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RESEARCH ARTICLE

DYNAMICS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF RURAL LEADERSHIP: A CASE STUDY OF TWO BLOCKS IN DISTRICT SHIMLA OF HIMACHAL PRADESH

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Abstract

The present chapter is an enquiry into the socio-economic background of rural leadership in the post-73rd Amendment Act, 1992, period. In this paper, the efforts have been made to examine the ground reality about emerging new leadership and its patterns. The major determinants of leadership and their socio-economic background i.e. age, caste, occupation, education, income level, social status, gender and party politics etc., have been critically analysed. The study area of present study has been selected in two blocks of District Shimla in Himachal Himalaya. The people of the whole Himalayan region shares common socio-cultural, historical, geographical, economic and political constraints and opportunities. Thus, the grassroots leaderships are shaped by similar kind of determinants of leadership. The study reveals that the new leadership is more educated, quite young and come from middle poor class of the society. At the same time, 73rd Amendment Act has provided better opportunities to women, Scheduled caste and Scheduled Tribe leadership to ensure their participation in the rural power structure. Study further explores that the dominance of caste, male, class and feudalistic nature of society etc., is still constraint in the development of PRIs leadership and its peripheral development.

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Introduction:-

The Leadership plays a significant role in promoting political development and democratic growth and has a pivotal role in the working of Panchayati Raj Institutions.¹ Leadership is the decision making body in the present society. Leader is a person who, by virtue of magnetism of his personality, social standards or economic affluence, is able to command respect from or dominate the evils of group of persons so as to be able to mould and direct energies into channel of his choice.² The effective functioning of PRIs depends mainly on the quality of leadership available at the grassroots level.³ India has attempted the development of local schemes within the broad framework of national policies so that the village people can be involved and brought into the main stream of national policies. It is possible only through local level leaders.⁴

Panchayati Raj System and development planning created a new class of leaders everywhere.⁵ The new leadership emerging in the countryside as a political consequence of Panchayat Raj is called "neo-traditional," by many scholars in this field. The Panchayati Raj bodies today represent the cumulative results of a process of change of the society, whose aspiration levels they embody. The interest of these new leaders in village affairs is not causal nor do they quote caste, wealth and status to win elections.⁶ In the absence of such leadership, nothing substantial can be achieved. From another angle, the very success of PRIs depends largely only on the quality of leadership and its

functioning in the PRIs. Thus, the effective functioning of PRIs depends mainly on the quality of leadership available at the grassroots level.⁷ The passage of 73rd constitutional amendment which was implemented on 24th April, 1993, ushered in a new era in the growth of grassroots institutions. The government of Himachal Pradesh also made an amendment in the existing panchayati raj act in 1994, and incorporated all those clauses which were given in the amendment.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts (1993) are a revolutionary landmark in the history of women's participation in politics of India. These amendment Acts have provided 33 percent reservation of seats (50 per cent) for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and Municipalities. This has laid down a strong foundation for women's participation in decision-making at the grass-roots level.⁸ There is no gainsaying the fact that in Himachal Pradesh, as in a number of other states in the country, the growth of Panchayati Raj Institutions, to brought awareness among the rural masses, motivated them to involve themselves in decision-making and has, thus, succeeded in discovering their dormant resources and skills.

The presents study is focussed upon comparative study of Panchayat elections and rural leadership. Therefore, the focus in this paper is on socio-economic background of rural leadership in the post-73rd Amendment Act period. The paper examines the impact of socio-cultural, economic and political environment on the leadership and functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions. At the same time, the determinants of rural leadership have been critically examined. The solution of the problem is confined to random and purposive basis in order to find out the results both primary and secondary sources of the data has been taken. The present study is an empirical study which consists of both primary as well as secondary data. The study was conducted mainly among the elected and non-elected members in 10 panchayats of two blocks i.e. Rampur Block and Rohru Block the district Shimla. The sample of 335 elected and non-elected respondents has been used partly for the purpose of data tabulation and partly for knowing general patterns of panchayat elections and rural leadership.

Determinants of Rural Leadership:

Panchayati Raj politics has come to be identified with village politics and consequently with rural power structure. The study of rural leadership will be incomplete if the background of the elected leaders is not taken into consideration. In the present study, an attempt has been made to know the socio-economic background as well as demographic characteristics of the rural leadership. To determine the socio-economic status of the leadership; age, gender, caste, education, type of family, income, occupation and party affiliation etc., have been taken into account to find out whether these factors have any significant bearing in determining the patterns of leaderships. The following determinants of rural leadership have been presented as under:

Age:

Age is a significant variable in the study of rural leadership because in the Indian villages community leadership has been the monopoly of the old person who, in the past, dominated rural life in all its aspects.⁹ Age is one of the most important factors that determine rural leadership. It was believed that the aged people dominate the PRIs, in a traditional society like ours. Age is associated with experience and wisdom. It has acquired a traditional importance in society and is considered to be an important factor in the Indian traditional leadership.¹⁰ Older members may be reluctant to adopt new methods of production and hence, are likely to continue with the traditional mode of production, especially in the rural society. Whereas the younger generation is likely to accept new challenges and may be more willing to try new methods of production or they are likely to yield more production.¹¹

