

## **Chapter: 8**

# **SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

### **8.1 Summary**

Women's representation at higher level Government in India is still very insignificant in number (11.3 per cent out of 543 elected members of 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, 2014). However, there are women representatives at higher level of Government, who are influential and have proved their abilities to become popular leader. This observation proves that given the chance, women can be competent policy maker and can run good Government as well. However, the quality of women's representation cannot be ensured by quantitative participation only. Although there is still no reservation for women at state and central level of Governments in India, 33% reservation for women in the local level Governments has been ensured by Law around three decades before. In this context, the present research starts with the argument that without understanding the nature of complexity faced by the women in their daily lives as homemakers and as local representatives, the reservation strategies are not going to change the socio-cultural lives of women in a big way. To justify this argument, the empirical research has been done on changing socio-cultural lives of the women representatives besides their participation in politics and local governance in the selected cities of West Bengal. This section presents the summery of the main findings, which are explained in detail in the foregoing chapters and signifies the overall trends captured by the research.

Vast literature exists on women's participation in Local Government with a special focus on the obstacles they face, women's reservation issue, proxy representation of women, and citizen's perception on women. A brief outline of the review of literature reveals insights and differential propositions on the themes of women's participation, associated obstacles and the roles they perform in local governance. Moreover, it also frames the discussion on how far women's reservation is a necessary step in India besides a comparison with the other countries. The citizens' perceptions about women representatives help us in verifying the capability of the women councillors as well as their acceptability at the grass root level. By analysing the methodologies and findings used in those literatures, the present study developed around the central research question: How are women's social and political spaces changing due to their political participation in the governance of small cities of West

Bengal? To address this central research question a number of objectives and another set of subsidiary research questions are developed. Thus this research can be defined as an evaluative research falling under the Gender Geography category within the discipline of Geography.

In exploring the changes in the socio-cultural lives and in the nature of political participation of the women councillors, the research starts with understanding the history and consequently tries to look into the historical backgrounds of women's empowerment in each of the selected cities. The analysis of the city-wise women' history shows that out of the four cities Darjiling and Balurghat, located in northern part of Bengal have a long history of women's movement and consequent emancipation of women in the society. From the field observation, it has been found that the condition and capability of women councillors in these two cities are far better in comparison to the other two cities of southern Bengal. Thus it is proved in the process of research that history is important in understanding the present. As a social process women's emancipation is highly linked with the present status of women in the cities and especially in the politics. The present research makes an argument that the positive influence of the history of women's involvement in public domain helps to increase the emancipation of women councillors and nominate more women even in the unreserved seats.

In understanding the impact of political participation of the women councillors on their socio-cultural life, the concepts of Having, Loving and Being developed by Erik Allardt (1999) has been used. From this analysis, the research explores the following changes in the lives of the women councillors. Women's participation in Local Government increased their stress of work and decreased their leisure time to a significant proportion. It also increased the hurdles of journey especially in visiting Municipal office and in some cases their own wards as well. Moreover, their normal time-use pattern has changed with their participation as a councillor. They have to manage their time, in order to work both in the private and in public sphere. In this context, it is important to mention that other women in the family usually help in household work of women councillors. If there is no other woman in the family to help them at home, women face double burden of work. The nature of the burden depends on their employment status and marital status. Women councillors of all the cities spend on an average 35 to 40 hours in a week for the work of the local councillor. In spite of spending so much time, they do not get any honour, award and prize. The amount of the honorarium is also very low. Therefore, the research makes an argument that lack of financial

opportunities in term of income and the enormous stress linked to management of time between household responsibilities and work related to that of councillor are the major causes of discouragement for women to continue their position in this field. Despite the reservation for women in urban governance over almost three decades, such discouragement does not offer a bright vision for the future of the women.

The research identifies the emancipation status of the women councillors in local governance through the Capability approach given by Amartya Sen (2000). The capability of the women councillors depends on the opportunities that help them to get freedom to attain valuable functioning in the political field. By analysing the freedom and functioning of the women councillors in the cities it has been observed that the influence of political parties is very strong in the field. Political parties give nomination of the women in the elected seats (both reserved and unreserved). It has been found in the field survey that orthodox nature of views of the political parties give nomination to only those women who belong to less educated, reserved categories and who have no prior engagement with the party before becoming a councillor. Moreover, Councillors' actions are also framed by both the party discipline and the electoral calculations. Women councillors have faced discrimination and inherent control by the influential men members of the political parties. They cannot take decisions on their own as it is highly controlled by the party and if they try to take independent decisions, they face opposition from them.

