



## Review Article

# SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PANCHAYAT LEADERS

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**Abstract:** A good deal of work in establishing closer linkage between research and extension has been done in the last few years. The result of painstaking efforts of research scientists have been carried to the farmers by an army of more than 70,000 village extension workers in the major states where professional agricultural extension system is functioning. The concept of leadership has undergone considerable change as research in this area of study progressed. Leadership was considered at one time to be a set of traits handed down chiefly through heredity from one person to another. In some societies the political leadership controls the economy; significant influence is exercised by them in the direction and rate in which changes take place in society. Secondary data in the form of published literature like journals, magazines, thesis, books etc were scanned to collect and review the available literature. The study showed that 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. Agriculture being the predominant occupation in rural areas, it is found that agriculturists are in a majority in power positions. The probable reason for annual incomes of panchayat leaders being on the upper side may be that, the leaders are generally elected from upper socio-economic strata of the society and also that contesting election even at panchayat levels entails considerable expenses which may be beyond the capacity of an ordinary rural person. The proposition that leaders in general belong to the upper socio-economic strata of the society also holds true when the size of land holding of panchayat leaders is analysed. Land holding is an important criterion which has contributed as a critical parameter in governing rural leadership. Janpad and jila panchayat leaders represents a larger constituency as compared to gram panchayat leaders. Comparatively more election expenditure is incurred by janpad and jila panchayat leaders owing to the wider area they represent and this could have been possible only if they belonged to upper socio-economic status category.

**Keywords:** Socio-Economic Characteristics, Panchayat Leaders

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## Introduction

Agricultural development programme however well planned and imaginative, cannot make an impact on rural life unless it is backed both by extension and research support. Research obviously cannot work in isolation, nor can extension, only together they form an effective team. A good deal of work in establishing closer linkage between research and extension has been done in the last few years. The result of painstaking efforts of research scientists have been carried to the farmers by an army of more than 70,000 village extension workers in the major states where professional agricultural extension system is functioning. Communication of technology is conceived as occurring through a network of relatively complex nature. The function of extension is to transfer and nurture this pool of knowledge within the rural system. Thus, extension embraces all those who contribute knowledge or transfer it to farmers. It is difficult for any country to provide enough number of extension workers to reach each and every family for its social welfare programme. It is rather more difficult for the developing countries where the resources are scarce. It is, therefore, not possible to have face to face contact with each and every individual living in the villages. This problem can be solved to some extent through the use of local leaders. The concept of leadership has undergone considerable change as research in this area of study progressed. Leadership was considered at one time to be a set of traits handed down chiefly through heredity from one person to another. Thus, positions of leadership were restricted to individuals belonging to certain strata of society commonly deemed worthy and suitable as leaders – leadership usually being determined by birth in the right family.

It was discovered, however, as social and economic barriers disappeared, that leaders began to emerge from hitherto "restricted" strata of society and that leadership was not the monopoly of a few favoured familial groups or social strata. The type of political leadership and individuals in power influences the rate and direction of change. The assessment of those who wield power in respect of the existing social situation, technological and non-technological changes and opportunities for such development and change, is of considerably more significance than the assessment of those who do not have power in society. In some societies the political leadership controls the economy; significant influence is exercised by them in the direction and rate in which changes take place in society [1-9].

## Material and Methods

Secondary data in the form of published literature like journals, magazines, thesis, books etc were scanned to collect and review the available literature on socio economic characteristics of panchayat leaders which is systematically presented. The socio-economic characteristics of panchayat leaders reviewed were occupation, annual income, size of land holding and socio economic status.

## Results and discussion

### Occupation

Rahudkar (1960) [10] found that the main occupation of the local leaders was farming. Patil (1963) [11] reported that farming was the main occupation of most of the rural leaders.

