CHAPTER-6

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Present study has been conducted in three districts of South Assam i.e., Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi. It has six chapters. First chapter is divided into two sections. The first section deals with the meaning and characteristics of local self-government. It also deals with some concepts such as delegation, devolution, deconcentration, decentralisation and democratic decentralisation. Section two includes discussions on the conceptual background of participation and empowerment, survey of literature, objectives, research questions, study area and methodology of the study. Second chapter gives a brief profile of the local self-government of Assam. Third chapter deals with a brief socio-economic profile of the study area and respondents. Chapter four focuses on the nature of women participation in rural and urban local bodies. It also deals with a comparative analysis of women participation in rural and urban local bodies. Chapter five presents the impact of reservation on women empowerment in rural and urban area. It also presents a comparative analysis of rural and urban local bodies and empowerment of women. Finally, chapter six presents the major findings of the study. It also presents some recommendations for improvement of women participation and future policy formulation and policy implementation.

This study has two parts: rural study area and urban study area. In rural study area there are three tiers Panchayati Raj system in Assam. These institutions are (a) Gaon Panchayat at the village level, (b) Anchalik Panchayat at the block level and, (c) Zilla Parishad at the district level. There are three Zilla Parishads in study area and all the Zilla Parishads have been selected for the study. All together there are 22 elected women Zilla Parishad members in study area and all of them have been selected as respondents of the study. There are 27 Anchalik Panchayats in rural area (Cachar-15, Karimganj-7 and Hailakandi-5) and 10% of the Anchalik Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. Accordingly we have selected 4 Anchalik Panchayats (Cachar-2, Karimganj-1 Hailakandi-1) for the study. Altogether there are 19 elected women Anchalik Panchayat members in selected Anchalik Panchayats
and all of them have been selected as respondents. There are 321 Gaon Panchayats in rural study area (Cachar-163, Karimganj-96 and Hailakandi-62) and 10% of the Gaon Panchayats have been selected through simple random sampling method as study area. Accordingly, we have selected 31 Gaon Panchayats for the study. Altogether there are 110 elected women members in selected Gaon Panchayats and all of them have been selected as respondents of the study.

In urban area there are four Municipal Boards and two Town Committees in Cachar, Karimganj and Hailakandi districts. All the Municipal boards and Town Committees have been selected as study area. All together there are 37 elected women members in urban study area and all of them have been selected as respondents of the study.

Total respondents of the study are 188 (rural-151 and urban-37)

MAJOR FINDINGS:

Major findings of the study are presented in the following sections.

Section-I

Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents of Rural Study Area:

- In the Panchayati Raj system the percentage of younger women leaders is more prominent than the older women leaders. As majority of women members belong to the age group of 31-45, we can say that young women leaders are emerging in Panchayati Raj system. This result is a reflection to the fact that although the older person is respected in our society but in the Panchayati Raj system young women leaders are in dominant position than the old women leaders.

- In rural area Hindu women members are in dominant position than Muslim and Christian women members. This is in line with the population composition of the study area, according to which highest percent of people of the study area belong to Hindu religion followed by Muslim.
• It is apparent from the study that in rural area women members comes from various caste groups but majority of them belong to General category.

• So far as the level of education is concerned Panchayat women leaders belong to all levels i.e., from primary to higher level of education. There is no illiterate Panchayat woman member.

• Majority of women Panchayat members are housewives who are not employed outside. There are few women members who have independent source of income. Majority of respondents belong to monthly income category of Rs. 1-3000, but this does not mean that they are engaged in any gainful employment. As they are Panchayat members, they get some money as honorarium and so they fall in income group Rs. 1-3000. Although the study reveals that respondent’s families’ belong to all level of income groups i.e. from lower level to higher level, majority of women members are from those families which do not have sound financial condition. Out of 151 women members there are only 13 members who have monthly income of Rs. 12001 and above category. This result indicates that the family income does not seem to be an important factor in the selection of women Panchayat members

• Majority of the respondents come from joint families and this is a reflection of the fact that joint family system provides a favourable atmosphere for woman to become Panchayat member.

• The study shows that only 3.3% respondents are heads of the family and 96.7% respondents are ordinary members of the family.

• Majority of respondents are married and the percentage of unmarried and widow members are very low. This result revealed that married women members are in a dominant position than unmarried and widow members in rural local bodies.
Another fact that came out from the study is that political parties are very active and are playing an important role in the Panchayati Raj system of study area. On the basis of finding of the study we can say that Indian National Congress is in dominant position in the Panchayati Raj Institutions of study area followed by Bharatiya Janata Party. Considering the fact that AIUDF contested the Panchayat election in 2007-2008 for the first time, it is surprising that it could make an impressive entry. It is equally important to note that though the Asom Gana Parishad (AGP) is one of the important regional parties of Assam and it had formed the government in Assam twice, in the local elections of the area it drew a blank. This may be due to the ethnic composition of the area. In short, it can be stated that irrespective of the party affiliation of the women members of the Panchayat bodies, political parties have definitely made a dent in the local politics. This is clearly substantiated by the existence of less number of contestants as independent. It is evident from the study that 88.7% respondent’s family members have political party affiliation. This indicates that political background of family members provides a favourable atmosphere for women’s election in Panchayati Raj system.

*Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents of Urban Study Area:*

- The percentage of younger women members is more than the older women members in the Municipal bodies of Barak valley.
- All the urban respondents belong to Hindu community. The dominance of particular religion reflects the population composition in the urban area.
- Majority of women members belong to General category of the society. From this result we can infer that women members from general category are in dominant position in comparison to women members of other categories.
- It is interesting to note that there is no illiterate woman member and all of them have education ranging between class V to graduation and above. In
spite of their education majority of them are not engaged in any gainful employment. The study reveals that only a small percentage of women members are engaged in different occupations such as business, legal practice, dance teacher, music teacher.

- It is evident from the study that majority of women members are from those families which has sound economic background (12001 and above category) and from this we can say that sound financial position of family is favourable for women’s election in urban self government and vice versa.

- Joint family system is conducive for the election of women to urban self government.

- The study shows that only one respondent is head of the family and majority of respondents belong to other category i.e. who are the ordinary members of the family.

- Majority of respondents are married and the percentage of unmarried and widow members are very low. This result is a reflection to the fact that women who are married are in advantageous position so far as the election of Municipal bodies is concerned.

- In terms of political party affiliation of the members, we find majority of them belong to INC followed by BJP. This indicates that national political parties are playing a dominant role in the Municipal bodies of study area. Almost all women members are affiliated with political parties and only one respondent got elected as Independent contestant. It is evident from the study that political parties are very active and play an important role. This is substantiated by the fact that there is only one member who contested the election as independent candidate. It is evident from the study that 97.3% respondent’s family members have political party affiliation. This indicates that political background of family members is conducive for women’s election in the urban study area.
**Comparative Analysis of Socio-Economic Profile of the Respondents of Rural and Urban Study Area:**

- Both in rural and urban area the percentage of younger women members are higher than the older women members.

- In rural area there are Hindu, Muslim and Christian women members but Hindu women members are in dominant position than Muslim and Christian women members. In urban area all the respondents belonged to Hindu community. There is no Muslim and Christian woman member. The dominance of particular religion reflects the population composition in the urban area.

