

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS, FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Democracy is rooted in the Indian villages through Panchayati Raj. People of rural areas have been given an opportunity to implement the grassroots planning as desired by them, through their elected representatives. Local government is important for the democracy. 73rd Amendment of the Constitution provided reservation to women in the democratic decentralization process. Thus, the issue of women empowerment was raised though women participation is in its infancy and it will have the positive effect in the long run in the whole democratic process. The main focus of this empirical research is to examine the women participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The 73rd Amendment is landmark step in the field of the grassroots democracy. Vertically it is a step to decentralise the powers, horizontally it is a step to uplift the vulnerable sections (women) to the level of their counterpart. Besides the legal equal status of women in the Constitution the actual position of women is grim. From this perspective, women reservation in the local bodies and emphasis on the status of Gram Sabha are the most relevant steps to empower the women. By these provisions women have been empowered theoretically but the question is our patriarchal society is able to digest the process of equalising the women or they create hindrance in this field. In the present study effort has been made to explore the level of women participation by their roles, attitudes and perceptions.

There was no single Panchayat Act in operation before the existence of Himachal Pradesh. The origin of Panchayats in Himachal Pradesh dates back to 1908 when Raja Brijal Chand of Kahloor established Quomi Panchayat. Punjab Gram Panchayat Act 1939 was operational at the time of independence of India. The HPPR Act was passed in 1952 and came into force in 1954. The HPPR Act 1968 was enacted to incorporate the major recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee including three tier system. Although apex tier (ZP) was not constituted, since the recommendations of Committee were not mandatory as it lacked constitutional binding on the States. The provision of Panchayati Raj was kept under Article 40 in Directive Principles of State Policy which resulted in half hearted measures on the part of the State governments, because it was added to the State List. So there were many flaws in the implementations of Panchayati Raj. Prior to the 73rd Amendment the fate of Panchayati Raj was in the hands of ruling party of the State. Himachal Pradesh Government enacted HPPR Act 1994 in conformity with 73rd Amendment. According to Act, the provision of three tier system, regular elections, reservations for SCs, STs and women (one-third), strengthening of Gram Sabha, constitution of State Finance Commission, State Election Commission, allocation of 29 subjects to PRIs, etc. were made. State Government took some steps such as supervisory powers to PRIs in case of school and other local level departments, four meetings of Gram Sabha, constitution of Up-Gram Sabha and power to select the beneficiaries by Gram Sabha makes PRIs more effective in Himachal Pradesh.

The study reveals that the leadership of the Panchayati Raj institutions has gone into the hands of comparative younger section of the women. During study it has been analyzed that the young strata of the women is taking active part in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Similarly SCs, STs and OBCs are also

taking active part in the grassroots institution in Himachal Pradesh. The women who belong to the SC won the election of Panchayati Raj Institutions more easily while the women belong to the higher castes have to face many problems during the elections. In all the cases maximum number of leaders belong to the SC category. Although it has been observed that those candidates who are supported by the upper castes get elected. Occupation of the leaders is also a factor to determine the voting behaviour of the people. During the study it has been observed that the agriculture sector is still the main occupation of the respondents at all levels of PRIs in the State. The source of livelihood of majority of population is agriculture.

From education point of view, it was inferred that mostly the women who participated in the Panchayati Raj Institutions elections were not highly educated. It has been observed during study that most of the women who contest the elections of PRIs were forced by the male members of their family. There were very few women candidates who contested these elections at their own will. Education is very important for human being. At present Himachal Pradesh Government provides free educations for women upto post-graduate level. Primary education has also been compulsory in Himachal Pradesh to all.

The study reveals that the income is also an important indicator of social status. In the study it was found that in rural areas it is hardly possible to expect people to talk about income in actual figures. It proves that most of the respondents hailing to poor status. The study also reveals that joint family system is still prevalent in the rural areas of the Karsog Block. It has been observed during the study that land holding of the respondents were not very big 160 respondents were having land below 10 bighas. In Himachal Pradesh the size of land is small. Majority of

the population is dependent on agriculture occupation and their income level is very low and people are poor.

Majority of respondents were not aware of the provision and main implications of the HPPR Act, 1994 after eighteen years of implementation. They had no idea about the system. Most of the women are unaware of the functioning of Panchayati Raj system.

The study also deals with the important aspect of reservation to the various sections of society including women. During the study it was observed that majority of respondents were satisfied with 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs.

The elections of PRIs are contested on non-party line and majority of the leaders of these institutions were against party based election. However, after the election each political party claims their victory in the elections of PRIs, by giving their data. Involvement of political parties directly and indirectly is one of the major causes of factionalism and groupism in the rural areas.

