PREFACE

In the era of Post-colonialism and Globalization, India stands out with its rapid economic growth and profound socioeconomic changes. An unparalleled expansion of the economy leading to educational and employment opportunities, extensive healthcare facilities, remarkable improvements in social indicators and other benefits of social legislation for people at various sectors are seen today. There has been unprecedented shift of human settlements from rural to urban area under modernization and urbanization. This has led to a widespread perception that with the ongoing process of social change and democratization in the 21st century, millions of women would be gained from 'modernity' that would open a flood-gate for their participation at all levels. But a deep insight into the matter gives us a paradoxical picture. On one hand, there exist the educated, assertive elite who have surpassed men in many respects and at the other extreme huge chunk of women who are struggling to break the patriarchal shackles at all levels.

To the most significant question as to 'who participates most in politics?', the obvious answer is 'people' and people stand for both men and women, who being the unique creations of nature, supplement and harmonize each other. But in reality, issues like political participation of women and their equal status with men are more easily professed than practiced. We still have miles to claim that there is perfect equality between men and women. The under-representation of women in political decision-making at all levels is a major concern in many parts of the world including India. The Jakarta Declaration had stipulated the empowerment of women not only from the equity angle but also as a necessary precondition for sustainable economic and social development. Their involvement in the political domain and in the decision-making process would be an important tool for empowerment as well as monitoring standards of political performance. Women's participation in politics is crucial as society calls for balancing views on the needs and the requirements of the both men and women and improving provision of services to the least powerful members of the community.
Since independence, India has passed a number of important legislations facilitating women's political participation in the decision-making process. As a result of the reservation policy under the 73rd and 74th Acts, millions of women have entered public life. This access to the political process does not solve all problems. Orissa is the first State in India to put into practice the 33% reservation of seats for women both at rural and urban levels. To increase the number of women in public services, 30% vacancies in Group B, C & D services have also been reserved for women in the State. Several capacity-building measures are covered by a special programme for the empowerment of women, called Swayam Sidha in Koraput, Bolangir and Kalahandi districts. Besides these, the State Government has launched Mission Shakti in 2001 with the purpose of forming one lakh Self Help Groups by 2007. Women's component plan has been introduced in the IX Plan, which states that not less than 30% of the funds and benefits should be specifically earmarked for women's programmes in all related sectors.

The social, economic and political changes during the last three decades have relaxed the rigid social structure to a considerable extent. Some amount of such change in the socio-cultural status of women in Orissa gives the message of development of society in the modern age, which is definitely a crucial step towards gender equality and empowerment. While gradually women are becoming increasingly accepted, a clear deviation between the goals enunciated in the constitution and legislative plans and the actual performance of women in the governing structures is still insignificant in many aspects especially at the political level. Their view points in most of the cases tend to remain unheard or in some instances even ignored, forcing them to function as mere figureheads. The sardonic and anti-female attitude, devaluation of their views, indifference to their dignity and self-image, and dominations are not uncommon. Some women candidates are political beginners backed by political parties. Their husbands often do not reconcile to their wives' position and do not allow them to move out independently and choose to perform their functions themselves. The traditional acceptance of the secondary role of women has also often led to women themselves justifying male domination on account of better exposure, public acceptability and physical strength.
However, obstructions to the political participation of the women are not singular to the case of Orissa alone. In the sociological stream women have traditionally always stayed behind men in all countries. And in spite of substantial endeavour today, the course of human sociology throughout the ages has shown an uneven tilt in favour of men. A number of factors can be attributed for the prevailing social and economic unevenness between men and women.

The purpose of my study is to examine the participation of women at the urban level after the declaration of the significant 74th Constitutional amendment Act. Urban governance is a wider concept. It administers and manages the city and seeks to endorse its economy, assures fair play, improves environmentalism and achieves all that by essentially involving people. The lack of basic services and infrastructure affects women most fundamentally in cities, because more than men they deal with water, sanitation, fuel and waste management due to their domestic responsibilities. In fact, they are better managers or decision makers on basic services on the household front. Hence all these grass root systems and organizations are part and parcel of a plan for renovating gender based identities and social relations, opening up access to civil society and promoting participation in implementation of new urban policies.