- Both in rural and urban self government women members come from various castes but majority of them belong to the general category. From this result we can infer that women members from general category are in dominant position in comparison to women members of other categories in local self government of South Assam.

- There is no illiterate woman member in rural and urban local bodies of South Assam. In rural area women members belong to all levels of education i.e., from class one to Graduation and above level. In urban area all women members have education ranging between class five to graduation and above. Although there is no illiterate women members in rural and urban area but there is slight difference in the educational level of rural and urban women members. In rural area there are respondents who have education ranging between ‘class one to class four’ but in urban areas there is no respondents who have education ‘below class five’.

- Both in rural and urban area majority of women members are housewives. There are few women members who have independent source of income. In spite of their education majority of them are not engaged in any gainful employment.

- Both in rural and urban area majority of respondents belong to the monthly income category of Rs. 1-3000 only, this does not mean that they
are engaged in any gainful employment. As they are members, they get some money as honorarium and so they fall in income group of Rs. 1-3000. Majority of them are not engaged in any gainful employment.

- In rural area majority of women members are from those families which do not have sound financial condition. But in urban area picture is different. In urban area majority of women members are from those families which have sound economic background. From this we can say that in rural area sound financial condition of family plays a nominal role in women’s election to local bodies but in urban area sound financial position of family plays an important role for women’s election to local bodies.

- Both in rural and urban area joint family system provide a favourable condition for women’s election to local self bodies.

- In rural and urban area, only a small percentage of respondents are heads of the family and majority of respondents are ordinary members of the family.

- Majority of respondents are married and the percentage of unmarried and widow women members are very low. This indicates that in rural and urban area married women members are in a dominant position than unmarried and widow women members.

- Both in rural and urban area political parties are very much active and playing an important role in the local bodies. In terms of political party affiliation of the members, we find majority of them belong to Indian National Congress followed by Bharatiya Janata Party. The study also reveals that political parties have made a dent in the local politics. This is clearly substantiated by the existence of less number of contestants as independent.

- In rural and urban area majority of respondent’s family members have political party affiliation. This indicates that political background of
family members provides a favourable atmosphere for women’s election in grass root level.

In the above section we presented the socio-economic profile of the respondents of rural and urban local bodies. It is found that both in rural and urban area the percentage of younger women members are higher than the older women members. In rural area Hindu women members are in dominant position than Muslim and Christian women members. In urban area all the respondents belonged to Hindu community. The dominance of particular religion reflects the population composition in the urban area. Both in rural and urban area majority of women members belong to general category. From this result we can say that religion and caste plays an important role in the selection of candidates for contesting election. There is no illiterate woman member in rural and urban local bodies. Although there is no illiterate women members but there is slight difference in the educational level of rural and urban women members. In rural area there are respondents who have education ranging between ‘class one to class four’ but in urban areas there is no respondents who have education ‘below class five’.

Both in rural and urban area majority of women members are housewives. There are few women members who have independent source of income. In spite of their education majority of them are not engaged in any gainful employment. Both in rural and urban area majority of respondents belong to monthly income category of Rs. 1-3000 only, this does not mean that they are engaged in any gainful employment. As they are members, they get some money as honorarium and so they fall in income group of Rs. 1-3000. In rural area good financial condition of family plays a nominal role in women’s election to local bodies but in urban area good financial position of family plays an important role for women’s election to local bodies. Both in rural and urban area joint family system provide a favourable condition for women’s election to local self bodies. In rural and urban area, only a small percentage of respondents are heads of the family and majority of respondents are ordinary members of the family. In rural and urban area married women members are in a dominant position than
unmarried and widow women members. Both in rural and urban area political parties are very much active and playing an important role in the local bodies. In terms of party affiliation of the members, we find majority of them belong to Indian National Congress followed by Bharatiya Janata Party. The study also reveals that political parties have made a dent in the local politics. This is clearly substantiated by the existence of less number of contestants as independent. Political background of family members provides a favourable atmosphere for women’s election in grass root level. On the basis of the analysis we can infer that socio-economic background of the elected women members determine the participation and empowerment of women in grass root level.

Section-II

This section has two parts. First part deals with the nature of women participation in rural and urban local bodies and second part deals with the impact of reservation on women empowerment. In the concluding part a brief summary of women participation and empowerment is presented on the basis of findings. The findings are presented below.

**Women Participation in Rural Local Bodies:**

- Majority of the women members (94.7%) have been elected to the GP/AP/ZP for the first time, a small percentage of women members (5.3%) are second timer and there is no third and fourth timer women members to GP/AP/ZP. It is evident from this that before the enactment of Assam Panchayat Act, 1994 women hardly participated in the local elections.

- Almost all of respondents (98.7%) have stated women reservation as the main reason for contesting the election followed by political family. Other reasons for contesting the election are: (i) to serve the people (75.5%), (ii) for all round development of the locality (70.2%), (iii) request from others (61.6%), (iv) interest in politics (12.6%), (v) for women empowerment (12.6%), (vi) inspiration drawn from nation's women political leader
(6.0%) and (vii) influence of women's organization (3.3%). 1.3% respondents have not given any answer. From this result we can infer that the reservation has opened a channel for women to occupy a legitimate space in the power structure and it has become possible for them to be a part of the decision making process in the grassroots level. It is also seen that influence of women's organization, nation's women political leader is very low in women’s election to GP/AP/ZP. Another fact which came out from the study is that only 12.6% of respondent contest GP/AP/ZP election for women empowerment and this indicates that women are less concerned about women related issues.

- Majority of family members are happy for the election of their women family member to Panchayat bodies and 38.4% family members view women’s election to Panchayat as a case of pride for their family. It is evident from this that reaction of the family members towards women participation in the Panchayat bodies is positive as there was no objection from the family members towards their participation.

- Awareness level of women members regarding the goal of PRIs is good as majority of them mentioned that all round development of the rural areas is the goal of PRIs.

- The functions of GP/AP/ZP which are pointed out by the respondents are: construct and repair road, culvert, drain, community hall etc (96.0%), rural housing (94.0%), agriculture including agriculture extension (92.1%) provide pure drinking water (60.3%), rural electrification (50.3%), education (49.7%), women and child development (35.1%) and prepare annual plans for area development (33.1%). It is also found that 4% respondents are not able to give any answer. From this result we can infer that majority of respondents are aware of the important functions of GP/AP/ZP such as agriculture, rural housing, road, drinking water and electricity.

- Majority of respondents (96%) are of the view that the GP/AP/ZP take up those works which are the functions of GP/AP/ZP and only 4%
respondents replied that they do not have any idea about the works of GP/AP/ZP. Whatever may be the extent of the work undertaken by different Panchayat bodies it has been observed that all these Panchayat bodies take up those works which are the functions of GP/AP/ZP. It reveals that the knowledge of women members about the working of the GP/AP/ZP is satisfactory as 96% of them mentioned that the GP/AP/ZP takes up those works which are the functions of GP/AP/ZP such as agriculture, rural housing, road, drinking water and electricity.

