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Socio-Economic and Political Backgrounds of the Panchayat Leaders: A Case Study of Chetam and Sigin-I Anchal Block, Upper Subansiri District Arunachal Pradesh

Gandhi Siga

*Research Scholar, Dept. of Political Science, Rajiv Gandhi University Rono Hills, Doimukh
Arunachal Pradesh*

Abstract

In Arunachal Pradesh Panchayat bodies have been the first modern political institutions. Democratic political process was started in the erstwhile NEFA (North East Frontier Agency) in 1969 with the inauguration of Panchayati Raj. Significantly, the modern Panchayati Raj was introduced in NEFA (Present Arunachal Pradesh) on the backdrop of existing traditional tribal councils. In substance, the indigenous isolated tribal communities were exposed to grassroots political process. A new framework of participatory development and village management was introduced which mobilized the tribes to a great extent. Thus, the panchayat institutions engineered the modern political process in Arunachal Pradesh. The introduction of modern political institutions in Arunachal Pradesh became the key instruments for the development of village life. The people got the opportunity to exercise their franchise for the first time in the panchayat elections. This very processes an eye opener for the village communities so far as the grassroots democratic political process is concerned. As a result, the people got themselves involved with the developmental process of the rural area. Panchayati Raj Institution has brought a many socio-political changes in the rural Arunachal Pradesh.

Keyword: *Panchayat Leaders, Chetam, Panchayati Raj, Arunachal Pradesh, NEFA*

Prior to the establishment of PRIs, the leadership in villages was determined by age, experience and from landed gentry. The power structure was very much in the hands of dominant and well-to-do classes. This process is undergoing a change with the influence of new, young and educated leaders elected by the popular vote. For any successful working of PRIs, the proper leadership is very essential and this depends largely on the quality of leadership available at the grass-roots level. It has been rightly observed that it is a sine-qua-non-of success in all human activities but in democratic system, particularly at the lower levels, it assumes greater significance and wider proportion.¹

Keeping in view all these factors, an attempt has made to study the socio-economic background, educational attainments and political association of the *panchayat* representatives was elicited which point out to the changing pattern of leadership at grass-roots level. The data available for analysis is the outcome of response of 30 members (panchayat leaders) of six villages from two *Anchal* blocks namely *Sera, Siga, Soki, Sippi, Sikar* and *Nima*. While studying the socio-economic background of the respondents, sex, age, education, occupation, marital status, income, political affiliations and exposure to newspaper or televisions are taken as important factors. In total, there are 516 *Gram* segments, 148 *Anchal* segments and 14 *Zilla* segments in Upper Subansiri district but in this study researcher has taken a study area for two panchayat segments which are *Chetam* and *Sigin-I Anchal* blocks. The details are shown in the table 1.1

Table: 1.1
Statement showing details number of Panchayat Members.

Name Blocks	Total seats of PRIs			Elected No. of Male/Female (Percentage %)					
	GPM	ASM	ZPM	GPM		ASM		ZPM	
				M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)	M (%)	F (%)
Taksing-limeking	21	07	01	07	14	04	03	01	00
Nacho	39	12	01	20	18	08	04	01	00
Siyum	53	13	01	30	23	09	04	01	00
Taliha	48	13	01	28	20	07	06	01	00
Payeng	35	10	01	18	17	08	02	01	00
Chetam	47	14	01	22	25	08	06	00	01
Giba	36	10	01	19	17	08	02	00	01
Daporijo segin-I	27	08	01	15	12	05	03	00	01
Daporijo segin-II	31	10	01	18	13	08	02	01	00
Gusar	37	10	01	21	16	07	03	01	00
Dumporijo	41	11	01	22	19	07	04	01	00
Baririjo	45	13	01	23	22	09	04	01	00
Chikom	30	09	01	19	11	06	03	00	01
Pate	25	08	01	15	10	04	04	00	01
Total=	516	148	14	284 (55)	232 (45)	99 (67)	49 (33)	09 (64)	05 (36)
Grand Total =	516	148	14	516 (100)		148 (100)		14 (100)	

Sources: - Results of Panchayati Raj Elections, 2008, State Election Commission, Itanagar

3.1 Sex

Table: 1.2
Distribution of Sex-wise break-up of panchayat leaders.

