

Political Empowerment and Participation of Women in India A-Study

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Abstract

The participation of women in public and political decision making process is a gender issue which has attracted a lot of attention. Women in India are still underrepresented in political and public decision making. Despite several instruments that make provision for women's participation in political and public life, they still face numerous challenges. This paper examines existing literature on political and public decision making in order to highlight the current status of women's participation in political and public life, identify factors that affect the participation of women in decision making and give recommendations on what can be done to promote the participation of women in decision making at high levels. In India, there are disparities between men and women with regard to equal access to public and political positions. Patriarchy, women playing multiple roles, lack of resources, male dominated work patterns are some of the factors that hinder the participation of women in political decision making processes. Strategies which include introduction of quotas, women empowerment and enforcement of affirmative action policies are suggested.

KEYWORDS: Women, political participation, empowerment

Introduction:

Women empowerment may mean equal status to women, opportunity and freedom to develop herself. The focus of empowerment is equipping women to be economically independent, self-reliant, have a positive self-esteem to enable them to face any difficult situation and they should be able to participate in the process of decision-making. The Constitution of India attempts to remove gender inequalities by banning discrimination based on sex and class, prohibiting human trafficking and forced labor, and reserving elected positions for women. Women's involvement in political parties is tied to the increasing demand for equal rights. In spite of constitutional provisions of gender equality yet only a few women have been able to make decisions by themselves in legislature. Indian women are relatively disempowered and they enjoy lower status than that of men from times immemorial. Gender-gap exists regarding access to education and employment. It is found that acceptance of unequal gender norms by women are still prevailing in the society.

In India the political participation of women isn't spectacular compared with men. This is often the case in most of the countries across the globe. However, women's political participation now's quite encouraging compared to past times. Nowadays it remains stronger than ever. But, in India, women UN agency have deciding powers invariably hail

from urban and elite teams. Even today, illustration of women in Indian parliament is much from satisfactory. Women are tight for extra space in legislative bodies. The study any unconcealed that political participation enable women to handle their basic issues and wishes in their community and ensures the openness, real fight against rent-seeking, responsibility, political commitment, political leadership, and political responsiveness of the prevailing national, regional, districts, and native levels. it's true that over 0.5 % of the world's population area unit women. But, they lack access to political deciding as compared to their counterparts the least bit levels of state. so women's equal participation in decision-making and politics is a requirement for straightforward justice or democracy.

Political Empowerment of Women:

Empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain better control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people, for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important. Empowerment is multi-dimensional, social, and a process. It is multi-dimensional in that it occurs within sociological, psychological, economic, and other dimensions. Empowerment also occurs at various levels, such as individual, group, and community. Empowerment, by definition, is a social process, since it occurs in relationship to others. Empowerment is a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it. Other aspects of empowerment may vary according to the specific context and people involved, but these remain constant. In addition, one important implication of this definition of empowerment is that the individual and community are fundamentally connected. Women's political empowerment is premised on "three fundamental and non-negotiable principles: (a) the equality between women and men; (b) Women's right to the full-fledged development of their potentials; and (c) women's right to self representation and self-determination". In empowerment, the key indeed is 'power'.

Women and Political Participation:

Politics is directly related to governance and management of any society. Political power is necessary to formulate policies, laws and order for a state. Women's political participation in mainstream political activity has important implications for the broader arena of governance in any country. The term of political participation generally refers to those volunteer activities of members of a society, in the selection of rulers and the formation of public policy. Since popular sovereignty is one of the inseparable attributes of democracy, the right to participate is an important aspect of democratic government and an inherent right in a democratic process. Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activities. Exercising voting rights during elections is one of the important political activities of the people. Participation of women in this political activity is almost equal to men. Political participation is not merely the casting of the vote rather it includes a wide range of other activities like- membership of political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meetings, demonstrations, communication with leaders, holding party positions, contesting elections, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other associated activities.

It has been stated that the personality traits and the socioeconomic and cultural

environment all combined are responsible for women's marginal participation to a great extent in our politics. The culture that puts a maximum importance on the males, the unstable political environment, criminalization or absence of political ideology are the factors that decide the extent and affectivity of whole political participation. The Socio-political environment has to ascertain participation and involvement of women in politics. Governance is ever related to a set of rules, institutions, and values that have involvement in the management of both the politics and society. Governing institutions and processes include political parties, parliaments, government and their mutual interactions within the society. Although governance is a generic term that could surely mean better government or management, values of governance, better types of government, better nature of political processes, the political parties and organization's interests of those are represented and protected, and the extent of power that the masses need to exercise for challenging the state or in suggesting alternative methods of governance etc. may vary in different political systems.