• Almost all the respondents are of the opinion that the main problems of their area are unemployment, shortage of pure drinking water, improper road condition, irregular supply of electricity or absence of electricity connection, improper sanitation, improper housing, etc. This result indicates that the awareness level of the women members about the problems of their local area is good as they have knowledge about the burning problems of their local area.

• It is found that majority of respondents (55.6%) are aware of the different schemes of rural development and they could name them and 44.4% do not have any idea about these schemes. 55.6% of them mentioned that the schemes which are taken up by their GP/AP/ZP are schemes related with various works such as construction, employment, drinking water, housing, irrigation facility etc. 55.6% of them are of the opinion that the schemes like IAY, IGNOAPS, SJRY, DDP and MGNREGA are implemented to some extent in their respective area. This result indicates that majority of women members have knowledge about different schemes of rural development and also have knowledge about the schemes which are implemented in their local area.

• There are various ways through which the respondents contributed in getting different schemes implemented in their area and these are: (i) by informing the people about the schemes (54.3%), (ii) by maintain close contact with officials/persons responsible for implementation (37.1%), (iii) by monitoring the implementation of the schemes (35.8%) and (iv) by
encouraging/motivating the people to come forward for the schemes (31.8%). 45.7% respondents has not given any answer. It is evident from this that although 45.7% respondents have not given any answer but the contribution of other respondents in the implementation of different schemes is a positive sign for women participation as majority of them are first timer and lacks experience.

- There are different functions which the elected women members of Panchayat bodies like to perform such as all round development of their locality (76.8%), make women self-dependent (21.9%), protest against women exploitation (21.2%) and women empowerment (12.6%) and only 18.5% members have not given any answer. Interestingly not many of the respondents have shown enthusiasm in issues relating to women. Nonetheless, it is commendable as majority of them are new to the system.

- Majority of respondents (77.5%) think that to some extent they are able to perform all the expected functions, 18.5% respondents gave no answer, 3.3% replied that they are not able to perform the expected functions and only one respondent replied that she has been able to perform the expected functions. It is evident from this that majority of respondents are able to perform their expected functions ‘to some extent’.

- It is found that majority of respondents (60.3%) are of the view that their functions are performed jointly by themselves and by other male members of their family, 28.5% are of the view that their functions are performed by others and only 11.3% respondents are of the view that they perform their allotted functions by themselves. It is evident from this result that majority of respondents take help from other male family members such as husband, father, father-in-law, son, brother and etc for performing their function. It is well known fact that proxy system prevails in PRIs and present study also reveals the same trend. But it is important to note some positive aspects of women participation such as 11.3% respondents perform their allotted functions by themselves and majority of them
(60.3%) take help from other male members of their family. This indicates that although majority of respondents are first timer and lacks experience but they try to perform their functions by taking help from other family members.

- The main reasons for the support of the local people to women members are: - (i) people’s perception of them as honest person (99.3%), (ii) family’s good hold over the areas (98.7%), (iii) popularity of the person in the village (95.4%), (iv) accepts them as their leader (70.2%) and (v) better education than other (.7%). It is also seen that .7% has not given any answer. It is evident from the study that wealth of the respondents does not play any role in getting support from the people. From the study it can be inferred that the GP/AP/ZP under study is characterized by close relationship between the people and the women members.

- Majority of women members (83.4%) always attend the meetings, 11.3% often attend the meetings and 5.3% rarely attend meetings. It is important to point out that women’s attendance in the meetings is satisfactory as majority of them stated that they always attend the meetings of Panchayat bodies.

- The regular participation of women members in the meetings is evident from the fact that they are aware of the ways by which these local bodies perform their functions. According to them in majority of GP/AP/ZP under study decisions are taken by majority principle and only in 34.4% rural local body consensus method is followed. Only 1.4% member does not know how GP/AP/ZP takes decision in the meetings. From this we can say that in majority of Panchayat bodies decisions are taken in accordance with Assam Panchayat Act and majority of women members have knowledge about how decisions are taken in meetings.

- Majority of the respondents (64.2%) are of the view that they follow ‘majority principle’ in decision making when there is any division of opinion in the meetings, 33.1% opined that they try to convince all the
members for a consensus when there is division of opinion in the meetings and 2.6% has not given any answer. It is evident from this that majority of women members have knowledge about how Panchayat bodies takes decision in the meeting when there is some kind of division opinion on any matter.

- Regarding the acceptance of ideas by other members in the GP/AP/ZP meetings 48.3% women members are of the view that their ideas are ‘not much’ accepted by other members in the meetings, 45.0% respondents are of the view that the ideas given by them are ‘often’ accepted by other members and 6.6% respondents are of the opinion that the ideas given by them are ‘always’ accepted by other members. It is evident from this that although only a few women members can influence the decision making of the local bodies all the time, it is important that majority of the respondents feel that often they are able to influence the decision making. Attitude of this kind help women to realize their strength and in the long run will lead to women’s empowerment.

- Regarding the rating of participation of women members in GP/AP/ZP meetings 45% respondents rate their participation as ‘active member’, 27% rate their participation as ‘keep silent most of the time’, and 23.8% were not able to give any answer and only 3.3% Panchayat member rate their participation as ‘most active’. This result reveals that there are both positive and negative aspects regarding the rating of performance of women members in meetings. Positive aspect is that 3.3% women member remains ‘most active’ and 45% remains ‘active’ in the meeting and this is positive aspect of women participation.

- The main issue(s) taken up by the concerned GP/AP/ZP in the meeting are on development and implementation of various schemes introduced by the government for rural development.

- Majority of women members are aware of the different sources of fund of their local bodies. According to them sources of fund are taxes and
government grants but none of them are aware of all the sources of tax as mentioned in the Assam Panchayat Act.

- Majority of women members (80.1%) admitted that the money thus generated by tax and other sources is not sufficient to meet the developmental expenses of the GP/AP/ZP and 19.9% respondents has not given any answer and they do not have any idea whether money received by the GP/AP/ZP is sufficient to meet its requirements or not. From this we can say majority of women members are aware of the fact that fund received from different sources is not sufficient to meet the developmental expenses of their locality.

- It is found that majority of women members (80.1%) are of the view that they prepare the plan of expenditure in the GP/AP/ZP meeting and 19.9% has not given any answer. This result indicates that majority of women member have knowledge about the expenditure process of fund received from different sources. From this we can infer that majority of women members participate in the meetings and take interest in the works of respective rural local bodies and due to their participation their self esteem have gone up and people in society at large look on them for development of grassroots level.

Women Participation in Urban Local Bodies:

- Majority of the respondents (91.9%) have been elected to the MB/TC for the first time, 8.1% have been elected as second timer and there is no third timer and fourth timer women members to MB/TC under study area. It is evident from this that before the enactment of 74th Amendment Act, 1994, women hardly participated in the local elections.

- It is found that bulk of the respondents (97.3%) consider women reservation is the main reason for contesting the election followed by political family background (64.9%). Other reasons for contesting the
election are: (i) to serve the people (59.5%), (ii) request from others (56.8%), (iii) for all round development of the locality (54.1%), (iv) interest in politics (18.9%), (v) for women empowerment (16.2%), (vi) inspiration drawn from nation's women political leader (10.8%) and (vii) influence of women's organization (10.8%). There are no responses from 2.7% respondents. From this result we can say that the reservation system is a radical step to empower women in India. As a result of reservation, several women have been elected to representative positions and it has become possible for them to become a part of the decision making process in the grassroots level. It is also seen that influence of women's organization, nation's women political leader is very low in women’s election to MB/TC. Another fact came out from the study is that only a small percentage of respondent contest MB/TC election for women empowerment and this indicates that women are less concerned about women related issues.

