CHAPTER-VIII
CONCLUSIONS

Empowerment of the people in any sphere plays an important role in moulding their social, political and economic life and also of the communities. Obviously, this truth holds good in respect of the women world-wide. In the Indian context the political participation of women and ultimately their political empowerment has become a very important goal to be achieved with the enactment of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992.

In the particular context of women the word ‘empowerment’ is about power. Empowerment can also be understood as the total transformation of the life of women particularly the women belonging to the poor and weaker sections. In recent years, empowerment of women in different sphere has been recognized as a vital factor in determining the status of women. The approach of political empowerment which gained currency only during 1990s has become a very important dimension of polity. In the context of women participation in the Political Process is regarded as one of the factors that perpetuate empowerment of women.

In case of women, empowerment underlines the process of enabling them to realize their own potentialities, abilities and capacities that enable them to take necessary measures to achieve their around development. In India the grant of certain rights and provisions by the Constitution was supported by a series of legislations by the Government is a step in this direction.

A perusal of the position of women in the Indian society projects a mixed as well as complex picture of ambivalence which ranges from
their contempt and hatred to deep fascination. There were distinct stages of rise and fall in the status of women in India. There is evidence which proves that the women of Vedic India were well educated and occupied a high position in the society.

During the National Movement Gandhiji who championed the cause of women, made extensive and tireless efforts to promote women's education. In fact, in India the specific activities to enhance the status of women were initiated in the 19th century by several social reforms. After Independence, there were serious attempts to uplift the women and to ensure for them equal status with men in the society. As result of all these policies and programme, there is considerable, though not significant, development in the conditions of women. In this situation political empowerment of women has become the leading strategy for the total development of women during 1990s decade.

It is a fact that the 73rd amendment which was enacted for the political empowerment of rural women through reservation in the local bodies motivated large number of women candidates to enter the arena of local politics. This can be considered as an encouraging trend towards women's empowerment. But the statutory representation in the local bodies is only the first step in promoting their political participation. Studies show that a large numbers of women are yet to be mobilized and that they face many socio-economic and psychological hurdles to enter politics and become leaders.

In this connection, there is a need to examine the women themselves have to say regarding their deeply the phenomena and implications of the ongoing process of political empowerment of women in the rural areas in the changed context. The present study addressed to this issue is
motivated by recognition of the above mentioned need. This study builds upon the contributions (theoretical and empirical) of many scholars and activists, some of them have been mentioned above.

**Findings and Conclusion:**

The main findings and observations of the present study are presented in the following pages. The study attempts to examine the socio-economic and political profile of the respondents selected from the political executives of various Panchayati Raj Bodies covered under the present study. It is hoped that the profile of the limited size of respondents has the representative character of the total women leaders of these bodies. As the study indicates, the majority of the respondents are in the middle age, who are above 30 years but below 50 years. There is also a good number of youth aged below 30 years. The number of respondents who have crossed 50 years and above is limited. It can be concluded that the women leaders elected as a result of the reservation system is either middle aged or youth. By all means this is a positive trend as they are young and energetic and hence able to carry out their functions effectively. In the aspect of education most of the respondents are moderately educated though not highly educated. This is also a positive trend regarding the emerging women leadership in the Panchayati Raj bodies. It is a very positive feature that the number of illiterate is very insignificant among the respondents. The vast majority of the respondents is housewives and not employed. However, few respondents have their occupation either as cultivation or agriculture labour.

Regarding the social background of the respondents it is evident that a majority of the respondents hail from the upper castes and the next
highest number belong to the backward classes. There are a few respondents who belong to scheduled castes. It can be assumed that the presence of backward classes and scheduled castes is possible mainly because of the reservations provided to these sections. Regarding the religious background of the respondents it is evident that highest majority of them are Hindus.

In the matter of Economic position the majority of the respondents are virtually landless as they have no own land or land in their names. However, a majority of the respondents come from the families which own land but most of them are either marginal and small farmers. In the same way the vast majority of the respondents are not income earners as they are not employed. The families of the highest number of respondents have own houses of one type or other.