The associated factors of the influence of political party are political engagement and political family background. Political engagement of the women councillors from their student lives helps to bring confidence among them. Moreover, it increases their visibility as a leader before becoming as a councillor and develops a separate identity apart from councillor. Political family background acts as a positive as well as negative factor for women. In one way, it provides a support base and political knowledge to the newcomers. In contrast, it also encourages the control and interventions of the men members of the family on the women councillors. This is also one reason of proxy representation of the women councillors. In some cases, the women councillors are nominated because of reservation and to secure the seat for the men member of their family for next election, which is called '*Partivartantra*' in Indian politics. From these observations, the research argues that such political complexity negatively influences the decision making abilities of the women councillors in the meeting and in other public forum.

Moreover, because of opposition and discrimination, their given decisions remain inaudible to the other members and officials in the meeting. The effects of '*parivartantra*' increase the lack of interest of the women councillors in this field. Because women councillors have learnt and received their capability as councillors on their tenure but they know, they will not be nominated when the seat becomes unreserved. In some cases, women councillors have the mind-set that the men members of their family and of the political party help them by doing the work of the councillor to reduce their burden. This patriarchal thinking has bound them to the limited space of their house and made them morally inactive even though they are in the position of councillors. It also decreases the visibility of the women councillors among the citizens and increases the popularity of the concerned men members for their future career against the same post. Ultimately, it affects the political freedom of the women councillors in the cities.

Such political freedom can be improved by enhancing social opportunities of the women councillors. Social opportunities improve the quality of social interaction. Besides education, physical mobility, training facilities and supports from family help the women councillors to gain the confidence to speak in public forum and in front of media. They get the opportunities of physical mobility outside their house due to their participation in political field. This is also a step towards women's empowerment. They become socially important person through their ward visit, attending meeting and contact with the common people of their ward. Training facilities also help to know their duties. Therefore, training is necessary during the entry phase of work of the women councillors. This is for developing leadership and communication skills to enable them to function effectively. However, in reality, the effort to arrange training for the women councillors is less among the officials of the Municipal Governments. If there are some arrangements of training, most of the women councillors do not attend because of family responsibilities as well as distance of the training venue. There is no compulsion to attend the training in their job rules. From these field observations, the research argues that legal compulsion of training is necessary for the women councillors to ensure their capability.

Family inspiration is the precondition for women councillors to join in this field. However, the household responsibility becomes the major cause of not pursuing the career in this field by the women. In this context, the research argues that women councillors need a supportive family and someone in the family who would be willing to take over the responsibilities of the family and children. Besides the supports from family, they need the

support from their co-workers i.e. from the Chairman, other councillors and Municipal officials. For this, the research proposes gender sensitive training for the co-workers of the women councillors. Above all, the proper communication and networking among the women councillors helps to form a strong group against the traditional men dominated culture of the offices. Lack of networking among the women representatives makes them more vulnerable to the hidden patriarchal structure in the Local Government. They have no common voice about their demands and that is why their proposal for development remains unimplemented in most cases.

The different kinds of freedom of the women councillors have been explained in detail in chapter five. If the women have all these political and socio-economic freedom, they can perform better both as CIC (Chairman-in-Council) councillors and as general councillors. CIC councillors are holding the responsibilities of different departments e.g., water, land, basic services, poverty eradication etc. Beside their own wards, they have to take care of the departmental problems as well. They are also in the higher position of the political hierarchy within the Local Government. The general councillors have the responsibilities of their own ward development. They can take the decisions regarding different works such as providing basic services, developmental works for the ward, and income-generating options for the low income-group people etc. In case of women's empowerment programmes, it is important to mention that women councillors can understand the women's problem better. They can argue for women's empowerment programmes, can develop health care and can protest against the social problems such as rape, harassment etc. To get to know all these problems they visit the ward regularly and attend meeting in the Municipal office to solve those problems.