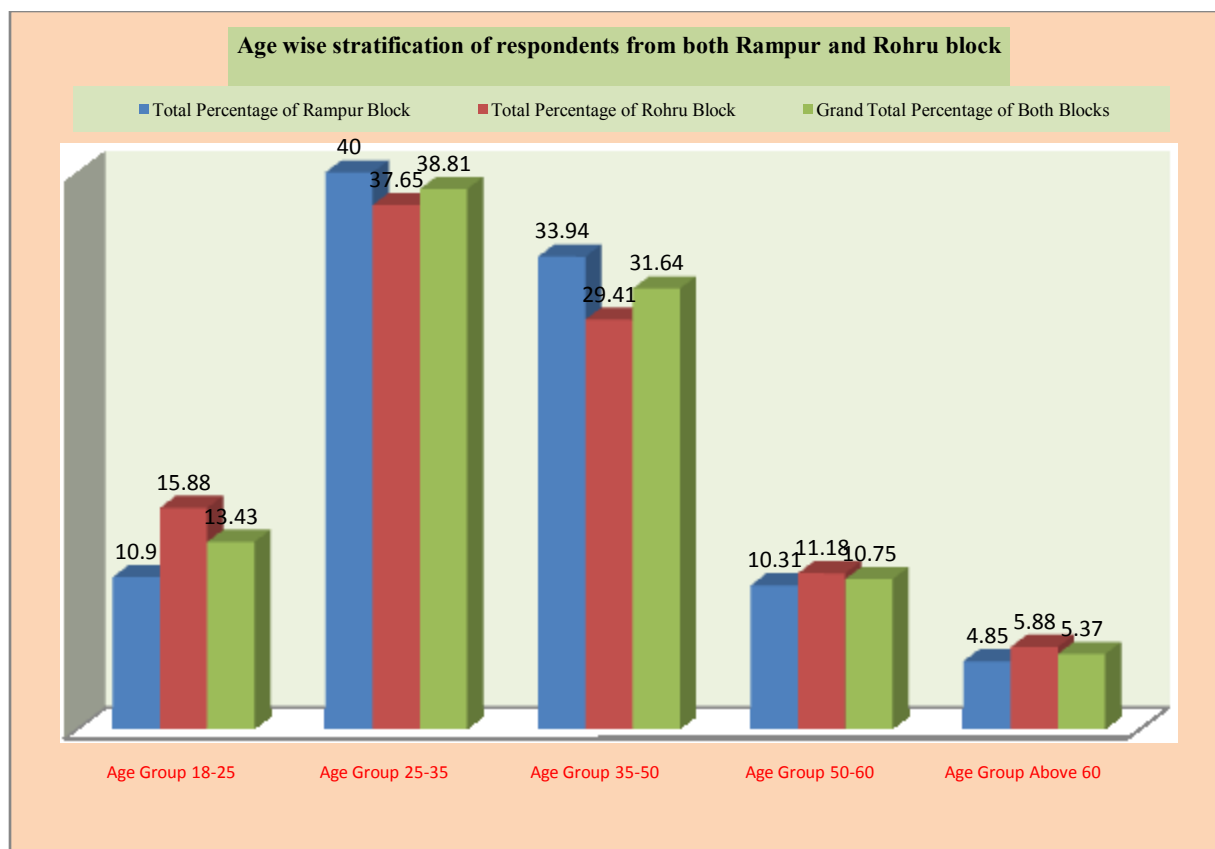


Figure-1:-

Similarly, the new leaderships have new approach towards PRIs politics and decision making process. The implementation of 73rd Constitutional amendment has brought some changes in the leadership pattern. Traditionally, the leadership was with few privileged persons of the society and now the younger strata of population are also taking keen interest in the political process particularly in the grassroots institutions. Age is important in the leadership patterns with the lowering of vote age from 21 to 18 years in the 61st Constitutional Amendment act, the youngest strata of the society have become much aware about their participation on the political system.

The FigureNo. 1 clearly shows that the age group between 25 -35 constitute the highest percentage of elected as well as non-elected respondents, which is followed by the age group between 35-50 and 18-25 respectively. So the clustered columns shown by the Graph No. 3.1 clearly implies that the youngest strata of the society are the largest dominant age group in the present study. The increasing literacy rate and awareness level are the major factors for participation of younger generation in the grassroots politics. It is evident from the above data that there is an active participation from the major strata of the society in rural leadership. This could be possible due to the new provisions of 73rd amendment and reservation of seats for women, SCs and STs.

Gender:

Women all over the world now vote in near equal proportion to men, but nowhere do they have equal numbers in political life.¹² Political participation of women has been limited due to various traditional factors such as caste, religion, feudal attitudes and family set-up. As a result, women have been left on the periphery of political life.¹³ The patterns of traditional leadership in the grassroots institutions have changed considerably. Earlier, the PRIs were the monopoly of male members. Since the very concept of Panchayati Raj was based upon the PanchParmeshwar only the aged male people were at the helms of affairs. After the enactment of 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the provision of 33 percent reservation for women was made in the three tiers of PRIs. Himachal Pradesh also followed the amendment and increased this level upto 50 percent.

The pyramids of Graph No.2, clearly shows that the percentage of male respondents are larger than the female respondents. Out of total strata taken for the study purpose we can say that male is the dominant group in both the blocks but it meets the constitutional requirement of 33 percent reservations of women in the PRIs in both the Blocks during 2005 and 2010 elections and at that time the reservation of 50 per cent was not legislated. It means women have got their due share in the Panchayati Raj Elections held after the amendment in the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act 1994 due to 73rd Amendment Acts and subsequent amendments.

