Chapter –VII

DISCUSSION

The First objective of the study is “To enumerate the factors that contributed for the emergence of the women into politics is fulfilled. In India, political parties are ridden with factions based upon religious and caste attachments, locality-based loyalties, pulls and pressures of different kinds and degrees. Findings of several studies suggest that having more women in leadership roles could inspire and help other women assert themselves. Awareness about rights and opportunities in the wake of planned development besides knowledge about the availability of reservations for securing political participation in the local governments has turned out to be an important factor for the emergence of women into politics. Economically well-to do family background and an actively connected political role to a close relative, mostly father, husband or mother are found to be factors for women emergence into politics.

The data presented in the tables 16-20 in chapter -V indicate the perceptions of women respondents on the reasons for joining into politics. The traits of their leaders besides situational factors prompted their entry into politics. It is noticed that regional issues, ideological convictions and hereditary compulsions emerged as factors in that order for motivating the sample respondents to join into politics. It is also found that there are variations in the perceptions of respondents of various categories based upon their socio-economic and other status. The data reveals that the situational factors that demanded their entry into politics are constitutional reservations, family influence, ideological and political aspects.

The first Hypothesis of the study is “Family background helped the women to emerge as political leaders”. Tables from 16 to 20 indicate that the inter correlations among social status, education, economic status, occupation and age - wise reasons for
joining in a political party are very positive. It is observed that there has not been much variation across the categories in terms of reasons for joining into political parties. However, relatively higher percentage of the respondents belonging to the Forward Communities in comparison with their counter parts in other categories joined for hereditary reasons. It is highlighted that the economic status of family of women respondents motivated them to join in political party and contest in election to get personal advantage. It also evident from the data across tables 16-20, that personal opportunism and pressure from their family members are cited as reasons for Home Makers for entering into politics. The data in the tables reveal that majority of sample respondents belongs to lower age group joined in politics due to a circumstantial opportunity they received while relatively higher number of respondents from older age groups joined due to hereditary compulsions. Tables from 26 to 30 indicate that an important factor that demanded the women entry into politics is family influence. Family encouragement besides sponsor from families that possess political background led women from lower income groups and lower age categories to emerge as political leaders.

The second Hypothesis is “There is a positive correlation between women literacy and political participation”. Education is an important aspect of women’s life for elevating to higher positions in politics. The table 3 presents that considerable percentage of leaders at Local Government is economically and educationally low. Table 10 reveals a noticeable variation in terms of educational status and their political identify. Relatively higher percentage of respondents among primary and secondary education categories have national party political association while relatively higher number of those who possess higher educational qualifications have regional party identity. It means the preference of identity to national or regional party is influenced by the educational qualification to some extent. Table 13 indicates that those who posses secondary or higher education emerged as either members or office bearers of their political parties. Those with low educational status are found relatively confined to ordinary membership
of the party despite their being the elected representatives at Local Government. Table 29 gives details of women respondents Education Wise situational factors that demanded their entry into politics. The graduation and higher education categories respondents are relatively influenced by women reservations and local political issues.

The second objective of the study is “To assess the personality traits of the women who emerged as political leaders’. Women leaders are noticed to possess, to a large extent, such traits as Individual character, ability to respond positively to hardship, Empathy with others, Willingness to speak out, Honesty, and Ability to get support from family and spouse, Strong belief in the power of the group or collective and so on. There is an opinion that effective participation in politics is determined more by psychological factors than sociological factors. Further, there is an observation that in regard to the active role in political parties, political agitations and defections, the women representatives have not lagged behind the male counterparts, which indicates opportunism and power mongering have also been the personality traits of some women leaders.

