CHAPTER - VIII
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In the present thesis, the issue of Panchayati Raj Institutions, its functioning as viewed by the people and the electorates has been analysed. In addition, the emphasis is laid to understand the role of panchayats in rural development and the power struggle that affects the composition and functioning of the Panchayats after 73rd Amendment. This descriptive study is based on the Gram Panchayats selected randomly from the three districts having different Human Development Index. From the selected Gram Panchayats, the members of the Gram Sabha (selected randomly) and the electorates of all the three levels of PRIs have been interviewed with the help of a structured schedule.

The socio-economic profile of the respondents reveals that the proportion of the male respondents is high as compared to that of the female in the selected villages. This is the dominant trend in the rural society.

Majority of the respondents are of middle age group. The proportion of very young (7.3 per cent) and very old (2.5 per cent) is nominal. Similarly, most of the respondents are from the upper castes and the proportion of Brahmins is found to be low.

Data also reveals that the Hindu constitutes 37.8 per cent of the total respondents as against the Sikh who have the majority constituting 57.3 per cent. Christians and Muslims have nominal proportion among the total respondents.

The literacy level in the selected villages is very high as nearly 82 per cent of the respondents are literate. Among the literate, majority of the respondents are matriculate (32.8 per cent) and many have professional qualification (9.3 per cent). Most of the professionally qualified respondents have been found in the Non-Scheduled Castes headed villages. Further, more graduates and postgraduates are found in the villages with the Scheduled Castes sarpanch as compared to the villages with the Non-Scheduled Castes sarpanch. This may be because in the former case Gram Panchayats are emphasizing more on education than on health and the like.

It is interesting to know that the majority of the respondents are found to be engaged in service sector as a main occupation (61.3 per cent). This shows a changing trend in rural economy. It may be due to non viability of agriculture or education has helped them to take up service sector as a main occupation. Some people in the
villages have subsidiary occupation as well and primary sector activities are the main secondary occupation of the respondents.

In rural society, land is a symbol of prestige. Data reveals that majority of the respondents are small farmers followed by medium and large farmers. In the Non-Scheduled Castes headed villages the number of marginal holdings is more because of fragmentation of land holdings and that is the reason the proportion of the respondents engaged in services is high in these villages as compared to that in the Scheduled Caste headed ones. Data also shows that there is difference in owned and operational land holdings of an individual which supports that process of leasing-out and leasing-in is operational in these villages; may be due to large number of marginal holdings and less viability of agriculture. Since, many of the respondents are engaged in tertiary sector with primary sector activities as secondary occupation, the annual income level of the respondents in majority of the cases is above one lac in both type of villages. From this, it seems that income level is increasing so is the standard of living in the rural society.

Marriage has been one of the important status determiners in the Indian society. It is found that maximum numbers of the respondents (78.9 per cent) are married. The proportion of unmarried, divorcee and widow is quite low.

Data with regard to family organisation shows that 52.0 per cent of the total respondents still have joint family. Nearly 12 per cent have extended family. Nuclear family is found among 36.2 per cent of the total respondents. Although, there is fragmentation of the joint family structure but still nuclear family is not a dominant phenomenon the rural society. A big proportion of nuclear families among the respondents may be attributed to rising income level associated with tendency towards individuals to improve economic status in the society. It also has its implications on family size as most of the respondents have families consisting of 3-5 members. Also majority of the families in the sample have more than one earner and same is the case with dependents. The enactment of reservation as per 73rd Amendment Act has not only shattered the dominance of the male but also of the upper castes. 73rd Act has given access to the female and the Scheduled Castes in the democratic institutions of local governance. In all the three tiers of PRIs, female and the Scheduled Castes are present but their number is just in accordance with the reservation limit.
On the other hand, it is the middle aged people who get represented in the PRIs. Further, old and young people are not coming as representatives at all the three tiers of PRIs.

It has been observed that all the three levels of PRIs, majority of the electorate are the Sikhs. The proportion of the Hindu and other religious groups is very low. This reflects the dominance of the Sikhs in the population composition of Punjab.

The data reveals that out of total sample, majority of the electorates in Gram Panchayats are literate. All the electorates in the Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads are also literate. It may be concluded that literacy is catching up in the rural areas and the educated people are actively participating in the political process. It is further evident from the data as only one of the electorate is having educational level up to primary; others are matric or above.

