

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

The research journey has now reached the important stage of knowledge construction. At the initial stage, the fundamental concepts related to the topic of the research like political participation, feminism and critical mass are analysed. Before embarking on the process of research, it was essential to decide the path of research – the ideological framework, research design, process profile etc. Review of Literature helped the researcher to evaluate and provide not only a theoretical basis for the research but give it a context. It has gone beyond the search for information and has enabled the researcher to appreciate the linkages between literature and research done in the field and enhance the scope of the present study. The entry of women in public sphere and their political participation at national, state and local level is explained in the fourth chapter. No activity can take place in vacuum. Therefore socio- political, cultural background of Thane district and Thane city has been the subject matter of fifth chapter. The sixth chapter focusses on analysis and interpretation of the data collected from women Corporators. It will be opportune to recapitulate learnings, observations and inferences of the journey and recommend forward path for reinforcing and catalysing political participation of women.

7.1 Summary

a) **Conceptual analysis:** Political participation is a hallmark of democratic form of government. It denotes the extent of participation of citizens from electoral process to ceremonial and protest methods. However, everyone may not have access to political participation. People are discriminated on different grounds in the society. One important aspect of discrimination is sex or gender. While sex is related to biological differences, gender is related to cultural and psychological differences. These differences are inculcated through the process of gender socialization. As Simon De Beauvoir puts it, “One is not born, but made woman.” (Chapter One pp 8)

In the process of gender socialization, girls are conveyed through various agents to accept secondary or subordinate position. This has led to division between public and private sphere. It is believed traditionally that public sphere is dominated by men and women are restricted to private sphere.

The ideology that rejected roles on the basis of gender is called feminism. Although it originated in the West, it has gradually become a universal ideology. During the first phase, this ideology insisted on single dress standards for men and women, dress reforms, equal property, equal legal and educational rights. During this period, the struggle of women was for the right to vote. By 1920, this right was extended to women in western countries. The second phase of feminism insisted on political equality.

With this background it is important to probe, to what extent political equality translated into reality? How many women exercise political rights beyond right to vote? How many of them became part of governance? One aspect of good governance is its sensitivity to gender.

- b) **Way towards 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment:** In this regard, one important theory is Critical Mass theory. In political science it emphasises that adequate number of women politicians will become more responsive to women's issues and needs. It may bring in different way of doing democracy. In Indian context, the critical mass was formed at grass root level through radical amendments to the Constitution of India. Women in India constitute nearly half of the population of India but they are poorly represented in various institutions of governance. Though Indian women participated on a large scale in national independence movement, after independence their participation in politics and other decision-making bodies was very limited.

The constitution of a Committee on Status of Women in 1972, insertion of Chapter on Women and Development in Sixth Five-Year Plan in 1980, setting up of the Department of Women and Child Development in 1985, National Perspective Plan in 1988, the establishment of National Commission on Women in 1992 were few of the important measures and milestones which accelerated the participation of women in governance. This also paved the way for 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (CAA), which brought fundamental changes in rural and urban local self-governing bodies.

- c) **Evolution of Local Self-governing Institutions:** Local self-governing institutions had existed in India since ancient times. The British thought of reviving these institutions. Lord Ripon's resolution on local self-government is considered as an important

landmark in the evolution of local self-government in India. After independence local self-government was enumerated in the state list in seventh schedule of the Constitution. As compared to the rural government, the development of urban local self-government was slow. Both at rural and urban level such institutions were established. But due to inadequate Constitutional provisions these institutions were not working effectively. It was at this background 73rd and 74th CAA was passed. Women entered at the local level politics in large numbers due to these two amendments.

d) **Status of Women at International Level:** Before proceeding to the nature of their participation in these bodies, it is worthwhile to evaluate the status of women at International level. According to UNDP Report 2014, worldwide the HDI value averages about 8% lower than the male HDI value. Among regions the largest gap is in South Asia. Women are discriminated in the field of health, education and employment. In some countries women are discriminated because of religious laws and in some cases, violence is inflicted on women. There are also restrictions on women as far as access to public places and productive resources are concerned.

e) **Status of Women in India:** In 1974, a report titled ‘Towards Equality’ was published in India which revealed deplorable condition of women in the country. After four decades, the condition does not seem to have changed much. The sex ratio is declining. Violence is inflicted on women. Women have lower economic status. Their health is neglected. India ranks second worst in South Asia as far as social indicators are concerned. These social indicators are sex ratio, nutrition, health, education etc.

