Chapter - VI

MAJOR FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Development of a society needs people’s understanding of the opportunities as well as their initiations and participation. In India, efforts are continuously being made to create and strengthen the people’s participation in the development activities as it has been realised that involvement of the people at the grassroots level is the most effective means through which people centric development can be achieved. To materialise this, the Seventy Third Constitution Amendment Act facilitates the actual decentralization of powers to the people enabling them to manage their own affairs. This change in the Indian political system is the result of a belief that the big government cannot attain growth and progress in a society without having direct participation of the people and their initiative. That is to say, the philosophy of power to the people was the guiding principle of the Seventy-third Amendment Act. Its main idea was to strengthen the PRIs in India and make them “institutions of self government” with responsibility, of promoting decentralised governance for rural development. In this context, it is imperative to explore the role of grassroots democratic institutions i.e. the PRIs. In the present research work an attempt has been made to understand the situation of democracy and development at the grassroots level by studying the working of the PRIs in the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

The study focuses on the conception of decentralisation, democratic decentralisation and Panchayati Raj. It is stated that decentralisation is an arrangement by which the ultimate authority to command is concentrated
in units located in different parts of the country. It overcomes the problems of centralised planning by adopting a paradigm of development that reflects on the real needs and preferences of the concerned community particularly its vulnerable and marginalised sections. However, the term decentralisation is a generic one which covers a number of modes such as deconcentration, delegation and devolution. To be precise deconcentration, delegation and devolution are the technical methods of administration and decentralisation is much wider than these as it has the capacity to develop democratic values for resolving fundamental and specific social and economic problems faced by diverse groups and communities in a complex, tradition-bound and culturally and economically diversified society. Thus, the basic idea of decentralisation which is very much democratic in character for which it is referred as democratic decentralisation is sharing the decision-making authority with lower levels. It brings about a system of governance in which citizens possess the right to hold local public officials accountable through the use of elections, grievance meetings and other democratic means. It is in this context the concept of democratic decentralisation stands as a meaningful authority devolved to local units of governance that are accessible and accountable to the local people. This spirit of democratic decentralisation in Indian context is rooted in the concept of Panchayati Raj, which acts as a vehicle in carrying back to the people the power that really belongs to them. The concept of Panchayati Raj has a variety of interpretations such as a mechanism for rural development, institutions of self-government by the people at the lowest level, an agency of state government and an institutional vehicle for rural development. In the present study Panchayati Raj has been taken as an institution for implementing developmental programmes at the rural areas as well as
making marginalised groups like women to participate in the decision
making process at the grassroots level.

The institution of grassroots democracy in the form of Panchayati Raj was
in existence even in the pre-independent India but situation changed
considerably after the adoption of the Constitution of India. Immediate
steps such as CDP and NES were taken for rural development. Later, to
review the working of the CDP and the NES and to suggest measures for
more people’s participation a committee known as Balwant Rai Mehta
Committee was constituted (1957). It recommended an early establishment
of statutory elective local bodies and devolution on them the necessary
resources, powers and authority. The philosophy behind the report was to
move the decision making centres closer to the people. Again, to revamp
the entire process, which remained silent for about 20 years, Ashoka Mehta
Committee (1977) was constituted. It recommended to revitalise the PRIs as
established according to the recommendations of the Balwant Rai Mehta
Report. Subsequently, other committees such as G. V. K. Rao Committee
(suggested for continuance of three-tier structure and urged that elections
to those bodies should be held regularly), L. M. Singhvi Committee
(focussed mainly on constitutional recognition of local self-government),
Thoungon Committee (also felt the need for constitutional recognition of
PRIs having a three-tier structure) were also constituted to initiate the
process of self government. However, the final stage in the evolution of the
PRIs has been the passing of the Seventy-third Amendment Act. It provided
for a stronger and wider democratic decentralisation by reforming and
enlarging the structures and functions of the PRIs. It made uniform
principles in developing local self-government bodies in rural India. Along
with the Seventy Third Constitution Amendment Act, the formation of a
separate Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR, 2004) at the Centre was another
major step to carry forward the process of democratic decentralisation. To execute the spirit of the Seventy Third (73rd) Amendment Act almost all the states of India has passed their respective Panchayat Acts and thereby PRIS has now become a reality. Assam and Arunachal Pradesh also responded to this development process. In conformity with this Act, both the States passed their respective Pachayati Raj Act, though they have their own process of development of grassroots democracy. However, Arunachal Pradesh was among the last states to pass the compliance legislation in line with Part IX of the Constitution. The delay occurred because it became necessary to amend the Constitution and seek deletion of the mandatory reservation provision for Scheduled Castes in Arunachal Pradesh because of its negligible presence in the State. As such the Ministry introduced the Constitution Amendment Bill (1999) in Parliament for amending Article 243-M of the Constitution to exempt Arunachal Pradesh from the requirement of providing for Scheduled Castes reservation. It has been observed that in Arunachal Pradesh the age old traditional pattern of grassroots leadership has undergone changes, which resulted into the adoption of modern political process with a democratic spirit. As envisaged under Part IX of the Constitution, both the State Governments constituted Panchayats at the District, Block and Gram levels and entrusted them with duties and responsibilities with a view to enabling them to function as institutions of self-government. However, it has been noticed that even though activity mapping document has been prepared by the Governments of both the States, but they did not take any steps to provide funds and functionaries to their respective PRIs.

