

PREFACE

In the second half of the 20th century, many new nations got their independence and these countries faced some common problems like poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, poor health condition, lack of awareness etc. To overcome these hindrances they took two types of developmental planning, one is centralised planning and another is decentralised planning. In the centralised planning plans are made at the centre. In the decentralised planning plans are made at different levels such as State, district, and other lower level. A country like India, Planning Commission was established for centralised planning and side by side, decentralised planning approach was also tried from early 1950s in the form of Community Development Programmes. But, the Panchayati Raj System received constitutional recognition after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992. West Bengal is one of the states which have made some progress in the implementation of the intention and spirit of the Constitutional Amendment Act, but full realization of the objectives behind the Amendment Act is miles away.

The present study is an attempt to understand the extent of people's participation on decentralised governance through Panchayati Raj Institutions in India with special references to Women attendance in Gram Sansads, Women Participation and Empowerment. The study is divided into six chapters. Chapter-I deals with an introduction, Conceptual Framework, Overview of Existing Literature, Significance of the Study, The Research Question and Research Methodology. Chapter-II 'Evolution of Decentralized Governance in the Indian Context with Special Reference to West Bengal' seeks to provide a brief outline about the

experiments and experiences of rural local governance in India since Ancient times with particular reference to the State of West Bengal. Chapter - III: 'People's Participation in Decentralized Governance—The Gram Sabha and Gram Sansad Experience in West Bengal' seeks to provide a brief outline about the experiments and experiences of rural local governance in West Bengal. In Chapter—IV 'Participation of Women in Decentralized Governance and Empowerment: The West Bengal Experience' an attempt has also been made to find out approach and strategy of women participation and empowerment through the Panchayati Raj Institutions in West Bengal. In Chapter-V 'Participation of Women in the Gram Sansads of Selected Gram Panchayats and Empowerment: The Survey Experience', an attempt has been made to find out the nature and extent of women participation in Gram Sansad meetings and finding out causes of participation / non-participation of women in the local democratic institution of Gram Sansad as well as the contributory / non/anti-contributory role of participation / non-participation on empowerment of women. Chapter-VI deals with the summary of findings and concluding observations.

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