

CHAPTER – VII

PERCEPTION OF VILLAGERS ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN PANCHAYAT MEMBERS TOWARDS VILLAGE DEVELOPMENT

7.1 Introduction

The Panchayati Raj system is an age-old phenomenon. Existence of panchayats was in Vedic period (Mathew, 2000). It has an effective control over the administrative, civic and judicial matters of the village community. During the days of the colonial rule, rural Bengal had introduced the Chowkidari Panchayat in 1870. At that time, panchayat system was not democratic, because the nominated persons were chosen by the district collector or any subordinate officer, not chosen from the different population groups. The initial legislation on panchayat in colonial period was that the only male residents who paid rent, land revenue or tax or had a stipulated annual income were eligible to contest elections. Women were neither voters nor candidates for the panchayat elections (Buch, 2000). After the first report of the Joint Select Committee of British Parliament on the bill for the Government of India Act 1919, the law was so modified that the council could allow the qualified women to become members. The condition was that women should be literate and holding immovable property. But it was impossible at that time of colonial period (Buch, 2000).

In the 20th century, Gandhiji revived the idea of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Gandhiji's view of Panchayati Raj was based on principle of democratic decentralization. Under Panchayati Raj, he wanted to see each village as a little republic, self-sufficient in its vital wants. Gandhiji wanted the villagers to be independent and self-reliant, so that they can meet their basic needs and can feel the real sense of 'Swaraj'. According to him pictures of villages of India are the real India and he said that "if the village perish India will perish too". In his whole concept of Panchayati Raj, however, there was no mention about women panchayat.

After independence, in 1957 Balwantrai Mehta Committee was the first committee which recommended the participation of women in three-tier Panchayati Raj. In 1978 Asok Mehta Committee also recommended the same thing. Balwantrai Mehta Committee suggested the co-option of two women (from amongst those who were interested in works among women and children in each panchayat body) in the three-tier panchayat. The third meeting of the Central Council of Local Government which was held in Srinagar in 1957, recorded that the elected representatives, about 20 in number in each block panchayat, "will co-opt two women who are interested in work among women and children" (Nirmala Butch, 2000). Even the fourth meeting of the Central Council of Local Government in 1958

recommended that at least two seats must be reserved for women in panchayat body. So some states revised their legislation (earlier it was one seat reservation for women in panchayat) and incorporated reservation of at least two seats for women, but the participation of women in PRIs was either very nibbling or nil. The exception was in Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Karnataka and Punjab where a few women got selected as members. In 1978 Asok Mehta Committee also recommended the reservation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution for upliftment of women and children by participating in decision making process and implementation level.

Our constitution has given 'equal' rights and opportunities to both men and women in the political, economic and social spheres and it also prohibits any kind of discrimination against women. Equality in all spheres is inseparable from active political participation. This means, not only using the right to vote but also power sharing, profit sharing, co-decision-making and co-policy-making sharing at all levels of government. After twenty five years, the proclamation of the Constitution, the report (1974) of Committee on Status of Women came out. This report depicted sordid scenario of women's status. The Status Report has forced the Indian Government to think seriously about the women development as an important task in the planning agenda. The recommendation of the committee on the Status of women was the establishment of Statutory Women's Panchayats at the village level with autonomy and resources of their own for management and administration of welfare and development programmes for women and children. The Committee recommendation (1974) focused on the participation of women in village development.

With the publication of the Report of the Committee on the Status of women the scholars and policy-makers diverted their attention to the issues of women which culminated in thinking about National Perspective Plan for Women (1988-2000) and establishing a National Commission for Women in 1992. The National Perspective Plan for Women provided directions for all-round development of women.

According to this plan, government should effectively secure participation of women in decision making processes at National, State and Local levels. There were three recommendations about women's political participation at local level:

- (a) 30 per cent seats should be reserved at Panchayat to Zilla Parishad level and wherever possible higher representation of dalits/tribals, women of weaker section should be ensured.
- (b) 30 per cent of executive heads of all bodies from village panchayat to district level and a certain percentage of chief executives of Panchayati Raj bodies at lower, middle and higher levels must be reserved for women.

- (c) A more effective step would be to declare a certain percentage of constituencies in the lower tier of Panchayati Raj as exclusively women's constituencies and all executive positions in a certain number of territorial jurisdiction reserved for women candidates.

The Central Government brought in the Constitution 64th Amendment Bill in 1989. This bill stated that "as nearly as may be" up to 30 per cent seats could be reserved in favour of women in the membership to panchayats at all the three levels, including SC/ST. This PRIs system was like three-tier Panchayati Raj system at the village, intermediate and district level in all the states and union territories; and guaranteed duration of five years for the panchayats at all levels etc. But this bill was not approved by the Rajya Sabha due to instability of the Government.

