Chapter - I

INTRODUCTION

Women’s participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. Governance relates to a set of rules, institutions, and values that are involved in the management of state and society. Governance institutions and processes include political parties, parliaments, government and their interactions with society. Although governance is a generic term which could mean good government or management, the governance values, types of government, the nature of political processes, the political parties and organizations, which/whose interests are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses have to challenge the state or in suggesting alternatives in methods of governance etc., may vary in different political systems.

Liberal democracy is founded on reason, law, and freedom of choice but the position of different social groups in the social and political space where power is located is not always equal in practice. This is particularly so in the case of women. The nature of society or state has a decisive impact on the extent and effectiveness of women’s political presence and participation. Notions of democracy, governance and the state are often not gender neutral constructs but result from both historical factors and experiences. The state and its organizational entities reflect the same social forces as other social organizations. It is thus necessary to examine the gender balance in women’s participation in the political process, decision making and policy formulation.

The limited nature of female participation and representation in national decision making institutions has important consequences for women and for the legitimacy of the institutions. Where women constitute half the population in a political system which
supports equality and where both women and men are legally eligible for political office, women’s participation should be equal to that of men. If this is not the case, it signifies deep flaws within the political system. Representation is not only a means of ensuring individual participation, it is also the responsibility of the representatives to act on behalf of the constituents, including women, who elected them and reflect their ideas and aspirations. Women’s disproportionate absence from the political process would mean that the concerns of half of the population cannot be sufficiently attended to or acted upon as it denies their viewpoints sufficient opportunity to be integrated in the political system.

While the Indian democratic state is committed to the protection of individual rights within the context of citizenship, a closer look at how it operates for the women reveals that these rights are not accessible in the public and private spheres in their full potential to all the women in India. There are historical, social and cultural factors that have limited women’s capacity and chances to exercise their freedom to participate in the political processes. The evolution of Indian democracy through the 15 General Elections so far has reflected a low representation of women in Parliament, State Legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies.

The under representation of women in the political sphere is inextricably linked with the low and inferior status of women in society in India especially in the context of the declining sex ratio, increasing violence and crimes against women and their marginalized status in employment, education and health sectors.¹

An average Indian woman has little control over her own fertility and reproductive health. More women are illiterates and dropped out of school when compared to men. There are fewer women in the paid workforce than men. Women’s work is undervalued and unrecognized. Women work longer hours than men and carry the major share of household and community work which is unpaid and invisible. Women are legally discriminated against in land and property rights. Women face violence inside and
outside the family throughout their lives. Most women in India have very little say in decisions affecting their own lives. The cumulative effect of all this is that women tend to lack the self-confidence and skills needed to function effectively in the public sphere. The under representation of women and absence of women from positions of power and decision-making reinforces their exploitation and deprivation. It is in this context that women’s greater political representation becomes all the more necessary.

**Political Participation and Representation of Women in India:**

Women in India raised the issue of representation in politics first in 1917. At that time it was basically a demand for universal adult franchise and political participation. By 1930 women had gained the Right to vote, which initially benefited women from elite families. Women’s involvement in struggles for political and civil rights in India were, however, sought to be linked to nationalist movements in alliance with males against the common foreign enemy. In any case women’s involvement in nationalist struggles changed their lives in that even though they were denied equal opportunities to shape the new state, they gained constitutional and legal rights. But even after the right to vote became a reality for all women, their representation in the parliament, political parties and other decision making bodies remained low even after independence, and after the Indian Constitution came into force in 1950. A few women, no doubt, attained positions as members of parliament and state legislatures and as leaders of opposition etc., mostly through family dynasties or through male political patronage. However, the percentage of women in legislatures and decision making positions always remained low. Women do not share the power of decision-making and are not involved in policy making in Indian democracy in proportion to their numerical strength. Thus, there is a gap between the formal idea of women’s participation and their meaningful use of power. The quest for greater political representation of women is, therefore, still relevant.
Women in India have lesser opportunities of public influence or for entering politics. Women also lack opportunities to move within the hierarchies without patronage of male leaders or mentors. The women’s wings of political parties may have given visibility to women in the form of a platform for participation rather than integrating them into central power structures. Women do not have necessary resources to enter and compete in contemporary political arena. Thus, improved social indicators in development graphs may not automatically ease women’s access to political power or improve political participation and representation. They do not necessarily translate into collective gains nor sustained political power. Of course the scope for women’s public activism varies across class, caste and region in India. The effectiveness of women’s participation also depends on the local configuration of power and cultural environment apart from problems of poverty, illiteracy, lack of economic resources, negative social and legal environments, family and household pressures, male dominated bureaucracy and politicians that the women face.

