CHAPTER 7
CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

This study is mainly concerned with the political participation of women in West Bengal. It explores the impact of socio-economic variables on electoral participation, the impact of socio-economic variables on attitudinal variables, and the impact of attitudinal variables on political participation. An attempt has also been made to look at the picture not only through survey data, but in a wider context, on the basis of official data as well. The main focus here has been on the gender differences and the rural-urban differences in the sphere of political participation.

Some of the hypotheses formulated by the researcher were fully supported by the survey data, some were only partially supported and some others were not supported at all.

To the first category belong the hypotheses that women are less involved in political participation than men, but mobilization of women voters is increasing and that the gender gap is diminishing. All these hypotheses have been fully supported by the survey data as well as by the official data. An examination of the survey data and the
election data revealed that women vote less than men.\footnote{1}

The study indicates that women had a lower degree of political ambition\footnote{2} and also lower sense of political efficacy than men.\footnote{3} Women were found to be less politically informed than their male counterparts.\footnote{4} It was observed that the percentage of positive attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the sphere of partisan choice was higher among men.\footnote{5} Partisan preference level was also lower among women.\footnote{6} But at the same time, the study also indicates that mobilization of women voters was increasing\footnote{7}, and the gender gap was gradually diminishing.\footnote{8}

\begin{enumerate}
\item \footnote{1}{Tables 2.2 and 6.1 supra.}
\item \footnote{2}{Table 3.1, supra.}
\item \footnote{3}{Table 3.22, supra.}
\item \footnote{4}{Table 4.1, supra.}
\item \footnote{5}{Table 4.22, supra.}
\item \footnote{6}{Table 4.43, supra.}
\item \footnote{7}{Table 6.1, supra.}
\item \footnote{8}{Idem.}
\end{enumerate}
The hypothesis was framed that the higher the level of education, the higher would be the level of political knowledge. This hypothesis has been significantly proved. A significant association between education and political knowledge could be observed among the respondents of the four categories covered by the study.\(^9\)

To the second category belong the hypotheses that are only partially supported by the survey data and the official data. It was hypothesized that urbanization can be identified with high levels of political ambition, sense of political efficacy, financial expectations about the future, political knowledge, positive support for independent partisan choice by women, and with partisan preference level.

The study indicates that urbanization does make men more ambitious than their rural counterparts.\(^10\) Urbanization increases the sense of political efficacy in the case of both the sexes.\(^11\) The study also indicates that urbanization had an inverse effect on the financial expectations rate. This holds equally true in case of both the sexes.\(^12\)

\(^9\) Tables 4.10, 4.11, 4.12 and 4.13, supra.
\(^10\) Table 3.1, supra.
\(^11\) Table 3.22, supra.
\(^12\) Table 3.43, supra.
Urbanization also significantly increased the political knowledge level of both the sexes,\textsuperscript{13} and had a positive impact in increasing the positive attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the sphere of partisan choice.\textsuperscript{14} Urbanization, to some extent, has increased the degree of partisan preference.\textsuperscript{15}

To explore the impact of caste on voting behaviour it was hypothesized that the higher the caste status, the higher would be the rate of participation. The present study reveals that caste status did not have any significant impact on the turnout figure of any of the four groups. The data, however, revealed that in the rural region, both among the men and women, the highest turnout was found among the Brahmins.\textsuperscript{16}

Another hypothesis was that the higher the level of education, the higher was the level of voting turnout.

This study reveals that education did not influence

\textsuperscript{13} Table 4.1, supra.
\textsuperscript{14} Table 4.22, supra.
\textsuperscript{15} Table 4.43, supra.
\textsuperscript{16} Tables 2.8, 2.9, supra.
the turnout rate of the rural women. However, the data also reveal that the abstention was highest among the illiterate women. Among the urban women the study indicates a curvilinear relationship between these two variables: turnout was raised with literacy, but decreased with a further rise in the level of education, and again continued to increase with college education. However, education did not have any significant impact on the voting behavior of men of both the regions.

Another hypothesis supported partially by the study is that the higher the exposure to mass media, the higher was the voting turnout. With the sole exception of rural women, exposure to mass media was positively associated with the rate of voting turnout.

It was hypothesised that the higher the level of political ambition, the higher would be the level of political participation. The hypothesis was supported in the case of the rural men only.