The analysis of the political background of the respondents reveals some important trends. A majority of the respondents are already engaged in Politics before assuming the present position but the extent of their political experience is limited as it is below 3 years. The length of political experience of very few respondents extends over ten years. It is also important to note that the vast majority of the respondents are connected with the political parties and only few respondents are independents without any party affiliation. The former respondents are either in the Congress Party or T.D.P., which are the major parties in the state. It is discouraging to note that most of the respondents who are in the political parties are ordinary members of their respective parties without holding any office.

Another important trend evident is that the highest majority of the respondents have no past experience in contesting any elections to any
political office. Hence, it is the first time for them to contest the elections held to their respective positions which they occupied now. Another important trend related to the political background of the respondents as revealed by the present study is that nearly half of them hail from political families whose members are in active politics for several years. The positive trend revealed by the present study is that the respondents actively participate in social service activities apart from attending to various functions connected with their political office. They are associated with the programmes of voluntary organizations working in their areas. **Thus, the first hypothesis ‘various social service activities have been organized by women representatives as well as they are associated with the programmes of voluntary organization’, can be accepted.**

Some are also holding important positions in these organizations. The respondents have the distinction of being politically active as they are involved in the activities of their respective parties such as participating in the meetings, rallies, processions, and such other activities conducted by their political parties. Thus the women leaders are not confined to their respective political functions alone but they are also involved in the external political activities which helped them to become politically mature and efficient leaders.

A study of the political knowledge and awareness of the respondents provides some interesting insights. It is revealed that the respondents have political awareness and knowledge to some extent but not to the level required by political executive of any level. **Hence, the second hypotheses ‘women representatives have political awareness**
and experience in the past but not to the level required by political executive of any level’, can partly be accepted.

They are aware of and have knowledge about some important aspects of Indian Political system. At the same time they are ignorant of several crucial political issues and facts. For instance, they are aware of the fact that there is a Constitution in the country but a vast majority of them have no knowledge about the contents of various Articles. It is highly discouraging to note that only fifty per cent of the respondents know the fact that parliamentary type of Government is working in India. At the same time it is still more highly disappointing to note that a vast majority of the respondents have no knowledge of the process of elections held to the very key positions like the President and Prime Minister. The only consideration is that the majority of the respondents know at least how the MLAs and MPs are elected.

Regarding the party system working in the country, the respondents have some knowledge. They know the names of the various political parties functioning in the country but they are not aware of their ideology and programmes. The respondents very well know about the political parties working in Andhra Pradesh. They have also similar knowledge about the regional parties working in different states in the country. However, their knowledge of coalition governments formed at the centre is poor. At least it gives some satisfaction to notice their almost all the respondents know that elections are held once in every five years for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

The important positive aspect revealed by the study regarding the political background of the respondents is that all the respondents have
been exercising their franchise regularly in all the elections. A good majority of them have the habit of regularly discussing politics with others. **Hence, the third hypothesis ‘women representatives regularly discuss important political matters and issues with their relatives and friends’, can be accepted.**

However, it is discouraging to note that nearly fifty per cent of respondents do not read newspapers at all. However, it is an encouraging trend that almost all respondents with very few exceptions reported that they view the TV and listen to the radio regularly only a small number of respondents show interest in news, events and programmes relating politics. They are interested in entertainment, sports and cultural programmes but not political events or news items.

As regarding another important aspect of the respondents’ knowledge and awareness of the panchayati Raj System, the study reveals that the respondents have no knowledge of the launching of the Panchayati Raj system and the existence of the Experts Committee which recommended the introduction of three tier system. Also a vast majority of the respondents are ignorant of the aims of Panchayati Raj System. However, a good majority of the respondents know about the structure of the panchayati Raj System. At the same time they are unable to tell correctly which government introduced the Mandal System in Andhra Pradesh. Almost all the respondents do not know which state first introduced the Panchayat Raj System in the country, the details of 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act and also the features of the Andhra Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act of 1994. In spite of this disappointing situation it gives some relief and satisfaction to know that a majority of the
respondents know at least how the system of elections held to the various offices in the Village Panchayats, Mandalas, and Zilla Parishads functions. While a majority of the respondents possess sound knowledge the functions of Village Panchayats and Mandal Parishads half of them know nothing about the functions of Zilla Parishads. However, they have sufficient knowledge of the financial system of the Panchayati Raj Institutions and the purpose of Gram Sabhas.