**Women’s wider Participation and Representation:**

Women in India constitute nearly half the population of the country, but they are poorly represented in the various governance and decision making bodies. The position depicted through the 15 General Elections so far reflects a low representation of women in Parliament, State legislatures, in political parties and other decision-making bodies. Less than 8% of Parliamentary seats, less than 6% Cabinet positions, less than 4% of seats in High Courts and the Supreme Court, have been occupied by women. Less than 3% of the administrators and managers are women. The average percentage of women’s representation in the Parliament, Assemblies and Council of Ministers taken together has been around 10%.6

The Indian Constitution guarantees to all women the fundamental right to equality (Article 14) and equal voting rights and political participation to both men and women. As reflected in the Preamble, the Indian Constitution is firmly grounded in the principles
of liberty, fraternity, equality and justice and contains a number of provisions for the empowerment of women. Women’s right to equality and non-discrimination are defined as justifiable fundamental rights (Article 15) and there is enough room for affirmative action programmes for women. Equality of opportunity in matters relating to employment or appointment to any office under the State is a fundamental right (Article 16). The Directive Principles of State Policy stress on the right to an adequate means of livelihood for both men and women equally (Article 39a), equal pay for equal work for both men and women (Article 39d), provision for just and humane conditions of work and for maternity relief (Article 39e). Directives for promoting harmony and renouncing practices derogatory to the dignity of women are also provided for in the Indian Constitution. The political rights of women are recognized without any discrimination, or distinction and they have the right to participate in decision making at all levels equally with men. The right to constitutional equality has been supplemented by legal equality by the passage of a number of acts through which the traditional inequalities in respect of marriage, divorce and property rights are sought to be eliminated. However, in spite of these constitutional and legal provisions, the ground reality is that women have not obtained adequate and proportionate representation in the legislative and other decision-making bodies.

There is certainly a need for women’s more effective role in decision-making processes for the democratic and constitutional assurances of equal citizenship and rights in the Indian Constitution to become a reality at the operational level. Citizenship is linked to political participation and representation. Lack of ability and opportunity to participate in the political system implies a lack of full membership in the system. For true equality to become a reality for women, the sharing of power on equal terms with men is essential. But the reality is that women continue to be marginally represented even in areas where the various policies have a direct impact on them. There is still a great gap between constitutional guarantees and the actual representation of women in the political system in India.
Political Mobilization and Participation:

Historically many women have been active in the informal political sphere in terms of political mobilization and they have participated in large numbers in political demonstrations and mass agitations as well as in the activities of nationalist and political bodies and organizations. The political mobilization and participation of women has been impressive in the Indian National Movement, in revolutionary Left Movements, anti-price rise stirs, on legislation on rape, against the practice of widow immolation, in the anti-liquor movements and movements against deforestation etc. During the National Movement against colonialism women were mobilized actively particularly under Gandhi’s leadership and women’s organizations within the political parties participated actively in the cause against colonialism for instance in the Civil Disobedience Movements and Salt Satyagraha etc. But once freedom was won, the women’s wings were more or less marginalized and assigned areas that primarily dealt with women and children or other ‘welfare’ activities and women’s organizations ended up playing a secondary and supportive role to the male leadership in power. The leaders of such organizations were seldom women with independent political careers unless they were from political families with the backing of male political activists.

