

CHAPTER - 06

6.1 Summary and Concluding Observation of the Research

In the final chapter of research the aim is to pull together a number of concluding comments and points concerning the prospects of the participatory local governance and development in West Bengal through the people participation in Gram Sansad. Actually, participatory development as a worldwide new approach to development is designed to enhance sustainability and self-reliance and to achieve social justice through improvements in the quality of people's participation. The main focal point of the participatory development is qualitative and quantitative people participation in the developmental process. From these quantitative people participation is the basic need for the success of the participatory development. In participatory development people are willingly involve themselves in a wide range of development activities, as agents and beneficiaries of development. So researcher thinks the central focus of the development is not necessarily to boost production of material goods; it should be to enhance people's capability to have a role in their own society's development. Participatory development always attempts to introduce a bottom-up style of development in order to remedy the government led approach's shortcomings, specifically by focusing on qualitative improvements in local society's participation. To create the conditions for promoting mass people participation, it is the duty of a government to adapt basic legislation and institutions that guarantee political and economic reforms as well as strive to meet a broader range of basic human needs like as food, housing, health, medical care and education. It is also necessary to relax regulations in order to remove obstacles to economic and political participation, improve financial management, and build infrastructure. These are the more important components of good governance, which is the basis of participatory development.

The terms 'governance' and 'good governance' are being increasingly used in development literature. The meaning of the word 'governance' is the act or manner of governing; the office or function of governing. Governance means the process of decision making and the process by which decisions are implemented. The term governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, national governance and local governance. On the one hand governance is the process of decision-making and process by which decisions are implemented. On the other hand government is one of the actors in

governance. Except government there are other actors in rural areas, such as influential landlords, peasant organization, NGOs, religious leaders, caste leaders and political parties (1). Researcher's research mainly focused on the government as an actor of the governance and also studied the effects of other actors in the development process. Good governance is the key word in the current development discourse. In simple terms, good governance can be described as the citizen friendly, citizen caring and responsive administration. Actually, good governance depends on the co-operation and involvement of citizen and organizations. The United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) has identified a number of key elements of good governance, which include participation, transparency, and responsiveness, rule of law, equality, accountability, effectiveness, efficiency and consensus orientation. The UNDP document states these aspects cannot stand alone; they are mutually reinforcing (2). Good governance requires wide participation in making public choices and regulations.

Government is an actor of governance. Local government is an actor of local governance. According to P. Stones (3) local government is that part of government of a country which deals with those matters which concerns people living in a particular locality. The local government is called the government at the local level simply because of the fact that conceptually, it has some inherent governmental characteristics which are: a) it governs its locality or area as if they are normally elected by the local people, b) it works as a multipurpose institution delivering goods and services directly to the people, c) it enjoys Constitutional status, d) it works as a self-governing institution with autonomous status. The people participation is crucial for the success of local government. The connotation of local government establishes the crucial significance of participation of people in the management and administration of their local affairs through their periodically elected representatives and their own frequent involvement in the formulation and implementation of development plans for their locality. So it is obvious that the concept of people's participation in local government is of great importance for successful functioning of a local authority. People's participation not only enhances individual's dignity and community feeling at all levels, but also make the programmes more responsive and better adapted to the local needs.

People's participation has emerged as a popular political slogan as it has become the pre-condition for development. Broadly, the people's participation in the local governance means their total involvement in its programmes and activities. The meaningful participation of the people in development means sharing of power in society. This is possible if people are

involved in the policy formulation, implementation of the policy as well as other governmental activities. The real participation of people in development process can be secured only by devolving power and resources to grassroots institutions. The first condition for such participation is that the government must manifest a positive political will favoring people's participation in politics; only then powers and resources can flow from the top. The second condition is that the bureaucracy in the field must be willing to extend a helping hand to the local community efforts. The third condition is that the people at the local level must have cohesion and harmony among themselves because a cohesive and institutionally organized group of people can actually participate and contribute to a democratic process (4). Participation is a comprehensive concept embracing all the aspects and phases of development starting with people's initiative and unto their sustaining their activity. Participation creates a sense of awareness, belonging, ownership and possession. It helps to develop self-reliance, self-confidence, competence and managerial capacity. Participation enables people to discover their strength, increases their aspiration level and mobilizes their resources for productive purposes. Participation brings people from periphery to core, from passive state to active state, and moulds them as thinkers, decision-makers, doers and implementers from their state as acceptors. It is a means to foster social responsibility and community ownership among the people. Actually, the ultimate objective of the people's participation is human resource development.