The following findings are presented on the basis of the analysis of the data as done in the preceding sections (Chapter III, Chapter IV and Chapter V)
with a reference to the similarities as well as dissimilarities of the functioning of the PRIs of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

6.1 Major Findings

**Socio-economic factors and the working of the PRIs**

- An analysis of the distribution of the respondents on the basis of sex shows that male elected representatives constitute the largest number in GPs in comparison to female representatives and it is because of their numerical strength as well as the social structure that male representatives are dominating the functioning of the PRIs in both the States of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. However, gap between male and female representation has been found more in Arunachal Pradesh as compared to Assam. The existence of the rigid social norms particularly the patriarchal norms actually making women less active at the grassroots politics.

- The age data of the respondents reveal that representation of youths (age group of 21–30 years) at the grassroots politics in both the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh is minimal, which is an indication of less interest of the youths at the grassroots politics. Reasons for such minimal participation of the youths lie in their careerist attitude. That is to say, in the longing for settlement in life youths are attracted towards income and jobs and thereby having less attraction towards grassroots politics. While being settled their attitude gets change. It is observed that a higher per cent of GP representatives (both male and female) is in the age group of 31-40 years and this shows the domination of the middle age group at the grassroots level. Besides, an analysis of the respondents marital status confirms
that married group occupies the highest percentage in both the states and this indicate the low level of interest of the unmarried people in participating at the grassroots politics.

- As regard the social background it is observed that in Assam, general category constitutes the highest percentage followed by SC, OBC, MOBC and ST. However, in comparison to female representatives male occupies significant position in all the categories. In course of interaction it is observed that most of the SC and women representatives have been contested and elected in the PRIs not because of their passion but because of the reservation of seats for them. Conversely, in Arunachal Pradesh, the situation is totally different. Here, reservation of seats is not available for SC because of their absence among the population. Hence, all the representatives belong to the ST category but differences exists among the members of various ST groups. However, like Assam, male representatives have also occupied the dominant position in the PRIs activities of Arunachal Pradesh.

- An analysis of the religious distribution of the respondents shows that in Assam, Hindu occupies the significant position in PRIs followed by Muslims and Christians. The result indicates that both Hindus and Muslims are taking equal part in the development process at the grassroots level in proportion to their population. As Christian population is less in the sampled districts, their representation is also very minimal. Likewise, in Arunachal Pradesh also, Hindu representatives exercise exclusive control in the activities of the PRIs followed by Christians and Buddhist. This involvement
in both the states reveal the interest of the people irrespective of their religion in the decision making process at the grassroots politics.

- The educational data collected from the respondents reveals that PRIs in both the states are controlled by the representatives who have education up to primary level. It is observed that representatives from Assam are more educated than that of Arunachal Pradesh. Further, it is noticed that the problem of literacy in both the states is grimmer among female representatives in comparison to their male counterpart. Female representatives both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are found comparatively less qualified than male representatives, which indicate the reality of women empowerment in the states. However, it is important to note here that the level of participation of the representatives from illiterate category is not significant and this proves that educated sections of the rural people are now gradually coming forward to participate in the PRIs.

- Family pattern represents two important components – size of the family and type of the family. As regard the size of the family it is observed that majority of the Panchayat representatives in Assam belong to the small family group (1-5 members) and both male and female representatives are more or less equally spread. Similar is the case with the type of the family, as it is observed that a significant portion of the representatives in Assam are found to be a part of the nuclear family system. This shows a decline in joint family system, which has been a major feature of the rural society since time immemorial. There is an escalation of individualistic attitudes which is actually bringing a change in the life-style of the rural masses also.
Unlike Assam, in Arunachal Pradesh, it is observed that majority of the representatives belong to the large family group (Above 5 members). Further, it is found that the joint family system is still in existence in Arunachal Pradesh as majority of the respondents belong to this category. The existence of this joint family system put the representatives in advantageous position at the time of Panchayat election.

- The distribution of respondents on the basis of income reveals that not a single male President/Chairperson of GP in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has an annual income of less than Rs. 20000, while in case of female President/Chairperson a significant number has an annual income of below Rs. 20000, which confirms that male Presidents/Chairpersons in both the states are more affluent comparing to female Presidents/Chairpersons. As regard to the economic status of male and female GP members, it is observed that in both the states a great number of female members have a nominal income comparing to male members, which clearly indicate the dependence syndrome of the female representatives. Again, a comparative analysis of the income level of the Presidents/Chairpersons to that of members shows that the former is relatively better-off than the latter. However, an overall analysis of the economic status of the elected representatives of both the states shows that individuals from various income levels have got an opportunity to participate in the activities of the PRIs.

- Analysing the land holding of the elected representatives of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, it is observed that male Presidents/Chairpersons are relatively in a better position as they
occupy larger size of land compared to female Presidents/Chairpersons and other members. It is thus clear that size of landholding is particularly relevant in relation to the holding of the post of President/Chairman. Again, among the male and female members it is noticed that the former is better off than the latter. It deserves to mention here that in spite of the low socio-economic status of women representatives they are found in a considerable number. It is only by virtue of reservation facilities that they are in a position to be included in the decision making process at the grassroots level.

- In course of interaction with the respondents their material possession is also taken into account. In terms of material possession Presidents/Chairpersons in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh are found in a quite better position to that of members. They possess household appliances, means of communication as well as agricultural tools. They also live in *pucca* houses, while it is observed that majority of the members in both the states live in *semi-pucca* houses and possessing limited household goods. Interestingly, female Presidents/Chairpersons having low level of annual income and land holding also possess better household materials. The reason is their belongingness to a comparatively better off family as against female members.