It is also attempted in this study to assess the role played by the women political functionaries working in the various Panchayati Raj Bodies who occupied these offices as the consequence of the reservations provided by the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act. The assessment of the role performance of these women executives is based on the views and perceptions elicited from the respondents of the present study. It has become clear that the powers granted to the political executives by the concerned Act are sufficient to carry their functions effectively. Hence they are able to function efficiently and effectively. It is also evident that the respondents are able to conduct the meetings of their respective deliberative wings regularly and smoothly as the chairpersons. It has also become evident that the majority of the respondents are taking decisions in the official matters effectively and independently and there is no outside interference in any manner. Their decisions are also implemented properly by the officials concerned. Thus, the fourth hypothesis ‘women representatives are able to take decisions in the official matters independently and effectively’, can be accepted. The study shows a positive trend that the women executives have been receiving the co-
operation and support of the male leaders and their family members to the maximum extent.

As the present study reveals the women leaders have been paying more attention and taking up necessary measures for solving the problems of women and hence there is improvement in the socio-economic conditions of women living in the their area. **Hence, the fifth hypothesis 'women representatives have been paying more attention for solving the problems of women in their areas', can be accepted.**

It is equally important to note that these women functionaries are benefited personally also after assuming the present political offices by way of improvement in their social status in the society.

On the whole, it is observed that all the five hypotheses set for the study have been proved aptly and are accepted.

**Conclusions:**

On the whole, it is clear that the system of reservation of women in the Panchayati Raj bodies has considerable positive effect on the conditions and standard of women living in the rural areas. There are certain significant changes in the socio-economic conditions of these women. The political empowerment attained by the system of reservation introduced by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has introduced certain radical changes in their life style. Unlike the past the rural women are now motivated to enter into the politics and hold political positions which ended the persistence of the domination of men for a long time. They are now interested in the public life and are willing to play a leadership role in the development process. They now entertain political
ambitions and aspire to hold higher political positions at the national and state levels. All these developments have reduced the domination and supremacy enjoyed by men in the field of politics for several centuries.

The striking conclusion that can be drawn from the present study is that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has facilitated the entry of a large number of women into the local politics through Panchayati Raj Bodies. It was proved beyond doubt that the female leadership had emerged on massive scale. The study led to the assertion that the women are interested in political career and play an active role in transforming the society and their own gender. The study proved abundantly that the significant changes that had taken place in the life of women as a result of assumption of political power include empowerment, increasing self-confidence, political awareness and ultimately capacity building. The women have gained psychological strength potentiality by gaining control over the resources, political and socio-economic situation and so on prevailing in the society. Further, women empowerment has successfully challenged the traditional practice of male domination and supremacy deeply rooted in the Indian society for the last several centuries.

The trend identified during the study that the women leaders hardly depend upon their male family members in performing their official responsibilities, has its own future implications for the broader political system. A close look at the changed situation reveals that the system of reservations in the local bodies and consequent political empowerment has certainly brought about qualitative improvement in the socio-economic life of women at the grassroots level. It can also be realized that the determination and commitment which the women Panchayati Raj leaders are displaying stands as testimony to the fact they
can certainly emerge as the torchbearers in transforming the living conditions of women in future. The empowerment at the grass root level will certainly lay down a base for the emergence of effective leadership among women. This is very much needed for the development of the country at a faster rate. It would also help to utilize the capacities and capabilities of women who constitute half of the total population of the country, resulting in a drastic impact on the progress of the nation. It can safely be presumed that the space provided to them in the political sphere certainly leads to space in the development and nation building in near future and eradicates the uncivilized phenomena of gender inequality forever.

It is certain that the country is committed to the cause of empowerment of women for their betterment. However, it is an arduous task to achieve. Women's participation in the political process and development is of crucial importance from the point of consideration of both equity and development. Apparently, today Indian women are no longer content with remaining as peripheral actors, but desire to play their due role in all spheres of the society. Empowerment in different spheres will act mainly a catalytic role in preparing them to attain this goal. Needless to emphasize that political empowerment is the prerequisite for their alround development. The experience so far gained in this field proved beyond doubt that the political empowerment of women is sine-qua-non for their development. But it is not a simple task to achieve through mere provision of reservations of seats in the local bodies as even in the higher level political institutions. Political empowerment should be accompanied by empowerment in other spheres, particularly social and economic spheres. Such a total empowerment of women demands a multi-
pronged approach and a strong commitment on the part of the policy makers and development administrators. Fortunately, the process of political empowerment of women has already been initiated and it is moving in the direction of achieving the goal. Completion of this task depends not only on the commitment of the policy makers and development administrators but also on the stake holders themselves who should avail of the opportunities thrown open to them, with firm determination and will power.