In this background of social status, it is interesting to see their political participation both at international and national level.

f) **Political participation at international level:** At international level, in 60% of countries, women account for less than 20% of parliamentary seats. The global average proportion of women in parliament is 22% in Jan 2015. The number of single or lower houses of parliament where women occupy 30% is 42 in 2015. Number of measures has been undertaken at international level to increase political participation of women. The number of women ministers is 715. In an article ‘Inter-Parliamentary Union’ it is mentioned that social affairs, education, family and women’s welfare are most common portfolios held by women. UN publication had stated that political parties are the most important institutions affecting women’s political participation.

Political parties can motivate women to enter political process. Most of the countries which has more than 30% of women national assemblies has applied quota in one form or the other.

g) **Political participation at National Level:** Political participation of women at national level is low. The underrepresentation of women in the political field can be linked with inferior status of women in Indian society. Tokenism is applied as far as political participation of women is concerned. Women are ‘included’. But it is not adequate to just include them. It is important to sensitize them to women’s issues. Increased participation of women will not only ensure political equality but will help in upliftment and empowerment of women. Women should view politics not only from electoral politics but as collective action by women to fight exploitation, degradation, injustice, subjugation, casteism and communalism. Women’s organisations should play an active role in motivating women to participate in the political process.

The roots of women’s participation in politics can be traced back to 19th century reform movement. (Baseline 2005) With the establishment of Indian National Congress, women started participating in political activities. Initially women from affluent families joined independence movement. It was Mahatma Gandhi who encouraged the average Indian women to participate in independence movement on a large scale. Women played an important role in Non-cooperation Movement, Civil Disobedience Movement and Quit India Movement.

Women were part of Constituent Assembly that framed the Constitution of India. After independence women participated in both formal and informal structures of politics. They participated in various movements. They participated in formal structures of politics as voters, candidates, legislators and ministers. The gap between male and female voters is reducing and in 2014 Lok Sabha elections it was 1.46%. (Chapter 3, pp 12) But political parties seem to be reluctant to field women candidates. Very few women find place in decision-making committees of political parties. The number of women parliamentarians increased from 22 in first Lok Sabha to 66 in 2014 in 16th Lok Sabha. Representation of women in State Legislative Assemblies is low. With the honourable exception of Indira Gandhi, very few women got an opportunity to become cabinet ministers. Most of the time women hold ‘soft portfolios’ like Health, Education, Social Welfare and Women and Child Development. It must be noted that in the current union council of ministers, Sushma Swaraj is Foreign Affairs Minister

and Nirmala Sitaraman is Defence Minister.

- h) **Political Participation of women in Maharashtra:** Women from Maharashtra did not lag behind. Women in Maharashtra have participated in formal and informal institutions of political life. Different political parties have their women's fronts. They became part of independence movement and also contested elections. Women from Maharashtra joined number of movements like Samyukta Maharashtra Movement, Goa Mukti Andolan etc. In 1962 in Maharashtra Legislative Assembly 13 women got elected. In 2014, Assembly elections 16 women got elected. Not much has changed in 55 years. Not more than five women are elected from Maharashtra to the Lok Sabha. In Maharashtra Cabinet, there is only one woman cabinet minister.
- i) **Women in Local Self-governing bodies:** Due to reservations lakhs of women entered rural local politics in substantial numbers. Reservations have brought many changes among women who participated in political process at rural level. These changes were not cosmetic but huge. One important medium that brought change in them is training. The training revolved around information about panchayat working. Healthcare and gender equality were too important components of training. They have done constructive work at rural level. But along with reservations much has to be done in terms of female literacy, independent voting rights and change in the status of women in family and society. When women entered politics at grass root level variables like age, education and occupation are decisive. Women perform better at local level when they are elected for second time, when they get training and when they have education beyond school level.

At urban level 50% women are there in urban bodies and they must give higher priority to issues of water supply, sanitation, solid waste management, education and health. Reservations do not automatically lead to their enhanced participation. Their perception about different issues, their knowledge and training, their political background and family support play an important role. Some important obstacles faced by women Corporators are lack of training, lack of knowledge about municipal functioning, lack of support from seniors in party, less cooperation from municipal officials, lack of financial resources, fear, insecurity, lack of confidence, criminalization of politics etc. Training for the Corporators must include gender sensitization, personality and leadership development and various functional issues of civic governance. One of the important issues related to women's participation is

“proxy women.” Women Corporators are not successful in operating as a group or force beyond party lines. Corporators must understand and grasp issues about changing urban scenario.