- An analysis of the respondents political affiliation shows that the largest number of elected representatives including Presidents/Chairpersons, Vice-Presidents (posts of vice-presidents is not available under APPRA) and members in both the states belong to the Indian National Congress (I) followed by Independent
candidates. It is worth mentioning here that the presence of Independent candidates in a large number reflects the enthusiasm of the people to participate in the PRIs activities. However, in course of interaction it is found that in Assam there is a tendency on the part of the independent candidates to join in the ruling political party in the post-election phase with a view to get advantages. However, this in turn provides stability in the decision making process at the GP level. But where the numbers of members from various political parties exist, political factions also prevail.

- In case of Arunachal Pradesh it is quite interesting to note that GPs having three/four members are facing more problems of selecting the beneficiaries and pursuing rural development programmes. It is mainly because of differences of opinion resulting from division of members into two or more parties. Thus, the party factions in both the states generate problems in realizing the spirit of democracy at the grassroots level.

- As the performance of the PRIs largely depends on the commitment of the elected representatives it is imperative to know the reason for their inclusion at the grassroots politics. An analysis of their opinion reveal that a good number of the representatives both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have participated in the PRIs mainly because of their party involvement followed by motivation of the family members/friends, self motivation, welfare of the locality and serving the women. Surprisingly, a significant number of female representatives in both the states opined that they joined PRIs as they are influenced by their family members. It is further observed in the course of interaction with the female representatives that even
while sharing information about their respective GPs they depend on their husbands/brothers, which is not at all a healthy sign for the better performance of the PRIs. Thus, the study reflects the low level of commitment of the representatives towards welfare activities.

**Working of the PRIs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh**

- The Study made an enquiry on the perception of the ERs about the positive contribution of the PRIs at the grassroots level. It is observed that the respondents from both the states viewed that introduction of democracy at the grassroots level have brought significant changes in the development process. Compared to the earlier days, women is now participating more in number in the decision making process at the village level. Not only this, there is a mark increase of people’s enthusiasm towards grassroots politics, development of leadership qualities, employment opportunities and also gradual rise in awareness of the people about various rural development schemes. As there is the availability of reservation facilities for the marginalized groups in Assam, there is also a sign of participation of the people belonging to these groups. In Arunachal Pradesh, it is observed that respondents are agreed on the declining trend of traditional way of governance (Village Council) mainly due to the flow of fund to the PRIs, which encourages people to take active part in the activities of these organizations rather than the traditional bodies. However, it is observed that due to the existence of multiple institutions like Gaon-bura, PRIs and traditional Village Council that people are not aware about the rules and regulations of the exiting different organisations. The main reason for this complexity is the failure of the governmental agencies to make them politically
conscious resulting into the low level of development initiatives. It is important to mention that unlike in Assam, in Arunachal Pradesh in spite of the existence of PRI as a vehicle for democracy and development, the same social elites who are in the traditional institutions continue to be the members of panchayat institutions.

- An analysis of the responses confirm that GS meetings are basically conducted at the time of selection of the beneficiaries under various governmental schemes, though the respective Panchayat Acts directed to conduct the GS meeting four times in a year in Assam and two times in a year in Arunachal Pradesh. That is to say, GS meetings are not held as per the respective Acts rather these are held only if situation demands, which is actually reducing the spirit of the introduction of democracy at the grassroots level.

- Participation of the elected representatives in the GS meeting is actually an indicator of the quality of the representatives. Elected representatives are expected to create a healthy environment for the local community, and particularly for women, to participate in GS meeting and present their opinion. But the study reveals that majority of the male respondents both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh participate in the meetings of the GS, while there is low level of female participation at the GS meeting. The women members do not take any initiative in mobilising other women of the villages to participate in the GS. Besides, it is observed that notice/announcement relating to the conduct of GS meeting is not made well in advance and this greatly affects the attendance in the meeting of the GS.
Regarding the working of the GS, the study observes that both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, GS meetings basically concentrate on the selection of beneficiaries for various governmental schemes and also for identification of BPL families. While a wide range of functions like reviewing activities of GP including existing schemes, scrutinizing annual accounts and audit report, endorsing village plan, selection of local schemes and utilization certificates are not generally dealt by the GS. Though plan proposals are presented at the GS meeting for its approval, but due to the lack of consciousness among the members (registered in electoral rolls) of GS about their responsibility regarding monitoring and planning they do not participate in a great number in the meeting and thereby giving a chance to the elected representatives to have their way. It has been reported that President/Chairperson in connivance with the Secretary manipulates the decisions of the GS meeting. Thus these observations confirm the impression that the meetings of the GS are just a formality and the actual role of the GS remains in paper only. That is to say, GS is virtually non-functional in exercising its power and responsibility as stated in the respective Acts.

It is found that as the devolution of funds, functions and functionaries stated by the activity mapping document is yet to be implemented in Assam, the PRIs have very limited involvements in the planning for schemes owned and implemented by other line departments. But for the schemes run by the Panchayat and Rural Development Directorate, a bottom-up approach is generally adopted by the State PR Department. It approves the district plans prepared by the three tiers and finally submit these to the Centre for receiving the funds. Currently, PRIs in Assam are involved in the
planning, implementation and monitoring of the schemes like MGNREGS, BRGF, TFC etc. Besides, an indirect involvement of the PRIs is found in the planning of some schemes like ICDS, TSC etc. which are monitored and implemented by other line departments. The primary role of the PRIs in planning for these schemes is the identification of beneficiaries at the GP level. It is observed that plans relating to all the schemes owned by State Panchayati Raj Department are manually received across all the three tiers of Panchayats, though the software called PlanPlus exist to do the same. Lack of proper training, non-availability of computers as well as skilled professionals particularly at the GP offices has limited the use of available opportunities.

