CHAPTER V

Conclusion and Observation

A research work has three fundamental pillars. Well thought hypothesis, set objectives and research outcomes are those pillars on which a research work is firmly grounded. On the eve of undertaking this research, the researcher has had two hypotheses- one was ‘absence of active and effective participation by women in panchayats will deteriorate the dreams of the 73rd Amendment to make them productive human resource in the society’. The Chapter-IV of the research work, where the field findings have been analysed, revealed that this hypothesis has been partly justified and partly found null and void. It means, in Tripura, participation of women in electoral politics is almost ‘active’ due to compulsory reservation of seats and other advantages enshrined in the 73rd Amendment but not found fully ‘effective’ due to proxy politics in some extent and due to some other reasons. Second hypothesis proved to stand positive as many women members who have managed to come and act independently have been playing positive role towards promotion of good governance in respect of economy and social development in rural areas of Tripura. However, both the hypotheses could be better judged by the field analysis and related observations as discussed below.

All the objectives have been of course, set on the basis of the two hypotheses. In terms of the first objective, it has been found from the study that Tripura has adopted almost all those provisions of the 73rd Amendment. From the documents of the Government’s concerned departments, it is also found that the state has made establishment of a three-tier PRI structure, with elected bodies at village, block and district levels. The state has accepted the recognition that the Gram Sabha constitutes a deliberative body at the village level. The state holds direct elections to five year terms for all members at all levels. One-third of all seats are reserved for women; reservations for SCs and STs proportional to their populations. Reservations for chairpersons of the Panchayats – Sarpanches – following the same guidelines have been implemented. A State Election
Commission (SEC) is created to supervise, organize and oversee Panchayat elections at all levels. A State Finance Commission (SFC) has been established to review and revise the financial position of the Panchayats on five-year intervals, and to make recommendations to the State government about the distribution of Panchayat funds.

More particularly, in response to the 73\textsuperscript{rd} amendment of the Constitution in 1992, Tripura was one of the first states to enact Tripura Panchayats Act, 1993 with a provision for setting up of three tier panchayat system- Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zilla Parishad. During 1994, various functions of 12 departments were assigned to the panchayat bodies. Again during 2000, some more functions were transferred to the panchayats. The State Finance Commission was set up in 1994 which has submitted its report in 1996 and is accepted by the Govt. The second SFC has already started functioning. SC, ST, Minorities, all communities including women were given necessary share in the rural politics. Four elections of the PRIs have been held (1994, 1999, 2004 & 2009). The state is now on the eve of 5\textsuperscript{th} round of panchayat election to be held in 2014. So far the policy of the state government, it has fully respected the provisions of 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment in respect of reservation and other means of decentralization.

Pertaining to the second objective, it may be broadly explained from the study that most of the women members who have come in under caste or class reservation have entered politics through socio-psychological force. This has also led many women to enter into politics with their social and economic disadvantages; mostly just literate with little productive resources mainly depend on house-keeping activities and daily wages. Because of poverty they find very difficult to give full time discharge their duties as they do not have any fixed financial remuneration. Very few among them are higher qualified. Only few have been found to have full knowledge on the dream of 73\textsuperscript{rd} Amendment.
In respect of 3rd and 4th objectives, the study has found that the ruling Left Front and Indian National Congress (INC) are the dominant political parties in Tripura. Women members and voters are largely divided between these parties. Prior to any panchayat election, parties nominate a woman not on the basis of her political experience or education but on the basis of political background and support of the family she belongs to. This trend made her obedient more to the nominating party than to her commitment and accountability to the people.

Many women contest on behalf of their husband or father who could not contest because of reservation. Some surrogates in place of rich and powerful leaders, here women play their role as a puppet to act in favour of vested interests. This practice makes her a bit blind of socio-economic conscience.

In few cases it is learnt that during Panchayat election, photograph of husband was on the position of contesting women candidates along with the candidate herself. Names of husband and wife were there. It happened mostly in the first round panchayat election in 1994 in Tripura. This is not in practice now, but the similar trend is found during electoral campaign when either candidate’s family members especially husband or party leaders remain more dominant than the candidate herself. In some cases they represented by their husband or father in the meetings and their signature taken in the register later on. Sometimes, male members escorted them to the meetings and encouraged them to speak there, while they are not found self-motivated.

After election was over women were given pradhanship in obedience to rotational reservation. Upapradhan of that panchayat who used to hold the pradhanship at the last tenure, was so powerful that existing woman pradhan could not use her discretion under her own rights in the institutional affairs of panchayat. Ironically, this type of empowerment made her more a de-jure than to be a de-facto executive for which the provision was farmed in the constitution.
Most of the elected women are unknown to power and function assigned to them. Very few can understand and explain in proper way the notions like ‘good governance’ or ‘Shushashan’. Some women feel that to go according to party manifesto only is good governance. Many times they are to remain as deaf to the decisions taken with consent from the majority of male members. This deafness lateron expressed as a sign of ‘consent or consensus’.