- j) **Profile of Thane District and Thane City:** Thane district occupies a vital place in the industrial development of Maharashtra. It has historical legacy. In 2011 Thane district was split into two with the creation of new Palghar district.

Thane city has historical and cultural heritage. It is famous for lakes, temples and forts. For a long time, it was considered as Gateway to Mumbai. Thane has sent MLAs to state legislature and MPs to Lok Sabha. It has number of social organisations, educational institutions and libraries. It has legacy of local self-governing institutions since British period. It has witnessed journey from council to corporation.

- k) **Political Participation of Women in Thane:** Women from Thane district too participated in national independence movement. No woman from Thane district has been elected to Lok Sabha. In the last 57 years only six women are elected to legislative assembly.

There are six municipal corporations in Thane district. Along with Thane the researcher has interviewed few Corporators from KDMC and NMMC. Kalyan has a historical legacy. It has contributed politically, socially and culturally. Navi Mumbai was established as a counter magnet to draw population from overcrowded Mumbai. NMMC was established in 1991. The researcher has interviewed 32 Corporators from TMC and 18 from KDMC and NMMC.

7.2 Conclusion:

It must be noted that before 73rd and 74th amendments, there were only a few women in politics. For example, Thane Municipal Corporation had only two women as Corporators. Therefore, the issue was not to incorporate the eligible party workers. It was how to fill void. In this background their performance is evaluated in corporation when the amendment is going to complete 25 years.

The researcher has interviewed 32 Corporators from TMC and 18 from KDMC and NMMC. The researcher thought it imperative to interview Corporators from other corporations in Thane district so as to compare and validate the findings. This was important considering socio-political similarities between Thane, Kalyan, Dombivli and Navi Mumbai. They account for approximately 70% of population of those residing in

Corporation areas of Thane district. (Chapter VI, p 7)

When one analyses the role of Corporator carefully it is observed that with the honourable exception of few it is extension of their role as a wife. Their role and activities are influenced by either husband or male relatives or by mentors. They are discriminated against male Corporators. It can be substantiated with the help of following points.

This analysis has to be in the background of patriarchal system predominant in our society. To what extent they operated within social structure? Did they try to break these structures? To what extent they were successful? If not, what are the underlying causes? These are some of the important issues to be probed and researcher has tried to do the same.

The following conclusions stand out from the data collected through interviews of women Corporators, their observation during the interviews and other corroborative material.

a) Marital Status - Most of the women Corporators are middle aged and married. In most of the cases their husbands are politically active. Most of the widows had husbands who were politically active. In case of ‘unmarried’ Corporators, they seemed to join politics under the influence of their father, uncle or brothers.

When young girls are entering various fields why have they shunned politics? When they can become IAS Officers, lawyers, Computer Engineers, Scientists, why not young politicians? Is male domination, corruption, criminalisation of politics deterring women from entering politics?

b) Educational qualifications- Most of the respondents among ‘Seniors’ and ‘Sitting’ corporators possess education up to Secondary level.

The education proportion does not significantly change with the caste category and shows large section of respondents belong to Secondary education regardless of their caste category.

c) Background of Women Corporators - Most of the Corporators are homemakers before contesting elections. They joined politics as the ward became reserved and it was not possible for husbands or male relatives to contest elections. They have joined politics due to the influence of their husband or male relatives.

Most of them were not active in social movements or not associated with any social organization or NGO. Most of those who got support of senior members in party were

with familial political background or were having mentors.

- d) **Technical Information** - As they themselves were not politically active, they did not have much information about the Constitution and its amendments, especially 73rd and 74th CAA. They were not aware about the concept of 'gender budgeting' too.

Most of the women respondents were not aware about Women Development Cell or did not have any rapport with State Human Rights Commission

- e) **Women in Political Parties** - Most of them supported the idea of reservation. They knew that in the absence of reservations men will not allow them to contest elections.

Most of the Corporators were satisfied with their representation in party organisation. But most of the women were accommodated in women's wings of the party and not in actual party organisation

- f) **Their perception of role and functions** - The researcher's understanding of their functions seemed coloured by the male colleagues. They were not aware about their role as representatives of the women. When they were asked about their perception of budget from women's viewpoint, most of them could not answer. Others were not clear about their ideas.