PRIs	M	F	M (%)	F (%)	Total
GPM	10	08	33.33%	26.66%	18
ASM	06	04	20%	13.33%	10
ZPM	00	02	0	6.66%	02
Grand Total	16	14	53.33%	46.66%	30 (100)

Sources: - Field Survey, 2012.

By tradition, leadership has been the monopoly of the males in rural India. It is only after the introduction of *Panchayati Raj* that leadership avenues have been opened in the rural areas. In Arunachal Pradesh, the Arunachal Pradesh *Panchayati Raj* Act of 1997 made a provision for reservation of not less than 1/3rd of the total numbers of the seats shall be reserved for women in all the *panchayat* bodies.² The Table.1.2 indicates the sex-wise distribution of *Panchayati Raj* representatives of 30 respondents. The male representatives constitute 53.33 per cent and female representatives constitute 46.66 per cent. It is clear from the table that there is little difference in representation of male and female. Significantly, there are two women *Zilla Parishad* Members.

Though there has been steady increase in the representation of women in *Panchayati Raj* bodies but it is learnt from the field experiences that maximum number of women representatives is still working on the advice of the male members of the family. Moreover, many women become the members of panchayat bodies because of statutory reservation provisions. However, during field study, it has been found that some of female members have contested the election successfully in

unreserved seats. Besides, one of women ZPMs has been consecutively elected for two terms. Though majority of members are yet male but the increasing of women members cannot be ignored, due to the fact that in tribal rural areas, women are still occupying traditional roles and only few cases have taken the role of leadership³. It is also been found during the field study that the majority of the women representatives are either wives of either political leaders or government officers.

3.2 Age

Table: 1.3

Age-wise distribution of Panchayat leaders.

Members	Below-30	30-45	45 and above	Total
GPM	08	06	04	18
ASM	02	03	05	10
ZPM	00	02	00	02
Total	10(33.33%)	09(36.66%)	11(30%)	30(100%)

Sources: - Field Survey, 2012.

Age is a very important factor, which has greater influence on affecting political participation. There is a general view that young and middle aged participates actively in institutions. Age groups matters much in deciding the behaviour of the individuals and groups⁴. Although it is difficult to measure the exact extent of the influence of age and yet its significance particularly in a developing country like India cannot be underscored⁵. Lipset maintains that different ages imply variations in life experiences and affect the political behaviour⁶. Traditionally, in tribal society, it was the privilege of the elders to occupy key positions in the power structure.⁷ The age factor determines the political consciousness of panchayat leaders.⁸ However, the introduction of elections and prescriptions of minimum age have provided an opportunity to younger generation to take active part in the day-to-day affairs of the system. In fact, the *panchayati Raj* system modernized the leadership pattern and became instrumental for the emergence of a new generation of young leaders.

The table 1.3 provides the breakup of age groups of the respondents. Age groups have been divided into three categories, viz. below 30 years, 30-45 years and 45-60 and above. The table reflects that there are more young leaders than the old ones. Out of the 18 *Gram Panchayat Members*, 08 members are below 30 years, 06 members are in the age groups of 30-45 years and only 04 members are in the age group of 45 and above. *Anchal Samitis* occupy key position in the *Panchayati Raj* System. Out of the 10 ASMs only 02 members are below the age group of 30 years, another 03 members are under the age group of 30-45 years, and 05 members are under the age group of 45 years and above. In *Zilla Parishad* only 02 members are in the age group of 30-45 years. It shows that the *Zilla Parishad Members* are from middle age group.

3.4 Marital Status

Table: 1.4

Distribution of marital status of the panchayat leaders.

Members	Married	Unmarried	Widow(er)	Grand Total
GPM	17	00	01	18
ASM	10	00	00	10
ZPM	02	00	00	02
Total	29(96.66%)	00	01(3.33%)	30(100%)

Sources: - Field Survey, 2012.