It is worth noting that the political mobilization of women and their participation in elections has steadily increased since the first General Elections of 1952. Between 1952 –1980 for instance, women’s participation increased by 12% against the turnout of men which increased by only 6%. In the General Elections of 2004 & 2009, the all India percentage of women voter turnout was 48%. As regards women voters’ turnout, from 37.1 per cent in the first General Elections in 1952 it increased gradually over the years to 55.6 by 1999. Notably, the gap between female and male voters was 15.9 per cent in 1952, but it decreased slowly over successive elections and came down to 8.4 per cent in 1996. It has remained at 8.3 per cent in 2004 general elections.7
This percentage increase in the turnout of women in elections has however not translated into a larger number of women being represented in the legislative bodies. Competitive elections and democracy has not necessarily led to better political representation of women in Indian politics. The candidates fielded by the various political parties are still predominantly male and women account for only five to ten percent of all candidates across parties and regions. The percentage of representation of women in the Lok Sabha varies from 4.4 in 1952 to 8.1 in 1984, declining to 5.2 in 1989, rising to 7.9 in 1998 and 9.02 in 1999 and again declining to 8.1 in 2004. In Rajya Sabha, proportion of female members started with 7.3 per cent in 1952 and rose to 15.5 per cent in 1991, but again declined to 6 per cent in 1998 and rose to 10.3 per cent in 2005, again slightly declining to 9.9 per cent in 2006. On the whole the representation of women in Parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) and the State Assemblies remains low. Thus despite the increase in electoral participation of women, their representation in the formal political structures has not changed much. Though voting is an important indicator of political participation and mobilization, it is not necessarily indicative of representation. Voting is a tool of political equality and it mobilizes women but voting by itself does not result in the desired end of equality. Almost all parties tie with each other in appealing to women’s votes at the time of elections but very few women get to contest in the elections. Almost all parties hesitate to field women candidates. Hence, the number of women candidates fielded by various political parties has always been very low as compared to their numbers in the population. Though a large number of women participate in voting, their low numbers in decision making bodies including those of political parties in India is notable. Among women who manage to rise in the political echelons, in spite of their ability in administration and the art of political articulation, very few women reach the level of cabinet ministers. Mostly they remain deputy ministers or ministers of state. When women reach the few ministerial positions, they are generally assigned portfolios in the social service sectors of Health Education, Social Welfare, Women and Child Development etc.\textsuperscript{8}
By the 1980s, issues raised by the women’s movements in India led to political parties realizing the importance of female voters and women’s wings became active. Mainstream political parties became conscious of women as a constituency and this was reflected in their election manifestoes and their considering women as candidates with potential votes. By the ninth Lok Sabha elections in 1989, one could find a conscious focus on women’s issues in the manifestoes of political parties. However, this did not translate into more seats for women in the political bodies and most parties resorted to tokenism and symbolism when it came to representation of women. Women issues were not taken up by parties in a serious manner nor translated into programmes, policies and legislation nor were they mandated specifically to address issues of women. Almost all political parties set up a women’s cell or wing but they worked as ancillary bodies. Very few women were able to capture seats of power. The number of women in the legislatures remained very small. Very few women reached the position of party president or leader of legislative party.9

More recently major political parties have indeed made a conscious effort to induct more women into the various levels of the party organization. The CPM has made an effort to induct more women into its district committees and state level bodies. The membership of women in the party however remains below 10%. But the membership of women in mass organizations as the Kisan Sabha and the CITU has shown an improvement. The CPM changed its stance on gender-based reservation only after 1988. The BJP had the highest percentage of women in decision-making bodies from the Parliamentary Board and the Election Committee down to the ward level.10 Traditionally, the Congress Party has fielded the largest number of women candidates and has had the largest number of women members in Parliament though the Congress working Committee has a rather low level of representation of women.

In spite of the efforts of political parties to induct more women, the extent of representation of women has not changed much. The number of women candidates in the 1998 parliamentary elections was not even half the number of women in the 1996
elections. In 1998 there were only 274 women candidates as against 599 in the 1996 elections. In the general elections in 1999, the same proportion of women were put up for elections by both the parties favoring the 84th Amendment Bill on the reservation for women in Parliament and the parties which were opposed to it. The Congress Party led by a woman had only 10% of women among the candidates. The BJP and the CPM had 7% of women among the candidates. The idea of 33% reservation for women in parliament was actively endorsed by most of the major political parties and this had raised expectation that many more women would be nominated to contest the elections. The election manifestoes and the public pronouncements of parties as well as the print and electronic media highlighted the idea of women’s representation by reservation or by nomination of more women for elections signifying a more conscious political stand on women’s representation. However, these stances did not translate actually into more nomination of women candidates during elections. Many parties ended up allotting some seats to women candidates only as a token and to symbolize their pro women egalitarian policy.