Salunkhe (1972) [12] concluded that majority of the panchayat members had agriculture as their main occupation. Kamble (1975) [13] observed that out of 120 formal leaders, 90 (75.00%) leaders had farming + dairy as their present occupation. Majority of the leaders were from the cultivating class. Yadav (1988) [14] indicated that out of total 86 panchayat members under study 45.35 percent had agriculture as their main occupation, 33.72 percent of them had agriculture + dairy as their occupation and only 20.93 percent had agriculture + others as their occupation. Khare (1995) [15] inferred that majority of the sarpanches had agriculture as their principal occupation. Ghosh (1996) [16] found that 19.77 percent of the gram panchayat members were agricultural labourers, 3.79 percent were bargadars and 18.99 percent were cultivators. Mondal and Ray (1996) [17] found that the gram panchayat pradhans were predominantly in service and about 58 percent belonged to this category. Most of the service holders were school teachers. 32 percent of the pradhans depended on farming. About 5 percent of the pradhans had no occupation and were dependent on others. Choudhary (1998) [18] reported that 51.19 percent of the women panchayat leaders had agriculture as their principal occupation. Shrivastava (1999) [19] concluded that 38.00 percent of the grass root level panchayat leaders had agriculture + animal husbandry as their main occupation, 22.00 percent of them were agricultural labourers, 18.66 percent of them had farming alone as their occupation, 10.00 percent of them had agriculture + business as their occupation, 7.34 percent of them had agriculture + service as their occupation and only 4.00 percent of them were doing business exclusively. On the other hand the principal occupations of upper level panchayat leaders were as follows : farming alone (31.82%), business alone (11.36%), agriculture labour (6.82%), agriculture + animal husbandry (34.09%), agriculture + business (6.82%) and agriculture + service (9.09%). Shrivastava (2003) [20] revealed that 41.74 percent of the village panchayat leaders were involved in agriculture and allied activities for their occupation, 38.83 percent of them were labourers, 7.76 percent of them were in business and 5.82 percent each were in service and other occupations for their livelihood. Rathi (2004) [21] noted that 38.13 percent of the gram panchayat members were involved in farming exclusively followed by business (18.12%), farming + business (16.88%), farming + service (15.00%) and labour (11.87%) for their occupation. Thakur (2006) [22] inferred that none of the women leaders of panchayati raj institutions had labour, farming and business as their exclusive occupations. However, 65.00 percent of them had farming + labour as their occupation, 23.00 percent had farming + service, where as 12.00 percent of them had farming + business as their occupation. Shrivastava (2011) [23] concluded that about three fifth of the gram panchayat and janpad and jila panchayat leaders each had farming as their main occupation. One of the important characteristics of rural population is that they are predominantly dependent on agriculture as their source of living which is also reflected in the sample drawn for the present study. Gandhi Siga (2015) [24] reported in his study that 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. 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 study 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. Rao (2018) [25] reported that 50% of dalit women panchayat heads were daily wage workers. The state bars panchayat presidents from holding a paid employment or any job that receives government funding, such as employment under MGNREGA, to avoid conflict of interest. But consider what this means to women whose families survive on daily earnings. In our survey of 32 panchayats headed by women in six districts of Tamil Nadu, we found that dalit and adivasi women came with almost no assets and meagre family incomes.

### Annual Income

Patil (1963) found that the annual income of rural leaders was above average *i.e.* Rs. 3501. Patil (1970) [26] reported that approximately equal percent *i.e.* 52 and 48 percent leaders belonged to low income group (up to Rs. 3500) and high

