CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

The aim of this empirical study is to examine and assess the nature and the attitude of the urban Khasi women towards electoral politics and its various activities. Attempts have been made to find out what is the urban Khasi women’s perception of politics which would thereby enable us to understand women’s attitudes towards politics.

As mentioned in the earlier chapters, the Khasi society is a matrilineal society where lineage is traced through the female line and the youngest daughter inherits the ancestral property. One would naturally assume that women in this society enjoy a more or less equal to or maybe even a higher status than the men of the society. Yet the fact that inheritance operates through women is no guarantee of the female political empowerment in any sense. In the Khasi society the ideal Khasi women is one who is submissive, virtuous, honest, dignified and hard-working. It is from the women that the clan procreates and maintains clan continuity. She looks after the home and is the custodian of the family property. Tradition on the other hand does not allow
women to meddle in the affairs of the state. In the present times the political involvement of the Khasi women in these traditional political institutions has not seen much change. On the political front, which is the main subject matter of the study undertaken, the Khasi women are lacking behind like all women in other societies. Though women represent half of the world’s enfranchised population, it is a universal fact that her representation is dismal in the political field.

Explanations for women’s lower rate of participation in politics are well agreed upon. Women have been depicted more or less as the ones who look after the home while public affairs are attended to by the male members. Laws of the land, culture, folkways, mores and attitudes of peoples seem to favour men more than women. There is no doubt that women as individuals and as a class have distinguished themselves in the social sphere, but in the political sphere they are yet to make their mark.

In the study undertaken the Khasi women are yet to establish themselves in the political field. At the traditional level the general adage of male franchise still prevails. Though a few local dorbars within Shillong have women members the same cannot be said of a majority of
the local dorbars. The members of the dorbars themselves are very reluctant to let go of the traditional practice of total male members. Men still have the tendency to look upon woman as incapable of handling matters that are outside the home front. The modern administrative system on the other hand legally and constitutionally places no bar on women's participation in the politics of the nation. Despite the liberty given to them very few women take the opportunity to make full use of this right. There is a vast disparity between women's formal political equality and their meaningful exercise of political power. Though women exercise their franchise they lag behind when it comes to occupying prestigious political offices or positions. The representation of the Khasi women in the legislative bodies is very negligible as can be observed in the previous chapters. Given below are the findings of the study undertaken.

The attitude of the urban Khasi women towards politics is one of distrust and disgust. A large percentage (75%) of the respondents regarded politics as too dirty to get involved in. The reason for this distrust and disgust finds its root in the perception that politicians fail to keep their promises after being elected. Talk of development, of
generating employment, in addition to promises of allotting funds and providing aid, do not materialize once the candidate is elected. Politicians are too busy making money for themselves and this has frustrated the public, who in turn see politics just as a mere arena for personal gain. As such, a majority of the respondents are of the view that politics is a dirty profession lacking in moral values, it has become a profession where material values and money play a crucial role. There was on the other hand a small fraction (25%) of the respondents who felt that it was the people aspiring or holding political offices (politicians) that gave politics a bad image. Thus it is not surprising that the bigger bulk of the women tended to show no interest in politics while a very small number of them showed interest. In general, a low percentage of women seem to have very little interest in politics, married women showing lesser interest than those who are not married, the reason being that, with a family to look after where was the time to spare for politics and for that matter even take part in it. What has been observed is that it is the unmarried, young, educated, middle-income groups who tended to show slightly more interest than the rest. Women also seldom discussed politics. The lack of interest and limited knowledge of politics are the most immediate reasons. Women who showed tendency to discuss
politics are mostly the educated women, women in their late thirties to late forties, government servants and high income group women. But in conclusion what has been observed is that women in general, irrespective of their marital status, age, education, occupation or income do not show much interest in politics nor do they discuss politics on a regular basis. Very few women showed any interest at all.