In Himachal Pradesh three tier system of PRIs has been adopted and most of the respondents were satisfied with the existing structural arrangement of PRIs. During the field survey it has been further observed that educated members and Pradhans are working effectively in building school playgrounds, paths and roads construction, etc.

The participation of women in Panchayats is certainly one mechanism through which such change can take place, and the strategic gender interests of women advanced. It is observed that the main cause of the poor participation of women in these institutions is illiteracy. The women were facing problems from bureaucracy which implements the policy and programmes of the elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Educational qualification indicates majority of the leaders are educated up to the matric. They are not able to understand technically the functioning and the overall system. This fact also proves that less education or illiteracy poses challenge to the women empowerment.

The study reveals that women have to face many problems from the male dominated society in which they were not supposed to do work outside their homes. While casting their vote women give importance to the opinion of the head of the family. It is observed during the study that the elected representatives were not free in decision-making. The decisions mostly were taken by the male members. Economic independence to women will encourage their participation and involvement in the functioning of PRIs. Financial dependence on male/husband is a major hindrance in the way of active participation.

It is one of the major achievements after the 73rd Amendment that the people have become conscious about the rural development programmes and participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Although Panchayati Raj Institutions depend upon the people participation. During the study it is found that few people are not taking active part in the Gram Sabha meeting. The study reveals that most of women are satisfied with the Gram Sabha meetings.

Although the 73rd Amendment to the Constitution provides for reservation of seats for women, yet it is unable to improve the participation of women in political processes at the grassroot level to a desirable extent. Women were satisfied with the working of women Pradhan/Up-Pradhan under Panchayati Raj. Their performance has been influenced by the reservation policy and women leadership is generally considered hard working and lesser the chance to be corrupt, dishonest and irresponsible as compared

to male leaders. However, the male members were not against the reservation for female at the level of three tier institutions.

It has been observed that male members played dominant role in the decision-making process and many elected representatives have no identity of their own and act as mere mouthpieces of powerful men in politics. While contesting elections women faced many problems from their family members and from the society.

There is also interference of the State Government in the functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Panchayati Raj Institutions are facing many problems relating to finance.

Performance of Panchayati Raj Institutions depends upon the financial position of these institutions. It is generally said that the poor performance of PRIs was due to financial paucity. Development activities can be carried out only with adequate finances. Adequate and sustainable finance resources and efficient financial administration are crucial to the success of Panchayati Raj at all levels. The Panchayati Raj Institutions made genuine efforts in many places to discharge their functions but, there were instances where they were not performing even the minimum obligatory functions, largely due to paucity of funds. Even the basic civic amenities like safe drinking water supply, sanitation and conservancy were not being provided to the community. The reasons being Panchayati Raj Institutions are dependent upon the State Government for funds. State bureaucracy plays an important role in the allocation of funds to different PRIs on different considerations.

During the study it has been observed that the Panchayati Raj Institutions are facing many problems in their working, as they do not have sufficient powers with them. Reluctance on the part of State Government to part with their powers is major impediment in

the proper functioning of Panchayati Raj Institutions. There is also interference from the upper level political elites which is responsible for the poor functioning of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

The study also reveals that there is corruption in various rural development schemes which are meant for the rural poor. Most of the benefits which are meant for BPL and SCs family are being availed by the higher strata of the society. There is corruption at different levels which are involved in the process.

It has been observed during study that the women elected to the Panchayati Raj Institutions were ignorant about the policies and programmes. When they were questioned about the imparting training, most of the women respondents were of the opinion that the staff attached to the grassroots institutions should be given training in rural development programmes along with deliberative wing.

It has been observed that political participation of women is not possible unless and until it is backed by economic empowerment. Women should have access to economic resources and rights. They should have equal right to property along with male members of the family. They should have access to right to work, equal income and wages, career and life opportunities. If women are not economically independent, their political participation cannot be meaningful. It has been observed during study that male members play dominant role in the decision-making process and many elected representatives have no identity of their own and act as mere mouthpieces of powerful men in politics.

It was found that the women elected to the PRIs used to sign the Panchayat register in the beginning but later their husbands started signing it for her. They used to attend all the meetings of the Gram Panchayat on her behalf.

Marital status of the common women and elected women indicates that married women enjoy more freedom as compare to the unmarried women. Due to patriarchal character family members and society did not permit girl to be actively involved in the public issues.

Share of SC category was the highest followed by general respondents. It may be due to the reservation of seats to them in the grassroots institutions or the women from the upper casts are less open and their participation in the public affairs is considered to be against the family norms.