income group (Rs. 3501 and above) respectively. Patil (1974) [27] concluded that most of the panchayat leaders have annual income in the range of Rs. 2000-5000. Kamble (1975) observed that majority of the leaders (59.16%) had their average annual income up to Rs. 15000 while 40.84 percent of the leaders have their average annual income of above Rs. 15000. Dixit (1987) [28] revealed that majority of the respondents have income of less than Rs. 5000 per year. Yadav (1988) indicated that 67.44 percent panchayat members had annual income of above Rs. 10000 while 32.56 percent had income of Rs. 5000-10000. Khare (1995) reported that highest percentage of sarpanches were from medium level of income category followed by high and low income category. Kurariya (1996) [29] revealed that majority (54.17%) of the elected representatives belonged to middle income group (Rs. 6000-18000). Choudhary (1998) found that 64.28 percent women panchayat leaders belonged to low income group (up to Rs. 30000) with respect to their annual income. Padmavathi *et al* (1998) [30] reported that majority of the respondents had medium level of farm income. Shrivastava (1999) observed that 37.33 percent of the grass root level panchayat leaders had annual income of Rs. 10001 to 25000, 34.67 percent of them had annual income up to Rs. 10000, 24.67 percent had annual income in the range of Rs. 25001-100000 whereas only 3.33 percent of them had annual income of above Rs. 100000. On the other hand half of the upper level panchayat leaders had annual income in the range of Rs. 10001-25000 and 11.38 percent of them had annual income of above Rs. 100000. Sangode (2000) [31] Inferred that majority of the tribal leaders (58.83%) had medium annual income (Rs. 25001-40000) followed by 18.82 percent of them who had very high annual income (above Rs. 50000), 14.11 percent of them had high annual income in the range of Rs. 40001-50000 whereas only 8.24 percent of them belonged to low income group (up to Rs. 20000). Rathi (2004) revealed that less than half (45.00%) of the respondents had annual income up to Rs. 20000, followed by 40.00 percent of the gram panchayat members who had annual income in the range of Rs. 20001-40000, 13.12 percent of the respondents had annual income in the range of Rs. 40001-60000 and a meagre 1.88 percent gram panchayat members had annual income of above Rs. 60000. Thakur (2006) noted that 36.00 percent women leaders of the panchayati raj institutions had annual income of Rs. 20001-40000, followed by an equal percent (25%) of them who had annual income of Rs. 40001-60000 and above Rs. 80000 respectively, 14.00 percent of them had annual income in the range of Rs. 60001-80000 and none of them had annual income up to Rs. 20000. Bhupta (2010) [32] reported that the per capita income of village Hivrebazhar has shot up from Rs. 832 in 1982 to Rs. 40000 in 2010 under the leadership of its sarpanch Popatrao Pawar. Lack of ground water and the failure of successive monsoons made it impossible to grow anything other than Bajra. As agricultural incomes fell, villagers migrated, unemployment rose, crime became common place and illicit liquor making flourished. When Pawar was elected as a sarpanch in 1989 his family wanted him to stay in the city. But he felt that he needed to make his village better. Between the devil of unemployment and the deep sea of inadequate water supply the 45 years old Pawar decided to tackle the later first. Utilising the Employment Guarantee Scheme, the predecessor of MGNREGA, the villagers and the forest department began constructing trenches along forest areas and planted 4.5 lack trees. As the forest cover increased water table rose automatically and the village got the first National Water Award for community lead water conservation from the Union Ministry of Water Resources. Overtime they also build check dams, gully plugs and bunds. The next step was to manage crops and water together. Water guzzling crops like banana, sugarcane and rice were banned while cattle were not allowed to graze in forest areas. Tree felling was also banned. The panchayat allowed crops that did well with drip irrigation or those that were rain fed. Now they also grow vegetables and cash crops like onion and ground nut. Shrivastava (2011) conclusively indicated that majority of the gram panchayat leaders belonged to low income group whereas majority of the janpad and jila panchayat leaders belonged to middle income group. With respect to annual income it can be said that janpad and jila panchayat leaders were in better position in comparison to the village panchayat leaders which is also indicated from their average annual income. In the case of gram panchayat leaders the average annual income was Rs. 56,800/- much below that of Rs. 1,23,570/- the average annual income earned by janpad and jila panchayat leaders.

