

CHAPTER: 4

WOMEN LEGISLATORS IN WEST BENGAL: A STUDY OF MAJOR WOMEN LEADERS SINCE 1990

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4.1.INTRODUCTION

In democracy, citizens' active participation in political affairs is crucial and necessary because it provides legitimacy to the system and also strengthens the democratic fabric (Palmer, 1976, p.50-57). The idea of democracy is to ensure 'a Government of the whole body by the whole people, equally represented' (Mill, 1962, p. 256-57). A focal point of the current discourse on democracy is the concept of political representation. The 'politics of ideas' has come to be 'challenged by the alternative politics of presence' (Phillips, 1995, p.5). Accordingly, there is a growing demand as women comprise about half of the population, this section of society requires due attention in the system and a due share in political decision-making process with the feminist cry 'personal is political' and 'political is personal'. It is argued that democracy would be failed in its objectives if women lack equal opportunity to participate in the governmental decision-making process. They are to be equal partners in the nation-building and political development, so women would be able to facilitate their 'real' empowerment.

Today more and more voluntary organizations and national agencies have been more concerned about women questions, their activities expanding new areas of action and they are also seeking to reach out to women in the rural and remote areas. The approach to women's issues is also gradually changing from one of protection and welfare, to that of participation and empowerment. With independence Indian women were guaranteed political equality with men. Indian Constitution ensures equality into various articles. Therefore, the Central and State Governments of India have endeavoured to uplift the socio-economic and political conditions of women through various legislations, policies and programmes. With such initiatives the number of women participating in the electoral fray has increased but the number of women representatives in the formal political structures has never exceeded 15 percent of all seats. With the introduction of democratic governance Indian women have obtained right to vote, right to participation, right to stand for elections and right to representation in the parliaments and state legislatures but their percentage has remained extremely low. Across the country today, there are estimated to be 656.288183 million (as per World Bank data on population, 2019) women in India and bringing these women into politics were an act of positive discrimination.

However, the idea of political representation and leadership is implicit in the concept of political participation. Precisely, political representation means representation of elected

persons, are the members of a legislature with power, collectively, to make laws and determine national policy, in fact it means particularly acting for others (Pitkin). Thus, the political representation relates to responsiveness, accountability and authorizations. And, political leadership is a system of social relationships involving power, authority, charisma, abilities, views, behaviours and the style of individual who occupy formal office as well. To feminist scholars, participation and representation are considered as significant but different means to include women in politics. Participation is a means to include women in politics 'from below', i.e. to exercise right to vote and representation is another means to include women 'from above', i.e. to get elected, in political institutions. In this perspective, taken into consideration of the notion of '*Role Model*' given by Phillips we have found the relation between the idea of political representation and political leadership. To Phillips, elected successful women can serve as *Role Model*. Inspiring by such role models many women do believe themselves to be capable of performing well in politics. When more women become present in politics and they could serve as role models as a result they inspire others to come forward. We can expect with this fuller inclusion of previously excluded groups will alter the direction of policy or the content of the decisions that are made as well as the way politics is done (Hust, 2004, p.36). This forms the background against which this chapter will specifically focus on elected women leaders in West Bengal, mainly MPs and MLAs. The chapter will have also case studies of selected women leaders.

4.2.THE PROFILE OF THE STATE: WEST BENGAL

West Bengal located in the eastern part of India; Bay of Bengal is lying to the south and bordering three alien countries and five Indian states, Bangladesh in the east and Nepal and Bhutan in the North; Indian state Sikkim to the north, Assam to the north-east, Odisha to the south-west and Jharkhand and Bihar to the west. West Bengal comprises with the Darjeeling Himalaya hill region, the Ganges delta, the Rarh region and coastal Sundarbans with an area 88,752 km², it has population of 91,276,115 (Census, 2011) of which male and female are 46,809,027 and 44,467,088 respectively. In 1947, when India gained independence Bengal was partitioned along religious lines. The western part went to the dominion of India and was named West Bengal. The eastern part went to the dominion of Pakistan as a province called East Bengal (later renamed East Pakistan in 1956), becoming the independent nation of Bangladesh in 1971. In 1950 the Princely State of Cooch Behar merged with West Bengal. In 1955 the former French Enclave of

Chandannagar, which had passed into Indian control after 1950, was integrated into West Bengal; portions of Bihar were also subsequently merged with West Bengal. Both West and East Bengal experienced large influxes of refugees during and after partition in 1947. Refugee resettlement and related issues continued to play a significant role in the politics and socio-economic condition of the state. Presently, West Bengal is divided into 23 administrative districts (Wikipedia). The economy of the state is largely based on agriculture though it has small-medium sized enterprises, its per capita domestic product in 2019-20 ₹115,748 which is the India's 23rd highest GSDP. The female-male ratio is 950/1000 and total literacy is 76.26% as per census, 2011.

Figure 4.1: Districts of West Bengal



The West Bengal State Assembly is unicameral legislature, which is called Vidhan Sabha, with 295 members (MLAs), including one nominated member from the Anglo-Indian community. The state contributes 42 seats to the Lok Sabha and 16 seats to the Rajya Sabha of the Indian Parliament. The system of Panchayati Raj was introduced in the State in 1956 through the West Bengal Panchayat Act. Though the next 21 years Panchayati Raj system was not an effective institution, failed to empower grassroots people. Since 1978 several Constitutional Amendments have taken place in the Panchayati Raj system in West Bengal and now it has emerged as the most effective and vibrant organ of grassroots democracy in the state (Mandal, 2008). Also West Bengal is one of the most

urbanised states in India. The urban governance through the 'Urban Local Bodies' (ULBs) i.e. Municipal Corporations, Municipalities and Notified Area Authorities, in the state of West Bengal dates back to British regime in 18th century. As a matter of fact, Kolkata Municipal Corporation or "KMC" (earlier known as Calcutta Municipal Corporation) is one of the oldest municipal bodies of the country. In 1726, a Mayor's court was established by a Royal Charter. The Bengal Municipal Act was passed in 1932, which brought about several innovative changes in municipal governance in the presidency. The post-Independence era witnessed repeated amendments to the Bengal Municipal Act (BMA) of 1932 in order to face the challenge of rapid urbanization in the state. Finally, the BMA was replaced by the West Bengal Municipal Act, in 1993 and it incorporated the provisions of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act. The West Bengal Municipal Act, 1993 also has gone through several amendments. However, the urban governance in West Bengal is being implemented through 118 Municipalities/ Notified Area Authorities and 7 Municipal Corporations (Source: Department of Urban Development & Municipal Affairs, Govt. of West Bengal).

TABLE 4.1: Basic Information about West Bengal

Area of the State	88,752 km ²
Density of Population(as per Census, 2011)	1028
No. of Districts	23
Approximate Population (as per projection, 2021)	10.19 Crore
Total Population(as per Census, 2011)	91,276,115
Male	46,809,027
Female	44,467,088
Sex ratio	950
Total Literacy (as per Census, 2011)	76.26 %
Male literacy	81.69 %
Female literacy	70.54 %

Source: censusindia.gov.in

4.3.THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN WEST BENGAL

There are a host of demographic information, which could provide a handful of socio economic indicators in relation to the status of women. To keep our analysis simple only few of them have been gleaned out in order to get some basic inside into our point of

concern. The indicators taken are sex ratio, literacy rate and percentage of school going children in the age group of 6-17 years and few other indicators on women's health and decision making.

In terms of sex ratio there is marked improvement during the last three decades of the 20th century (1991-2021) both at the national level as well as in West Bengal. In fact, West Bengal has shown a marked improvement in sex ratio during these period from 917 (1991) to 950 (2011). In fact the state has improved its position in terms of sex ratio from 22nd in 1991 to 17th in 2011 among the Indian states and union territories during the last two decades of 20th century. The sex ratio figure of the Indian states and union territories reveal that the top 10 states in 2011 are Kerala, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Meghalaya, Manipur, Telangana, Odisha and Mizoram. It is also notable that Kerala (Female- 1084, Male-964 as per Census 2011) and Puducherry (Female- 1037, Male-967 as per Census 2011) are the only two States where female population is more than the male population. In West Bengal Darjeeling district (970) stands first in terms of sex ratio followed by West Midnapore (966), Hooghly (961), Murshidabad (959), South 24 Parganas (956), Birbhum (956), North 24 Parganas (955), Bankura (954), Jalpaiguri (953) and other districts.

A look into the literacy scenario reveals that the state of West Bengal has shown an increase of about 11% in female literacy during the last decade of the 20th century. The female literacy rate for the state stood at 59.61% in 2001 and reached to 70.54% in 2011. However, the state remained ahead of the national average on female literacy rate during 2011. Apart from the literacy figures the available information on the population in the age group of 6-17 years attending school by age and sex provides an interesting insight. Of all the females in the age group of 6-17 years 85.9% (though it became lower 76.8% as per NFHS 2019-20) attend school in West Bengal compared to 68.8% in India as per NFHS 2015-16. The corresponding figure for the males in the same age group is lower 83.7% in West Bengal. A close look also reveals that with the increasing age school attendance for females rises significantly.

The information on state of women's health specially at the reproductive age provides valuable insight into the status of women in any society. Two aspects of women's health prevalence of anaemia and antenatal care are taken in the present analysis. The available

information reveals that in India 53.2 percent of ever married women suffer from iron deficiency anaemia which is even higher in West Bengal 59.8 percent. In terms of antenatal care West Bengal shows much better result. In India where 58.6 percent of women at reproductive age group receive antenatal care from a qualified doctors outside home, in West Bengal such care is available to about 87.3 percent of women in the same category as per National Family Health Survey report, 2015-16 though it falls to 72.6% during 2019-2020.

Finally, some of the observations on never married women involved in household decision making clearly revealed that in West Bengal, as in India, the decision making power of women mainly revolves around her kitchen. About half or more have no power to decide on their own health care and purchase of jewellery for household items and staying with their parents or siblings. Moreover, about half of the ever married women in West Bengal have no access to money which all are indications towards powerlessness of women in the society (Mitra and Mitra, 2006, p.78-80). West Bengal being a part of the world community cannot escape from the bad effects of commercialisation and globalization. Still it seeks to protect the rights of women enshrined in the Constitution of India; enhance their dignity and ensure their participation in the economic, social and political activities.