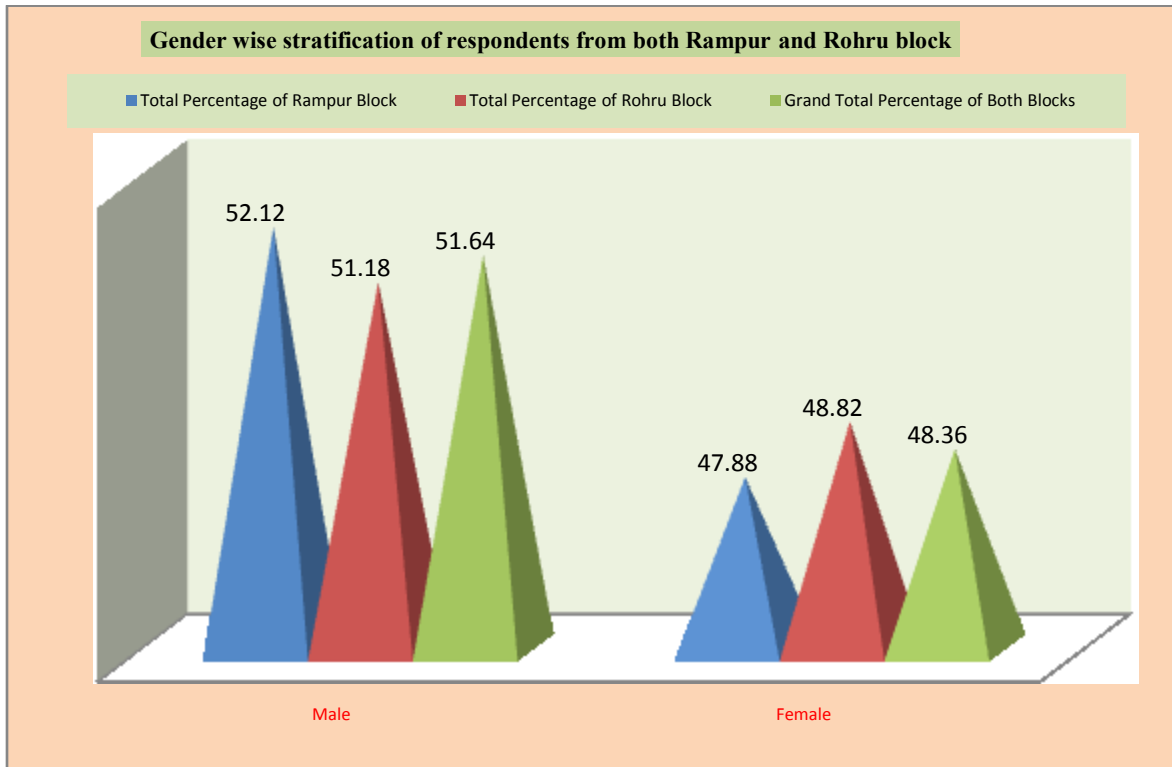


Figure-2:-

Caste:

Caste plays a significant role in molding the emergence of leadership at village level. It has been observed that the person belonging to the 'dominant castes' have usually been found elected to these grassroots level institutions.¹⁴ Caste is an important variable of an individual's ascribed status and the Indian society is hierarchically divided based on the caste which is more true in the rural areas. Caste is believed to have played an important role in the elections.¹⁵ The caste also plays a dominant role in determining the nature and types of leadership in the villages.¹⁶ Relation between castes are governed among other things by concepts within the caste.¹⁷ Traditionally, the rural leadership has been a monopoly of the high caste Brahmin, Rajput and big land lords, but the empirical studies point out that due to the adult franchise and democratic decentralization, the leadership is moving to the numerically dominant groups and castes.

The clustered cylindrical representation of the Figure No. 3, clearly presents that the General caste constitutes highest percentage of elected as well as non-elected respondents and SC is the second largest strata out of the total sample survey, whereas the OBC category constitutes lowest percentage in both the blocks. It appears from the above analysis that the share of General category in Rohru Block was higher in comparison to Rampur Block. It is clear that the higher castes has almost larger share in the rural leadership of PRIs in Himachal Pradesh. This is due to the fact that all open seats are mostly contested by the contestants of General Category and other categories disassociate from it.

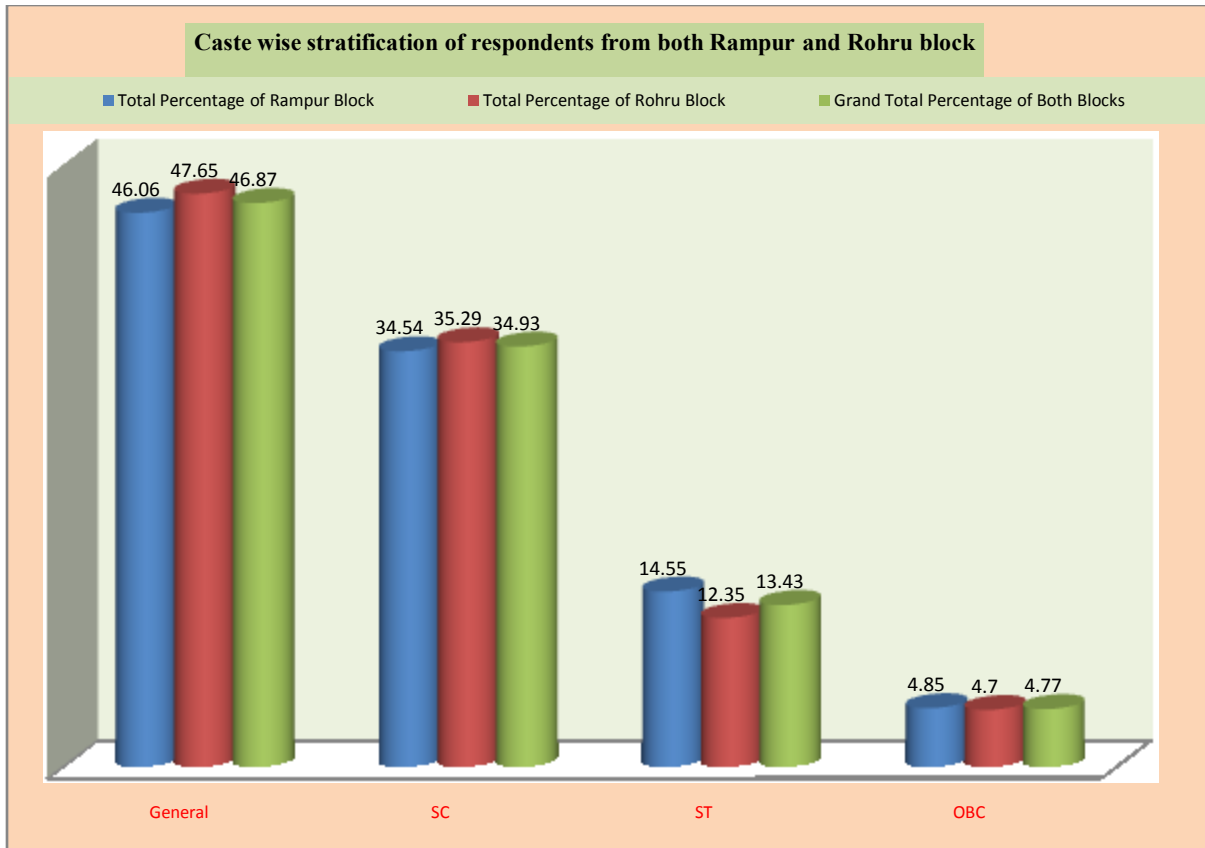


Figure-3:-

Education:

Education is the most revolutionary force in the world and changes drastically every aspects of human life.¹⁸The relation between education and democracy is the source of political participation in modern times and it helps to understand the complexities of democratic politics and guide the people of their rights and duties. It also guides about the vote and their right use to the voters.¹⁹Education is considered as an important variable not only for widening brain of the individual but it also helps a person to make use of rational and scientific approach in different problems.²⁰ Education is a blessing and blessed are those who have received this blessing.²¹It determines the individual states and prestige and his functional utility to the society.²²

The stacked cone depiction of Figure No. 4 reveals that the respondents having educational qualification 10+2 constitutes the highest percentage, second largest strata out of the total sample survey from both the blocks are Matriculate, whereas the Post Graduate and other professional qualification like Engineers, Doctors, Lawyers etc. are very less as per the stacked conical representation of the graph from both Rampur and Rohru blocks.