While organising programs for women, 'out of box' thinking was completely missing.

- g) **Their experience of municipal officers** - The interaction with Corporators indicated that if they were elected for the first time and did not have male relatives, their work was neglected by municipal officials and they often had confrontations with municipal officials.

- h) **Their perception of training** - Among the 'sitting' Corporators of TMC, most were apathetic towards the idea of training. During interaction they stated that as they get information about political proceedings at home, there was no need of training. Their idea of training seemed to be coloured by male relatives. Possibly their familial supporters themselves do not understand the importance of training or it is an intentional attempt to keep them politically unaware, so that they will work according to the guidance given by family members.

- i) **Committees offered to them** - Discrimination is clearly visible in case of committees. Women are members of committees like Women and Child Development, education or health. They have hardly been made Chairperson of

Standing Committee or as its member who handles financial matters. They are not adequately represented in Transport Committee. Their membership of a particular committee or not being in the committee is also influenced by male members. As they are not members of Standing Committee their role in budgetary procedure is confined to putting forth their demands. Most of them feel that they have inadequate funds. The position of Leader of House is rarely entrusted to women.

- j) **Obstacles they faced** - When asked about obstacles, one of the most important obstacles cited by women Corporators was male domination. Some of them were of the opinion that they are not allowed to speak in the house. Major decisions are taken without taking them into confidence. Few Corporators also opined that after becoming Mayor, the career of women comes to dead end whereas men are offered tickets for Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. Few Corporators opined that the kind of proximity the male Corporators developed with municipal officials is not possible in case of female Corporators. Problems with municipal administration, impatience of the people, and scarcity of funds were other few obstacles.
- k) **Solidarity among women Corporators** – A large percentage of women Corporators felt that there is no solidarity among the women Corporators beyond party lines. Two reasons responsible for this may be party diktats and the familial political background of women Corporators. Many a times they prefer to discuss their problems with male relatives or mentors. In one incident, in Thane about a year ago, one girl was misled by one auto driver. Sensing danger, she jumped from the running auto and fell unconscious. Incidentally, one woman Corporator saw the girl and took her to hospital and helped her as a Good Samaritan. However, she did not institutionalize this issue to underscore the security concerns of women travellers in Thane city. She lost or did not use an excellent opportunity to mobilize all women Corporators on this particular issue which was party agnostic and which was close to everyone's heart. Lack of solidarity is an important issue which needs further probe.
- l) **Their perception of domestic duties** - When they were asked about management of dual responsibilities, most of them agreed that they have dual roles. They first complete their domestic chores and then proceed to the job of Corporator. Many of them seemed to be proud that their priority is domestic responsibilities. They seemed to have conventional thinking as far as division of work at home is concerned.

m) Their motivational efforts - When they were asked about the encouragement they give to young girls to join politics, most of them answered negatively. Probably as they themselves have entered politics under someone's influence, they are not in a position to encourage young girls to join politics.

n) Observations during interaction-

i) **Presence of male relative** – In case of few women Corporators, their husbands or brother in law were present at the time of interview. In one case one of the male colleagues was present. Even during simple interactions with the researcher too, many male sponsors did not allow the respondents to express independently. They stayed on, interjected, interfered and even answered on the behalf of respondents. Unfortunately, respondents did not have the courage to ask them to refrain from meddling. The researcher had to tell them gently to let these women to talk. This interference was enough to show how male relatives must be meddling at the time of their actual work. Whether male relatives or party colleagues, they took the respondents for granted and made no bones about it.

The researcher met the respondents at their residences. It was interesting to note that they were never given personal space. Many sat and talked in the presence of other family members busy watching blaring television programs.