Participation being an integral process of overall development of a nation, its objective must not be merely political or economic, as is often the case, but it should also be aimed at satisfying social, cultural and ethnic demands. Moreover, in this process people are involved at every stage of development, such as institution, conception, planning, decision making, implementation, management, supervision, evaluation, revision of the plan, fresh initiatives and sharing of benefits. Moreover, people's participation is a learning process as it transforms knowledge and skill to the people while they participate in developmental activities. It is a non-formal education and education through activity. Participatory process has three roles (5) 'Educative', 'Integrative', and 'Empowering'. It educates the people in social responsibility for himself as well as for the community; participation increases the feeling of belonging and thus, derives social integration. Assuming the responsibility, the people give up the sense of 'superiority subordination' and start to have confidence in themselves. Thus, participation has a normative orientation that seeks to involve those people who in the past had been left out of the development process. For this reason, participation is

essentially linked to the question of social justice and equality in the society. As a result, in recent times, people's participation has become as a popular slogan, particularly in all developing countries. In India, there are various initiatives taken by the government for the mass people's participation. Political parties are also tries to include the people in any development projects in order to widen political support.

In India, for the mass people's participation in development process there is strong local self government, where people are easily engaged in various developmental plans and programmes. In rural India there is a strong Constitutional Panchayati Raj Institution for the local governance. For the success of local governance, the Panchayati Raj Institution is a three-tiered structure in India. Gram Panchayat, which normally covers a cluster of villages, is the lowest tier of the institution. The members of the Gram Panchayat are directly elected by secret ballot on the basis of universal adult franchise. The chairman of the GP is known as Pradhan. The Pradhan will have general responsibility for financial and executive administration of the GP. The next higher tier is called Panchayat Samity at the Block level. The members of the Panchayat Samity are also directly elected by the people. The Chairperson of the Panchayat Samity is called Sabhapati. The Panchayat Samity controls the services of virtually all the technical and non technical officers and employees of the Block. In the three tier Panchayat system, the Zilla Parishad is the highest level of body for rural administration. Most of the members of the Zilla Parishad are directly elected by the people; some come as ex-officio members by nomination. The Chairperson of the Zilla Parishad is called Sabhadipati. The meeting of the Zilla Parishad is held at least once a month.

In West Bengal, the Gram Panchayats are very large in respect of area and population. So, no useful purpose can be served in the meetings of such a large number of people. For this reason in order to ensure direct interaction with the villagers, the Gram Sansad was introduced at the booth level. Thus, the West Bengal Panchayat Act introduced a two-tiered structure for facilitating direct democracy and confirmed people's participation. These two tiers are Gram Sabha at Gram Panchayat level and Gram Sansad at village/ward level. A Gram Sabha has been defined as 'a body consisting of person registered in the electoral rolls pertaining to a Gram' where a Gram is 'any Mouza or part of a Mouza or a group of contiguous mouzas or parts thereof as on how the state government may notify'. Gram Sabha meeting shall be held once every year during the month of December. The resolution of the Gram Sansad and views of Gram Panchayat shall be placed before Gram Sabha for

deliberation and recommendations. The question and recommendations coming before Gram Sabha shall be recorded and referred to Gram Panchayat for its consideration. The annual budget before being finally formulated by Gram Panchayat must be approved by Gram Sabha. Annual plan and annual report of the Gram Panchayat shall also be discussed in the Gram Sabha meeting. The Gram Sabha is the place for the voice of the people. It airs their grievances and watches over the functioning of the Panchayat. The Gram Sabha can be an effective forum for mobilizing the masses in relation to community activities, by gathering the people under one umbrella and interacting on issues of mutual interest.

Gram Sansad has been defined by the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Act, 1994 as a 'body consisting of persons registered at any time in the electoral rolls pertaining to a constituency of a Gram Panchayat, delimited for the purpose of last preceding general election to the Gram Panchayat' (6). A Sansad is required to guide and advise the Panchayat in regard to the schemes for economic development and social justice undertaken or proposed to be undertaken in its area. The Gram Panchayat is required to consider every resolution adopted at the meeting of the Gram Sansads. The decisions and actions taken by it will be reported at its next meeting. Apart from this, the Gram Panchayat shall place its budget to the Gram Sansad, report on the work done during the previous year, and propose work to be done in the following year by the Gram Panchayat. The Panchayat shall also place the latest report on audit and accounts before the Gram Sansads during their half-yearly meetings. According to the West Bengal Panchayat law, the Gram Sansad can be considered as the voice of the people. It is expected that such bodies not only shall guide in policy making, they shall also act as a watchdog over Panchayat's activities. This body can help Gram Panchayat for effective implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the developmental programme undertaken by the Gram Panchayat.

In chapter 1 brief the introduction, statement of the research problem, objective of the study, research questions, methodology, a brief literature review, significance of the study and chapterization of research have been discussed.

