SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In this part the summary of the major points of each chapter is followed by the concluding observations.

Chapter 01

The first chapter has served as an introduction, which is primarily concerned with the conceptual-theoretical account of the entire study. The point of departure has been on the linkage between participation, development and communication with a specific focus on PDC. The fundamental aspect here is communication which is channeled to facilitate people’s participation in development programmes.

Rural people form an important segment of the PDC. Thus, a specific focus is put on PRDC which is supposed to facilitate their participation in the rural development programmes that are supposed to improve their socio-economic condition.

The chapter also mentions that the study undertaken depends upon the local field data. The Survey of Literature in the chapter reveals a number of books on development-communication interface, books on rural development and SHGs though mention has been made of the availability of limited books directly dealing with the theme.

Chapter 02

The focus in this chapter has been on the background of the study areas with the objective to understand its development scenario and its roots in specific historical conditions. A general discussion has also been done on the Panchayat system of India, which is essential to understand the system of rural governance in India. Importance has also been given to the Gorkhaland movement which demands separate statehood and the formation of the DGHC --- without which the dynamics of rural (non)development in the study areas cannot be analysed.

Accordingly, the role of the DGHC in development particularly rural development has been discussed. The decision of the DGHC to have a single-tier Panchayat system and its negative repercussion on rural development consequently affecting PRDC. This
chapter ends with a brief description of the two Blocks and four each selected GPs under them.

**Chapter 03**

As the thesis is centrally focused on PRDC this chapter deals with the official channels of communication that have a key role to play in development. The chapter explains how the creation of the DGHC has lead to the birth of ‘dual’ administration, with the state government remaining a key actor. Under the DGHC the vital role of the DRDC and the GP in relation to PRDC has been analysed. The chapter also seeks to view and interpret the DPRDD and the Block Office as ‘official channels’ of communication.

The potentialities as well as the deficiencies of these channels have been elaborated in the chapter. It has been emphasized that the existence of a single-tier Panchayat system and the dual governance has hindered smooth PRDC.

**Chapter 04**

The study would have remained incomplete without making an assessment of the possible role of the people in PRDC. Thus, this chapter mainly deals with the identification of the local rural people, their varied occupations, their means of livelihood, their lives, their perceptions of rural development and so forth. People’s role in PRDC has, therefore, been identified in terms of the people-to-people channels like Samaj Ghars, Farmers’ Clubs, Youth Clubs, and faith-based organizations. In focusing on the people-to-government channels the role of the GPs and the Blocks has also been identified. Much importance has also been placed on the role of the political parties even if the chapter explains that there is a gap between the role-expectation and the role-performance insofar as the political parties are concerned. Amidst these channels the SHGs seems to have emerged as an important channel in facilitating peoples’ participation in their socio-economic development.

In this chapter the study goes against the pre-set view, so dominant in Development Communication literature, to point out the limited role of information technology. While this does not imply the dismissal of the power of information technology it
points to the *primacy* of the greater interdependence and linkages of human
communication in development interventions.

**Chapter 05**

This chapter is centrally focused on the study of SHGs in context of the study areas.
The chapter has its rationale in the SHGs coming out in the study as the most
important emerging channel of PRDC. The chapter explains the background of the
SHGs with special reference to the SGSY— a scheme under the Ministry of Rural
Development, Government of India, which intends to alleviate the socio-economic
conditions of the rural poor.

The chapter also explains how in the background of the unstable political situation,
the stagnating fund scenario, the rural poor of the Darjeeling Hills appear to have
found some kind of 'outlet' of interaction and articulation in the SHGs. The chapter,
remaining cautious of the tendency to romanticize the SHGs, points out the
constraints and limitations of the SHGs, but ultimately finds in this 'channels' lot of
possibilities of utilizing the power of the PRDC to rebuild lives of the people in the
study areas in particular and the Darjeeling Hills in general.

**CONCLUSIONS**

In the general context of the Darjeeling Hills and the specific context of the study
areas the study reveals a deep crisis induced by underdevelopment, marked most
evidently by the lack of basic amenities and facilities that are supposed to contribute
to decent and dignified living. While programmes, projects and policies are enacted
there has been little effect of the ‘trickle down’ strategy vis-à-vis rural development in
the Hills. Rural people there are still faced with lack of roads, safe drinking water,
electricity, health care, educational and employment facilities, agricultural and
livestock facilities among others. This apart, political turmoil and the unrest never
seem to leave the Hills. The demand for a separate state, the earlier tussle between the
DGHC and the Government of West Bengal, the dissolution of the GPs, the
emergence of radical outfit like the GJMM in 2007, have put the Hill people,
particularly the rural poor, at the receiving end. One can go as far as to comment that
the people are forced to remain the amorphous, ‘silent’ ‘masses’, and not the ‘citizens’ who are supposed to be active and vocal at the grassroots level.