In the inner party structures in the decision-making levels and the posts within the party, women are even less represented in most political parties. Women have a very low representation if at all in the actual decision-making bodies and rarely influence the more significant party policies. Most often they are relegated to the ‘women’s wing’ of the party where they are required to deal with what are considered to be ‘women’s issues’ such as dowry and rape cases and sometimes on more general concerns like price rise which are considered to affect ‘housewives’. Issues like child and family welfare are largely seen as women issues, and falling in a realm which is not political. By and large a masculine view of political priorities is in operation. Most of the women’s wings of political parties have very little power and have hardly any say in the decision making and important policy matters.
Political parties assert that it is difficult to get sufficiently qualified women candidates. Other arguments have also been advanced. It has been held that women are not independent voters; a majority of them are illiterate; a majority of them make their choice on the basis of suggestions from male members of their families—husbands or sons; women lack information and political awareness or that women are not politically conscious. On the other hand, in reality women have been active and vocal both in times of peace and crisis. They have been active in movements of peace, women and child welfare, trade unionism, food adulteration, price rise and deforestation and many other issues.

The real reason for the low political representation of women in the formal political structures and decision making levels, seems to lie in the compulsions of competitive elections and the quest for power by the political parties in a multiparty democracy. Increasingly the compulsions of the political parties due to narrow majorities, precarious coalitions and hung parliaments have made the question of power rather than that of representation the determining factor. Women’s issues and women’s participation and representation are encouraged only within the parameters of power and are constrained by the basic objectives and interest of the parties either to capture power or survival, if in power. While women are mobilized to vote by all the parties, at the stage of distributing tickets for standing for elections, the number of women drops dramatically. At this stage, political parties are driven more by power considerations with an eye on the ‘winnability’ of the candidates from the angle of the prospect of government formation. Women lose out at this stage as the imperative of ‘winnability’ seems to compel political parties to deny tickets to women unless they are sure to win. Women are considered to have less chances of winning, which is not necessarily true.

**Women in power in Indian Politics**

Political leadership by women is not dramatically different from that of men. Women leaders are no better or worse than men. Nor have women leaders been
typically anxious to give greater representation to other women within their own organizations or in the political process generally. Representation of women has not necessarily increased greatly under the leadership of women. In fact interestingly the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts and the policy and implementation of 33% reservation for women in Local Bodies received strong support and impetus due to Rajiv Gandhi’s interest and advocacy in the matter.

Thus, the Indian political system cannot be said to be non-receptive to the emergence and dominance of women leaders even though the political representation of women has not particularly registered a significant increase over the last 15 General Elections. While on the one hand most women politicians have found it difficult to rise within male dominated party hierarchies, on the other hand some women have managed to become leaders when they have set up parties of their own. Once they have established themselves as leaders, there has been an unquestioning acceptance of their leadership and decisions by the party rank and file, even if it is largely male.

Women in parliament or legislatures do not necessarily confine themselves to women issues only. In the absence of a specific mandate for representing women issues, most of them feel that they represent both men and women of their constituencies. Like men they are drawn into the game of power with all its ruthlessness even though women’s approach to politics may not be identical to that of men. In fact even the women’s wings or organizations of parties are not necessarily marked by kind of feminist perspective or sensitivity. Also the patriarchal articulations whether by male politicians and leaders or internalized by women candidates in presenting themselves as ‘bahus’ and ‘betis’ relying on traditional patriarchal notions of femininity are not absent in Indian politics. Many times women public figures do adapt to and adopt male priorities predominating in public life in order to be acceptable. Many women internalize the norms and roles of patriarchal political structures and merely replicate them instead of questioning them, resulting in reinforcing existing hierarchies of power. Questions have
been raised as to whether an increase in numerical strength of women in the political process and decision making bodies automatically leads to a qualitative shift in power and whether women on balance pay greater attention to the concerns of women more than male politicians. Problems of tokenism, visibility, marginality etc. are often discussed in referring to women as a ‘minority’ operating in a male domain.