Another significant factor, which determines the leadership position in tribal society, is a marital status of the persons. Generally, it is considered that the married persons get better chance to become a leader as a tribal society gives due recognition to a married person. Marital status of a person is recognized as social dignity in the society.⁹ It is general belief of the society that a married person will play a leading role in the society, because a married person is considered as mature, responsible and dutiful in his role performance in the society. On the other hand, the unmarried person has played more or less little role in the society due to lack of social recognition and his status of immaturity as considered by the society. Therefore, the marital status is considered as a determining factor for performing the assigned role effectively in the public affairs.

Hence, the marital status influences to a significant extent on the rural leadership patterns. It is evident from the table 1.4 that all the *panchayat* leaders under study are married persons. It has also been found that many of the male panchayat leaders are having two-three wives because polygamy is common practices among some tribal communities.

3.5 Nature of Family

Table: 1.5
Distribution of Panchayat leaders by nature of family.

Members	Nature of family		Total
	Joint family (%)	Nuclear family (%)	
GPM	12	06	18
ASM	08	02	10
ZPM	02	00	02
Total	22 (73.33)	8 (26.66)	30 (100)

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

A family is the basic structural unit of any society. Society is defined as the social system made up of inter-related and inter-dependent institutions, such as family, education, work, religion and law. Gordon Marshall, a sociologist defined a family as: An intimate domestic group made up of people related to one another by bonds of blood, sexual mating or legal ties. It has been a very resilient social unit that has survived and adapted through time.¹⁰

The family is an important social institution, functioning positively for both the individual as well as the society. According to the sociologist George Peter Murdock, a family is the primary agent of socialization, and socializes new members into the culture of the society by teaching them common societal norms and values. The family controls society's members to maintain consensus and social order through the institution of marriage.¹¹

Thus, the family is an important variable, which is defined in terms of joint and nuclear families and the former by definition, is larger in size than the later. The table 1.5 shows the nature of family of the panchayat leaders. From the table it appears that majority of panchayat leaders, i.e., 73.33 per cent belong to joint family and only 26.66 per cent 8 belongs to nuclear family. An analysis of the table reveals that large families have the potential to capture leadership position in PRIs in rural tribal areas.

3.6 Educational Backgrounds

Table: 1.6
Distribution of leaders based on their educational qualification.

Members	Illiterate	Primary	Middle	Secondary	Hr.sec.	College & Above	Total
GPM	10	06	02	00	00	00	18
ASM	00	02	02	02	4	00	10
ZPM	00	02	00	00	00	00	02
Total	10(33.33)	10(33.33)	04(13.33)	02(6.66)	04(13.33)	00	30(100)

Sources: -Field Survey 2012.

Education is considered as another important indicator of leadership position in a political system. Education is necessary for accelerating the overall development of a nation and it facilitates the development of progressive attitudes in an individual's towards the social and economic problems.¹² A good education definitely makes him to understand things better. For local leaders, it is much more important, because it will make them to understand the objectives of *Panchayati Raj* and initiate to take part in its functioning. The education qualification has been an important factor in shaping the perception of the educated young leaders of the *Panchayati Raj* institutions. The educated leaders always articulate their roles perfectly than their uneducated counterparts. It is general feature in Arunachal Pradesh that the young generation leaders are mostly educated and the old generation leaders and mostly unlettered. For the effective functioning of new *Panchayati Raj* system, the leaders

should have a strong educational foundation and a dynamic quality of leadership. The triple responsibility, namely, legislative, executive and judicial needs a thorough understanding of the system and its operational devices to make the villages self-reliant without the assistance of the upper level governmental institutions.¹³

Educational background of the leaders certainly is going to play a major role in determining the functioning of the *Panchayat* bodies. However, in case of the present study we have found a different story. It is evident from the table 1.6 that the maximum numbers of members are illiterates and with less education. Of the 30 members 10 (33.33%) had no education and 10(33.3%) had primary education. It is surprising to note that all Zilla Parishad Members under study have studied upto primary level.

However, a welcoming feature is that even the educated persons have been attracted towards power positions in *Panchayati Raj* bodies. Almost all members of PRIs have fully agreed that the educated persons should contest for the PR bodies and there should be prescription of minimum education qualification to contest in the elections. From the data, it is clear that illiterate and primary educated representatives have a greater representation.

