CHAPTER VI
CONCLUDING OBSERVATION
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CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages an attempt has been made to study the changing scenario of political participation in a single Grama Panchayat, the Garudagaon Grama Panchayat situated in Cuttack district of Orissa. The scholar has attempted to pinpoint on Garudagaon Grama Panchayat, sequence of changes in rural administration that results in Panchayati Raj Institutions and changes in their scopes by amendments. The changing scenario of political participation of people in general has been studied on respondent villagers as regards to their activity, role performance and attitude.

Rural local governance can go by any name. The nomenclature of 'Panchayat' adds a local feeling, a sense of greatness, a solid historical basis and what not. This is with an aim to attract people, to involve people and to increase democratic forces at rural bases in the country. But reality has remained away from the Panchayats. It has been toys in the hands of state government. The state government is itself in in troubled waters in India on a financial stand. The Government of Orissa still burdened by natural calamities like flood, cyclone, drought and super cyclone. No doubt, local governance involves the state's efforts.

The stories of development of the nation have always cornered around the villages. Community Development Programmes, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Alleviation of Poverty, Integrated Rural Development Programmes and so many to number have involvement with village people. Involving people in administration and development has no other way than the local self-government institutions that are democratic and foster local mandate. That is the reason to pay importance to Panchayati Raj Institutions. These organisations will not only help in development, but also provide realities and vigilance.
The Grama Panchayat and the two higher tiers (Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad) have been evolving during the last 4 to 5 decades based on needs, expectations and problems. Apart from state-wise amendments, these organisations have suffered from negligence due to want of election and finance. The ultimate decision of Panchayat came by decade long process of legislation, the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment that has revolutionized the functioning of the local governing institutions, the Panchayats and the Municipal Institutions.

Thus, there are two sides of the Panchayat functioning: first, the way it has evolved to present form. It has not come at once to the present shape. Second, it has involved local people in a separate way. For example, it had no concept on reserving for women and reserving for Scheduled Castes and Reserved Tribes. Earlier, the Grama Panchayat had none or very few of these category of representatives. Today's Grama Panchayat has certain proportional fixations of these representatives based on population compositions.

It is very easy to interpret them in the papers stating the amendments and alterations. But practically it cannot be presumed what actually happens at the village level in the Grama Panchayat spheres. Imposing a change in Indian constitution in the Parliament and state Assemblies may find a difficult to be accepted policy in the field. This excites study at grassroots. The citizenry of Grama Panchayat is the right agent to give a clear picture of the realities of rural local self-government in field.

The first issue of study is the temporal sequence of Grama Panchayat functioning of Garudagaon Grama Panchayat from the initial days of constitution. The manner the Garudagaon Grama Panchayat existed and proceeded are now matters of history, but of definite importance when being reviewed for analysis of scenario of political participation.

A set of variables in socio-economic background is visible that must have influenced the roles of the respondent citizens, not necessarily justifying that any person other than the one subjected under such an environment would have been a
Grama Panchayat citizen. Rather this external environment has played a favourable role in fostering the elite potential of the particular individual under study.

For the study of this kind, using the method of field study in the Garudagaon Grama Panchayat has made a microanalysis. The analysis undertaken to test the hypotheses has been made on the basis of data gathered from both primary and secondary sources.

Prior to the study of the main issue, a conceptual analysis of popular participation has been made in Chapter II of this dissertation to quantify the democratic values of political participation. The historical elements of popular participation in government and administration have been elaborated. The concept of democratic decentralization and diffusion of democratic values in a dissimilar political milieu is of great importance. Lastly, how best the grassroots structure has been involved by so called popular participation is a matter that has been emphasized and study into such dimensions has been stressed.

