Chapter -7

Conclusion and Suggestions

The concept of local government or Panchayat has filtered down from the Vedic times and this we know from the historical accounts. Villages and their administrative system have continued till today with minor variations intact in their concept. At the grass-root level, village was an economic as well as an administrative unit.

Presently, local government in India consists of two broad categories – Rural and Urban. Both these have been Constitutional Amendments in 1992. The full benefit of development can only be realized with full participation and the role of women can not be isolated from the total framework of development as they constitute half of the population. A review of the economic roles played by women in India shows that the traditional village community of India consisted of the cultivators, the artisans and those performing menial services, in which women played a distinctive and accepted role in the process of earning a livelihood for the family in both the marketing of products of agriculture and handicrafts.

Since, the Decade of women (1975 -85) women’s development has been conceptualized by equity, empowerment and rights based approaches, with varying emphasis on concerns like the condition/situation and the practical or strategic needs of women. A major drawback in this welfare approach was that women were net recipients and not participants in the agencies and programmes created for their own development. Then came the ‘Empowerment
Approach' through which gender bias could be eliminated and women could be a part of their own development schemes and projects.

In the Constituent Assembly of 1950, as well as while writing the 1974 towards Equality Report, women leaders rejected the notion of 'Quota' in the political decision making process. The National Perspective Plan (1988-2000), after a decade or so, categorically recommended 30 % of seats reserved for women in Panchayats. Finally, the 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts (1992) had a provision of reserving not less than 33 % of the total seats for women, both at the functionary as well as membership level. It is imperative to note here that within a span of 10 years, about 5 -6 million women have come to active politics by cause of reservation of seats in local government institution.

In the pervious chapters an attempt has been made to analyse in detail the outcome of empowerment of women in Panchayati Raj institutions in Himachal Pradesh as a consequence of the 73rd Amendment of the constitution. The present chapter focuses, the major findings of the study with some suggestions to improve the existing arrangement.

The present study is based on the basic assumption or hypothesis that the women leaders have failed to perform their duties at the grass-root level. The hypothesis was further divided into sub-hypothesis:

(i) Low literacy and lack of knowledge amongst women leaders have resulted in non-performance of their role.

(ii) The negligence and indifferent attitude of executives towards women leaders have resulted in dissatisfaction amongst them.
Findings of the present study reveal that despite deep-rooted systemic, cultural and political resistance, women have demonstrated the potential of challenging the problems of the society. The elected women representatives are engendering the development process at the grass-roots level with enabling support and capacity building by civil society agencies and women's groups. The representation of six million women in the PRIs, directly and indirectly, has given inputs to the processes of social mobilization. The new leadership of the PRIs has substituted the old rural leadership.

Findings of the Study

The Panchayati Raj is an ancient concept which has a long history in India. These are the oldest administrative institutions in our country. During Vedic era, powers vested in the hands of people in the hands of people and the organization was known as 'Panchayati System'. Description of Panchayats is available in famous books, such as jatakas, Ramayana and Kautilya and Arthashastra. As time passed by, they were brought under control of the king after which the village assembly lost much of its power and prestige but still certain matters were discussed in this assembly. Also, it was the connecting link between the village and central administration. The institution of local self governments received considerable attention during the British rule but the focus was entirely on the urban bodies. Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Gram Swaraj led to a consensus and a provision was made in the Constitution under the Directive Principles of State Policy in Article 4 which emphasized on the
powers and authority to be vested in village Panchayats. It was found the study that in 1948, Jawaharlal Nehru while inaugurating the conference of the ministers on Local Self Governments in the provinces, said, local self governments is and must be on the basis of any true system of democracy. Democracy must be built from below and not the top. In 1982, the government of India Resolution, for the first time, directed local governments to set up rural boards similar to municipal boards. Then in 1907, in the Report of the decentralization, it was said that an inquiry must be made into the financial and administrative relations of the government of India and the provincial governments that, it was found later in 1952 and 1953, two programme Community Development and National Extension Services, were launched respectively, but they failed to achieve their development objectives. Then came the Balwantrai Mehta Committee Report which came in 1957. The creation of P.R. in 1959 was held as a revolution. The Committee emphasized that there should be a three tier structure of local self governing bodies from the village to the district, adequate powers may be entrusted to these bodies to avoid examine state control, all developments programmes to be executed through these bodies, etc.

