

CHAPTER- VIII

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

8.1: Summary

Increase in political participation of women through 73rd Amendment Act, was not only a political connotation but also for reaching social impact which will lead to development of women. Participation of women in Panchayati Raj System has been considered as the most effective instrument to remove the inequality, invisibility and powerlessness of women.

This chapter presents with the summary of findings, conclusions and suggestions of the study.

Chapter-1 is introductory in nature. It has outlined the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, research methodology and chapterisation scheme of the study.

Chapter-2 deals with review of relevant literature. The review work has been done themitacally. Literature on educational empowerment, economic empowerment and political empowerment have been reviewed separately. After reviewing the literature the research gap has been identified.

Chapter-3 gives an overview of the socio-economic conditions of the women panchayat members in selected blocks of Cooch Behar and Nadia districts.

From the data we have seen that 62 per cent women panchayat members coming from SC community in Cooch Behar district whereas in Nadia district it is 36.11 per cent and all over more than 50 per cent members are coming from same community.

Most of the women panchayat members belong to age group of 36-45 years followed by 26-35 years, then above 45 and below 26 years. Only a few women (6.25 per cent) from the younger generation (below 26 yrs.) have come forward to become panchayat members. It implies that young age group women are coming in politics in lesser numbers.

Primary data reveal that both the districts taken together educationally the women panchayat members are very poor as nearly 60 per cent have attained 8th standard and below. In fact more than 9 per cent women panchayat members had even never attended school. Individually if we see then we can say that in Cooch Behar district 11.36 per cent women panchayat members are illiterate whereas in Nadia it is 06.94 per cent. In Cooch Behar district 72.72 per cent women panchayat members are educated up to 8th or below

standard and in Nadia district it is 43.05 per cent. But in Nadia district more than 56 per cent women panchayat members' educational status are 10th standard passed or more than that whereas in Cooch Behar district it is near about 27 per cent.

From the primary data it was seen that women panchayat members' marriage largely happened at the age group of 18-20 years. But in Cooch Behar district more than 60 per cent marriages of women panchayat members took place before the age of 18 years whereas in Nadia district it happened only in 29 per cent cases. Coefficient of variation of age at marriage is less in Cooch Behar district than Nadia district which implies that Cooch Behar district is more consistent in the matter of age at marriage i.e. before 18 years whereas in Nadia it is 18 years and above.

More than 45 per cent married women panchayat members' have more than two children. More children at home implies more responsibility and more work at home.

From the primary data we have seen that more than 41 per cent women members' yearly income is Rs.30, 000 or less than that. The main source of income of their families are small business, selling crops, daily labourer (both agriculture and non-agriculture), farming in their own lands, profit from business, service and others. Land sizes are very small for agriculture. 40.63 per cent women panchayat members have no agricultural land and have only home stead where they have constructed their houses. 50.62 per cent women panchayat members are holding 0.33-2.50 acres land and 7.50 per cent members are holding 2.50-5.00 acres land among them 91.66 per cent are from Cooch Behar district and 8.34 per cent are from Nadia district.

Chapter-4 deals with the women panchayat members' participation in the decision making processes. Proper information is a good input for decision making. For doing panchayat work properly, it is required to read and understand the government instructions. But in the previous chapter it has been seen that educational background of women panchayat members are very poor i.e. more than 60 per cent women panchayat members have attained only 8th standard or below.

In India women are in much worse position than men in terms of literacy rate, workforce participation, life expectancy etc. Since access to political opportunities and participation in political decision making process are important components of capability, therefore after getting elected there is scope for women to establish their talents and efficiency and decision making power for all round development of the country. After 73rd Amendment Act participation of women in three-tier panchayati system has increased. To understand whether the participation of women has increased effectively or not it is to be

seen how much they participate in the decision making process at gram panchayat level like those in panchayat meetings, gram sabha and gram sansad meetings.

From the primary data it was seen that there was a positive response for attending gram sabha and gram sansad meetings and about 100 per cent attendance in panchayat meetings. 87.50 per cent of total women panchayat members said that they place their opinion in the meetings.