4.4.WEST BENGAL:WOMEN AND POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

Three decades after independence Indian National Congress (INC) dominated nearly all of the states of India. Similarly, since the time of 1952 to till 1977(1st to 7th State Assembly election) in the West Bengal State Assembly, Indian National Congress (INC) was the ruling party. However, in 1977, the Communist Party of India (CPI-M) won in the state legislative elections and became the ruling party. From 1977-2011 (8th to 14thState Assembly election), the CPI-M remained in power for 34 long years as the world's longest-serving democratically elected communist government until it was lost office in 2011. After a long period, in West Bengal under the woman leadership Mamata Banerjee the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) came into power. AITC had been an ally in what was then the Congress Party's national ruling coalition government. The AITC's founder and leader, Mamata Banerjee became the State's first female Chief Minister. Since the inception of West Bengal in its' political history we had only one female Governor (Padmaja Naidu, from 1956-1967) and presently have woman Chief

Minister. While during the freedom struggle women from Bengal actively participated in demonstrations and arrested in large number and became subject to police violence. In 1928, the first formal organization Mahila Rastriya Sangha (MRS) formed to mobilize women for political work in Bengal and Calcutta women formed the Nari Satyagraha Samiti (NSS) in 1929 in response to the congress call for women to be ready to serve the nation. By 1933 most of the women revolutionaries of Bengal were in prison and were subject to extreme police violence (Forbes, 1998, p. 135-41). In spite of such bravery stories of Bengali women during freedom struggle, after independence they remain uncounted and even invisible and sometimes deplorably visible in the elected decision making bodies (Legislative Assembly & Council of Ministry) of the State, Table 4.2 & 4.3 showing the fact in this regard.

4.4.1. POLITICAL PARTIES AND WOMEN MEMBERS:

In a democratic setup, the political road to decision-making usually leads to the parliamentary system via the political parties. Though the ultimate aim of various political parties is to achieve power, they differ in their ideologies and programmes (Kumari & Dubey, 1994, p. 61). So, it becomes imperative to see the general attitude of various political parties towards women in general, what has been the level of representation of women in the different political parties at the primary membership level and whether the percentage is reflected in the leadership level? All political parties in their manifesto support equal status of women that women should be given equal rights, but the question is that, in actual reality to what extent they actually succeeded in giving equal position to women within their own parties (Kumari & Dubey, 1994, p. 69). Table 4.2 provides a look at party wise figures of women members will help painting a picture, the extent to which all parties except one party provide chances of nearly equal participation within their own party setup. It has found that no sincere effort is made by the political parties so that a significant number of women can enter into the party organization and particularly at the decision making process. All parties have specified women's wings i.e. Mahila Congress (INC), All India Democratic Women's Association (CPI-M), Mahila Morcha (BJP), Trinamool Mahila Congress (AITC), which are playing very important role in regard to motivate and encourage women to participate in politics. But these women's wing work within the limitations of the party's women's issues. The role of Women's Organization is of crucial importance in this regard. But, no political

party is giving due importance while making the party's propaganda (Ghatak, 2010, p.293). In general, women primary party members are utilized by the party during elections to mobilize womenfolk or else they are given the responsibility of holding a campaign meeting to represent their party, in place of senior male candidates. Women members are generally used to do social work for the party during natural calamities etc. Even within the party, majority of the women are not given any important positions and responsibilities.

TABLE: 4.2

Membership Level of Women in Four-leading Political Parties of West Bengal

Name of Party	Total Membership in West Bengal	Number of Women Members in West Bengal	Percentage of Women Members in West Bengal	Total Members in the Highest Decision Making Body (State-level)	Number of Women in the Highest Decision Making Body (State-level)
INC	10, 00, 000 (Approx)	4, 00, 000 (Approx)	40%	39	4 (10.3%)
BJP	50,00,000 (Approx)	20,00,000 (Approx)	40%	3	0
CPI-M	1,85,500	9,275	5%	18	5 (27.8%)
AITC	80,00,000 (Approx)	40,00,000 (Approx)	50%	174	29 (16.7%)

Source: Data supplied by the respective political parties (All figures are of 2016)

In this regard, equally important is the role of the family and social obligations. But, family and social obligations prove to be a major hindrance for women. The role of the family in this regard is not encouraging. It is not a regular feature that women are taking equal role even in the decision making process of the family. With a view to improve the position of the women in the lawmaking body the first active role should be taken by the family and then by the political parties. The status and position of women first should be improved from the family level. The women's organizations have to take prime responsibility regarding the question of women's equality and women's rights. Social and political organizations should come forward and help in this regard. Women's representations in all section of the party organization have to increase. Legislation and constitutional measures are not enough to improve the representation of women from regional to national decision making body. Poor women's representation in the legislature is not at all a good sign for the betterment and success of any democratic society (Ghatak,

2010, p.293). However, the Table 4.2 shows evidence that there is found a huge gap between the level of women's primary membership and leadership in decision making bodies.

4.4.2. PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE ELECTORAL POLITICS: THE EXPERIENCE OF WEST BENGAL

Right to vote can be said to be the starting point in the struggle for women's political equality. The participation of women in the electoral process is an indicator of their political consciousness. In India, limited adult franchise was granted to women in 1937. Since then, women have been participating in political process, as voters, as candidates contesting the elections, involved in deliberations both in State Assemblies and Parliament and also through holding public office at different levels in the Judiciary. Women's participation in formal elections is to a great extent dependent on the mobilization efforts of the political parties, general awareness among the community of the importance of exercising franchise and overall political culture.

4.4.2.1.POLITICAL PARTIES AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

In a democratic set up, the political road to decision making usually leads to the system via the political parties. While analyzing the role and participation of women members in various political parties, it becomes imperative to see the promises or programmes which they have for the upliftment of women in their manifestoes, and to what extent they encourage women within their party organizations.

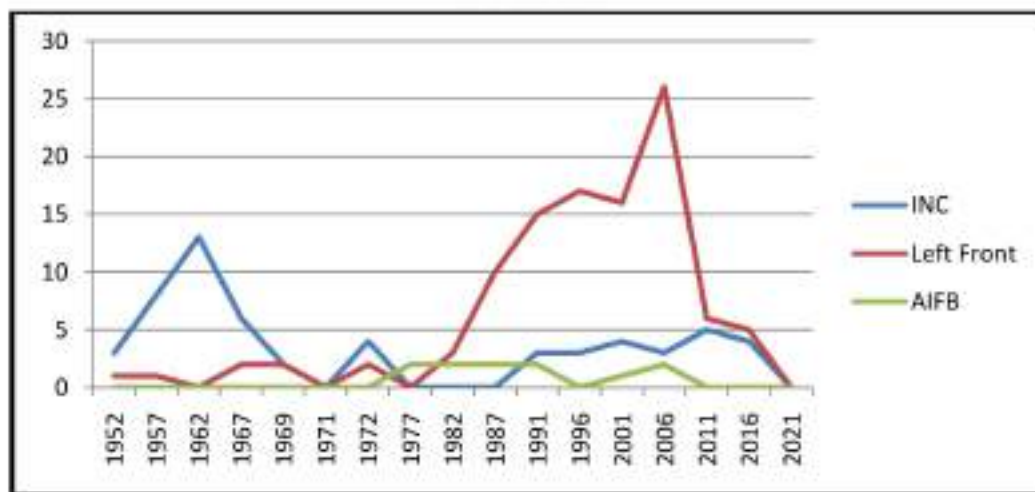
TABLE: 4.3
PARTY-WISE WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN WEST BENGAL VIDHAN SABHA, 1952-2021

Year of Assembly Elections	INC	Left Front	AIFB	Others	IND	AITC	Total
1952	3	1	0	2	0	0	6
1957	8	1	0	1	1	0	11
1962	13	0	0	1	0	0	14
1967	6	2	0	1	0	0	9
1969	2	2	0	3	0	0	7
1971	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
1972	4	2	0	1	0	0	7
1977	0	0	2	1	1	0	4
1982	0	3	2	2	0	0	7
1987	0	10	2	1	0	0	13
1991	3	15	2	3	0	0	23
1996	3	17	0	2	0	0	22
2001	4	16	1	3	0	5	29
2006	3	26	2	3	0	3	37
2011	5	6	0	0	0	26	37
2016	4	5	0	1	0	29	39
2021	0	0	0	7 (BJP)	0	33	40

Source: Compiled from the data available with the West Bengal Legislative Assembly Library.

*IND =Independent, *Left Front= CPI (M)& CPI (M)

FIGURE NO: 4.2
PARTY-WISE WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN WEST BENGAL VIDHAN SABHA
1952-2021



The Table 4.3 reveals the fact that till 1962 election the maximum number of female candidates has been fielded by the Indian National Congress and Congress was the

leading party of giving more representation to the women in the assembly though it is very few. But, from 1977 the situation has been changed totally, the number dropped to one and then zero, there was a tendency towards a sharp decrease in the number of women contestants set up by the Congress. The number of women contestants put up by the Congress, however, always remained much below its stipulated target of 15% of the total candidates. The target of 15% was officially fixed up by the party in 1957 and since then it has been repeatedly reiterated. From 1982 the Left Front party (CPI & CPM) has showed more positive attitude in setting up women candidates. The number of women candidates fielded by the party in 1987 was 10. The other smaller parties have shown fluctuations in this respect. It may be noted that though women candidates contested the elections as independents but the success of such candidates was insignificant. In almost all the elections, the unsuccessful independent women candidates lost their security deposit. From the year 2001 in the political map of West Bengal a new political party that is All India Trinamool Congress (AITC), has emerged under the leadership of Mamata Banerjee and started performing well, presently it is the leading party in West Bengal politics.

The table shows that there were only 6 women representatives in the first assembly in 1952. Their number increased to 40 in 2021, it is the highest ever number. In 2011 & 2016, 37 and 39 women were elected in the assembly. In the present Vidhan Sabha we have 7 out of 40 women MLAs from BJP and 33 from AITC. First time in West Bengal, there is no representatives from the Congress and Left Front in the current legislative assembly and this is the first time ever BJP started to represent women members in the assembly. However, the overall representation of women in the Vidhan Sabha is too low compare to men representatives. Women's participation in the elections to the State legislations shows that only a few women avail the opportunity of representing in the assembly. Thus, the above table indicates evidence that the political parties do not usually nominate women as candidates in the Assembly elections. Though, in 2011 Government of India approved 50% reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, with this women's representation has been improved in the local governance but the 33% women's reservation in the Parliament and state assemblies is still a matter of uncertainty.