After the elections of 1991 the Congress Party came back to power, the National Commission for Women was set up (1992) and the 73rd Amendment Bill was passed in 1992 and it came into effect from 24th April 1993. This 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has stated that "not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes) of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women."

The Clause (4) of the Act has the following provision "-----not less than one-third of the total number of offices of chairperson in the Panchayats at each level shall be reserved for women". With the 73rd Amendment, a new era has dawned in the panchayat movement in India. This Amendment gave the opportunity of women to participate in the local level decision-making process. After 73rd Amendment, most of the states have incorporated "not less than one-third" reservation clause in their new panchayat legislation.

After reservation women participation in the three-tier panchayati system has dramatically increased. In Chapter-6 it has been already analysed the opinion of the women panchayat representatives about their panchayati work. This Chapter will analyse the perception of villagers about the women reservation in the three-tier panchayati system.

Tyagi and Sinha (2004) have observed that the traditional mind-set of rural people about the role of women is still strong. That means, the main responsibility of women is in the household activities. According to them their (women) representation in local bodies would disturb the harmony of household life. Therefore, as usual, women would look after home while their male family members would work as a proxy to them in panchayats and thus not much would change in reality.

From the various studies made by researchers, we get the mix interpretation about the reservation of women in the local self-government. Some said that Ghosh (1995) in West Bengal; Narayan (1995) in Karnataka; Pal (1995) in Haryana and Panda (1995) in Orissa etc. elected women panchayat members were assertive to play their role in panchayats and villagers were also happy with their performance. On the other hand, Subha (1995); Lieten (1996); Sharma (1996); Bhargav and Subha (1996); Mandal (1997); Nayak (1998) etc. about the reservation of women in the three tier panchayati system were very discouraging regarding their tremendous expectations for the 73rd Amendment Act.

7.2 Selection of Villagers in Both the Districts for Getting Perception of Their (Villagers) Opinion about the Participation of Women in the Three-tier Panchayati System

The present chapter will discuss about perceptions of villagers on the participation of women in the three-tier panchayati system. The present researcher interviewed both male and female villagers. The questionnaire tried to bring out certain facts like whether they really know about reservation or not; whether any significant / visible changes in their village has occurred after taking over of the panchayat by women; whether they get any kind of help from their women panchayat members; whether women panchayat members can look after the village as well as panchayati work properly; whether women panchayat members listen to villagers' problems patiently; whether they (women panchayat members) take decision; being a woman whether they give necessary importance to women's related problems; whether the villagers go to any gram sabha or attend any gram samsad meetings; according to them (villagers) who is better panchayat member with respect to male or female member; on what basis, last year votes were cast etc.

Researcher interviewed three villagers randomly from each selected constituency where women were elected panchayat members, of two selected districts in this research study. In both the districts Cooch Behar and Nadia, there are four selected blocks, each from four different subdivisions. The four blocks in Cooch Behar district are: Cooch Behar-II, Dinhata-I, Mathabhanga-I and Tufangang-I. In Nadia district the four selected blocks are Haringhata, Karimpur-II, Krishnanagar-II and Ranaghat-II. From each block, three number of GPs are selected where women are panchayat Pradhans. Under Women Panchayat Pradhan, all women panchayat members are considered. The selected number of villagers in Cooch Behar-II block is $37 \times 3 = 111$, in Dinhata-I it is $18 \times 3 = 54$, in Mathabhanga-I it is $18 \times 3 = 54$ and in Tufangang-I it is $15 \times 3 = 45$. The total number of villagers in Cooch Behar district is $(111 + 54 + 54 + 45) = 264$. The selected number of villagers in Haringhata block is $24 \times 3 = 72$, in Karimpur-I it is $19 \times 3 = 57$, in Krishnanagar-II it is $10 \times 3 = 30$ and in Ranaghat-I it is

19X3=57. The total number of villagers in Nadia district is (72+57+30+57) =216. So, the total number of interviewed villagers for this study, in both the districts is (264+216=) 480.

7.3 Socio-Economic Condition of the Villagers in Both the Districts

Before going to discuss about the villager's perception about women panchayat members, it is necessary to make a brief discussion about the villager's socio-economic condition of both the districts. The socio-economic profile is vital for this study as it helps to get a socio-economic picture of the respondents as well as villages. There are several socio-economic factors, but this study has been taken some factors which are related with this chapter. The socio-economic factors which are considered herefor villagers, are: age group of the respondents, caste, education, status of the houses, yearly income, and main source of income.

From the field survey, it has been seen that among the selected villagers (480) of both the districts 167 i.e. 34.80 per cent is female and 313 i.e. 65.20 per cent is male. But in this study male and female both are considered as a villagers and each respondent is considered as a unit of a family. The gender wise of the respondents in both the districts is presented in Table 7.1.