**Suggestions:**

On the basis of the present study certain suggestions can be made for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the performance of the women leaders working Panchayati Raj bodies:

1. The present study and other studies proved that the process of political empowerment of women had already begun at least at the grassroots. But a long distance has to be covered to reach the end. The women should equip themselves with necessary skills and potentiality. The society should also play its due role by providing a strong support to help them to attain this goal.

2. The provision of reservations in the political offices at different levels should be supported by other initiatives, in the direction of creating necessary supportive environment so that they can utilize the opportunities completely for the sake of their emancipation and also the development of society at large.

3. The political empowerment of women becomes a reality only when women can assert themselves by exercising their political power
efficiently and independently. This requires capacity building and skills improvement on their part. It is possible through education and training. They should also learn lessons from their own experience and overcome their difficulties.

4. There is an imperative need for indepth and intensive research on various dimensions of political empowerment of women, a phenomenon which has already made its appearance in the political system of the Country. This research should be taken up both at the macro and micro levels. The knowledge gathered through this research would provide inputs to the policy makers, planners and development administrators to reorient their approach towards more effective political empowerment of women and other related issues and change the policies and programmes appropriate to reaching the designed Goal.

5. The women organizations, feminists’ leaders, NGOs working in the field of women welfare, social activists, have a major role to play in making the initiatives pursued by the government in the direction of political empowerment of women successful. They should motivate and help the women political functionaries particularly, those working in the Panchayati Raj bodies in playing their roles effectively. They should educate the organize seminars and work shops designed to women leaders to perform better in their tasks. They should also organize training programmes involving experts and experienced help them in capacity building and skill development processes professional to for carrying out their functions efficiently. Government should stand necessary support such initiative which supplement the role of government in this direction.

6. A suitable environment particularly in the rural setting should be created for the effective functioning of the women political leadership
which is still in emerging process. The family, political parties and their leaders, the social activists, women organizations etc., have a key role to play in the creation of such environment.

7. It is suggested that the future approach for the attainment of the goal of empowerment and development of women needs to be based on the theme of convergence and harmonization of the various initiatives pursued by the government in this direction. Such a holistic approach enhances the effectiveness and potentiality of these initiatives in achieving their end with in the short period. It would also facilitate capacity building and skill development besides creating self-confidence among the women. This enables the women to derive the maximum benefit from the myriad politics and programmes targeted for their development and empowerment and to march forward to attain them within reasonable period, with their own involvement and contribution.

8. It may be suggested that the women should be educated so that they can develop necessary political awareness for contesting various political offices in the Panchayati Raj bodies reserved for them.

As indicated by this study lack of education is the most important inhibiting factor in the way of building dynamic and efficient women leadership at the local level. Hence, necessary steps should be taken to promote functional literacy among the women living in the rural areas.

9. It may be suggested that the women Panchayat Leaders who live below poverty line should be provided with land through necessary land reforms. As the present study reveals there is a high degree of landlessness among the women Panchayat leaders, particularly, those belonging to the weaker sections. Hence, this landlessness should be eradicated through
distribution of land. This would lead to economic empowerment of women which leads to their political empowerment.

It is imperative that necessary awareness should be created among the women leaders particularly, among those belonging to the SCs, STs and BCs in order to enhance their effectiveness. This can be achieved through conducting training and orientation programmes regularly.

10. It is also suggested that the women leaders should be educated about the Acts, rules and regulations concerning the various Panchayati Raj bodies in which they hold different political positions. This knowledge and awareness are very essential to help them to discharge their roles more effectively.

11. It is necessary that the women political functionaries working in the Panchayati Raj Institutions should be ensured necessary co-operation and help from the higher level political executives and also officials.

12. It is be suggested to reserve 50 per cent of seats for women in legislative bodies at the national and state levels for their political empowerment.

13. It is be suggested that the all the powers granted by the Panchayati Raj Act should be transfered to the panchayati Raj institutions from State Governments.