

SUMMARY

Democratic Government is an important form of Government since ancient time to modern time. A democratic government is a government in which the majority of the people hold political power and has the right and opportunity to participate in the decision-making process. In Democracy the major decisions of government or the direction of policy behind these decisions – rest directly or indirectly on the freely given consent of a majority of the adult governed. Truly complex democratic practices however have their roots in ancient Greece, specifically in Athens. But Athenian and other early Greek democracies were quite different from modern liberal democracies. They were form of direct democracy typically found in small communities. Ancient Greek's direct democracy allowed the public excluding women, children and slaves, to participate directly in the affairs of government, choosing policies and making governing decisions. The people were the state. In modern times, Switzerland is the best example of direct democracy. The idea of direct legislations by the people is almost peculiar to Switzerland.

Landesgemeinde' is an important institution of direct democracy in Switzerland. This is the primitive system of government by a primary assembly. The assembly is known as the landesgemeinde and meets once a year under the presidency of the annually elected Landsmen. This assembly enacts laws, passes resolutions and disposes of questions relating to finance and public works. It elects an administrative council and a smaller council, which manages the less important current business.

Though, Indian after independence, has adopted the system of representative or indirect democracy yet some institution of direct democracy such as `Word

committees; or neighborhood Committees' in urban areas and 'Gram Sabha' in the rural area can be seen.

In India Gram Sabha has been one of the essential institutions of village administration since ancient times. In Rig-Vedic period these used to be a sort of village council or an association consisted by elder villagers called 'Gan Sangthan'. According to Kautaliya's Arthashastra as this Sabha was known Raj Sabdo Jivi Sang. According to Panini Aasthadhyi this Sabha was called 'Sangh or Gan or Nikay'. In Ramayana and Mahabhartar also there have been references of 'Gram Sangha' or 'Gram Sansad'.

The modern administrative structure in Indian villages was built up by the 'Mauryan Emperors'. The Gram Sabha in Mauryan period comprised of a headman and a few others members. The main functions of Gram Sabha was to take decisions about any issue related to the village. But the caste system of Hinduism was strictly maintained during that period. The Brahman, Jamindars or landed enjoyed most of the Powers of Gram Sabha. During British rule all Administrative Policy of Gram Sabha and Local Government in India was demolished which were centuries old. They actually centralized the entire administrative system of India. Company rules were not in favor of Panchayati Raj system.

India was ruled by a centralized administrative system during colonial period, at the top was Governor General and under him governors ruled the provinces and the districts were ruled by Collector/Deputy Commissioners. After independence Political map of India has changed completely. The scheme of distribution of powers in our Constitution and centralized planning have made center strong. The states have also centralized powers in their own jurisdiction. Thus a trend of decentralization started.

In recent years, decentralization- the transfer of political, administrative and financial powers to local government bodies has received single attention all over the world. The term 'decentralization' has generally been used to a variety of institutional reforms which have been evolved and practiced in a number of countries with varying degrees of success. It means reassigning responsibilities, authority and resources from higher level government organization to local government bodies along with sufficient autonomy and accountability so as to enable them to function efficiently.

In democracy, the empowerment of people and the grassroots democracy ensures genuine participatory development process at local. This change in the Indian political System is the result of a growing conviction that large government cannot achieve growth and development without direct participation and initiative from people. The objective of decentralization is to execute and implement schemes and programs to meet local needs, to mobilize & channelize their energies towards socio-economic reconstruction and to involve them in all activities of the communities and reduce the work of higher levels of government.

Gram Sabha is the basic institution of decentralized governance because decentralization is a key to better performance by the local institutions. It is the first modern political institution that seeks to place direct political power in hands of the people, without the mediation of elected representatives. The genesis of the concept of the Gram Sabha starts again from independence and Mahatma Gandhi's concept of Gram Swaraj came in light which means governance of the villages by the people of village themselves. The task was naturally to be managed by Gram Panchayat with the consent of Gram Sabha. Gram Sabha was to be organically linked with the representative bodies at the village, Mandal, State and National levels. Gandhi ji aimed at making the Individual the center of the local administration. People are

expected to take personal interest in common interest like village industries, agricultural productions, irrigation and planning etc.

