

## CHAPTER –VI

### SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

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**From the field survey made in the preceding chapter, the important findings regarding participation in the Gram Sansad meeting may be summarized as under:**

1. Local rural self government was formed in order to ascertain the participation of rural local citizen, their policy making and its implementation and after all its evaluation by themselves. After the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amended of our Constitution, for the purpose of real establishment of local governance in grassroots level, we could not claim in reality that it could attain its goal. The Panchayats were empowered with the special power of policy making on 29 subjects in the “schedule eleven” through 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in the Constitution. But all state governments of India did not lose its hold and were not interested to handover the power to the Panchayats. Thus, the concept of decentralization of power to local government could never be fruitful.
2. The provision of Gram Sabha was there in the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution taking in view the purpose of ascertaining the participation of people in rural self governance. By the provision of Gram Sabha each and every voter of a Panchayat area is a member of Gram Sabha and it is themselves who are to decide and make various planning for the development of rural area. In this system the rural people would express their own views in a fully democratic atmosphere. The formation of Gram Sabha is a compulsion as per our Constitution after the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment but

unfortunately in the Constitution there is no proper guideline regarding the mode of formation of Gram Sabha, its power and activities. In fact the state legislative assemblies were given the Constitutional power to promote rules and regulations about Gram Sabha. So far as the vast area of Gram Sabha is concerned it's not possible for all the members in a Panchayat area where more or less ten thousand people live, to actively participate in conducting good governance. However to solve the above mentioned problem, in West Bengal, Kerala and Orissa comparatively less populated institution namely Gram Sansad in each and every village was formed for ascertaining the active participation of the rural people. And by means of active participation in socio-political discussion, rural people can contribute their own ideas and share their knowledge and information.

3. For the cause of the development of rural area Gram Sabha were entitled to absolute power of decision making and its implementation. But ironically a few state governments empower the Gram Sabhas with the power to control the Gram Panchayat. The role of Gram Sabha limited only to the secondary power of giving advices. Most of the state government in India limited the role of Gram Sabhas regarding the economic activities only to discuss annual statements of accounts, to give administrative reports and to make a list of names of beneficiaries regarding poverty eradication programme. However, a few state governments like Haryana, Punjab, and Tamilnadu empowered the Gram Sabhas with the power of approving the budget.

4. Gram Sansad was formed with the aim of improving, encouraging and involving citizen participation in the decision making process and making rural self-governance more accountable, effective and transparent. Unfortunately in our field study expected attendance and representation in the Gram Sansad by local people was not found. In both the Gram Panchayats of Jalpaiguri district regular attendance of the rural masses was 8-11 per cent. This rate of attendance is very near to the average attendance rate in Gram Sansad meeting in West Bengal.
5. The data collected in our research clearly proves that in Gram Sansad the attendance of women is much lower than that of men. This scene is very akin to the whole of India which we got from various studies. In the Gram Sansad meeting of both the Gram Panchayats in Jalpaiguri district the rate of average regular attendance of women is just the half of men attendance. So, the data clearly indicate that women participation and representation in democratic institution like rural self government remained unchanged. It has not been possible to increase even after forming institution like Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad.
6. The meetings of Gram Sansads in these two Gram Panchayts are being held regularly. The Gram Panchayats maintain the work of the Gram Sansad which is clearly defined in the Panchayat Act. The Panchayat Budget of the past year, list of the beneficiaries of the Panchayat projects, the work done in the last year, and the plan for the next year are all discussed in the annual meetings in the month of May. The written reports and the opinions of the Gram Sansad members about next year's budget submitted to

the Panchayat officers and the last audit report of the Panchayats are also discussed in the half-yearly meetings in November.