With governance, notwithstanding the various attributes, remaining a communicative act at its core, the need for the hour is to bring about a more efficient and effective context-specific development milieu and civic engagement by reorientation of various factors like leadership, community relations, appropriate technologies, with the goal of reshaping various core processes, structures, values, learning processes and planning methods. The relevance of the PRDC can hardly be underestimated here as it goes a long way to make a distinction between development-of-the-community and development-in-the-community.

Despite such stagnation and the continuous development crisis the local people in the Darjeeling Hills look for a better future which would be marked by the fulfillment of their basic needs and a decent socio-economic standard. While their articulation may not be as ‘smart’, and as ‘instantaneous’ and ‘voluminous’, as their urban counterparts they also nurture a desire for more effective governance. It is possible to realize this aspiration if the government takes the initiative to utilize various communication channels, identified in the study, to facilitate people’s participation in rural development. The locality and the neighbourhood are sites with lot of potential, which can foster exchange of information, ideas and opinions— both critical and appreciative— to improve their socio-economic conditions. For instance, as we have shown, the local people have high expectations from the SHGs which they think can change their lives by facilitating a ‘we feeling’ and forming what is now widely known as ‘social capital’. It has generated a trust information network where we get to see human communication from a closer range.

Regardless of the fact that Darjeeling Hills is in dire need of development the ‘ordinary’ people of the study areas portray a positive attitude. It is not a scenario of blanket despair as the local people are prepared to cooperate with the government and non-government agencies for activities that go beyond ‘one size fits all’ approach and are meant to improve their lives according to their specific needs. The rise of the SHGs reveals that people are also geared up for participation in any kind of development schemes and projects if given suitable opportunities.
The GP is one government structure on which the local rural people tend to rely most for improving their conditions. However, the pathetic state of affairs of the GPs has belied their expectations. The revival of the GPs and encouragement to new initiatives like the SHGs can help to reverse the scenario. It can produce a positive motivational influence paving the way for long-term vision of transparent, accountable and responsive governance. It can go a long way in encouraging and improving community participation in the implementation of local development initiatives.

It is true that there is no ‘magic wand’ for ushering swift change. However, there is both scope and space to have a reasonably well-thought out endeavour—‘political’ in the broader sense— to address the dynamics of existing power relations by resorting to a ‘bottom-up’ approach, as distinct from the vertical top-down approach to development and governance that is being followed. E-Governance at the village level has been the buzzword among the policy makers both at the central and the state government. ICT is being harnessed to bring about effective and planned communication aimed at achieving development. However, its need is yet to be realized in the rural areas of Darjeeling where computers were set up in the GPs only in 2008. Dearth of electricity, frequent power cuts adds to its woe. Again it’s a question of ignorance on the part of the government authorities and their too many excuses for initiating such benefits that can strengthen PRDC. Issues of sustained change can come about in a vast array of organizations and institutions— in the relatively simple and in the hugely complex, in the governmental and the non-governmental, in the corporate and the not-for-profit—all in simultaneity. Our study sought in a modest way to reveal that the process is weaved in organic communication which is horizontal to the greatest possible extent and no less important, linked to the grassroots level existential reality and the urge of the people, both open and latent, to reverse the adverse scenario.

It is thus very important on the part of the facilitators to understand their ‘privileged’ role if they want to utilize the power of the PRDC. The facilitators, as repeatedly pointed out by researchers, are in a privileged position because they are supposed to possess the resources for development. They can communicate much better with the people if they address the local realities—by the incorporation of local resource, local skill and local knowledge, by promoting transparency and accountability based on
critical self reflection of administrators, by inclusive decision-making criteria, and by instituting democratic decentralization of power in the true sense of the term.

Last but not the least, the study, by situating communication at the centrestage, detaches us from the ‘prophet of doom’ approach in which the whole scenario becomes too negative to effect any improvement. It at the same time disengages us from the ‘therapeutic’ approach in which the people are considered to be too weak and incapable to realize their own needs. The findings weaken the myth that the people are necessarily apathetic and indifferent to development issues and initiatives. The PRDC, to add, is an antidote to these super-ordinate, hegemonic approaches.

To conclude, the scope for people-driven transformation, especially in the contemporary political scenario in India marked by a complex interplay between the representative democracy and participatory democracy, is yet to be harnessed with due democratic spirit in which communication--- beyond tokenism--- is to be viewed simultaneously as a process, an ideology of action and an outcome. The findings of the study weaken the myth that the people are necessarily apathetic and indifferent to development issues and initiatives.