The higher values of standard deviation of annual income in both the case of gram panchayat and jila and janpad panchayat leaders indicates that their annual incomes were widely dispersed from mean *i.e.* the difference between maximum annual income and minimum annual income from average annual income is very large. The probable reason for annual incomes of panchayat leaders being on the upper side may be that, the leaders are generally elected from upper socio-economic strata of the society and also that contesting election even at panchayat levels entails considerable expenses which may be beyond the capacity of an ordinary rural person. Rao (2018) reported that in Tamil Nadu, panchayat presidents—an elected full-time constitutional role—are not paid any salaries. The only other states in India that do not pay a salary to its rural elected representatives are Maharashtra, Gujarat and Odisha. Panchayat presidents in Tamil Nadu are paid an honorarium of Rs 1,000 to cover travel expenses and an additional Rs 100 for attending a meeting twice a month. Compare this to the earnings of a member of the state's legislative assembly (MLA)—after a recent 100% hike, he/she receives a basic monthly salary of Rs 1.05 lakh, apart from the several perks and pensions. The last time Tamil Nadu revised its honorarium for panchayat officials was in 2012, when it was hiked from Rs 300 to Rs 1,000. And the meeting fee was raised from Rs 50 to Rs 100.

### Size of Land Holding

Rahudkar (1960) found that 98.00 percent leaders were land owners and 40 percent of them owned more than 50 acres of land. Choukidar (1964) [33] reported that out of the total leaders studied 89.15 percent were possessing the land whereas 10.85 percent of them were found to be landless. Salunkhe (1972) recorded that half of the panchayat members were possessing land holding up to 10 acres. Patil (1974) observed that 42.53 percent panchayat leaders were having up to 10 acres of operational land holdings and 23.40 percent of them were having more than 21 acres of land. Suryavanshi (1974) [34] noted that nearly 50 percent of the leaders possessed land up to 3 hectares while 7.90 percent of the leaders were landless. Kamble (1975) reported that about 50 percent of the formal leaders possessed above 2 hectares of land, 35.00 percent of them possessed up to 2 hectares of land and only 14.17 percent of them were landless. Walunj (1977) [35] found that 45.00 percent of the respondents had operational land holding of up to 3 hectares. Patel (1983) [36] reported that majority of the leaders (58.08%) possessed land up to 2 hectares while out of 105 leaders 16 leaders were landless. Dixit (1987) concluded that 51 percent of the respondents were from medium land holding class *i.e.* 5-7.5 hectares. Yadav (1988) observed that 45.35 percent gram panchayat members belonged to big (above 10 acres) category with respect to their size of land holding. Khare (1995) revealed that the majority of sarpanches were big farmers followed by landless and small farmers with regards to the size of land holding. Kurariya (1996) indicated that 38.77 percent elected village representatives in panchayati raj system belonged to small (1-2 hectare) category according to their size of land holding while 36.67 percent of them belonged to marginal (up to 1 hectare) category. Mondal and Ray (1996) observed that 18.00 percent of gram panchayat pradhans had no land and 20.00 percent had less than 1 acre land, 37.00 percent of the pradhans had land holding between 1 to 5 acres and 25.00 percent had about 5 acres land. None of the pradhans had big land holdings. Chowdhary (1998) found that majority of women panchayat leaders belonged to big farmer category followed by landless, marginal and small farmer category with the last two categories having equal number of respondents. Shrivastava (1999) reported that 38.67 percent of the grass root level panchayat leaders had up to 1 hectare land, 24.00 percent of them were landless, 20.00 percent of them had 1.1-2.0 hectare land, 12.66 percent had above 3 hectare land and only 04.67 percent of them had 2.1 to 3 hectare land. On the other hand 29.55 percent of the upper level panchayat leaders had up to 1 hectare land, 20.45, 18.19, 15.90 and 15.90 percent of them had 1.1-2.0 hectare, above 3 hectare, 2.1-3.0 hectare and no land respectively. Shrivastava (2003) revealed that majority of the village panchayat leaders (54.36%) were landless, 18.44 percent of them had above 2 hectare land, 17.47 percent had below 1 hectare land and 09.73 percent of them had 1-2 hectare land. Rath (2004) inferred that 32.50 percent of the gram panchayat member had medium sized land holding followed by 28.75, 20.00 and 18.75 percent of them who had small,

