorates. In the absence of proper security arrangement, powerful candidates or their representatives often compel people to vote in their presence. This infringes the privacy of the voter and his right to make free choice. 18.50 per cent of the respondents identified it as the most serious challenge before exercising franchise. Few constituting 15.90 per cent felt deterred in the exercise of their franchise due to the threat of the rival group who had apprehended to be rejected by them.

**Involvement of Political parties**

The involvement of political parties has added a new dimension to panchayat elections as many believe that the interference of political parties has deteriorated the rural political scenario. It encourages rigging and other malpractices and thus
pollutes the election atmosphere. May be this is the reason that the respondents in high number were found opposed to party involvement in panchayat elections.

Table: 3.21: Distribution of Respondents’ Opinion regarding the Involvement of Political Parties in Panchayat Elections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Involvement of Political Parties in Panchayat Elections</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>40.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>16.30%</td>
<td>33.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.60%</td>
<td>74.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table above, out of 270 respondents an overwhelming majority of 201 (74.40 per cent) did not favour the involvement of political parties, while only 69 constituting 25.60 per cent were found to be in favour of party involvement in panchayat elections. The importance of party involvement was even negated by those having affiliation to political parties in some cases as it snatches away the ease and simplicity of panchayat elections and transforms it to a complicated political game.

III

One of the objectives of this study is to capture the opinion of the voters about panchayat leaders which is important to understand their mutual relationship. Thus, in this section an attempt has been made to assess the opinion of the respondents about their leaders so as to understand their level of satisfaction towards their leaders and the reasons behind the same.

In response to the first question relating to the opinion of the respondents about their leaders it was found that out of 270, 208 (77.00 per cent) were dissatisfied, while only 62 constituting 23.00 per cent were found to be satisfied with their leaders.
Table: 3.22: Distribution of Respondents’ Opinion regarding their Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Satisfied</th>
<th>Dissatisfied</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>22 8.20%</td>
<td>113 41.80%</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40 14.80%</td>
<td>95 35.20%</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>62 23.00%</td>
<td>208 77.00%</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is notable in this context that the level of dissatisfaction of men is higher than women about panchayat leaders. As shown in the table above 113 men constituting 41.80 per cent expressed their dissatisfaction towards the panchayat leaders, while the number of women who expressed similar feeling was 95 i.e., 35.20 per cent. This may be because of the fact that men have to interact more with local leaders while women seldom have to do this.

What could be the reason for respondents’ satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their leaders? To find answer to this, few questions were asked to the respondents.

Table: 3.23: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of Personal Interaction with Leaders

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents having Personal Interaction</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>83 30.80%</td>
<td>52 19.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>76 28.10%</td>
<td>59 21.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>159 58.90%</td>
<td>111 41.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As shown in the table above a majority of 159 (58.90 per cent) respondents comprising almost an equal proportion of men and women were found to have approached panchayat leaders for the solution of some or other problem, while the rest 111 (41.10 per cent) did not ever approach them.

Table: 3.24: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of the Experiences of Personal Interaction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences of Personal Interaction</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acted promptly</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>7.80%</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not show any interest</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13.70%</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No result achieved</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9.30%</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>83</td>
<td>30.80%</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>28.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents who had approached the panchayat leaders gathered different experiences. 41 (15.20 per cent) respondents comprising 21 (7.80 per cent) men and 20 (7.40 per cent) women had found the leaders to be very responsive and acted promptly to solve their problem. 66 (24.40 per cent) comprising 37 (13.70 per cent) men and 29 (10.70 per cent) women had found them to be lethargic and disinterested about their problems. 52 (19.30 per cent) comprising 25 (9.30 per cent) men and 27 (10.00 per cent) women had found them to be ineffective as they got no result by approaching them. These people registered strong dissatisfaction against panchayat leaders.

As said earlier that out of 270 respondents 111 constituting 41.10 per cent have never approached any panchayat leader for any problem. Having interaction with them it was found that 20 (7.40 per cent) male
Chapter 3

Table: 3.25: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of the Reasons for not Approaching Leaders at PRI

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No faith on them</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.40%</td>
<td>.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They do not pay attention to common man's problem</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.80%</td>
<td>1.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Due to ideological differences</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.40%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any other</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6.70%</td>
<td>16.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
<td><strong>59</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>19.30%</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.90%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

respondents did not approach them due to the absence of faith on them, while no female has mentioned the same as reason for non-interacting the leaders at PRI. 18 (6.70 per cent) respondents comprising 13 (4.80 per cent) men and 5 (1.90 per cent) women did not ever approach the panchayat leaders as they believed that the leaders would not pay any attention to their problems. 11 (4.10 per cent) mostly women (3.70 per cent) did not approach the leaders due to ideological differences with them. The rest 62 (23.00 per cent) comprising 18 (6.70 per cent) males and 44 (16.30 per cent) females did not approach panchayat leaders due to other reasons like family constraints, personal hesitation or due the absence of any reason to do so. It is needless to say that the above findings reflect that the majority of the rural electorates are not satisfied with their leaders at PRIs.