Table 7.1: Gender wise Distribution of the Respondents (Villagers) of the Two Districts

Districts	Female	%	Male	%	Total
Cooch Behar	89	33.71	175	66.29	264
Nadia	78	36.11	138	63.89	216
Total	167	34.80	313	65.20	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table shows that overall 34.80 per cent female villagers represent their perception about the women panchayat member on behalf of their families. In Nadia district this female percentage is higher than Cooch Behar.

Table 7.2: Caste Structure of the Respondents (Villagers) of Both the Districts

Districts/Caste	SC	%	ST	%	GEN	%	Total
Cooch Behar	171	64.77	7	2.65	86	32.58	264
Nadia	66	30.55	9	4.17	141	65.28	216
Total	237	49.37	16	3.33	227	47.29	480

Source: Field Survey

The above Table 7.2 shows that overall 49.37 per cent respondents belong to SC community and 47.29 per cent belong to general community and only 3.33 per cent belong to ST community. In Cooch Behar district 64.77 per cent respondents belong to SC community. Because of that the elected Women Panchayat Members are coming more from SC community in Cooch Behar district (see Table no. 3.4).

Table 7.3: Marital Status of the Respondents (Villagers) of Both the Districts

Districts	Married	%	Unmarried	%	Widow	%	Total
Cooch Behar	223	84.47	32	12.12	09	03.41	264
Nadia	145	67.13	65	30.09	06	02.78	216
Total	368	76.67	97	20.21	15	03.12	480

Source: Field Survey

The above Table shows that more than 76 per cent interviewer (villagers) are married. It implies that their family responsibility is more than the unmarried persons. Percentage of married respondents (villagers) is higher in Cooch Behar district than Nadia. Table 7.3 also shows that percentage of unmarried respondents is higher in Nadia district than Cooch Behar. In fact from Table 3.15 we can see that there was no unmarried women panchayat members in Cooch Behar district. The above Table is also showing that percentage of unmarried among the respondents is lower. Unmarried or late married is an indicator of development, because a person gets time to do the work what he or she actually wants to do smoothly. Married person comes under pressure (responsibility) to earn money.

Table 7.4: Age Distribution of the Respondents (Villagers) of Both the Districts

Districts	18-30	%	31-45	%	46-60	%	Above 60	%	Total
Cooch Behar	76	28.79	124	46.97	50	18.94	14	05.30	264
Nadia	66	30.56	82	37.96	46	21.30	22	10.18	216
Total	142	29.58	206	42.92	96	20.00	36	07.50	480

Source: Field Survey

Table -7.4 shows that most of the respondents are of age group 31-45 (42.92 per cent). In this age group, their requirements and responsibilities are more in their lives. In both the districts respondent are coming more from the age group 31-45. 18-30 this age group people of age group 18-30 years either wants to finish their study or wants to establish their lives by earning money. For this age group employment is necessary. The main thing is that the age group 31-45 they normally keep updated themselves in political and economic situations or the things happening surroundings their area.

Table 7.5: Educational Status of Respondents (Villagers) of Both the Districts

Districts	Illiterate	Read & write	Primary Schooling (IV)	Up to VIII	Secondary school pass (X)	Higher secondary pass (XII)	Graduate	Total
Cooch Behar	38 (14.39)	23 (08.71)	68 (25.76)	89 (33.71)	35 (13.26)	8 (03.03)	3 (01.14)	264 (100)
Nadia	23 (10.65)	25 (11.57)	42 (19.44)	48 (22.22)	57 (26.40)	13 (06.02)	8 (03.70)	216 (100)
Total	61 (12.71)	48 (10.00)	110 (22.92)	137 (28.54)	92 (19.17)	21 (04.37)	11 (02.29)	480 (100)

Source : Field Survey

Note: Percentage figures are within the brackets.

From the above Table 7.5 it can be seen that among the respondents 12.71 per cent are illiterate and 28.54 per cent are 8th pass. But one noteworthy matter is that in Nadia district, higher percentage of villagers are literate or educated than Cooch Behar district. In Nadia district, percentage of 10th passed, 12th passed and graduate respondents are higher than Cooch Behar district. In fact illiterate percentage is higher in Cooch Behar district than Nadia district. But the educational differences between the two districts is not so high. Education is the main weapon for awareness. Now a days it is very necessary for both i.e. for Panchayat Members (for application of Government policies and programmes and taking decision for village development) and for villagers (for getting the Government facilities).