Many times male members make undue interference and observe over the activities done by female members that create a kind frustration in their minds. While female members mainly who are elected for the first time, voice their concerns on any issues in the meetings, male members play non-cooperative role. It is also alleged by some members that govt. officials give more preference to the male members.

It is also observed that some female members have developed political ambition too. Although initially were forced to contest the election, after one or two years they adopted the system quickly, now they start dominating male members, even appeared very demonstrative before the bureaucrats in the process of demand mediation and interest articulation. But their number is very low.

Good governance largely depends on the positive and facilitative functional relationship in terms of coordination, cooperation between the elected members and government officials. Further it is a prerequisite of democracy that administrative wing should function under deliberative wing, that is, bureaucracy should be answerable and accountable to the elected political leadership. But excessive political control over government officials and vice versa is detrimental to way of good governance of panchayat mechanism. In the state of Tripura, a gap is observed between government priority of agenda and area specific agenda of development and here the level of functional cooperation between the groups differ.
The study reveals that elected panchayat body do not bother so much of pain to go through the details to ensure participatory planning of development work. Most of the plans, implementation rules, goals and objectives and achievement strategies are forced by the government. Government officials do it by sending quarterly and annual report to the higher authority without any proper endorsement by the community.

In many aspects of panchayat activities, political and local control is found at the surface. So, the system seems prone more to political gain in making visible change in the poverty and development scenario of the state. Due to excessive party control, women members find it hard to develop any innovative ideas to promote good governance.

Existence and empowerment of Gram Sabha and Gram Sangsad have been considered highly significant in the way of strengthening the Panchayat Raj. The meetings of the Gram Sangsad held almost regularly, although the number of postponed meeting also quite a good number. As per the rule, a Quorum of Gram Sabha is constituted with $1/8^{th}$ of total electors of concerned Gram Panchayat, it is $1/5^{th}$ in the case of Gram Samsad. In the first meeting, if quorum is not formed the meeting will automatically be adjourned, for adjourned meeting no quorum is required at all. It is noticed that most of the meeting postponed due to low level attendance. The cause of great concern is the poor attendance of women. Gram Sangsad is failing to mobilize women in the meetings. The drawback of a Gram Sangsad are; electors are politically polarized, low literacy among electors, dominance of local power brokers, distance of meeting place and deprivation of daily wages.

Different political parties are now trying to mobilize women towards political participation. It is may be because of reservation compulsion, but a good side is that these parties encourage and motivate women and give them orientation to strengthen their party’s position considering the future challenges. In one way this has paved the way for creating greater scope for women’s political participation.
Knowledge and use of computer based information technology is considered to one of the significant tool to ensure good governance. But in the study, only 14% members found to have knowledge about computer from other sources but none has been found to have knowledge on its use. Nobody knows what is Internet and its use. Two panchayat’s offices found to have computers from the concerned block office but with no expert to play them.

In similar way, knowledge of Right to Information Act (RTI) and its use is now believed to be the most burning apparatus to protect and promote good governance in every walks of political and administrative life. But, in the study, 95% women members do not have any knowledge about RTI. Only 5% women found to have knowledge about RTI, but they have neither used it against any authority nor any body has used it against them.

The above findings and observations are the broad in sense of the term. These are the blend of both negative and positive realities of women’s governance in panchayat raj mechanism of Tripura. The field study has also revealed many other micro observations and findings which a reader/researcher may find out in chapter to chapter on a careful journey throughout the thesis. However, the 5th objective of the research may be better realized in the next under the heading of ‘Recommendations and Policy Prescriptions’.
Recommendations/Policy Prescriptions

This part of the thesis is very important in view of the fact that here the researcher may use the opportunity of recommending suggestions and policy prescriptions on the basis of his overall observations and field findings. Of course, readers and academicians will have discretion in respect of their assessment over these recommendations. However, the recommendations may be pointed out as below:

5th round of Panchayat Election is scheduled to be held in the month of July-2014 in Tripura, and the task of selecting candidates for nomination is on full swing. The State is found making positive justification to the provisions of reservation and other advantages in terms of women governance in its panchayat governance. It has now become a significant responsibility of political parties to mobilize and prepare women to come in electoral politics spontaneously through political education. They should allow women to act independently so that they can overcome the burdens of male dependency and social audacity which may lead the panchayat governance towards promoting good governance.

Accountability is an inevitable character of good governance. But most of the members of Gram Panchayats feel a little accountability to the Gram Sabha. They are prone to more responsible to the party they belong to. Political parties, while in power, should be impartial and should act beyond their narrow political gains.