17 Table 2.12, supra.
18 Idem.
19 Table 2.14, supra.
20 Tables 2.25, 2.26 and 2.27, supra.
21 Table 5.2, supra.
The impact of the socio-economic variables on the sense of political efficacy was explored with the hypothesis that a higher level of political efficacy was associated with higher caste status, higher level of education, higher level of family income, and gainful employment. This study indicates that in the rural region, it was found that caste status had a significant impact on the efficacy level. Among the women, the Brahmins had the maximum efficacy score.22 Among their opposite counterparts also, a positive correlation between these two variables could be established.23 However, caste status had no impact on the efficacy level in the urban region. In the rural region, among both the sexes, a high level of education was followed by a high sense of political efficacy.24 However, education did not influence the efficacy level in the urban region. Higher income status of the family significantly influenced the political efficacy level in the rural region only (both among the men and the women).25 It was found that, except in the case of rural women, a positive association between occupation and sense of efficacy could be established in case of the three other

22 Table 3.27, supra.
23 Table 3.28, supra.
24 Tables 3.31, 3.32, supra.
25 Tables 3.35 and 3.36, supra.
groups.\textsuperscript{26} It was assumed by the researcher that the higher the sense of political efficacy, the higher would be the level of political participation. Except in the case of rural women, this hypothesis has been proved valid in the case of the three other groups.\textsuperscript{27}

Financial expectations about the future was considered as one of the variables linked to political participation. It was hypothesised that a higher level of financial expectations about the future was associated with higher caste status, with higher level of education, with higher family income and with gainful employment.

The survey data suggest that among the rural women, a higher caste status was positively associated with higher financial expectations about the future.\textsuperscript{28} This study indicates that in the rural region, among the women only, a higher educational level raised the level of financial expectations about the future.\textsuperscript{29} But the association could not be established in case of the three other groups.

\textsuperscript{26} Tables 3.40, 3.41 and 3.42, supra.
\textsuperscript{27} Tables 5.6, 5.7 and 5.8, supra.
\textsuperscript{28} Table 3.48, supra.
\textsuperscript{29} Table 3.52, supra.
The survey indicates that the level of financial expectation increased with an increase of the family income level of the rural women. However, higher family income did not help to increase the expectation level of the three other groups. This study also reveals that the occupational status influenced the financial expectation level of the urban women only.

To examine the impact of political knowledge on the level of socio-economic variables, the hypothesis was framed that a higher level of political knowledge is associated with higher caste status, with higher level of education, with higher level of family income, and with gainful employment.

The present study reveals that in the rural region both among the men and the women higher caste status was positively associated with the level of political knowledge.

The present survey indicates that a higher level of family income had a positive influence on the higher level of political knowledge in case of both the sexes in the rural region only.

30 Table 3.56, supra.
31 Table 3.62, supra.
32 Tables 4.6 and 4.7, supra.
33 Tables 4.14 and 4.15, supra.
The study also reveals that except in the case of the rural male respondents, occupational status had no impact on the political knowledge level of the respondents of the three other groups.

One of the hypotheses formulated by the researcher was that the higher the level of political knowledge, the higher would be the participation level. The study indicates that in case of women of both the regions, only medium participation level increased consistently with an increase in the level of political knowledge. Among the rural and urban men high participatory scores were found to be most widespread in the category having high political knowledge scores.

Attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the sphere of partisan choice has been considered here in the context of political participation. It was hypothesised that a higher level of positive attitude is associated with higher caste status, higher level of education, higher level of family income, and with the occupational status.

34 Table 4.19 supra.
35 Tables 5.13 and 5.15.
36 Tables 5.14, 5.16.
Caste status was found to be positively associated with positive attitude in the rural region only in case of both the sexes. The study also reveals that among both the sexes in the rural region only, a higher level of education was followed by a more liberal attitude. The study indicates that there was a significant association between occupational status and positive attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the sphere of partisan choice only among the rural men, and the urban women.

It was assumed, that a more positive attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the sphere of partisan choice would be positively associated with the level of political participation. The hypothesis was partly proved valid in case of women of both the regions, i.e., medium participation level increased consistently with a more positive attitude level, and significantly proved in the case of the urban men.

37 Tables 4.27 and 4.28, supra.
38 Tables 4.31 and 4.32, supra.
39 Table 4.40, supra.
40 Table 4.41, supra.
41 Tables 5.17 and 5.19, supra.
42 Table 5.20, supra.
The influence of the socio-economic variables on partisan preference of respondents was explored with the hypothesis that there was a positive association between a high partisan preference level with higher caste status, with high level of education, with high family income level and with the occupational status.