Taking part in decision making process the knowledge of current situation is required which increases awareness level. This knowledge is acquired through reading news paper, viewing T.V., interacting with people and others. In all cases Nadia district is in better position than Cooch Behar. Public interaction is the way of exchanging views. This public interaction is related with the degree of freedom of movement of women panchayat members. This freedom of movement is the indicator of autonomy of women as well as abilities to take decision.

The degree of participation in decision making at household level signifies the women's autonomy. Autonomy is a status symbol and it is an important component of empowerment. Women's autonomy has a significant impact on their ability.

For domestic purchase, in majority cases decisions are taken by their husbands. From the primary data it was seen that 72.50 percent of women panchayat members are not involved in the decision regarding what they (husbands and others) purchase for domestic purposes.

Only 11.36 percent women panchayat members can take the decision independently to go outside for earning purposes. It is one kind of domination of male priorities over female as expected in a biased society. The women's condition within the four walls of their houses is more or less the same irrespective of their locations. Women panchayat members cannot do savings for their own or for their children without their husbands' consent. About 67 percent of women members cannot take the decision about their monetary security for their future. Nadia and Cooch Behar districts have more or less same results.

In Cooch Behar district more than 51 per cent and in Nadia district also more than 58 percent women panchayat members are enjoying freedom of expenditure.

As regards family planning, more than 57 percent women panchayat members' opinion in Cooch Behar district is not considered by their husband. More than 63 percent women panchayat members' opinion in Nadia district about family planning is not considered by their husband.

Chapter-5 has analysed the performance of women panchayat members in promoting women empowerment in different manners. Among them the relationship between SHGs and women panchayat members is very significant. The financial service through the SHGs empowers rural women economically and psychologically which enable the power of the self-esteem and self-confidence and give ability to earn and control economic resources. From the analysis of the data we have seen, women panchayat members in both selected districts are connected with the SHGs. Women panchayat members in Cooch Behar district have given more importance on loan related matters whereas in Nadia district members have given emphasis on keeping contact with the members of the SHGs. 'Keep contact' with the SHGs members is the effective way towards success of the groups for economic activities. In Cooch Behar district 12.28 per cent women panchayat members keep contact with the SHGs members and in Nadia district it is 27.72 per cent. Nadia district is more successful in SHGs' economic activities (Table 5.3) in comparison with Cooch Behar.

More than 68 per cent women panchayat members said that women are participating in the work under MGNREGS projects but they do not know the criteria of the employment that of the total beneficiaries at least one-third should be women.

From the primary data we have seen that more than 7 per cent of total women panchayat members was not able to allot the houses to women under the IAY.

For improving the quality of life of the rural people and providing privacy and dignity of women, government of India introduced "Total Sanitation Campaign" (TSC). One of the most important obligatory duties of Gram Panchayats is to ensure installation of sanitary toilet in each and every household to completely stop the unhygienic practice of open defecation. More than 64 per cent (Table-5.16) women panchayat members have reported that they have provided sanitary latrine in every households in their area of responsibility. But it is far behind from 100 per cent success.

With the improvement of sanitation in rural areas, for availability of drinking water in rural areas, the Government of India has introduced some important measures like "Nirmal Bharat Abhiyan". The Panchayat and Rural Development Department is in overall charge of execution of the scheme. More than 32 per cent Women Panchayat Members reported that they are providing drinking water for enhancing quality of life and checking incidences of water borne diseases. The performance of women panchayat members in Nadia district for providing drinking water is very poor only 6.94 per cent (Table 5.18). This is because in Nadia district 37.50 per cent (Table-3.34) women panchayat members have no source of drinking water in their own houses.

35.23 per cent (Table 5.19) girl marriage has happened at below 18 years in Cooch Behar district but in Nadia district it is 25 per cent (Table -5.20).

Proper antenatal check-up is very important for reducing morbidity and avoiding mortality of the mother as well as infant. In order to reduce maternal mortality rate and to ensure safe delivery under trained hands institutional birth is very necessary. In Cooch Behar district 67.05 per cent (Table-5.23) women panchayat members said that there is Institutional birth and in Nadia it is 88.89 per cent (Table-5.24).