4.4.2.2.LOK SABHA AND WOMEN OF WEST BENGAL

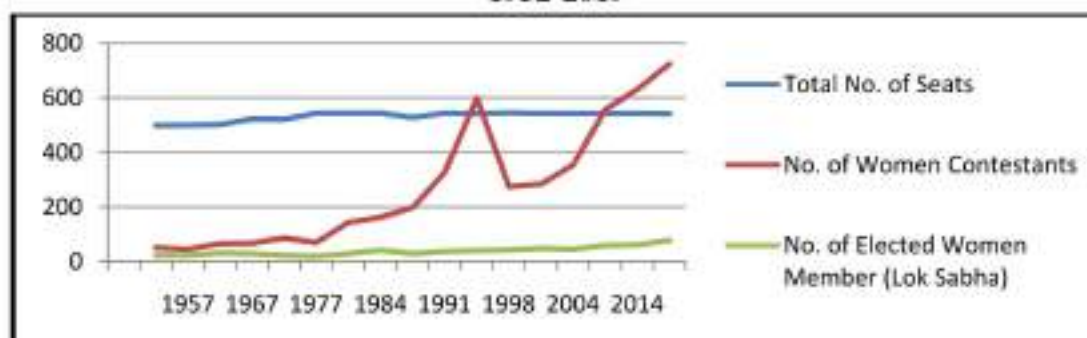
It is evident that in the Lok Sabha there is a gross under-representation of women. Table 4.4 indicates the number of women representation in the Lok Sabha. In the present Lok Sabha out of 42 Lok Sabha seats from West Bengal, women representation is 11. Women representation from West Bengal in Lok Sabha has been as follows (Table 4.4).

TABLE: 4.4
Representation of Women Members from West Bengal to Lok Sabha 1952-2019
 (Since 1977 total Seats of West Bengal are: 42)

Years of Lok Sabha Elections	Total No. of Seats	No. of Women Contestants	No. of Elected Women Member (Lok Sabha)	Percentage of Women Over Total No. of Seats (all India)	No. of Elected Women Member from West Bengal
1952	499	51	22	4.4	1
1957	500	45	22	4.4	2
1962	503	66	31	6.1	2
1967	523	67	29	5.5	2
1971	521	86	22	4.2	2
1977	544	70	19	3.4	2
1980	544	143	28	5.1	2
1984	544	162	42	7.7	5
1989	529	198	29	5.4	2
1991	544	326	37	6.8	3
1996	541	599	40	7.3	4
1998	545	274	43	7.8	5
1999	543	284	49	9.02	5
2004	543	355	45	8.2	4
2009	543	556	59	10.8	7
2014	543	631	62	11.4	12
2019	542	724	78	14.3	11

Source: Source: Statistical Report on General Elections, Election Commission of India, New Delhi.

FIGURE NO:4.3
Representation of Women Members From West Bengal To Lok Sabha
1952-2019



The early Lok Sabha of 1957 had two women members out of 31 seats and from 1957 to 1980 in six Lok Sabhas, there were two women members from West Bengal. Since 1984, the number of women MPs from West Bengal is fluctuating. In 1984, West Bengal had 5 women representatives to the Lok Sabha and in the next three Lok Sabha; West Bengal had fewer women MPs such as 2, 3, and 4 respectively. Again, the number of women MPs from West Bengal became 5 to two consecutive Lok Sabha. In the 14th and 15th Lok Sabha, the West Bengal had 4 and 7 women MPs out of total 42 Lok Sabha seats. The table 4.3 shows that in the 16th Lok Sabha, 2014 people of West Bengal have elected maximum number of women parliamentarians. The state has elected 12 women MPs in 2014 compared to 11 in the 2019 general election and it was the highest ever number. The percentage of women MPs has increased from 4.4 to 14.39 between the first Lok Sabha to the seventeenth Lok Sabha. The representation of women in Rajya Sabha is also not encouraging. Presently from West Bengal out of total 16 members 4 women are representing in the Rajya Sabha, which is to some extent promising compare to Lok Sabha. However, the presence of women in the Upper House is a little higher but the overall condition is not so much encouraging.

4.4.2.3. WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

The representation of women in the Legislative Assembly of West Bengal, as reflected in Table 4.5, shows that there were 6 women elected out of 238 total seats in 1952 and the number of women MLAs has reached to 40 out of 294 seats in 2021. The percentage of women MLAs has increased from 2.52% to 13.60% in 2021 and this is the highest ever percentage. The number and percentage of women members in the assembly always fluctuated and never crossed the limit of 14%. The table shows there is also exist

percentage of difference between contesting and electing women members, since 1996 the difference becomes wider steadily.

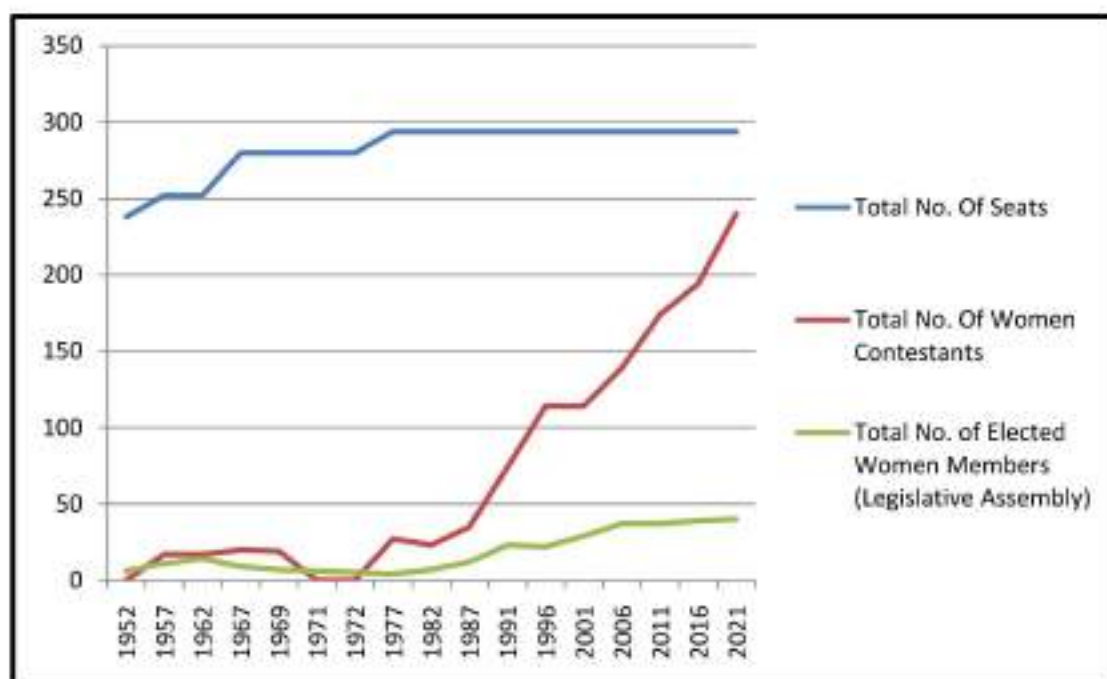
TABLE: 4.5
WOMEN MLAs OF WEST BENGAL, 1952-2021

Years of Assembly Elections	Total No. Of Seats	Total No. Of Women Contestants	Total No. of Elected Women Members (Legislative Assembly)	Gap Between Contesting & Electing Percentage of Women Members	Percentage of Women MLAs Over Total No. of Seats
1952	238	-	6	-	2.52
1957	252	17	11	35.3	4.36
1962	252	17	14	17.65	5.55
1967	280	20	9	55	3.21
1969	280	19	7	63.16	2.50
1971	280	-	6	-	2.14
1972	280	-	5	-	1.78
1977	294	27	4	85.19	1.36
1982	294	23	7	69.57	2.38
1987	294	35	12	65.72	4.08
1991	294	74	23	68.92	7.82
1996	294	114	22	80.71	7.48
2001	294	114	29	74.57	9.86
2006	294	139	37	73.39	12.58
2011	294	174	37	78.74	12.58
2016	294	194	39	79.9	13.26
2021	294	240	40	83.34	13.60

Source: Compiled from the data available with the West Bengal Legislative Assembly Library.

Very few women have been able to reach the high level of power and authority. This is true not only in India but in other countries of the world also. Though West Bengal had a woman Governor for a full decade, from 1957 to 1966, poor representation of women in the state legislature and Ministries has been reflected from 1952 to 2021. Poor representation of women in the legislature is held to be the main reason for the small number of women in the ministries (Sen Choudhury, 1995, p.115).

FIGURE NO: 4.4
WOMEN MLAs OF WEST BENGAL, 1952-2021



4.4.2.4.PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN THE MINISTRY OF WEST BENGAL

As far as Women Ministry is concerned, there were 2 women ministers out of a total 30 ministers in 1952. The largest number of women ministers have been found in the ministry formed in 1962, there was 13.51% representation of women in the ministry as mentioned in the table no 4.6. Two women were included as Cabinet Ministers and three as Deputy Ministers. But, the situation changed in two years time when the post of Deputy Minister was discontinued. Only two women remained as Cabinet members till the Fourth General Election. When United Front Government was formed in 1967, West Bengal had a ministry without any woman. When the United Front came back to power in 1969 with an overwhelming majority in the Legislative Assembly, two women were included in the ministry: one as a rank of Cabinet Minister and one as a Minister of State. The short-lived Government of 1971 also did not have any woman Minister (Sen Choudhury, 1995, p.115).

Politics in West Bengal turned a full circle in 1972, when a Congress Government was formed again. But out of 28 members ministry included only one woman as a Deputy Minister. The Left Front came to power in West Bengal in 1977 and since then the number of women ministers has fluctuated within one to four. In 2011, All India

Trinamool Congress (AITC) under a woman chief had been come to power in West Bengal, though the number of women ministers had remained 4 where 45 or 40 men in the council of ministers till 2016 (see Table 4.6). The number of women ministers has been doubled in 2021 from 4 to 8. Sixty-nine years has been passed from first assembly election, but the situation has not changed remarkably; the number of women ministers has changed from 2 to 8 only while we expected that the women's underrepresentation in the decision making bodies would be changed when the State Government started to lead by a Woman Chief. On the basis of available data, the following table indicates that the percentage of women in the 1962 ministry was 13.51% and in 2021 percentage is 18.60% that is the highest ever.

