

Reasons for low Participation of Women in Political System

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ABSTRACT

Equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens are given by Indian constitution irrespective of their caste, creed, religion or sex. Participation in politics is the feature that distinguishes a democracy from any other form of government. The present study is to explore the reasons of lack of political awareness among women and how sociopolitical environment can be made conducive to women's participation in politics to ensure their empowerment and their contribution in the development of the nation. Political participation means participation in decision-making process. Indian government has provided a reservation for seats for women in local government. The posts of President, Prime Minister, Chief Minister and Governor have been graced by women, yet representation of women in Indian parliament is very low. Illiteracy, discriminatory attitude towards women and burden of household duties are the major barriers in women's participation in politics. Family members in India never think it necessary to give training of leadership skills to women. The present study is an attempt to explore impact of socioeconomic conditions that prevent women's entry into politics. It is difficult for women to achieve meaningful participation in politics because social isolation, limited support, personal factors, lack of confidence and motivation make them to take back foot. Several social, financial and political issues will be solved with the increase in the ratio of women in politics. They can contribute to reduce inequality, and social evils to a large extent.

Keywords: Politics, constitution, empowerment, decision-making, socio-political, motivation, representation, quality.

INTRODUCTION

Access to decision-making instead of the kitchen and the knife.

“Political empowerment can change women's life.”

The constitution of India guarantees equal rights and opportunities to all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed, religion or sex. However, the actual working of the constitution reflects that women who constitute nearly half of our total population have not been able to participate effectively in various walks of life including the political. The account of Indian women constituting 48.1 percent of the total population is shrouded in silence and subordination. Till 1997 women's average representation was only 4 percent in the state assemblies. In the central council of Ministers only in 1961 women could cross 10 percent share. Actually women have remained second class citizens in terms of political participation and political power.

Success of a democratic political system can be ensured by participation of women in politics. It is this feature that distinguishes a democracy from any other form of government. Citizens' active participation in political affairs is a technique for setting goals, choosing priorities and deciding what resources are needed for goal attainment. Political participation is not confined to the selection of decision-makers only but also to affect their political behaviors and hence their decisions at large.

So political participation is the involvement of citizens in such political activities which directly or indirectly influence the behavior and actions of decision-makers. The concept of political participation includes activities like voting, campaigning in elections, convincing other persons to vote in a particular way, attending public meetings, distributing party literature, joining a party, contributing money to a party, contesting elections and holding public or party office etc.

Besides conventional activities participation now also includes such activities like, petitioning, participation in mass movements, agitations, strikes, presenting memorandums, protests, marches and violent acts designed to change political system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

No research can be completed without deep study of related area of research. G.S.Mehta,(2002). states that the ratio of women in local government had a little improvement in their social stature. Some critics consider that women are responsible for their condition and status they have in society. Dr.M. Pargunan,(2007).emphasize that the need of the hour is to empower women through orientation and political training. Women find themselves at every political level under-represented and far from decision making power. Those who are willing to participate in politics, they don't find cultural, political and social environment friendly. According to Stefanie Strulik, it is essential to evaluate the impact of government's acts and policies regarding women's reservation in politics. Process of gender relations and politics are needed to be redefined. Usha Narayan, (2010).focuses on the role of women in local government and advocates women's contribution for the upliftment of society as they are the movers of Indian society. Real powers should be vested in them enacting laws in the parliament.

Objectives of the present study:

To find out answers to the questions how, why and to what extent education, family background, psychological factors, socio-economic status, marriage, culture, political environment and traditional values play an important role in deciding women's participation in politics.

- Which other factors affect women' participation and exercise of political rights.
- Which other factors affect women's participation and political awareness.
- How can women be motivated to participate and contribute to the political development?

Hypotheses:

- More women who join politics are married and join politics in middle age when they are comparatively free from the family responsibilities.
- Women from political family background, better economic status, joint families, better educated and married are more likely to contest election than the less advantaged women.
- The process of modernization changes the character of political behavior of women. They gradually attempt to gain for themselves a share in the process of participating in more and more political activities.

I would like to put these hypotheses to test in the present research paper.

Reasons of low Political Participation of women:

Women largely remain inactive and indifferent towards politics. They encounter many obstacles because of tradition, prejudice and social and economic conditions. Politics is still regarded as man's affair and political life is generally considered to be a masculine activity. Women's proportion in the Parliament as well as State Legislatures and other grass root hierarchies is not very significant. Their participating in politics as voters, candidates, campaigners and office-holders in political parties, on an equal footing with men, still remains a dream.

Psychological, situational, structural, socio-economic and political variables account for the low participation and involvement of women in politics.

1.1 Traditional and cultural values:

The issue of women's participation in politics can't be viewed in isolation from the general position of women in society. The social and cultural values and taboos imposed by a society also determine the decisions of women's life. They are supposed to carry forward the tradition, norms and values of the society. Adult political habits are learned in childhood. Girls are generally encouraged to engage in appropriate role-playing which as a rule includes conformity, passivity and concern with domestic activities. They are often discouraged from taking an active part in political activities. On the other hand, boys are encouraged to be leaders, self-reliant and to exhibit traits conducive to economic achievements. The process of socialization that women undergo in their families does not prepare them for non-traditional roles. Some critics have observed that it is not possible for women to overcome the obstacles like poverty, illiteracy and prevalent social taboos because they have been exploited for ages.It is said that women would be reluctant to participate in politics, unless allowed by the family elders in the community to do so. Women who come forward to participate in politics, most of them have to work under the command and guidance of the male. They would be compelled to put signature and stamp where male heads of their family and political party want.