So, these P.R.Is became mainly executive agencies for the national and state plans. Then came the Ashok Mehta Committee Report in August 1978 and made 132 recommendations. The main recommendations that can be noted are that there should be a two tier set-up in the P.R. structure, i.e. a district level Zila Parishad and a Mandal Panchayat covering a population of 15,000 to 20,000, the term of PRIs to be four years and direct elections to be held simultaneously, a permanent amount grant of not less than Rs. 2.50 per
capita should be made to the Mandal Panchayats, etc. Ashok Mehta Report has made an attempt to revitalize the P. R. system as established according to the reconsideration's of Balwantrai Mehta Report.

It was highlighted during the study that there were a few more landmarks like the Chief Minister's Conference in 1979, Dantwala Committee in 1977, the phase of revival (1983) onwards, L.M. Singhvi Committee in 1986 and Sarkaria Commission in 1988. Then finally came the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 with effect from 24th April, 1993 which conferred constitutional status to Panchayats and government from the village upwards.

It was also found that the P. R. system in the H. P. was established in a statutory form under the provisions of the H. P. P.R. Act, 1952 in the year 1954. The number rose from 280 Gram Panchayats before the enactment of the H.P.P.R. Act, 1952 to 2922 Gram Panchayats. 71 Panchayat Samitis and 12 Zila Parishads as on 10-03-1999. In the chapter of Organizational Structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Himachal Pradesh, it was found that sound organizational structure is an essential key for the success of an organization to a systematic bringing together of interdependent parts to form a unified whole through which authority, coordination and control may be exercised to achieve a given purpose.

It was found in detail about the various important sections given in the H.P.P.R. Act, 1994. Section–3 declared that the government could declare by notification any village or group of contiguous villages with a population of not less than one thousand and not more than five thousand to constitute one or more sabha areas. The government could also increase, diminish or alter any
sabha area. Section -4 dealt with the establishment of Gram Sabha by name in every area in which there would be a list of voters whose names would be entered but in not more than one Gram Sabha area. The detail of meeting was also given in this section. Every Sabha was to hold four general meetings in each year. The quorum of such general meetings would be representation of at least one third of the total number of families represented by one or more members of the Gram Sabha.

Section -7 dealt with the functions of Gram Sabha, which entitled mobilizing voluntary labour and contribution in kind and cash for the community welfare programmes, identification of beneficiaries for the implementation of development schemes pertaining to the village promotion of unity and harmony etc.

Section -7-A dealt with the Constitution of Up-Gram Sabha for each ward of a Gram Sabha with its details also regarding its general meetings, venue and time of the meetings, nomination of its members, etc. Further Section-8 as associated with the Constitution of Gram Panchayats and seat reservation and Section-9 with the meetings of the Gram Panchayats. Section-10 dealt with the maintenance of Gram Panchayat records and Section-11 with its functions. Section -12 and 13 was connected with the power of removal and nuisance and to make general orders.

Section-77 stated about the establishment of Panchayat Samiti and its Constitution. Section 79, 80 and 81 dealt with the election of Chairman and Vice- Chairman of the Panchayat Samiti and its functions. Section 82 to 87
dealt with standing committees and its procedures and establishment of Zila Parishad. Section 93 dealt with the functions of the State Government to a Zila Parishad and Section 94 with the power of the State Government in relation to functions of Zila Parishad.

The next chapter dealt with the socio-economic background of elected women representatives of PRIs. It was found that women leadership was dominated by Vaishya Community and was literate. As far as occupation was concerned, majority of the women elected representatives belonged to the category of agriculturists and the income group of rural women leadership was analysed to be the lowest income group of below Rs. 50,000. Most of the respondents had a small family which had less than five members and the time spent by them in household work was about 6-8 hours daily. Their husbands helped in household work only some times. It was very encouraging to note from the analysis of the data that the majority of women leaders believed in promotion of the education of the girl child. The women leaders were quite aware as far as newspaper reading was concerned. Each one of them read a newspaper whether in Hindi or English. They belonged to some religious organization and half of the sample population was a member of a political party.

In the chapter of 'Relationship between the State Government and the Panchayati Raj Institutions', it was observed that the rural local leaders found their performance satisfactory and it was easy to work as a consequence of good relationship between the officials and non-officials. Further, it became evident that the rural local leaders were happy with the performance of local
functionaries. Again, the respondents were satisfied with the devolution of powers to PRIs as per the new Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act. Otherwise, it is usually found that decentralization of powers is a major tensional area between the state and the center. Here, it was found, encouragingly, that the political leaders were happy.

It was found, during the study, of the most common and controversial relationship between officials and non-officials, that in Block Panchrukhi, the women leaders were not aware of the development programmes, schemes and projects whereas in Block Rait only about half of the sample population knew about them. It is the duty of the officials to tell the women leaders about such development programmes which they are not fulfilling.