TABLE: 4.6

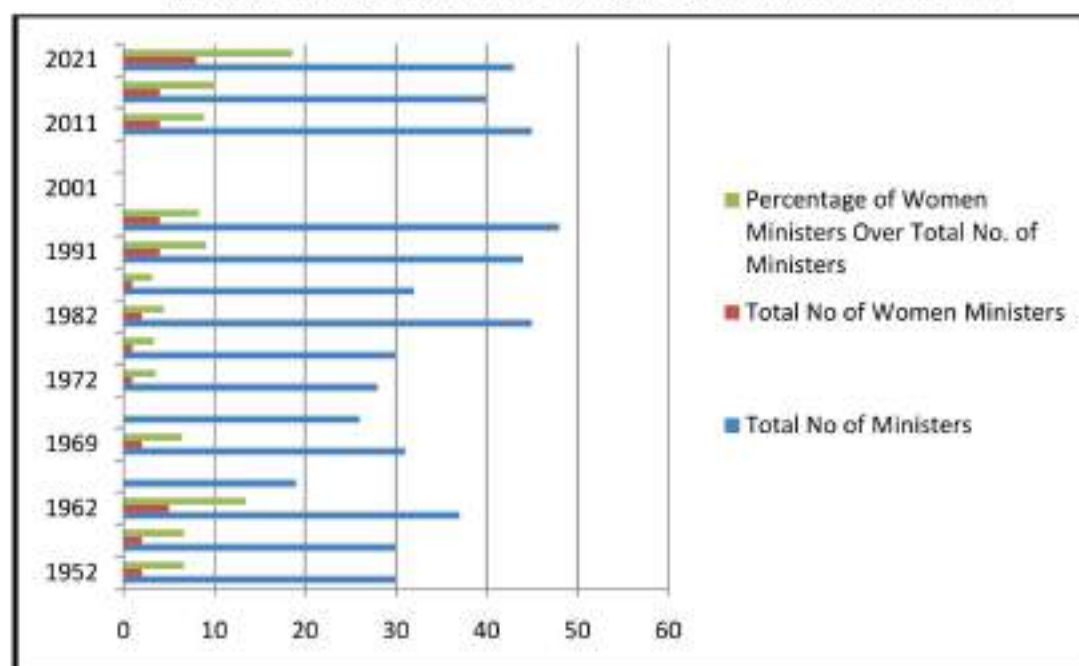
WOMEN MINISTERS IN WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT, 1952-2021

Year of Assembly Elections	Total No of Ministers	Total No of Women Ministers	Percentage of Women Ministers Over Total No. of Ministers
1952	30	2	6.66
1957	30	2	6.66
1962	37	5	13.51
1967	19	-	-
1969	31	2	6.45
1971	26	-	-
1972	28	1	3.57
1977	30	1	3.33
1982	45	2	4.44
1987	32	1	3.12
1991	44	4	9.09
1996	48	4	8.33
2001	NA	-	-
2006	NA	-	-
2011	45	4	8.88
2016	40	4	10
2021	43	8	18.60

* NA-Not available.

Source: <http://wbicc.in/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Council-of-Minister>.

FIGURE NO: 4.5
WOMEN MINISTERS IN WEST BENGAL GOVERNMENT, 1952-2021



The Congress Government as well as United Front and Left Front Government, was allotted comparatively marginal portfolios to women. Even, presently under the woman Chief Minister of West Bengal, the position of women ministers has not changed; still the important portfolios like Home, Finance, or Defence remain in the hands of male and have never been held by a woman. Hence, it is found that the women ministers are very negligible in the state of West Bengal; there are only 8 women ministers out of total 43 ministers. In spite of Constitutional and Governmental endeavours women's underrepresentation remains persistent and pervasive. West Bengal is not an exceptional state in India where membership of women in the legislature is abysmally low, it is only 16.66% women representatives over total number of seats (as per 2021 Assembly election) in compare to that the percentage of women representation in the parliament is slightly better, which is 26.19% in Lok Sabha over total number of seats (as per 2019 Lok Sabha election).

4.4.3. WEST BENGAL: A FOCUS ON ELECTED WOMEN LEADERS IN POLITICS

In the 1990s, there was considerably higher participation as well as representation of women in politics, the world over as compared to the previous decades. This change was noticed also in other vital areas which were usually off-limits for women such as in the

bureaucracy, the judiciary and in business. Both developed and developing countries witnessed and accepted the dramatic rise in the numbers of the women holding key posts. Women even hold the key posts. Women even held the offices of president and prime minister in several countries (Kumari, 2012). This trend is more marked in developing countries like India, even within the India there are some states where we observed the similar trend. Indian States such as Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, West Bengal etc are/were leading by Woman as head of the states and as head (Governor) of the governments (Chief Minister). Presently, there are 4 Indian states where women are holding the post of Governor (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Chhattisgarh and Telengana) and West Bengal is the only states of India leading by woman Chief Minister.

The matter of women's involvement in politics in the state West Bengal, post 1990 indicates a trend that more and more women are contesting the polls from various political parties and the number of women participating in the electoral process has increased also (see above table 4.4). In this study Women legislators, MPs and MLAs of West Bengal, have been selected because they are most important part in the decision making process of the Government. Actually, legislators make the laws which actually govern the state. The elected women leaders must ensure women's empowerment through the political institutions which they represent. Therefore, it is necessary to develop structures and methods for accountability from women elected representatives and to develop links and support systems between women's groups and the women in political institutions (Nath, 1997, p.14). In this respect, arguments of Anne Phillips is notable in favour of increased political leadership of women: (i) Successful women politicians act as role models for the others; (ii) States increasing the proportion of the women elected would ensure the principles of justice between the sexes; (iii) Ensuring the fulfilling of certain interests of women, which may otherwise be neglected; and (iv) Enhancing the quality of political life (Phillips, 1995, p. 62).

However, this section is based mainly on field interviews and also draws upon a selective review of literature on leadership. Twenty five women leaders from West Bengal were meet and spoken with in the course of the study. The interviews are based on a one time interaction and there were no follow-up visits. However, even with this limitations of interviews provided a glimpse of the qualities of leadership that have emerged in different places and the difference it has made to the lives of women. Each of these women is in a

leadership position, either a member or ex-member of legislative assembly or of the parliament (Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha). They each play a role in the public sphere as well as in the private sphere within the home. Their life experiences are different, the natures of the issues that exercise them are different, and their perception of their own present and future roles is very different. These profiles are based on quick interviews and may not reveal many things for which a longer stay and better understanding of the area would be essential. While fully recognising this limitations the interviews bring out certain issues which appear to us to be worthy of further and more detailed study. What we have tried to do therefore is simply to list the various issues that seemed to emerge from the interviews and discussions (see chapter 5 & 6), which seem to us to be potentially rewarding areas in any future study.

4.4.3.1. ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS: THE STRUCTURAL FACTORS

The problem of active political participation of women in the elections can differ from one place to the other. The reasons for or low political participation may be sought in the cultural, socio-economic and political realities of the women. Generally, women's reproductive and family roles make it difficult for women to be actively engaged in politics. In many societies, economic dependence, lack of political socialization and women's domestic responsibility are the key factors that limit the political participation of women. Also, many families were not willing to finance the elections of their women from family funds, do they do so for male members from family funds. Since most women have no economic resources of their own, their aspirations could only be fulfilled if they were fully backed by a political party. The pattern of socialisation of girls and social norms also partly accounted for women's low political participation based on the paradigm of the public and private dichotomy. Many women are deterred from active participation in politics due to the threats of violence and character assassination which are on the rise. The argument that domestic duties prevented them from participation is commonly used by women (Jamir, 2012, p.82). However, in the present political process of entry into decision making political institutions there is growing influence of money and muscle power, backroom dealings and communalization and criminalization, due to these, many women have left political parties and formed in formal women's groups

(Nath, 1997, p. 12). Women groups probably play an extremely important role in encouraging and enabling leadership.

However, it is noticed in the post decades of 1990 in West Bengal women are taking active part in the elections. In spite of various obstacles women are step forward in governance structures. There are several factors that helped the women leaders to actively participate in the elections. Field study indicates that at a personal level, all women legislators were unanimous in their opinion that for effective women participation in governance process literacy is must require. Women's talent and efficiency are necessary for all round development of the society and country as well. Women education is highly necessary for the society as mothers are the first teachers of their children. In order to examine the relationship between education and political participation, the women legislator's educational qualifications are shown in Table 4.7. It is significant to note that education has played a major role in moulding women's participation in politics. In this study we find that 24% of women legislators hold post-graduate and 48% graduate degrees, that means almost 75% of the women legislators are highly educated by the Indian standards. This shows that law or decision making women are academically well-qualified. Hence, there is a positive co-relation between education and participation of women in politics.

TABLE: 4.7

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF THE LEGISLATORS

Sl. No.	Education	No. of Women Legislators
1	Secondary Level (V to X)	02
2	Undergraduate (X to B.A/B.SC/B.COM)	05
3	Graduate	12
4	Postgraduate	06
	Total	25

Thus, we can see that proper education has a great impact on the active participation of women leaders in the elections and governance as well.

- Education makes them aware of their rights and responsibilities and the proper way to get the rights and fulfil the responsibilities. They also become some of the role models in their fields and any other field which give them aspirations.
- Education increases their confidence in themselves. They get confidence to speak their mind freely and frankly. It gives them the confidence to believe in

themselves and their own power role and responsibilities. All women leaders were unanimous in their acknowledgement of enhancement in their confidence labels, knowledge, decision-making capacity, elevation of social status, political awareness and subsequent personality development.

- Education let them know the value of things and opportunities and to utilise them to the fullest.
- Education helps them to make proper planning and develop their managerial skills which help them in proper governing and balancing their household duties and public duties.
- Education gives them the confidence to save themselves from any kind of exploitation by the men, be it in day to day life or in public sphere through education they can know the provisions against exploitations.

Also, it is found from the field study apart from education-

- *Family support,*
- *Positive perceptions of society towards women leadership,*
- *Changing behaviour of political parties and*
- *Attitudes of male leaders,* all are helped women leaders to participate in the elections actively.

