SUMMING UP AND MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The study has attempted to understand the political participation of women in Goa. The three major objectives of the study were: (i) To understand the role played by women at various level in the political processes of Goa, i.e., as freedom fighters, voters, grassroots leaders, and as activists (ii) To look at the impact and significance of such participation for women's rights and living conditions (iii) To assess the role played by the state to promote women's welfare. The study has exposed a large number of paradoxes existing in Goan society. The culture of the post colonial Goan society is a synthesis of traditional and western values. It has assimilated elements of various cultures, from dynasties of Kadambas to Vijaynagar rulers, from Muslim rulers, and has pervasive influence of Portuguese rule. The forces of modernization, westernization, and development have also influenced Goan society. This has resulted in better prospects for women in Goa, yet, and this is paradoxical, the forces of patriarchy are visible. In the conclusions, I look at some of these paradoxes encountered while trying to understand women's political participation in Goa, and comment on the forces that have shaped women's activities.

- The position of women in Goa is better than their counterparts in the neighbouring states of Karnataka or Maharastra. Women in Goa have achieved some degree of equality with men. They receive better treatment in society. The small size of the State has been a conducive force for the progress of women in Goa. The small population, access to education and health facilities, the provision of piped water and electricity to the whole of Goa, and wider employment opportunities have amply benefited women. The provision of right to inheritance on par with men, and the existence of Uniform Civil Code have ensured women the much required socio-legal security. The trend towards nuclear families has reduced the household drudgery of women. Besides, Goan society is by and large peaceful. The people of different castes and communities, have been living in harmony. This have created a favourable atmosphere for better status of women in Goa.
The influence of Portuguese rule has been positive towards women’s emancipation. The reforms introduced by colonial rulers freed women from clutches of evil practices like Sati, child-marriage, illiteracy etc. The major contribution of the Portuguese was the introduction of the Uniform Civil Code. It gives protection to woman at the time of marriage and the property she owns at that time. Daughters are entitled to their rightful share in their father’s property, and have half the share in the husband’s property. Civil marriage is regarded as the only valid marriage for all the purposes. Further, Portuguese invasion led to penetration of western civilization into the Goan society. This resulted in women becoming politically conscious, and they rose against the Portuguese rule.

Participation of women in Goa Liberation Struggle lead to a tradition of female involvement in politics. The women freedom fighters came from all age groups, classes and castes. They participated in the struggle in different ways. They attended morchas, rallies, lead satyagrahas, distributed pamphlets and posters, gave shelter to the freedom fighters, nursed their wounds, and cooked for them. They even went in jail for the cause of freedom. However men were the main movers of the movement. They lead the parameters for the struggle and even determined the role to be played by women. The role of women was regarded as supplementary and supportive of the activities of the male family members, husband or father or brothers. The roles were performed within the accepted framework, without challenging the traditional norms. Thus as soon as Goa was liberated, women were regressed back to their iconic roles. The reforms introduced by the Portuguese could not eliminate the patriarchal forces which continued to exist. Goa’s Liberation also gave rebirth to the Narkasur (the demon) of patriarchy which relegated women within the four walls of the house. Those who were able to assert themselves in political life, could do so mainly due to the active support of their husbands. A few of them who contested could not win the elections. People viewed such participation as deviation from conventional role of women, and could not accept women competing with men in the power struggle. Women’s participation in liberation struggle was acceptable because such an activity
was projected as ideal of 'unselfishness' and 'sacrifice'. While the same move of women was thwarted as 'selfish' and 'power ambitious' after liberation.

- With regard to participation of women in politics, a paradox is reflected. Women, as voters, participate in large numbers, but their representation at decision-making level has been poor. The following trends are observed with regard to political participation of women in Goa.

  1. The percentage of women voters has been high and the gender gap in voting turnout is very narrow. The sex ratio as well as the Electoral Sex Ratio is highly favorable in Goa. Women are enthusiastic about voting and vote independently. However, though there is increase in education, urbanization, less violence or less fear of anti-social elements, the percentage of voting in Goa is showing a downward trend when compared with the first two decades of post liberation. This is mainly due to the political instability, frequency in elections, and the failure of the representatives to deliver.

