

## DECLARATION

I, Budh Bahadur Lama, PhD Scholar bearing Registration no. Ph.D./Pol. Sc (371)/1023/R-2018 dated, 26/11/2018, Department of Political Science, University of North Bengal, Dist. Darjeeling, West Bengal, do hereby declare that I have duly worked on my PhD thesis entitled '**Participatory Democracy and Grassroots Governance in India: A Study of the Nature of People's Participation in Gram Sansads in Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal**' under the supervision of Professor Dyutis Chakrabarti. I have not submitted this work to any other University or Institute for any other degree.

This thesis is being submitted to University of North Bengal for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science.

Dated: 23/11/2023

Place: NBU

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**CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that Sri Budh Bahadur Lama has prepared the work on his thesis entitled 'Participatory Democracy and Grassroots Governance in India: A Study of the Nature of People's Participation in Gram Sansads in Paschim Medinipur District, West Bengal' for the award of Ph.D. degree in Political Science under the University of North Bengal. He has completed his work under my supervision in the Department of Political Science, University of North Bengal. The work is based on information gather both from primary and secondary sources and it is original in nature.

Thank you,

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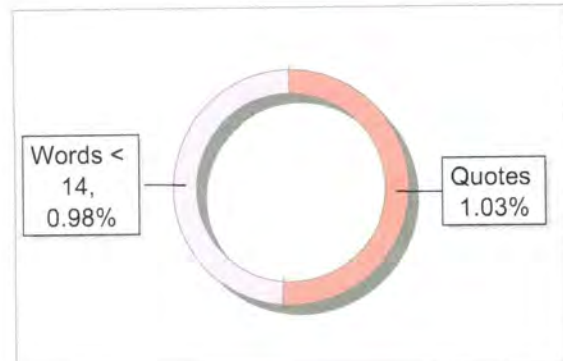
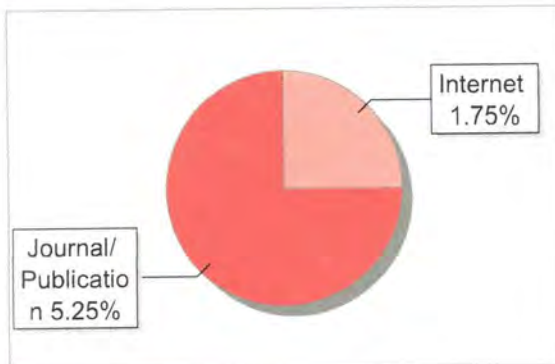


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## PREFACE

India maintains a distinct social structure based on caste hierarchy and class division as a nation-state. In some ways, the Indian political system is seen to represent a synthesis of liberal and democratic traditions, as it incorporates both equality and liberty. The current Indian democracy is based on the idea that all citizens should be involved in the formulation, execution, and review of public policies. Thus, the meaning and manifestation of democracy in India have changed recently. Democracy is noted for being the only political system that permits participation in the decision-making process by all categories of citizens.

The core of grassroots democracy is the participation of individuals or groups in elections, government, and decision-making. In other words, the main characteristic of grassroots democracy is the transfer of decision-making power to the lowest tier of the organizational structure. Additionally, the term 'grassroots democracy' describes a political system in which democracy is truly extended to local levels as well as national and state levels. Therefore, it is a method of public participation that is based on individuals' involvement in the ongoing public affairs of their own local region rather than being remote, irregular, or insufficient to elect representatives for a very distant government. Therefore, grassroots democracy is essentially a form of decentralized democracy in which public affairs are managed through an inclusive system of citizen engagement in grassroots decision-making rather than through an executive branch. To put it succinctly, 'grassroots democracy is an effort to sow the democratic seed deeply into the soil of a country, not just window dressing.'