Similarly, in Arunachal Pradesh also the PRIs take part in monitoring and implementation of schemes like MGNREGS, BRGF and Haryali. But as regard to the schemes owned by other line departments they have very negligible role to play. Even in the schemes like ICDS, IAY and IGNOAPS where PRIs are supposed to be involved in the process of selection of the beneficiaries, the PRIs are not involved in the selection process. However, like Assam, plans relating to all the schemes owned by State Panchayati Raj Department are manually received across all the three tiers of Panchayats. Sometimes there is a huge delay in the preparation of plans as most of the GPs are located in far flung areas having communication problems. The absence of office premises (except ZP), IT applications and skilled manpower has made the functioning of the PRIs of Arunachal Pradesh more cumbersome and challenging.
• As regard the level of participation of the PRIs in the implementation of RD Schemes it is observed that in comparison to Arunachal Pradesh, the position of PRIs in Assam is better in selecting the beneficiaries as well as implementing and monitoring the Schemes. Surprisingly, it has been noticed that while selecting the list of beneficiaries the PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh follow the waitlist of 2001 Survey, which is more than a decade old. Consequently, there is every possibility of deprivation of others, not included in the list. Again, in Arunachal Pradesh, the Schemes of the Department of Rural Development such as IAY, SGSY, MGNREGS and TSC are implemented through DRDA. Apart from these PRIs are not involved in providing any service to the citizens and also failed to disseminate information of schemes like ICDS, RKVY, PYKKA, ARWSP etc. to the people. Surprisingly, though the Sports and Youth Affairs Department has the fund in its account for implementation of PYKKA, but due to the low level of awareness among the PRIs members, proposals were not sent and the scheme remain in paper only. However, in Assam PRIs members are better organised comparing to Arunachal Pradesh, therefore, schemes like PYKKA have already been implemented at the district level.

• The GPs are not involved in selecting the various rural development programmes. They are only concerned in selecting the list of the beneficiaries under various developmental schemes. However, as regard to the process of selection of the beneficiaries the respondents indicated about the connivance of the Secretary of the GP and the President/Chairperson of the GP in the preparation of beneficiary list in advance and getting it formally approved at the GS meeting. It is further observed that officials did not attend the meetings of the
GS until the elected representatives requested them to clarify the details of the schemes.

- As regard the functioning of the GPs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, it is observed that they are mainly associated with the government sponsored programmes. The functioning of GP is revolving round the RD programmes only such as IAY, SGSY, MGNREGA, HARIYALI, BRGF, KALPATARU and the like. However, the functions that are assigned in their respective Acts are not given due importance. GPs are working offhandedly and performing only the housekeeping functions mainly due to the financial crisis as well as indifferent attitude of the government. During interaction it is clearly noticed that there is a wide gap between the Panchayat functionaries and the line department.

- The Panchayats have been empowered as implementing agency for most of RD Schemes at the grassroots-level. It is binding for the Panchayats to follow strictly the guidelines as prescribed while selecting the beneficiaries. However, the study observes the opposite views among the Presidents/Chairpersons and other GP members. It is found that that a relatively higher percentage of the Presidents/Chairpersons are of the opinion that the list of beneficiaries is prepared as per the programme guidelines. While a relatively lower proportion of members in both the states confirmed the preparation of beneficiary list as per the prescribed guidelines. This difference of opinion indicates that there is a gap between the programme guidelines and the process involved in the selection of beneficiary.
The study reveals that both in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh the working of the PRIs is not moving in a right direction. Majority of the respondents in both the states fully agree with the view that the working of the PRIs is not in right track as the party leaders (who are not members of the local bodies) determine the agenda of the PRIs. In addition to this, lack of unity among the members is creating more problems in the functioning of the PRIs. Issues such as influence of the social elites and the interference from the district administration are not the real hurdles in the working of the PRIs in Assam, while in case of Arunachal Pradesh influence of the social elites exist to a great extent. The reason for such influence lies in its traditional system. Though modern Panchayati Raj has been under progress in Arunachal Pradesh but the influence of the traditional ways and means cannot be ignored and hence social elites are in a position to influence the working of the GPs. The divergence in the socio-political situation has led to different situations in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh.

It is observed that majority of GP members are not satisfied with the role of the GP President/Chairperson as they did not share the information about the various plans/schemes, fund position and the grants allotted for these to the members.

PRIs require adequate capacity building support to effectively discharge their assigned roles and responsibilities as institutions of local self governance. Appropriate training of PRI representatives given in time is one of the crucial components of the functioning of democracy at the grassroots level. Regarding capacity building of the elected representatives of PR in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh,
Governmental Statistics show that various training programmes under Central/State Government development schemes were conducted during 2008-09 and 2009-10. However, the study shows that majority of the respondents in both the states did not receive any training after becoming Panchayat representatives. Again, it is noticed that those who become Panchayat member for the second term have received some kind of training (like training on Panchayat Acts and budget making) earlier but the majority of the fresh entrants are not trained.