  2. It is observed that the immediate years after marriage have influence on the voting behaviour of women. Women are less likely to vote when they are 'transferred' to their husband's place, due to the various reasons: (i) their names are not included in the voting list of the new place they have shifted to (ii) their native place is usually far away from their husband's place, and due to the distance they can't go to their native place to vote, (iii) pregnancy or post delivery reasons also restrict women from voting.

  3. It is observed that women are more concerned with their immediate sub-system than the larger state and national systems. They also give more importance to achievement oriented factors like party affiliation or merit of the candidate rather than ascriptive factors.

  4. It is revealed that the dependency-independence dichotomy is contextual. It has often been seen that women are dependent on men in making political decisions. Such a view is one sided. Family is a cohesive unit, and both men as well women form its major components. The members are likely to act on an united front, after mutual discussions and agreements, to achieve what is
best for the family. Thus there is mutual dependency, which need not always
be viewed as dependency of women on men.

• With regard to women’s share in decision-making at the state and national level in
Goa, the following observations were made:

1. The percentage of women elected to Goa Legislative Assembly is increasing.

2. There is positive trend noticed with regard to women contesting elections.
   However in spite an increase in women contesting elections, they constitute
   less than 5% of the total number of contestants.

3. Political parties are not willing to mobilize women and are reluctant to field
   women as candidates.

4. Women are also not very enthusiastic of entering politics as politics is viewed
   as ‘dirty game’. With increasing greed, conflicts and unholy competition,
   women are less willing to enter it.

5. Most of the women who have contested have their male family members
   (father/husband/brothers) involved in active politics. There are few of them
   who have gained the candidature due to their close relationship with
   established party leaders. However, two of them have been able to make a
   niche for themselves on their own.

6. The elected women have not been able to contribute in any constructive way
   towards the gender cause. This is mainly because they remain subordinate to
   the party dictates.

7. Though the voting percentage of women is highly favourable, it does not reflect
   any co-relationship with their representation as elected members.

• The study of women at grassroots level reflects interesting findings. The 73rd and 74th
Amendments have been a milestone in the participation of women in Goa. There is
perceptible change in the rural development as well as in the status of women. It has
led to empowerment and has also brought in feminine perspective to the rural
development programmes. Women’s leadership at the grassroots level can be viewed
as an important springboard for women to contest at Zilla Panchayats and even to
Legislative Assembly. It has also helped in role definition. Becoming politically active has offered women a chance to engage in many tasks that were normally off limits to them. Thus now they debate political issues, address people, make and defend political demands, organize group activity, and exercise responsibility as a leader. This has given them a sense of self-esteem and brought about remarkable change in their personal lives. It has provided them an opportunity to question the existing gender division of labour. Thus increased political role has offered women in Goa more latitude to engage in new types of behaviour.

Certain important observations made in the study of women panchas are:

1. Young women have come to power at grassroots politics. There are less instance of character assassination and no reported case of assault on women panchas. Villages are small, people are known to each other and women leaders are usually looked upon as 'sun'(daughter in law) or 'dhuc'(daughter) of the village. However the paradox remains that unmarried women still do not have access to politics, in spite of having education, the prevailing trend of late marriage, and positive attitude of the villagers.

2. It is also observed that the high caste families are more reluctant to field women at grassroots politics. Women from these castes have been able to get access to wider openings and have larger opportunities, they have access to education, and have ‘encroached’ upon the fields dominated by men, like driving or swimming, however they have not been able to cut the ice as far as their entry in politics is concerned.