The data gives a picture on the socio-economic profile of respondents in the sample to assess the antecedents i.e., the background of individual women members interested in playing an important role in Local Government Politics. The sample reflects that considerable percentage of women leaders at Local Government are economically and educationally low and there is a recognizable variation in terms of age wise entry level into Local politics. The data presents a picture that there are identifiable variations in political identity on the basis of their social status. The data give an idea that the women are largely dependent on their political parties for their political identity for gaining entry into politics. The larger number of respondents opting for early political identity may be attributed to the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act that ensured 33% reservations for Women in Local Government.
The Third hypothesis “Social status is a significant source for women to emerge as leaders”. Social status is considered as an independent variable as it stands the basis for reservations. The Constitution provides facility of reservations in Local Government. Table 10 provides that a significant number of BC category respondents are identified with regional party while the majority of the SC respondents are identified with the National Party. The table presents a picture that there are identifiable variations in political identity on the basis of their social status. Table 11 presents the social status wise nature of association of the respondents with their party. It is observed that a relatively high number of the respondents of the Forward Caste category are active members when compared to the other social categories. Similarly, a relatively high percentage of respondents from Forward Caste category when compared to their counterparts in other categories possess political office. Table 26 presents the social status wise respondents situational factors that demanded their entry into politics. It gives a picture that a significant number of women respondents entered into politics on the basis of women reservations. Regarding the BC and SC respondents there is significant influence of caste reservations which demanded their entry into politics when compared to Forward Caste respondents. Table 46 gives a picture that social status or caste is an important factor for women to emerge as leaders. The data indicate social status rather than educational qualifications or any other factors as the primary influence upon women.

The Fourth hypothesis “Younger women prefer to enter into politics and become leaders” is found validated by data. Table 4 presents that 66% of the women respondents are youth and figure in the categories of below 45 years. A majority of the respondents belonging to Sc and ST have entered into public life are close to middle and a significant number of Forward Caste respondents began their political life below 35 years. Larger number of respondents preferred political entry at relatively young age to avail the opportunity they got due to 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. The table -12 reveals that majority of the respondents from the younger categories remain either ordinary or active members while a relatively higher percentage of respondents from higher age
category are noticed as members with political office. Though the younger women respondents prefer to have an active role, many of them do not get as senior and older women respondents receive more support from both the party and the society. This could be attributed to the Indian culture that younger women normally may be inhibited to seek active public life. Table 20 presents that majority of sample respondents at lower age joined in political parties due to the personal opportunity they received while a relatively higher number of the respondents from the higher age groups joined to ideological or hereditary compulsions. There is a clear variation based upon age in terms of the factors that prompted the respondents to get into politics (Table-30).

The third objective of the study “To identify the variations, if any, in terms of priorities between women leaders and their male counterparts” is also established. It is observed that the respondents perceived to have impediments in council meetings with their male counterparts. A significant number of respondents from low income groups faced many impediments in the council meetings. Those impediments were noted to be in the form of imposing time restrictions, differ intentionally their items, making scaring personalized remarks and undue interference in women councilors presentations and so on by their male counterparts. The respondents from Home Makers faced more impediments than the other categories respondents. Though the attendance of women councilors is high in the meetings, their quality participation in the proceedings of the meetings is very low.

The Fifth hypothesis “Financial dependence is an obstacle for women to become effective leaders” is validated with data. Table 8 presents that the women are largely dependent (96%) on their political parties or owes to their political identity for gaining entry into Local politics. Table 15 reveals that a relatively higher number of respondents under any category assumed the office status of the political party on the basis of their economic status. Those lower on economic status are largely remained as the ordinary members. In other words, that economic status and the status of a respondent in a political party are linked with each other. Table 17 highlighted that the economic status
of sample respondents motivated them to join into a political party in order to secure the personal advantage. As per the Table - 27, it appears that economic opportunism is a lower priority for respondents of all income categories. Even Home Makers are found significantly involved in local issues in comparison with women of other occupational identities. It is made out that women are largely dependent on their family members or political parties to contest in elections due to financial reasons. It is understood that as there is no financial independence and largely women are dependents, finance is an obstacle for women to become effective leaders.

The Hypothesis is “Women leaders give priority for problems of health, hygiene and education etc., when compared to long term priorities of male counterparts. Table 50 presents that a considerable number of women respondents from all social status categories said that they discussed the welfare issues in the council meetings regularly. It is also noticed that a significant percentage of respondents from Above and Below BPL families and Tax Payers income groups expressed that they regularly discussed these welfare issues. It is noticed that respondents from Home Makers category said that they discussed these welfare issues in the council meetings regularly. It shows that the number of respondents from lower age group who participated and discussed these welfare issues in the council meetings regularly is relatively higher than the other age groups. The age group 56 to above years (75%) who regularly discussed these matters is higher than the middle age group.