From the discussion about the theoretical framework of participatory local governance and development in Chapter 2 it is important to note that there is an interrelated discussion between decentralization government, governance, development, participation and participatory development. This chapter clearly defines decentralization, participation, governance, development and participatory development. In this chapter it is clearly noted

that decentralization has four characteristic features: a) statutory basis for obtaining systematic and consistent practices; b) assignment of work or responsibility; c) the entrustment of authority that equals the assigned responsibility; d) the creation of accountability on the part of the decentralized agencies to whom the transfer of authority has taken place to perform in terms of the standards established. The rationale of democratic decentralization and participation is also discussed. Participatory local governance and development is discussed theoretically from various angles in this chapter. The meaning, theoretical aspects, importance and various dimensions of participatory local governance and development are clearly analysed in this chapter. Democratic decentralization and participation in globalised era is also analysed in this chapter. Panchayati Raj Institution of India, especially of West Bengal is briefly discussed. The structure, function, the activities and the involvement of people in Panchayati Raj Institution are discussed very clearly from various angles. Evolution of Panchayati Raj Institution of rural India is briefly discussed in steps from the very ancient period to the present day. Various amendments to the Panchayati Raj system are briefly discussed. The most important Panchayat amendment Act is the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. This amendment defines Panchayat as “institutions of self government to which the legislature of a state may, by law, endow power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self government”. However, it goes to say that “such law may contain provisions for the devolutions of powers and responsibilities upon Panchayats at the appropriate level” (a) with respect to development and social justice; (b) the implementation of schemes for economic development and social justice as may be entrusted to them including those in relation to the matters listed in the ‘eleventh schedule’. This act also has attempted to institutionalize people’s participation through a body called ‘Gram Sabha’. The Gram Sansad as a people’s forum was incorporated by the West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act, 1992 as an epitome of participatory democracy. The West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act, 2003 had made the provision for the constitution of a Gram Unnayan Samity in every Sansad area for active people’s participation in implementation and equitable distribution of benefits of rural development programmes within its jurisdiction.

Chapter 3 deeply analyses the case of Panchayati Raj Institution of West Bengal, and discusses participatory development and local governance. The notions of ‘participatory development’ and ‘local governance’ have been inseparable since the end of the cold war; most of the countries have demanded development aid for successfully governing their

people. The period since the 1980's has seen a global trend toward political democratization and pluralism, economic liberalization and transitions to a market oriented economy, although this has varied from country to country and region to region. In this light, increasing attention has come to be paid to the importance of border people's participation. In December 1989, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Development Assistance committee released a policy statement on development cooperation in the 1990s. It cited participatory development, which would stimulate the productive energies of people, encourage border participation of all people in the planning process, and lead to a more equitable sharing of their benefits. Development within a developing society aims at building into society the mechanisms that will ultimately permit self-reliant growth without foreign assistance at sustaining stable growth patterns for economic development in harmony with the environment and to take part in development to overcome income gaps, regional disparities and inequality between men and women. For this to be possible, it is this participation that is important. Actually, participatory development is an approach to development that is designed to enhance sustainability and self reliance and to achieve social justice through improvements in the quality of people's participation. Modern Local Government puts emphasis on more active forms of citizenship, and on the community governance. Participation in governance for a good society requires direct connection between citizen and state. In West Bengal, the Panchayati Raj Institution in rural areas, as a form of local government, had gained considerable importance for rural development from the very beginning of the introduction of the decentralized governance. Statutorily Constituted Panchayat was established by the British Govt. in India in Bengal in 1870, when the Bengal Village Chowkidari act was passed (7). The sole purpose of the Panchayats were levying and collecting Chowkidari tax for the maintenance of the village watchman. From 1919 onwards, undivided Bengal had two tiers of rural local government. In 1935, the Bengal Village Self-Government Act, 1919 was amended and same changes were introduced. The 1919 Village Act was further amended in 1947. In 1950, women were allowed to vote and to stand as candidates for the first time in the Union Boards elections. After independence the article 40 in the Directive Principles of State Policy of Constitution states that "the state shall take steps to organize Village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local self-government". But no states took steps to develop village Panchayats until the Balvantary Mehta led team underlined the need for building up grassroots democratic institutions in the villages for the purpose of implementing the development programmes. But West Bengal had different steps for the

establishment of the local self-government. The West Bengal Panchayat Bill was passed in 1957. Under this act, the state introduced two tiered Panchayat system. The West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act, 1963 provided for re-modeling of local government with a view to bringing about democratic decentralization and people participation in planning and development. Actually West Bengal started its journey at a time when the phase of decline of the Panchayat Institutions in other states of the country had begun. The West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act 1973 provided a three tiered Panchayat system – Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samity at the Block level and Zilla Parishad at the district level. The new chapter of the Panchayati Raj Institution was started from the 1978 election in West Bengal. The major amendments to the Panchayat acts were made in 1978, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1992, 1994, 1997, 2003, 2008 and 2013. These amendments have reinforced the participatory character of the Panchayat system, especially in the provision of the inclusion of the women, backward classes and through the creation of Gram Sabha, Gram Sansad and Gram Unnayan Samity. In view of the professed objective of participatory development through Panchayati Raj Institution, the West Bengal Panchayat amendment act, 1994 in the spirit of 73rd amendment to the Constitution of India created three fora for people's participation – Gram Sabha, Gram Sansad and Beneficiary committees. Gram Sabha as a people's forum recorded the recommendation of the Gram Sansad and referred that to the Gram Panchayat for implementation. Gram Sansad, a ward-level people's forum shall guide and advise the Gram Panchayat in regard to the schemes for economic development and social justice under taken or proposed to be under taken in its area. Formally the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad have been given enormous powers. These bodies act as the guide to Panchayats in policy making and also act as a watchdog over the Panchayat's activities, criticise Panchayats for failures and help the Panchayats in implementation. Although formally vested with a lot of power, the real situation is different. Neither authorities nor the people give due significance to these forum. As a result, although officially they exist, functionally they lack teeth. Gram Sabhas, due to their large size, remain ineffective while Gram Sansads cannot afford to remain so.