While it is considered important to bring women to positions of power, it is equally necessary to sensitize those in power whether men or women about gender. Along with this the importance of women’s economic independence, education and awareness and their improvement in the socio economic sphere can hardly be stressed. The restructuring of gender relations within both the family and society is an equally important step towards freedom, equality and justice.

**Representation through Reservations:**

Various strategies have been proposed to further the political representation of women in India. From a reservation of 33% seats at various levels including the Parliament, it has also been suggested that political parties reserve 33% of their seats for women in the elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party recently announced such a reservation in its organization. However, it has been questioned whether women constitute an undifferentiated category and whether collective identification and mobilization of women as a ‘disadvantaged’ group in general on the basis of gender is a viable proposition in the politically accepted sense of the term particularly in view of caste and class differences among them. Mere presence of women in Parliament even if greater in numbers will not mean much unless they are truly representative of women’s concerns covering all categories. In the ongoing debate about reservation of seats for women in the Parliament it has been pointed out that an undifferentiated reservation for women will reinforce the existing inequalities in women’s access to positions of power. It is the elite and politicized families from which there is a smooth entry for women in politics. Women playing supportive roles to males in the family and emerging from their
shadows have also found easy entry. Another trend has been the entry of widows of prominent political figures into politics and positions of power. On the whole the important factors for women’s active presence in politics in India as trends show are in general: family background, political influence, family financial position, existing involvement in politics, literacy, local conditions, campaign strategy, influence within the party and personality traits etc. rather than only competence, capability and merit. The combined result of all these factors is that very few women manage to get or are given party tickets. If the factors of economic dependence, prohibitive election costs, threats of violence and character assassination are added, even fewer can get seats in the legislature.

In any case, it is argued by those in favour of reservation, there is no doubt that democracy and representation will be strengthened with compulsorily more presence of women through reservation. This is evident from the impact of the implementation of 33% reservation of seats for women in the Local Bodies (Panchayats) in India by the 73rd Constitutional Amendment as a result of which the representation of women in the formal structures of governance at the local level has recorded a steady increase. Women’s presence at the decision making levels will not only enhance the status of women but will also strengthen democratic traditions and make democracy more meaningful in fighting injustice and oppression while at the same time help to bring a different, explicitly female perspective to the political arena. Unless women are brought into the decision-making levels directly, important women issues will never be tackled with the seriousness they require.

In addition, democracy demands the regard for not only the interests of those who support in elections but also the aspirations of those who expect to be represented. The recognition of the right of every citizen to participate in public decisions is a basic element of democracy, which, to be effective, requires that the needs and interests of all members of the society are respected and represented. Even if others might claim to represent them, there is no guarantee of justice and equity if one half of the population is
consistently excluded from taking part fully in decision making as is the case with women in Indian politics and governance. There is therefore need for more inclusive processes of achieving representation. The value of inclusion of women in governance and decision-making institutions lies in the diversity of experiences women will bring to governance whether there are ‘female’ concerns or not. Comprehensive representation would be obtained if women constituting half the population find a proportionate number of seats in government.

It is important to stress that like the equal right to vote, participation and representation in legislative bodies may not in itself be enough for women’s political empowerment or to remedy the problems of discrimination faced by women in Indian society. Equality with equity is a goal which may not easily be achieved only by high representation of women in legislatures and other public bodies but has to be buttressed by other supportive measures. Even so, the demand for reservation of seats for women in political bodies to rectify the imbalance has gained strength in India in the light of persisting gender gaps in the various spheres of development. In the absence of any serious political self-correction so far, the demand for reservation of seats in legislatures and party structures has been stressed in India aiming at such an equitable representation. While the steady increase in the electoral participation and mobilization of women in India has increased the visibility of women in the legislative politics this has not happened in the exercise of executive and judicial power due to their lack of presence in the decision making structures. From this perspective, the important question is what are the benefits of democracy for women. Electoral participation and quotas through affirmative action alone are not enough to result in gender equity.

**Study of Local Politics:**

The study of state and local politics is a much neglected subject till eastern scholars took interest in this direction after which Indian scholars followed suit. The study of state politics in India has an importance of its own in view of the fact that, in
the main, this momentous area of investigation and analysis has gone “unrecognized and unstudied.” A proper understanding of the politics in India is not possible unless we have a definite idea of the State and Local Politics. Thus, the State and local politics is the most meaningful unit for an understanding of the Indian political process and electoral behavior. Indian politics reflects a combination of diverse stresses and strains and a variety of forces and factors that operate at different levels. This phenomenon became more pronounced influencing the polity at national level. The interlocked mechanism of State politics resembles a sort of inter growth between the Union and the Local Politics.