- Majority of family members (67.6%) are happy for women’s election to Municipal bodies, 32.4% family members are proud of the election of the women of their family to Municipal bodies. This reveals that reaction of the family members towards women participation in the Municipal bodies is positive as there is no objection from the family members towards their participation.

- Majority of respondents (73%) are of the opinion that all round development of the urban area is the goal of MB/TC. It is evident from this that awareness level of women members about the goal of Municipal bodies is good as majority of them are of the view that all round development of the urban areas is the goal of MB/TC.

- Regarding the functions of MB/TC majority of respondents (94.6%) are of the view that MB/TC performs functions relating to the health and sanitation of the area under its jurisdiction, 94.6% to construct, repair and maintenance of road, culvert, drain etc, 91.9% to maintain and establish town halls, children parks, markets, street lighting etc, 73% to provide
pure drinking water, 37.8% to make provision for maternity and child welfare, 35.1% to look after the education of the children of the residents and 35.1% registration of birth and deaths. From this result we can infer that majority of women member are aware of the important functions of MB/TC such as health and sanitation, road, drinking water and maintaining and establishing town halls, children parks, markets, street lighting etc.

- Majority of respondents (94.6%) are of the view that the MB/TC takes up those works which are the functions of MB/TC and only 5.4% respondents replied that they do not have any idea about the works of MB/TC. It reveals that the knowledge of women members about the working of the MB/TC is satisfactory as 94.6 % of them mentioned that the MB/TC takes up those works which are the functions of MB/TC such as health and sanitation, road, drinking water, maintaining and establishing town halls, children parks, markets, street lighting etc.

- According to the respondents the main problems of their areas are unemployment (97.3%), improper road conditions (83.8%), lack of proper public toilets (83.8), lack of proper drainage system (78.4%), shortage of pure drinking water (37.8), traffic problems (18.9%). This result indicates that the awareness level of the women members about the problems of their respective area is good as they have knowledge about the burning problems of their local area.

- Majority of respondents (75.7%) are aware of the different schemes of urban development and only 24.3% respondents do not have any idea about these schemes. 75.7% of them mentioned that the schemes which are taken up by their MB/TC are schemes related with various works such as construction, sanitation, drinking water and housing etc. 75.7% of them are of the opinion that the schemes like Rajiv Awas Yojana, BRGF, SJSRY, NFBS, Anna Suraksha Yojana and Kalpataru and etc., are implemented to some extent in their area. This result indicates that majority of women members have knowledge about different schemes of
urban development and also have knowledge about the schemes which are implemented in their local area.

- There are various ways through which the respondents contributed in getting different schemes implemented in their area such as (i) by informing the people about the schemes (62.2%), (ii) by encouraging/motivating the people to come forward for the schemes (35.1%), (iii) by maintain close contact with officials/persons responsible for implementation (35.1%) and (iv) by monitoring the implementation of the schemes (29.7%). Only 37.8% women members have not given any answer. This result shows that their level of contribution is a positive sign for women participation as majority of women member are first timer and lacks experience. The enthusiasm shown by the respondents in the implementation of different schemes is encouraging and is indicative of their participation in the local bodies.

- There are different functions which the elected women members of urban local bodies like to perform such as (i) all round development of their locality (75.7%), (ii) make women self-dependent (27.0%), (iii) protest against women exploitation (24.3%) and (iv) women empowerment (16.2%). 24.3% members have not given any answer. This result shows that majority of women (75.7%) like to develop their area. Interestingly not many of the respondents have shown enthusiasm in issues relating to women. Nonetheless, it is commendable as majority of them are new to the system.

- Majority of respondents (73%) are of the view that to some extent they have been able to perform all the expected functions, 24.3% respondent have not given any answer and only one respondent replied that she has been able to perform the expected functions. It is evident from this that to some extent majority of respondents is able to perform their expected functions.
Regarding the performance of functions majority of respondents (62.2%) are of the view that their functions are performed jointly by themselves and by taking help from other male members of the family, 27% mentioned that their functions are performed by others and only 10.8% respondents mentioned that they perform their functions by themselves. It is evident from this result that majority of respondents are of the view that they take help from other family members for performing their function. It is also found there are other family members of respondent which include husband, father, father-in-law, son, brother and etc who perform their functions. Various studies on the Municipal bodies have pointed out this kind of practice elsewhere in India which is known ‘proxy system’ and the present study is no exception. Nonetheless, the study also reveals some positive aspects of women participation such as 10.8% respondents perform their allotted functions by themselves and majority of them (62.2%) performs their functions jointly by themselves and by taking help from other male members of their family. This indicates that although majority of respondents are first timer and lacks experience but they are trying to perform their functions by taking help from other family members.

The main reasons for the support of the local people to women members are: (i) people’s perception as honest person (94.6%), (ii) popularity of the person in the village (91.9%), (iii) family’s good hold over the areas (86.5%), (iv) accepts them as their leader (62.2%), (v) better education than other (5.4%) and (vi) more wealth than other (2.7%). It is also seen that only 5.4% has not given any answer. It is evident from this that education and wealth of the candidate plays a minimum role in getting support from the people. From this result it can be inferred that the MB/TC under study is characterized by a close relationship between the people and the women members.

Regarding attendance in the MB/TC meetings the study shows that 75.7% women members always attend the meetings, 18.9% often attend the
meetings and 5.4% rarely attend meetings. From this result we can say that woman’s attendance in the meetings of urban local bodies is good for women participation as majority of them stated that they always attend the meetings.

- In majority of MB/TC decisions are taken on the basis of ‘majority principle’ and only in 27% urban local body ‘consensus method’ is followed. It is also seen that 5.4% members do not know how the MB/TC takes decision in the meetings. From this we can say that in majority of Municipal bodies decisions are taken in accordance with Assam Municipal Act and majority of women members have knowledge about how decisions are taken in meetings.

- Majority of the respondents (70.3%) are of the view that they follow ‘majority principle’ in decision making when there is any division of opinion in the meetings, 16.2% opined that they try to convince all the members for a consensus and 8.1% has given their opinion as the ‘drop the issue altogether’ when there is division of opinion in the meetings. It is evident from this that majority of women members have knowledge of decision making process in the meeting when there is some kind of division opinion on any matter.