FIGURE NO: 4.6

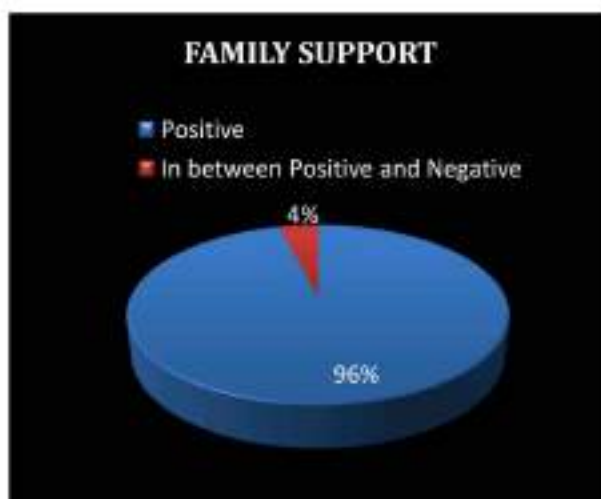


FIGURE NO: 4.7

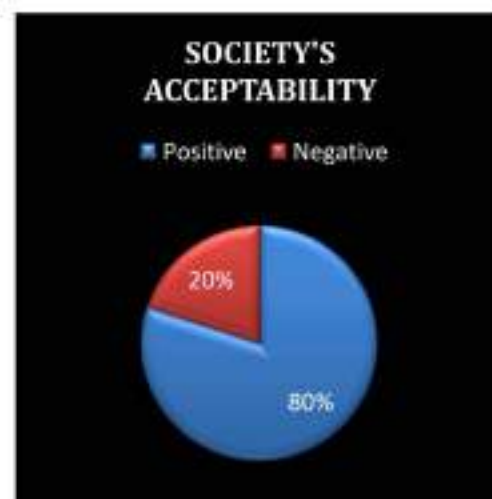


FIGURE NO: 4.8

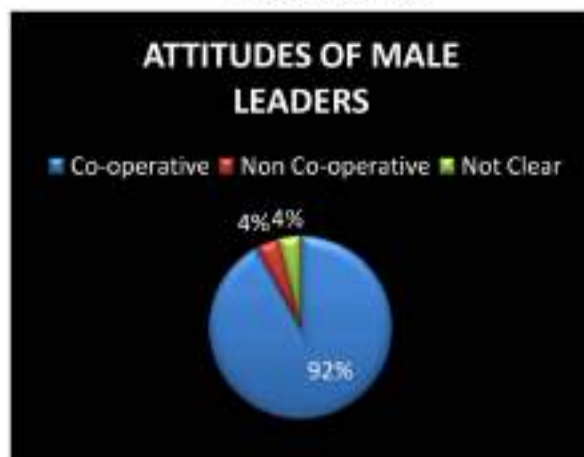
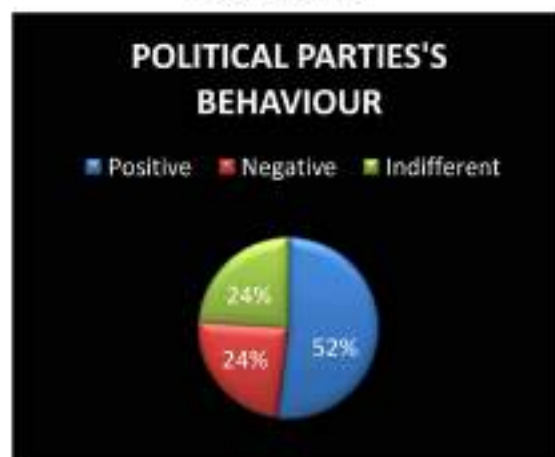


FIGURE NO: 4.9



Up-to 96% of interviewed women leaders were unanimous in their opinion that their families are supportive and up-to 80% women leaders considered society's perception is positive in the matter of their participation in election (see above figures 4.6& 4.7). Present days, the behaviour of political parties is changing regarding women's involvement in electoral activities which are helping women leaders to perform their political roles. In response to co-operation from male leaders', up-to 92% women leaders agreed that now-a-days male political leaders are co-operative in the matter of women's participation in politics (see above figures 4.8& 4.9). Also, some women legislators argued that government's policies and schemes, e.g. quota reservation, in regard to women's political participation playing the significant role which we have seen in local-governance, though there are sometimes also visible that women played proxy representation for their husband, father-in-law, father or son. Apart from that, with the emergence of many regional political parties in the state politics (discussed in the chapter 3) women are getting the opportunity to involve in the political process. However, all these are the factors which are making the presence of women visible in the electoral process.

4.4.4. THE CASE STUDIES:

This section attempts to draw a the case studies of some women legislators in terms of their entry into politics, their socio-economic background, their involvement in party decision making process and participation in legislature proceedings. The details of 9 women legislators as case studies as are described focusing mainly on the aspect of the proposed questions raised in the problem of the present study.

➤ Case Study-I

Ms. Mamata Banerjee, popularly known in the All India Trinamool Congress party (AITC) and in West Bengal as 'Didi', was born in 1955 and is now 66 years old and unmarried. She involved in politics when she was only 15, student of under-graduation. She is the first woman who became the Chief Minister twice of the state West Bengal. Also, she has achieved many milestones in her Political career. By profession she is an advocate and political and social worker. Ms. Banerjee, one of the senior most members of Indian Parliament, had been elected seven times from different political parties to the Lok Sabha. Though, she had entered in the Parliament through the 8th Lok Sabha in 1984 but 1984 was not the beginning year of her political carrier. From 1975-1980, due to several protest incidents she gained attention of local Congress group and handed over the post of General-Secretary of Mahila Congress (I) in West Bengal and she remained General-Secretary of Mahila Congress (I) in West Bengal, 1970-1980; Secretary of District Congress Committee, South Calcutta, 1978-81.

She was born into a lower middle class Bengali Hindu family in Kolkata. Her family was pushed into poverty by her father's early death, which happened when Banerjee was in her mid-teens. The large family, consisting of the widowed mother, six brothers, and two sisters, subsequently faced much hardship. Unlike many others in a similar situation, she forged ahead with her education and between the mid-1970s and the early 1980s she earned bachelor's and master's degrees from Calcutta University, a law diploma, and a qualification to be a schoolteacher. But Banerjee's lived experience of acute privation during her formative years as a person and as a political activist is at the root of her identification with the poor and the vulnerable. Unlike many other politicians in India, this is not an affectation but genuine empathy born of lived experience. Banerjee's non-elite, ordinary social background and her cultural authenticity go a long way towards explaining her mass appeal in India's fourth-most populous state, and consequently her weight as one of the most important figures in India's regionalised polity of the early twenty-first century. But understanding her lived experience as a politician is also essential to making sense of her as a leader. She has literally risen from the grassroots of politics. She began her political life as an activist of the Congress party's student wing in West Bengal in the mid-1970s (her parents were staunch Congress supporters). She spent the first two decades of her political life as a loyal organiser of the Congress party, the sole significant opposition to the CPI (M)-led regime in West Bengal. Starting in 1990,

she rose rapidly to become by far the most popular opposition leader in West Bengal. By the mid-1990s she had developed a mass following in the state, which enabled her to not just survive the exit from the Congress but strike out on her own. When Banerjee finally ousted West Bengal's entrenched regime from power, it was the culmination of two decades of 'struggle' resembling a personal and political crusade. The struggle met demoralising setbacks on the way, notably in state elections in 2001 and 2006 and the national election of 2004. At times she felt discouraged, but she picked herself up and persevered, convinced of the rightness of her cause, and she waged her campaigns in her characteristic combative style. She relishes 'struggle'. Unlike the other women political leaders in India, Mamata Banerjee is a completely self-made leader—she never had a comparable mentor-figure, let alone any advantages of birth or political lineage to call upon (Bose, 2016).

Mamata Banerjee rose without any family connections, through sheer grit and determination, to become a recognised regional and national leader. She has a number of achievements to her credit: she was elected six times to the Lok Sabha from the South Kolkata constituency; she was a Youth Congress leader in West Bengal; she formed her own party—the TMC—which is positioned as both anti-Congress and anti-Left, an ally of both the NDA and United Progressive Alliance-II (UPA-II); she was appointed railway minister in both governments. However, the most seminal achievement has been defeating the Communists who were in power for almost 34 years, a feat that could not be achieved by the Congress opposition (Banerjee, 2004). Like Jayalalithaa—a colourful and unorthodox woman leader with huge public bases, flamboyant personality and 'populist appeal' (Banerjee, 2004, p. 285)—Banerjee does not conform to public standards of feminine behaviour; she does not only have a reputation for unpredictability, ruthlessness, and a volatile temper, but also a mastery of the timing of public gestures, the manipulation of public sentiment, sycophantic loyalty from followers and complete control over the party. In contrast, her public image is clean; she is viewed as honest and supported by the poorer sections, especially women, although she has used both 'assertive and paternalist populism' to build her constituency and gain power (Banerjee, 2004, p. 302). Unmarried and from a modest, lower middle-class family, she still dresses in inexpensive khadi sarees and slippers and lives frugally in her old house in a congested south Kolkata area. But Banerjee has displayed little capacity to effectively govern West Bengal. Rather, she is a 'street fighter' ready to *gherao* (ambush) political leaders, join

marches and sit-ins on the streets, even as chief minister, for social and political causes. Her followers compare her to the goddess Durga and a tigress for the twin qualities of female courage and intolerance for injustice, which voters find rare in politicians (Banerjee, 2004, p. 303).

She was elected to the 8th Lok Sabha in 1984 and re-elected to the 10th and 11th Lok Sabha in 1991 and in 1996 from the Congress Party. Again she was re-elected to the 12th Lok Sabha in 1998 from another political party (WBTC) and 1999 onwards from 13th to 15th Lok Sabha, three times (1999, 2004 & 2009), she had been elected from the AITC (All India Trinamool Congress) party. Presently, she is the Chief Minister of West Bengal.

During her long political carrier she had held so many important positions. From 1991 to 1993 she was the Union Minister of State, Human Resource Development, Department of Youth Affairs and Sports with additional charge of Women and Child Development; Union Cabinet Minister, Railways, 1999-2001; Union Cabinet Minister, Coal and Mines, 2004; again Union Cabinet Minister, Railways, 2009-2011.

This case study shows that this woman leader is entered in politics at young age from very ordinary lower middle class family though she is well educated, dynamic, confident and courageous woman. She is one the woman chief ministers of Indian states, and presently she is the only incumbent woman chief minister in India. She has emerged as a leader by virtue of talent as she had no political family background. She has not only been successful in winning parliamentary seat several times but also became the chief minister of the most populous state of India twice.

As a Chief Minister of West Bengal she started many schemes like Shishu Aloy, Kanyashree, Sabuj Sathi, Khadya Sathi, Sabujshree, Shikshashree, Gatidhara Scheme, Gitanjali, Shishu Sathi, Swasthya Sathi, Anandadhara, Sabala, Yuvashree, Swabalamban etc for improving socio-economic conditions of middle and lower class people. Kanyashree and Sabala schemes launched specifically for the upliftment of girls. Apart from Women's reservation Bill apparently, there is other women specific issue, which was taken up by her in Assembly or raised in the Parliament.

➤ Case Study-II

The second case study is about another women legislature who belongs to Communist Party of India (Marxist). She is associated with politics from last 52 years. Right from her school days she was associated with the leftist movement. The initial inspiration to enter politics was from her family; her father was involved in politics. She was also influenced by Naxalbari movement (1967-68). She confessed that Naxalbari movement inspired her lot, which makes in her an enthusiasm to work for establish justice in the society. So from childhood she finds interest in political activities with the intention to serve the people. After her marriage there was no difficulty for her because her husband was also active in politics.

Smt. Anju Kar, who is 66 year old now, and widow, she completed Graduation, by profession she is a full time political and social worker. He contested first general election in 1982, she contested 5 times and elected while she faced several obstacles from opposition party. From 1982 -1987 and 1991- 2006, she was a member of legislative assembly. As a woman legislator she remained in decision-making bodies long 20 years with a pause of 5 years. She came from a middle class educated family. She has political background. Still she is well connected to her political party and whole years she is busy to attend party's conferences, workshops, campaigns, organisational activities. She had to play a dual role one for the public life and other of single widow mother of her daughter which she finds a difficult task.