It is evident that women in rural areas are not well educated. They know reading and writing. In rural areas educational system is not well developed. Hence, education level and their understanding of the current issues are poor.

The occupational structure of the respondents reflected that the total sample belonged to the agricultural sector. In Karsog Block majority of the respondents belong to the agriculture occupation. Most of the respondents belong to low income group. Size of land holding in the State is very small. It was observed that due to the growth of population the size of the land holding in the State is going down day by day at village level and poor people are compelled to sell their land for the fulfillment of the domestic/ social needs.

After eighteen years of implementation of the Act rural common women are not aware about the power and functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions only few were aware of the amended Act of Panchayati Raj. Some women are having better knowledge of new PRIs.

Socio-economic profile of women and their comparison with the elected women indicates that women after sixty-five years of independence in the rural areas is suffering from abject poverty and

social stigma even after the equal status for women has been provided under the Constitution. Although socio-economic empowerment of women is slow, but not stagnant.

While data indicates that women participate in political activities through political parties. It is observed that party affiliation and PRIs are inter-related. Prior to the 73rd Amendment women had little role as members of the political parties. Their participation in political activities increased now. It is observed that majority of the respondents were against the party based election of PRIs, they want to maintain *status-quo* with regard to these elections. But at the same time most of the respondents accept the indirect involvement of political parties in the elections and working of PRIs.

During the study it has been observed that majority of the women respondents were satisfied with 50 percent reservation for women. In the study it is observed that the common women are not aware about the various policy programmes of rural development.

During the study it has been observed that the most of the rural women do not go for voting without prior consultation of their husband, father, brother or any other male member of the family. However, the electoral education, awareness campaign and capacity building programmes are the right steps to empower women folk and strengthen their willingness towards, independent voting. The common women are being dominated by the male members while decision making process in PRIs.

During the conversation it is observed that their awareness and expectation from Panchayats is not very high. Hence, their satisfaction is due to their ignorance. Although they get chance to speak but they do not speak before the male folk. It is observed their participation in Gram Sabha is not effective.

The study finds that most of the common women were satisfied with working of Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad.

In the case of women representation it was found that both the rural masses and rural leaders accepted the reservation for women and they treat women Pradhans and members at par to their male counterparts. But their performance in most of the cases is poor. They depend on their husband, other family members and male Panchayati Raj leaders for taking important decisions.

These inferences based on the data supplied indicate that 73rd Amendment has empowered marginalized sections politically, but their economic status clearly indicates their poverty which is one of the major hindrances in the overall empowerment of the women.

The system of Panchayati Raj Institutions is in transitional stage. Old as well as new institutions are determining the Panchayati Raj system. Women participation is not effective as yet but there is a ray of hope; gradually the system is accepting their role as leaders. The increasing level of education also indicates that the future generations will have wider and more constructive thinking about the Panchayati Raj Institutions. They will be able to shed the traditional institutions like caste, class, male chauvinism. Awareness through education will increase the people's participation and common masses will fight for their rights.

It is true that the State Government is not very enthusiastic about empowering the Panchayati Raj Institutions. Still the Government has made some notifications in this regard. When the people become aware, the State Government will be forced to give them more powers. Thus the 73rd Amendment has showed the way to empower the masses. But there is a long journey ahead.

Today PRIs are urgent need. They are playing crucial role in the development process therefore, it would be necessary to strengthen them right now, so that they could play their legitimate role in the development process in course of time. Elected female leaders have to play key role in implementing, monitoring and evaluating the development activities along with strengthening the democracy.

On the basis of the entire study following findings have been derived:

- The findings clearly show that women have very poor knowledge about the Panchayati Raj Institutions and constitutional provisions, rural development programmes and duties of the government official in the local administration. The main reasons for lack of knowledge are illiteracy, lack of experience of Panchayat work and duty and lack of interest in politics and public life.
- Majority of the respondents are of the younger age group. Women are not able to play an effective role as a Pradhan because of low profile, poor orientation, lack of enthusiasm and lack of political background. Besides these individual approaches, social obstacles such as conservative approach, family responsibility, and lack of co-operation from family and patriarchal culture seem to inhibit women's participation in local governance through PRIs.
- Majority of the women respondents belong to joint family. Leadership is much influenced by the family. The inherited social position and the reputation of the joint family play an effective role in the leadership pattern.
- One of the significant finding of the present study is that the villagers were satisfied with the work of the women Pradhan. The main reason is that, women Pradhan are taking keen

interest in different programmes of rural development. They have played notable role in solving basic problems of the village. Because of the women Pradhan the administration of the panchayat has become soft, smooth going, the level of corruption has decreased, and women Pradhan gave prime importance to the development of the basic needs.