7. There are a number of serious problems that need to be met in the years ahead. In our survey we found that on the basis of caste there are differences as to the attendance in Gram Sansad meeting. The rate of attendance of the women from SC and ST categories in Gram Sansad meeting is lower than that of the general caste people in general and women in particular.
8. So far as the Patriarchal society is concerned in our country still today the avenues for women participation in Panchayati Raj System is not widely opened. In the meetings of two Gram Panchayat from Jalpaiguri district what we see is that the rate of attendance of the unmarried women is more or less double than that of the married women. But, surprisingly if we consider it from the perspective of activeness in participation the married women are more active than the unmarried. In our observation, very significantly we found that normally in our society the rural married women do not get the opportunities to go outside the house for attending the Gram Sansad meeting but those married women who overcome the barriers play very significant role in the meetings of Gram Sansad.
9. On the basis of economic condition of the rural people we classified them into two categories- APL and BPL. In our study it was found that the attendance in the Gram Sansad meeting of the APLs is higher than the BPLs.

10. As the part of our study we found that there is a correlation between two factors educational qualification and the rate of attendance of the people of the Gram Sansad meeting. On the basis of the data collected from the members of the Gram Sansads of the two Gram Panchayats, it is clear that in accordance with educational qualification the extent of attendance and active participation increase.
11. The data of our survey show that the rural people who are permanently employed in the government or private sectors are more actively associated with Gram Sansad than the rural people who are house wives, temporary employees, daily labourers or agricultural or casual labourers.
12. India is nation of villages where more than 70 percent of the total population lives in village. Village economy is based on land holding pattern of the rural people. From the data collected from the respondents of the two Gram Panchayats in the district of Jalpaiguri, it is found that the families having more than 2.6 acres of land are much more regular attendees in Gram Sansad than others.
13. Self Help Group (SHG) brought a revolutionary change in village economy. It is a notable and undeniable factor making women more self reliant and has a greater role in the context of the Gram Sansad meeting. Those women who are associated and involve with SHG, their attendance in Gram Sansad is much more than the others.
14. We have also tested whether there is any significant difference between the two Gram Panchayats of Jalpaiguri district in terms of the number of women's participation.

The result shows that the number of women participants in Gram Sansad meeting of Turturikhanda Gram Panchayat is higher than Garalbari Gram Panchayat.

15. According to the data from our survey, there are many specific reasons behind the non-attendance of the women in Gram Sansad meetings. The main obstacle to their non-attendance and participation is that they do not have proper and clear conception about the rules and activities of Gram Sansad. Beside this, they also lack formal education which also a reason of their non-attendance. In addition to all these problems we found some other reasons. They do not get proper information in time about Gram Sansad meeting. In some cases social and domestic barriers are faced by the women for which they cannot participate in Gram Sansad meeting.
16. The women consider themselves unnecessary in participating Gram Sansad because they are not conscious about the structure, power and even their own role in Gram Sansad. The above picture became clear in our field survey.
17. Most of the respondents from the two Gram Panchayats of Jalpaiguri district do not have clear idea whether regular Gram Sansad meeting are held or not and proper rule and procedures are maintained or not. From this it is clear that the unconsciousness regarding Gram Sansad is the main factor in the way of establishing Gram Sansad as a participatory self government.
18. The data from the respondents of two Gram Panchayats show that there is no objection on behalf of the respondents about the venue of Gram Sansad meeting and the respondents, who remain present in the Gram Sansad meeting, come in time in the

meeting. However, most of the respondents think that it would be better if the Gram Sansad meetings are organized in holydays and just before evening time. The respondents who usually remain present in the meeting agree with the fact that the duration of the Gram Sansad meeting is normally more than one hour.

19. It is more than two decades that in West Bengal Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad were formed in order to establish rural self-governance but, proper initiating steps were not taken by the government to make people conscious about such institutions. More than 50 percent respondents from the two Gram Panchayats of Jalpaiguri district are of the opinion that they do not have clear conception about Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad.
20. Only attendance by the rural people does not means active participation in rural self-governance. Our field survey makes it clear that the percentage of women respondents from the two Gram Panchayats of Jalpaiguri district who actively participate in various discussions in Gram Sansad is only 22.
21. The data of our field survey make us to analysis that generally the male participants are more vocal to express their views and opinion than the female participants. The women are interested to enroll their name only in the beneficiary list of different government programs but surprisingly they do not actively participate in various rural developmental activities where their own benefit lies.