- Regarding acceptance of ideas by other members in the MB/TC meetings majority of respondents (51.4%) are of the view that the ideas given by them are ‘often’ accepted by other members, 35.1% members are of the view that their ideas are ‘not much’ accepted by other members and 13.5% respondents are of the opinion that the ideas given by them are ‘always’ accepted by other members. It is evident from this that although only a few women members can influence the decision making of the Municipal bodies all the time, it is important that majority of the respondents feel that often they are able to influence the decision making. Attitude of this kind help women to realize their strength and in the long run will lead to women’s empowerment.
• Regarding rating of participation of respondents in the MB/TC meetings it is found that majority of women member (56.8%) rate their participation as ‘active’, 29.7% rate their participation as ‘not active’ since they ‘keep silent most of the time’ in the meetings, only 8.1% women member rate their participation as ‘most active’ and 8.1% were unable to rate their participation in the meetings. This result reveals that there are both positive and negative aspects regarding the rating of performance in meetings. It is evident from this that majority of respondents remains ‘active’ in the meetings and this reveals that women participation in the MB/TC meetings is satisfactory. Further, 8.1% women members remain ‘most active’ and this is a source of inspiration for other women members of local bodies.

• It is found that the most common issues discussed by all the MB/TC in the meetings are issues related to area development and implementation of various schemes of urban development.

• Regarding sources of fund majority of women members are aware of the different sources of fund of their local bodies. According to them sources of fund are taxes and government grants but none of them are aware of all the sources of tax as mentioned in the Assam Municipal Act.

• Majority of respondents (78.4%) admitted that the money generated by tax and other sources is not sufficient to meet the developmental expenses of the MB/TC area and 18.9% respondents were unable to give any answer and they do not have any idea whether money received by the MB/TC is sufficient to meet its requirements and 2.7% are of the view that it is sufficient as they get government grants regularly. From this we can infer that the fund received from different sources is not sufficient to meet the developmental expenses of their locality.

• Majority of women members (86.5%) are of the view that they prepare the expenditure plan in the MB/TC meeting and 13.5% were unable to give any answer. This result indicates that majority of women member
have knowledge about how planning of expenditure of fund is prepared. From this we can infer that majority of women members participate in the meetings and take interest in the works of respective MB/TC and due to their participation their self esteem have gone up and people in society at large look on them for development of grassroots level.

**Comparative Analysis of Women Participation in Rural and Urban Local Bodies:**

- Both in rural and urban area majority of women members have been elected to the local bodies for first time. In rural area only 5.3% have been elected to the local bodies for the second time and there is no third and fourth timer women members. In urban area only 8.1% have been elected to the MB/TC for the second time and there is no third timer and fourth timer women members. It is evident from this that before the enactment of 73\textsuperscript{rd} and 74\textsuperscript{th} Amendment Acts, women hardly participated in the local elections.

- Almost all the respondents of rural and urban area (rural-98.7% and urban-97.3%) stated women reservation as the main reason for contesting the election followed by political family. From this result we can infer that the reservation has opened a channel for women to occupy a legitimate space in the power structure in the grassroots level. It is also seen that influence of women's organization, nation's women political leader is very low in women’s election to local bodies. It is evident from the study that urban women members are more enthusiastic than rural women members about women empowerment because in rural area only 12.6% respondent contest election for women empowerment and in urban area 16.2% respondent contest election for women empowerment. It is also seen that urban women members have more interest in politics than rural women members (urban-18.9% and rural-12.6%).

- Regarding family’s reaction towards women participation in the local bodies the study shows that both in rural and urban areas family members
are happy for women’s election to local bodies and they are also of the view that women’s election to local bodies is the pride of their family. This indicates that reaction of the family members towards women participation in the local bodies is positive for women participation in local bodies.

- The awareness level of women members regarding the goal of PRIs/Municipal bodies is good as majority of them mentioned that all round development of the rural areas/urban areas is the goal of PRIs/Municipal bodies.

- Majority of rural respondents are aware of the important functions of GP/AP/ZP such as agriculture, rural housing, road, drinking water and electricity. It is also seen that majority of urban women members are aware of the important functions of MB/TC such as health and sanitation, road, drinking water, maintaining and establishing town halls, children parks, markets, street lighting etc.

- Both in rural and urban areas the awareness level of the women members about the problems of their local area is good as majority of them have knowledge about the burning problems of their local area.

- In rural area it is found that majority of respondents (55.6%) are aware of the different schemes of rural development and they could name them and 44.4% do not have any idea about these schemes. In urban area the picture is slight different. It is found that 75.7% respondents are aware of the different schemes of urban development and 24.3% respondents do not have any idea about these schemes. This result indicates that the awareness level of urban women members about different schemes is more than rural women members.

- Although in rural and urban areas, the level of contribution of women members regarding the implementation of different schemes is low but it is a positive sign for women participation as majority of women members are first timer and lacks experience. The enthusiasm shown by the
respondents in the implementation of different schemes is encouraging and is indicative of their participation in the local bodies.

- There are different functions which the elected women members of rural and urban local bodies like to perform such as all round development of their locality (rural-76.8% and urban-75.7%), make women self-dependent (rural-21.9% and urban-27.0%), protest against women exploitation (rural-21.2% and urban-24.3%) and women empowerment (rural-12.6% and urban-16.2%). This result shows that majority of women members like to develop their area. Interestingly, not many of the respondents have shown enthusiasm in issues relating to women. Nonetheless, it is commendable as majority of them are new to the system. Another fact came out from this result is that urban women members have shown more enthusiasm than rural women members regarding women related issues.

- Both in rural and urban area majority of respondents think that to some extent they are able to perform all the expected functions.

- Various studies on the local bodies have pointed out the practice of ‘proxy system’ in India and the present study is no exception. Regarding the performance of function it is seen that majority of respondents of rural and urban area take help from other family members such as husband, father, father in law, son, brother and etc for performing their function. The study reveals some positive aspects of women participation such as some respondents (rural-11.3% and urban-10.8%) perform their allotted functions by themselves and majority of respondents performs their functions jointly by themselves and by taking help from other male members of their family. This indicates that although majority of respondents are first timer and at the same time lacks experience but they are trying to perform their functions by taking help from other family members.
• Both in rural and urban areas, majority of respondents admitted of getting support as a member from the people of the locality. It is seen that the rural and urban local bodies under study are characterized by close relationship between the people and the women members. It is also evident from the study that in rural area wealth of the respondents does not play any role in getting support from the people but in urban area wealth of the respondents plays a nominal role in getting support of the people.

• Woman’s attendance in the meetings of rural and urban local bodies is good as majority of them stated that they always attend the meetings. It is evident from the study that in majority of local bodies decisions are taken in accordance with Assam Panchayat Act/ Assam Municipal Act and majority of women members have knowledge about how decisions are taken in meetings.

• Regarding the acceptance of ideas by other members in the meetings, urban women members are slight advanced than rural women members. In rural area 6.6% respondents are of the opinion that the ideas given by them are ‘always’ accepted by other members in the meetings whereas in urban area 13.5% respondents are of the opinion that the ideas given by them are ‘always’ accepted by other members in the meetings. It is evident from the study that in rural area 45% respondents are of the view that the ideas given by them are ‘often’ accepted by other members whereas in urban area 51.4% respondents are of the view that the ideas given by them are ‘often’ accepted by other members in the meetings.

• Regarding the rating of participation in the meetings of local bodies the study reveals that the urban women members remain more active than rural women member. It is evident from the study that 45% rural respondents rate their participation in the meeting as ‘active member’, and 3.3% Panchayat member rate their participation as ‘most active’. Picture is slight advance in urban area where it is found that 56.8% of women
member rate their participation as ‘active’, 8.1% Panchayat member rate their participation as ‘most active’ in the meetings.