In the past, the democracies existed in the ancient world in places like Greece, Rome, Switzerland, etc. The Greek city states encourage the entire body of their free citizens because of the small size of the states, to develop acquaintances and interest in the local politics and granted them political rights and privileges. The politicians and persons engaged in the service of the State were considered as men of high prestige. There were public assemblies with the member's right to vote, to hold office, and many other privileges normally enjoyed by the members of political society. The political consciousness was developed with a view to make the identification of the people with the community prefect and it was based on the customs and ideals of Greek society. In Athens every adult male citizen irrespective of their economic status was a member of the general assembly of the citizens in which all power was vested. Relics of pure democracy still remain in some of the Swiss cantons that hold open-air public meetings.
Democratic decentralization seems to be a process that enhances the processes of democracy. Any developmental activity can be presumed to be effective only after decentralization is effective. Decentralization is based on individual's participation, responsiveness and efficiently. Centralization on the contrary breeds bureaucratization at the cost of people's participation. Local authorities are pivots in promoting popular participation in public affairs to bring about economic development and bring about radical social change. Thus the Grama Panchayat is the lowest Indian rural grassroots where the value of popular participation is greatest, where the public utility services are most meaningful to the citizen.

In Chapter III of the dissertation, Panchayati Raj system in India and Orissa has been narrated in detail. Panchayat seems to be the village organisation that has its spontaneous and natural genesis in villages of India since time immemorial. It has been held as a medium of anchoring for rural development in India by Bapu, who envisioned India from villages during the Movement Struggle. Unfortunately, Panchayats had escaped the attention of the Founding Fathers of Indian Constitution on the wake of Indian independence and had only nominal appearance. This almost took 45 years to develop and to be amended in a prestigious manner in the constitution.

It has taken a process of experimentation and evolution to incorporate multiple factors to make uniform arrangement based on priorities and basic changes to be accepted all over the nation with minor alteration at state level. This has accepted the greater discrepancies of people's fractions and gender and has given popular mandate and financial backbone. These essential changes had followed reports of Balwantrai Mehta Study team that justifies to initiate a 'three tier Panchayat structure' and to opine on democratic decentralization.

Almost 20 years after the first Mehta, came the second Mehta's (Ashok Mehta) report on sluggishness and maladies of Panchayati Raj functioning with many remedial measures of coming over the standstill situation. This was followed by two
or 3 other study reports and their suggestion. All these factors were responsible to initiate a national debate and deliberation to initiate and effect the constitutional amendment. This has historically reached a point of time to even equate the rural urban dichotomies in India and to make mirror image legislation for urban governance.

Orissa, as a state of India, reveals a specific pattern of tradition, culture, polity and economy based on the historical, geographical, economic and political determinants. The Panchayati Raj system in Orissa and its functioning, particularly the Grama Panchayat had followed some statutory provisions, the Orissa Grama Panchayat Act of 1948, that has been amended from time to time to lately come to incorporate all ways of constitutional amendments of 1992 in the Orissa Grama Panchayat Act of 1994. It has within its domain some detailed working of direct democratic devices like the Gram Sabha and Palli Sabha, the today's equivalent of Athenian democratic model.

The detailed structural configuration and functioning lowest tier of Grama Panchayat have been detailed including declaration of Scheduled Areas. A review of Grama Panchayat functioning in general has been incorporated in this Chapter IV.

In this dissertation, a profile of one Grama Panchayat, the Garudagaon Grama Panchayat has been taken as a model for detail study to reveal functioning since its date of conceptualisation. This has been made with the ideology that acts and amendments are legal and procedural elements, the realities are manifested in field. The study of a single Grama Panchayat may yield any administrative lapses or real needs in the structure and functions of the grassroots organisation. This has been dealt in Chapter IV of the dissertation.

With a brief history of the village Garudagaon, a profile of geographical, statistical, socio-cultural, economic dimensions with other demographic elements has been made. The first Grama Panchayat constituted has been detailed with the political elements and the functions in detail. This has followed the second, third and
subsequent ones with as much detail available from secondary sources. The people and popular mandate through the years including the Gram Sabha and Palli Sabha functioning has been narrated. The financial structure and the poverty alleviation measures of the Garudagaon Grama Panchayat have been dealt with in this Chapter IV.