In chapter 4 there is a brief description of Coochbehar district of West Bengal which is researcher's field. There is a brief historical background of the name of Coochbehar. Before 28th August, 1949 Coochbehar was a princely state under British government. In early times the territory was known as 'Pragiyotisha'. According to Harendra Narayan Roy Choudhary, one of Hira's sons, Bisu, became the king under the name of Visvasimha in

1510. Raja Jagaddipendra Narayan was the last Maharaja of Coochbehar. Raja Jagaddipendra Narayan transferred the state to India on 28th August, 1949. The transfer of administration of the state to the govt. of India came into force on 12th September, 1949. Eventually, Coochbehar was transferred and merged with the province of West Bengal on 19th January 1950 and from the date Coochbehar emerged as a new district in the administrative map of West Bengal. There is no natural boundary of the district. Coochbehar is a district under the Jalpaiguri division of the State of West Bengal. The northern boundary and most part of the western boundary are formed by the district of Jalpaiguri; the state of Assam is in the east, and Bangladesh is in the west as well as in the south. Coochbehar is essentially a flat land with a slight south-eastern slope. In Coochbehar, there are six river systems flowing in south-easterly direction. The climate of the district is characterized by a highly humid atmosphere and abundant rains, with the temperatures being seldom excessive. The total area of the district is 3387 sq. kms, which contributes 3.82% of the land mass of the state of West Bengal. The first Census conducted between the years 1871-72. This Census disclosed a total population of the than Coochbehar state was 5, 32,565 persons. In 1951, the population was 6, 68,949. In 2011 Census the total population found 28, 22,780 persons. At present the density of population is 833 per sq.kms. The total number of literates according to the 2011 Census is 18, 74,984. Out of them 10, 45,903 are male and 8, 34,081 are female. The present literacy rate is 75.93%. Out of them male literacy rate is 81.82% and female literacy rate is 69.08%. Coochbehar presently had 3.09% population of the total population of the state. Coochbehar is an agricultural district. The main occupation of the people of this district is agriculture. The principal crops of the district is paddy, jute, tobacco, mustard seed, pulses, wheat, barley, millets, corn, potato, onion, garlic, ginger and turmeric. Coochbehar district is an irrigation deficient district. There are no major irrigation schemes worth mentioning the district. At present about 35% of the total cultivable land is under irrigation. There are no large scale industries in the district. Some small scale industries like hand-loom weaving, paddy husking, bidi-making exist in the district. At present an industrial area has been set up in 'Chakchaka' very close to the district town. At present the estate comprises 131 acres of land. 52 entrepreneurs have already procured 32 acres of land in the industrial growth centre and 22 units have already started production. The present set up of the general administration is similar to same as the other districts of the state. At present District Magistrate is the head of the district. He is assisted in his administration by two Additional Deputy Magistrates. At present there are 12 blocks in the district. The Block Development Officer is the head of the block administration. There are no details about the rural administration in the time of Raj.

There was an institution known as 'Dewania' in the time of early Raj. These 'Dewanias' were large 'Joteders' residing on their firms; and the neighboring areas contained their tenants. The Coochbehar Village Chowkidary Act was passed in 1893-94 on the model of the Bengal act of the same name of 1891. The collecting members of the Panchayat were appointed by the state and a Chowkidari rate intern of the act was levied on the residents of the Panchayat area by the collecting Panchayat and deposited with the Sub-Divisional Officer. The West Bengal Panchayat Act of 1957 was extended to the district and whole district was covered by the Gram and Anchal Panchayats. There were 11 Anchalik Parishads set up under the West Bengal Zilla Parishad Act, 1964, corresponding to the 11 Blocks in the district. Three tier Panchayat system has successfully been implemented in West Bengal in the year 1978. At present in Coochbehar there have 128 Gram Panchayats, 12 Panchayat Samities and one Zilla Parishad. There are 1188 villages and 1703 Gram Sansads in the district. In the 2013 Panchayat election, rural power shifted to the Trinamul Congress (TMC) from the Left Front.