3.7 Exposure to Mass Media

Table: 1.7
Leaders' Exposure to Newspaper and Radio.

Members	News papers		Radio/TV	
	Regular Readers	Non-Readers	Exposed	Not-Exposed
GPM	2	16	6	12
ASM	6	4	8	2
ZPM	1	1	2	00
Total	9 (30)	21(70)	16 (53.33)	14 (46.66)
Grand total	30(100)		30(100)	

Sources: - Filed Survey, 2012.

Mass media is considered as strong agent of political socialization¹⁴. Mass media plays an important role in creating political awareness among people and ensures their participation in the democratic process. It also plays a significant role in bringing changes in the society. Socialization is a long-term process that every human being undergoes as he or she becomes a functioning member of society¹⁵. Socialization refers to the internalizing of all of the lessons from many sources concerning ways of behaving that are approved or expected by society, as individuals mature through every stage in the life cycle¹⁶. Mass media is one of the agents that politically socialize masses. Radio, Television and Newspaper are playing significant role in a politically socialized life. Mass media is a source of information, which not only affects daily activities of human life but also provides information about other events like development being took place on national and international forums. The main purpose of mass media is to ensure a well-informed citizenry for our social and political structure. The mass media provides information and programmes that can promote democracy.

In order to find out *panchayat* leaders' exposure to Mass media, questions were asked on exposure to Newspaper, Radio and TV. The table 1.7 shows that out of 30 members, only 9 are regular readers of newspapers, which constitute 30 per cent only and remaining 21 members, which constitutes 70 per cent are did not read any news paper. Those who do not read newspapers are because of their poor educational background and majority of them are settled in rural villages where newspaper is not available to them. On the other hand, about 53.33 per cent of members are exposed to Radio and TV. Therefore, it is evident that many of the rural leaders are still not exposure to the modern means of mass media. Even majority of them are not aware about the local newspapers.

3.8 Occupations

Table: 1.8

Distribution of leaders based on their occupation.

Members	Agriculture	Contractor	Private Business	Grand Total
GPM	14	04	00	18
ASM	02	03	05	10
ZPM	00	01	01	02
Total	16(53.33)	08(26.66)	06(20)	30(100)

Sources: - Field Survey, 2012.

Occupation is another important determining factor of rural leadership. It is through their occupation that the contestants come into touch with and influence the voters.¹⁷ Agriculture being the predominant occupation in rural areas, it is found that agriculturists are in a majority in power positions. It is evident from the table 1.8 that, of the total 30 members, 16(53.33%) are engaged in agriculture and they consider it as their main occupation, another 08(26.66%) group are engaged in contract works and remaining group 06(20%) percent have been engaged in doing private business. Some of them reported that they have been doing subsidiary jobs for additional income but their primary occupation remains agriculture.

3.9 Economic Status (Income)

Table: 1.9

Distribution of leaders based on their income (monthly).

PRIs	Below 10,000 (Thousands)	10,000-20,000 (Thousands)	20,000 and above (Thousands)	Grand Total
GPM	15	03		
ASM	07	02	01	
ZPM	00	00	02	
Total	22(73.33)	05(16.66)	3(10)	30(100)

Sources: - field Survey, 2012.

Undoubtedly, this is a most important determinant of rural leadership. The economic status of a person is always in consonance with his status in society.¹⁸ Income usually is considered as an index of social status and influence of a person, particularly in a developing country like India where social status and influence more often than not, go with the income of a person¹⁹. In fact, in rural areas, it is the landed gentry contest for the elections. Because, contesting for elections is an expensive proposition and the poor cannot afford it. Only the privileged has the opportunities and they can afford to go for it. It is observed that enquiring into the economic status of a person in village is always a hard task. Usually they are reluctant to reveal their income. While asking about their economic status some techniques has been used to reveal monthly income like business holding, agriculture production, total members of family other sources of income. It is evident from the table 1.9 that out of 30 members, an overwhelming majority of 22(73.33%) are below monthly income of Rs.10, 000, 05(16.66%) members are Rs. 10,000-20,000 monthly income group and 03(10%) members are Rs. 20,000 and above income group. It has been found that maximum of the lower income groups belong to *Gram Panchayat Members* and higher income categories are *ASMs* and *ZPMs*.