The six panchayats under study are multi-caste in composition with numerous castes being represented in the social structure of the villages. The Scheduled Castes constitute 50.0 per cent of the representatives followed by Jats (45.8 per cent). It can be concluded that the Scheduled Castes are actively participating in PRIs at the village level. But at the Panchayat Samiti level the situation is quite different; the percentage of the Scheduled Castes has reduced to 46.7 and that of Jats has increased to 53.3 and same is the situation at Zila Parishad level. This may be inferred that the reservation at the village level does not ensure their high representation at the block or district level. Moreover, the representation of backward castes is almost excluded at the block and district level of the PRIs.

A high percentage of the total electorates from the Gram Panchayats are primarily involved in agriculture and service sector. The data about the electorates of Panchayat Samitis reveal that majority of them are cultivators (60.0 per cent). Those in service and shop keeping are less (33.3 and 6.7 per cent). At the Zila Parishad level, the proportion of cultivators and service men is equal. It has also been seen that electorates at the village level to a large extent and at the Panchayat Samiti level to a small extent have additional occupation besides their main one.

It is observed that out of the total sample at the village level, majority of the electorates are small farmers (50.0 per cent). The percentage of electorates who are medium and large farmers is very less (10.0 per cent each). The data concerning the Panchayat Samitis reveals that the majority of the electorates are having small land holdings (77.8 per cent). There is no representation of marginal farmers at the
Panchayat Samiti level and same is the case at the Zila Parishad level. The representation of medium farmers (7.5 acre- 15 acre) is more at the Zila Parishad than at the Panchayat Samiti level. This may be inferred that as one move in the hierarchy of PRIs structure the representation of the marginal and small farmers decrease and that of the medium farmers increase. In other words higher the political representative body higher is the representation of the rich people. This reflects the marginalization of the lower socio-economic status groups but the fact is otherwise. The Scheduled Castes who are elected to Panchayat Samiti too have a small or medium land holding. In other words, (economic) class of the representatives gets precedence even among the marginalized social groups (Scheduled Castes). This may be a reflection of movement of the Scheduled Castes in the political structure because of land ownership. Of course, reservation has opened their avenues of political participation in the democratic institutions functional at various levels.

Out of the total sample, majority of the electorates in the Gram Panchayats (33.3 per cent) are having annual income between Rs.50,000 to Rs.1 lac, followed by those having income ranging between Rs.1 to Rs.2 lac (29.2 per cent). Only 12.5 per cent of the electorates are having an annual income below Rs.50,000. Further, the representation of the electorates having income between Rs.50,000 to Rs.1 lac and 1 to 2 lac is high at the Panchayat Samiti level. The data pertaining to the Zila Parishads to a large extent follows the pattern as exhibited at the Panchayat Samiti level. Of course, those having income more than Rs.1 lac are over-represented at the Zila Parishad than those having income up to Rs.1 lac. None of the representatives has income below Rs.50,000 at the Panchayat Samiti or Zila Parishad level. So, this supports our earlier inference that economic standing helps one to attain political position and support in the democratic institutions. In the other words, caste, class and politics are inter related and in this relationship, those marginalized persons are entering who have a class position in the rural society. In short, reservation of the weaker sections in the political bodies has helped the creamy layer to take such advantages.

Prevalence of joint family (83.3 per cent) as is evident from the data is way ahead of the nuclear ones (16.7 per cent). In the Panchayat Samitis the trend is reverse as majority of the electorates are having nuclear families (66.7 per cent) and the rest have joint families. On the contrary, at the Zila Parishad level, most of the electorates have joint family (75.0 per cent). The representation of the joint family
seems to be still high among the electorates and it not giving way to the nuclear family. So, joint family is inconsistent or turning nuclear could not be verified from the data related to the electorate though the data about the respondents refer to a changing trend.

In the Gram Panchayats, families with 6-8 member’s strength are found to be maximum (50.0 per cent) followed by families with 3-5 members (45.8 per cent). Families with above 8 members are not found. Thus, comparatively preference for large families is found to be on decline. The trend is reverse at the block level. The data from the Panchayat Samitis shows that majority of the electorates are having 3-5 family members (66.7 per cent) followed by 6-8 member families (26.7 per cent). The number of families with more than 8 members is negligible. In the three Panchayat Samitis under study there is high percentage of families with 3-5 members. Further, data regarding the family size of electorates working at the Zila Parishad level have more families of 6-8 members (41.7 per cent) followed by families of above 8 members (33.3 per cent). The analysis reveals that the representation of the electorates having families with more than 8 members increase from the village to the Zila Parishad level. This further depicts that the number of family members in the joint family setting is being restricted.