Chapter V of the dissertation deals with socio-economic profile of 200 respondent citizens from among the revenue villages constituting the Garudagaon Grama Panchayat area. A socioeconomic profile has been constructed consisting of age, sex, caste, marital status, educational qualification and annual income. It was noted that there were 20 political representatives of Garudagaon Grama Panchayat among the respondents who, presently or in past, held posts of Sarapanch, Naib-Sarapanch or Ward-Member. Some specific data concerning their political life have been obtained.

To the pertinent questions on political participation in Grama Panchayat elections at different periods of study, majority of the respondents revealed that they have involvement in Panchayat politics. Apart from few that filed nominations for contest, others played some role in campaigning in the elections. It was noted that there was perfect reservation for women and Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Grama Panchayat with rotation of reserved seats.

The participation of Gram Sabha and Palli Sabha was considered at high esteem though there were major fall of attendance in meetings due to personal, official or geographical reasons. The attendance of women, Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribe is seen to be growing gradually.

On the questions related to personal opinion on reservation of seats or patterns of finance and other aspects, specific appreciation was noticed. This is the satisfaction of the residents of Garudagaon Grama Panchayat over the implementation of the constitutional amendment.
On being asked what more they wanted in future, the specific reply was to form a Grama Panchayat out of one revenue village that can overcome few other factors that stand as hindrance to Gram Sabha attendance and exact participation of people in Panchayats.

The empirical testing of hypotheses had been done on certain grounds of people's participation in Panchayat affairs. The local organisation is native, it is within the basic knowledge of every villagers the meaning and function of Grama Panchayat. The nomenclature and configuration of the Panchayat has been suited to the purposes of Panchayati Raj system to fit into local government system as well as an agency of rural development in implementing many of the programmes including the Poverty Alleviation Programmes. The authenticity and identification of real poor need the certification of Gram Sabha, the village assembly. Time to time changes in Panchayat configuration and functional patterns need constant advertisement for the citizens in general and the beneficiaries in particular.

The hypothesis, "People's participation is more after implementation of the new constitutional amendments than earlier is reflected in Garudagaon Grama Panchayat" is found to be correct. The figure of people's participation, political contests, respondents' response as regards to involvement in electoral and non-electoral participation is in the direction of enhanced enthusiasm, interest and support to Garudagaon Grama Panchayat.

The reservation of seats in Indian political system on population basis had been in vogue for parliament and assembly elections. After different committee reports, debates and deliberations, the reservation for Panchayati Raj system and Municipal system had come to be one-third for women and proportional to the population of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. Even prior to the implementation of reservation of seats as provided by constitution of India, the Orissa Grama Panchayat Act was amended in 1991 and similar reservation was implemented in Municipal and Grama Panchayat election in Orissa. So, residents of Garudagaon
have realised the Grama Panchayat election with reserved seats for women and weaker sections of population. The hypothesis, "People of Garudagaon find it easy to work in a system of reservations for women and weaker sections" is put to test by asking them, "Are you satisfied with reservation policy at Panchayat Level?". Ninety-two percent of respondents like women reservation and 89 % like reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. So the hypothesis holds good.

The provisions of 73rd Constitutional Amendment specify regularity of Grama Panchayat election and impose restrictions on supersession by advice of immediate election for rest of the left-out term within 6 months. This provides steady election and popular mandate to Grama Panchayat. So the hypothesis, "Election is regular and smooth in comparison to pre-amendment period" is found to be right. In 1992, the elections to Panchayats were conducted in time. There was a period of confusion and supersession in history of Grama Panchayats in Orissa. The election that followed 1992 election was inordinately delayed to become an issue against the state government at centre. But subsequently the Grama Panchayat seems to be in gears.