Although, the state has achieved around 84 percent literacy rate but higher education is still far from reach of poor rural people as the present survey has revealed in the study. Thus, the poor or semi-educational background of the villagers/respondents is also one of the reasons for the poor participation in the democratic process. Education generates awareness and awareness induces people to participate at large in every Panchayat elections, Gram Sabha meetings, so that they can ask questions, raise their grassroots level local issues and take part in debate with the governing body of the Panchayat. Therefore, it is evident from the above analysis that educational background influences the communities to participate in the democratic process.

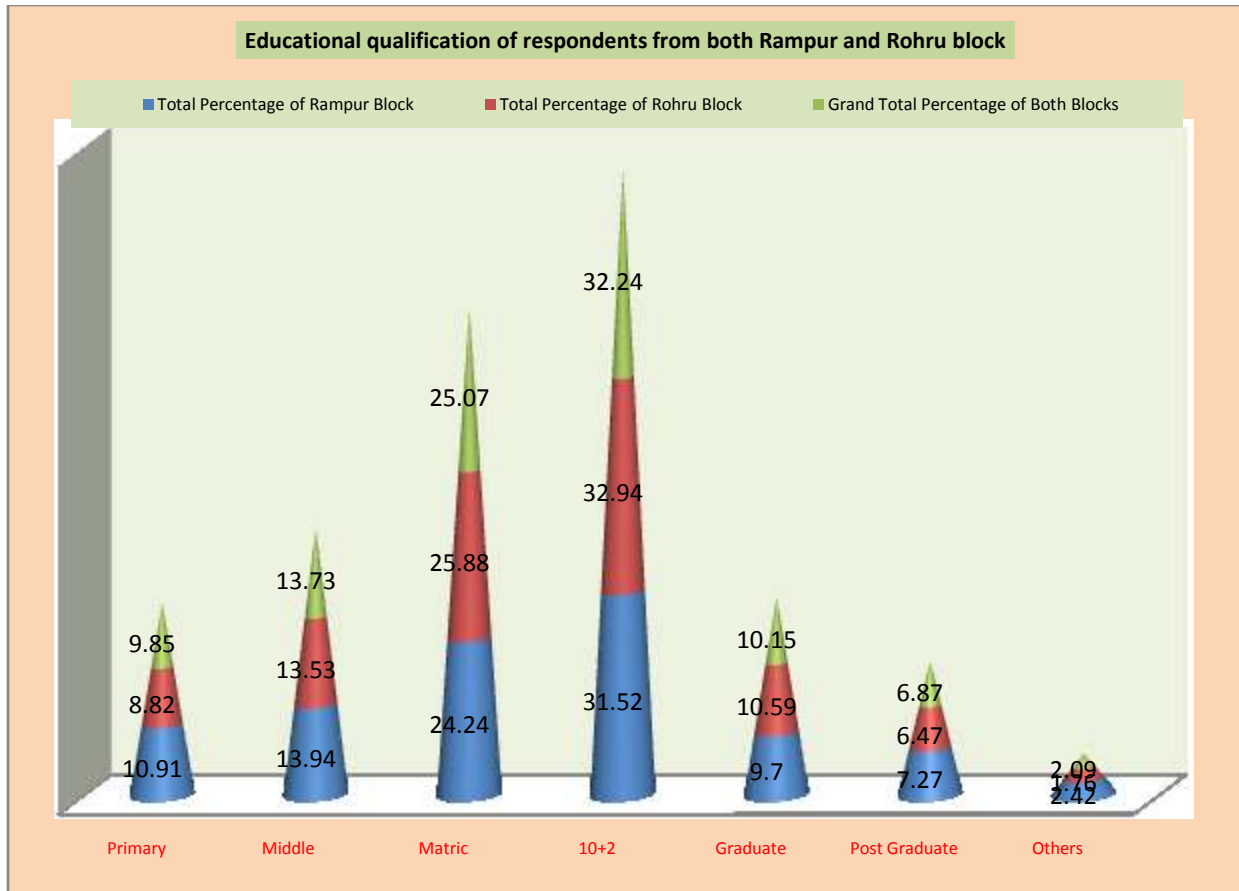


Figure-4:-

Income:

Economic status of individual is a powerful determinant of the rural leadership and people who has good economic position in the rural areas, used to have good influence in the village. Lack of financial institutions in the past had made the people dependent on the money lenders in the villages. As a result, rural leadership was from financially well off class. Now, the exploitation by the money lenders has been reduced to a greater extent with the coming up of cooperative credit institutions and poor people got their financial needs fulfilled through these institutions.²³

The level of income of villagers has improved in the past two decades due to increase in horticultural and agricultural productivities as well as its prices over the period of time.

The stacked cylindrical representation of Figure No.5, interprets that the respondents from both the blocks having annual income from all sources between 50,000/- to 75,000/- constitutes the highest percentage, which is followed by having annual income, below 25,000/-, between 25,000/- to 50,000/-, between 75,000/- to 1,00,000/- and above 1,00,000/- respectively. It is evident from the above analysis that in Rampur Block, the respondents were having higher income levels in comparison to Rohru Block. More are the chances to enter politics if the better is level of income. But better financial position is in no way the sole criteria in entering the politics of grass root institutions.