It is important to keep encouraging women and providing more opportunities for them to be selected to work for local politics. Looking at this induction of women in large numbers the question that arises is the extent to which women of Orissa feel they have been able to achieve equality in respect of their empowerment and emergence in politics, rights and justice at the level of urban governance. Also whether the shifting configuration of power between the forces of tradition and modernity have shaped women’s role in politics and women’s relation in politics with the rapid growth of urbanization under modernization and industrialization. And lastly, who all constitute the women councillors joining at this level of governance. Whether political reservation alone would be sufficient to transform them into real actors with clear-cut interest remains uncertain and it has to be seen how the wider concerns of civil society are converted into awareness in the political domain.

No theoretical scheme based on mere legislation can complete the empowerment process of women. The socio economic and structural hindrances to women’s political
participation must be removed at the earliest. As long as they continue in force, women’s access to the decision-making process would be sternly blight, and the constructive and positive energies of women will not be available for the betterment of human conditions. Self-confidence within women is the first requisite to bring bottom up changes in society. They need to reinforce their own strength, organization and mobilization, be bold and determined, gain access to the governing structures and formulation of public policy and transform them all to a gender-just state. Women themselves must formulate goal, struggle hard, and together with men should come forward to face the new challenges of the present day society. In effect women seek visibility, equity, participation, opportunity to counter discrimination and marginalization, freedom from shackles of cultural and social stereotypes, a voice in decision-making in the public sphere and gender sensitive state policies. Though family, financial status, inadequacy of communication and the plethora of social structural limitations might be barriers for women entering urban local politics, women nevertheless need local support and the belief in their capability as good managers and coordinators in local development. The major need here is the change in the mindset and attitude of both sexes and a chance for women to exchange and express their ideas.

The new environments of Municipal councils, over a decade after the implementation of the 74th Amendment Act with the reservation issue for women, is beginning to transform the process and priorities of local self government and the women who have been brought into politics. The new forces have changed status and age as determinants of leadership roles, education has gained premium, the right to information has signaled a direction towards transparency, and political identity with the ruling party has assumed a new meaning. Keeping in mind this background the study has been made.

The present study is divided into six chapters. In the first chapter, an attempt has been made to make a short review of available literature; both published and unpublished relating to the position of women at the political level in the world and in India. It also deals with the problem, scope, objectives, the hypothesis for the theme and methods of study. The second chapter has concentrated on the theoretical aspect of political participation and its determinants with special reference to the political participation of the women and several hurdles faced by them in the process. A brief historical
background of the emergence of municipal administration in India along with its organization, powers and functions and changes introduced under 74th constitutional amendment Act are given in third chapter. All the observations of the field study relating to socio-economic and political background of the women councillors of the Sundargarh district in Orissa and their participation in the process of governance is discussed elaborately in the fourth chapter with the use of tables and mathematical analysis as far as practicable. The fifth chapter has covered the detail analysis of the socio-economic and political profile of women councillors in all four Municipal councils from the tables accompanied by a comparative assessment of the results, political efficacy of women members, observations relating to constraints of political participation. The concluding statements along with suggestion for remedial measures for their effective participation have been made in the sixth chapter.

In course of the field study for the collection of secondary and primary sources of information, certain difficulties had been faced. Since four municipal councils were covered, contacting all the respondents and distribution of the questionnaire to them was a problem. Sometimes Personal interview was conducted and frequent contact was established with some members either meeting personally or over telephonic discussion. In majority of cases the questions were translated into local language for their better understanding. There was some difficulty in obtaining secondary data relating to previous women councillors as well as present ones as records were not maintained systematically in some cases.

However, the researcher expresses her immense gratitude to a number of persons and institutions for their sincere and kind cooperation in the preparation of the thesis. A reference to some of the most important among them seems imperative although limitation of space would not permit me to mention all the names.

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