With the exception of a few women Corporators who had created their own identity and work independently, others seemed to be influenced by male relatives or mentors. Male dominance seemed to be an integral part of our social fabric and it cannot be wished away or changed rapidly.

ii) Reflections of minutes General Body meetings of TMC from 2012 to 2017

The deliberations recorded in the said minutes throw light on the role and contribution of the Women Corporators. The minutes had showed that in 2012-13 Corporators occupied only 15% of the total space. In 2016-17 it increased to 21%. But in general women have occupied very less space in minutes as compared to male Corporators. Those who are re-elected or have male relatives seem to be more vocal. While welcoming new Commissioner, the Corporator Minakshi Shinde presently Mayor stated that if they did not welcome the Commissioner, journalists would comment that women

Corporators do not talk in the house. Many Women Corporators have stated in house that the municipal officers do not give them equal treatment. One woman Corporator has bitterly remarked in one of the meetings that male Corporators get funds of Rs. 30 - 35 lacs for the work in wards whereas women Corporators are harried for even small tasks. She laments that the Women Corporators become a laughing stock with such treatment. It can be stated that women Corporators do not seem to be involved in issues which are related to rules and regulations of corporation. Probably they lack this information. Therefore, they must be well equipped with municipal rules and regulations.

With the above discussion one is reminded of the famous quote of the feminist writer Simon De Beauvoir. She states, “Woman is considered as ‘other’ ... She is determined and differentiated in relation to man, while he is not relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject. He is the Absolute. She is the other.”

7.3 Recommendations: In this background the following recommendations can be made which will help women Corporators to play their role effectively

- a) **Role of Political Parties** – Political parties must field women candidates at all levels of electoral process. They must be given equal representation in the organisational structure of political parties instead of accommodating them in women’s fronts of political parties. Political parties must promote their women workers at grass root levels in elections. Political parties should prescribe the experience criterion which will curb the concept of ‘proxy candidates.’ Political parties should give candidature to women with social and political background.
- b) **Education of candidates** – At Sarpanch level, educational qualifications are already prescribed. Educational qualifications should be prescribed for elections in urban local self – governing institutions. It will motivate educated people in general and educated women to enter politics.
- c) **Relief from domestic responsibilities** – Gender socialization should be in such a manner that both boys and girls should be inculcated with the value of gender equality. This will help girls to be relieved from shouldering all domestic responsibilities and concentrate on their public role.

- d) Role of training** – Training will go a long way in helping women Corporators to play an active role. The most important components of training should be:
- Acquaintance with milestone laws and important constitutional amendment
 - Acquaintance with municipal proceedings, rules and regulations and different aspects of municipal system. E.g. How to raise issues, budgetary procedure, idea of gender budgeting, how to write letters etc.
 - Awareness about duties and functions of Corporator
 - Understanding of the political system from national to grass root level
 - Awareness about carrying duties as special representatives of women
 - Sessions on personality development and gender equality.
- e) Realization on part of male Corporators** – Even after 25 years, male Corporators have not accepted women as equal partners. There should be orientation for male Corporators which will help them to realize this fact.
- f) Reservation for women in committees-** It has been observed that women are intentionally kept away from certain committees. There should be 50% reservation for women in each committee.
- g) Reservation for Women in State Legislative Assembly and Lok Sabha** If seats are reserved for women in higher bodies of governance, some capable women will get an opportunity to climb higher ladders pf power.

Some of these recommendations may sound romantic or idealistic today. But many ideas which sounded utopian at one point of time were translated into reality.

7.5 The New Dawn:

Maharashtra has a legacy of women social reformers who were motivated by their husbands. To name a few, Savitribai Phule, Ramabai Ranade and Laxmibai Tilak. They all belonged to conservative background but learnt about new liberal values only after marriage. Marriage was a turning point in their life as their husbands inspired and guided them. But at one particular stage they created their own identity. They carried the legacy of reform movement of their husbands. Savitribai continued the work of Satyashodhak Samaj even after death of Jyotiba Phule. Laxmibai Tilak's efforts towards social cause surprised even Rev. Tilak. Ramabai Ranade tried to make women self-sufficient by establishing institution like Seva Sadan. Even today they are respected not because they

were wives of great personalities, but because they changed their life and helped hundreds of downtrodden women to do the same. Their evolution as a human being was spectacular.

While many women Corporators may have been elected with the support of male family members or other male supporters, but having got elected they need to urgently take charge of the situation. They must realize and need to understand the nitty-gritties of work, express their opinions, participate in the discussions and work as a pressure group to influence policy making. It is not just quantitative increase, but their qualitative development which will help them to play an active role. They must look at themselves as human beings and evolve as human beings.

It does not matter, therefore, whether you are sponsored by somebody. What matters is whether you internalise the role assigned to you in the most effective manner and perform it well. The journey from ‘other’ to ‘self’ and ‘object’ to ‘subject’ may be arduous but not impossible.