Table 7.6: Yearly Income (Rs.) Distribution of Respondents (Villagers) of Both the Districts

Districts	Up to 20,000	20,001-30,000	30,001-40,000	40,001-50,000	Above 50,000	Total
Cooch Behar	160 (60.61)	41 (15.53)	35 (13.26)	12 (04.55)	16 (06.06)	264
Nadia	105 (48.61)	36 (16.67)	39 (18.06)	14 (06.48)	22 (10.18)	216
Total	265 (55.21)	77 (16.04)	74 (15.42)	26 (05.42)	38 (07.92)	480

Source : Field Survey

Note: Percentage figures are within the brackets.

The above Table shows that more than 55 per cent respondents belong to yearly income group up to Rs. 20,000 otherwise it can be said that most of the respondents yearly income it's not even Rs. 20,000. The Table is showing that when yearly income range increases then percentage of respondents within those income groups decreases. To know the reason of low income, it is necessary to see the main source of income of the respondents (villagers).

The following Table will show the main source of income of the respondents (villagers).

Table 7.7: Main Source of Income of Respondents (Villagers) of both the Districts

Districts	Profit from businesses	Selling crops	Farming in their own land	Daily labourer (agri.& non-agri.)	Service	Others	Total
Cooch Behar	26 (09.85)	43 (16.29)	21 (07.95)	114 (43.18)	12 (04.55)	48 (18.18)	264 (100)
Nadia	15 (06.94)	39 (18.06)	33 (15.28)	81 (37.50)	10 (04.63)	38 (17.59)	216 (100)
Total	41 (08.54)	82 (17.08)	54 (11.25)	195 (40.63)	22 (04.58)	86 (17.92)	480 (100)

Source: Field Survey

Note: Percentage figures are within the brackets.

From the above Table 7.7, it can be seen that most of the responders are daily labourer and this is true for both the districts also. The second highest is 'others'. In others different types of sources of income are included. Among them some are rickshaw and van puller, fisher man, mason and some are only dependent on MGNREGS payment etc. This vulnerable group has taken second highest position for main source of income. Table 7.7 shows the actual economic situation of rural area in both the districts.

For knowing the details about the economic situation of the villagers we have taken also other indicators which are given below in the Tables. From both the Tables 7.6 and 7.7 it can be said that people of these villages are economically weak. From this situation we can assume that the villagers will wait for the government programmes and facilities and they will interact with the panchayat members for getting the benefits from the government programme.

Table 7.8: Agricultural Land Holding of the Respondents (Villagers) of Both the Districts

Districts	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Cooch Behar	103	39.02	161	60.98	264
Nadia	67	31.02	149	68.98	216
Total	170	35.42	310	64.58	480

Source : Field Survey

Table 7.8 shows that 64.58 per cent respondents have no land. Those who have land the area is very small for agricultural purposes. Because of no land most of the people are engaged as daily labourer or in other jobs like MGNREGS or rickshaw or van puller or mason and others.

Table 7.9: Condition of Houses of the Respondents (Villagers) of both the Districts

Districts	Kutcha	%	Pucca	%	Semi-Pucca	%	Total
Cooch Behar	223	84.47	9	03.41	32	12.12	264
Nadia	108	50.00	62	28.70	46	21.30	216
Total	331	68.96	71	14.79	78	16.25	480

Source : Field Survey

From the above Table 7.9 it can be seen that more than 68 percent people stay in Kutcha house. In Cooch Behar more than 84 per cent of the respondents stay in Kutcha houses. In fact, from field survey it has been seen that in Cooch Behar district beneficiaries get 'Tin' houses under IAY whereas in Nadia district beneficiaries get 'Cemented' houses under IAY. Why this difference, there is no proper answer. For beneficiaries it is a big thing that they get houses under IAY.

7.4 Villagers' Perception about Women Panchayat Members' Performance Related with Rural Women

Data presented in the above Tables represent a picture of socio - economic conditions of sample households of Cooch Behar and Nadia districts. From the socio-economic condition it can be assumed that the villagers interact with the panchayats or panchayat officials for their requirement or panchayat members connect with them for the purpose of village development. Village will develop only if the poor villagers' living conditions improve. From our field survey data we shall make an attempt to find out whether the villagers are actually happy with these women panchayat members or not. Some indicators which we have already mentioned, are necessary for this purpose. We have analysed the perception of villagers about the women panchayat members which is given below.

In this regard the question asked was: Did women panchayat members perform their duties related with problems of women? The following Table will show the villagers' concept about the thinking of the women panchayat members for development of rural women in their area.

Table 7.10: Villagers' Perception about the Women Panchayat Members' Performance for Women Related Issues

District	Satisfactory Performance	%	Unsatisfactory Perform.	%	Total
Cooch Behar	16	6.06	248	93.94	264
Nadia	25	11.57	191	88.43	216
Total	41	8.54	439	91.46	480

Source : Field Survey

From the above Table 7.10 it can be seen that only 8.54 per cent villagers say that women panchayat members are doing satisfactory for the rural women. But 91.46 per cent responders are unsatisfied about the performance of women panchayat members for rural women.