As per the Constitution, the elections of the Gram Panchayats are to be held after every five years. Majority of the respondents (84 per cent) states that the elections are held regularly after five years where as some reply that the elections are held after a gap of more than five years. It means that nearly 16 per cent of the respondents are not aware of the last elections.

In the Scheduled Castes headed villages, majority of the respondents finds that being a Scheduled Castes (32.4 per cent) in the reserved constituency is important. But having political affiliation (34.3 per cent) irrespective of caste helps one to dominate in the elections. In the Non-Scheduled Castes headed villages, it is the Upper Castes that dominates the elections. In view of the respondents, numerical strength is another variable that defines the dominant position in the village elections. Personal reputation is not of much significance in the process but ability to lead and connection with the leaders of political parties does have significance. For this, the respondents hold that the elections are not contested on party line but certain factors may have a prominent role in getting elected. As per the respondents, the main factor that contributes the elections to panchayat as a member is political affiliation of one or
the other regional political party; may be ruling or opposite; the fact largely advocated by Beteille (1965) in his study of Sripuram village in Tanjore district. Other factors like money and personal reputation have negligible impact. The electorates have also reported that the political affiliation helps them in elections and later to get more grants.

Before reservation mostly land lords have dominated the election process but after reservation the situation has changed as only a small percentage of the total respondents hold that landlord and Upper Castes dominate in the elections. Out of the total sample, fifty per cent of the respondents hold that Jats are having more representation in the Gram Panchayats, whereas other fifty per cent find that it is the Scheduled Castes. It is true as in the Non-Scheduled Castes headed panchayats there is more representation of Jats and vice versa in the case of the Scheduled Castes headed panchayats. This corroborates the above that Caste is an important variable and reservation has strengthened the position of the Scheduled Castes to enter the political sphere. This observation is supported by Pal (1996) as well.

In the traditional system, village elders constituted the panchayats but the introduction of PRIs and its democratization, avenues for the young irrespective of caste or class have opened up. As a consequence, the panchayats are not being represented by the old. Data in this regard provides that majority of the electorates in all levels of PRIs are in the middle age i.e. 36 to 55 years. This means that young people are participating in the elections and participation of older people is decreasing as it used to be.

The role of development of the weaker sections of the society (including women and the Scheduled Castes) has been assigned to the Gram Panchayats. In view of the electorates, Gram Panchayats have provided training, employment and facilities to the weaker sections. These have also implemented various welfare schemes for them. As per the electorates, the Scheduled Castes headed Gram Panchayats have emphasized on providing training and employment while those headed by the Non-Scheduled Castes on providing facilities and welfare schemes to these sections.

So far as relation with female elected representatives; the study finds that members are usually sympathetic towards the female members. Some of the respondents have hold that no importance is given to the female members and some are of the view that male members listen to the female members but do not act accordingly. This depicts not only the lower status of the female members and their
negligible role in decision making; a fact elaborated by Lieten (1988) about women electorates in Bengal. This is also supported by some of the electorates who are of the view that female are participating passively in the process. The main reason for the passive participation as cited by the electorates is that it is the husbands or any other male member of the family who participate in the process on their behalf. This is corroborated by Salgoankar (2000) and Singh et al (1995). Some percentage of the electorates has said that female members participate but they are not listened. A few of them have cited ignorance of the female members regarding the matter. It is also revealed that in the Non-Scheduled Castes headed panchayats passive participation of the female members is high. Thus, reservation in local bodies has not improved participation of women in decision making process. Pai (2000) too has found the same.

Another weaker section, whose participation has been ensured under the Panchayat Act, is the Scheduled Castes. The study points out that big proportion of them do not participate and if participate they do so on provocation in the decision making as expressed by the respondents. In this regard, the majority of the electorates (70.8 per cent) are of the view that the Scheduled Castes members are participating actively, rest believe that these members are participating passively. Further data reveals that in the Scheduled Castes headed panchayats as compared to the Non-Scheduled Castes headed panchayats, the Scheduled Castes members are participating more actively. The reason for passive participation as cited by the majority of the electorates (42.8 per cent) is that the Scheduled Castes are still given lower status in the panchayats. Some are of the view that land owners dominate the Gram Panchayats so the Scheduled Castes are not listened. It is also seen that in the Non-Scheduled Castes headed panchayats, the Scheduled Castes members are given lower status but it is not in case of Scheduled Castes headed panchayats.