- Both in rural and urban local areas majority of women members are aware of the different sources of fund of their local bodies. According to them sources of fund are taxes and government grants but none of them are aware of all the sources of tax as mentioned in the Assam Panchayat Act/Assam Municipal Act.

- In rural and urban areas majority of respondents admitted that the money thus generated by tax and other sources is not sufficient to meet the developmental expenses of the local area. From this we can infer that the fund received from different sources is not sufficient to meet the developmental expenses of their locality.

- Knowledge of urban women members regarding the ‘planning process of fund’ is slight advanced than rural women members. The study reveals that 80.1% women members are of the view that they prepare the plan of expenditure in the GP/ AP/ZP meeting and 19.9% has not given any answer whereas is urban area (86.5%) of women members are of the view that they prepare the expenditure plan in the MB/TC meeting and 13.5% were unable to give any answer. This result indicates that the urban women members have more knowledge than rural women members regarding the planning process of fund in the local bodies. But at the same time both in rural and urban area majority of women members participate in the meetings and take interest in the works of respective local bodies and due to their participation their self esteem have gone up and people in society at large look on them for development of grassroots level.

Rural Local Bodies and Empowerment of Women:

- Participation of women in decision making process of their family plays an important role in women empowerment. An attempt has been made to examine the role of women members in the decision making process of their family. It is found that cent percent respondents plays role in the decision making process of their family. The study reveals that there are
different ways through which women members participate in the decision making process of their families and these are: (i) by giving opinion on any discussion involving the family interest (100%), (ii) by giving opinion in the purchase of the things in the family (94%), (iii) by giving opinion in sending children to school (78.8%), (iv) by giving opinion in resolving any dispute/conflict/quarrel within the family (68.9%) and (v) by giving opinion in framing budget of the family (38.4%). It is evident from this that women’s participation in decision making process of their family is commendable as every one of them are of the view that they take part in decision making process of their family and at the same time they also mentioned some important ways by which they play their role such as, by giving opinion on any discussion involving the family interest, by giving opinion in the purchase of the things in the family, by giving opinion in sending children to school and by giving opinion in resolving any dispute/conflict/quarrel within the family. So far as the budget of the family is concerned women’s role is not good and this may be due to fact that many respondents are financially dependent on male.

- It is observed that many changes have occurred among women after becoming member such as (i) get more respect from society (99.3%), (ii) can take steps to resolve some conflicts within their GP/AP/ZP area (47%), (iii) can take steps to protest against women's exploitation (21.2%) and (iv) get more respect from their family members (2.6%). Only 7% has not given any answer. This result indicates that because of reservation many changes have occurred among women and these changes are positive aspects of women empowerment and participation.

- Majority of respondents (79.5%) are of the opinion that reservation of seats for women in rural local bodies is a great step towards women empowerment and 20.5% was unable to give any answer. It is also evident from the study that reservation is a great step towards women empowerment for various reasons such as (i) it provides a space for
women in society (79.5%), (ii) it helps in women's participation in politics (57.6%), (iii) it helps in bringing about women's self-confidence and self-assessment (37.7%), (iv) it provides a space for women in family (15.2%) and (v) it makes women politically more conscious (52.3%). It is also found that 20.5% women members were unable to give their opinion on reservation. It is evident from this result that although 20.5% women members have not given any answer but as a whole we can say that the reservation system is a great step towards women participation and empowerment. Majority of them mentioned different areas where they benefited from reservation such as reservation provides a space for women in society, it helps in women's participation in politics and it makes women politically more conscious.

- It is found that there are many obstacles in the process of women empowerment and these are:-(i) lack of money (94.7%), (ii) lack of training (91.4%), (iii) family responsibility (90.7%), (iv) control of family members (64.2%), (v) socio-cultural limitations (38.4%), (vi) non-cooperation of officials in providing necessary information in time (13.2%), (vii) lack of education (10.6%) and (viii) shyness/lack of outside exposure (4.6%). It is also found that 5.3% respondents have not given any answer. From this result we can infer that there are many obstacles in the process of women participation and empowerment. Majority of them mentioned various obstacles such as lack of money, lack of training, family responsibility and control of family members for their less participation and empowerment.

- Regarding the assessment of work of women members it is found that 47.7% members assess their work as ‘satisfactory’, 11.3% members assess their work as ‘active’, 9.3% members assess their work as ‘do not enjoy, miss household work and 6% members assess their work as ‘not active’. It is also found that 25.8% respondents were unable to give any answer. It is evident from this that although 25.8% women members have
not given any answer but at the same time there are many women members who assess their work either as ‘active’ or as ‘satisfactory’ and this is the positive impact of reservation which will lead to their participation and empowerment.

- It is found that there are many areas where women members feel empowered such as (i) better care of health of myself and my children (84.1%), (ii) more consciousness of my rights (39.7%), (iii) self-reliance, self-respect and self assessment has increased (37.7%), (iv) can take steps to protest against women's exploitation (21.2%) and (v) can equally participate with male in decision making process inside and outside the home (17.9%). It is also found that 15.9% women members have not given any answer as they were not able to assess their areas of empowerment. It is evident from this that there are many areas where women members feel empowered and this indicates that we are in the path of ensuring women participation and empowerment but at the same time we have miles to go to achieve the desire goal of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act as their level of achievement in some areas are very low such as (i) can equally participate with male in decision making process inside and outside the home (17.9%) and (ii) can take steps to protest against women's exploitation (21.2%).

*Urban Local Bodies and Empowerment of Women:*

- Participation of women in the decision making process of their family is an important criterion of women empowerment. An attempt has been made to examine the role of women members in the decision making process of their family. It is found that cent percent respondent plays role in the decision making process of their family. The study reveals that there are different ways by which women members participate in the decision making process of their families and these ways are: (i) by giving opinion on any discussion involving the family interest (100%), (ii) by giving opinion in sending children to school (91.9%), (iii) by giving
opinion in the purchase of the things in the family (83.8%), (iv) by giving opinion in resolving any dispute/conflict/quarrel within the family (64.9%) and (v) by giving opinion in framing budget of the family (62.2%). From this result we can infer that women’s participation in decision making process of their family is laudable as every one of them are of the view that they take part in decision making process of their family and at the same time they also mentioned some important ways through which they play their role such as by giving opinion on any discussion involving the family interest, by giving opinion in sending children to school, by giving opinion in the purchase of the things in the family, by giving opinion in resolving any dispute/conflict/quarrel within the family and by giving opinion in framing budget of the family.

- It is observed that many changes have occurred among women members once they are elected as member to the local bodies, such as, (a) get more respect from society (97.3%), (b) can take steps to resolve some conflicts within their MB/TC area (43.2%), (c) can take steps to protest against women's exploitation (32.4%), (d) get more respect from their family members (5.4%). It is also seen that 2.7% has not given any answer. It is evident from this that reservation system is successful to a good extent to make women powerful as many changes have occurred among women after becoming member and these changes are positive aspects of women empowerment.

