
Chapter – VI

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Like rest of the world and India, nearly half the population of Maharashtra accounts for women. However, their relative representation in the state legislative assembly is rather very poor. Right from the beginning, not only in Maharashtra, but all over India as such, women had no active role in politics. Historically Bombay Legislative Council was evolved by the act of India Council 1861. In the beginning this council was "unicameril" comprising of only one house. The year 1935 however, was a landmark in the political history when the same council became "bicameril" consisting of two houses i.e. upper and lower houses.

Regarding the women's right of voting the government of India Act of 1935 had considerably liberalized the franchise to include large number of women. But smartly enough its implementation was counteracted by imposing the restrictions on eligibility of registering women voters. However, after independence new constitution of India was formulated and adopted by the Republic of India. Under Bombay province two houses came into existance 1) Bombay Legislative Council

and 2) Bombay Legislative Assembly. The Bombay Assembly consisting of 288 members were to be elected by general voting. The first general election was held in 1952, and then in 1957, 1962 and so on after every five years. Unfortunately very few women contested the elections and some got elected.

As mentioned above, the first general election was held in India in 1952, under the new constitution of free India. At this time Bombay province like other provinces of India had bicameral houses i.e. legislative assembly and legislative council. So the elections were also held in several constituencies of each district under Bombay province. Subsequently the elections were held in 1957, 1962 and so on after every five years. As separate Sanyukta Maharashtra State with the inclusion of Bombay was created in 1960, the elections thereafter were held under Maharashtra State Assembly. As mentioned in Chapter I, because of the limitations in the scope of this dissertation and for practical purpose, the detailed work of women legislators from Kolhapur and Sangli districts and short summaries of some legislators from Solapur and Satara were covered.

Shrimati Vimlabai Bagal was the first woman legislator from the Kagal constituency of Kolhapur district. Considering

her socio-political background, she was nominated by Maharashtra Akikaran Samiti to contest the election in 1957. She won the election with the majority of votes defeating her opponent of congress party. She served as a member of Bombay legislative assembly from the period 1957 to 1962.

As she was related with the socio-political well known Bagal family of Kolhapur Sansthan, sisiter of Dr. Appasaheb Pawar, the first V.C. of Shivaji University, and inborn qualities of social services, she proved herself as one of the most successful legislators in assembly. She was an active member of the movement started by Maharashtra Akikaran Samiti which resulted in the creation of Maharashtra State with the inclusion of Bombay on May 1, 1960. Regarding her role in assembly she was very sincere and punctual in attending practically all the debates and participating in them. As a member of opposition party, she attacked and criticised the ruling congress party, whenever she thought that there was some in-justice. Unfortunately, she served only one term of five years as a legislator. Due to certain odd circumstances, either political or personal, she had to decide to take political retirement. However, recently she wrote her autobiography under the title of "Chintan" which should be a good reference for the readers.

Late Shrimati Sarojini Khanjire of Shirol constituency was the second woman legislator from Kolhapur district. Her husband late Shri. Babasaheb Khanjire was a well known freedom fighter and social reformer as well as a legislator of Bombay assembly.

Though Shrimati Khanjire was a legislator (1985 to 1990) of Shirol constituency, her prior work and contribution in co-operative sector in Ichalkaraji and Shirol taluka was of great administration. She was responsible for the foundation of Ichalkaranji Mahila Sahakari Bank, which was the land mark of achievement in her entire socio-political career. This bank was a matter of pride for women community because it was a bank of women run by women. It was an ideal example for women all over Maharashtra. She was also a member of working committee of Kolhapur district central co-operative bank, Maharashtra Co-operative Bank. Her work and experience in the Co-operative field became a guide line for the women in Maharashtra.

During her earlier career she was an active member of Ichalkaranji Municipality for many years. Because of her social work, she was regarded as one of the architects or makers of modern Ichalkaranji city. She was always worried about the industrial workers and their children. For them, she

started night school and college to provide the facilities of education. The workers and middle class community of Ichalkaranji will always remember her invaluable educational contribution. After passing away of her husband, Shri. Babasaheb Khanjire, Sarojinitai continued his social work tirelessly in Ichalkaranji and Shirol taluka. After getting elected to the satte assembly from Shirol constituency, she became well known all over Maharashtra as one of the ideal woman legislators for her work in social field. On April 10, 2002, Shrimati Sarojini Khanire passed away. But her followers and her children have taken the same path to follow her foot prints.

Dr. Sarojini Babar got elected in 1952, general election from Walwa-Shirala consituecy of former south Satara but now Sangli district as a legioslator to Bombay assembly. Before this election, she was well known all over Maharashtra as a author and writer in Marathi literature. Being a well educated woman and because of her sincereity, she gained a good reputation among the other members of assembly who were mostly educated and freedom fighters.

As she was a good writer in Marathi literature, she supported the idea of switching over from English language to the regional languages or mother tongues as a media of

instructions in all government correspondences as well in the educational systems. She took part enthusiastically in many debates whether related to her own constituency or to any other matter. Specially she paid much attention to the problems of women and the educational spread in rural areas. Before participating in any discussion, she used to study the bill, and then only express her views in a very bold manner. She was known as a very outspoken legislator. Dr. Sarojini Babar basically was a writer in folk literature and hence she always advocated the use of mother tongue in education so that the students can learn more easily. After completing the term of legislatorship, she was elected to Maharashtra Vidhan Parishad in 1964, and then to Rajya Sabha in 1968. No matter where she was elected or what position she had, Dr. Babar always showed her interest in solving the problems of the people.

Other women legislators like Prabhavati Zadbuke, Nirmalaraje Bhosale and Parvati Malgonda of Solapur district and Dr. Shalinitai Patil of Satara district have also contributed their work in the assembly for the social welfare of the society.

In the present dissertation we have discussed and reviewed the work of women legislators from Kolhapur, Sangli, Satara and Solapur districts. We have studied their valuable

social and political contributions. There were number of other women in Maharashtra, who have been legislators and still other women in the history who were successful in their career, though the number may be relatively less, In view of this fact, there is one thing that disturbs our mind, that in state of Maharashtra, the former Bombay state, which is regarded as a leading progressive state in India, we do not find a woman at the position of leadership of the state. There have been women chief ministers like Shahikala Bandodkar of Goa, Jaylalita of Tamil Nadu, Nandini Satpati of Orisa, Shila Dixit of New Delhi etc. and most importantly Shrimati Indira Gandhi, who was the prime minister of India. Unfortunately, Maharashtra state did not have a woman chief minister.

Maharashtra state assembly has total number of seats 288, but so far only 10 to 12 women elected as M.L.A., hardly one or two have become state ministers. At present, by rule in Maharashtra, one third women members represent in Gram Panchayat, Taluka Panchayat, Zilla Parishad, Nagar Parishad, Municipality etc. But the parliament or State Assembly does not have such provision by law and hence the women's representation is negligible. Today in India and all over world women's movement have been trying to achieve their rights.

For that matter, Indian Universities have started a separate centres for women study. It is hoped that in future women will acquire one third seats in parliament and state assemblies. It is also sincerely hoped that the experience, calibre and talent of qualified women will contribute to the over all progress of the country.