CHAPTER VI

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

On the basis of the analysis made in the previous chapters the summary of findings and the major suggestions are presented in this chapter.

Objectives of the study

1. To analyse the socio-economic background of the sample respondents selected for the study.

2. To assess the participation of common women and women Panchayat members in grassroot level development.

3. To identify various pressures inhibiting the participation of women in grassroot level development.

4. To suggest measures for the active participation of women in grassroot level development activities.
Socio-economic Analysis of the Respondents

1. More than 75 per cent of both the categories of respondents belong to the 31 to 40 years and the above 40 years age group.

2. The majority of the women are married. Unmarried women are found to be less inclined to participate at the Panchayat level activities.

3. The majority of the women Panchayat members are educated up to high school and above. More than 90 percent of the NHG members are educated up to high school level and below.

4. In both the groups the majority of the respondents are housewives. Less than one-fifth of the Panchayat members and more than one-third of the NHG members are earners. The occupational pattern differs widely between the two groups of respondents, since the employed Panchayat members are found in the organised sector unlike the other group, who are daily wage workers.

5. Most of the respondents in both the categories belong to nuclear families. In comparison, more women in the NHGs are from joint families than the women Panchayat members.

6. The majority of both the groups have small families consisting of four members. Medium-sized and large families are found more among the common women than among the Panchayat members.
7. The majority (69 percent) of the women Panchayat members earn a monthly income of Rs.1000 (their monthly honorarium) and the rest earn more than that. The majority (65 percent) of the NHG members are non-earners and the rest earn below Rs. 1000 per month.

8. Except a few, all the respondents from both the categories own land.

9. Of the sample women Panchayat members, 98 percent own more than 50 cents of land whereas, in the other category, the majority (93 per cent) five to 50 cents.

10. The annual family income of both the categories of respondents is low. The annual family income of the women Panchayat members is higher than that of the women in the NHGs.

The socio-economic analysis of the two categories of respondents shows that, comparatively, the women Panchayat members are better placed than the NHG members.
Probability of Women’s Participation by Socio economic Variables

1. Age influences women’s participation as the probability of participation increases with the age of respondents.

2. A direct correlation is observed between the educational level and the level of participation. The level of participation increases with the level of education.

3. Marital status has a clear say in women’s participation in Panchayat activities outside the home. The probability of participation of married women is found to be greater than that of unmarried women. Women who are separated or widowed record even greater probability.

4. The probability of participation of women who belong to nuclear families is more than that of women from joint families.

5. Occupational status positively influences the level of participation. There is a higher probability of participation in the case of employed women than the unemployed ones.

6. When the income of the family is high, the probability of participation is also high. So, the level of participation is influenced by the family income of the women.

So, socio-economic variables like age, education, occupation, marital status, family type and family income influence women’s participation at the grassroot level. So, the first two hypotheses formulated for the present study has been statistically validated.
Participation of NHG members

1. Women started associating with the NHGs only recently as the majority (75 percent) had joined within the last two years.

2. Multiple responsibilities of women such as taking care of children, household work and income earning work outside the home restrict the regular participation of one-third of the women in the NHGs.

3. Cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of children, apart from farm work and animal husbandry, are the daily items of work that women in general are daily engaged in.

4. According to many of the respondents, (91 percent) the NHGs empower women. Micro credit and other economic benefits are the ways through which the NHGs empower women.

5. Almost all the NHGs are engaged in micro credit. The Panchayats implement other welfare programmes also through the NHGs.

6. For many respondents (78 percent) their family expenditure has increased due to newly acquired knowledge. Buying electrical appliances and other commodities and expenditure on health, education and travel are the reasons for the increase in expenditure. Exposure to the outside world through group activities has caused the change in the life style of the respondents.
7. The majority (58 percent) of the members of the NHGs do not discuss general issues and the problems of the locality. As the majority of the groups are engaged in economic activities like micro credit their subject of discussion is limited to their group activity only,

8. The majority of the group members submit requests to the Panchayat for getting benefits, group loans and the like on the basis of the discussions held in the groups,

9. The members of the NHGs have no role in the mobilization and the utilisation of the Panchayat’s resources

10. The NHGs play no part in the decision-making process in the Panchayat as they do not come to know about or influence the decision-making at the Panchayat level. The NHGs have a limited function—that of a channel for implementing economic programmes in the Panchayat.

11. The majority of the members of the NHGs (85 percent) either never or only occasionally attend the Gram Sabha meetings convened in their Panchayat.

12. Those who attend the Gram Sabha meetings are silent spectators as they do not participate in the discussions or raise the issues and the problems of the locality.

13. The common women are unaware of the financial allotments to their Wards.
14. More than one-third of the women want to do social work for the welfare of women and children.

15. The majority (86 percent) do not want to contest the elections to the Panchayat again. Lack of interest, lack of time and difficulties caused by income earning activities besides restrictions in the family inhibit many.