- Majority of respondents (83.7%) are of the opinion that reservation of seats for women in urban local bodies is a great step towards women empowerment and 16.2% did not give any answer. An analysis of the data reveals that there are many ways for which reservation is a great step for women empowerment and these ways are: (i) it provides a space for women in society (83.7%), (ii) it makes women politically more conscious (62.2%), (iii) it helps in women's participation in politics (59.4%), (iv) it helps in bringing about women's self-confidence and self-
assessment (43.2%) and (v) it provides a space for women in family (16.2%). It is evident from this result that although 16.2% women members have not given any answer but we can infer that the reservation system is a great step towards women participation and empowerment. Majority of them mentioned different areas where they benefited from reservation such as reservation provides a space for women in society, it helps in women's participation in politics and it makes women politically more conscious.

- It is found that there are many obstacles in the process of women participation and empowerment and these are: - (i) lack of money (83.8%), (ii) family responsibility (83.8%), (iii) control of family members (67.6%), (iv) lack of training (59.5%), (v) non-cooperation of officials in providing necessary information in time (10.8%), (vi) lack of education (5.4%), (vii) socio-cultural limitations (8.1%), and (viii) shyness/outside exposure (5.4%). The study also reveals that 16.3% respondents were unable to give any answer. It is evident from this result that there are many obstacles in the process of women participation and empowerment. Majority of them mentioned various obstacles such as lack of money, family responsibility, control of family members and lack of training for their less participation and empowerment.

- Majority of respondents (56.8%) assess their work as ‘satisfactory’, 13.5% members assess their work as ‘active’, 5.4% members assess their work as ‘not active’ and 5.4% members assess their work as ‘do not enjoy, miss household work. It is also found that 18.9% respondents were unable to give any answer. It is evident from this that although 18.9% women members have not given any answer but at the same time there are many women members who assess their work either as ‘active’ or as ‘satisfactory’ and this indicates that many women are participating in the decision making process at the grassroots.
• An attempt has been made to examine the areas where women members feel empowered. It is found that there are many areas where women members feel empowered such as: (i) better care of health of myself and my children (86.5%), (ii) better consciousness of my rights (48.6%), (iii) self-reliance, self-respect and self assessment has increased (45.9%), (iv) can take steps to protest against women's exploitation (24.3%) and (v) can equally participate with male in decision making process inside and outside the home (21.6%). It is also seen that 13.5% women members have not given any answer as they were not able to assess the areas of empowerment. It is evident from this that there are many areas where women members feel empowered and this indicates that we are in the path of ensuring women participation and empowerment.

**Comparative Analysis of Rural and Urban Local Bodies and Empowerment of Women:**

• Both in rural and urban areas women’s participation in the decision making process of their family is commendable as every one of them are of the view that they take part in decision making process of their family and at the same time they also mentioned different ways through which they are participating in the decision making process of their families such as: by giving opinion on any discussion involving the family interest (rural-100% and urban-100%), by giving opinion in the purchase of the things in the family (rural-94% and urban-83.8%), by giving opinion in sending children to school (rural-78.8% and urban-91.9%), by giving opinion in resolving any dispute/conflict/quarrel within the family (rural-68.9% and urban-64.9%) and by giving opinion in framing budget of the family (rural-38.4% and urban-62.2%). An analysis of this result reveals that the role of rural women is not good regarding the budget of their family and this may be due to fact that many respondents are financially dependent on male. On the other hand, the role of urban women members regarding budged their family is good as majority of them plays role in framing the budged of their family and this may be due to the fact that urban women are more exposure than rural
women. It is also found that the participation of urban women is more than rural women regarding sending of their children to school.

- Majority of respondents (rural- 79.5% and urban-83.7%) are of the opinion that reservation of seats for women in local bodies is a great step towards women empowerment. The study shows that there are various reasons for which reservation is a great step towards women empowerment such as: it provides a space for women in society (rural-79.5% and urban-83.7%), it helps in women's participation in politics (rural- 57.6% and urban-59.4%), it makes women politically more conscious (rural- 52.3% and urban-62.2%), it helps in bringing about women's self-confidence and self-assessment (rural- 37.7% and urban-43.2%) and it provides a space for women in family (rural-15.2% and urban-16.2%). From this result we can infer that the impact of reservation is more on urban women than rural women.

- Both in rural and urban areas there are many obstacles in the process of women participation and empowerment such as: lack of money (rural-94.7% and urban-83.8%), lack of training (rural-91.4% and urban-59.5%), family responsibility (rural-90.7% and urban-83.8%), control of family members (rural-64.2% and urban-67.6%), socio-cultural limitations (rural-38.4% and urban-8.1%), non-cooperation of officials in providing necessary information in time (rural-13.2% and urban-10.8%), lack of education (rural-10.6% and urban-5.4%) and shyness/lack of outside exposure (rural-4.6% and urban-5.4%). From this result we can infer that the level of obstacles facing by rural women members is more than urban women members. Another fact came out from the study is that the socio-cultural limitations are more in rural area than urban area.

- In rural area 47.7% members assess their work as ‘satisfactory’ and in urban are 56.8% members assess their work as ‘satisfactory’. It is also found that in rural area 11.3% members assess their work as ‘active’ and in urban area 13.5% members assess their work as ‘active’. From this we can infer that
performance of work of urban women members is more satisfactory than rural women members.

- Both in rural and urban areas there are many areas where women members feel empowered. These areas are: better care of health of myself and my children (rural- 84.1% and urban-86.5%), more consciousness of my rights (rural- 39.7% and urban-48.6%), self-reliance, self-respect and self assessment has increased (rural-37.7% and urban-45.9%), can take steps to protest against women's exploitation (rural-21.2%and urban-24.3%) and can equally participate with male in decision making process inside and outside the home (rural-17.9% and urban-21.6%). On the basis of this result we can infer that the level of empowerment of urban women members is higher than rural women members. It is also seen that in urban area the reservation system is more successful than rural area.

In the above section we presented two things. First part deals with the nature of women participation in local bodies and second part deals with the impact of reservation on women empowerment. It is observed that before the enactment of 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts, women hardly participated in the local elections and these Amendments have made it possible for the women to become part of the planning and execution process of development. Majority of women members are new to the system of local self government. Reservation has opened a channel for them to occupy a legitimate space in the power structure in the grassroots level. As a result of reservation, several women have been elected to representative positions and it has become possible for them to become a part of the decision making process in the grassroots level. Although majority members are new to the system and lacks experience but their level of awareness about the goals, functions, workings, proceeding of meetings and financial matter of local bodies are good and satisfactory. Their knowledge regarding various schemes of rural and urban development is also satisfactory. People may ask question what is the relationship of awareness level with participation and empowerment?. Attempt is made to examine the awareness level about the goals,
functions, workings, proceeding of meetings and financial matter of local bodies because in many occasions knowledge about the goals, functions, workings, proceeding of meetings and financial matter of local bodies helps in participation and sometimes those with higher knowledge show higher degree of participation in local bodies. From this study we can infer that majority of women members participate in the meetings and take interest in the works of respective local bodies and due to their participation their self esteem have gone up and people in society at large look on them for development of grassroots level.