- The village leaders face obstacles while implementing schemes under the Panchayati Raj system. Interference of local politicians and dominant caste groups, lack of information of development programmes and delay release of funds are features of the working of PRIs.
- An important finding of this study is that share of SC category was the highest followed by general respondents. In all the cases maximum number of leaders belong to the SC category.
- Majority of the respondents were not aware of the provisions and main implications of the HPPR Act, 1994. After about eighteen years of the implementation of the Act, they had no idea about the system.
- Socio-economic profile of women indicates that women after sixty-five years of independence suffering from abject poverty and social stigma besides the equal status for women by the constitution. Although pace of women socio-economic empowerment is slow but not stagnant.

Suggestions

- Steps should be taken to empower women economically along with political empowerment.
- Women should be imparted vocational education to evolve her entrepreneur skills.

- Syllabi in the school and higher education should be based on the practical utility by which the society should be sensitized. Male folk of the society should realise the importance of female folk.
- Constitution should be amended to give reservation to the women in Parliament and State Legislatures, so the women should have share in deciding the policy, programmes according to their own needs.
- In Gram Sabha meeting women attendance should be fixed to complete the quorum.
- Government and NGOs should take steps to popularise Gram Sabha as basic unit of democracy. Gram Sabha can prove to be very effective in the field of good governance which is a step towards more responsive, effective and participative democracy.
- In the development activities higher echelons of government should facilitate the process of decentralised planning. Gram Sabha with the PRIs should have power to plan their micro development projects according to their own needs;
- Women should be encouraged to be effective part of planning process at the village level. Women folk better know the local needs and they are more affected section of the society;
- After eighteen years of the new Panchayati Raj Act, empirically it is observed that women have potential to perform their role. But they need exhaustive periodical training to become role performers.
- In the Gram Sabha meetings steps should be taken by the government and media to encourage the masses specifically women to be active part of local bodies.

- It should be made compulsory for them to attend the training courses which are being presently conducted for the elected representatives of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Special training programmes are, however, required for the women and Scheduled Castes among them as they lag far behind others in the awareness regarding the powers and functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions and the schemes of rural development on account of their lack of education and other constraints.
- The NGOs, self-help groups, Mahila Mandals and youth clubs should have to be strengthened for the capacity building of the women and the dalits through their social mobilization.
- Effective steps are required for making the office of Panch more attractive and for curbing the tendency of Pradhan and Gram Sachivs of not holding proper meetings of the Gram Panchayats. The Gram Sabha also needs to be strengthened for breaking the hegemony of Pradhan on the Gram Panchayat, Samiti and Zila Parishad should be given more powers for increasing interest of the candidates and voters in their elections.
- Various programmes for welfare and development of women are to be integrated by giving the women representatives and opportunity to improve the economic condition in general, besides developing their leadership qualities.
- MPs and MLAs should consult the Panchayati Raj leaders from time to time and allocate the funds according to the needs of the area. It should be done by the prior approval of the Planning Committee at the district level.

- Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) should be recognized in the rural society. They should play effective role in the working of the Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- NGOs, government and intelligentsia of the society should try to change behavioural attitude of the rural society towards the SCs/STs and women. Study showed the majority of women are illiterate.
- The Mahila Pradhan of the Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste should be provided with safety and security against the dominant castes and classes of the society. So that they can take decision freely and independently in the Gram Panchayat and can do their work in effective way.
- The mass media plays a constructive role in enhancing women's leadership by giving wider coverage to various activities and measures taken by women Sarpanch and by highlighting their problems and prospects, through audio video systems. Success stories of women leaders and their struggles and experiences may be prototyped to the women publically so as to motivate and encourage rural women to shoulder leadership responsibilities.
- The use of electronic media must be made to broadcast special programmes for women and their rights and responsibilities, the Constitution Amendment Act, 1992 etc. along with the same lines as the Krishi Darshan Programme, other occasion where awareness programmes can be conducted include social gatherings with in the village themselves.
- Self Help Groups, NGOs are also contributing in their own way in women empowerment process. SHGs and NGOs should try to improve their working style so that people may get aware of their plans and programmes.

Mahila Mandals can motivate women to contest election. To get a sense of economic independence and self-confidence, participation in Mahila Mandals and SHGs should be ensured.

Women participation is not an end in itself. It is the beginning of grassroots democracy and requires constant improvements and work efficiency. As PRIs are playing crucial role in development process, therefore, it would be necessary to strengthen them. The direct involvement of women in decision-making bodies is a milestone in development process. So reservation has certainly created a silent revolution among women folk of Karsog.