16. The case studies reveal that women generally attend only those Gram Sabha meetings that are convened for the selection of beneficiaries of various programmes. Moreover, there is rampant corruption and partisan consideration in giving benefits in the Panchayats. The beneficiary list finalised in the Gram Sabha meeting is often altered at the time of implementation.

17. Improper convening of the meeting, inhibitions like familial disregard, restrictions on women’s participation in such meetings and household responsibilities reduce women’s initiative to turn up at such meetings.

18. Economic benefits are the motivating factor behind the increased level of participation of women in the NHGs.

19. The lack of awareness of women members regarding the functions and powers of the Gram Sabha as well as their own rights and duties in the Panchayati Raj setup has turned the Gram Sabha into a mere beneficiary selection unit under the decentralised planning system.
Participation of Women Panchayat Members

1. Reservation is the single most important factor, apart from compulsion of political parties, personal interest and family influence behind the participation of women in the Panchayat elections.

2. The majority (88 percent) of the women respondents contested in reserved seats.

3. Except a few (4 percent) independent candidates, all the women contested with political parties’ support.

4. The majority are new to the field and have no previous experience. The rest have had experience in socio-political activities prior to their entry into Panchayat politics.

5. The majority are first timers in the Panchayat Council. Only a few (8 percent) have retained their seats for a second time. Most of the ex-members who enrolled after the enactment of the Panchayati Raj Act withdrew from contesting. Those who have been elected more than twice and have long-term experience are very few (two percent).

6. The majority (62 percent) of the women had close relatives, especially husbands (30 percent), in the field of politics.
7. Most of the women members are found in the Welfare and the Finance Committees of the Panchayats. The Development Committees offer representation to only a few women (nine percent). As such there is gender discrimination in work division.

8. Women representatives are sidelined in assigning responsible positions in Panchayat Committees. Only eight percent are Chairpersons of different Committees. Of which six percent are found in Welfare Committees.

9. Women Panchayat members settle various issues like family problems, litigation, labour problems of the people of their Wards.

10. The majority report party interference in the activities of the Panchayat.

11. Independent decision-making is hardly possible as 93 percent report that they have never acted against party decisions relating to the activities of the Panchayat.

12. Women’s participation in the party structure is grossly inadequate. Only five percent of the women members hold official positions in the local area committees of various parties.

13. According to the majority (59 percent), there are special considerations and gender bias in assigning official positions in the organisational structure of the party.
14. The majority (72 percent) face opposition in Panchayat from various quarters like opposition party, the general public, one's own party etc.

15. Many (98 percent) women Panchayat members face problems in implementing development activities in the Panchayat. Delay, lack of funds, opposition and lack of cooperation are the major problems cited by them.

16. The majority of the women members face problems in various Committee meetings. They are sidelined in Committees. Lack of proper discussion on various matters makes it difficult for them to cope with their functions. A few of them report caste based segregation and difficulty due to the lack of an active role in the financial affairs of the Panchayat.

17. The majority of the current incumbents (55 percent) want to withdraw from future elections to the Panchayat. Independent decision-making is hardly possible as far as women members are concerned.

18. Except 13 percent, all of them expressed reluctance to contest in the elections without the support of a party. No chance of success, lack of funds, no prospects in the future are the reasons cited by the majority (66 percent)
Pressures Inhibiting Women’s Participation at the Grassroots

I. Family

1. Women’s participation at the grassroots is influenced by the responsibility of the women to take care of their children. Many women in both the categories face difficulties due to their role as mother in the first place.

2. The thinking that for women household work comes first and any other work is secondary forces many women to regard their outside responsibilities as less important. The NHG women are influenced more by this kind of dictums in their family.

3. Observing a strict pattern of behaviour in outside activities as a result of the moral burden vested thrust upon women to keep up the family’s dignity and good name obstructs the active participation of both categories of women-Panchayat members (33 percent) and NHG women (62 percent).

4. The entire responsibility of the family (as one’s husband is otherwise busy) hinders women’s participation. More of the women Panchayat members than the NHG women found it difficult to manage both the duties together.

5. Male dominance in the family restricts women’s participation.
Except in the case of problem numbers 2 and 3 above, there is no significant difference between the two categories of respondents. As such women in general, irrespective of their position, face difficulties in participation in the activities outside the home due to the difficulties they face relating to their family.

II. Freedom of Mobility

Due to the insistence on getting prior permission to go out, the majority of the respondents in both the groups face difficulties in participation. Comparing the groups, the women Panchayat members (61 percent) are in a better position than the common women (85 percent)

1. The majority of the common women (67 percent) and a minority (48 percent) of the Panchayat women face restrictions in participation due to having to keep to a stipulated time to reach home once they go out.