The study reveals that neither in the urban region nor in the rural region, could any positive association between partisan preference and caste status be established. It was observed that higher educational level positively influenced the partisan preference level among the male respondents in the rural region only. It was found that a higher family income had no impact on the partisan preference of the respondents of any group. The survey data also reveal that influence of occupational status on the level of partisan preference was insignificant.

One hypothesis was framed that the higher the level of partisan preference, the higher would be the level of political participation. The hypothesis was proved significant only in the case of rural men.

To the third category belong the hypotheses that were not supported at all by the present study.

43 Table 4.53, supra.
44 Table 5.22, supra.
It was hypothesized that urbanization had a positive effect on the rate of voting turnout.

The study indicates that urbanization had no positive effect on the rate of voting turnout of both men and women. The percentage of voting abstention was higher among urban women than among rural women. This has been indicated both by the survey data and the statistical analysis of the election data.45

It was assumed that variation in age was correlated with turnout at the polls. The present study indicates that age had no impact on the voting turnout rate. Both in the rural and the urban regions, and in case of both the sexes, it was found that there was no steady growth, nor was there any steady decline in the voting rate associated with age.16

It was assumed that higher levels of political ambition, sense of political efficacy, financial expectations about the future, political knowledge, a highly positive attitude towards independent decision-making by women in the sphere of partisan choice, partisan preference and political participation were positively associated with increasing age.

45 Tables 2.3 and 6.3, supra.

46 Tables 2.4, 2.5 and 2.6 and 2.7, supra.
The present study reveals that there was no consistent pattern of increase or decrease of age associated with any of these variables. The hypothesis was framed that the higher the level of economic status of the family, the higher would be the rate of voting participation. The survey data did not establish any significant association between family income and the voting turnout rate.

The influence of occupation was explored with the hypothesis that voting turnout would be higher among those who were gainfully employed. In the rural region, among the women, the present survey did not cover various occupational groups. So no general conclusion could be drawn here. In the case of the three other groups also, occupational status did not influence the turnout level.

The hypothesis was framed that a higher political ambition score was associated with higher caste status, with higher level of education, with higher family income and with occupational status. The present study reveals that there was no consistent pattern of increase or decrease in the level of political ambition associated with any of these variables.

It was hypothesised that the higher the level of financial expectations, the higher would be the level of political participation. The hypothesis has not been supported by the present survey. However, the researcher's
data suggest that in the urban region, a negative orientation induced greater participation.47

The hypothesis was framed that there is growing representation of women voters. This hypothesis has been proved invalid. The study indicates that there was under representation of women in the Legislative Assembly.48 and in the ministries.49 It was hypothesized that there was an encouraging trend to set up more women candidates by the political parties. The hypothesis was also proved invalid. In West Bengal, neither the multi-party system nor the left parties showed any encouraging trend to set up the women candidates.50

The study therefore indicates that women's participation in the electoral process has shown a steady increase, but their ability to produce an impact on the political process has been negligible. The present study once again establishes the point that was stressed by the Committee on the Status of Women a decade ago that "all the indicators of

47 Tables 5.11 and 5.12, supra.
48 Table 6.4, supra.
49 Table 6.6, supra.
50 Table 6.5, supra.
participation, attitudes and impact come up with the same
cresults - the resolution in political status of women for
which constitutional equality was the only instrument,
still remains a very distant objective".51 The large masses
of women continue to lack spokesmen who understand their
social problems and are committed to their removal in the
representative bodies of the state. In spite of some
changes, it is still evident that there is a difference in
the level of political participation between men and women,
both quantitatively and qualitatively.

Throughout this study, the researcher has sought to
examine the degree of political participation of women of West
Bengal. Such a study cannot, obviously, establish a general
theory of political behaviour of women. Still it may be hoped
that it will contribute, at least to some extent, to the estab-
ishment of a theory which may have extensive application.

51 Report of the Committee on the Status of Women
in India, Towards Equality (New Delhi, Government
of India, Department of Social Welfare, Ministry
of Education and Social Welfare, 1974)
Article 7.97.
Reference may be made once again to the major findings of the present study. Both from survey data and official data, the researcher finds that women's political mobilization is increasing but their participation in politics as compared to that of men is still less. The gap, however, is diminishing. The large masses of women still continue to lack spokesmen. Some of the researcher's findings regarding the association between some political factors and socio-economic variables are contrary to some common assumptions. For example, age, caste status, occupation and income are not found to have any significant impact on political participation, and voting turnout is more among the rural women than among their urban counterparts. These findings may reveal new areas for further investigations.