Chapter 5 briefly discusses the role of the Gram Sansad and the people's participation in development process, and also explores the reasons behind the non participation of people in Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad. Mass participation is supposed to have a few positive impacts on rural development efforts. When almost all development decisions are made by the villagers, development will come closer to the felt needs, priorities and requirements of the people concerned. People's participation is to help selecting programmes that would conform to popular perception, identifying recipients who really deserve benefits of available government schemes. Raising question on the use of public projects will ensure better maintenance. In India in the form of Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad, participatory development is now being emphasized where villagers are to assemble and to take stock of the activities, accounts of the Gram Panchayats, undertaken social audit, administer accountability and put forth their perceived priorities in the sphere of rural development. These are to be the common forum, umbrella organizations for interacting on issues concerning the community, for deciding common priority and set forth agenda for common well-being. Day-to-day eminence of the Gram Sansad is gradually increasing. Nowadays Gram Panchayat has to duly consider every resolution of Sansad. So theoretically these forums – Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad are the best platform for decision making of the people. For this regards people's participation is very important for the success of these institutions. But the real situation is far different from what it is in theory. The participation of the people in the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad is very poor. Report about Gram Sabha

meetings during the period of 1998 to 2002 deals with various problems related to people's participation. Reports say that most of the meetings of the Gram Sabha were not held during this period. In 1998, only 17% Gram Sabha meetings were held, 6% meetings did not touch the quorum numbers and 8% meetings were not held. In 1999, 56.5% meetings were held, 4% meetings were adjourned and 15.2% meetings were not held. In 2000, 44% meetings were held, 12% meetings adjourned and 23% meetings were not held. In 2001, 65.3% meetings were held, 30.76% meetings were adjourned and 5% meetings were not held. In 2002, only 6.6% meetings were held, 3.18% meetings were adjourned and 90% meetings were not held. People's participation in Gram Sabha is also very poor in nature. In 2001, Murshidabad recorded highest attendance in Gram Sabha meeting, which is 819 people, only 8% of the total voters. The highest women attendance was 208 from Paschim Midnapur district which is only 2% of total voters. In 2002, highest attendance recorded from the Nadia district was only 639 in number which is only 6% of total voters. Full data has not been found about the Gram Sabha for clear studies. But one thing is clear that the people's forum, the Gram Sabha, is like a dead body now.

People's participation in Gram Sansad is very important for the success of the participatory development in India. But the real situation is far different from the theoretical aspects. A comparative study during the period of 1997 to 2002 of annual Gram Sansad meetings indicates that the highest number of meetings was held jointly in 1998 and 2002. In these years 97% meetings held in the state of West Bengal. On the other hand only 165 meetings were held in the year 1997. This is very bad news for the success of participatory development. The highest attendance in the Gram Sansad meeting recorded from the year 1997 was only 17%, and lowest attendance found jointly from the years 2001 and 2002 was only 12% of average total electorate. The highest percentage of meetings adjourned was 20.84% in the year 2002, and the highest 39% meetings were not held during this period. The highest number of half yearly meetings was held in 2001 during this period. In 2001, total 955 meetings were held. The highest percentage of half yearly meetings adjourned in the year 2000 was 28%. The highest percentage of people attended the half yearly meetings in jointly in 1997 and 1998 was only 18%. The lowest percentage of people that attended meetings in the year 2000 was only 10.53%. Comparatively participation is better in the half yearly meetings than from the annual meetings. This truth is clear from this comparative study between the attendance of annual and half yearly Gram Sansad meetings. But attendance, which is at the core of success of participatory development, does not raise hopes. One thing

is clear that people are not aware about the Gram Sansad, so they are not interested to participate in the meetings. A study on the Gram Sabha meetings during the period of 1999 to 2002 of Coochbehar district indicates uneven performance of the Gram Sabha. People's participation in the Sabha meetings is not satisfactory. In every year during this period most of the meetings were adjourned or not held. Women's participation is poorer than men's participation, which indicates Gram Sabha is now just a body for the beautification of the local Institution in West Bengal.

A comparative study was conducted on the half yearly Gram Sansad meetings of the Coochbehar district during 1998 to 2002. In 1998, 100% meetings were held in Coochbehar and a highest of 42% of the meetings was adjourned jointly in the years 2001 and 2002. The highest of 143 (19.1%) people were present in the half yearly meeting in the year 2002 in Coochbehar and the highest number of women attended the half yearly Gram Sansad meeting in 2002, which is only 2%. On the other hand a highest of 100% annual meetings of the Gram Sansad was held in 1999 in Coochbehar and a highest of 2.11% of these meetings were adjourned in 2002 during this period. The highest 45% meetings were not held in 2001. The highest average attendance was only 17% in 2001 during this period and women highest attendance was only 3% from the same year. It is clear from the above discussion that the nature of people's participation is more or less the same in both half yearly and annual meetings. It is also clear from the above discussion that attendance is also slightly better in half yearly meetings than annual meetings. A fewer number of half yearly meetings are adjourned and withheld than annual meetings. But one thing is clear that participation is not hopeful and their activities are also not hopeful. Even today Gram Sansad is not capable of attracting mass participation. But it is very necessary for economic and social development of the country.