Another interesting fact that came to light was that majority of the respondents of both the blocks did not reply about the interference of state government in the working of PRIs. The reason could have been their hesitation or fear to speak against the state government regarding technical knowledge being provided to the PRI leaders, it came to light that in both the blocks Panchrukhi and Rait the respondents were not satisfied at all. When the respondents were asked about their satisfaction of level regarding the visits of officials, it was found that in Block Panchrukhi, only one third of the sample population was satisfied and almost none was happy with the officials, frequency of visits. Finally, in this chapter, the issue of satisfaction regarding the control of various departments under PRIs was studied and once again, the respondents did not answer. Thus, the sub-hypothesis, that is the negligence
and indifferent attitude of executives towards women leaders have resulted in dissatisfaction amongst them, has been proved correct.

Finally, the last chapter dealt with the participatory role of women leaders in developmental activities. It became clear that women elected representatives of the sample population were not very active, in limiting the purdah system and the same was the case of dowry system's eradication. They were not highly associated with female literacy programmes and at a medium level in avoidance of elimination of girl child and reduction of domestic violence. So, it was found that the respondents were socially responsible only at a medium level.

The economic activities were studied from six angels. Firstly, it was found that majority of the respondents participated at a medium level in assisting others in seeking employment whereas the knowledge about he preparation of budget was found to be of a high level in Block Rait but low in Panchrukhi. This can also be attributed to the reason of low level of education. It was also observed that as far as preparation of budget was concerned the women leaders' participation was of a medium level and regarding checking misappropriation of Panchayat budget, the response was definitely of a high level. It was found that they participated only at a medium level while discussing the expenditure of schools, anganwadis, etc. Finally, the role of women leaders in getting the right of parental property was found to be different in both the blocks-Rait and Panchrukhi. In Block Rait, the respondents were not very active and in Block Panchrukhi, the majority involved themselves at an average level.
The next area that was studied was the participatory role of the elected women representatives in educational activities. It was found that a majority of them were highly aware and helped in making the literacy programmes work but while studying the perception of the respondents; it became clear that the contribution of the respondents was low regarding providing education to preschool and primary school children. Basically, this is the problem being faced both by NGOs and the Government, that is, the means to reach out to grass-root women so as to make them aware and alert in bringing about a change in the educational area. The government has attempted programmes through the Ministry of Education like the Mahila Samakhya Programme and an awareness generation programme of the Central Social Welfare Board.

So, the sub-hypothesis, that is, low literacy and lack of knowledge amongst women leaders, have resulted in non-performance of their role has been proved partially as all the indicators in this activity of education was found to be of low or medium level. It was further found that sports or cultural shows and enrolment drive of children in school were also promoted by the elected women representatives at a medium level.

The next indicator examined was the involvement of elected women representatives with public work respondents were found to be highly active in associating themselves with construction of road and drainage facilities in the villages. The high level involvement could be due to the self-interest of developing their respective areas and linking it to the main roads for better market facility and trade. Further, their contribution in installing smokeless
chulhas was found to be of a low level. Their role in obtaining drinking water for common people construction of a community Bhawan was gauged at a medium level. Provision of good hygienic sanitation facilities at public places and construction of pucca houses by the elected women representatives was again found to be an average level.

The last indicator was the study of trade and commerce activities including organization of cooperative marketing of agricultural and other products, providing cheap credit facilities to people, checking malpractices maintenance of cooperatives godowns, organization of cooperative consumer societies and procurement of remunerative prices. It was noticed that the contribution of the elected women representatives was low. This proves the hypothesis of this study that the women leaders have failed to perform their duties at the grass-root level.

Suggestions

It is observed that as a “socially and economically disadvantaged section” women have been to understand the ways in which power is shared and why greater representation is needed to influence the redistribution of power and resources. Policies of reservation can redress the imbalance of both the genders. Rural development, based on gender equality, can be attained by women themselves by integrating themselves so as to develop an employ their skills. Women's representation is seen as an instrument for change and women are seen as an interest group who will take up the cause of
other disadvantaged women. It is anticipated that once they become a part of
the decision they become a part of the decision making process, they would
demand participation in development decisions and a reorientation of public
policies. The process of Indian women coming into their own politically has
been slow and halting because Indian culture is apolitical and the force of
tradition has been particularly against participation of women in politics.

Based on the findings of the study, following are measures outlined for
making full and efficient use of potentials and skills of rural women for
accelerating development process.