The following Table shows the percentage distribution of responding villagers who gave comments about the women panchayat members' knowledge of panchayati work.

Table 7.11: Villagers' Perception about the Women Panchayat Members' Knowledge about the Panchayati Work

Districts	Possesses Knowledge				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	76	28.79	188	71.21	264
Nadia	87	40.28	129	59.72	216
Total	163	33.95	317	66.04	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table 7.11 shows that according to villagers 33.95 per cent women panchayat members have the knowledge of panchayati work. But 66.04 per cent opine that they don't have. Comparing both the districts it can be seen that women panchayat members of Nadia has more knowledge than Cooch Behar district.

The following Table shows the villagers' concept about the implementation of panchayati work by women panchayat members.

Table 7.12: Villagers' Perception about the Implementation of Panchayati Work by Women Panchayat Members

Districts	Whether Implemented				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	68	25.76	196	74.24	264
Nadia	67	31.02	149	68.98	216
Total	135	28.12	345	71.87	480

Source: Field Survey

From the above Table 7.11 it can be seen that according to 33.95 per cent villagers, women panchayat members have the knowledge of panchayati work. But Table 7.12 shows that according to 28.12 per cent villagers, women panchayat members' have implemented the panchayati work. The gap between knowledge of panchayati work and the scope of implementation of work decreases the interest and power of women panchayat members' for development work. This gap is also an indicator of low confidence level of the members.

From 1998 in West Bengal 73rd Amendment Act has been implemented, especially the matter of 33 per cent reservation of seats in local government. The following Table shows the villagers opinion about the knowledge of women reservation in the three tier panchayati system.

Table 7.13: Percentage Distribution of Villagers' about the Knowledge of Reservation of Seats for Women in the Three -Tier Panchayati System.

Districts	Whether Aware				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	125	47.35	139	52.65	264
Nadia	146	67.59	70	32.41	216
Total	271	56.46	209	43.54	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table shows that only 56.46 per cent responders in both the districts know about the women reservation in the three-tier panchayati system whereas in Nadia district 67.59 per cent and in Cooch Behar district only 47.35 per cent know about the women reservation. The percentage of informed persons are higher in Nadia district than Cooch Behar because literacy is lower in Cooch Behar district. Table 7.5 reveals that responders in Nadia district is more literate than Cooch Behar and the 2011 census shows that percentage increase (2001-2011) in literacy is little higher in Nadia district (9.44) than Cooch Behar (9.19).

The following Table shows whether villagers have seen any change in their villages after reservation of seats for women.

Table 7.14: Villagers' Perception about the Village Improvement after Reservation of Seats for Women in Three - tier Panchayati System

Districts	Whether Improvement has taken place				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	74	28.03	190	71.97	264
Nadia	75	34.72	141	65.28	216
Total	149	31.04	331	68.95	480

Source : Field Survey

From the above Table it can be seen that in Cooch Behar district 28.03 per cent and in Nadia district 34.72 per cent people said that there was improvement in the village under women panchayat members after reservation. But overall 68.95 per cent people said that there was no improvement after reservation.

For more analysis, researcher has taken some women related development indicators, such as drinking water supply, organising health camp for ladies and children, involvement of ladies in SHG formation, and whether primary schools are in satisfactory conditions for studying together for boys and girls etc.

The following Table shows the percentage distribution of the responders who responded about the drinking water related issue of their villages.

Table 7.15: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Satisfaction about Women Panchayat Members work for Drinking Water Supply in Their Villages

Districts	Whether Facilitated / Implemented the Work				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	178	67.42	86	32.58	264
Nadia	115	53.24	101	46.76	216
Total	293	73.54	187	38.96	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table shows that overall 73.54 per cent people are satisfied with drinking water availability whereas in Cooch Behar district it is higher compared to Nadia district. But the availability of water according to women panchayat members in Nadia district (Table 5.18) is very low compared to villagers' response. From this comparison it can be said that women panchayat members has no clear knowledge about the drinking water availability at villages.

The following Table exhibits the response of villagers regarding providing women's healthcare facilities in their villages.

Table 7.16: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Satisfaction about Women Panchayat Members Work for Healthcare Facilities Related with Antenatal Check-up

Districts	Whether Facilitated the Work				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	210	79.55	54	20.45	264
Nadia	212	98.15	04	1.85	216
Total	422	87.92	58	12.08	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table reveals that overall 87.92 per cent villagers are satisfied with the healthcare facility for antenatal check-up whereas in Nadia district 98.15 per cent villagers said that they are satisfied with the healthcare system.

The following Table presents the villagers' response related to child immunization facilities in their villages.

