SUMMARY

The world over women are struggling to break the shackles that bind them and challenging the unequal distribution of power in society. The need for transformation of gender relationships necessitate their leadership in the state, markets and civil society – the key centers of power in the present globalizing economy. It is, therefore, imperative for women to be in the corridors of power to negotiate a better deal for themselves, if they are to influence policy decisions relevant for receiving justice for themselves. Empowerment of women in all spheres, in particular the political sphere is crucial for their advancement and for the foundation of a gender-equal society. It is central to the achievement of the goals of equality, development and peace. Women’s political empowerment is premised on “three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: 1) the equality between men and women, 2) women’s right to the full development of their potentials, 3) women’s right to self-representation and self-determination.”

According to Jakarta Declaration “empowerment of women is not only an equity consideration, it was also a necessary precondition for sustainable economic and social development. Involvement of women in the political arena and in decision-making roles is an important tool for empowerment as well as monitoring standards of political performance.”

Women are, however, virtually invisible in the political sphere. The notion of a distinct political sphere as opposed to the private sphere has been used to legitimize the exclusion of women from the public sphere. Under-representation or invisibility of women in decision-making reinforces their deprivation, leading to an unequal distribution of resources, neglect of their interests, needs, perspectives and priorities and to say in policy making.
To effectuate feminization of politics a critical mass of women in the decision-making bodies is yet to emerge. The substantial gains made by the women’s movement over the decades, are not adequately reflected in the representation of women in positions of power. The 30 per cent target of women’s representation fixed by the Economic and Social Council is not included in the International Development Targets. The world average of women in legislative bodies continues to be merely 12 to 13 percent, only a few countries have 30 per cent or more women in decision-making posts.

The constitution of India grants equity to women and empowers the state to adopt measures in favor of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio-economic and political disadvantages faced by them. The national commission for women was set up by an Act of parliament in 1990 to safeguard the rights and legal entitlements of women in India. The 74th Amendment of the Indian constitution, 1992 has served as a major break through towards ensuring women’s equal access and increased participation in political power structure and decision making at the local level. This Act guarantees to safeguard the interests of urban local self government to enable them to function as an effective democratic and self governing institution at the grassroots level. After 1993, women’s participation in local government increased rapidly with the enactment of the legislation providing 33 % of seats for women in local bodies.

The participation of women in the political arena and in decision-making role is an important tool for empowerment. The extent of this participation reflects standards of political performance of women at local level. However, the process of entry into decision-making institutions, mark growing influence of money and muscle power. Women besides men face problems as new entrants due to lack of previous knowledge and experience of business rules and administrative procedures.

Election is the main forum for self-government and democracy. They draw the attention to the problem and needs of disadvantaged sections, while marking promises in the name of manifesto to locals. These are indicative of national concerns as well as
mandate for action. Proper selection of candidates in an election is vital for representative democracy to function. This hierarchy is so rigid that the natural process of democracy and constitutional guarantees are still found inadequate to make any change. The political parties started changing their attitudes towards women candidates which is reflected in their election manifestos, speeches and slogans. Statistics on women’s participation in the electoral process at the local level are not very encouraging. It is important to make the leaders understand the significance of organizing training campus for women possessing leadership qualities.

Women’s equality in power sharing and active participation in decision making in important to achieve the goals of empowerment. Many NGOs and women’s groups have provided training to empower women; however more contracted efforts are required to facilitate the process of women’s ascent to key positions in political field. It is the basic requirement that the women’s groups recognize the importance of women as a constituency and ensure their full participation and representation in policy formulation. At the grass-roots level, the women’s groups are small and scattered and have diverse ways of empowering women. There are no infrastructure facilities available at this level of networking that could bring them together and strengthen them by allowing autonomy in their functioning. There is a need to create unity in diversify between women’s groups, organization and individuals involved with about changes in the women’s subordinate status. The movement must provide a support system for women who entered in political process to win election. To ensure women’s equal access to and full participation in decision making bodies, the legislative, executive, Judicial, corporate, trusts etc., serious efforts for capacity building among women representatives are necessary.

Though there are several studies on women, there is a need for more studies based upon areas, cultures and contexts. Following the International Women’s Year (1975), various organizations in India and other parts of the world have been sponsoring women studies. There is an enormous increase in the number of seminars, symposia and
conferences on women. While the earlier studies had focused on women workers, recent studies are found addressed to diverse problems of women as manual workers, the status of women sanctioned by various religions, political representation of women, reasons for entering the political and professional world and the conflict arising out of managing their dual role. The review of literature include the status of women in Indian and global contexts. The literature on women found to have been reflecting a broad spectrum of issues ranging from their traditional role to the highly professional, technology powered unconventional women.