A micro level study was conducted for better result in Rampur – I Gram Panchayat of Tufanganj Block – II and Khagrabari Gram Panchayat of Coochbehar Sadar Block – II from Coochbehar district of West Bengal. Researcher studied the attendance performance of the people in Gram Sansad meetings in both half yearly and annual meetings during the period of 2003 to 2006. In 2003-04, the highest number of people, which is only 21.62%, was present in the Sansad No 95 out of 11 Gram Sansads and lowest number of people which is only 10.8% attended in the Sansad No 92 out of 11 Gram Sansads. The highest of 90.38% males participated in the Sansad No 95, which are only 188 out of 962 voters. The highest of

47.51% females participated in the Sansad No 89, which are only 86 women. In the year 2004-05, the highest number of people participated from the Sansad No 87, which is 37.27% and a lowest of 11.7% people participated in the Sansad No 93. The highest of 90.74% males participated in the Sansad No 95 and highest female percentage of 53.36% participated in the Sansad No 91 in the same year. In the year 2005-06, in the half yearly Sansad meetings, highest of 20.56% people participated in the Sansad No 96 and a lowest 11.7% people participated in the Sansad No 93. A highest of 72.63% males participated in the Sansad No 90 and a highest of 50.34% women participated in the Sansad No 88. The annual Sansad meetings of the period of 2003 to 2006 also indicate various dimensions of people's participation in participatory governance. In 2003-04, highest of 21.40% people was present in the Sansad meeting in the Sansad No 96 and lowest of 12.35% people was present in the Sansad No 92. Highest of 88.15% males participated in the Sansad No 92 and highest of 41.56% women participated in the Sansad No 93. In 2004-05, highest of 28.36% people was present in the Sansad meeting in the Sansad No 87 and a lowest of 4.99% people was present in the Sansad No 95. Highest of 92.73% males was present in the Sansad No 92 and highest of 41.67% women participated in the Sansad No 95. In 2005-06, highest of 22.36% people was present in the Sansad No 87 and lowest of 11.03% people was present in the Sansad No 93. Highest of 80% males was present in the Sansad No 90 and highest of 42.41% women was present in the Sansad No 94. It is clear from the field study that the participation is not very good in all Sansad meetings during this period. No meetings touch 30% attendance during this period. The trends of the attendance are more or less the same in both annual and half yearly meetings.

To investigate the role of Gram Sansad for facilitating participatory development researcher studied the various dimensions of people's participation in the Gram Sansad meetings in 16 Gram Sansads during the period of 2003 to 2006 in both annual and half yearly meetings. In 2003-06, in the half yearly meetings, the highest percentage of people, which is 14.02%, was present in the Sansad No 109 and a lowest of 3.06% people was present in the Sansad No 114. A highest of 94.9% males was present in the Sansad meeting of the Sansad No 105 and highest of 41% women was present in the Sansad No 112. In 2004-05, in half yearly meeting, 14.14% people were present in the Sansad No 109. Highest of 94.87% males was present in the Sansad No 102 and highest of 49% women was present in the Sansad No 96. In 2005-06, highest of 18.32% people was present in the Sansad No 93 and lowest of only 2.56% people was present in the Sansad No 105 and highest of 63% women

participated in the Sansad No 112. The annual meetings during the period 2003-06 indicate various dimensions of people participation. In 2003-04, highest of 14.72% people was present in the Sansad No 112 in the annual meeting and lowest of 5.09% people was present in the Sansad No 102. Highest of 94% males was present in the Sansad No 112 and highest of 45% women was present in the Sansad No 96. In the year 2004-05, the highest attendance was 11.8% in the Sansad No 112 and lowest number of women, only 3.03%, attended the Sansad meeting. Highest of 100% males was present in the Sansad No 103 and highest of 56% females was present in the Sansad No 96. Full records and data of the annual Sansad meetings of the year 2005-06 are not found. Only two meetings were held in 2005-06 according to the data of the annual Sansad meetings provided by the Panchayat office.

It is clear from the above discussion about the people's participation in Gram Sansad that the participation is not very good. Participation in Sansad meetings in both annual and half yearly is not hopeful. Performance of the people's participation is very poor. Performance of the Khagrabari Gram Panchayat is poorer than Rampur I Gram Panchayat. All of the meetings were not held in Khagrabari Gram Panchayat. More Sansad meetings were adjourned in Khagrabari Gram Panchayat than Rampur – I Gram Panchayat. Most of the adjourned Gram Sansad meetings were not held in the Khagrabari Gram Panchayat. But one observation found from both Gram Panchayats was that the members those who were present in the Sansad meetings were taking part in discussions. Most of the discussions concerned on local area development programmes and select beneficiaries for various schemes and projects and the preparation of the beneficiary lists. More interestingly, researcher observes one thing that was most of the participants was supporters of the ruling party and they always handled the meeting for their political gain. Opposition Party supporters are not interested in participating in the meetings, because their opinion was never considered in the decision making process. Due to the lack of awareness about the importance of the Gram Sansad and the importance of their presence in the Sansad meetings they are not interested to participate in the meetings. But without mass participation the benefits of the participatory development will not able to come. There are so many causes behind the non participation of the people in the Gram Sansad meetings. The most important causes are highlighted below:

- i) People are unaware about the functions and power of the Gram Sansad.
- ii) People are unaware about their role in the developmental process.