The respondents stress that while making plans, the Gram Panchayats take into account local needs and availability of local resources and funds. The electorates of Gram Panchayats have also held that local needs are taken into account. Every panch is asked to give needs of the area and then accordingly plans are made by the Gram Panchayats. Environmental conservation is a major issue while formulating plans by the Gram Panchayats. Further, in the non- Scheduled Castes headed panchayats local needs are given more consideration as compared to the Scheduled Castes headed ones.
Majority of the electorates from the Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads are not satisfied with the functioning of PRIs. The main reason for this is the political interference at all levels. Bureaucracy is another hurdle in smooth functioning. This fact is supported by Singh (1998). Even Pal’s study (1996) has also corroborated the above fact but he holds that in spite of this, State level political leaders and bureaucracy have a major role to play in the functioning of the Panchayati Raj system in the State.

The electorates of the Panchayat Samitis have largely (60.0 per cent) held that it is the political leaders who distribute funds to villages. Sometimes even Panchayat Samitis are not taken into confidence and cheques are distributed by local MLAs and MPs themselves. A few of the electorates are of the view that BDO himself decide distribution and allocation of funds to Gram Panchayats.

As per the 1994 Act, Gram Panchayats do not have any direct right for taxes but these can impose tax subject to any rules made under the Act or any order made by the State Government. The Gram Panchayats under study do not collect or impose any kind of tax as reported by the electorates. The respondents from the Non-Scheduled Castes headed villages are in favour of giving rights of tax collection to the Gram Panchayats. In the scheduled Castes headed villages people are not in favour in this. On query, it is found that giving such right may lead to struggle within the panchayat or the people may defy the authority of the panchayats.

The level of awareness about their rights/duties/functions among the electorates at all the three levels of PRIs is less than expected. They are aware about the various schemes where funds flow from Centre or State Government, but lack awareness about the general development functions.

Regarding utilisation of funds at the Gram Panchayat level, all the electorates are of the view that the funds are properly utilized for the purpose these are sanctioned may be the grants are received for the purpose twice or thrice. As reported by them there is no flexibility in utilisation of funds.

All the electorates irrespective of the panchayat category have reported that auditing of the grants utilised by the Gram Panchayats is done at regular intervals.

Respondents are of the view that the Scheduled Castes headed panchayats get more funds from MLAs, rural development projects and other Government schemes as compared to the Non-Scheduled Castes headed panchayats. This may be because of the emphasis laid by the respective Governments on the development of the weaker
sections. It may also be because of the variation in terms of party affiliation. The same is apprehended by the electorates of different levels that political affiliation helps them to get more grants.

The respondents under study have accepted existence of factions in the villages. With the change in the traditional values of the people in the field of kinship and family, the aspiration for individual gains, status and honor have brought political and self interest ahead of others. Data shows that the basis of factions is either the political party or caste. Choudhary (1987) too finds the same. In spite of this, the respondents have stressed on positive role where as Choudhary find more of its negative role rather the positive one. As reported by the respondents, factions play positive role in the working of panchayats by checking misuse of funds and functions performed by the panchayats. While playing negative role these factions hamper village development and they are critique of panchayat functions.

Some respondent are of the opinion that people in the villages have forcibly occupied common land. In the villages headed by the Scheduled Castes the number of such cases is more as compared to the Non-Scheduled Castes headed ones. This may be because the political and bureaucratic interference and political affiliation with the ruling party of the panchayats have contributed and also encouraged the people to forcibly occupy village common land.

Majority of the respondents (51.0 per cent) states that the Panchayats organize lectures to provide information about the development schemes to the rural people. The seminars/workshops are organized for electorates of Gram Panchayat by the Department of rural development to provide information about schemes of rural development and in turn the electorates organize lectures in the villages to transmit that knowledge to the people.

The strategies of rural development do not limit creating awareness about various schemes of Government but to take concerted efforts in the field of raising crop production through the introduction of new varieties of crops, improvement in cattle stock, promote horticulture and other subsidiary occupation that augment income of the rural people and generate employment opportunities. The respondents were asked to provide information about the efforts made by the Panchayats in this regard. Although these functions are in the preview of Gram Panchayats under the Act, but none of the panchayats under study is doing anything in this direction as reported by the respondents. When the same question was put to the Gram Panchayat
members, they too showed indifference. The electorates were having knowledge of Government schemes like Indira Awas Yojana and MNREGA but they were not having knowledge of development schemes where they have to put efforts.