Functioning of Gram Sabha or Palli Sabha is now considered as pivotal in the functioning of Gram Sasan or the Grama Panchayat. Gram Sabha is the 'assembly' of the village where every citizen is a regular participant. But unfortunately, this meeting officially held twice in a year was almost reluctantly attended. Quite large number of Grama Panchayat citizens did not attend, so much so that the quorum of the Gram Sabha was less than the stipulated one-tenth of citizens and it was invariably shifted to a next date. But the post-amendment scenario of Gram Sabha functioning is supposed to be a favourable story for the village. To elicit the improvements in people's participation, the hypothesis was "Participation in the Gram Sabha or Palli Sabha is growing more than before". Virtually, the attendance of people in Gram Sabha is noticed to be marginally better today than before 1992 constitutional amendments as seen from Grama Panchayat records and from the response to the question, "Are the Gram / Palli Sabha attended by people more than
before the implementation of constitutional amendment of 1992?" Sixty-six percent of the respondents have responded in affirmative.

Popular participation is a check and balance to the bureaucratic forces of the government operative in remote rural areas. The huge amount of expenditure of the development works during Community Development Programme and subsequent Five-Year Plans are not accounted for in the fields. It was sincerely felt that a minor percent of the provisions can come to the real development field. The Panchayati Raj Institutions, being people's representatives, are therefore trusted as agents of vigilance. So with proper functioning of the Panchayati Raj system it is expected that the development works might be implemented in a smooth way. Therefore, the hypothesis, "The development work taken up by Panchayati Raj System is more effective than before" was put to test. This is found to be correct based on the observation that the Grama Panchayat works accurately in identifying the Below the Poverty Line people and other beneficiaries to avail the anti-poverty assistance. The funds of JRY, JGSY or SJRY at the hands of Garudagaon Grama Panchayat are being utilised with local needs and priorities.

Indian life and impacts of caste are converging at villages to a really narrow social pattern. Caste creates heinous attitudes and temperaments and one can be afraid this can pollute the sanctity of Panchayati Raj, the grassroots people's organisation. So, the hypothesis, "Caste in Grama Panchayat has been a dominant sociological factor" had been put to test in this study. The opinion of the respondents on socio-cultural milieu of the village, 87.5 % informed that there was no 'caste-conscious feeling' among villagers and 95 % stated that caste did not play any role in Grama Panchayat elections of Garudagaon Grama Panchayat. Hence the hypothesis on caste dominance in Grama Panchayat of Garudagaon stands invalid.

The Grama Panchayat / Gram Sabha is entitled to identify the Below the Poverty Line people so as to enable them to avail the benefits of anti-poverty programmes of the state and central governments. This identification is very important and this task
is entrusted on village assembly or Gram Sabha that is an esteemed organisation for the purpose. In spite of this, there is a fear that some of the poor may escape being identified and non-poor might infiltrate as Below Poverty Line. This was put to test by the hypothesis, "Poor people were finding difficult to get identified as Below Poverty Line at Garudagaon Grama Panchayat". But the respondents' opinion is that all the poor people are rightly being labeled as Below the Poverty Line of citizens to avail the benefit. Thus the hypothesis does not hold good.

Paucity of finances was a cause of sickness of Panchayats in earlier years that led to the stagnant phase in history of Panchayati Raj revolution in India as a whole. Thence comes the constitutional amendments that remedied the economic malady by specific advice of constitution of a State Finance Commission in every state for distribution of the proceeds of taxes etc. among state and local bodies, both urban and rural. In this circumstance, it is expected that the Grama Panchayat, as an end-organ of Panchayat system viewed from above can easily reflect any financial flow. So the hypothesis "Garudagaon Grama Panchayat gets more funds these days than pre-amendment days" was put to the test. Consulting the financial flows through the Grama Panchayat and its internal income and antipoverty schemes through agency of Panchayats, it is noteworthy that the financial structure has not improved at all in comparison to the status years back. Garudagaon internally gets almost same amount of income and has no major sources as the state government has erased the Panchayat Tax or the House Tax on every household since long. There is no means of any regenerative non-tax revenue from any fixed assets. What the Orissa State Finance Commission has recommended is grants of the amount of salary of the Panchayat Secretary from state government. In the words of the Panchayat Secretary dealing with finances of the Garudagaon Grama Panchayat, the amount of bank interest the Panchayat gets from the money availed for anti-poverty programmes is even much more than the internal revenue of the Grama Panchayat.
Thus the hypothesis is not true. Garudagaon Grama Panchayat suffers from financial constraints despite constitutional amendments.