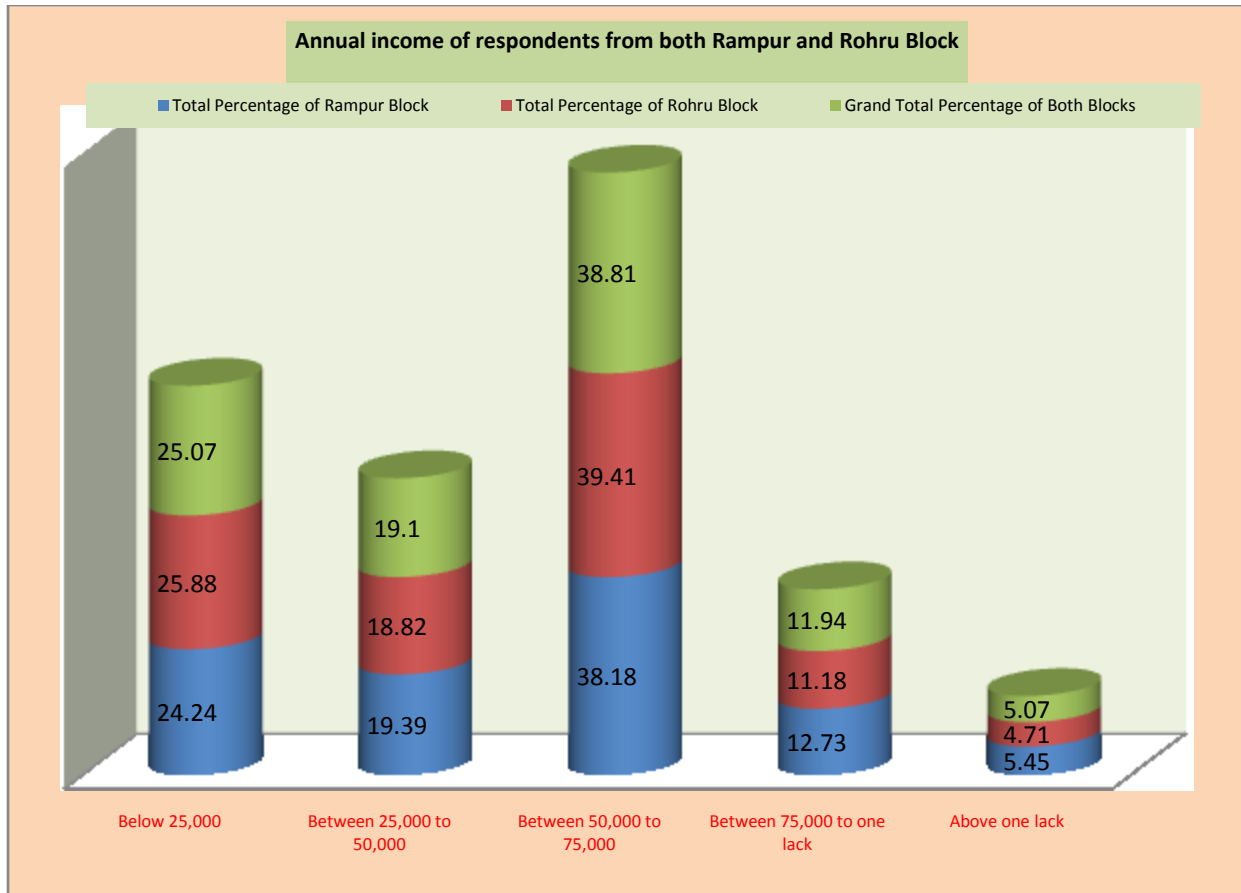


Figure-5:-

Occupation:

Occupation is also one of the important variables which determine family’s social standing. This is due to the fact that not only different occupations have different prestige but are also associated with different privileges and economic benefits.²⁴ Occupation of the rural society is one of the important factors contributing to the emergence of a leader. Persons of only those occupations can afford to be leader who get leisure time and can also stay in the village. Only agriculturists, labourers and traditional occupation holders get opportunity to stay in the village. Among these occupation holders the agriculturist class gets more leisure time than other classes. Moreover, service-holders usually do not get spare time and sometimes they are also debarred from fighting elections.

The 3-D Line representation of the Figure No. 6, reveals that the agriculture is the main occupation of the masses in the region. It is strictly followed by service (government, semi government and private sector), business and other occupations respectively. As per the study and responses from interviewed candidates, it is found that people opt for job opportunities for their livelihood even after having agriculture as the main occupation. Overall majority of the respondents are in agricultural activities and therefore they can take active part in the politics of PRIs.