### **Important Findings regarding Women Empowerment:**

22. The women of the two Gram Panchayats, we find in our study, are mainly engaged in household activities like cooking though the meals for a day is made ready according to the choice of the male members of the house.
23. Surprisingly the women of the said Gram Panchayats cannot dress themselves according to their choice. They are to maintain different kind of social customs made by the patriarchal society.
24. The opinions made by the women how to look after their children or give education to their children have merely any importance.
25. They enjoy a very little space in the economic sphere of their families. They do not get opportunity to know the facts how much income or expenditure of their families have or how a property of their families are getting sold or purchased.
26. Income is the major determinant of the standard of living of the people. But the percentage is very low when we find some women are engaged in some sort of economic activities, earning something and trying their best to uphold their livelihood. In this way they are economically getting empowered to a certain degree.
27. Very expectedly from the present study it becomes clear that the women are far away from the affairs of politics and for which actual empowerment of women is a mirage till today.
28. Women are key to good governance. Their increasing representation in democratic institution has provided stability in Indian polity. Positive steps were taken in our

Constitution to encourage participation of women in rural self governance. It gives chance to open up the avenues for direct participation of women in government policy making process. In fact, 33 percent of the total seats of Panchayats were reserved for women representatives. However, this initiative became partially successful in encouraging and involving women in local governance. In most of the cases women representatives are coming out of those families of dominant political leaders. It may be the wife, daughter or any female members of the families of political leaders who are selected for contesting election and after their victory the males come to the front and as proxy on behalf of the elected women members take all administrative decision regarding governance. So, the question is not only of the extent to which women are participating in governance but how and from where they are coming to join in the participatory rural governance. Socially, educationally and economically backward ones remained in the back till today and real empowerment of women is still a mirage.

29. Though the Gram Sansad meetings are being held regularly, but the participation of majority of members has not yet been ensured. Participation of people from all sections of society has not been ensured till now. The problem of lack of quorum is being averted by the legal provision of deferring meetings. Women of the society have not got the opportunity to present their views or opinion in the Gram Sansads and the empowerment of women has not been achievable without the active participation of women in the decision making process of Gram Sansads.

30. Decision making is an important parameter indicating the degree of participation and empowerment. Thus an attempt was also made to understand whether women members have any access to the decision making process, and if yes, how they participate in this process and if their opinions or demands have any voice in the Gram Sansad meetings. In this framework women respondents replied that they raise issues and demands in the Gram Sansad meetings and sometimes also give suggestions to overcome the problems. Many women stated that their opinions and demands in the Gram Sansad meetings do not get appropriate attention and sometimes are not even heard.

It is acknowledged that the analysis so far made is limited by data unavailability, data inaccuracies and limited purpose as well as time constraints. It is true that the New Panchayati Raj Act has offered an opportunity for active participation of hitherto suppressed rural women in socio-economic life and this has clearly resulted increased numerical participation of women. However, the fact to be realized is that if Panchayati Raj Institutions are to become a vibrant vehicle for the empowerment of rural women, a lot more need to be done. In sum and substance following recommendations may be suggested for future policy implementation.

- 1) Decentralized Governance cannot run successfully without proper knowledge and skills towards grassroots democracy. Awareness development is the most crucial task for injecting an attitude within the people in general and women in particular towards participation in the decision making process in Gram Sansads.

- 2) Local training programmes and workshops are to be created to empower women which tread gender issues and build their confidence, as well as analyze the particulars of Panchayat operation. Women's organizations are to be created and strengthened so that women can exchange information and discuss ways to address their common problem.
- 3) Education, especially elementary education, must be made compulsory for ensuring equal participation of women in all walks of life. The governmental and non-governmental organizations may be engaged for women education programmes and skills development programmes for realizing their responsibilities and develop their character and personality.
- 4) Economic self sufficiency is one of the major pre-condition for political empowerment of women. They are to depend on the husband or male members of the family. They have not taken any decision in the family matters as well as their personal matters. In such a situation, it is not possible for them to take an effective role in political sphere. They should be engaged in some society specific gainful economic activities and the government and banking institutions should come forward to provide those credits for such activities. Women Self-Help Groups be given additional care so that they can have scope and agenda for economic empowerment to incorporate social and political empowerment too.
- 5) The lack of information is one of the major causes for low attendance in Gram Sansad meetings. Gram Panchayats should announce properly the date, time and venue of the

Gram Sansad meetings at least seven days before, so that, the villagers may be well aware about related information on Gram Sansad.