Local election politics provide an academic opportunity for more detailed study. Such studies would certainly help us to understand the economic, social, and political considerations involved in the evolution of federalism in India.

In India all elections have a specific local context, but it is worth while to relate local context to state and national framework of politics as elections have important implications for state and national political processes. This kind of study helps to identify the major political parties, their electoral strategies and disguised coalitions at local and also state levels. We can observe how these elections are issue-oriented and how the elections activate caste and community loyalties. This is observable quite clearly at the time of nomination of candidate by various political parties in each municipal constituency of the district. It is correct to maintain that political parties win or lose the elections on the basis of local acceptability of the party candidate and caste and community operations. A very significant phenomenon of elections is, pitching of caste. Caste consciousness has emerged stronger than religious consciousness in the State. The on going process of social change and development in the district and the state revealed itself through the results of the Assembly and local elections.
Caste, community, religion and other rooted structures of local powers are seen as yielding ground to broad based integrated social structures.\textsuperscript{16} Local issues play an important role in Parliamentary and Assembly elections. In elections local leadership and value factors gained more significance than the programme factor. Electoral politics leads to the emergence of new groups, factions, and lobbies and generates dynamic leadership at state and local levels. These groups, factions and leadership play important role in shaping, developing and establishing the electoral culture of an area as being increasingly recognized today.

A federal structure of the government, established by the Constitution, reveals a crystallization of relationships taken place between national, state, district and local levels. It is interesting to note that, the local bodies in a district, have been able to exercise considerable influence on state governments and because of recent constitutional developments, extract a number of grants and concessions from the centre on variety of issues. Panchayt Raj institutions at district and lower levels introduced a new dimension to the political system as a whole.

As noted by Rajni Kothari “A new feature in the distribution of political power in India is the growing importance of the democratic element in the political system, namely the voters in the Constituencies and local elites. This has led to an increasing decentralization of political initiative and administrative decision-making and increased powers for leaders at the State and District levels. Furthermore, the new leadership of political system is also coming from the local elections, which is, of course, inevitable”.\textsuperscript{17} Socialization in politics and changes in political processes and alignments have mainly taken place in districts and this had its impact on political process and recruitment at the State level as well as National level.

According to Norman D.Palmer “In a complex society such as India it is particularly important to study voting behavior patterns not just in the aggregate, on a macro and national basis”, but also to bear in mind what Imtiaz Ahmed has called the
“significance of local political framework for the understanding of the political behavior of social and communal groups in an area”. Thus, particular attention has to be given to the local political framework for the understanding of political behavior of social or communal groups in an area. More particularly, Dr. Ahmed has emphasized how the local context and situation in a particular constituency influence electoral behavior and he has stressed the significance of local, social and economic cleavages in determining voting patterns and political alignments at the time of election. Below the State level, Assembly Constituencies and Municipal Constituencies, indeed are the most meaningful units for the understanding of Indian political processes and institutions.

Moreover, the Election Commission also takes a district as the primary unit for the purposes of delimitation of electoral constituencies whether it is for Lok Sabha or the State Assembly. The election activities in India are typically organized in terms of constituency coverage.

Studies in terms of a Municipality coverage provide not only an excellent opportunity to understand the nature of party politics at the grassroots level but also throw light on the roles played by factors like caste, factional and linkage politics in a district. Therefore, a proper understanding of Indian political system requires, estimation and review of the political developments in the State and the State political studies requires proper understanding of political developments at the district and the below.

When the elections come, the State leaders have to rely heavily upon those who occupy positions of influence in the local institutions and, socially and economically powerful local elites. The general trend is that the higher-level leaders in the state who aspire to be elected to the state legislature depend on the elites at local levels.