Political parties have been viewed critically on their impacts on rural life. Styling villages "a sink of localism, a den of ignorance" and thus writing them off cannot solve the problems of Indian villages. Such an extreme charge is not so simple to be accepted as justified. One of the principal sources of anxiety of many well wishers of Grama Panchayats in India is that village elections are presumed to create more problems than they have been thought of. Panchayat election is suspected to intensify the group factions and to leads to division. In most instances the old divisions and animosities that had existed for years may find a chance to be reinforced. Agriculture is the main profession in Indian villages. No matter how fair and impartial a Panchayat were to be any decision it makes regarding matters of agriculture or land may embitter the unsuccessful parties and generate resentment. It is not disputed that ideally the Grama Panchayat and the Gram Sabha should assume the various functions of land management, maintenance of land records, the right to authorize and enter land transfers, partitions, amalgamations and other mutation proceedings. In fact, factionalism is persistent in India much before statutory election procedure was introduced. Election can sway by these elements rather than election can create faction among villagers. Present evidence of exclusion of political parties from Grama Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti elections shows that the political parties provide hidden support to candidates in Grama Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti. It proves that no system of election anywhere can be immune to political parties. An opinion has been sought from the respondents to test the hypothesis, "Political parties in Grama Panchayat sphere make social and political life cumbersome" in the present context of socio-political lifestyles of people. The response had been 84 % of respondents in favour of party based election at Garudagaon Grama Panchayat and 88 % in favour of party based election at Panchayat Samiti. To rule out any major disputes by introducing political parties, 54%
respondents have felt that nothing will hamper usual social life in Garudagaon Grama Panchayat. Thus the hypothesis stands invalid.

Grama Panchayat finance is a matter of debate since 1950s. Taxation and appropriations and distribution has not been steady, the Indian states cry for more funds from centre, the local government institutions being their own creature, is destined to be pauper. Be it Taxation Enquiry Commission or the State Finance Commission, the critical advise had been raise income from Non Tax Revenue from regenerative means from assets. The Panchayat representatives being apt respondents in finances of Garudagaon Grama Panchayat were specifically asked on this issue and the response was strongly in favour of getting some good funds out of regenerative ways of shops, kiosks etc. So the hypothesis, "Raising the internal income is a right way of fostering growth of Grama Panchayat" is found to be quite right.

Despite all efforts of decentralization of democratic power and empowering the grassroots local governments, the saddest outcome is the poor quorum in Gram Sabha, the village assembly. Taking into consideration that every attempt for the Panchayati Raj system was nothing but state-rural administrative relationship and every precious legislation was meant for the organisation and people, people must enjoy the fruits of democracy. But apathy of the villagers for Gram Sabha and Palli Sabha is a negative mark for democracy. To tide over such a problem and to suggest a solution, some pertinent questions were there in the questionnaire especially on further decentralization of Grama Panchayat at revenue village level rather than constituting on population basis. Majority of the respondents (63 %) are in favour of constitution of Grama Panchayat at revenue village level with ideology that development is both on people and geographical boundary, it will be intense in a close population than far off villages taken together. This according their opinion will enhance the ideology of local self-government and participation. So the hypothesis,
"If Garudagaon revenue village alone will constitute a Grama Panchayat, the area development and participation will be more than the present" is found to be valid.

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