2. Restrictions on and difficulties in traveling to distant places are also hurdles to women’s participation.

3. Women in both the groups face difficulties in going out in the morning due to time bound domestic work.

4. The majority of the common women and one-third of the women Panchayat members face difficulties in participation due to their inability to take decision regarding journeys on their own.
Regarding the problems related to mobility, a significant difference is found between the groups. It is found that the women Panchayat members enjoy more freedom of mobility than the common women. However, the difference between the groups is relative and a substantial proportion in the Panchayat member category (more than one-third) face obstacles to participation due to restrictions like the common women.

III. Politics

1. The majority of the women at the grassroots face problems in participation due to corruption and bickering in local politics. Women Panchayat members who are contenders in the field encounter difficulties more than the common women.

2. The majority (69 percent) of the women Panchayat members face problems in participation due to the nexus between political parties and the underworld.

3. The participation of women is adversely affected by the indifference and the lack of confidence among people towards people’s representatives. Comparatively, it is found that the Panchayat members are in a more difficult position than the common women.

4. In both the categories more than 90 percent of the women are constrained in political participation due to the violence perpetrated against women.
5. The majority of the women at the Panchayat level face obstacles to participation due to political favouritism.

While comparing the two groups of women with regard to problems related to the field of politics, the difference between the groups is found to be highly significant. The majority of the women representatives faced difficulties more than the common women due to these problems.

Probability of Women’s Participation in Activities outside the Home

Of the 15 variables in the Checklist seven are found to be significantly influencing women’s participation outside the home. They are:

1. The dictum that household works come first and any other work is secondary.
2. Need to get prior permission to go out of the home
3. Have to reach home at stipulated time
4. Can not set out early in the morning.
5. Self decision for journey is not possible.
6. Nexus between political parties and the underworld.
7. Indifference and lack of confidence among people towards politicians.

In all the seven variables, higher probability is found for negative response (i.e., ‘No’ response) than positive response (‘Yes’ response) That means presence of these problems reduce the chance of women’s participation outside the home. The major results are;

1. The probability of participation tends to reduce when women are bound to perform household work primarily.
2. Restrictions on mobility and lack of freedom to decide one’s own movements inhibit women’s active participation. The probability of participation increases as restrictions decrease.

3. The negative attitude of people towards politics and the degraded political condition discourage women’s initiative to participate.

Respondents Ranking of Various problems hindering their Participation

On the factors hindering women’s participation listed in the Checklist it is found that the majority of both the categories of women identified the problems in a significantly similar order. The factors are:

1. Societal non-acceptance of gender equality
2. Reluctance to accept women as leaders
3. Belief that women do not have time for public activities
4. The belief that housekeeping is the primary duty of women
5. Prejudice against women’s faculties
6. Spreading stories about women social workers
7. The belief those women are for housekeeping and men for public work.
8. Imposition of moral values and social taboos more on women than on men.

The rank correlation obtained to be 0.983 which is significant at 5 percent level. That means significant correlation between the groups is found with regard to the factors hindering their participation. These factors
adversely influence the participation of women in general, irrespective of any difference on the basis of position, status, education or level of income.

Suggestions

1. Measures to ensure a feeling of security during travel and safe boarding facilities for women should be provided.

2. Sensitising people through awareness programmes on women’s participation is to be undertaken at regular intervals.

3. Educating children on gender equality and participation is necessary.

4. Special vocational training programmes for girls to make them self-sufficient in life are necessary.

5. Wide publicity through mass media should be resorted to, to educate the people.

6. Transparency in governance at the local level and confidence building among the people will enhance participation.

7. People’s representatives should act as agents of change.

8. Neighborhood Groups are to be reactivated to function as a corollary to the Gram Sabha.

9. Women representatives should be given equal share in power positions in the Panchayat administration,

10. Training programmes for promoting capacity building among the representatives should be organised in a sustained manner.

11. Support measures for working women members are to be implemented to aid them in fulfilling their functions without stress.
12. Strong measures to curb violence against women representatives are to be enforced.

13. Women should be given equal representation in all positions of power including in the organisational structure of political parties.

14. Strong political will and a change of mindset in favour of women to effect change for gender justice is essential.

Conclusion

Women’s participation is thus found limited at the grassroot level. Women in the Panchayat are still treated as beneficiaries of various programmes. Besides, the common women wield no influence in the decentralised planning structure. They do not know what their rights and duties are. Male hegemony and the domination of power politics limit women’s role as people’s representatives to a marginally low level. Problems in the family, restrictions on mobility and an unhealthy political atmosphere inhibit their active participation. Prejudices based on a biased attitude towards women as participants check their role as equal participants outside the home.

It can be concluded that half-hearted efforts and piecemeal approaches to solve these problems will not suffice, as the issue of participation is multidimensional in nature, encompassing the social, economic, cultural and political domains of society. Hence, in order to effect change with justice to half of the population in the right direction, a concerted and genuine effort is essential.