CHAPTER - VI

CONCLUSION

Orissa, as a state of India has a particular pattern of culture, tradition, polity and economy based on its historical, and socioeconomic and political settings. In this dissertation, the socioeconomic and political profile of women councillors of Sundargarh district has been taken to make a comparative assessment of the functioning of them with the variation in the socio political environment within the same district. The 74th constitutional amendment has not only provided a new panorama to urban bodies through devolution of power but also has become a democratic apparatus with voice of all including urban women to assert their rightful share in the process of urban governance. It is a legislative step to empowering women and to train them for the next higher step in the decision making process with an expectation of gradual rise of women’s political participation in future.

Political participation is a vital link towards the total empowerment of women. With that empowerment will create a balanced environment with gender just polity and she will be at par with men as partner and equal participant in the progress of the society. However this upsurge of women's power in urban governance with the pace of urbanization and industrialization requires introspection for understanding the ground realities in the course of their actual performance. As empowerment signifies the extent of autonomy and choice in one's life style there is a need for measuring the degree, dimension and nature of participation of women councillors to understand whether their participation is spontaneous or induced one, and how far the role performance is effective and genuine.

In this dissertation, an introductory Chapter I with description of global scenario of status of women, the Indian scenario has been dealt with. Chapter II has dealt with the conceptual analysis of political participation of women. Chapter III has a detail description of functioning of Municipal System in India and Orissa. The implementation of the contents of 74th Constitutional Amendment and constitution of municipal institutions has been described. The demographic profile of Sundargarh district, the municipal institutions and women councillors have been observed in Chapter IV of the
The Chapter VI of the dissertation has analysis of the socioeconomic profile of the women councillor and their awareness, interest and involvement in municipal politics with attitude and ambitions. The conceptualised hypotheses have been tested in this chapter.

The research findings, in the ultimate analysis shows that the process of politically empowering women through reservations in the local elected bodies at urban level of Sundargarh districts in Orissa has definitely helped in the wider mobilization of women. All of them were councillors for the first time and even in that first term, they have learnt to negotiate with their newly found positions in an inherently male dominated system at least to some extent. At the same time it is pity to note that most women councillors considered themselves first as housewives and then identified themselves as councillors. Those rising numbers who were sufficiently effective enough to play their role were not looked upon as role models in contrast to male councillors. They were looked down upon as part of the same political class—incompetent, ignorant, dependent and self-serving one. Except very few, most of women councillors are seen to have low profile, unrecognized for their gender specific role and suffering from unequal treatment. Bogged down by male dominance, male aggressiveness and factors of uncertainty along with their role conflict, many women councillors were not able to play a decisive role in the affairs of the community. In the absence of adequate insight into institutional conditions, exposure to the public life, inarticulateness, and lack of required educational qualification, sufficient awareness, knowledge, skills, indifference of the municipal authorities, paucity of fund, socialization process reinforcing her subordinate position at the personal level, motherhood and public and private dichotomy and lack of support from ruling party have resulted in low self esteem, passivity in political activity and low self confidence in them. Their viewpoints as conveyed by some respondents in most of the cases were unheard, ignored, and plans and proposals were sabotaged on flimsy grounds. They were not bold enough to break barriers of male dominated institutions and were satisfied with their positions without challenging it.

Their complete role reversal though was not in sight but vistas are opening for some women councillors who believe that they are entitled to make decisions on major domestic and public issues. Their changes in status and functioning, as councillors in
Municipality may be trivial but any small rise bringing positive changes are definitely gigantic steps. The social, economic and political changes of the last three decades have relaxed the rigid social structure to some extent for which the new forces have reduced the influence of caste and age as determinants of leadership roles. Due to one-third reservation policy mostly the housewives and some social activists are emerging as leaders. Educational qualification and political identification with the ruling party has assumed a new significance. Political patronage and family influence rather than personal merit has become the criteria for selecting women representatives.