Further more, there are many levels of elected bodies in India – starting from National Parliament to Village Panchayats, controlling vast economic power including
A Municipal Council is a miniature legislature writ large. It represents the general and specific will to the civic community through its political parties, national, regional and local. Political parties in all democratic nations openly operate in municipal government. They are functioning in cities and towns as they do in the states. They take municipal elections in million and millions plus cities and towns as a matter of great prestige. Generally political parties, during municipal elections in Indian cities select candidates mostly on caste, community, money, muscle and such other considerations and very little on considerations of honesty, integrity, party work, social work, and knowledge of civic administration and campaign vigorously by inviting state and national party leaders. Door to door canvassing is most visible in most of the municipal elections in India. Promises and pamphlets, leaflets and banners are all common features in these elections.

CONSTITUTIONALISM OF URBAN LOCAL BODIES:

The Constitution 74th Amendment set a new trend in the process of good decentralized governance by giving the local bodies a statutory status as a result of which municipalities have become the principal representative platform for urban population. The 74th Act has given an opportunity to empower and revitalize the urban local bodies so that they can play an effective role in urban management. In addition to the 74th Act, the New Urban Policy of 2002 will not only strengthen institutions of urban governance but will also ensure participation of various stakeholders in planned urban development. The 74th Constitutional Amendment Act came into force on 1st June, 1993. This Act has added Part-A to the Constitution. It is entitled “The Municipalities” and consists of provisions from articles 243-P to 243-ZG. In addition, the Act has also added Twelfth Schedule to the Constitution. The Constitutional Amendment has made municipal elections mandatory every five years. The Finance Commission has also been
constituted to ensure that the local bodies do not starve of funds. It allocates funds between the state and local governments. The Act provides for the constitution of three types of municipalities in every state i.e., Municipal Corporation, Municipal Council and Municipal Committee. Municipal Corporation for a large urban area, Municipal Council for a smaller urban area and Nagar Panchayat for a transitory area, that is, an area in transition from a rural area to the urban area. The act further provides for the State Election Commission and enjoin that if the urban local bodies are dissolved before the expiration of their term, then it is supposed to conduct election of these bodies within six months of their dissolution. 74th Constitutional Amendment Act has assigned vast area of responsibility to the Municipalities under article 243. Eighteen functional items have been assigned to the Municipalities through this Amendment Act.

Urbanisation and Urban Politics:

The ongoing urbanization of the world is sometimes portrayed as a sort of natural process, as determined by economics or something else beyond the control of humans. The study of urban politics reveals a different truth altogether; that the process of urbanization is itself is inherently political. To study urban politics is to study what happens on the ground, among people who share the same space for day-to-day living. This makes the study of urban politics particularly challenging and difficult to analyze.23

The socio-economic problems of the present day society are increasingly founded in the developing cities of India. Awareness of these problems of urbanization, has attracted the attention of social scientists while attempting to understand the community of the city. Studies on “urban politics” have developed an attitude of ignorance towards the contributions made by other social science disciplines.24 Urbanization as a phenomenon exhibits many facets. But it is mainly related to socio-economic change. The present growth of urban areas in India is due to growth of population and also due to migration from the rural to the urban areas. In a developing countries the process of urbanization leaves little time for individual adjustments and for the assimilation of immigrant social groups into the urban life. Consequently many cities have acquired
“rural culture”. With the availability of some macro studies and some single town case studies it is possible to formulate some hypotheses relating to the urban political process and its relationship with social process.

Studies on Indian urban politics are mainly concerned with the description of urban problems, rather than prescription and in this respect they are seeking the help of sociologists to get the answer to the most important question of ‘who rules the urban communities.’ The political elites guide the political activists on the one hand and are also controlled and guided by caste, faction, religion and ethnic considerations on the other. These considerations have tempted the scholar to take up a study of medium size town like Narsapur in West Godavari District. The politics of the town has been affected by the numerically dominant communities like Kapu, Agnikula Kshatriya and Settibaila.

**WOMEN IN URBAN LOCAL BODIES:**

The participation of women in urban local bodies is considered essential not only for ensuring their political participation in the democratic process but also realizing the developmental goals for women. Participation of women in these bodies can be as voters, as members of political parties; as candidates and as elected members of Urban Local Bodies.