• It is noted that the key reason for non-participation of the majority of the representatives in any kind of training programme relating to capacity building is that they are not well informed for participation in such programmes. Respondents felt the need for comprehensive training as the PRIs functions and responsibilities have now become extensive. It is observed that lack of training is actually affecting the quality of functioning of the PRIs in both the states and, therefore, the bodies are not up to the expectation of the people.

• It is found that training programmes which are already conducted are participatory in nature and the trainees felt comfortable in interacting with the trainers. However, they are dissatisfied with the training content made available to them resulting into the failure of generating thorough knowledge about their respective Panchayat Acts.

• As regard the RD programmes are not successfully implemented everywhere though the elected representatives are, in principle, closely involved in the monitoring process of these programmes. The main reasons for this situation in both the states are (a) apathy of the
state officials, (b) lack of knowledge about different development programmes and (c) low quality works. According to the respondents from Assam, the RD Schemes did not pay heed to the local needs, that is to say, schemes are not area specific and there is also low level of coordination exist among the Panchayat representatives at various levels. In addition, party affiliations as well as indifferent attitude of the officials are responsible for low level of implementation of the RD programmes. On the other hand, the respondents from Arunachal Pradesh added that lack of fund and infrastructure are two important issues behind the abortive implementation of the RD programmes. In course of investigation it is observed that the GPs in Arunachal Pradesh do not have their own office premises which, in turn affects the working of the Panchayat adversely. They are not able to perform day to day functioning and, therefore, maintaining office records in proper order becomes uphill tasks. On the other hand, the GPs in Assam do not have such problem and the meetings of the GPs are held at their respective office premises. However, in comparison with ZP and AP offices, GP offices in Assam are in poor condition. Further, in some cases the GPs of both the states are located on the outskirts of the villages and rural connectivity becomes a major impediment to the operation of these offices. Thus, immediate development of civil infrastructure is an urgent necessity for both the states.

- It is observed that GPs of both the states suffer from acute shortage of manpower at each level to deliver the mandated services to the citizens. With the introduction of ICT facilities there is an extra load on the GPs to keep pace with the new technology. Due to existence of
untrained manpower the adoption of technology which is supposed to enhance the efficacy of the organisation has failed to achieve its goal. An enormous capacity building initiatives is needed at all levels of PRIs to make the GPs an effective channel for service delivery.

- With regard to the influence of political leaders on the working of the PRIs the two states present different pictures. While in Assam the MPs and MLAs wield extensive influence especially in the selection of beneficiaries for various development schemes, while in Arunachal Pradesh the influence of the political leaders in development schemes is less. The reason is that the entire system of Panchayati Raj in Arunachal Pradesh is still at the infant stage and the influence of the age old village council still exists in some form. Nonetheless, it is found that the workings of the PRIs of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh have now become completely politicized and this is actually affecting the participation of the people in the village development process.

- The Study clearly reveals that PRIs of Assam are more focused than that of Arunachal Pradesh. Unlike Assam, in Arunachal Pradesh there is no involvement of AS in the Committees working in the districts. It is observed that PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh are not involved in most of the committees and wherever they are involved they perform a limited function which does not match their prescribed roles and responsibilities. Besides, in Assam each tier has its Standing Committees looking after their allotted tasks, while in case of Arunachal Pradesh Standing Committees do not exist.
However, one fact remains common to the PRIs of both the states, i.e., they lack coordination among different tiers and line departments due to which they are less effective and citizens do not receive benefits from them as expected. Again, in Assam it has been found out that representation in most of the committees is a headcount formality and there is very little role that PRI members have in running the departmental schemes.

- The services which are identified as the basic requirements for the citizens such as registration of birth, death, unemployed youth, disabled, SC/ST/OBC/MOBC; income certificate, permanent resident certificate relating to higher education, land record certificate and ration card have not been handed over to the GPs in neither of the states. These services are at present provided through district administration or the line department establishments within the district. Thus, the failure of providing these basic services to the citizens make the role of the PRIs limited to ‘Agency Function’ only.

- Further, it is observed that in both the states there is low level of awareness among the GP representatives/functionaries about their rights and responsibilities under their respective Panchayat Acts. The information gathered from them relating to plan formulation and implementation proves their ineptitude towards the successful working of the GP. It is reflected in the study that the functioning of the GP lacks an element of social responsibilities/consciousness while performing its duties as an institution of decentralised governance. GPs do not maintain any statistics relating to socio-economic data of the people as well as physical and natural resources.
of the villages, which are actually essential components for making plan proposals.

**Role of Women representatives in the decision making process at the grassroots level**

- As regard the women representatives of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh it is found that policy of reservation facilitated their participation at the grassroots level. Without reservation it is difficult for them to be represented because in a male dominated society they are not encouraged to come forward in politics. Reservation opened up the opportunities for them to participate in the decision making process and thereby make them involve in the process of village development. The representation of women in the PRIs would have given them opportunities to raise their views, bring their priorities into the focus and express their problems. However, the rigid social structure, attitude of the family members and traditional practices are acting as hurdles for women representatives to function as elected leaders.

