Chapter 5
CONCLUSIONS

In this thesis an attempt has been made to understand the nature of political consciousness pertaining to democracy at grass-root level. Primarily, this case study tried to map out the trajectory of political consciousness of two districts: Shimla and Bilaspur, representing the upper and lower regions of the state of Himachal Pradesh. As study progressed we came across four important broad themes. The themes are: nature of political consciousness, issues concerning participation and dynamism of democracy, formation of identity politics with multiple political aspirations, and lastly the nature of substantive democracy in delineating the dynamism (strengths and weaknesses) of grass-root democracy.

When we look at nature of democratic upsurge and its consequences for the citizens who constitute the democratic polity, the case of Himachal Pradesh is unique. It belongs to the upper regions of Indian State. Culture, religious diversity and remnants of feudalism play crucial role in the political process in Himachal Pradesh. The present study tried to explore these terrains of contestations while focusing on two districts as representatives of diversifying political phenomena in the realms of democracy.

It would be pertinent to mention that during the re-organization of states and granting of state-hood to Himachal Pradesh, there have been various contributing factors that sharpened the nature of political consciousness among the citizens of the state. These factors include a pride and advantages for separate identity. In a due course of time, governmental policies created the aspirations of social, economic, educational and political mobility among the masses of the Himachal Pradesh. And as a matter of consequence of these historical happenings
in the life of emergent state, we noticed that there have been a shifting impact of these policies and programmes of the government. When we analysed the democratic, social, political and economic profile of two districts some revealing factors and indicators came to the fore.

The regional diversity in the formation of political consciousness in the upper and lower regions of the state signify two important factors and these includes, (a) the formation of group politics and issues pertaining to groupism within the social and political structures of the society, (b) regionalism and other factors such as caste, education, economic and regional disparities. Political consciousness is a process and as an outcome of the democratization within the two regions of the state that has created the conditions of conflict formation among different stake holders of the society. To illustrate this point our study, demonstrates that in upper regions of Himachal, community and communitarian ethos (kinship and caste) play an important role in determining the diverse participation at grass-root levels. On the other hand in the lower regions of the state, it is party affiliations and loyalties that play important role in determining the nature of political consciousness and further expands the discourse of political contestations to mould the consciousness of participating actors and groups to articulate their demands and political aspirations. The contrast between two districts indicates towards the formation of varied kinds of political consciousness in evaluating the nature of democracy and political preferences at grass-root level.

At another level of our study, there have been a few important indicators that capture the participatory aspects of democracy and it is in this context that 73rd amendment has created a significant space for opportunities to diverse sections of society. It has also provided an opportunity to directly participate in the decision making processes of the democracy in the state. As a matter of consequence, it has led to the process of percolation of different kinds of contestation among groups,
communities and parties to the grassroots. It articulates and highlights their own interests in a conflicting and contesting manner, therefore, we can say that upcoming and functioning of PRIs through government processes has created a space for conflict formation among groups and communities at the village levels.

Another significant aspect of our research indicates the formation of identity politics and its consequences for grass-root democracy in the state. It includes primordial identities such as caste, kinship and regions and issues pertaining to personal faiths/ beliefs. In order to substantiate issues related with identity politics our study informs that there has been an emergence of different aspirations of identities. These include local, regional, caste and communitarian identities. These identities have generated conflicting claims about social, political and economic resources and distribution of these resources among varied groups with different identity orientations that impacts and influences the decision making processes and politics of representation in the state. And as a consequence of such conflicts concerning resources of goods and policies, it created the conditions of conflict formation and democratic political dynamism in a static society of Himachal Pradesh. Thus, we can say that there is no single set of political preference determining the choices of these contesting groups and communities. Strikingly enough, our study also reveals that in the upper regions of the state i.e. Shimla, the issues of conflict formation and political preference is broadly determined by issues such as caste, personal relationship, kinship and a bit of regionalism. On the other hand at the lower regions of the state i.e. Bilaspur, it is the party affiliations and loyalties of various kinds that play important role in the process of conflict formation and political preferences. Another interesting finding of our study reveals that at the process conflict formation and political preferences in turn facilitates deepening of democracy in Himachal Pradesh. It is community and communitarian factor that play very important role at both regions of the
state. Thus, the process of conflict formation at the grass-root level enhances the ongoing process of the democratization of the Himachal society and brightens up dynamism and diversity within the state, which further helps in deepening democracy at the grassroots.

The findings of our study indicate the substantive nature of democracy in the state concerning certain issues and aspirations that emerged from everyday life of people’s discourse in this hill state of India. And here it would be interesting to note that in the upper region of the state caste issues such as inter-caste and intra-caste rivalry, social, cultural and communitarian ethos play an important role in determining the aspects of participation, delivery of justice and dynamics of people preferences for strengthening of democracy. Though there are different kinds of responses towards the directions of the democracy. When we look at the some important factors of caste, community and social and cultural ethos, at lower regions of the state here party solidarity and loyalty play important role in decision making processes of the democracy. But we have yet to determine and discover that whether it can be called vibrant democracy or a process of the grass-root democratization which is in the process of unfolding itself towards sharpening of political consciousness. However, despite all these negative aspects of identity politics and ambivalences of ruptures in the political processes, the introduction of PRIs has been contributing a great deal in democratizing the historically feudal society of Himachal Pradesh. It has raised the level of political consciousness and increased popular participation in the development programmes.