Table 7.17: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Satisfaction about Women Panchayat Members Initiative for Healthcare Facility Related with Child Immunization

Districts	Satisfied	%	Not Satisfied	%	Total
Cooch Behar	190	71.97	74	28.03	264
Nadia	134	62.04	82	37.96	216
Total	324	67.50	156	32.50	480

Source : Field Survey

From the above Table it is obvious that 32.50 per cent villagers are not satisfied with the initiatives of Women Panchayat Members for child immunization. Villagers said that for Polio and BCG only satisfactory arrangements are available. There is a gap between the knowledge of panchayat members and the concept of proper child immunization. Villagers' consciousness is also required for 100 per cent success of child immunization.

The following Table shows the villagers responses about the women panchayat members' performance related with health camp.

Table 7.18: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Response about Women Panchayat Members' Initiative for Health Camp

Districts	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Cooch Behar	232	87.89	32	12.12	264
Nadia	212	98.15	04	01.85	216
Total	444	92.50	36	07.50	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table 7.18 shows, 92.50 per cent villagers' response positively about the health camp which is arranged by panchayat members. But positive response is higher in Nadia district than Cooch Behar district.

The following Table shows the villagers responses about the women panchayat members performance to involve the village ladies in the SHGs.

Table 7.19: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Response about the Participation of Their Family Women Members in the SHGs

Districts	Whether Facilitated Involvement				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	24	9.09	240	90.91	264
Nadia	33	15.28	183	84.72	216
Total	57	11.87	423	88.13	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table shows that more than 88 per cent respondents say that their lady Panchayat members are not involved with the SHGs. Only about 12 per cent people say that women panchayat members were involved in the formation of SHGs. Villagers have brought out that there are political reasons behind breaking down of SHGs. Besides political reasons, factors like default of repayment of loan amount from bank and misuse of money on their social needs like marriage of their children, medicines, repair of house are responsible for non-functioning of SHGs. Within the members, difference of opinion is another reason for non-participation of ladies in SHGs. Panchayat members do not try to resolve the matters or encourage the rural ladies to form SHGs. Panchayat members only support those group members who are the supporters of same political party which panchayat members belong to. However, at some places SHGs are functioning well as represented by, Table 5.2 in Chapter 5 which shows that 73.68 per cent women panchayat members helped the SHGs by giving advise about financial facility and training by organising meeting with SHG's members, helped them for getting loan. Tables 5.2 and 7.19 have brought out the data about non-functioning of SHGs.

The following Table shows the villagers response about the preferable condition of primary school for studying together boys and girls.

Table 7.20: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Response about the Preferable Condition of Primary School for Studying Together Boys and Girls

Districts	Yes	%	No	%	Total
Cooch Behar	250	94.70	14	05.30	264
Nadia	211	97.68	05	02.31	216
Total	461	96.04	19	03.95	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table 7.20 shows that 96.04 per cent villagers agree that there is conducive atmosphere for girls and boys to study together in the primary schools in their areas.

The following Table displays the percentage distribution of villagers response about receiving the benefits of various welfare and development schemes of government under Panchayati Raj system.

Table 7.21: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Response about Receiving the Benefits of Various Welfare and Development Schemes of Government under Panchayati Raj system

Districts	Beneficiary	%	Non-beneficiary	%	Total
Cooch Behar	38	14.40	226	85.61	264
Nadia	61	39.35	155	71.76	216
Total	99	20.62	381	79.37	480

Source : Field Survey

From the above Table 7.21 it can be seen that the percentage of beneficiary i.e. 20.62 per cent is very less compare to non-beneficiary percentage i.e. 79.37 per cent.

The following Table presents the percentage distribution of the responders (villagers) who communicate with G.P. Office for getting any kind of help (within the capacity of the panchayat) or any kind of advice or discussing for issues related to village development and others.

Table 7.22: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Response about the Communication with Panchayat Office

Districts	Whether Villagers Make Contact with GP Office				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	133	50.38	131	49.62	264
Nadia	118	54.63	98	45.37	216
Total	251	52.29	229	47.71	480

Source : Field Survey

Form the above Table it can be seen that overall more than 52 per cent people go to Panchayat Office for their requirement. But 47.71 per cent people do not go to the Panchayat office. They are not going because Office does not listen to their problems. This allegation is made by those persons also who reported that they go to Panchayat Office. The following Table shows how many people are satisfied with the behaviour of panchayat office.

Table 7.23: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Response about the Satisfaction of the Behaviour of the Panchayat Office

Districts	Whether People are Satisfied				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	64	24.24	200	75.76	264
Nadia	54	25.00	162	75.00	216
Total	118	24.58	362	75.42	480

The above Table shows that only 24.58 per cent people reported that they are satisfied with the behaviour of the Panchayat Office. But 75.42 per cent people observed that Panchayat Office does not listen to their problems carefully and this 75.42 per cent includes those persons also who go to Panchayat Office.