- The Study observes that there is some change in the position of the women representatives at the social level after becoming the Panchayat member. Ironically, though they are getting importance in the society, their position in the family have not improved significantly because many of them are treated like substitutes or proxies for their family members (Husband / Brother) and they lose their legitimate role to take part in the decision making process. As a result women representatives in both the states have failed to take up women related issues not only at the GS meeting but also at the meeting of the GP.
• Analysing the responses it is observed that a significant portion of the women representatives in both the states do not regularly attend the GS/GP meetings. The reason for such nominal attendance lies in the ‘proxy system’ as developed in the working of the PRIs. During interaction most of the women representatives admitted that they select nominees, basically from their family members and the nominees attend the meetings of the GP as well as GS and take decisions on their behalf. Such a practice is leading to the growth of ‘Proxy system’ in the PRIs and thereby hampering the spirit of reservation of seats for women and also undermining the quality of participation. Hence, uplifting the position of women through reservation is a distant reality until the proxy system is removed by law.

• Again, it is because of domestic responsibilities, pressure of the family members as well as social constraints that most of the women representatives are selecting nominees to look after the day to day activities of the GP. During field survey it is observed that women representatives responded to the questions in consultation with their husbands/brothers. They are not even allowed to freely interact with the investigator. This is more noticeable in Assam and particularly among the women representatives from Muslim community.

• It is found that majority of the women representatives in both the states have failed to take up issues like motivating women to participate in the meeting of GS, making them aware of various governmental schemes, helping them in getting the schemes and mobilising them to form SHGs. It can be inferred that because of the existence of ‘proxy system’ most of the women representatives are
not in touch with the problems/issues of the people and hence majority of them do not find any relevant issues to raise. It is thus evident that women elected representatives in both the states play a negligible role in the decision making process at the grassroots level.

**Financial Status of the PRIs of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh**

- The Study reveals the dismal picture of the self-sufficiency of the PRIs in both the states. The working of the PRIs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh solely depends on the Government fund. In spite of the provision for the imposition and collection of taxes, it is observed that in both the states there is no system of IRM as well as public contribution. The elected representatives do not take keen interest to generate fund as they are receiving the grant from higher authority. They are also not interested to initiate or suggest area specific development programmes.

- In case of Assam it has been noticed that a very small number of GPs located adjacent to town areas collect some taxes on supply of drinking water, starting of new businesses and fee for registration of bi-cycles, rickshaws etc. However, the collection of taxes/fees is not compulsory. It has been observed that people residing in the GPs sometimes voluntarily approach it to register their firms/vehicles etc.

- It is noticed that the position of the GPs locating at the remote areas is very dismal as regard to the taxation. Though GPs have the potentiality of becoming self-sufficient, but due to lack of initiative from both the Government Officials and the ERs, the GPs are depending only on the government sources. Situation is more
pathetic in Arunachal Pradesh, where the ERs and villagers do not have any knowledge of taxation. No step has yet been taken to initiate the process of taxation although the APPRA made a detailed provision for taxation on variety of items. In course of interaction it is found that the process of initiation of tax is very problematic in Arunachal Pradesh as there is no system of taxation exists at any level.

- As compared to Arunachal Pradesh, the position of Assam is better. Assam has already developed the practice of recruiting tax collectors at the GP level. These personnel are generally appointed on commission basis. With the help of these collectors the GPs generate revenues. However, in both the states a uniform tax structure has yet to develop. Consequently, the overall position of collection of taxes is not satisfactory. The tax payment is at the discretion of the people and those who do not wish to pay the taxes are under no obligation whatsoever and no legal action can be taken against them. This kind of freedom has actually made the PRIs cash deficient. Besides, the revenues which are received by the Panchayats through the various sources like assigned revenue, settlement of hats, ghat and fisheries and income from issuing No Objection Certificate are too meagre to maintain the functioning of the Panchayat. Since internal revenue generation in both the states has been insignificant, the level of expenditure on provision and maintenance of services including salary, allowances etc. of the PRI members has also been negligible or nil.

- It is seen that no relevant bye-laws exist in both the states relating to laying down the rate of taxes, manner of collection etc. This dampens
any zeal the elected representatives might have had in the matter of mobilization of their resources. This, in turn, has made the functionaries of PRIs to follow a lackadaisical approach in the matter of mobilization of internal resources. Such kind of apathetic attitude in both the states resulted into the dependence of the entire PR structure on exogenous financial support. However, in course of interaction it is found that in Assam one bye-laws exist but it is actually outdated and no match with the ground situation.

- Again, GPs in both the States do not receive frequent grant from the local area development fund of MP’s and MLA’s, which they are entitled to. In course of discussion respondents from both the states revealed that majority of the grant from the said fund actually goes to the urban areas. Again, there is a process of providing share to the nominee/representative of MP’s/MLA’s for receiving any grant from their respective fund, which is at the disposal of the Deputy Commissioner. In addition, it is found that those GP Presidents who have close contacts with the nominee/representative of the respective MP/MLA’s are able to receive grants for the development of their area. This indicates how party affiliation hinders the village development process across the states.

- As the functioning of the PRIs revolves around the grant received from the Government under various schemes, there is a necessity for making the functioning more accountable and transparent. In order to do so, the mechanism of social audit has been introduced in both the states, but it is limited only to MGNREGA. It is found that the position of social audit is far better in Assam than that of Arunachal Pradesh. It is worth mentioning here that in Assam, all the districts
have already initiated the process of social audit under MGNREGA. In respect of other affairs such as verification of annual statement of accounts and audit reports, social audit has yet to come into force and this puts a great question mark about the transparency of the working of the GPs. On the other hand, in Arunachal Pradesh it is observed that among all the districts, only West Kameng district has initiated the process of social audit under MGNREGA and this reveals the weaknesses of the PRIs as regard to their transparency of working. The provision for social audit in accordance to the law has yet to make its ground throughout the State.