- iii) Illiteracy is one of the strong factors for the non participation of the people in Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad. Due to illiteracy people are not aware about their role in the developmental process. They know that the Gram Sansad is the meeting of 'babus' where they have not permission to enter. Most of the people know that Gram Sansad meeting is political party's meeting so they are not interested to attend the meeting.
- iv) Unwillingness of Political Parties to empower Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha is the another strong factor for the non participation in the Gram Sansad.
- v) Politicization of Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha by the ruling party making these forum as party meeting; it is another cause for the non participation.
- vi) The young generation, mainly in the 18-25 age groups, is reluctant to participate in the Gram Sansad due to the unawareness about the actual role of the Gram Sansad. People of this age group think that these meetings are only for the guardian of each family and they only offer 'token' help for the rural poor. So such meetings will not help them in searching for education and jobs. Absence of this age group from the Sansad meetings, the Sansad has lost its significance as a direct forum for all-round development.
- vii) Unwillingness of the Panchayats Officials and also their unawareness about the proper function and role of the Gram Sansad. The mass of people are not interested to participate in these meetings.
- viii) Most of the people believe that participation in the Sansad and Sabha meeting is only a waste of time.
- ix) Most of the people expressed their anger at the time of field work and they said that the powerful members of the ruling party never paid attention to and heard the problems of the poor.
- x) Opposition party supporters are not interested to participate in the Sabha and Sansad meetings.

- xi) Reluctance of the Central and State Government to grant full autonomy of the Panchayati Raj Institution is also another strong factor for the non participation of the people.
- xii) Without financial autonomy Gram Panchayat is working as an agent of the Central and State govt., so due to lack of financial power Panchayati Raj Institutions is not able to fulfill all types of demands of the rural people.
- xiii) Corruption in the Panchayat functionaries is a strong factor for the non participation of the people in the Gram Sansad.
- xiv) Women are less interested to participate in the Gram Sansad meetings than men. Researcher's observation suggests that women are not interested to participate in the Gram Sansad. Literacy of the women is less than men, so they are not aware about their role in the nation building. So they are reluctant to participate in the Gram Sansad.
- xv) Due to the burden of house holds works women are not interested to participate in the Gram sansad.

6.2 Concluding Observation

The widespread engagement with issues of participatory local governance and development creates enormous opportunities for redefining and deepening meanings of democracy for extending the rights of mass people's participation in development process. In India, there are some initiatives taken by the Constitution to expand the scope and power of the Village Constituency/Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad meetings in terms of greater people participation in the planning process as well as to expand the participation of women and other weaker sections. West Bengal is the first state to take this type of initiatives and establish the people's forum Gram Sansad at the ward level under the West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act, 1992. The West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act, 2003 has made it obligatory for a Gram Panchayat to act upon any recommendations of a Gram Sansad relating to prioritization of any list of beneficiaries or schemes or programme so far as it relates to the area of the Gram Sansad. The main function of the Gram Sansad is to guide and advise the Gram Panchayat with regard to the schemes for economic development and social justice, identification of beneficiaries for various poverty alleviation and food security programmes,

constitution of one or more beneficiaries committees for ensuring active participation of people in implementation, maintenance and equitable distribution of benefits of one or more schemes in its areas. A Gram Sansad may raise objection to any action of Pradhan or any other member of Gram Panchayat for failure to implement any development work properly. It is mandatory for a Gram Panchayat to place in the meetings of Gram Sansad the budget and audit report of the accounts of Gram Panchayat for deliberation, recommendation and suggestion of Gram Sansad. Gram Sansad is the platform for the common people, where they prepare planning for their own development. But people's participation in the Gram Sansad is very poor in every Gram Sansad meeting in West Bengal. People's participation has not crossed 30% in a single meeting in the Gram Sansad and in Gram Sabha during researcher's observation. People's participation is found always to range from 8% to below 30%. Most of the meetings of the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad only crossed the quorum number. Researcher's observation found that most of the meetings of the Gram Sansad from Khagrabari Gram Panchayat were held without quorum. Most of the meetings of the Gram Sansad are held in afternoon between 4pm and 6pm in both the Gram Panchayats. Gram Panchayat officials announce the date and venue of the meetings more or less 7 days in advance by using micro-phones in the respective Gram Sansad area and by hanging notices on the notice board in the Gram Panchayat office. But the general mass of people is not interested to participate in the meetings. Interestingly, one thing that was noticed was that the participants in the meetings only meagrely participated in the discussion. They also meagrely take part in the preparation of the beneficiary lists for various schemes sponsored by the central and state government. Most of the time it is found that ruling party supporters are mostly interested to participate in the meetings, and they always take upon themselves the responsibility for the preparation and formulation of the plan and programmes. It is also found that ruling party supporters are always privileged in the beneficiary lists. For this reason opposition party supporters always try to keep themselves out of this forum. Opposition party supporters always know that Gram Sansad meetings actually are the meetings of the ruling party. The young generation in the age group of 18-25 is not interested to participate in the meetings, because their opinion is that this is place only for the aged people and party members. They are also not interested to participate in the Sansad meetings because they know that this is the meetings only for the preparation of the beneficiary lists for various government sponsored schemes. It is right that there is no scope to discuss how to

engage the young generation in the employment sectors. There is also no discussion about matters related to higher education, so the young generation or new voters are not interested to participate in the meetings. They think that it is only a waste of time, and so they are not interested to participate in the meetings. Women are not interested to participate in the Sansad and Sabha meetings. After completion of the household works women are feels very tired so they are unable to participate in the meetings. Always men are dominating in the Sabha and Sansad meetings, so women are not interested to participate in the meetings. Most of the illiterate women think that it is the meetings for their son/husband/father/brother, so they are not interested to participate in the meetings. As like as these causes there are so many other causes behind the low participation in the Sabha and Sansad meetings for facilitating participatory development. Researcher's observation suggests some remedies which will be able to attract the general mass of people to the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha, the forum of participatory development. These are:

Enhancing the awareness about the importance of the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad among all the sections of the peoples will improve the participation which will facilitate participatory local governance and development. For this, electronic media will be able to play an important role for increasing awareness programme among the people. It is the responsibility of the government to operate various awareness programmes for mass participation. It is duty of all political parties to take initiatives to organize awareness campaigns among the people about the importance of the Gram Sansad as a forum of participatory development. Civil society also will be able to play a very important role in ensuring mass participation at the Gram Sansad meetings. This is so because civil society is now playing a very important role in democracy. Good will of the Panchayats members and the panchayat functionaries will also able to increase the people's participation in the participatory development.

Illiteracy is one of the strongest causes behind the non participation of the people in the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad meetings, which are the basic units of the participatory development. Illiterate people think that the meeting of the Gram Sansad is the meetings of the village babus and also the meeting of the ruling party. So they are not interested to participate in the meetings. They are also not aware about their role in the Sansad and Sabha, so they are not interested to participate in the meetings. Right to Education Act, 2009 gave

ample scope to the people to send their children to school for education. Now education is a fundamental right of every Indian. Researcher is hopeful that mass education will be able to create mass participation in the village forum which will strengthen the participatory development. Researcher is also hopeful that under the Right to Education Act, every person will be able to educate himself / herself and also able to participate in the planning process which will be able to eradicate poverty from the society and provide social justice to all sections of the people. Higher educated people are also not interested to participate in the Gram Sansad and Sabha meetings, because they think that these meetings are only for the gathering place for distribution of benefits of the central and state government programmes to the rural poor. So it is very necessary to bring awareness among them about the importance of the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha in the process of nation building. This type of awareness is to attract the higher educated people in the grassroots planning. Young generation mainly the new voters always try to stay out of the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad meetings, because no discussions are included in the Sabha and Sansad directly related to their interest. But it is impossible to reach success without their active participation in the participatory development process. For this reason it is very necessary to include discussions related to job and education in the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad meetings so that they are able to establish a strong participatory form of development. There is need of proper training about the purpose and function of the Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad among the Panchayat members and Panchayat functionaries for establish themselves as the proper guide to the general people for the success of the participatory development. It is very necessary to give full autonomy to the Panchayati Raj Institution. At present this institution has gained only partial autonomy. At present, only 29 subjects have been handed over to the Panchayati Raj Institution in the eleventh schedule in the Constitution. Panchayati Raj Institution has not gained financial autonomy till today. So this Institution fully depends on the Central and State funds. A minimum amount of taxes is collected by the Panchayati Raj Institution, which is a very marginal amount for their work. So without financial autonomy this Institution will not be able to establish itself as the third strata of the government. Without financial autonomy Panchayati Raj Institution now acts as the agent of the central and state governments. For this reason people are not interested to participate in this Institution and do not have full respect for this Institution. Financial stability of the Panchayati Raj Institution will create mass participation in the lowest level of people's institution, the Gram Sansad, a

platform of the general people. It is very necessary to create own resources for their own development. It is the time to give power to the Panchayati Raj Institution to collect the various types of taxes from the rural people for their own development. Corruption is another strong cause for the failure of participatory development. In India local level Panchayat functionaries are mostly corrupt. So people are not interested to participate in the participatory development process. Researcher thinks the role of the civil society is to remove corruption from grassroots democracy. It is very necessary to introduce a strong anti-corruption law which will be able to establish corruption-free India. Researcher's knowledge suggests that the reservation policy of the women and weaker sections will be able to increase more and more their participation in the developmental process. At present many of the states follow the 50% reservation policy for the women in Panchayati Raj Institution. The West Bengal Panchayat Amendment Act, 2012 provides 50% reservation policy for the women. For this reason in the Panchayat election, 2012 there were a good numbers of representatives elected from the women in all three tiers of the Panchayati Raj Institution. It is very good news for the success of the participatory development. Right to Education Act will also be able to increase mass participation in the participatory development process. Various governmental schemes and programmes will also be able to increase the participation of the rural people in the Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha meetings which are the platform of the common people. Finally, researcher can say that the concept of the participatory development is now in a nascent stage. Resecher hope that people will be able to eradicate all types of deficiencies of the participatory development through the local government by governance for their own interest. Reesearcher is hopeful that participatory development also will be able to establish itself as the only concept for the all round development of the human society.

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