Education is one of the most important socio-economic factors influencing human development of a society. 86th Amendment to the Constitution of India states that free and compulsory education to the children of 6-14 years of age group is a Fundamental Right. In Cooch Behar district 82.23 per cent girl students are attending school at the age group of (6-10) years. In Nadia district it is 95.83 per cent.

In Cooch Behar district 26.14 per cent women panchayat members said that there is no separate toilet for girls at school and in Nadia district 18.13 per cent women panchayat members said that there is no separate toilet for girls at primary school.

From this chapter-5 and chapter-3 we have seen that Nadia district's rural women including panchayat members and pradhans are more conscious about their social factors with their poor economic conditions compared to rural women including panchayat members and pradhans in Cooch Behar district.

Chapter – 6 has discussed about how do women panchayat pradhans including members maintain a balance in performance of their duties at home and panchayat institution.

Article 243 to 243-O, Article 243-G of the Constitution stipulates with the Panchayats powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government.

For the economic development at the village level and for ensuring social justice, panchayat members will have to perform their duties on behalf of the gram panchayats, through the West Bengal Panchayat Act. According to West Bengal Panchayat Act seventy one (71) duties of the gram panchayats are mentioned in this chapter.

Nevertheless becoming a highly reputed responsible women in her working place, she is treated first as 'home maker' then the rest. Women panchayat members are not exceptional. From the primary data we have seen that out of 136 members (except 24 pradhans) 55.88 per cent (Table-6.2) women panchayat members spend more than eight

hours for household work and if we consider Table- 6.3 then we can see that, 104 members out of 136 members i.e. 76.47 per cent women panchayat members spend 8 hours and above for household work. In fact 58.33 per cent panchayat Pradhans spend more than half (i.e. 8-11 hours) of their whole day time on household work. Due to this (household work) reason 80.15 per cent members and 75 per cent Pradhans said that it is a burden.

Chapter – 7 is based on perception of villagers about the contribution of women panchayat members. The results are not very encouraging. About the performance of women panchayat members related with women issue only 8.54 per cent villagers have given positive view. Regarding the knowledge of the women panchayat members 33.95 per cent villagers responded in affirmative.

From the study it was seen that only 56.46 per cent of total 480 respondents said that they are aware about reservation of women in Panchayats. Only 31.04 per cent villagers told that women reservation caused some development in villages. 34.17 per cent villagers responded that no development was made after the reservation of women in Panchayat took place.

Only 10.63 per cent villagers said that village development is satisfactory and very few, i.e., 1.87 per cent said that they are very satisfied with the village development. 82.71 per cent villagers said that they did not get any cooperation from women panchayat members.

The study also showed that 42.71 per cent of villagers attended the public meetings of the panchayats. In casting their vote during election they have to follow the dictate of the local party leaders or influential persons – not their own choice.

For drinking water issue, healthcare issue like antenatal ckeck-up, child immunization etc. villagers' response was affirmative, i.e., more than 60 per cent villagers' response was positive. Table 7.18 shows that village women's participation is poor (11.87 per cent) in SHGs. Villagers said that panchayat members do not try to encourage the rural ladies to form SHGs. If there is a difference of opinion within the members belonging to same SHG, villagers said that panchayat members do not try to resolve the matter.

8.2: Conclusion

1. Age is an important factor in influencing the pattern of leadership. Government introduces new schemes and programmes. For implementation and supervision people of younger generation are effective. But in rural area there is a tendency of early age at marriage which brings lots of problems physically and mentally. At very early age when they do not know properly how to maintain the relation with in-laws or cope-up properly

with the in-laws house of that time they become teenager mother. Because of that they always remain busy with the domestic work and maintaining relation rather than their liking.