An interesting observation here is that although women in general disliked politics, many are in favour of seeing more women taking part in politics. Women in general are of the view that more women should participate as it is a right one should make full use of. Women tend to regard women as being more honest, hardworking, are more approachable and of better understanding, and as such are of the opinion that they certainly would make good and capable political leaders. But not all women agree with this view that a woman is capable enough to handle the complexity of political activities. Women respondents agree to the need for greater women’s participation and they think that women would make good political leaders but these respondents are themselves reluctant to join active politics if given an opportunity to do so. What can be concluded here is that women are still reluctant to step into a role
dominated by the men and seem to be more or less comfortable with the way things are.

The vote is the simplest and most common form of political participation. From the study undertaken it has been observed that majority of them have exercised their right to vote at least once, if not more, after attaining voting age. Voting did not necessarily mean showing interest in political activities or in politics at all. On the contrary what most of the respondents said was that it was merely an act of exercising one’s right to vote. Women are very aware of their voting right. They are equally aware of the power of voting. When it came to the women voters’ perception in choosing a particular candidate, they seem to show a preference for the personal merits of a candidate rather than party affiliations. It is only during the election period that women in large numbers participate in politics by exercising their right to franchise but this right is only seasonal and does not exactly bring out the total significance of participation.

Khasi society like other societies considered political institutions to be the realm of influence of men while women tended to the domestic
responsibilities. Women were considered incompetent to deal with the complexity of politics. In the past total male franchise was practiced but in the present times there are a few women members in these local political institutions. From the study undertaken it is very clear that women feel very strongly that it is time that women too should be given a chance to participate in these traditional political institutions. Women feel that there are certain issues they can handle better than the men. An interesting observation made is that though the respondents feel women should be allowed to take part in the dorbars, when asked if women should also be made head of these dorbars, there was uncertainty to this question. A majority of the respondents are not sure as to whether women should be heads of dorbars and stated that tradition would not permit such deviation. This shows that women are still influenced by traditional tenets. Women have submitted and acclimatized themselves to this reality that they cannot visualize even in the near future as being the bearers of traditional political authority. There is no doubt that these traditional political institutions are still very much male dominated institutions. Men still regard this arena as their domain and are reluctant to hand over the reigns of political control.
In the present times even though women's role outside the home is increasingly recognized, her first priority is the home nonetheless. The present study very clearly shows that irrespective of whether one is married or not, educated or illiterate, employed or unemployed, there are very few takers opting for a political career. Women themselves seem to be comfortable with the way things are as they find political matters to be beyond their comprehension and interest. This is quite natural as women have been kept away from the political arena far too long.

In the case of women politicians, they form just a handful of the lot. Women politicians have yet to make their presence felt in the State. A lot of hard work and dedication is required from their side in order to be acknowledged by the electorate, both male and female. Besides, they also need the support and favour of political parties which would ensure at least some percentage of women candidates in elections.

What has been observed is that women's own attitudes are the final pre-condition for their political participation. The study reveals that women choose not to actively participate in political life. Of the few who
did participate, only a fraction of them could finally become part of the
decision-making process. These women had favourable family
conditions like older children or none at all and family or outside help for
domestic chores. The fact cannot be denied that political passivity of
women has been due to the masculine world of politics where a women's
chance of successful adaptation are very limited. Another reason is that
women themselves still cling steadfastly to tradition, that the primary
function of a woman is that of a home maker.

In conclusion what can be said is that the Khasi women are still a
very apolitical group. They are yet to make their presence felt in this
arena. Despite the liberty of franchise and ability to stand for office,
very few women take the opportunity to do so. Those few women
pursuing a political career face tough competition and need a lot of
support not only from the men but also from women as well. That more
women should take part in politics should also be complimented by more
women coming forward to pursue political careers. If women themselves
are reluctant to change their attitude towards politics then the whole
exercise of advocating for more women’s participation in this field
stands void. What is important here is that women should cultivate a
favourable attitude towards politics. Until women themselves are ready to step out, no amount of reforms or measures to bring political empowerment to women would be successful.