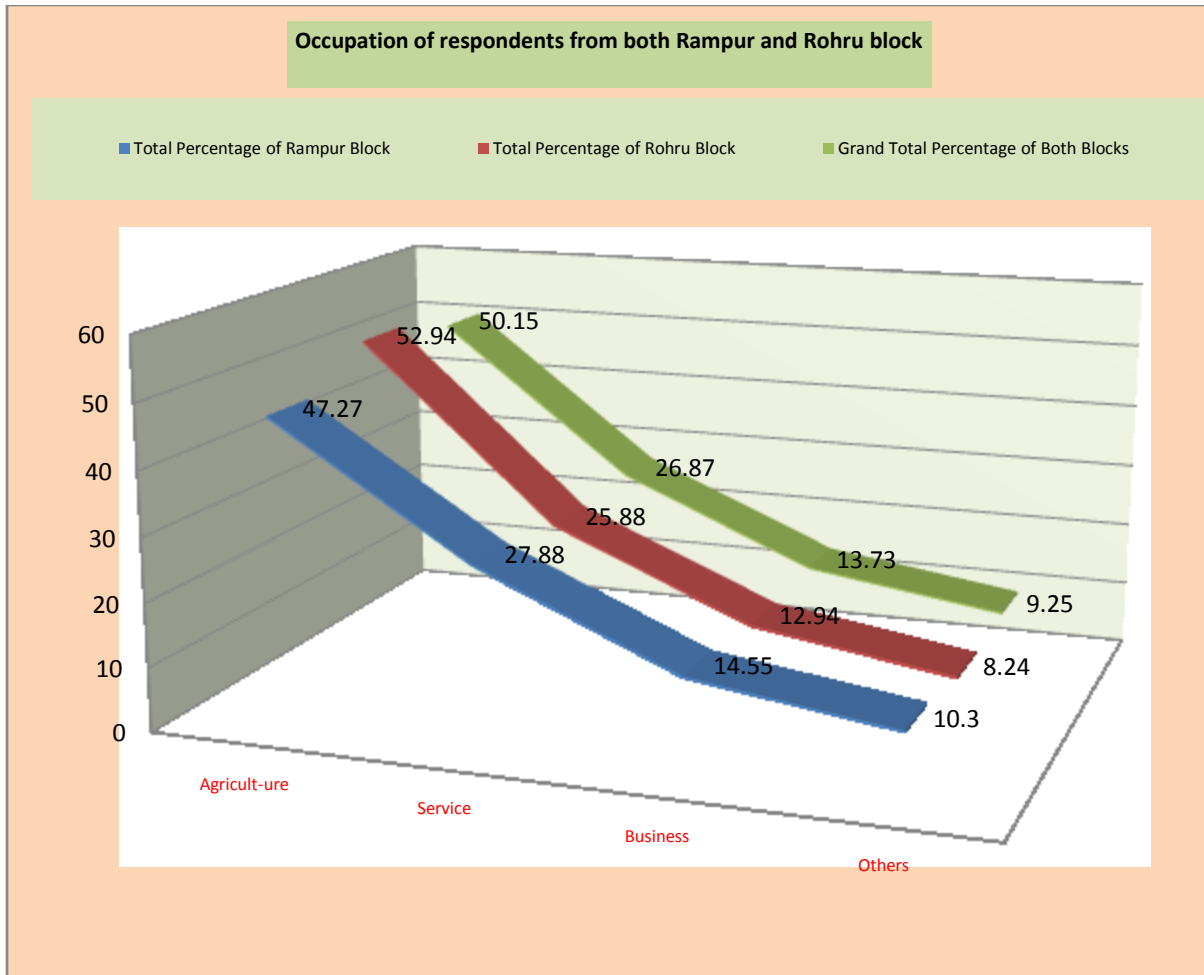


Figure-6:-

Type of Family:

In type of family structure, one usually distinguishes between the joint and nucleus family. The joint family is associated with a traditional, agricultural society where conservation and family status tend to dominate over individual interest. The nucleus family, more a development of industrialized society, permits of a greater degree of flexibility and self-expression among its members in spite of a certain sense of isolation in some respects.²⁵Traditionally, there is joint family culture in India and in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh, the joint family system still exists. But with the impact of modernization and social change this system is eroding slowly.

The clustered conical representation of the Figure No. 7 reveals that the highest percentage is constituted by the nuclear families in both the blocks. In the present study it has been found that the people are still living in the joint families as well. But the percentage of nuclear families is dominating the percentage of joint families. Thus, change from joint family system to nuclear family is clearly visible.

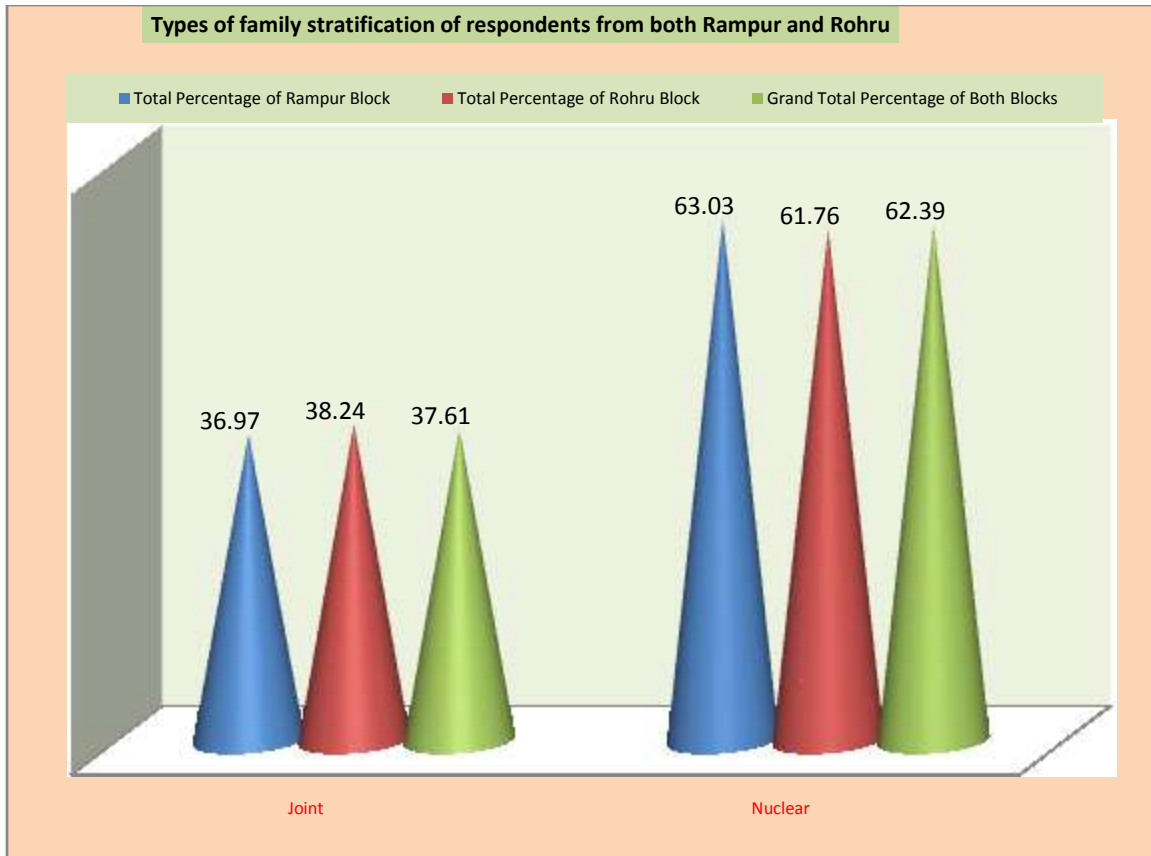


Figure-7:-

Size of Land Holdings:

Land-ownership is an important factor in establishing dominance in the village. The pattern and ownership in rural India was such that the bulk of the land was concentrated in the hands of a relatively small number of big owners as against a large number who either owned very little land or no land at all. According to V.M. Sirsikar, land holdings is not a single determinant but a related variable to determine the leader's income in general and economic status in particular.²⁶ In Himachal Pradesh, the majority of the population is engaged in agriculture and horticulture related activities. It is due to hilly and tough terrain and the main occupation of the people is agriculture and horticulture. The main crops grown in the State are wheat, maize and paddy and Apples are the main fruit crop of the District Shimla. Apples of good qualities are grown here. The level of holding is very small in the State. The various land reforms have deprived these from the land who were not cultivators. The land of such people has gone to tiller. Land ownership as a variable to various multiple factors comprising social-cultural status is the determinants of leadership.²⁷ In Himachal Pradesh, out of the total area 55.67lakh hectare, the area is operated by 8.63 lakh farmers. The average holding size comes to 1.1 hectare. About 21 percent of the total Gross State Domestic Product comes from agriculture and its allied sector in theState.²⁸

The clustered column representation of the Figure No. 8 illustrates that the respondents having size of land holdings below 10 Bighas constitutes the highest percentage for both Rampur and Rohru blocks. As per the graphic demonstration, respondents having size holdings of 50 Bighas and above constitutes only 5 to 6 percent of the total strata taken for the study from both the blocks. In the sample data and column depiction of the graph, it has been found that one third of the respondents comprises of 10–30 Bighas size of land holdings. In both the Blocks majority of the respondents were found from the category of below 10 bighas of land holdings.

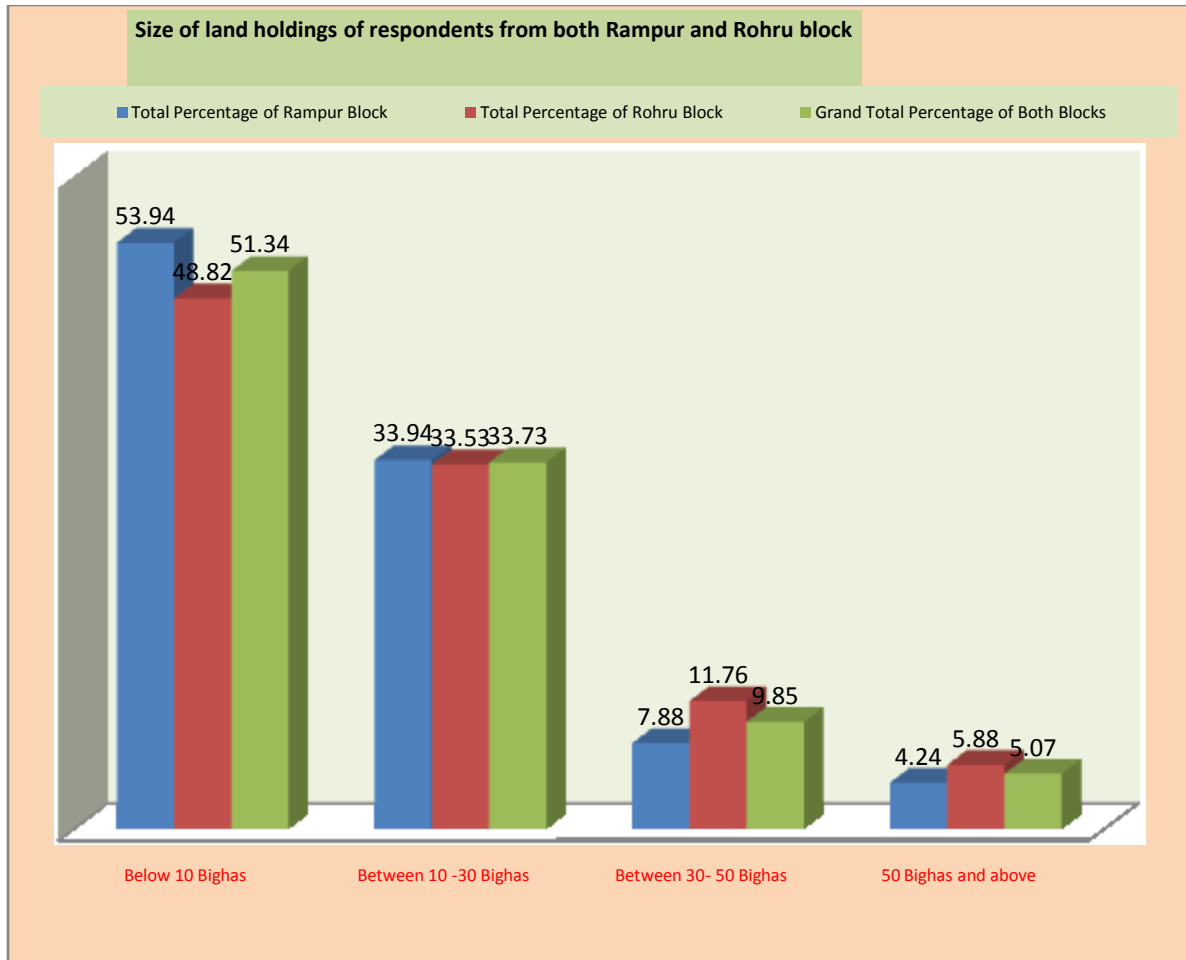


Figure-8:-

Affiliation with Political Party:

Political parties are vital to the growth and sustenance of the democratic set-up in the country. They develop and maintain the public opinion and help the process for political education of the people. Participation of the people at all level is possible through the leaders and workers of the political party. Existence of political consciousness and public participation is major political events in a democracy.²⁹The purpose of the section is to highlight the political background of leaders at Panchayat level. The affiliation of the leaders with different political parties becomes significant. A leader's membership or sympathy for a political party is an indication of leader's ideological commitment of preference on the one hand that political parties to exist and play role in relation to PRIs on the other.³⁰The direct or indirect interference in the affairs of Panchayat run the institutions dominated by the political parties resulted into the political affiliation of people at village level. The people are affiliated to different political parties i.e. Congress, BJP, CPI (M) and independent etc. In the present study respondents were asked about their political affiliation with any political party.