This obviously arises the question that inspite of getting their own candidates elected at the PRIs why people are so unhappy with them. In search of answer to this question it was found that the rising expectations on the part of the rural people towards their leaders and the incompetence on the part of the latter to fulfill the same has created a communication gap between the two which eventually resulted
in deep dissatisfaction of the former for the latter. Out of this dissatisfaction people often deny the role of panchayat leaders in rural development.

Table: 3.26: Distribution of Respondents’ Opinion about the Role of Panchayat Leaders in Rural Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Respondents’ Opinion about the Role of Panchayat Leaders in Rural Development</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>41.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.20%</td>
<td>31.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26.70%</td>
<td>73.30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In response to the above question it was found that a majority of 198 (73.30 per cent) respondents do not think any importance of panchayat leaders in rural development and among them men constitute 41.50 per cent and women 31.80 per cent. Contrary to that, the rest 72 (26.70 per cent) comprising 8.50 per cent men and 18.20 per cent women think that panchayat leaders play an active role in rural development.

The respondents who believe in the importance and role of panchayat leaders in rural development have shown varied reasons in support of their view. Out of 72 (26.70 per cent) respondents 41 (15.20 per cent) believe so because they think that the panchayat leaders are familiar to the local situation and hence can contribute to the local development. 28 (10.40 per cent) respondents believe that the panchayat leaders can identify the local problems in consultation with the local people and, therefore, can play an effective role in rural development. 3 (1.10 per cent) believe that panchayat leaders play an active role in imparting political training and awareness among the rural people which prepares the rural mass to participate in the great venture of development.
Table: 3.27: Distribution of Respondents’ Opinion about the Importance of Panchayat Leaders in Rural Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance of Panchayat Leader’s Role in Rural Development</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do they Play an Important Role?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are familiar to the local problems</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.20%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They can identify local problems in consultation with the local people</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.20%</td>
<td>8.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are imparting political training and awareness among the rural masses</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.10%</td>
<td>.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.50%</td>
<td>18.20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why do not they Play any Role in Rural Development?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are not concerned with rural development rather engaged in their personal development</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.90%</td>
<td>14.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the decision-making, they are dictated by the political leaders at the top</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.10%</td>
<td>11.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are ignorant and not aware of their rights and responsibilities</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.50%</td>
<td>6.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>41.50%</td>
<td>31.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The respondents who had denied the role of panchayat leaders in rural development also pointed out various reasons in support of their view. Of the total of 198 (73.30 per cent) respondents, an overwhelming majority of 109 (40.30 per cent) have denied the role of panchayat leaders as they believe that panchayat leaders are not concerned with rural development rather engaged in their personal development. 41(15.20 per cent) criticized the role panchayat leaders on the ground of their inability to take sound decisions. According to them, their decision is not independent and influenced by the leaders at the higher level. 48 (17.80 per cent) denied the role of panchayat leaders in rural development as they are ignorant to
understand the intricacies of governance and do not even understand their own rights and responsibilities towards their office.

The above analysis shows that the bulk of the rural people are not happy with the performance of the panchayat leaders and do not recognize their role in rural development. Yet people in increasing number wish to join local leadership. The increase in financial grants to the panchayats has further accelerated the process. Thus, the opinion of the electorates was sought to understand the cause behind rush in panchayat leadership.

**Table: 3.28: Distribution of Respondents’ Opinion regarding the Factors that Encourage People to Join Politics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Factors that Encourage People to Join Local Politics</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal ambition</td>
<td>Craving for power</td>
<td>Social commitment</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20.40%</td>
<td>26.60%</td>
<td>3.00%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>135</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31.50%</td>
<td>14.10%</td>
<td>4.40%</td>
<td>50.00%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>270</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51.90%</td>
<td>40.70%</td>
<td>7.40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in the table above, a majority of 140 (51.90 per cent) respondents said that personal ambition led people to join local politics. 110 (40.70 per cent) mentioned craving for power as the factor instrumental behind joining local politics. It is interesting to note that only 20 (7.40 per cent) considered social commitment as an important factor to join politics at the local level.

Panchayat is not meant for the leaders only. People can also take part in the same through Gram Sabha. It is a common forum where issues of local importance are supposed to be discussed and decided by the people. Thus, the attendance of rural masses in Gram Sabha meetings is very essential to realize the spirit of
decentralization of power in our democracy. But unfortunately a single respondent in the present study was not found to have attended the Gram Sabha meetings in last one year. The reasons cited by them are varied.