- It is observed that on a whole, Catholic women are more informed, are conscious and assertive about their rights. They are politically motivated and show personal interest in participating in public life. A large number of factors have contributed towards the progress of Catholic women in Goa. The Portuguese rule was more favourable to Catholic women in early years of colonial rule. The reforms like right to property, educational facilities etc, introduced by the Portuguese were well appropriated by Catholic women and passed on to the next generation. The Catholic families in Goa are based on democratic norms. The sexual division of labour is less static and
woman enjoy freedom to make or unmake decisions of her life and home. This has given Catholic woman more freedom in areas outside family to exert herself and nourish her identity. On the other hand, Hindu family patronize and cherish the old authoritarian paternal set up. It becomes difficult for a Hindu women to break the umbilical cord of male domination. The efforts of the Church and the Missionaries also need to be duly recognized for ensuring better status for Catholic women. Church has been successful in keeping the community united, it preaches equality, emphasizes on Church marriage, organizes marriage formation course, gives alms to needy women, and run orphanages and old age homes. The Missionaries have set up a large number of educational centres in Goa, and some of them are exclusively meant for girls. These factors have helped women to break the clutches of patriarchal domination and establish an identity for themselves. The Hindu women have failed to break the shackles of patriarchy, and shy off availing of the socio-legal benefits. They are socialized to consider their role within a limited arena, and any act of deviance from the set framework is looked upon as disrespect for the elder members in the family. The existence of caste rivalries in Hindu Community and lack of unity has further strengthened the patriarchal forces.

- It is observed that the development as perceived by the Government of Goa has led to negative impact on the status of women in Goa. The increasing importance given to tourism industry, and emphasis on capital intensive developmental projects have adversely affected women. It is now apparent that far from enjoying the benefit of so-called development, the majority of women have been pushed to the periphery of production processes. Alongside the ‘invisible’ economic processes there is visible escalation of violence against women. These developments have further strengthened the patriarchal forces. The increasing violence against women demands more active role of voluntary women’s groups. It is observed that the role of these NGOs is limited only to the few major cities, and their impact is hardly felt in other parts of Goa. Besides the problem of location, the area is also limited by the ability of meager women workers working actively in the field. The study of one of such major NGOs in Goa, reflect that the effective functioning of the organization is handicapped due to
shortfalls within it. Thus it has no criteria for membership, the people with strong personalities dominated the decision making, and ambition and desire have made its presence felt within the organization. The members have been able to remain small and comfortable by pushing out those who disagree, while there are people who have left the organization to form their own organization on similar lines. Further more, its composition also points out that only few are vocal, resourceful, and perform most of the tasks and suggest programmes, and have become the mainstay of the organization. The members also come from elite class, and are less engaged in household activities. The members are invited by the state on Committees and Commissions, and the organization have been able to explore the space provided by the state on the questions of legal reforms. However it is not sufficient to address the state, but there is a need to develop the strategies to create the impact on family, community and market arenas. They have to work in syllogism and symmetrical to mobilize the media, political parties, parliamentary committees, scholarly and legal resources and people at large.

- The detailed study of the implementation of the Financial Assistance to Widows Scheme in Goa was of critical importance to analyze the role played by the State in the development and empowerment of women in Goa. The State has provided progressive legislation and positive intervention on behalf of women. However the hierarchical structures of society, the caste, class and religious divide, and the diverse cultural values, does not allow women to enjoy the fruits of such legislation. Also, though the size of the State is small, the mal-functioning of the administrative machinery has led to uneven distribution of gains of development. The State is always haunted with lack of funds, and the axe falls on funds meant for women’s development. The low motivation on the part of the government, the bureaucratic approach, and apathy towards women’s issues have lead to ill implementation of various schemes meant for women. The piecemeal approach adopted by the state calls for severe criticism. Merely identifying some problems and deciding for its solution in a most bureaucratic centralized fashion cannot and will not solve the problems faced by women. The deep rooted gender inequalities and gender biases needs to be
challenged and changed. When the policies are made for women they need to be taken into confidence, and their opinions and views should be given due importance. The schemes should be need based and not rule based, furthermore the rules should be enabling and not constraining.

Thus to sum up, participation of women should not be considered as a goal in itself, but should be considered as a strategy to bring in change in the position of women, as well as in the society at large. Larger participation of women should challenge the hierarchies and ideologies that subordinate them. It is necessary to bring in values of equality, rights and justice in the real sense of the term. It can be foreseen that women in Goa will have to play a larger role in the coming future. The faster pace of urbanization, spread of nuclear family, economic growth, increasing access to higher education, favourable demographic factors ensure women a transformative role. And the strategy of transformative politics demands a change in power structures and gender relations.