2. Although there is no minimum educational norm to be elected as panchayat members, it is a big problem for the uneducated members that they do not understand the written instructions and government policies and programmes. They always dependent on either office members or their male counterparts or male educated members of their family.
3. For 8th standard pass and below educated women panchayat members, it is difficult to understand the government orders and circulars. Lack of information seriously hampers the functioning of the panchayat members. This difference between lack of information and implementation of the function of the panchayat creates a doubt of the work of what to do and what not to do which leads to create less confidence for taking proper decision.
4. Traditionally, rich and upper caste village elders were found to be the village leader or Panchayat. But from the findings of the primary data it is clear that now a days panchayat members can come from any kind of socio-economic background. In fact they are coming more from the poor-uneducated and Schedule Caste community.
5. It is a good effect of reservation that 100 per cent women Panchayat members are attending the Panchayat meetings and more than 85 per cent members place their opinion in the meeting.
6. Autonomy is a status symbol of women empowerment. Women have considerably lower autonomy in comparison with men except free movement in Nadia district and expenditure for self in both the districts. Women's autonomy in the families plays an important role in taking decision at panchayat level because it contributes directly for confidence building within. With the enhanced decision taking capability at the household level, women can repeat the same ability in the wider platform.
7. Secondary data (Table 5:3) states that women SHGs in Nadia district are more successful in economic activities than the Cooch Behar district's SHGs whereas number of SHGs in Cooch Behar district is higher. The reasons behind the success of Nadia district for economic activity of SHGs are: Panchayat members keeping contact with the SHGs members and better performance of district cooperative banks which is less in the case of Cooch Behar district (Table- 5.4).

8. By introducing MGNREGA in 2006, the Government of India provides employment right to the rural people. In this Act women workers receive the special attention. From the primary data it was seen that women Panchayat members did not know about the criteria of this Act which gives lots of facilities for rural women beneficiaries.
9. Government introduced Indira Awaas Yojana (IAY) for economically backward rural women. This scheme especially assigned houses to the name of a female member of the beneficiary family. More than 7 per cent of total women panchayat members were not able to allot the houses to women due to unavailability of BPL card in their name.
10. Women panchayat members were not able to provide drinking water to the household of 100 per cent villagers. 17.50 per cent (Table 3.34) of women panchayat members do not have provision of drinking water at their homes. Because of that they (women panchayat members) are not laying enough emphasis on provision of drinking water in other household of their panchayat area.
11. The basic reason for early age at marriage is that according to 2001 and 2011 censuses more than 50 per cent population in Cooch Behar district belong to SC community. They are not economically strong. Otherwise also, uneducated rural people have a tendency to give marriage of their daughters or sisters at early age.
12. In Nadia district institutional birth rate is higher because, according to women panchayat members, there is 100 per cent (Table-5.22) tendency of the pregnant ladies to go to health centre for antenatal check-up and during that time they get knowledge about the health care facility from the healthcare professionals. From the secondary data we have seen that availability of beds in health institutions in respect of population is higher in Nadia district than Cooch Behar district. But about child immunization, women panchayat members in both the districts expressed their views that village women are aware about child immunization.
13. The girl children who are not going to school in Cooch Behar district is because of financial crisis. They are involved, especially in Dinhata block, in illegal activities like selling salt and sugar and other commodities in Bangladesh and they used to migrate with their parents to other states or other country like Bhutan for regular income at higher wage. In Nadia district girl children are especially involved in brick-making industry. Besides these, there is another reason for not attending school– no separate toilet for girls at their schools.

14. After giving all energy to household work, it is difficult to spend time and energy for doing other work like Panchayati work which does not bring financial benefits. That is why according to some Panchayat members including Pradhans also 'the responsibility of panchayati work is a burden'. The other reason for this burden is that they cannot get the chance to do their work freely or independently according to their capability.
15. To perform their duties they do not get enough financial allowance to sustain their living. No conveyance allowance is given to them to visit sites of various work being undertaken by the panchayat. This is another reason that women panchayat members are dependent on their male family members because sometimes it is impossible to visit the work site which is far from their houses. This insufficient facilities affect the livelihood of Panchayat members adversely. During the field survey we have seen that under IAY the cash amount for beneficiaries is different in different areas. But it should be uniform since it is a centrally sponsored scheme. For MGNREGS government forcefully started the account payment system, i.e., beneficiaries have to have post office or bank account where their payment will be made directly and payment can safely go to their hands. If panchayat members get sufficient salary for their work then the villagers will be benefited satisfactorily.
16. There has been a mixed response from the villagers about performance of the women panchayat members. There is a possibility to get good feedback if the panchayat members do their work as public representatives rather than party representatives.
17. For achieving inclusive growth and increasing the political power of rural women reservation in the self-government at local level has no alternative. Social and economic development of village should be their main work. Empowerment and development of rural women is also a part of their work. But for them it is very difficult to achieve the goal because of the obstructions like patriarchal society, political party and issues of corruption, favouritism and other social factors. It is also true that with these obstructions some women panchayat members are still trying to give their best in West Bengal.