Reasons of Low Participation:

The data analysis above proves the facts about two aspects of women's political participation in India- the one aspect shows that women's political participation in India is not too much appropriate for better empowerment of women in Indian politics. Second aspect presents the positive side of women's political participation that proves female contestants' number to be higher than it was in 1957 Lok Sabha elections. It is important to understand that the rising number of women is an encouraging sign to pave the way for greater political participation of women. With the rise of new political parties that don't have faith in political patronage of families, party systems and more importantly money and muscle power, believe in a greater number of women entering the political fray and that only points at encouraging signs for a section that constitutes half the population as they will be part of the decision making group.

It is assumed that there are various reasons responsible for little political participation of women in India. The first reason is violence and the threat of violence that is affecting the ability of many women to take active participation in many social and political spheres. Lack of Self confidence is the second reason accountable for low participation of Indian women, particularly in, elections. Especially, Discrimination meted with Dalit women has also led to low political participation. However, from time to time, The Government of India has made several efforts to ensure the participation of Dalit women, but still these efforts are not fully effective and sufficient. Women are still less literate as compared to men. One can easily notice how illiteracy constrains the ability of women to understand the political system and issues related to these.

Gender stereotypes, psychological and traditional barriers and lack of training and resources too are becoming other dominating reasons for low political participation in India. Most of the political parties, ethnic groups and clans are controlled by strong male leaders and it leaves a little opportunity for women leaders to enter into the political process. Patriarchal society and male domination are also the main reasons behind the low participation of women.

Government initiatives and Constitutional provisions:

There was a bill on 2008 as women's reservation bill or the constitutional amendment 104th which clearly states that women has 33% reservation to participation in politics. The Constitution of India guaranteed justice-social, economic and political, liberty of thought, and equality to all citizens. Constitution provided for equality of women and called State to take measures to neutralize the socio-economic, educational and political disadvantage faced by women.

- Article 14: It guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law with in the territory of India.
- Article 15: It prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth. According to article 15(3), State can make special provisions for the benefit women and children.
- Article 16: Equality of opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment. No citizen can be denied employment on grounds of religion, race, cast, sex, decent, place of birth residence or any of them.
- Article 39: Article 39(a) provides for an adequate means of livelihood for all citizens. Article 39 (b) has provisions for equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Article 39 (c) has provisions for securing the health and strength of workers, men and women, and not to abuse the tender age of children.
- Article 42: It guarantees just and humane condition of work and maternity relief. Article 42 is in accordance with Article 23 and 25 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- Article 325 and 326: They guarantee political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, respectively.
- Article 243 (D): It provides for the political reservation to women in every panchayat elections. It has extended this reservation to elected office as well.(Damodaran and Neupane)

In spite of the above provisions, participation of women in politics has not improved significantly. ("Constitutional Law: Constitutional and Charter Provisions: Right of Women to Vote") The increase in the number of women in legislature definitely will not bring overnight changes in the status of women. It is foolishness to think that it will solve the entire problems faced by women and bring equality immediately. It is also true that powerful women leaders in our politics have failed to do much to the women in India. The 73rd and 74th Amendment to the Constitution of India with 33.33% reservation for women has given opportunity for the entry of large number of socially marginalized category such as women to enter into the domain of local institution and their performance is very encouraging. In the year 2006, 10,41,430 women were elected to the local institutions. These reservations or quota brought quantitative changes, facilitated women to be represented in local governments and deserved to be hailed as major achievement in the empowerment of women. Success stories of women in local governments indicate the qualitative changes that are coming forth. Increment list perspective would enable qualitative change in the performance of women in politics and governance.

Conclusions:

Even though the participation of women in decision making in India is characterized by several barriers, women are making a mark in other areas especially academia and professions such as law and medicine. Women constitute 50 per cent of the total population therefore, their participation in decision making is crucial because their perspectives and voices are crucial if sustainable development is to be achieved. The social and economic development challenges being faced by the country currently can be solved if women are brought on board because again, women contribute both in the productive and reproductive spheres. Participation by women in decision making ensures that, their voices are heard and needs met, since most of them are vulnerable. The India government should acknowledge the fact that, women are a driving force of development; therefore factors that limit their participation should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Gender parity in decision making is essential for development that is sustainable and in the long run would also reflect positively in other areas of inequality such as education, health, violence, poverty and career opportunities.

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