To conclude, the study reveals that caste in rural society is still important and caste identities have assumed greater significance with the implementation of reservation policy at the grass root levels of PRIs. Legislative measures have sharpened the wedge between castes particularly upper and lower ones and this is supported by political parties who try to avail political benefits by supporting the lower castes. This is evident from the fact that more funds are transferred to the Scheduled Castes headed Gram Panchayats than to the Non-Scheduled Castes headed Gram Panchayats under various schemes and even from the discretionary funds of the political leaders at the State and Centre level. This way caste and politics seems to be interrelated. Not only caste and politics are interrelated, the power holders invariably represent the upper strata. These groups exploit the numerical strength of women and the Scheduled Castes to their favour by either supporting members having allegiance to the ruling party or allowing them to forcibly occupy village common land to generate false consciousness of class (land owning). In the long run, the politically elite class continues to rule the groups who have been exploited and dominated so far to their advantage. In other words, the elite class (the lions) takes advantage of the numerical dominance of other groups (the foxes) to sustain their political position at various levels of PRIs, the theoretical formulation given by Pareto regarding circulation of elites. Of course, Pareto talks of derivations and residues in relation to power structure in combination. In the democratic structure of PRIs, numerical strength is a constant factor to attain power where as economic status; political connections outside the village, grants received are the variable factors. The combination of these defines the power politics of the village irrespective of reservation or not.

The study further affirms that weaker sections particularly the SCs are forcibly occupying village common land and such occupancy is more in the villages headed by the Scheduled Castes sarpanch. It is justified through the support of political parties and lack of awareness (intended /unintended) about the duties related to forced occupancy of land and its vacation. This process is largely taking place because the lower castes are trying to control land with all means. Such tendency originates from the traditional system of power structure in which upper castes have been drawing
their power through their hold over land. So, land is not only a symbol of prestige but of power as well. Gill (2003) too has found the same. In other words, the land and its ownership supports the power structure in which land owners have continued since long and they want stability in their position of power. On the contrary, the Scheduled Castes with their numerical strength and efforts to control the land want to change the power structure that has perpetuated in favour of the landed class and made their dominance in the political structure. It is in this context, the land owners have been termed as lions/rentiers and the Scheduled Castes as foxes/speculators. For this reason, land continues to be a symbol of power and prestige in the rural society.

PRIs are also considered as a means to empower not only the weaker sections but also the women. But the study avows that participation of women is limited to the extent of reservation. They are not important in power structure and decision making. It is the male counterpart of the family who actively participate in the decision making process. This reflects that as the prestigious male bastion in the village power structure starts breaking and allow women into its portal, it degrade the upper position of the male held so far. To cover it up, the male through their counterpart taking advantage of women reservation and their political linkage try to control the power structure. In spite of this, the women have started taking interest in the women related issues. It can be concluded that Panchayati Raj Institutions has at least initiated the process of women’s participation or empowerment.

The functioning of the PRIs is marred by political and bureaucratic interference particularly at the first and second tier because of the low level of awareness among the electorates about the functions/rights/duties. No doubt, constitutionally all these have been specified but power to exercise these functions/rights/duties have not been devolved to these elected representatives at all levels. This may be due to lack of political will on the part of the State Government. Pal (1996); Ghosh (1996) and Sharma (2001) too have similar observation. Even, the Gram Panchayats have not been given any right to generate resources to undertake rural development activities. They depend on Sate and Centre Government or other bodies for the same. There is no flexibility regarding utilisation of funds as funds are to be utilized for the purpose these are released. The study conducted by Balan et al (2009) conform the same. Interestingly, in politically influential villages, funds are released for the same purpose time and again. With these shortcomings, the PRIs are
not able to attain the objectives for which these have been enacted and for this reason, they are not contributing to rural development as was supposed to be.

In short, the efforts of the Government to ameliorate the social and economic position of the weaker sections through PRIs are hampered by the structural inequalities which have been perpetuating in the rural society. Such inequalities are further supported by the political structure. To attain the path of development of rural society, PRIs need to be strengthened by devolving powers including financial powers and use of the local resources including human resources. Such process may help these institutions to work more democratically without political interference and thereby, play an active role in the rural development.