The functioning of the women councilors can also be analysed through the perception of the citizens as well as of the men councilors. Perception is the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses to develop an opinion or belief. In the present research, the perception of the men councilors and the citizens about their women councillors has been analysed. Good attitude and perception of the men councillors (MCs) towards the women councillors (WCs) plays an indirect role in the freedom of the women councillors. The positive mind-set of the men councillors makes the path of the women councillors much easier, enabling them to reach the ultimate level of capability in all fields of their work. In the cities under study, men councilors have positive attitude towards their co-workers. However, they perceive that the household work is more important for the women than other work. It represents the inherent patriarchal mind-set among the men

councillors of the cities. For this reason, the research already proposes the gender sensitive training for the men councillors as well.

Citizens' perception acts like a feedback system to analyse the real nature of functioning capability of the councillors. The last chapter analysed the patterns of perception of the citizens on the behaviour, capacity and skill of handling the problem, and leadership quality of women councillors in running the Local Government and the comparison of women on all those counts with the men. The major general observation on women as reported by citizens is women are good in behaviour as they give patient hearing to the complains raised by the citizens, and try to solve their problems as fast as possible. However, citizens do not see women in the field as there is high proxy and their men members of the family often do the hard work on the ground. Thus, women councillors' works remain invisible to the citizens. In judging women councillors, citizens are often biased by the standard of the men. That is why, women councillors have to prove themselves as competent in terms of the prevailing model, which is men's model. If we exclude that endemic patriarchal mind-set of the citizens, women are more accepted to the citizens as the people's representative.

However, the general perceptions of the citizens on the women councillor vary widely across cities. Darjiling, being located in the hilly region, have high water scarcity and landslides as major problems of the citizens. In Balurghat, citizens raised the issues of drinking water quality and floods. In Raniganj and Hugli-Chinsurah, the major demands of the citizens are infrastructural development. Therefore, the councillors are also engaged to fulfil their demands with their efforts. The overall responses of the citizens regarding the work of the women councillors in the cities of Darjiling and Balurghat are good. In the cities of Raniganj and Hugli-Chinsurah, men are rated higher by the citizens as there is huge proxy practiced in these cities of South Bengal. This space specificity is also prevalent in case of freedom and functioning behaviour of the women councilors in the cities.

Therefore, the present research concludes that politics is the source of power and position and patriarchy is more prevalent there. That is why, though there is reservation of seats for women in Local Government level, the Women's Reservation Bill or the Constitution (108 Amendment) Bill, 2008 which proposed to reserve one third of all seats in the lower house of Parliament and in State Assemblies has never been made. In the Local Government, the reservation helps to increase quantitative representation of women. However,

there are many difficulties that women face which have been explained thoroughly in the entire thesis. Therefore, the issue should proceed beyond the number (quantitative representation of women) only. It is time to focus on the quality of representation of women councillors besides securing their quantity through reservation. There is also a question – how the qualitative representation of the women councillors can be ensured. In this context, it is important to mention that empowerment of women is not possible if they do not understand the abilities on their own. Therefore, to empower themselves as a councillors, it is necessary to provide them the knowledge about the power and responsibilities of the post of the councillors. It can be possible through sharing of information by compulsory training and other awareness programmes. Even without any kinds of formal support for the training and others facilitating programme from the Government, the research has observed that there is a slow process of empowerment continuing among women with their participation in governance. Through participation, women councillors came in contact with the public sphere outside their home and they have developed their own identity in the society and among the citizens. This can be encouraged by giving more economic freedom and moral supports to the women councillors. This will secure their freedom and give a good vision of the future among them. To reduce the effects of '*Parivartantra*', women's work should be more visible to citizens. It will also increase the acceptability of the women councillors to the citizens.

### **8.1 Looking Ahead: Further Research Scope**

In the present research, we have identified and addressed education, employment and political party wise variation in the capability of women councillors in addition to their variation over the cities. We have also noted that there is a lot of 'intersectionality' among the women councillors at the individual level, which was not addressed in this research. Intersectionality is a term coined by American civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to describe overlapping or *intersecting* social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality is the idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities (Intersectionality Theory, n.d.). The identities that can intersect include gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, age, psychological and physical ability, and other forms

of identity (Intersectionality Theory, n.d.). It provides an insight into how multiple systems of oppression are interrelate and interactive. Intersectionality is not a static field; rather, it is dynamic and constantly developing as a response to formations of complex social inequalities. Therefore, it will be useful to do an in-depth research on intersectionality among women councillors and their resultant inequality in terms of freedom and functioning. This will also help to understand how the problems and prospects of women councillors are rooted in their unequal social status which is again linked to a complex of overarching axes of social determinants such as ethnicity, race and caste.