After independence and especially after 1977, West Bengal was one of the first states in India to experiment with panchayats as village-level governing bodies. West Bengal has consistently attempted to carry out the democratic decentralization process beyond the provisions of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (CAA). Making the provision for Gram Sansad apart from Gram Sabha is therefore a step forward. Gram Sansad and Gram Sabha are established at the Gram Panchayat and Gram Sansad levels, respectively, with the participation of all voters in each 'booth' or electoral constituency. It is believed that by establishing Gram Sansad, a comparatively smaller unit will increase the likelihood of public engagement and establish a truly decentralized local government, in contrast to a massive Gram Sabha with a vast population. Actually, within West Bengal's system of rural local self-government, Gram Sansad is the lowest level. It is the local democracy's 'true soul.' In order to jointly manage their own local affairs, all of the villagers are required to participate in a process of direct contact, conversation, and decision-making. Thus, Gram Sansad is the hub of both

development efforts and democratic authority in the community. It not only adds social control, accountability, and transparency to the process of participatory government, but it also makes it easier for common rural residents to become empowered. It is a forum where everyone's voice is paramount. It has the power to transform the collective cacophony of people into their voice.

But without widespread and enthusiastic involvement, Gram Sansads won't be able to fulfill the true purpose that the West Bengal government's policymakers have for it. Therefore, the length of usage of Gram Sansad in the particular rural context determines its potential. Thus, for the average villager, inclusive and participatory grassroots governance remains a pipe dream. However, there have been doubts about the Gram Sansad's distinctive structure's efficacy as a tool for promoting decentralized decision-making and participative local administration. However, there have been doubts about the Gram Sansad's distinctive structure's efficacy as a tool for promoting decentralized decision-making and participative local administration. Some have suggested that the general public has no interest in the meetings and discussions held by Gram Sansads. The majority doesn't take part in or attend discussions. Meeting participation is frequently driven solely by the need to appease local authorities and boost attendance. They don't bring up problems. In reality, a local oligarchy or a small handful of leaders govern and manage the Sansads.

In this perspective, understanding the participatory nature of India's Panchayati Raj system requires looking at how Gram Sansads actually operate. It is important to pay attention to whether the institutions and mechanisms designed to promote participatory democracy and decentralized decision-making are progressively turning into theoretical or procedural tools in the hands of local elites.

In order to further investigate this issue, the current study focuses on the type of involvement in West Bengal's Gram Sansads, specifically in the Paschim Medinipur area. The study's main goal has been to look at the following fundamental question: To what extent have the Gram Sansads been successful in establishing themselves as a mechanism that guarantees village participation in governance at the local level? Or do the Gram Sansads seem like simply another piece of art? The Paschim Medinipur district is looking into the matter.

## ABBREVIATIONS

CAA	Constitutional Amendment Act
GS	Gram Sabha/ Gram Sansad/ Gram Swaraj
PRIs	Panchayati Raj Institutions
GPs	Gram Panchayats
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
BDO	Block Development Officer
NPIs	Nagar Palika Institutions
PPC	People's Plan Campaign
PPP	People's Participatory Planning
PS	Panchayat Samiti
DPSP	Directive Principles of the State Policy
NES	National Extension Service
NDC	National Development Council
PM	Prime Minister
CM	Chief Minister
DM	District Magistrate
DPC	District Planning Committee
ST	Schedule Tribe
SC	Schedule Caste
OBC	Other Backward Class
PESA	The Provisions of Panchayats (Extension to the Scheduled Areas)
MFP	Minor Forest Produce
VDC	Village Development Council
NER	North Eastern Region
IAY	Indira Awas Yojana
AAAY	Antyodaya Yojana
NOPS	National Old Pension Scheme
BRGF	Backward Region Grant Fund

MGNREG	Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ICDS	Integrated Child Development Services
IWMP	Integrated Watershed Management Programme
RKVY	Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana
SHGs	Self Help Groups
EWRs	Elected Women Representatives
ZP	Zilla Parishad
DPO	District Panchayat Officer
EOPs	Extension Officer for Panchayats
MP	Member of Parliament
MLA	Member of Legislative Assembly
EO	Executive Officer
WBCS	West Bengal Civil Service
LF	Left Front
CPI(M)	Communist Party of India (Marxist)
NIRD	National Institute of Rural Development
GUS	Gram Unnayan Samiti
AITC	All-India Trinamool Congress
CDB	Community Development Block
DPC	District Planning Committee
BPC	Block Planning Committee
SFC	State Finance Commission
SRDP	Strengthening Rural Decentralization Programme
PAAO	Panchayat Audit and Accounts Officers
CCA	Convergent Community Action
APA	Annual Performance Assessment
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
IND	Independent
GPCC	Gram Panchayat Core Committee

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Budh Bahadur Lama

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