The stacked cylindrical bar demonstration of the FigureNo. 9 portrays that the highest percentage of elected and non-elected respondents from both the blocks were affiliated to Congress party and which is followed by political affiliation of respondents to BJP, CPI (M) and Independent respective. The study reveals that the number of those respondents, who were affiliated with the Congress party, was higher in Rampur Block in comparison to Rohru Block. While in Rampur block the influence of CPI (M) is also seen during the study. The affiliation of leaders with different political parties becomes significant in the study of rural leadership.

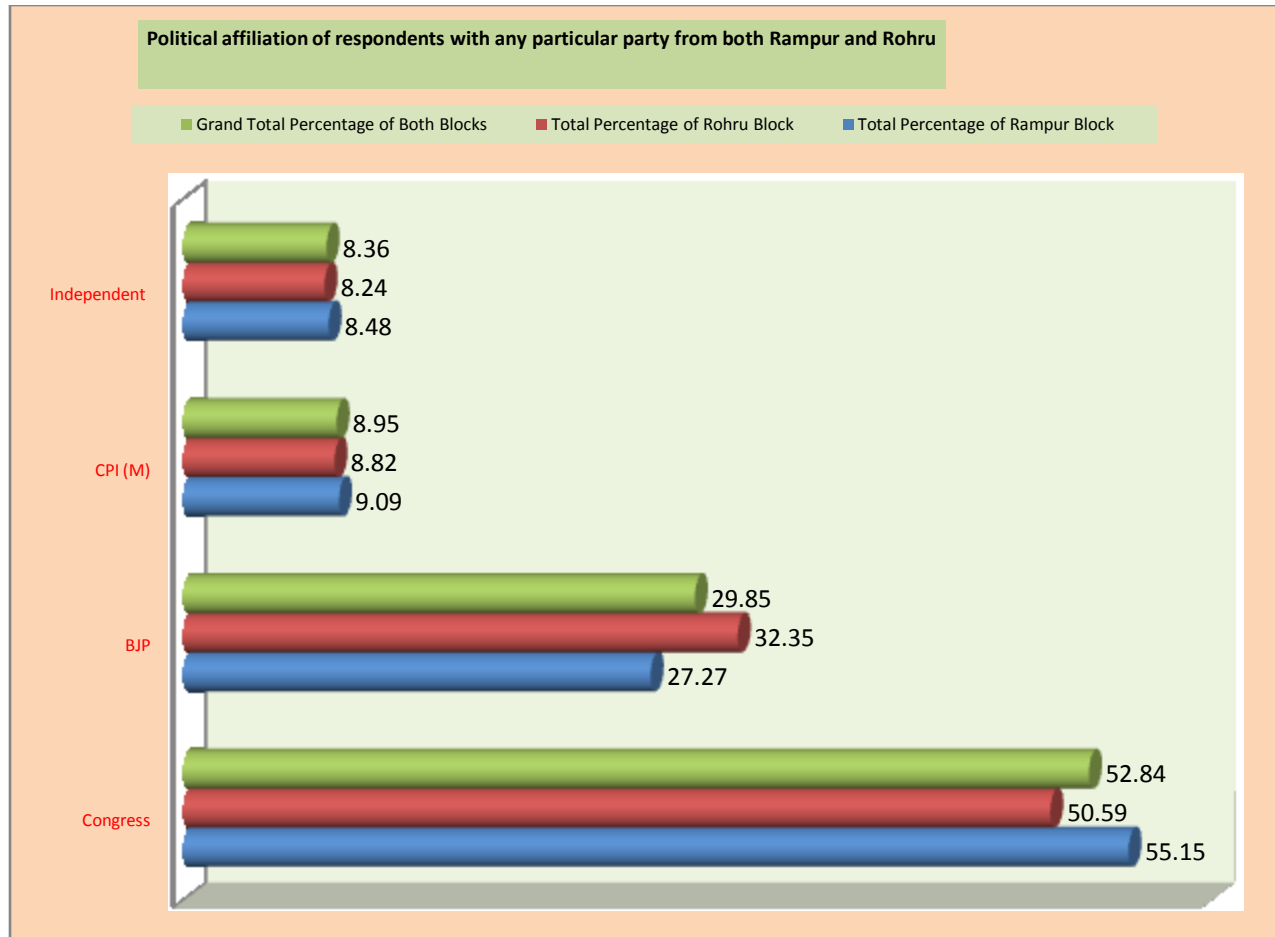


Figure-9:-

The study has highlighted that some kind of influence is visible in the politics of grass root institutions as well as in its functioning.

Conclusion:-

The present paper explores the dynamics of socioeconomic background of the elected and non-elected respondents. It is found that majority of the respondents are young and of middle age group. As far as caste factor is concerned study reveals find that the Himachal PRIs are represented by the people belonging to different caste groups. The high caste groups find adequate representation, and Women, SCs, STs and OBCs are also adequately represented in proportion to their population in Assam society. Most of the respondents belong to small family rather than the traditional joint family. Observation of the researcher reveals that joint family has broken down and nuclear family has emerged which have a predominant impact on the composition of PRIs in Himachal in recent times. The dominant political parties and its leaders do not like to induct new blood in local bodies. As far as educational background is concerned, it is found that the respondents belonging to 10+2 or less than 10+2 level educational qualification level category dominate the PRIs and highly educated men-women do not come to leadership position at the grassroots level. Occupationally, the PRIs are dominated by the agricultural and horticultural cultivators, businessmen and other private job holders.

Most of the elected and non-elected respondents are having agriculture and horticulture as their occupations, their annual income is not very high and they fall in the category of lower middle class status. The paper further reveals that none of our respondent is outside the purview of party politics and the respondents at large are affiliated to the Congress (I) party which is followed by BJP. Further, it is found that most of the respondents come to PRIs politics exclusively on motivation of political parties and due to their personal interest. Thus, we conclude by saying that

though women, SCs and STs are socially and politically empowered through the Panchayati Raj Institutions, they are yet to be empowered economically.

In nutshell, we can say that the mission and objectives of strengthening of grassroots democracy and empowerment of women, SCs and STs through the grassroots governance at the village level in the post-73rd Constitution Amendment Act 1992, have not been implemented in letter and spirit.

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