During the drafting of the Constitution of India, Panchayati Raj institutions were placed in non-justifiable part of constitution, the Directive Principle of State Policy, as Article 40. According to the article, The State shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as unit of self-government. The concept Gram Sabha was endorsed by the conference of the ministers of local self-government held at Shimla in 1954. The conference recommended that the meetings of Gram Sabha be convened by the Gram Panchayat more frequently and there should be at least two such meetings in each year. However the reviews of National Extension Service Programs have shown that people's participation was not forthcoming. Ultimately the National Development Council constituted a committee on plan projects under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta. It recommended three tier structures of the Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad. For democratic decentralization but it made no mention of the Gram Sabha in its report submitted in 1959. Diwakar Committee recommended that to strengthen the Gram Sabha, it is necessary to strengthen the Panchayat itself and to enable the two to work out a proper relationship between them. Since the Panchayat is executive of the Gram Sabha, strengthening the executive and defining the life and relationship of Panchayat and Gram Sabha, will strengthen the Gram Sabha itself.

Ashok Mehta Committee in 1978 proposed village committees which were assigned the duty of organizing two Gram Sabha meeting every year to explain the people what programs the Mandal Panchayat are executing in their area. In 1986, L.M. Singhvi Committee considered Gram Sabha as the base of a decentralized

democracy and recommended for making village panchayats more viable. In 1992, The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act came into force which included the Gram Sabha as the basis of the three tier panchayati Raj. In the new dispensation the Gram Sabha become a constitutional reality vested with specific powers and functions. As per article 243(B) “Gram Sabha” means a body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of Panchayat at the village level. . According to 73rd Amendment, all State Governments have provided for the institutions of Gram Sabha in their respective Panchayat Raj Act. Keeping in view the provisions of the 73rd constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 state Government of Haryana has passed “Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994”. According to Haryana Panchayati Raj Act 1994 section- 7, “If a village or an area of the village has minimum population is five hundred or more than five hundred State Government announce that area is Gram Sabha area”. According to Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 Section -12, Gram Sabha has some powers and Functions. In this Act the scope and functions of Gram Sabha along with the methodology of their working have been outlined. There are considerable variations across states in matters like structure, jurisdiction, and frequency of meetings, powers and functions of Gram Sabha. The present study deals with the role of Gram Sabha in one of the smaller but progressive states of the Indian Union i.e. Haryana.

Haryana, emerged on the political map of India, as the 17th State of the Indian Union on November, 1st 1966 as a result of bifurcation of bilingual state of Punjab under the Punjab State Reorganization Act, passed by the Indian Parliament. Geographically, the state is located in the North Western part of India. It is one of the smaller states of India with an area of 44, 212 Sq. K.M. The population of the state constitutes 2% of total population of India. The climate of state is one of the sub-

tropical continental monsoon types. Though agriculture is the main stay of the economy of the state yet it has also made rapid strides the industrial sector. Haryana Panchayat Raj Act came into force in 1994, according to which 'Gram Sabha' means a body consisting of persons registered as voters in the electoral rolls a village comprised with in the area of the Panchayat at village level. According to Haryana Panchayat Raj Act the meetings and quorum of Gram Sabha, general meetings, extraordinary meeting, and role of Sarpanch, Block Development and Panchayat Officer (BDPO), Gram Sabha was decided. According to Haryana Panchayati Raj Act the functions and powers of Gram Sabha are review of general progress of the development plans, considering the budget prepared by the Gram Panchayat, Social audit, scrutinize the existing schemes completed works, questioning to Sarpanch and Panch, locate the places of schemes and other works etc. Administration in Indian village is considered one of the most scientifically structured administrative systems of all time. The ancient concept of Gram Sabha is still in existence in the name of Panchayat in the Indian villages. Panchayat Raj System is more democratic in nature compared to that the Gram Sabha System, as the common elects the members of Gram panchayat in modern India. The year 1999-2000 was declared as the year of the Gram Sabha by the Union Finance Minister. This has helped to focus attention on this vital institution as a mechanism for consultation in the process of direct democracy at the village level. To evaluate the role of Gram Sabha in rural area the study has been focused upon the district Jhajjar.

Jhajjar District which consists of five blocks-Bahadurgarh, Beri, Jhajjar, Matanhail and Salawas. The present study is an empirical study in which selection of the universe is based on multistage sampling. Block wise number of Gram Panchayats are - Block Bahadurgarh (62), Beri (36), Jhajjar (71), Matanhail (43) and Salhawas

(36). From each block 10% of total villages i.e. 25 villages have been taken by using random sampling method. The reservation policy for women, Schedule Caste and other Backward Class categories in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI's) is followed for selection of respondents. Total 250 respondents are taken. Both primary and secondary data is used in the study. The information provided by the respondents have been classified, tabulated and analyzed and on their basis conclusions have been drawn.