The Fourth objective of the study is “To estimate the support women leaders received for performing their public role as representatives”. It is observed that male co-members in the council are found to extend either limited assistance or nil cooperation. There is a subtle non-recognition of women councilors as they are perceived proxies to their male family members. The data from tables present a picture that age, occupation and educational status are not variables that can account for the support received in the council from their male counterparts. Similarly, the data indicate that majority of the
women councilors never received any kind of support from the Public as they are hardly recognized as their representatives. Further, the demands of the public are normally represented to the male family members of the women councilors rather than to them who possess formal status as representatives. It is not uncommon that even the official role functionaries of the Local Government approach the male members of the women representatives amounting to perpetuation of an informal structure within the formal structure.

The Hypothesis is “Women leaders face practical problems to balance their dual responsibilities i.e., official and family roles” is supported by data. Table- 50 presents the respondents perception on how they balance between family and public roles. A significant number of respondents from all social status categories expressed that the balance between the dual responsibilities, socio-political and family roles is very difficult. Even the Below BPL and Above BPL income groups felt that the balancing this dual task is more difficult. A considerable number of respondents from Home Makers category also accepted that this dual task is a difficult one. The respondents from Higher Education category (44.44%) and Graduation level category (52.14%) said that this dual task is a difficult one. The lower age group from 36 to 45 years (63.15%) accepted that it is difficult to balance between socio-political and family roles. Table- 48 gives a picture on women respondents’ perception on getting husbands cooperation in performing public role. The percentage of respondents who perceived to have received support and those who stated not to have received assistance from their husbands are almost equal. It is observed that their husband’s limited cooperation is inadequate to balance between the socio-political and public roles. As such Women are confined primarily for family responsibilities than their male counter parts. Time is a big constraint compelling the women representatives to limit themselves their public role.

The Hypothesis is “Traditions and practices of the society cause for the encouragement of proxy leadership” is validated by the data. The table -27 presents that
low income group women joined into politics relatively due to their family members’ pressure. It is observed that family influence as a factor is recognized relatively more on women to enter into politics. Their entry is marked by the wish to gain political benefit to their family through contesting in the elections under the constitutional provision for reservations. Hence, there is a subtle non-recognition of women councilors. They are perceived proxies to their female family members. Table-51 presents that respondents perception on tradition as obstacle for women participation in politics and it causes for the encouragement of proxy leadership. It is observed from the said table that considerable women respondents from all categories said that tradition as obstacle and there is a need to change in the present system for the effective participation of women in politics. It is observed that the male family members of the family take keen interest in local politics, due to women reservations they want to keep their hold over local area by nominating their women members to contest in the election. However, the male members of the women representatives play the de facto role.

The Fifth objective of the study is “To highlight the obstacles for women to be effective in their public life”. The present study identified a number of hurdles for effective participation of women councilors in their official status or formal role both in office and out of the office. With regard to over 60 percent of the respondents, it is found the primary obstacle is no other than their family members. Unlike in some of the developed societies where the women are largely involved in civic engagement, the religious implications in India do not permit the average woman to take active interest in Politics of the area. Further, there is an inherent belief in the society that women have a big job as home makers, facilitate no support for any active participation by women. In other words, this cultural aspect is responsible for many a women to be resistant to be on par with males in Politics and Governance. It is observed that women are scared of public insult and some kind of looking down to take active part. In other words, the fear of being looked down in civil society is an obstacle for their effective functioning. It is observed that across all categories of women respondents, traditions are perceived as an obstacle
for effective participation of women. Lack of financial autonomy to women also emerged as an obstacle for performing independently their formal role. Many of the respondents of the study are merited to be representing the family or some other private social status than being the public representatives by the data. The perception of women that they have emerged as the counselors only to fulfill the statutory requirement and hence their role is limited to be formal and de jure itself i.e., their basic attitude itself is an obstacle irrespective of their educational qualifications, financial and social status. There is a need for lots of sensitization among women about their importance in public life.