One important aspect of her political life has been that she was minister from 1991-2006 in several important portfolios, as from 1991-2001 she was Minister of State For Adult Education, Non-formal Education, Audio Visual Education, Social Welfare Homes, Education of The Handicapped(Excluding Integrated Education For Disabled Children), Library Services And Social Education Extension And All Matters Relating To District social Education offices and Extension offices(Social Education) in the department of Education; and from 2001-2006 Minister of State of Municipal Affairs. In 1998, she received prestigious *Noma Award* on the achievement of Literacy Programme from UNESCO. This was due to her excellence and talent in leadership. She had been Member, Library Committee, 1982 & 1987; Member, Subject Committee on Welfare, 1990; Member, Subject Committee on Education, Information & Cultural Affairs, Sports & Youth Services, 1997.

She fights for the problems of the local people. She has taken up many issues of atrocities on Women in the Assembly. she also raised issues related to various problems like agricultural development, health, social welfare of women and child as well as physically challenged, education etc. She started many social work related to the women empowerment such as women literacy and their income generation, for instance created 10 lakhs self help groups and ICDS projects. She admitted that very few women are vocal in the assembly. She feels that the family responsibilities are hindrance for women to enter into politics along with that lack of political knowledge and political consciousness, illiteracy and financial crisis make the road complicated for women to get involved in politics. She was one of the opinions that women should be educated and trained before they enter politics. They should be given more responsibility; they should join politics in larger number in order to put strong resistance to criminalization of politics. She also argued that political parties should take positive efforts and government should take also initiatives to involve women in politics. She supported reservation of seats for women and believed that with the reservation women's participation in politics will be ensured in large number.

Smt. Anju Kar, one of the major women political leaders in West Bengal. She became role model to many common women through her dedication to political activities and still, her strong personality provides confidence and courage to women to make a foot hold in politics.

➤ **Case Study-III**

This case study is about another women legislator, Smt. Sabitri Mitra, who is 59 years old now. She is teacher by profession. She joined active politics because of inspirations of a male political leader of Malda district, Gani Khan Choudhury. Welfare works for the Malda district by Gani Khan Chaudhary inspired Sabitri Mitra to get into involve politics. She realised politics give the platform for doing welfare work for the people.

She joined Indian National Congress in 1982 at the age of 20. From 1982- 1990 she was active Congress worker. She contested first general election in 1991 and also elected. Since 1991 she elected repeatedly till 2011, only in 2016 she defeated. She is the only woman leader in West Bengal without any pause being member of West Bengal

Legislative Assembly since 1991 to till 2016. We have not found any woman leader in the state who remained in decision-making body long 26 years without any political ground.

She was elected from Araidanga constituency on Indian National Congress ticket till 2006 and elected 4 times. Though she contested election on All India Trinamool Congress ticket from Manikchak constituency in 2011 & 2016 and elected in 2011 (15th Legislative Assembly) and defeated in 2016. One important aspect of a political life has been that she was made minister in Mamata Banerjee's Council of Ministers. From 2011- 2016, she was Minister of women and child development department; Minister of social welfare as well.

During her long time presence in the Assembly she was member of many important committees and worked on many party post in the Congress including Member, Ex-officio member; standing committee on social welfare disaster management and refugee relief and rehabilitation, 2011; subject committee on welfare tourism sports and youth services, 1993, 1996; subject committee on relief refugee relief and rehabilitation, tourism welfare, 1997& 2001; standing committee on food and supplies food processing and fisheries, 1997; standing committee on irrigation and development, 2001; standing committee on public works and public health engineering, 2006; Yuba Congress committee and Zilla Congress committee etc.

As a representative of her constituency in the Assembly she has raised issues specific to her area as well as those of general concern in the Assembly. She takes keen interest in all assembly proceedings and never had any problems in putting her viewpoint convincingly on the Assembly floor. She has moved several resolutions successful in the Assembly. She introduced amendment Bill in education like hike the amount of scholarship. However she contained it that all women legislature should unite and extend their support on women's specific issues irrespective of their affiliation to different political parties. One very interesting factor that came out was that she was against reservation of seats for women and believed that there should not be any discrimination between women and men legislators. Rather she feels that all male legislators should strongly support women related issues. Given an opportunity women can do equally well as men.

Also, she has contribution towards women's empowerment and educational development, such as she had major efforts for making educational institutions in Malda district. Apart

from that being a social worker she is still working for the welfare of the people in her constituency even after her defeat in last election.

She came from a middle class family without out any political background. However, she expressed that her husband supported and motivated her always in challenging situation. She faced lots of problem during the time of contesting election even after facing life threatening risk she never give up the intention of welfare of the people of her constituency. She showed her concern for the criminalization and communalization of politics. She contended that mass awareness programs and electoral reforms can help in educating the people to counter the existing social evils.

➤ **Case Study-IV**

This is a case study of a leading woman legislator. She was a practicing advocate in Calcutta High Court till 2011 election. She is an active member of Trinamool Mahila Congress, the women's wing of All India Trinamool Congress (AITC). However, right from her college days she was associated with student politics. Till 2009, she was an active worker of Indian National Congress as her paternal family was strong follower of ideology of INC, so from childhood she followed and believed in the same. In 2009, she joined AITC with the intention to work for society's welfare. She elected in the Assembly first time in 2011 on AITC party's ticket from Dum Dum Uttar constituency and she re-elected in 2017 through by-election from Kathi-Dakshin constituency. Smt. Chandrima Bhattacharya born in 1955 in Kolkata, West Bengal in an upper caste Brahmin family. She is now 67 years of age. She completed B.Com and LLB from University of Calcutta.

Smt. Bhattacharya changed her party from Congress to AITC because she inspired by the leadership style of Ms. Mamata Banerjee. From 2011 she assesses herself as 24 hours political worker for the people, it was not because of circumstances but because of her choice she joined active politics. In two terms of Mamata Banerjee's Government, she gets the independent charge of Minister of Housing; Minister in-charge of Health and Family Welfare, Land and Land Reforms and Refugee Relief and Rehabilitation, Panchayats and Rural Development. In 2012, she was promoted as a Cabinet Minister and given independent charge of Judicial and Law department. Along with the charge of Ministry, she was Member, Public Accounts Committee, 2011; Standing Committee on

Self Help Group and Self Employment, 2011. Within a span of short time she handled several important portfolios of West Bengal Government.

She raised issues mostly health, legal, rules and regulations as well as whole range issues related to the general problems and in fact noting specific to women related problems. She introduced land related bills, housing bills health regarding bills and many others but not women specific bills in the Assembly. She has never raised an issue related to the women in the Assembly. Though, to empower the women she initiated many efforts such as she tried to strengthen women economically forms self help groups. Therefore, she wants women to be economically independent and this in her view is possible only if women have knowledge and awareness of one's self and society and of personal needs, health issues and legal rights. One important thing came out that she does not believe there are genuinely any obstacles to enter into politics for women, at the same time she said that women have to do hard work more than men to get a foothold in politics. To raise the participation of women in politics she suggested political parties should play active role. She thinks women must participate in politics because through it women can be conscious about their legal rights and about the availability of social and economic resources which make them empowered automatically. Also, she feels to establish gender justice to empower women is required. She emphasises that there should be no discrimination between men and women and that they should be treated equally in all realms of life.

This case study shows that this women leader is well educated and be involved in politics at very young age though it takes long time to be a part of formal political structures.

➤ **Case Study-V**

This is another case study of leading woman legislator of West Bengal Smt. Sonali Guha (Bose) started political carrier at very young age, who is now 52 years old. The initial inspiration to enter politics was from her parents. After her marriage there was no difficulty for her because her husband is also very active in politics. Also, she admitted that because of her husband being in politics, she has more exposure and better awareness. Smt. Guha is a science graduate. She is the first woman deputy speaker in West Bengal Legislative Assembly. She is known as trusted lieutenant of Mamata Banerjee. She elected in the Assembly first time in 2001 though she contested first time in

the general election in 1996 and she re-elected second, third and fourth time in 2006, 2011 & 2016 respectively on AITC party's ticket from Satgachhia constituency. Since the formation of AITC she is with it. She is life time member of AITC. Smt. Guha is associated with politics from last 35 years. She has participated in many protest incidents of AITC and organised election campaigns for the party, raised funds for the party in its initial years.

Smt. Guha has been raising problems of her constituency in the Assembly and general problems as well. She visits her constituency frequently and actively involved in the development of her constituency. She headed many local political organizations which are working for empowerment of women. As a woman leader she tried to provide all facilities of governmental schemes to women. She campaigned for Government's female centred schemes such as Kanyasree and Rupasree. She had to face strong opposition when she stood in the elections even faced physical assaults by police in several protest incidents. She said that her male colleagues are very co-operative to her and she has no experience of any indifference attitude of them anytime, anywhere. She argued that she and her party do not believe in difference between women and men leaders. She strongly advocated for women reservation in the Parliament and Assemblies to raise the participation of women in politics. In this regard she opined that Government should take more initiatives to increase the women's political representation. She thinks women's apathy towards political participation because of family's obstructions and economic crisis.

Smt. Guha is a fourth time member of Legislative Assembly, since 2001 to till today she has been member of several committees, Member, Library Committee, 2001; Standing Committee on Cottage and Small Scale Industries, Co-operative and Animal Resource, 2001; Committee on Govt. Assurance; Committee on Education, 2001, Committee on the Entitlements of the Members, 2011. She has been Chairman, Standing Committee on Labour 2006-2009; Chairman, Standing Committee on I & T; Chairman, Library Committee, 2011; Chairman, Committee on Privileges, 2011; in 2011 she became Deputy Speaker of the Assembly. She was also given many assignment in her party, for instance she was president of West Bengal Trinamool Chhatra Parishad, which she completed successfully.

This case reveals that a woman legislator entered into politics at early age and she not only has been successful in winning Assembly seat four times but also became successful woman leader and inspires many ordinary women to be a part of politics.

➤ Case Study-VI

Here is a case of another woman legislator from CPM who belongs to the middle class family and has been Minister in the State. Smt. Bilasi Bala Sahis is now 59 years old now. She completed graduation, who is teacher by profession. Her family was partially associated with politics. Since last 33 years she has been associated with politics. She had joined CPM as a life member in the year 1987. At the age of 26 she entered into politics, it was not because of family heritage or favourable circumstances but because of her choice that she joined politics.

She is an active member of the women's wing of the CPM, All India Democratic Women's Association. She was the secretary of mass organisation of the party. Presently, she is doing works as a party member to organise meetings, workshop, conferences, and other committee related works. She always finds co-operation from male party members in organisational works.