In addition to these, the auditing system of accounts of the Panchayat of both the states is not as per the norms set by CAG. Again, there is no separate Public Accounts Committees (PACs) for reviewing the audit report of the Panchayats. At present, Panchayat accounts are being maintained manually at all the levels of PRIs. As internal revenue generation is either nil or in some cases very low, there is no uniform system of maintaining a comprehensive account. The cash register is maintained at all levels of PRIs and the income and expenditure is recorded in these registers. Besides, the extent of automation and computerization of Panchayat accounts are yet to be implemented.

In a nutshell it can be concluded from the study that in spite of the laudable pronouncements by the governments both at the union and state levels the working of the PRIs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh has not shown much progress. Both the state governments and the elected representatives continue to suffer from lack of motivation in making the PRIs a successful institution. Under the new arrangement important role has been assigned to the GS in order to make democratic decentralization a reality but this has
not been achieved in practice mainly due to the apathy of the elected representatives to motivate the people to attend the meetings of GS. Consequently, effective people’s participation in the development of the villages remains a distant dream. The local bodies suffer from paucity of finance and there is not much enthusiasm among the elected representatives to mobilize fund through taxation. In fact, majority of the elected representatives are content to depend on the government fund although these are neither sufficient nor regular. There is not much emphasis on the capacity building of the elected representatives including women members.

6.2 Suggestions and Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study and field experiences some important suggestions are forwarded for strengthening the PRIs of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. The suggestions are stated below under certain heads:

Working of PRIs: GS and GP

- Appropriate steps from the district administration are needed to conduct regular meetings of GS as per their respective Acts so that an assessment of the activities of GP including existing schemes, annual accounts and audit report, village plan, local schemes and utilization certificates are taken place. There should be mandatory provisions for the officials to participate in the GS Meeting so that the intricacies involved with various schemes are discussed and clarified.

- To make GS more effective it is suggested that GPs should arrange the group/ward sabhas beforehand at the village level so that interests of each group/ward are protected. Besides, a wide
publicity/announcement relating to the conduct of GS meeting has to be made well-in-advance. Such kind of initiatives will increase the level of attendance of the people of the villages at the GS meeting.

- There is a need to review the selection process of the beneficiary as in many cases connivance of the GP Secretary and the GP President is noticed in preparing the list of beneficiaries for various RD schemes. It is suggested that list of beneficiary should be prepared at first, at the group/ward/mahila sabhas and then it should be sent to the GS meetings for discussion and approval. Necessary amendments are required in the Acts to bring about the changes.

- Immediate attention is required on the part of the government to implement the activity mapping document. The devolution of fund and functionaries to the PRIs are urgently required so as to make them the real agents of service delivery.

- It is urgently required to put greater emphasis upon undertaking social audit on all the developmental schemes at the GP level, following the best practices available in different states. Besides, it is imperative for the government of both the states to make the relevant bye laws covering the various dimensions of PRIs. The absence of relevant bye laws is acting as a hurdle in making the PRIs more responsive to the needs of the people.

- As it was observed during the study that GP representatives have low level of commitment towards welfare activities, the Government through SIRD should take the initiative in organising camps,
workshops and discussions at the district level which will enable the PRIs members’ to be active.

- It is essential that GPs should be encouraged to maintain the statistics of their respective villages (like family backgrounds, births, deaths, unemployment, potential tax payers etc) so that proposals can be made taking into account the requirements of the areas. Besides, the services which are identified as the basic requirements of the citizens such as issuing of birth certificate, death certificate, residential certificate, income certificate etc are at present provided through district administration or the line department established within the district. It has been realised that if these services are handed over to the respective GPs then they will be more functional and at the same time people living in the far flung areas will have an easy access to their required needs.

- As GS is entitled to discuss and initiate proposals relating to the solution of problems of the village community, there is a need to arrange more and more awareness campaigns at the group/ward level. Government may involve the reputed NGOs working in the district to organise such camps.

- Though in both the states of Assam and Arunachal Pradesh DPC has been established but largely it is non-functional. Hence, there is an urgent need to strengthen it because it is the only platform where representatives from all sections (MLAs / MP / Municipal Boards / District Administration) can make an inclusive plan needed for the district.
Training and Capacity Building

- Attention should be given for the training of the GP representatives in order to acquaint them with the role and responsibilities of these bodies. It is also suggested that whenever GPs receive fund for any developmental schemes it should immediately arrange the meeting involving all the GP members as well as officials related to the scheme so that a better understanding/coordination develop among the functionaries.

- It is suggested that training should be organised on a regular basis covering rules and regulations set by the respective Acts, administrative issues, budgeting, monitoring as well as implementation of development schemes, district specific problems and computer related works of the GPs. Besides, training should include practical sessions, interactions based on field experiences and successful case studies. Such kind of training programmes must include all categories of ERs including President/Chairperson and members of GP.

- Conducting training courses for all the ERs are immediately required after the declaration of election results so as to equip them about the various aspects of the working of the PRIs. This should be followed by the conduct of specialised training programmes for the ERs in the subsequent years. However, for making women ERs more involved in the working of the GP, the training programmes on the basics of Panchayati Raj is required to be organised which will encourage them to participate in the decision making process.
It is further suggested to conduct the training course at the block level so that area specific problems are addressed. However, in all cases information relating to the conduct of training programmes in terms of capacity building of the ERs has to be sent well-in-advance so that they can make necessary arrangements for participating in the programmes.