The revolutionary initiative to alleviate the position of women came through the 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments. From the point of view of women empowerment, the constitutional provisions are of great significance. First is the mandate of reserving one-third of all elected positions in Panchayat and Municipal bodies to the women. The second is the provision for the constitution of ward Committees in municipalities, ‘Gram Sabhas’ in Panchayats for extending the democratic decentralization further down the line to the levels lower than the municipal councils and village Panchayats. Already over a million women are now functioning as elected members on the councils of Panchayat Raj Institutions and Municipal Bodies.
One-third of these institutions are headed by women as ‘Sarpanches’, Chairpersons, Mayors etc. Some states like Kerala and Andhra Pradesh have taken a number of initiatives to involve the ‘Self Help Groups’ of women in the development activities undertaken at the village Panchayat level. However, similar moves in the urban context are observed to be slow to be brought about. Besides the present municipal institution, a suggestion that is generally made is to work towards a symbiosis between the women empowerment efforts and those for good urban governance.

Prior to the passage of 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments, the participation of women in political affairs has been dismally poor mainly because of the male dominated set up of the Indian society. This is quite evident that despite the fact that about 48% of the Indian population consists of women and the participation has been negligible. The percentage of women MPs has never touched double figure mark in the Lok Sabha. In the case of State Legislatures situations is all the more discouraging as is clear from the fact that the average women’s representation in them is just four percent. The position is rather more gloomy when one talks about their representation in the elections to the local self governing bodies. In view of this painful reality, various scholars, political leaders and social reformers felt the need to empower women politically initially at the gross-roots levels. This wide spread feeling ultimately culminated in the passage of 73rd and 74th Constitution Amendments which provide one-third reservations to women in Panchayat Raj bodies and Municipalities respectively. By virtue of these provisions quite a large number of women contestants jumped into the election arena to try their luck.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

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 deals mostly with the quality of life for citizens. Municipal responsibilities relate both to women’s practical needs and their strategic needs. The better we meet women’s strategic needs, the better they are able to contribute to good city governance. Good local government enables a better response to women’s practical needs.

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 style of politics seems to prevail in elections to State or National Assemblies, as contrast to elections to local bodies. A micro study of electoral politics is instrumental in a proper understanding of the nature of Indian politics and the representation of women in politics. The Narsapur Municipal Council in West Godavari District makes an ideal setting to study the local political processes, the women leadership and the performance of women political leaders in the fast changing political scenario.

In this present study an attempt is made to study the Emergence of Women as Political Leaders in Narsapur, an important coastal town having considerable localized
culture. The Narasapur town of Andhra Pradesh is selected as the universe of the study for the following reasons.

1. The Narasapur town made predominant contribution to the freedom struggle against the British Rule indicative of the political awareness of the public in the region.

2. The Narasapur possesses rich ancient past and has been accredited as the hub for “The Rice Bowl of Andhra Pradesh”.

3. Narasapur is a trade centre housing crochet laces, cotton spinning, and aquaculture. Every year Lace Industry and Prawn Culture earns crores of rupees of foreign exchange to the government. In lace industry women are the main workforce playing an important role in the lace production.

4. In the matters of education and culture Narasapur is quite high when compared to district literacy.

5. Narasapur in West Godavari District is known for its high political awareness and matured political activity when compared to other areas of this district.

6. The West Godavari District is one of the important districts in Andhra Pradesh which is a strong hold of ruling Telugu Desam Party (TDP) in the State upto 2009. Hence the Narasapur in West Godavari District is selected for case study due to majority of women support to TDP and strong hold of Telugu Desam Party from 1983 to 2009.

7. Between 1995 and 2005, two women were elected as chairpersons and played a significant role in the municipal administration and development of Narsapur town.
In Narsapur women population is higher than the male population, hence they are the significant factor for deciding the fate of the politicians in the town.

In view of the above reasons and significant factors, the Narsapur town in West Godavari District has been selected as a case study.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

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 a micro study on the emergence of women as leaders, a designated urban area with predominant rural features namely Narsapur 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.

The following form the 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.
REFERENCES

11. Ibid.,
12. Ghosh, Jayati (1999), Women in Indian Politics, Frontline, October 8, 1999
17. Rajni Kothari, Politics in India (New Delhi: Orient Longman Ltd., 1970), p.120.
23. Magnusson, Warren; University of Victoria, Political Science 332 - Urban Politics, Spring 2006
24. Ibid.,