The type of proxy politics in panchayats, where women from weaker sections do not participate in their assigned activities, nor are they sometimes allowed to do so in some areas. In such a situation, the election of women is bound to cause great resentment and every effort is made to subvert and sabotage the process. Rule should be framed to prohibit this practice. In no way, women should remain only as meek subservient to male domination. Experienced members of the family, who cannot contest due to reservation may cooperate women members as and when needed, but should never try to make them puppet.
The 73rd Amendment and subsequent State Panchayat Raj Act have provided for a poor friendly power structure in the state through reservation in electoral process. But in order to make the process sustainable, members of Panchayats should be trained to discharge their prescribed rights and duties properly. They should also be given frequent orientation about the changing trends and norms of development plans. Technical education should be imparted in the course manual for the training program.

For a full time dedication to perform their duties elected members of the Panchayats should be given a monthly remuneration of the Rs. between 4000 to 6000. This will give them livelihood security and will reduce corruption and misappropriation of money or any such desire. This will also lead them to overcome financial insolvency.

In order to bring accountability, transparency among the government officials and elected panchayat functionaries, members of Gram Sangsad or Gram Sabha, especially women electors, should be oriented about their power and functions. Moreover, they should be properly trained to conduct effective social audit, monitoring and evaluation of the development activities. They should also be oriented on the rights and governance issues of today.

In order to bring transparency in the panchayat governance, it would be better if the project details, budget and sources of funds are displayed publicly in the sign board at different points in the area. Another way is to involve more and more local people in various activities and in daily/weekly briefings to the community, people are to be informed about the ongoing activities and problems if any. Though, details are displayed in case of big projects but for micro level schemes the process found almost absent as in such cases beneficiaries are selected by some powerful members of the panchayat. This practice should be avoided through mobilizing Gram Samsad. NGOs and Civil Society Organizations may be active in this area.
It has also been observed that Gram Sabha and Gram Samsad often fail to fulfil their role as deliberative bodies or as a mechanism for accountability. This is partly attributed to low levels of participation among the electorate as well as the non-cooperation of local officials. Examples of the latter include officials delaying or postponing Gram Sabha meetings, officials are not attending Gram Sabha, and, more generally, official decisions having no bearing on decisions reached during the Gram Sabha. Massive awareness campaign to mobilize people with more focus on women, for their maximum presence and active participation in every aspects of panchayat activities should be arranged. NGOs, Civil Society Organizations along with government authority should come out to boast up the campaign process.

Government or NGOs authority should arrange exchange visit for elected women members of panchayats and the members of Gram Sangsad to gain experience of the success cases done by other rural bodies in the state or out side the state through physical verification. This process will encourage women to act as deliberative agent of social progress.

Sometimes, confrontation figures between panchayat leadership and administrative leadership. This is mainly due to absence of clear cut demarcation of powers, functions, and responsibilities among panchayat presidents and concerned executive officials. Both sides should avoid competitive control upon each other and should act in complementary, for this purpose periodical meeting should be conducted.

Social audit is a regular and effective institution to promote the culture of transparency and accountability through the Gram Sabha. More initiatives are required towards greater empowerment of the Gram Sabha with a view to making them efficient and effective instruments for participatory democracy. For this, agency like ombudsman may be established for specially looking into the cases against women, complaints of mal-administration and corruption. It should be ensured that the poor people, who stand up to speak against their oppression, should be given due protection so that they do not become the victims of oppressive forces.
There is needed for mandatory presence of at least 50% of the women members in all meetings Gram Sabha and Gram Samsad. It will put pressure on the Gram Panchayat to mobilize women for their increasing attendance in the meetings. For this purpose mass awareness program should be conducted in the panchayats area.

Minimum level of education (for example Class VIII) for women may be made as compulsory criteria for contesting panchayat election. Compulsory training should be imparted to the women members on the use of computer based IT education and use of RTI to mobilize people to combat all level corruptions and any violation of established rules and rights.

To wind up, it may be said that no social research can claim to be the absolute one. The researcher of this thesis also does not claim any finality of the process and outcomes of the work. The researcher may only claim that this has been an honest attempt to assess the real impact of huge number of women’s involvement in the system of panchayat raj in terms of good governance with secular an unbiased outlook. The researcher has also tried to unearth the nature of role being played by the elected women members and the related problems they face in their day to day activities. For this purpose, the researcher has gone through an extensive review of literature and attempted field study to gain knowledge about the ground realities. Although, may not be the final, but still it is expected that new researchers and academicians may consider this effort as a tool to go for further research. Policy makers and social service providers may take it as one of many ways to empower women of the country so that they can contribute to the protection and promotion of good governance in both rural and national decision making mechanism.