As early as in 1917, Indian women raised the issue of representation in politics, which at that time meant a demand for universal adult franchise. Emphasizing the right to vote as basic to a citizen's participation in the public domain, Sarojini Naidu addressed the Secretary of State, in 1917 by saying: When such a franchise is being drawn upon, women may be recognized as people and it may be worded in such terms as will not disqualify for sex, but allow our women the same opportunities of representation as our men. In 1996, the claim for equal opportunities with respect to representation of Indian women in the legislature is as pertinent as it was eighty years ago. Even though, the Indian Constitution of 1948 guarantees equal social, economic and political rights to women, the representation of women in political bodies is still abysmally low. This is sharply contrasted by the fact that the participation of Indian women in elections has steadily increased since the first general elections held in 1952. In the period from 1952 to 1980 women's participation in the elections increased by 12 per cent whereas the turn out of men increased by merely 6 per cent in 1996, the turnout for women was 47.75 per cent whereas for men it was 52.25 per cent.

The increase in the turn out of women in elections has, however, not been translated into a larger number of women being represented in the legislative bodies. The percentage as women in
the national Parliament after the general elections in May 1996 still amounts to only 6.7 per cent of the total seats, and even in earlier Parliament and A.P. Assembly never exceeded 8.1 per cent. It is evident that in the world largest democracy, politics are clearly dominated by men. Women do not share the power of decision-making and are subsequently not involved in policy-making in the Indian democracy. Against the backdrop, 33 per cent reservation of seats in the legislative (viz. The National Parliament and A.P. State Assembly) as proposed in September 1996 though the 81st Amendment to the Indian Constitution is now supported even by those citizens who for a long time were optimistic that the political system would open up for women and prove that representation for women is fertile. Today, it seems that reservation for women is the only recourse for equal representation and decision-making. At the same time, there is a recognition of the need to go beyond the reservation policy.

The increasing relevance of women as voters in the democratic system is not adequately reflected in the constitution of institutions through which political power is acquired, that is, the political parties. The ratio of women in political parties across the country and across ideologies, ranges from 5-12 per cent of the membership. Although political parties in the seventies began to realize the importance of the female vote bank and did set up women's wings, little progress has been made. Women have neither participated in politics in significantly high numbers nor have they acquired higher
positions of decision-making. So called 'Women’s issues' have not been taken up by parties in a serious manner nor translated into programmes, policies and legislation.

By looking into the histories, ideologies, and political manifestoes, have tried to gain better insights into the position of women in the political system. In depth interviews with women politicians highlight the first hand experiences and perspectives of select women who have successfully climbed their way up to positions of power. The main concern of this study is about the political awareness and political participation of women in Guntur district. It is hoped that it will contribute to overcoming the existing mechanisms of discrimination against woman in the political system.