Smt. Sahis elected in the Assembly first in 1991, after that she re-elected in 1996, 2001 and in 2006. She is also fourth time member of West Bengal Legislative Assembly (WBLA). She faced many challenges to discharge her duties as a representative and with her understanding on the situation she overcomes challenges. The 20 years tenure from 1991-2011, she had given charge of several portfolios of State Ministers, Minister of Forest department in 1996 & 2006 and Minister of Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Welfare department in 2001; Minister Of State Of Backward Classes Welfare Department, 2001. She had been also Member, Subject Committee on Panchayat, 1991; Select Committee on the West Bengal Panchayat (Amendment) Bill, 1994.

She concerned about the issues related to women, so she tried to convince women regarding benefits of Self-Help groups (SHGs) and had become successful by created SHGs within her constituency. She expressed her view that education is the only means which make women conscious about their social-political and economic rights, women should be properly educated otherwise society will not be completely developed. Education for women is also requiring for the establishment of equality. One important

matter noted from her view that she was against to provide special provision to women such as reservation of seats rather she said we should change our perception towards women as weaker section and provide them equal opportunities in every sphere of life.

She rose on the floor of the Assembly women-related issues or problems specially safety for women. Along with that she was concerned about the development issues of her constituency, i.e. water, roads etc. though she never introduced any bill in the Assembly. She thinks lack of family's support and understanding political issues are the general problems behind the under-participation of women in politics. In this respect she suggested political parties should take initiatives to make aware and to motivate women in the field of politics. For the sustainable development of the society she opined that there should be more women leaders in politics.

This case study evolves a story of a woman legislator who is educated and coming from a middle class family and entered into politics by her own choice and make a no of women economically independent and politically aware and became a role model to many common women.

➤ **Case Study-VII**

This is a case study of a woman parliamentarian, who is now 77 years old. Smt. Minati Sen is a graduate lady and was a teacher. She had no difficulty in entering politics because her father-in-law and mother-in-law was directly associated with the Congress politics. She saw her mother-in-law during the time of elections actively participated in political activities. Her brother was actively involved in politics, who was a trade union leader though her father was partially attached with politics. The initial inspiration to enter politics was from her brother. Since college days she was active in student politics and believed in the ideology of Left parties and she had been actively participated in various cultural activities, such as theatre, debate and other co-curricular activities and organized blood donation camps, rehabilitation programmes. After her marriage she got the environment of politics within the family, though there was ideological difference but she never faced any ideological contradiction within the family. Later, she contested three times Lok Sabha election on CPI-M ticket.

Smt. Sen is associated with politics since 1962 and started active politics at the age of 37. She was the president and secretary of Jalpaiguri district committee of All India

Democratic Women's Association (AIDWA) and was the former secretary of State Organization of AIDWA, women's wing of the CPI-M. She rendered all kinds of support to the socially and economically deprived women through AIDWA. Mrs. Sen elected to the 12th Lok Sabha in 1998 and re-elected to 13th and 14th Lok Sabha in 1998, 1999 & 2004 respectively from Jalpaiguri constituency, West Bengal. During her parliamentary tenure she was member of various committees, such as – Committee on External Affairs and its Sub-Committee-II, 1998-1999; Committee on External Affairs, 1999-2000; Committee on Empowerment of women, 2002-04; Consultative Committee under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1998-1999 and 2000-04; Committee on Empowerment of Women, Committee on Water Resources and Consultative Committee on Social Justice and Empowerment 2004; 2006 onwards Committee on Empowerment of Women and Committee on Empowerment of Women; 2007 onwards Committee on Water Resources. In addition to these, she was also Member of (i) National Council for Teachers Education, 1998; (ii) Governing Council of National Mission of Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan.

She expressed her concern about the differential attitudes of our society and political parties as well towards the women even she said that such behaviour she found within her own political party also. She confessed that women always given less importance within her party, in the case nominate women candidates for the elections, and several committees and even it is mostly visible in the of matter of allocating the charge of ministry in the Left Front Governments of West Bengal. She said, the names of women come first when the situation comes to retrench the ministry and their names come last when the matter comes to allocate ministry. She confessed that she is witness many incidence where in spite of ability women are excluded from decision making organs of the party only because of they are women. According to her, women still are not getting the equal opportunity to prove them capable in the sphere of politics. She thinks these attitudes of political parties should change otherwise society could not be developed. In this regard, she advocates reservation of seats for women in the Legislature and decision making bodies since women constitute 50 percent of the total population of the country. She emphasises that there should be no discrimination between men and women and that they should be treated equally in all realms of life. Also, she worked towards bringing changes in the society such she fought for the eradication of dowry system of society. Smt. Sen raised a number of issues of women's empowerment along with issues related

development of her constituency, issues related to article 377 and introduced a bill on to remove lottery system on the floor of Parliament.

She feels that women's lack of confidence, family co-operation and discriminatory attitudes of the society are the barriers behind the less participation of women in politics. To raise their number she suggested we should make women politically aware, boost up self confidence of them which will make them vocal about their rights and freedom. She stated that as a woman leader she feels women are more responsible, dedicative towards duties.

However, this story of senior woman leader, who coming from an educated higher class family, brings the fact in front of us that she is firm on her opinion. Her family's support gives her enough opportunities to turn her dreams into reality.

➤ **Case Study-VIII**

Here is another case study of women parliamentarian, Smt. Malini Bhattacharya, who also belongs to the CPI-M. She is a broad minded liberal lady, does not believe in caste and religion, she is an atheist person. She has completed Post-graduation and Ph.D at Jadavpur University, by profession she was a professor, Writer and Artist. She is a life member of CPI-M and President of AIDWA. Other than political organization she was also member of various social and educational organisations; Member of Regional Advisory Board of the Film Certification Board, 1986-90; Bangla Academy; Rajya Lok Sanskriti Parishad, West Bengal; Board of Secondary Education, West Bengal; Court of JNU, January 19, 1990; involved in teachers' movements and cultural movements in West Bengal.

Prof. Bhattacharya has been associated with politics for the last 50 years when she was in her 30s. She got involved in politics due to her ideological belief in leftist political party and she thought politics is a way of social service. She is a member of party since 1975. In 1985, she had been member of delegation of CPI (M) Social Scientists to China. She was elected to Lok Sabha first time in 1989 (Tenth Lok Sabha) and again re-elected in 1991 (Tenth Lok Sabha). She had been member of Consultative Committee, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 1990 and Committee on Environment and Forests, 1991.

She stated that she had faced several problems in discharging her duties as a representative and to handle such problems she trained herself to take up issues not necessarily pertaining to women and also went around her constituency to be in touch with people. She strongly advocated for reservation of 33% seats for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies. She suggested amendments to Representation of People Act to discourage money power and muscle power in elections. According to her, women bear a disproportionate part of household responsibilities, they face discrimination inside political formations like parties and trade union unions and criminalization of politics all are deterrents of women's participation in politics. By helping to implement Government schemes like Anganwadi she tried to empower women. She was vocal in the Parliament on the legislations mention in the article 23, destruction of Babri Masjid, health issues, intellectual property rights, cultural policy etc. By taking up cases of violence against women, by participating in the passage of laws like National Commission for Women Act, PCPNDT (Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques) Act, she also worked towards bringing changes in terms of policy decisions of the Government. She said, in the matter of women issues she found some male members are very co-operative, some women members are indifferent. She showed her concern for the indifferent attitude of political parties towards women's participation in politics.

She thinks women should participate in politics because they are capable enough which they had proved earlier by the participation in the pre-independence movement. For the interest of democracy women should provide opportunities to be a part of decision making process otherwise democracy will remain flawed. Within political parties there is discrimination even on the floor of Parliament women are not generally allowed to speak in other issues, though women get co-operation from male colleagues when women related issues raised, so she suggested there should be positive efforts to erase such inequalities immediately.

This case study shows that this woman leader comes from highly educated and higher class family and entered politics by her choice though there was her family support. Hence, it was not difficult for her to be active in politics.

➤ Case Study-IX

This is a case study of leading woman parliamentarian who changed her party from GNLFF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) to AITC. She won on GNLFF tickets continuously three times, in the West Bengal Legislative Assembly, first time in 1996, second time in 2001 and third time in 2006 from Kurseong constituency. She changed her party in 2014. Smt. Shanta Chhetri was born in 1957 in Kurseong, Darjeeling, 64 years of age now and was 39 years when elected in 1996 in the Assembly, before that in 1994 she elected in the Kurseong Municipality. She is post-graduate in Commerce and by profession is a social worker. She is recipient of President Girl's Guide (Bharat Scouts and Guides). Presently, she is Member of Parliament (MP), Rajya Sabha 19th August, 2017 onwards from AITC.

Since, 1994 she has been associated with politics, her family members were not in politics. She entered in politics due to her personal interest and thought politics is also a way which can provide a platform of social work. In the Assembly she had been member of various committees, Committee on Education, Information & Cultural Affairs, 1996; Committee on Privileges, 1996; Standing Committee on Health & Family Welfare-2001; Committee on Women & Child Welfare; Entitlements Committee. Also, she has been member of several local organisation and associations of self-Government institution, statutory body or learned society, such as working president of AITC's District (Darjeeling) Committee of Hill, 2014; Member: North Bengal University Court. Member: Divisional Consultative Committee (N.F. Railway); Member: W.B. Wild Life Advisory Board; Member: W.B. State Legal Authority Services; Member: Governing Body, Downhill School & Victoria School, Kurseong; Member: Governing Body Darjeeling Polytechnic. Presently, she is Chairperson of National Health Mission Recruitment Committee.

She is in favour of the 50% seats reservation for women in the Assembly and in the Parliament as well. She said from her experience that limited numbers of women were coming forward to join political activities and also there were few women in the elected bodies but now-a-days women are participating in politics in a large number. She felt that societal and family obligations as well as general apathy, for instance security crisis, towards politics are the causes keeping away women from politics. Political uncertainties in the country are also discouraging women from political participation. She stated, in spite of all political parties' efforts to recruit more women in political structures, still

women remain as passively active in politics. Smt. Chhetri worked for sexual assault and abuse against women and women trafficking. As a representative of her constituency in the Assembly, she had raised issues specific to her area, i.e. development of Darjeeling in aspect of education, roads, forest, irrigation, natural disasters, tourism, social welfare and various problems of DGHC (Darjeeling Gorkha Hill Council). Being a MP she has been vocal on the floor of the Rajya Sabha on mob lynching, Kolkata metro railways, and development of Darjeeling etc. She said that her men colleagues were/are very co-operative to her in the Assembly and in Parliament as well while when performing as a woman leader she faced sometimes indirect interference from male members with her party. She suggested, increasing the number of women in politics, political parties should take initiative to increase awareness of women especially rural women.

This case study also tells us that a woman with higher education and without political family background can be successful political leader and can inspire other to be a role model.

➤ **SUMMING UP OF CASE STUDIES:**

The above mentioned case studies show that the conception of women leaders towards the role of women in politics, their status in the political party and their opinion and suggestions for certain remedial measures to be undertaken in order to improve the role of women in the political process.