The following Table shows the percentages of villagers who attend the Gram Sabha and Gram Sangsad meetings.

Table 7.24: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' Response about Attending the Meeting of Gram Sangsad and Gram Sabha

Districts	Whether Attend Meetings				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	111	42.05	153	57.95	264
Nadia	94	43.52	122	56.48	216
Total	205	42.71	275	57.29	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table shows that 57.29 per cent villagers not attend the Gram Sangsad and Gram Sabha meetings whereas Gram Sangsad and Gram Sabha are the two places where people can place their opinions, demands and grievances without any hesitation. The Gram Sabha is the only forum which can ensure direct democracy. It offers equal opportunity of direct participation of the people in the planning process as well as monitoring elected representatives. But there also more than 57 per cent villagers do not want to go to the meetings. Why they do not want to attend, the reasons are presented in Table 7.25.

Table 7.25: Percentage Distribution of the Villagers' about Reasons of Not Attending the Meeting of Gram Sangsad and Gram Sabha

District	Reasons for not Attending Meetings					Total
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	
Cooch Behar	86 (56.21)	4 (02.61)	7 (04.57)	40 (26.14)	16 (10.46)	153
Nadia	74 (60.66)	2 (01.64)	23 (18.85)	16 (13.11)	7 (05.74)	122
Grand Total	160 (58.18)	6 (02.18)	30 (10.91)	56 (20.36)	23 (08.26)	275

Source : Field Survey

Note : i) Percentage figures are within the brackets.

(ii) (1) – (5) the reasons are: (1) *No need to attend*; (2) *Date and Agenda decided before*; (3) *Do not understand anything*; (4) *Announcement is not done properly*; (5) *Their (villagers) opinion is not given importance*.

The above Table shows that 58 per cent people say that they have no need to go to attend the meetings. 20 per cent people say that announcement has not been done properly. Near about 11 per cent people say that they do not attend because they do not understand anything in the meeting. More than 8 per cent say that no importance of their opinion is given in the meeting. This percentage calculation has been done considering the persons who do not attend the meetings.

The following Table shows the percentage distribution of villagers who has or hasn't got help from the women panchayat members in both the districts.

Table 7.26: Villagers' Perception about the Cooperation / Help from Women Panchayat Members

Districts	Whether Cooperation Received				Total
	Yes	%	No	%	
Cooch Behar	22	08.33	242	91.67	264
Nadia	61	28.24	155	71.76	216
Total	83	17.29	397	82.71	480

Source : Field Survey

The above Table shows that only 17.29 percent get help from women panchayat members and 82.71 per cent villagers' do not get help from women panchayat members. For them male members can do better job than female members. In Cooch Behar district especially in border (Gitaldaha) area, people want male panchayat members because many times it is required to talk to B.S.F. Jawan. Lady panchayat hesitates to go to talk to them. Though the two selected districts belong to two different areas of West Bengal i.e. Cooch Behar in Northern part of West Bengal and Nadia in Southern part of West Bengal but

people's response was similar which may be because of the similarity of the socio-cultural milieu as the two districts are in the same state.

The following Table shows precisely villagers' perception about the women panchayat members' contribution for village development.

Table 7.27: Villagers' Perception about Women Panchayat Members Contribution for Village Development

Districts	Perception of Villagers						Total
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
Cooch Behar	108 (40.91)	118 (44.70)	24 (09.09)	5 (01.89)	9 (03.41)	- (00)	264
Nadia	56 (25.93)	125 (57.87)	27 (12.50)	5 (02.31)	- (00)	3 (01.39)	216
Total	164 (34.17)	243 (50.63)	51 (10.63)	10 (02.08)	9 (01.87)	3 (00.62)	480

Source : Field Survey

Note : i) Percentage figures are within the brackets.

ii) The perceptions of villagers i.e. (1) – (6) in the above Table 7.15 are given below:

(1) No development (2) Roughly said yes (3) Satisfactory (4) Its okey, but many things are due
(4) Very satisfactory (6) No response

The above Table 7.27 says that 34.17 per cent people strongly say that, there is no development at all in their villages. But more than 50 per cent people are saying that the development is roughly satisfactory. Others are also saying that the development are either satisfactory or development is under process or good also. According to villagers family of women representatives interfere in panchayati work; women representatives used to come to meeting with their husbands or any other male member of their families, they spend most of time for their housekeeping work; women representatives work under pressure of their male counterparts; and others.

Tyagi and Sinha (2004) have observed in their study that illiteracy of rural women is the major problem for active participation in panchayats. Due to this reason women do not understand their role and rights. They also have lack confidence in their ability and therefore do not take any initiative.