8.3 Suggestions

On the basis of our in-depth study, the following suggestions can be given for improvement of the situation:-

1. The 3rd generation Panchayati system decentralises and redistributes the power of politics from the upper and rich class people to the marginalised group of the people. But the problems still remains. Women are constitutionally recognised but they are not given the opportunity inspite of their numbers. Mainly patriarchal society is controlling their affairs. There is a lack of awareness among women about the constitutional provision giving them sufficient power because no training is given to them regarding constitutional and legal provisions. They are to be imparted programme oriented training.
2. For elected Panchayat members there is no minimum educational norm. This provision is utilised optimally by political parties because they also prefer illiterate candidates who will follow their direction without asking any questions. It is very painful for the society that some ones' burden of work is being borne by some other persons. At the same time it is a black mark for the reservation where women are reserved for the seats not for the work. There is a need to make one compulsory norm that at least 10th pass candidates get chance to nominate their name for panchayat election. It will be possible when number of women leaders in the political parties increase or women are in the influential position in political parties.
3. For making the women's participation compulsory in the decision making process, it would be better to make it mandatory for every women member to express her opinion in the meeting and minutes of the meeting expressing their opinion have to be recorded thereafter.
4. Socially and geographically backward area like Cooch Behar [more than 50 per cent population belong to SC community and special characters like enclaves (chhitmohals) and Bangladesh boarder] need special attention. Uniform strategy often fails to meet the needs of the poor.
5. To minimize the issue of corruption and to increase the frequency of attendance of members in the Anchal office, it is essential to increase monthly honorarium for Panchayat Pradhans as well as members.
6. Some members' houses are situated in the interior place where communication is almost non-existent. To enable the members to visit their office (Anchal) regularly, it would be in the interest of society to provide them bi-cycle.
7. Through networking system it would be possible to share experience especially to exchange their ideas among the members (including pradhans) within the districts and

other districts' and learn from one another also. It is good for development of rural areas.

8. For public health government has given lots of responsibilities to the GPs at local level. According to that, government should organise the workshop only on the health related matters from which panchayat members can get the clear views for the development of health of their villagers.
9. It is not only sufficient to construct toilet at schools and houses but there is a need to monitor their maintenance and usage. Some people tend to defecate in open despite having toilets. Awareness amongst villagers is required to be increased by organising workshop / lectures.
10. Total Sanitation Campaign becomes 100 per cent successful when 100 per cent households have the sanitary latrine facility and they use it and when in schools there are separate toilet for girls in 100 per cent cases.
11. To prevent marriage at early age, it is recommended to arrange workshop by doctors about implications on the health of ladies getting married early.
12. Women Panchayat members should be conscious about the problems being faced by women in the society and initiate appropriate steps to resolve them with the help of state authorities.
13. Capacity building is required at a large scale for their (panchayat members') improvement. Good performance of panchayat members should be recognised by the government, thus inspiring others to follow the example and to perform better.
14. Most of the women panchayat members have lack of awareness about their powers and duties provided in Panchayati Raj Act. The government should provide training regarding their powers and duties.
15. It is also true that 3rd generation panchayat system is very young since it has been established from the year 1993 and women will do better and best with their patience, matured understanding, capability and efficiency in our future life. So, we have to wait for better performance of women panchayat members in near future.
16. In spite of the enormous hurdles faced by these women in a patriarchal society, where they also have to overcome their illiteracy and lack of awareness of political rights, many of them have to come up not only as sincere panchayat workers but as competent local leaders along with their male counterparts and administrators.