CHAPTER VII

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION
CONCLUSION

The incorporation of 74th Constitutional Amendment made the local government institutions in the urban areas as Constitutional entities. The provisions of reservation for women in the urban governance have provided a great opportunity for women in the democratic processes of urban development. Women for a long time considered to be vote banks, now have assumed the new role as stakeholders of power. Now they are shaping and sharing the powers in the urban local bodies. Their huge participation in the local body elections proved that they are not behind the men in the art of possible i.e., politics. If the size of representation to the women is increased they may improve their ability to govern the people in the urban areas. It is felt that they need training and orientation for knowing the complex processes of urban administration. The initiative taken by the Rajiv Gandhi to streamline the urban governance is started giving fruitful results as the women are now engaged in political activities as elected representatives, as chairperson of municipalities and mayor of a few corporations.

There have always been individual women who have wielded vast political influence, in India like Vijayalakshmi Pandit, Sarojini Naidu, Anne Besant, Indira Gandhi and Jayalalithaa. There are few studies, which focused on their achievement and remarkable role in politics. But this does not reveal the comprehensive role played by women in politics. Likewise, women's
participation in legislature and parliament has also been studied extensively to show their lower representation in the decision, making bodies. Similarly, studies done by scholars on women represent active in Panchatiraj institutions also remain partial as they focus the role of women in the rural local government. However, not a single study is available on the role of women councillors in urban governance, which enumerate their role as political participant, decision-maker, intermediary between public and the urban administrator etc. it is in this context this study is undertaken to examine the various roles played by the women councillors in Chennai Municipal Corporation.

In India, women’s involvement in politics, particularly in urban governance is not so extensive. This may be due to lack of knowledge, education, external exposure and political apathy and so on. Under the prevailing conditions and social norms, generally women do not come forward to contest elections against men. For this reason reservation for women in local bodies and other deliberative bodies is considered necessary. After the reservation for women in local bodies become mandatory, the election results presented some surprise; one such surprise is that women have entered local bodies elections in large numbers.

As far as Chennai Municipal Corporation election is concerned during 2001 election, there were large numbers of women contestants in the reserved seats, among the 52 wards, more than 5 contestants were contested in forty wards. Thus, it is necessary to peep into the socio-economic background of the women councillors, who have emerged as successful in the contest.
Shyamala and Pinjar (1995) in their study found that the Zilla Panchayat women members elected after 1993 Karnataka Panchayat Act were about 41.60 and 32.80 per cent representing the age group of 31 to 40 and 32.80 per cent and a few were above 41 years. This indicates that younger women constitute a majority among the women members in the local bodies. This was attributed to the fact that with the reduction in voting age, voters have tends to vote for young women.

Earlier it was assumed that the mean age being 48. The indication is that the ideal age for women to take up political offices is often their relative freedom from family responsibilities like the production and nursing of children. Besides age, and their freedom from family responsibilities, their interpersonal network, experience, behaviour and relatively mature ideas about the public domain are important personal factors for their involvement in politics and electoral success.

As far as age is concerned, as a variable in determining political involvement of women provide a different connotation in this study. Because only 25 per cent of the elected women councillors are from the age group of 20-30, i.e. in the younger age group. More than half i.e., 51.92 per cent women councillors are from the middle age group. It seems that 23.08 per cent women, who have some earlier experience in politics have been elected as councillors.

Religion and caste play the predominant role in elections and influence the electoral prospectus of the candidates. Generally it is believed that politics is in the hands of upper and dominant community. But this belief was shattered by the mandatory reservation of seats for women and scheduled castes and scheduled
tribes. For instance, among the women councillors of Chennai Corporation 34.61
belong to Scheduled Castes and 26.92 per cent are from most backward
communities. Another 28.85 per cent women councillors are from backward
communities.

It is a recognised fact that political background of an individual plays a
vital role in getting public support to become a councillor. As such, it was found
that more than 50 per cent of women councillors’ husbands who occupy some
positions in the respective political parties, like secretary or joint secretary of the
particular zone or division. Thus, obviously the political background and
influence of the men in the family provide a better chance for women to enter into
politics. This was confirmed by the fact that 59.62 per cent women councillors
specified that their husbands were behind their political success.

One important aspect of the women councillors is that most of them are
first time elected as councillors, hence, 82.69 per cent of them need training in
various aspects of urban governance. Further, 59.62 per cent women councillors
are not well aware about the existence of several schemes meant for urban
development and enhancing civic amenities.

Another assumption that is disputed in this study is, basic education is
necessary for the better performance of the women councillors in urban
governance. Because, 63.46 per cent women councillors told that more than basic
education, the linkage between political leaders, party circle, individual
determination is necessary for undertaking development works.
It is interesting to note that 63.46 per cent women councillors repute the opinion that only men can effectively function in politics. They appear to have developed confidence after their election to corporation as councillors and they confirm that they perform well in their new political role as councillors. It is also much interesting to know the fact that 75 per cent women councillors demand that 33 per cent reservation for women in local bodies must be increased to 50 per cent, as they constitute half of the electorate and population. Further, 44.23 per cent women councillors opined that they are willing to contest again and remain in politics. This shows that the women have attained certain stage of political maturity to fit in their newly assumed role.

Another trend that must be researched need attention is that the level of co-operation the women get from their family members. In this study it was found that except 36.54 per cent women councillors, all other get satisfactory co-operation from their family members. Hence, nearly 70 per cent women councillors felt that their involvement in politics did not affect their family and personal life.

To conclude it must be interesting and informative to have glance of participation of women in the political dynamics of Chennai Municipal Corporation. Among the list of Mayors and Presidents of Chennai Municipal Corporation we could find only two names of women viz., Mrs.Thara Cherian (1957-58) and Mrs. Kamakshi Jayaraman (1971-72).
Another important fact that it must be noticed is that Janata Party has fielded Mrs. Chandrlekha as a Mayoral candidate when the elections was held under the new pattern of municipal administration. But, she lost the battle. Again during 2001 Mayoral election only one-woman candidate contested as an independent candidate viz., Mrs. Arunthathi Ponnammal. Similarly, during 2001 corporation election for the 52 seats reserved for women, only 290 women candidates have contested. It must also be noted among the 10 ward committees chairpersons only one is woman i.e., Mrs. Thirugnanasoundari elected from 71 ward. Similarly, among the six committees only one is headed by a woman councillor viz., Mrs. Mangaiyarkarasi, chairperson of health committee.

In a way this study shows that women have come to the light from darkness but they have to travel a long way before they achieve political equality at all levels at par with men.