The political status of women in developing countries and the levels and quality of their political participation are far from adequate, considering their share in the population structure, their part in social and economic development as well as their actual and potential role in the national development process. The unfavorable economic and social position of women in developing countries directly reflect the level of participation in decision making process at all levels. In many developing countries a large portion of the women actively participated in the national liberation movement and in the creation of national political structure. However, they were often under-represented in the decision making apparatus at different levels. Studies on women’s participation have revealed that they are more active at the informal level, which are closer to their problems than participative political activity. This passivity of women in formal political activity is both a symptom and a cause of some major developmental problems.\(^5\) Political participation can be considered to include an involvement in any form of organized activity that affects or seeks to affect power relationships. Political participation leads to political empowerment which is crucial to women’s achievement of equality for without real clout at the decision making level social and economic empowerment quickly become dead ends.\(^6\)

Women’s role in decision making is one of the most important questions for consideration in the movement for their empowerment. Despite constituting nearly half of the population of the country, their participation has been very low in decision making.
The main reasons for low participation has been the women’s subordinate position to men in every aspect of life since ancient times. Their place of work was confined to household chores and rearing of children. Her identity was attached to that of her father, husband or son, i.e., her status was dependent upon the male partner. It is not that women in the past have not contributed substantially in politics, but because of their subservient status and low esteem, majority of them were denied entry in political decision-making. Though the Constitution of India provided for the Government to make special provisions to safeguard the interests of women (Articles 15(3) and 39), it did not make any provision for reservation for women in respect of political offices.

Reservation for women in urban local government is not just a question of getting a certain number in; it also develops their capacities to play their rightful roles in the development process and makes an important difference as the local governments deal mostly with the quality of life for citizens. Municipal responsibilities relate largely to such practical needs as Health, Hygiene, Sanitation and so on, which are perceived as the interest and domain or women. Their participation in Local Governance and civic engagement is perceived to be ideal for development.

A very active role for women in local governance is envisaged as compared to governance at the state and national levels in India. The above reservation provision has provided great opportunities and challenges to women in India, particularly in the field of local governance. This is of great significance, since the local level participation has considerably broadened the base of women’s participation in politics. At local level a different styles of politics seem to prevail in elections compared to elections for State or National Assemblies. Any micro study on Women Leadership is useful for it brings out area specific considerations and provides for indigenous theory building. The Narsapur Municipal Council in West Godavari District of Andhra Pradesh is chosen for the study of the local political processes, the emergence of women leadership and the performance of women political leaders in fast changing political scenario.
The study is intended to estimate the impact of politicization and empowerment of women in the context of 74th Amendment Act enabling a large number of women to become political leaders, challenges to the status of women in the society, and factors responsible for the emergence of women leadership in Narsapur town. Considering the need for micro studies on the emergence of women as leaders, a designated urban area with predominant rural features namely Narasapur Municipality in Andhra Pradesh is chosen as the universe for the present study. This coastal town has a rich cultural heritage besides being strategic economically, administratively and politically. Following are the main objectives of the present study.

1. To enumerate the factors that contributed for the emergence of women into local politics.

2. To assess the personality factors of the women who emerged as political leaders.

3. To identify the variations, if any, in terms of priorities between women leaders and their male counterparts.

4. To estimate the support women leaders received for performing their public role as representatives.

5. To highlight the obstacles for women to be effective in their public role.

A questionnaire was prepared and administered for raising data. Scientific procedures and techniques were followed for collecting the data. The data were classified and categorized as per the pre-determined categorizations. The data were analyzed for significance without employing any higher statistical methods, for the size of the sample is small. The analysis of the data was corroborated with the findings of the earlier studies besides determining the extent of compliance with existing conceptions. Further, it was used to determine whether the hypotheses and objectives of the study got validated by the data or not. Findings of the study largely confirmed and upheld the hypotheses. The study resulted in many observations fit to be inputs for policy makers and implementers.
The Socio-economic profile of the respondents in the sample is analyzed to assess the antecedents i.e., the background of individual women members interested in playing prominent role as facilitators of civic engagement in Local Governments. For the purpose of this study, the researcher identified 50 women who served as representatives of the people in an Urban Local Government. The study is significant as it portrays women in public life, their perceptions in the aftermath of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act.

The study resulted the following observations:

1. Family background helped the women to emerge as political leaders.
2. There is a positive correlation between women literacy and political participation.
3. Social status is a significant source for women to emerge as leaders.
4. Lower age women desire to enter into politics and become leaders compared to elder women.
5. Financial dependence is an obstacle for women to become effective leaders.
6. Women leaders give priority for problems of health, hygiene and education when compared to long term priorities spoken by their male counterparts.
7. Women leaders face practical problems to balance the dual responsibilities, i.e., family and public roles.
8. Traditions and practices of the society are a source for the encouragement of proxy leadership.

REFERENCES


4. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Netherlands are a few examples of countries having more than thirty percent of women in decision making posts.