- 6) Most of the rural people are engaged in agriculture activities, some of them are casual labour. Women mainly spend all their energy to maintain the household. So, Gram Sansad meetings should be organized at the afternoon, when rural people can be free for their day time jobs.
- 7) The political parties should understand and play a positive role for making the Gram Sansad effective. It depends on the political will of the ruling political party whether they can use the Gram Sansad as a direct democratic institution or a rubber stamp.
- 8) The poor rural villagers may attend the Gram Sansad meetings if they will get some sort of benefit from the Gram Sansad. The beneficiaries of different government schemes like the IAY Scheme are selected in the meeting of Gram Sansads and the final list is prepared by the Gram Panchayats out of the beneficiaries selected by Gram Sansads on priority basis. The rural underprivileged people attend the Gram Sansad meetings to enroll their name in the beneficiaries list. But, at the present time the Gram Sansads do not prepare the beneficiaries list. The Gram Sansad should work actively if they have got sufficient fund and responsibility and provide the benefit for the poorer section of the rural society.
- 9) Instead of an advisory body, the Gram Sansad should be made an approving/sanctioning authority for taking up any development programme at the village level.

- 10) The Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad should be allowed to function the way the parliament functions at the national level and state legislature at the state level. It should evolve its own procedure for conducting its business.
- 11) It should be mandatory for every Gram Sabha to meet not less than four times a year. It will not be advisable to impose uniform dates for holding Gram Sabha meetings, because we live in a country, which is geographically diverse in nature. A particular date may suit one region but not another.
- 12) In order to ensure participation of disadvantaged groups, the quorum for holding a Gram Sansad meeting necessarily should include 33 per cent participation/ presence of women.
- 13) The role and responsibility of the Gram Sansad and its functional relationship with Gram Panchayat need to be clearly spelled out.
- 14) The Gram Sansad is a vibrant vehicle in our grassroots democracy. But, neither the State Government nor the political representatives have taken Gram Sansad very seriously. The State Government, Political Parties and Civil Society should take the initiative to protect the grassroots institution like Gram Sansad.
- 15) The male dominated rural social structure is still not reconciled to the women's participation in politics. Media creates a supportive environment for women members by letting society know about their accomplishments, and by influencing public opinion in support of women's reservation and rights. Hence, the media should be encouraged to come forward for this noble cause.

16) Separate Sansad for women should be introduced so that the male dominance could be avoided and proper gender balance could be reflected in the plan. At the same time view points of both the sexes could be balanced together towards the completeness of planning.

17) Political Empowerment of women need more support from officials and the public. Gender discrimination should be minimized or avoided.

18) Reservation for women should be continued to ensure their empowerment through greater participation in political administration and decision making. More reservation for women in Panchayats is suggested for the empowerment of women.

Empowerment is the process through which the powerless becomes powerful in the different sphere of life. It means the control over resources and ideology. The Indian women still carries the curse of traditional social system on them. In our country as well as even in the whole world women are usually confined to household activities and this is the only reason for their dependence, social neglect, and political ignorance which in their turn prevented women from empowering themselves.

It is true that the active participation of women in the decision making and their empowerment in the Panchayati Raj Institutions in general and Gram Sansad in particular were not ensured even after the two decades of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment. Undoubtedly the reservation of seats in the grassroots democratic institutions for women has created some opportunities for participating in the decision making process but it is not the only way to make them wholly empowered. Women empowerment will be possible if

women are able to make decisions in every spheres of their life i.e. economic, social, psych-physical and political. Gram Sansad is one of the institutions for exhilarating women empowerment but it has so far failed to do so as women are yet to be concerned about their rights as well as the achievement of the same through an organized struggle. Women empowerment as a process required multi-dimensional efforts and holistic interventions. This required concerted and sustained efforts by all concerned-policy makers, Government, NGOs, Training Institutions and by the women and men themselves.