Villagers have a traditional thinking that rural women should carry on household activities only and men will do the panchayat related work as a proxy to their women. They feel that women do not have an understanding of development work to be undertaken by panchayats.

For village development it is required to ask on what basis they cast their votes. The following Table exhibits the reasons of casting the vote.

Table 7.28: Background of Casting of Vote

Districts	Basis / Reasons for Casting Vote						Total
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	
Cooch Behar	2 (00.76)	119 (45.08)	82 (31.06)	21 (07.95)	31 (11.74)	9 (03.41)	264
Nadia	13 (06.02)	62 (28.70)	132 (61.11)	3 (01.39)	6 (02.78)	(00)	216
Grand Total	15 (03.13)	181 (37.71)	214 (44.58)	24 (05.00)	37 (07.71)	9 (01.87)	480

Source: Field Survey

Note: i) Percentage figures are within the brackets.

(ii) (1) – (6) Backgrounds of casting vote are given below:

(1) On the basis of previous elected members' performances; (2) On the basis of particular party supporter; (3) On the basis of candidate; (4) On the basis of performance of the political parties; (5) On the basis of caste; (6) Follow the family members.

The above Table shows that 44.58 per cent people cast their votes on the basis of particular political party, whereas in Nadia district 61.11 per cent villagers cast their vote on the basis of particular political party without seeing the merit of the candidate. 37.71 per cent people cast their votes on the basis of candidate. In Cooch Behar district 45.08 per cent voters cast their votes only on the basis of candidate. Very low percentage of villagers cast their vote on the basis of performance of the political party or the performance of the previous elected candidates. So most of the people cast their vote either on the basis of candidate or particular supporting party. If vote casting happened on the basis of particular political party, it does not matter about the gender, what only matters is the performance or influence of the party. But if the people cast their vote on the basis of candidate then their (representatives) performance is very important. But the responsibility of village development depends on both sides i.e. voters choice and elected members. From the above analysis we have seen that all over villagers have given the mixed response about the performance of the women panchayat members.

7.5 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The present chapter deals with perception of villagers on the contribution of women panchayat members towards village development. For collecting the the feedback from the villagers, the present researcher introduced new set of questionnaire i.e. Group-B set and a total number of 480 villagers were interviewed in both the the districts i.e. 480 = 264 (Cooch Behar) + 216 (Nadia). Among them 49.37 per cent are SC and 47.29 per cent are general and remaining belong to ST. Among 480 respondents, 29.58 per cent are of young age(18-30 Yrs.) group and 42.92 per cent are in middle age (31-45) group. Remaining persons are of the age of 46 years and above.

They are not so much educated. Percentage of respondents who are educated up to 8th class is higher in the district of Cooch Behar than Nadia. From secondary to graduate, the picture is reverse, i.e the percentage of respondents in Nadia district is higher than that of Cooch Behar.

Annual income of maximum families (55.21 per cent) is upto Rs.20,000/- whereas very few families (07.92 per cent) have yearly income of above Rs.50,000/-. Main source of income of most of the families is daily labourer (agricultural and non-agricultural). Thus considering the socio-economic condition of the villagers, it can be said that it would be a big task for the panchayat representatives to improve the living conditions of the villagers as well as women being a women representatives.

From the primary data we have seen that 91.46 per cent respondents are unsatisfied with the performance of women panchayat members related with women issues. According to 66.04 per cent respondents, women panchayat members have no idea about how to do the panchayati work.

On the issue of drinking water it is revealed that 73.54 per cent respondents are satisfied with the performance of women panchayat members for providing drinking water facilities in their villages. We have not taken data on sanitary latrine but conversation with respondents revealed that some respondents have sanitary latrine but some others do not have. Some people told that sanitary mart will provide only platform for the toilet without providing any other building work like walls, door and roof. The villagers have no money to complete the building structure of toilet.

88.13 per cent respondents said that women panchayat members are not good performers to solve the internal problems within the SHG members. About MGNREGS, respondents reported that the beneficiaries do not get the full amount which the government provides. Male beneficiaries get more wage in a single day than the female because male

persons did more work physically than the female in a single work. For example, according to one day wage, a beneficiary can dig 75 quibiccm mud but a male beneficiaryis digging 100 quibic cm mud and hence he gets more money but it is against the guidelines.

For antenatal check-up and child immunization, respondents are satisfied with the performance of women panchayat members.

Only 20.62 per cent are saying they are benefited from various government schemes. But it is not sufficient.

However, they are not attending Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad meetings for various reasons. Only 42.71 per cent respondents attend the meetings. Villagers said women panchayat members could not do their work because of their male members in the family and male counterpart at their working place did their works as a helping hand. But it is true that due to reservation women will be the panchayat representatives and some power will be at their hands for economic development as well as women development.