The ranking of leadership qualities women councillors in Sundargarh district in Orissa is related directly to their socioeconomic status. The dimensions of leadership qualities have been analyzed by observing their reputation, participation in various administrative affairs, decision making capacities, the ability of coping with the challenges and judging their mental efficacy at the personal level by taking various indicators. Male councillors from male dominant perspective have assessed the effectiveness of women's participation. They were of opinion that women could do better in areas like health, education, hygiene and like others and men's agenda gave more importance to the finance aspect in Sundargarh district. Actually the inaccessibility of women to this area was due to absence of sufficient knowledge, information, training and experience making them less visible. Again the efficacy of women councillors at the political level was dependent on their contact with the ruling political party, their party affiliation, party position of the Chairman and their relationship with him / her and government officials as well as most of the programmes are routed through them. But due to gender insensitivity the women members were not taken seriously. In this context the study shows certain points deserve special mentioning. Firstly, women councillors in most of the cases lacked autonomy in the decision making process as the male councillors had never recognized that women also have an independent mind. In general, most of the women councillors were portrayed as symbols of docile dependency without a voice of their own. Secondly, the view that women were not competent enough to participate in urban governance either due to their biological factor or gender had forced the society in questioning their capacity in public life. Thirdly, though women are gradually becoming increasingly accepted in the political stream of the local level, the absence of upward
mobility and advancement among them had forced one to concentrate on their motivational and attitudinal level. Fourthly, women representatives were found to be judging themselves by two standards, one is that of their feminist role of caring, emotive and passive nature and other is her modern role in the public sphere whereby she is expected to be aggressive, assertive, confident, and result oriented. This compartmentalization posed difficulty for the respondents to choose appropriate course of behaviour. Fifthly, it seemed due to the historical origin of patriarchy and its socialization; they had understood power in terms of "who has over them, rather than the power that should be exercised on their part." However one positive thing is that the emergence of this new leadership role is due to the achieved status of an individual. We owe a lot to these emerging women leaders to bestow them with the art of communication, negotiation and management through training supported by transparency and accountability of officials and male colleagues to contribute substantially for their successful functioning.

The women in the public life require a protecting guard of popular hold from all sides and considerable good will for accomplishing their responsibilities significantly. The reservation policy is not the solution to rely on attitudinal, social and structural blockade which women face in their entry into politics. Simply electing a few women to assume key political positions is mere tokenism and such women would simply serve as the mouthpiece of men who had placed them in such power situation. What is required is the entry of women with an awakened political consciousness and taking pride in exercising wisdom, initiation and skills as tools of policy making and possessing the courage to oppose the domination of male power establishments. Social systems that are deeply ingrained in notions of patriarchy need to undergo fundamental transformation in Sundergarh districts of Orissa. If male councillors would gradually learn to honour their differences with women peace and harmonious coexistence could be established. Differences in the way male councillors and women councillors work and speak must be recognized and allowed to boost the confidence of women and the biases that slip into speech and activity and reinforce stereotypes should be eliminated. Psychologists have stated that females seek reinforcements when their activities are acclaimed and genuine appreciation is given and this aspect has also to be taken care for their advancement in the
political arena. Hence an active involvement of women in politics is possible in those women who have higher achievement motive and greater social approval. Again not only change within the existing political structure is required, but also within women's own perception of sensitive issues that directly concern their lives. In other words, through organization, teamwork, sharing of experiences, accessing resources and building capacities through political or non-political organizations, and through genuine recognition and appreciation of their work, women councillors can begin their independent and modest ventures.

The novel measures introduced in the states of Kerala, West Bengal, and Karnataka in order to expand the base of participation may be adopted as a model for women's entry arena into the political sphere of the process of democratic decentralization. They should be provided with enough participatory opportunities and exposure to liberate them of the forced and artificial restraining frames to emerge as more confident, articulate, progressive and prominent leaders.

Sufficient care has to be taken to remove the prejudices and improve the positive self-images of women. If female has to grow, then educating those women sufficiently in all aspects is a necessary precondition before their entry into the political world. The social empowerment must precede the political empowerment to develop an increased sense of self-reliance. It will help them to be relieved from household responsibilities to some extent and will make it easier for them to act outside patriarchal laws for their effective functioning.

Efforts to maintain women in politics whether at grassroots level or national level must be an uninterrupted process irrespective of reservations. In order to overcome the shortcomings of the welfare approach, Amartya Sen had proposed to look women as the agents of change rather than as passive beneficiaries. He had proposed for creation of material and social environment that should contribute towards their participation bringing gender equity.

Thus a comprehensive approach based on capacity building, welfare and human rights of women can remove the existing gap and would improve the self-efficacy of women. All the members in the councils should recognize that women are essential part of the political system and the voices of women will lead to a developed and equitable
society and the strengthening of democracy. The women's group working at local level should adopt a common policy, and a common vision to create gender specific development paradigm in all the areas of policymaking, planning and structures. Once the political participation of women would reach parity, the traditional male centered politics characterized by authority, domination, violence and sometimes corruption would succumb to politics that is characterized by unity, cooperation, caring, sacrifice and honesty.

In the ultimate analysis, if women continue to find themselves ignored, neglected and deprived, then part of the answer for efficacious regeneration lies in their own potential to systematize and aggregate their cause. Women councillors as such have to take the initiative and set free themselves from several constraints they docilely suffer today. To realize the dream, they should be prepared to undertake a long journey of struggle, which is plagued with barriers. Women have to discover their own identity, which is neither male nor female but only humane. There is a clear need of a gender specific development model in all the areas of policy making and planning so that the need of women could be met and their participation would be ensured. This necessitates a holistic approach based on political worth, welfare and an all round transformation in the consciousness of both men and women as well as in the socio cultural norms for eliminating existing gap in and resulting in gender equity in the political arena.