**Participation of Women ERs in the decision making process:**

- In order to tackle the problem of low attendance of women representatives at the GS meeting Mahila Sabhas at the village level should be organised so that women can freely discuss the issues relating to their interests. The outcomes of the meetings can then be presented in the GS meeting for its consideration.

- Efforts have to be taken to include the women elected representatives in planning, monitoring as well as evaluation of the welfare schemes. In order to do so immediate steps have to be initiated to stop the ‘Proxy/Substitute System’. A strict law has to be expeditiously framed to ban the proxy/substitute system so that women are not deprived of participating in the decision making process. Not only this, efforts have to be made to motivate women through training programmes to attend & sensitise men not to give proxy.

- Not only this, an attitudinal change is required to be initiated in both men and women. The feeling that women are meant for managing the domestic matters and rearing children is required to be replaced into a feeling of equal partnership of woman and man. Otherwise, an entire initiative of making democracy successful at the grassroots level will turn into a myth.
• It is observed that there are some very active women Presidents/Chairpersons as well as members at the PRIs, who are very energetic in taking part in various developmental programmes. Such ERs are needed to be recognised by the society. There is a need to develop the practices of honouring them in public meetings and by publishing their valuable contributions/success stories etc. This will go a long way in motivating other women members to join the development process.

Resource mobilisation of Panchayats

• In order to make democracy effective at the grassroots level, steps need to be taken to generate and mobilise local resources by raising revenue-tax and non-tax. It is urgently required that GPs should create its own resources to meet the office expenses including the salary, sitting allowance etc. of the ERs. An attractive incentive grant should be provided to those GPs who have taken steps in the direction of fiscal autonomy and this will motivate others to do the same.

• Steps should be initiated in order to strengthen the administrative and enforcement capability of Panchayats to collect revenues through frequent training of the tax collectors. In case one collector for each village Panchayat is not feasible, a tax collector can be assigned to multiple villages with precise specification of responsibility.

• It is suggested that Panchayats can also develop remunerative enterprises such as community halls, small scale industrial estates,
shopping complexes etc by borrowing funds from state governments or banks. These can also be leased out in order to earn more revenue.

- It is noticed that GPs are at present unable to systematically maintain the records of various transactions, which create problem in the collection of information. Hence, there is a need to initiate a uniform procedure for the PRIs so that an exact assessment could be made about the ground situation at the time of policy making.

- It is important to open up ‘Panchayat Sector Window’ in the budgets of the relevant line department so as to match the devolution of functions. Such kind of steps would ensure the flow of funds for undertaking the devolved activities.

- It is required to strengthen the procedure of audit and accounts. The uniform system of maintaining GP accounts are needed to be introduced in conformity with the list of codes for each programmes as prescribed by C&AG.

Other Steps

- As huge number of complaints relating to corruption particularly siphoning off the grant/money at GP, Block and District level are often reported in the print media, an immediate step is required to establish an Ombudsman like institution to deal with the complaints and to take appropriate steps to check the menace.

- At present states are given rank on the basis of their performance at the national level. But to be more effective it is suggested to initiate the process of award as ‘Best GP Award’ at the district and state level and on the basis of this more incentives can be provided to the best performers.
Many GPs located in the remote areas in both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh do not have ICT facilities. Given the importance of ICT in the present scenario it is required to provide ICT facilities in all the GPs so that geographical location should not remain a barrier in the development process. Besides, software like Plan Plus has to be made use of so that plans relating to all the schemes are prepared correctly. However, to do so adequate and trained man power is required and the government should make necessary arrangements in order to equip the GPs to avail the facilities.

The above discussions made under different chapters are in tune with the objectives of the study such as tracing the history of PRIs in Assam as well as understanding the transition of traditional system of local governance to modern PRIs in Arunachal Pradesh, studying the working of the PRIs in both the states in a comparative perspective, finding out the role of marginalised groups mainly women in the decision making process at the grassroots level and also exploring the degree of similarities/dissimilarities between the PRIs of both the states. Corresponding to these objectives, the main research questions are: Do the Socio-economic factors determine the working of the PRIs? To what extent do the PRIs facilitate the development of their respective areas in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh? What is the role of women representatives in PRIs vis-a-vis the decision making process? Is the financial position of the PRIs in both the states adequate to meet their needs? In the present study we have explored the working of the PRIs keeping in mind the above research questions and these have been discussed in different chapters in detail.

A thorough investigation of various aspects of grassroots democracy of both Assam and Arunachal Pradesh reveal that the PRIs are suffering from a
variety of problems as they are working within the limitations of inherent structural framework and it is yet to emerge as a real mechanism of service delivery. There is low level of performance of the PRIs of both the states though huge sums of money under various RD programmes are being received by the respective states. Absence of systematic ways of capacity building, low level of empowerment of the marginalised groups particularly women, absence of adequate infrastructural facilities, excessive interference of the party personnel and apathetic attitude of the rural people in participating in the meetings of GS are great hurdles for the PRIs to be effective. Success of democracy at the grassroots level solely depends of the vigilance of the people and, therefore, steps have to be taken not only to train the elected Panchayat representatives but also to train and make the common people aware of their responsibilities. The problems as well as remedies as cited above needs to be addressed at the earliest and follow up actions must also be taken so that the entire initiative of providing socio-economic and political justice to the rural people becomes a reality. The present study has broadened the scope for undertaking more research works covering more states in order to unveil the working pattern of the PRIs. Such kind of studies will definitely help the policy makers to formulate new policies as well as development schemes that suit the needs of the people.