This clearly shows that economically well off sections of the society are represented in the higher positions of PRIs and they have a definite say in the affairs of the local level administration.

3.10 political Party Affiliation

Table: 1.10

Distribution of panchayat leaders on political party affiliation.

Members	INC	BJP	PPA	Others	IND	Total
GPM	08	02	00	02	06	
ASM	04	02	00	00	04	
ZPM	01	00	00	00	01	
TOTAL	13(43.33)	04(13.33)	00	02(6.66)	11(36.66)	30(100)

Sources: - Field survey, 2012.

Yet another important factor in enhancing the *panchayati Raj* bodies is the political party affiliation of the leaders. It is also a major area of discussion among the academics and activists whether the local bodies could be run on party basis. Association of different political parties affirms the knowledge of a person in understanding the political affairs of the system in which they participates directly or indirectly²⁰. The political parties play a crucial role in fulfilling the aspirations of the people through enlightening them with their manifestos to bring in various measures to improve the life conditions of the people at large. Their role is significant in a democratic country like ours either at the centre or at the state or at the local government level.

Therefore, it is inevitable that the political parties interfere in the working of PRIs and their participation is clearly manifest. With this as a background, a direct question was asked to know whether the *panchayat* members belonged to any political party. As per as party affiliation of the members is concerned, the data reveal that out of 30 members, 13(43.33%) members have affiliation with the Congress-I(Indian National Congress), 04(13.33%) with the BJP party, 02(6.66%) with the other political parties, and 11(36.66%) were independents or with no affiliation with any political party. During the discussion, they expressed that most of the schemes and programmes have been abruptly stopped due to change over of leadership in the power structure at the State level. Heavy amount of money has been wasted in this regard. From their personal experience, they emphasized that contesting elections on party basis in *panchayat* bodies would create more hurdles to the progress of the village than creating a congenial atmosphere.

Thus, the analysis of the data, based on the sample, suggests that congress enjoys highest percentages of leaders at all the three levels. It is also observed that many of the *panchayat* leaders are willing to join in ruling Congress-(I) party, saying that, "more funds will be provided if they join with ruling political party".

Conclusion: Some of the important findings of this study are that the educational backgrounds of the panchayat leaders are very poor. Maximum of the panchayat members are not educated. In this study, it has been found that around 33.33 per cent of the representatives are no education backgrounds and another 33.33 per cent, 13.33 per cent, 6.66 per cent and 13.33 per cent were literate upto primary, middle, secondary and Hr. secondary level. Very significantly there is no representatives were found from college & upper level. Therefore, it is observed that it would be difficult for them while exercising their responsibilities and official functionaries. The level of their economic status has found some differences. The majority of the *Gram Panchayat Members* and *Anchal Samiti Members* are poor economic background and some of the remaining ASM including all the ZPM are very sound in economic position. The study shows that around 73.33 per cent, which includes 15 *Gram Panchayat Members*, and 07 *Anchal Samiti Members* were below the monthly income of 50 thousand. It has been found that all the ZPM including some of the ASM under study were holding a large amount of properties like land, vehicles, commercial plots etc. Therefore, it is found that economically well off sections of the society have captured in the higher positioned of PRIs and they have a definite say in the affairs of the local level administration. Finding of my study also shows the political party affiliation of the panchayat representatives. As per as party affiliation of the members is concerned the majority of representatives have affiliated with Indian National Congress-I about 43.33 per cent. The remaining are shared by political parties like BJP 13.33 per cent, others 6.66 percent and in Independent 36.66 per cent. Therefore, it is cleared that the role of political parties in the grass root politics under study area is very vital and significant. A finding of the study also shows that majority of the panchayat representatives are married person about 96.66 per cent and majority of them are from joint family about 73.33 per cent. Very significantly, the study also revealed that approximately around 70 per cent of people's representatives are non-readers of any regional and national newspaper and again 46.66 per cent are non-exposure to Televisions. It is also found that majority of the people's representatives are being dominated by agriculture in occupation which comprised of 53.33 per cent.

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