1.2 Family Background and Domestic Responsibilities:

The institution of family influences the political behaviors of women in many ways. Women's role is generally confined to home, bearing and rearing children. Most of the time their activities are dictated by their husbands or male guardians. The relative prominence of father as a political actor creates male

supremacy within the family circle. This type of socialization is the cause of low women participation in political affairs. This causes mothers to infuse no political values in her daughter. Psychological factor is also responsible for low participation of women in politics as they are interested in performing all other activities than taking interest in politics. The pressure of domestic responsibilities has kept them busy in their homes and women politicians found little time and energy to follow their professional path. They are mostly part-time politicians.

It is general assumption that women associated with high level of political participation at leadership or power positions, owe a part of it to their political family background. This is mainly because of the fact that the open environment and very presence of politically involved persons in the family increases the frequency of political discussion, encourages contact with the outside world, especially with other political activists and leaders which increase the amount of political stimuli. Once a family member occupies an important position in party and government, the probability of other members moving into active political stratum increases.

1.3 Education:

Women with high education generally have more easy access to politics than the uneducated women. Women with higher education are more likely to be exposed to more mass media, to occupy higher status position, to have greater information about government and politics and to feel more efficacious. Besides it, schools and colleges provide the setting in which one acquires the skills of participation, learns to join organization, fulfil duties, participate in meetings and discussion and organize to achieve group goals. The more educated are better able to transmit their political interest and knowledge to the coming generation. Education cannot be ignored as far as political development of women is concerned. The most important cause of less political participation is illiteracy. Education contributes to raise women's consciousness and their level of self-confidence which bring them out from the traditional clutches and broaden their views and thinking about the outside world. I, however, do not argue that uneducated women are incapable of heavy participation in politics. But educated women are more knowledgeable about women's rights and duties in the political mainstream of the nation. Illiterate women are not even independent voters. A majority of them make their choice on the basis of suggestions from male members of the family, they lack information and political awareness; and they are not politically conscious.

1.4 Political Environment:

Political environment is equally important for understanding the character of political participation. The more open is the competition based on established norms of procedures, the greater will be the tendency to participate. Existence of party system and its nature also affect the level of women's political participation to a great extent. Party's issues and ideology and the existence of pressure tactics also weigh heavily in political participation. Even those women who do manage to be politically active often hesitate to join politics because it is considered a "dirty game". The cost of elections is another hindrance as few women have independent income and families are unwilling to finance them. Political parties seem feeling shy of putting up women candidates. They are considered a liability to the party. Secondly, women may not gain the same level of funding or social support. Women have relatively less ability to use money, muscle power and other forms of influence in the public sphere while electoral politics in India today rely on violence. So political participation of women depends on the overall political situation.

Women cast their votes in large numbers, take part in agitation of political activities, but they are deprived of enjoying power position and occupying prestigious political offices. Constitution has granted equality between men and women, yet the reality is that only a few women who enter politics seldom enjoy political power or are involved in decision – making process.

1.5 Lack of awareness and Training:

It was hoped that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act would increase the number of women's participation in politics by making them strong politically at the grass root level, by making provisions of reservation in the Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samities and Zila Parishads. This would provide ground for them for further political assertions in the form of Members of Legislature and Parliament. But only representation of women cannot be the guarantee of promotion of their interests. They are required to be equipped through suitable training and other means to shoulder the enhanced responsibilities. Some recent studies on reservation of women have identified important impediments which include manipulation by local power brokers in making reservation for women ineffective; ignorance about their rights and procedures, non – cooperation of official in providing necessary information to enable them to perform their function effectively; lack of needed competence to manage the affairs, lack of proper maintenance of requisite documents, proxy in election process, meetings, participation in development programmes

and decision – making, little knowledge about the provisions of Act, functioning and role of PRIS; lack of confidence etc . So systematized training along with appropriate follow up on regular interval is required to train women.

SUGGESTIONS

The only change that has been seen now a days is that women are becoming politically more conscious and aware about their political rights. Here are some suggestions requiring the improvement of women's role in politics.

(a) Women should be imparted proper education and training in order to make them conscious about their political rights. This will enable them to raise their self-confidence in taking part in politics.

(b) There should be a reservation of seats for women in political structure from grass –roots level to state and national level and this policy should be implemented and realized.

(c) Women in themselves should develop a favorable attitude towards politics. Family members should also co-operate by sharing their family responsibilities and encouraging them to take part in political activities.

(d) Women should not feel jealous of each other, but should co-operate with one another in political activities.

(e) There must be a positive political infrastructure which would not hinder women's entrance in active politics.

(f) Political activity of mothers is restricted during childbearing years. This limitation results in women getting a late start in politics which enable them to acquire the seniority and experience necessary to achieve influential positions in policy-making process.

So, if women are to be fairly represented in position of political power and in the policy making process, fundamental changes in societal beliefs about women's domestic responsibility will have to take place.

CONCLUSION

On the basis of the present study it is concluded that lack of interest that women generally show in political matters is not the result of a single moment or a single factor but the result of a learning process. Women are socialized into the wife and mother role and politics is considered incompatible to them. All the married legislators agree that a cooperative husband is the first requirement for success fully juggling of family and political carries. Men's attitudes towards women's entry into politics and leadership positions are changing. The situation has moved from one of total rejection to limited objection and in some cases active

encouragement too. Government's action for women's equality cannot be adequate unless women themselves become aware of their rights and responsibilities. So women who have ability should come to the forefront immediately.

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