marginal and large sized land holdings respectively. Thakur (2006) revealed that 36.00 percent of the women leaders of panchayati raj institutions had small sized land holding, followed by 32.00 percent, 18.00 and 14.00 percent of them who had medium, large and marginal sized land holdings respectively. Shrivastava (2011) conclusively stated that majority of the janpad and jila panchayat leaders had big sized land holding while a slightly above one fourth gram panchayat leaders had big size land holding. The proposition that leaders in general belong to the upper socio economic strata of the society also holds true when the size of land holding of panchayat leaders is analysed. Land holding is an important criteria which has contributed as a critical parameter in governing rural leadership. The opinion leaders in villages traditionally had large size of land holdings and were early adopters of agricultural innovations. It is these leaders who played a key role in dissemination of farm information. Rao (2018) found that six of the 12 dalit women we interviewed were daily wage workers with no assets at all. The other six were slightly better off, owned between 1-5 acres of land. Two of the three adivasi women lived in a one-room tenement, and subsisted on either daily wage work or collecting forest produce. In contrast, women from the dominant castes such as Thevars, Gounders and Vanniyars had family ownership of land ranging from 10 acres to 30 acres.

### Socio Economic Status

Fliegel *et al* (1968) [37] concluded that leaders whose impact was felt most on village level adoption, generally came from the higher socio-economic status. Thombre (1976) [38] found that majority of the panchayat members (75%) were represented by the people of middle socio-economic status, 19.00 percent were of high socio-economic status and only 6.00 percent were of lower socio-economic status. Walunj (1977) found that gram panchayat members with higher socio-economic status were more effective in village development activities. Intodia and Shaktawat (1980) [39] stated that out of the total 42 respondents, 27 were of medium socio-economic status, 6 and 9 were of high and low socio-economic status respectively. Muthaiah (1981) [40] observed that both effective and less effective farm leaders possessed higher socio-economic status than their followers. Singh and Israel (1989) [41] concluded that contact farmers had higher socio-economic status than non-contact farmers. Sinha *et al* (1989) [42] revealed that majority of opinion leaders in both type of villages (progressive and non-progressive villages) was having medium socio-economic status. Sundarambal (1990) [43] found that informal leaders belonged to medium socio-economic status. Jeevan (1992) [44] reported that leaders had higher socio-economic status than non leaders. Mondal and Ray (1996) concluded that about 60 percent of the gram panchayat pradhans belonged to middle and lower middle class and about 40 percent of them belonged to upper middle and upper class. Garje (1997) [45] observed that majority of the respondents (59.38%) were having medium level socio-economic status followed by 26.56 percent of the respondents who had low socio-economic status and only 14.60 percent of them had high socio-economic status. Shrivastava (1999) showed that majority (70.67%) of the grass root level panchayat leaders were from medium socio-economic status, 15.33 percent of them were from low socio-economic status and 14.00 percent were from high socio-economic status. Whereas 68.18 percent of the upper level panchayat leaders were from medium socio-economic status followed by 18.18 and 13.64 percent of them who were from high and low socio-economic status respectively. Shirke and Sawant (2001) [46] revealed that maximum number of leaders (54.00%) faced the problems towards agricultural development activities due to low socio-economic status. Rath (2004) inferred that exactly half of the gram panchayat members were from medium socio-economic status followed by 41.25 percent of them who belonged to low socio-economic status and only 8.75 percent of them were from high socio-economic status. Thakur (2006) reported that majority (51.00%) of the village panchayat leaders were from medium socio-economic status, 30.00 percent of them were from low socio-economic status and 19.00 percent were from high socio-economic status. Shrivastava (2011) concluded that majority of the gram panchayat as well as janpad and jila panchayat leaders belonged to medium socio economic status. The mean scores of socio economic status of gram panchayat leaders was 68 and that of janpad and jila panchayat leaders was 121.33.



It can be inferred that janpad and jila panchayat leaders had higher socio economic status as compared to gram panchayat leaders. Janpad and jila panchayat leaders represents a larger constituency as compared to gram panchayat leaders. Comparatively more election expenditure is incurred by janpad and jila panchayat leaders owing to the wider area they represent and this could have been possible only if they belonged to upper socio economic status category.

**Application of research:** In rural society people from higher socio economic status are easily recognised, command respect and have their influence on the people. This gives them better chance of getting elected in comparison to people of low socio economic status.

**Research Category:** Agri Business Management

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