Findings of the study are:

Awareness level of Respondents:- For the working of an organization to be successful, it is highly important for all the members to be fully aware about the basis of organization. The desirable level of awareness results into maximum output. In this regard the study shows a poor level of awareness of the respondents about Gram Sabha as an organization. Only 20% respondents are aware about the membership of Gram Sabha. Though mostly respondents know about age and respondents of Gram Sabha members, but this is partially right. They are less aware about the name of Gram Sabha members in voter list of village as a compulsion. 57.2% respondents know about the number of meetings of Gram Sabha but only 27.6% respondents know about its time that means less awareness and less participation in Gram Sabha meetings. Although people know that only Sarpanch has the authority to call the Gram Sabha meetings which is partially right. People are not aware about minimum number of Gram Sabha members during meetings. This shows that people are about some facts but they are partially aware.

Information level of Respondents:- Although awareness, information level of the respondents is also important for success of Gram Sabha as an organization. The respondents know about the place of Gram Sabha meetings and they get information before meetings at appropriate time. Mostly respondents have information about the

medium of information and writing in proceeding. **Knowledge of Respondents:** -

The Respondents have knowledge deficit regarding agenda of Sawani and Hari meeting's agenda and video conferencing during Gram Sabha meetings either due to lack of interest or facility. 58.4% respondents agree about being the member of Gram Sabha. Though they are less aware about work and power of Gram Sabha according to Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. But they have less knowledge about the venue of Gram Sabha meetings as mostly replied that house of Sarpanch is the place for Gram Sabha meetings.

Participation of Respondents: -Mostly respondents are theoretically aware about Gram Sabha meetings but their participation level is low. Only 22.8% respondents take part in Gram Sabha meetings. Participation level of women and schedule caste members is very low because of personal matter, lack of time, lack of information and mostly due to social bindings. There is less participation of Government Officers in Gram Sabha meetings.

Involvement in Gram Sabha meetings:-Involvement in Gram Sabha meetings means active participation in Gram Sabha meetings by respondents. People know about signature and thumb impression formality during Gram Sabha meetings on any proposal. Though people are less involved in priorities decided during Gram Sabha meetings. They know about amendment in proposal and in presented annual budget but less respondents answer about their involvement in raising question and giving proposal during such meetings they have lack of involvement regarding discussion on proposal in Gram Sabha meetings. They involve in decision of Gram Sabha by raising hands.

Interest of Respondents:-Mostly respondents are aware about the formation of committee for development works and members of committees and the

implementation but they have less interest due to discrimination during development work and misuse of money by the Sarpanch. A few respondents know about their role in Gram Sabha meetings and 55.6% respondents are not satisfied from work and power of Gram Sabha. The reason for less interest are monopoly of Sarpanch and Panchyat Members, improper organization of Gram Sabha meetings and lack of participation and aware.

Effectiveness:-The effectiveness of Gram Sabha as an organization is accepted by 60% respondents. All the respondents know about the number of female panch and Schedule caste panch and name of Sarpanch in their respective areas. As a whole it can be said that people are aware about the effectiveness of Gram Sabha as decentralized governance.

Testing of Hypothesis:- In this regard the finding of the study show that awareness level of people about Gram Sabha is not satisfactory. The Gram Sabha has to play a key role in rendering the Gram Panchayat transparent and directly accountable to the people. The Gram Sabha is a mean to solve people's problems and felt needs and to decide how to use the available resources optimally in ways desired by them, to benefit the poorest in the village through direct democratic and participatory planning, budgeting, social audit, monitoring and evaluation. But due to lack of awareness, improper information, sparse attendance in Gram Sabha meetings, lack of clear understanding amongst the people about Gram Sabha working lead to poor discharging of its responsibility as an institute by 'Gram Sabha'. Hence the first hypothesis- "The institute of 'Gram Sabha 'is not discharging its responsibilities in Jhajjar District stands proved. The study shows that Gram Sabha plays a crucial role in ensuring a transparent and accountable administration by Gram Panchayat, its functions are planning, implementation, monitoring the functions of Gram Panchayat,