It is well known fact that proxy system prevails in local bodies and present study is no exception. Regarding the performance of function it is seen that majority of respondents of rural and urban areas take help from other family members such as husband, father, father in law, son, brother and etc for performing their function. There are also some women members who do not perform their functions by themselves and their power and functions are performed by others. But there are positive aspects of women participation such as some respondents (rural-11.3% and urban-10.8%) perform their allotted functions by themselves. Majority of respondents performs their functions jointly by themselves and by taking help from other male members of their family. We should praise their effort because in spite of their less experience they are trying to perform their functions. Their level of contribution regarding the implementation of different schemes is low but the enthusiasm shown by the respondents in the implementation of different scheme is encouraging and this will lead to positive changes in the entire socio-political system. Majority of women members like to develop their area. Interestingly, not many of the respondents have shown enthusiasm in issues relating to women.

Woman’s attendance in the meetings of rural and urban local bodies is good as majority of them stated that they always attend the meetings. Although only a few women members can influence the decision making process of the local bodies all the time, it is important that majority of the respondents feel that often they are able to influence the decision making. Attitude of this kind help women to realize their strength and in the long run will lead to women’s empowerment.
Regarding the rating of participation in the meetings of local bodies the study reveals that many respondents rate their participation in the meeting as ‘active member’. It is found that women’s participation in the decision making process of their family is commendable as every one of them are of the view that they take part in decision making process of their family.

Attempt is made to examine whether their participation led to empowerment. It is found that participation of women in local bodies has brought some change in the values and attitudes of society towards the women. Reservation system has helped to bring social and political development of women as a class. The 73rd and 74th constitutional Amendments Acts are really encouraging and praiseworthy efforts of the Government of India to provide opportunities to women to take part in the political and developmental affairs at local level. Reservation contributed a lot for women participation and empowerment. Because of reservation women benefited in many fields such as: (i) reservation provided a space for women in society, (ii) it helps in women’s participation in politics, (iii) it makes women politically more conscious, (iv) it helps in bringing about women's self-confidence and self-assessment and (v) it provides a space for women in family.

After getting elected many women members feel empowered in many areas such as: (i) better care of their health (rural- 84.1% and urban-86.5%), (ii) more consciousness of their rights (rural- 39.7% and urban-48.6%), (iii) self-reliance, self-respect and self assessment has increased (rural-37.7% and urban-45.9%), (iv) can take steps to protest against women's exploitation (rural-21.2%and urban-24.3%) (v) can equally participate with male in decision making process inside and outside the home (rural-17.9% and urabn-21.6%).

No doubt reservation has brought some change in the values and attitudes of society towards the women but there are many obstacles in the process of women participation and empowerment such as: lack of money, lack of training, family responsibility, control of family members, socio-cultural limitations, non-cooperation of officials in providing necessary information in time and
shyness/lack of outside exposure. The level of obstacles facing by rural women members is more than urban women members. Another fact came out from the study is that the socio-cultural limitations are more in rural area than urban area. The patriarchal social system also hampers the empowerment of women both in rural and urban areas.

There is no uniformity regarding the impact of reservation on women in rural and urban local bodies. The level of participation and empowerment of urban women members is higher than rural women members. Urban areas provide favorable environment for the active participation of women members than in the rural areas. Urban women members are more enthusiastic than rural women members about participation and empowerment. Urban women members have shown more enthusiasm than rural women members regarding women related issues. Woman’s attendance in the meetings of rural and urban local bodies is good as majority of them stated that they always attend the meetings. Regarding the acceptance of ideas by other members in the meetings urban women members are slight advance than rural women members. Regarding the rating of participation in the meetings of local bodies urban women members remain more active than rural women member.

In fine we can say that the participation of women in the grass root level has been ensured by reservation system and many women are playing a constructive role in the development and welfare activities. Women members of local bodies are gradually becoming aware of their responsibilities. Their participation is leading towards their empowerment but there are many obstacles which hinder women representatives to perform their work effectively and so they need time, support, resources and training. If women members gets all these definitely there will be full involvement of the women of grassroots in the decision making process.

**Recommendations for Improvement of Women Participation and for Future Policy Formulation and Policy Implementation:**

The study reveals that there are many obstacles in the process of women participation and empowerment. In order to ensure full involvement of the
women of grassroots in the decision making process and to make grassroots democracy a success following recommendations are suggested.

- **Training:** - Training is the fundamental requirement for women entering in rural and urban local bodies. Majority of respondents of the present study are of the view that lack of training is responsible for their less participation. Immediately, after their election training should be given to them regarding the purpose of their election and attendance at training camps must be made compulsory. By providing training, self reliance and self assessment of women members could be enhanced and make them more conscious of their rights, duties and functions to be performed. They have to be trained in different areas such as (i) how to make plans and execute them, (ii) how to inspire others to cooperate for implementation of various schemes and programmes, (iii) development of leadership skills, (iv) how to lead local bodies to the path of development and (v) a comprehensive training with various development schemes operating in their jurisdiction.

- **Special Honorarium for Elected Women Representatives:** - Majority of respondents in the present study is of the view that due to lack of money they are not able to perform their work effectively. It is also found that that the remuneration given to members of local bodies is just nominal. To encourage the participation of women in local bodies, special honorarium needs to be given to them so that they can become financially self reliant and can perform their allotted functions, responsibilities effectively. They should get a prestigious salary so that can bear their day to day expenditure.

- **Advisory Committee:** - An Advisory committee can be constituted by experts in every rural and urban local body to monitor the progress of work. Members of committee must have broad knowledge about local self government and women related issues. Advisory Committee should monitor the performance of every member in quarterly, half- yearly and yearly basis and if necessary advice should be provided to particular member or to all members for effective functioning of local bodies. These committees should
take different steps to make newly elected women representatives aware about their functions and different women related issues.

- **Extension of Rotation Cycle of Reserved Seats to Two Terms: -** It is evident from the study that majority of women members of the local bodies are first timer and naturally they have less experience as member. If they avail the chance as member for second term, they will be able to perform their work more effectively. Provision should be made to extend the rotation cycle of reservation of seats for women to two terms.

- **Role of Media-** Media coverage should be given where women have entered in the local bodies and have started working either as member or as chairperson. A continuous communication must be maintained through media between the Government, Panchayats, Municipal bodies and people. Media should highlight the different problems and obstacles which hinder women members to performing their functions effectively.

- **Reward:** - The work done by the elected women representatives at various level of local self-government should be assessed annually at district, state and national level and outstanding workers must publicly be rewarded at some functions. This will generate a feeling of fair competition and enthusiasm among women members and they will come forward and participate more effectively in the functioning of local bodies.

- **Public Opinion:** - A concerted movement for building public opinion is required to be launched by the government and by the people to break the old myths, such as, male superiority, the so-called women’s inability to work in public life, etc. The people particularly the people of the locality should form a strong public opinion that women must be empowered and it is the duty of all of us to make them empower.

- **Attitudinal Change:** - Empowerment, in true sense of the term cannot be achieved unless women have the self confidence to perform the works on
their own. However, given the nature of the society and the position of women therein, it may be difficult for the newly elected members to be self-reliant if she does not have the previous experience. Under such situation help and advice from other members of the family to give the guidance and suggestions whenever needed will go a long way in giving them the confidence and cultivating her leadership quality.