Table: 3.29: Distribution of Respondents on the basis of their Opinion regarding Non-participation in Gram Sabha meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Cause of Absence from Gram Sabha Meeting</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of information</td>
<td>No meeting convened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.30%</td>
<td>20.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.00%</td>
<td>20.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>56.30%</td>
<td>40.70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data reveal that a majority of 150 respondents constituting 56.30 per cent could not attend Gram Sabha meetings due to the lack of information about it, while 110 (40.70 per cent) could not attend as meeting was not convened. 8 (3.00 per cent) respondents defaulted due to other reasons like personal indifference, fear of chaos and inability to understand the proceedings of the meetings.

It is clear from the above discussion that there are several factors that influence the voting behaviour of the rural people according to their relevance in the given scenario. Analysis of data relating to the socio-economic profile of the respondents reveal that the entire rural electorate is divided into two major religious groups viz. Hinduism and Islam at the rate of 52.20 per cent and 47.80 per cent respectively. This influences the choice of the voters in shaping leadership at the PRI. So far as the caste composition of the electorates was concerned, a majority of 54.80 per cent of the respondents were found to belong to the general category, while the remaining 45.20 per cent belonged to SC, ST and OBC at the rate of 13.00 per cent, 0.70 per cent and 31.50 per cent respectively. It is important to note in this context that out of 148 (54.80 per cent) respondents of general category a majority of 129 were Muslims, while only 19 were found to be Hindus. This is because there is no
notable caste division in Muslim community as like Hindus. This caste identity also plays a role in leadership formation particularly at the time religious factor is not dominant. So far as the economic condition of the electorate was concerned, it was found that the rural people were no more centered to a particular occupation. People belonging to different occupational groups like agriculturists, wage earners, businessmen and housewives were found to have been sharing rural economy in almost an equal proportion. Regarding the income of the electorates, it was found that an overwhelming majority of them were either having no income or income up to Rs.5000/- per month and the respondents having no income were mostly women. Regarding socio-political involvement of the electorates, it was found that most of them were neither associated with any community organization nor affiliated to any political party and have not taken an active part in the panchayat election 2008 either in favour of a candidate or of a party.

In response to the first research question, (What are the factors that influence peoples’ participation in panchayat election?) it was found that there are several factors which influence people’s participation in panchayat elections. A majority of 55.60 per cent of respondents were found to have given maximum priority to religion while voting for a candidate. Apart from this, priority was also given to other factors like political affiliation, caste and family status according to their relevance in the given scenario. But as the dynamics of caste is not quite dominant there, it is not given as much importance as religion. Interestingly, other factors like age, educational attainment and personal visit of the candidate to the electorate were not found to exert any significant influence on the voters.

As regards the second question, (Do people face any obstacle in the way of participation?) it was found that except a few, almost all the rural voters (84.10 per cent) comprising both males (41.10 per cent) and females (43.00 per cent) have faced some or other challenges in exercising their franchise in panchayat elections. The major problem that is faced by rural voters and as pointed out by 61.10 per cent of respondents is the lack of adequate security in elections. Unlike Assembly or Parliamentary elections, panchayat election concerns the interests of even the small
groups of the village and as such it is more sensitive and violent and thus requires extra security and alertness. But unfortunately, no extra security measure is provided by the administration keeping in view the sensitivity of panchayat elections. The polling booths are often left open without deploying a single police personnel. Under such circumstances, violence and disorder become inevitable in the polling booths and that hinders participation of the common people. Besides, people also feel confused about the presence of four ballots at a time in panchayat elections. 46.30 per cent of the respondents have identified it as a hindrance towards making an appropriate choice. The presence of four ballots for the post of G.P. member, G.P. president, A.P. member and Z.P. member with almost similar symbols confuses the rural masses as rural people generally caste their vote on the basis of symbol without taking note of the name of the candidate. Study also reveals that lack of cooperation on the part of the local administration and blind power race among too many contestants for a single post also lead to chaos in panchayat elections. Besides, the influence of political parties also plays a negative role as it encourages rigging and other malpractices in elections. Such deterrents have their impact in the pattern of leadership. As said earlier the formation of a progressive leadership demands a healthy atmosphere in which people can make their choice of leaders freely and fearlessly. It is needless to say that the right to franchise exercised under constraints also constrain the formation of leadership.

Regarding the third question, (Do people share good opinion about panchayat leaders?) the study reveals that most (77.00 per cent) of the rural voters do not share good opinion about leaders in PRIs. They consider them to be corrupt and indifferent to the well-being of the common men. 40.30 per cent of the electorates view that the panchayat leaders are not concerned with rural development, rather they are engaged in their personal wellbeing. Regarding the factors that encourage people to join politics, as many as, 51.90 per cent and 40.70 per cent of rural people have identified personal ambition and craving for power as important motivating factors that instigate people to join local politics.
To conclude, it may be said that despite the interplay of various socio-economic and political factors which influence voter’s choice of leaders, rural electorates are becoming conscious slowly to exert necessary pressure on rural leadership. The signs of such consciousness are reflected in voter’s opinion about leaders. The lack of commitment on the part of the leaders is being taken note of. This is a welcome development. This is what makes democracy balanced and successful.