social audit, annual budgeting and evaluation. But the concept of Gram Sabha has been conceived of as ultimate source of power of Panchayats has not yet been understood by its members. The members of Gram Sabha are not much aware about the dates, purpose of Gram Sabha meetings and their roles in it. Hence the second hypothesis - 'Mostly Gram Sabha members are aware about power and functions of Gram Sabha' stands disproved. In this context the study highlights that about one fourth of respondents have knowledge regarding the time of meeting. Yet people are aware about medium of information, but a few people have knowledge regarding venue and time of Gram Sabha meetings that means Gram Sabha meetings are not held properly on time. Mostly people do not know about the quorum and venue of Gram Sabha meeting's agenda of Sawani and Hari meetings and only one fourth respondents have interest in Gram Sabha meetings and they don't know about proposals discussed in Gram Sabha meetings. Hence the third hypothesis- 'Gram Sabha members actively attend and participate in Gram Sabha meetings stands disproved. The meetings of Gram Sabha are held properly on time' stands disproved. Hence the fourth hypothesis - 'the weaker section i.e. Women, Schedule Caste, Other Backward Class do not attend and participate actively on effective role through planning, budgeting and monitoring stands proved. In this regard the study makes it clear that more than half respondents know about the members of Gram Sabha but due to lack of interest women don't participate in Gram Sabha meetings while people from Schedule Castes and Other Backward Castes less participate in Gram Sabha meetings due to lack of awareness and discrimination. In this context the study reveals that half of the respondents agree that Sarpanch has the power and his monopoly make them less interested in participating in Gram Sabha meetings, mostly respondents do not know about the functions of Gram Sabha meetings regarding

village development and less aware about priorities decided during Gram Sabha meetings, lack of awareness regarding budgeting and discussion on proposal in Gram Sabha. More than half respondents agree that there is groupism during budget approval and misuse of money done by Sarpanch, discrimination during development program. Hence this hypothesis- 'Gram Sabha members are not playing an effective role through planning, budgeting and monitoring' stands proved, but Gram Sabha play an effective role through Social Audit' stands disproved.

Suggestions: -At the end of the study some suggestions are suggested for improving role of the Gram Sabha: The study shows a poor level of awareness about Gram Sabha quorum, meeting time, venue and their participation in Gram Sabha meetings. For this awareness training program, "Nukkad Natak" should be conducted to panch and Gram Sabha members. The attendance during Gram Sabha, should be strictly done and the panch should hold the responsibility for their members of their areas to attend the Gram Sabha meetings. The time, venue and place for holding Gram Sabha meeting must be intimated through a notice giving at least two days prior information an effective medium like display of wall posters, house to house canvassing, and public address system at various places. The information can also be spread widely by village level official functionaries like Aanganwari worker, health Department Staff, School teacher etc. Gram Sabha meetings must be called at a time convenient to majority of members. It should be fixed at a time when male members are free from economic activities and female members are free from domestic and other obligations. It was observed that the Government Officials attitude toward organizing Gram Sabha meetings was indifferent. They should take initiative for making Gram Sabha a vibrant body. Strict actions should be taken against them for their negligence regarding this. Government should also organize training awareness program not only

for Sarpanch and Panch but also for common people to ensure effective participation in Gram Sabha meetings. Social issues like opening schools, programs for adult education, opening of sewing center for women, ensuring Doctors in Primary Health Centre (PHC), Crime against women, youth unemployment should be discussed in Gram Sabha meetings. A sub-quorum of female attendance should be fixed in order to ensure adequate participation of women in the meetings of Gram Sabha. It should be made compulsory for the members of Mahila Mandals to attend the Gram Sabha meetings. The weaker sections of the society such as women, schedule caste members and other backward classes, self-help groups are be organized so that they can empower themselves economically as well as socially in a better manner. Help of any NGO should be taken to pressurize the Sarpanch and Gram Panchayat to organize and to encourage the members of participates in Gram Sabha meetings. The transparency by ensured by displaying all relevant information on a board regarding the estimates, availability of funds and the works done by the Panchayats during the specific time period. This kind of activity will curb corruption and misuse of funds to a great extent. Every Gram Sabha should obtain from the Gram Sabha, a certification of utilization of funds by that Panchayats for the plans, programs and projects.

To conclude Panchayati Raj Institutions are the base of Decentralized Governance. The Gram Sabha has very important role to play in strengthening of the Panchayati Raj System. It has the potential for involving the entire village community in preparation and implementation of planning for their development. It is therefore desirable to activate this body on sustainable basis so that the goal of Haryana Panchayati Raj System can be achieved.