All these case studies reveal that women legislators emerged as leaders through electoral process and many of them were elected to the Assembly and Parliament as well three-four times consecutively. This shows their popularity in their constituencies.

Most of the women legislators of our case studies belong to families having a political background, with the support of their parents and their spouse they have established themselves in the party organisation. Therefore, they suggested that women should be motivated, politically educated and should be encouraged to participate in the political process. Though, some of women political leaders without having political background have been successful and became the inspiration of many women. Majority of them felt that women related issues are discussed casually and importance paid to such issues is marginal. This is primarily because women are not represented in large numbers in

different elected bodies either at the local level or other state level or at the national level. They therefore stressed the need for at least 30% representation for women. Two of them even suggested that it should be 50% because women constitute 50% of the total population.

Many of them suggested that women should be properly educated and their awareness should be increased so that they can effectively participate in the political process particularly in the decision making process. Although on the floor of the house they tried to raise various issues but most of them seem to be more concerned with issues related to women. Irrespective of their party affiliation and they seem to unite and take a common stand on the floor of the House on women's specific issues. They also expressed their concern about the indifference attitude of male leaders in the Assembly and the Parliament as well. One of them shows concern about the indifferent attitude of some women legislator in some cases. Some of them also suggested that political parties should take positive endeavours to raise the number of women in political structures.

4.5. EMERGENT TRENDS OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP IN WEST BENGAL

In the political history of West Bengal we had only one woman governor and one female chief minister. So it is reasonable to think that a very limited number of women had been/ has been leaders in the state politics since the inception. Since 1990s the trend of marginal number of women leaders started to change due to several factors (discussed in the chapter 3 & 4), while not remarkable. Women started to become members of the legislature or able to reach top political positions mainly because of their family connections means they are either the daughters, or wives, of well-known male political leaders. There were a very handful number of women leaders those who have succeeded due to their personal interest and hard work. Till the first decade of 21st century, women leaders have been able to enter politics either through their family linkages or by their hard work and dedication. This picture is undergoing a gradual change from the first decade of 21st century and a new emerging trend has been observed in women's leadership of West Bengal. Women started to become members of the legislature without family connection and hard work, but only on face value or popularity in the glamour world. Presently in West Bengal, women leaders elected from three different backgrounds- (i) political or family linkages, (ii) personal interest or hard work and (iii) face value or popularity (film actors, singers, sports person etc). While, a handful number

of women reached at top political position by their hard work but a majority number of women elected from political and popularity grounds in the state.

Recently we can see that many celebrity women candidates are contesting election and becoming the member of Legislative Assembly and Parliament in West Bengal, which has been very visible in the state election of 2021. The celebrity women candidates have no political family connection or they have never been fulltime political worker, not even did any hard work to get a party ticket to contest the election or not fully dedicated to political activities, though they become leader easily because they are celebrity. This trend is become more popular in Bengal now-a-days. In this regard, one important question arises that is this trend justifying to dedicative and fulltime women political workers? In practice, after spending major times of life, facing lots of hurdles from society and political spheres and along with huge family responsibilities a woman have to prove herself that she is eligible to bear the responsibility of people's representative and she might be chosen as party candidate to contest the election. Whereas in the case of celebrity women all these rigid criteria become loose and flexible, hence in such situation another question arises why it happen? If women celebrities elected as leaders that is not a matter of issue, because a political leader can come from any field, any profession etc but the issue of concern is after getting elected do they justify their post which they hold? The answer may 'No', and this is a serious issue of concern. Now in this regard another question arises why they have been given the opportunity to become elected political leader? The answers of all these questions related to electoral gain. Celebrity women political leaders are playing the role as part time political worker which is the most serious concern of democracy. Political leadership cannot be a part time activity rather it requires fully dedicative attention towards policy making that cherish the aim of democracy and public welfares. The celebrity candidates actually treated as number nothing more than that. The pillar of representative democracy, political parties are playing the vital role in this regard, West Bengal is not an exception. Presently in a democratic country, like India, election decides everything, so in West Bengal to gaining the political power the political parties (AITC & BJP) of West Bengal using the celebrity candidates as an electoral plank to form the government. As a result, most of the celebrity candidates are become just like puppet candidate in the elections. Also, we have mentioned in the previous chapter that elections are held on a party basis and party loyalty is an important issue in West Bengal, so the candidates are assumed to represent a

party's interests. In recent years, politics has grown more polarized, hence, to remain in political power position it has become increasingly difficult to cross party lines. Therefore, such situation in West Bengal may create a new trend of political representation that we may call '*Puppet Representation*'. Perhaps, the puppet representation effectively works when the elected leaders are celebrity and that is comparatively less effective when the elected leaders are fulltime political worker and take the matter of politics very seriously.

Moreover, another importantly trend has been visible in West Bengal just before the last assembly election (2021) that is defection in high rate. Many notable women leaders, who are full time political workers (such as Smt. Sonali Guha (Bose), who was the first woman deputy speaker in West Bengal Legislative Assembly, has changed her party due to not given election ticket by the party also many other instances there) of West Bengal has changed their party due to several reasons, while after election results they expressed a wish to return their old party. The defection trends of women leaders bring the special characteristics of women (loyalty, moralistic) into question which leads us to think that most importantly when the issue is about to gain power or retain in power then both sexes, men & women, behaving in similar way. However, recently the emerging trend of defection also visible among women leaders, in a slightly more higher rate than earlier, in the state of West Bengal.

Therefore, the above discussion reflects the light on the emergent trends of women political leadership in West Bengal which must be our very serious concern for the sake of democracy. Within such new emergent political trends we are very much doubtful about the efficacy of democratic decision or policy making institutions.

4.6. CONCLUSION:

West Bengal being one of the states of India with lots of diversity has a diverse demography. In many levels and various dimensions of life, from domestic to public life, women have faced lack of confidence among their counter parts. West Bengal is not free from gender discrimination; man-woman disparity is still present. Women need to be involved in decision making process in order to bring their demands in the national agenda and in the state agenda as well. And the participation of women in policy making increases the quality of governance. Though, the government has put many efforts in

bringing the women in the mainstream of the governance, but in practical, the scenario has changed only a little bit. It is a fact that customs traditions and norms that subjugated women still pass east and women have to function in this framework. Mere increasing the quantity is not going to help. The necessity of the hour is that the government's attempt should be made worthy by making qualitative development along with the quantitative development. All the women are brought to the forefront, they are either not given their due or they are not able to present themselves. These are due to various problems that the women face in their practical life.

Presently, in spite of women's participation in politics of West Bengal in larger number but the reality reflects that women were disproportionately allocated to just health, social services and education while the important portfolio finance was a male-only grouping. While some of the women legislators welcomed gendered allocation of responsibilities, others viewed it as a form of discrimination that reflected society-wide attitudes about women.

The case studies of selected women legislators reveal that if a woman has been able to prove her as an active legislators or parliamentarian for the one time then she has been elected again and again in the Assembly and Parliament and that time political party does not matter from which party she belongs. Women leaders, who were/are in the position to make or influence public decisions on the same footing as men, so they don't need the reference of any political party, but if once she has been failed to prove herself then she may be never choose by the same political party for the election. Though, this trend we have seen rarely in case of male candidates. In this respect, one thing is need to mention here that male party leaders have shown little willingness to include women in party decision making bodies or help to create a suitable atmosphere for women's participation in their own organizations. This attitude of male party leaders is not a healthy sign towards women participation in politics and also for democracy. Hence, these tendencies of participation and attitudes towards women participation in the political process should be removed or changed in order to establish gender equality in decision-making otherwise democracy will be meaningless literally.

In West Bengal, in 2021 women for the first time 240 contested and 40 got elected. It is expected that by this time, a preliminary leadership has grown among the women in the political sphere in West Bengal which plays a *role model* for the rest of the state. In this

chapter, an effort has been made to understand what the primary membership level of women in the different political parties and whether that percentage is reflected in the leadership level within the respective political parties or not and what are the factors that have helped the women political leaders to actively participate in the elections as well. It is observed in this chapter that though in some cases, women leaders are taking active part in the decision making process but they could not motivate women in large numbers to participate in the decision making process. At the same time, it is observed that when women are getting the opportunity their interest in development of the state is also increasing and their presence in politics is also increasing. Finally, we may say that the disadvantageous position of women in the state is only a matter of some time. Now the women legislators and parliamentarians are performing the role of change agents and they have to go long way to bring about a remarkable change.

➤ **SUMMARY:**

- West Bengal being a part of the world community cannot escape from the effects of gender discrimination and injustice. In terms of sex ratio, literacy rate, women's health and decision making power West Bengal is showing a marked improvement during the last three decades of the 20th century (1991-2021). Though the State improving at a very slow pace. Still it seeks to – (i) protect the rights of women enshrined in the Constitution of India; (ii) enhance their dignity and ensure their participation in the economic, social and political activities.
- In the political history of West Bengal, Indian National Congress (INC) was the ruling party from 1952 to till 1977 (1st to 7th State Assembly election), from 1977-2011 (8th to 14th State Assembly election) the CPI-M remained in power and since 2011 (15th to 17th State Assembly election) in West Bengal under the woman leadership Mamata Banerjee the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC) is ruling the State. Since the inception of West Bengal we had only one female Governor (Padmaja Naidu, from 1956-1967) and presently have woman Chief Minister (Since 2011), still women are deplorably visible in the elected decision making bodies (Legislative Assembly & Council of Ministry) of the State.
- Considering the arguments of Anne Phillips in favour of increased political leadership of women: (i) Successful women politicians act as role models for the others; (ii) States increasing the proportion of the women elected would ensure the principles of justice between the sexes; (iii) Ensuring the fulfilling of certain

interests of women, which may otherwise be neglected; and (iv) Enhancing the quality of political life (Phillips, 1995, 62), the present study has been selected women legislators, MPs and MLAs of West Bengal.

- Women's entry into politics of West Bengal, post 1990 indicates a trend that more and more women are contesting the polls from various political parties and the number of women participating in the electoral process has increased.
- Education, family support, positive perceptions of society towards women leadership, changing behaviour of political parties and attitudes of male leaders and government policies all are helped women leaders to participate in election actively.
- The case studies of major women leaders of West Bengal highlighted the conception of women leaders towards the role of women in politics, their status in the political party and their opinion and suggestions for certain remedial measures in order to improve the role of women in the political process.
- Presently in West Bengal, women leaders elected from three different backgrounds- (i) political or family linkages, (ii) personal interest or hard work and (iii) face value or popularity (film actors, singers, sports person etc).
- With the increasing number of women in the elected bodies, though it is not very satisfactory, it is expected a preliminary leadership has grown among the women in the political sphere in West Bengal which plays a *role model* for the rest of the state.