1. In part of the Constitution (73rd Amendment Act, 1992) under Article 243
   B, it has been mentioned that Gram Sabha means a body consisting of
   persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised
   within an Area Panchayat at the Village. According to this provision of
   the Act, the Panchayats in and around industrial towns are dominated by
   migrant. The concentration of the local people is sometimes ignored.
   So, it is suggested that at the time of the creation of a new Panchayat,
   the local people may be given preference.

2. Since it is given in the provisions of the Constitution that the legislative of
   state may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and
   authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions
   of self-government. This provision creates a disparity in devolution of
   powers, from one state to another, as every state creates its own
   parameters of powers and responsibilities that are given to the
   Panchayats. So, it is suggested that it may be laid down clearly in the
Constitution about the powers, authority and responsibilities so as to avoid any variation from one state to another.

3. Section-7 dealt with the functions of Gram Sabha which outlined amongst other functions about the identification beneficiaries for the implementation of development schemes pertaining to the village but during the course of study, it was found that most of the elected women representatives were not aware of the development programmes initiated by the State Government from time to time.

Hence, it is suggested that government should take necessary action to hold workshops, seminars and awareness campaigns so that all members are apprised of them. The elected women representatives spend most of their time in household chores. So, it is evident from the study that they could not devote much time to the functioning of PRIs. Since, the women have to do all household work manually; a solution to this problem can be mechanization. The government may provide soft loan or one time grant to elected women representatives to buy electronic household of gadgets which will definitely have a positive bearing on their daily schedule thereby enabling them to spare enough time for a meaningful role in the PRIs.

4. It was found that the respondents were not satisfied with the technical knowledge provided to them as well as the frequency of the visits of officials. It is suggested here that these officials should come under the direct control and supervision of these elected representatives so as to have a better development process.

5. A discrepancy was found in both the blocks under study, regarding their knowledge about the preparation of budget. This shows an unbalanced
approach of the officials. This is substantiated by the fact that out of the total, 3037 number of Gram Panchayats in Himachal Pradesh in which there were 6074 number of Pradhans and Up-Pradhans. Only 4883 were provided training and 1191 members of Pradhans and Up-Pradhans were left untrained by the end of March, 2004. Same was the case of Gram Panchayat Members. Out of 18,549 members of Gram Panchayat, 7554 were imparted training whereas 10,995 were left untrained. Although their tenure about to be over, they are still waiting to be trained. It is suggested to set up more Panchayati Raj to ensure 100 percent coverage and regular training to the Panchayati Raj functionaries.

Role of women in children’s education is very vital as early socialization of the child takes place mainly in the family under the guidance of the mother. They should be motivated if their children are to be educated. During the course of study, it was observed that the participation of the elected women representatives in providing education to preschool and primary school children was low. So, it is suggested here that the government must promote a higher status of education so as to improve the level of literacy among children in rural areas.

In the light of the above, there is an urgent need to make the women leaders literate and acquaint them with their rights and responsibilities. It is suggested that they should be trained to exercise the rights and shoulder the responsibilities in an effective manner. Such training, if not imparted, will not only check the proxy decision, made by men but may sooner or later lead to an overall improvement in the quality of decision-making, thereby, raising the welfare format of the rural society.
8. The trade and commerce activities had a low input from elected women representatives. Actually, the development of agro-business is quite complicated and needs to be understood by the farmers. The risk and uncertainty must be taken care of. The farmers have to be persuaded to market their crop and produce by providing infrastructural support roads, cold storage chains, godowns, etc.

9. The private entrepreneurs can be encouraged to help in setting up agro-based industries in rural areas. High cost of transport, irregular electric supply, poor genetic quality of the crop, lack of assured market, etc. are the main concerns of farmers. Help can be coordinated and organised by non-governmental organisations.

10. Various programmes for welfare and development of women are integrated for giving the women representatives an opportunity to improve their economic condition and leadership quality.

11. More opportunities of self-employment should be given to women folk in the rural areas of Himachal Pradesh.

12. Frequency of visits of officials to PRIs must be increased.

13. The Non-Governmental Organizations who are getting aid from the government must come under direct control and guidance of these leaders.

14. Bureaucratic approach should be given up. Bureaucracy should perform the role of a guide and advisor and not interfere in the PRI working.

The 73rd Amendment of the Indian Constitution and the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 are not ends in themselves. They made the advent of grass-root democracy in Himachal Pradesh. Many more
amendments will be needed in the Constitution and the state legislation from
time to time to strengthen it. There is a need for a closer coordination between
women's organizations and the elected women representatives to strengthen
the struggle of women for equality and justice in the economic, social and
political sphere. It is believed that without organised pressure, it would be
difficult to get women's issues and perspectives on the political agenda.