

POLITICAL STATUS OF WOMEN: A STUDY ON POLITICAL AWARENESS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

Present piece of research paper is an attempt to investigate and access the political awareness among women through their own view point. The study was conducted in India. It was found that all women cast their vote in village body elections (Gram sabha and Gam Panchayet) but this enthusiasm of participation sinks down for higher election of state assembly (MLA) and Parliament (MP), 56.82 and 46.46 percent respectively.

Though almost half of the women cast their vote for higher elections yet only one-fourth to one-fifth women know the name of their elected MLA and MP respectively, which depicts that they don't have much interest in these higher body elections and casting vote is just the execution of the family decision taken by the males of the family. Further it was found that only 27.33 percent women know about the political parties and affiliation to the parties is limited to 4.68 percent women only.

KEYWORDS: Political, women, awareness, Participation, India, vote, Gram sabha, Gam Panchayet, MLA, MP, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Democracy implies impartiality for all human persons, men and women. As against this basic notion of democracy what is mostly seen is that women are excluded from dissimilar walks of life, more visibly in Politics [1]. The U.N. observes that women constitute "world's largest excluded category". For the attainment of true democratic spirit shall be ensured better political participation. "In the struggle for sex justice", Usha Narayanan argues, "Political participation constitutes the first and foremost step in that direction.". Equal treatment to women in political life, to be meaningful and result vie should start from the grassroots level [2]. To provide training and practice in the decision-making, the rural democratic institutions are the ideal structures to begin with. One of the aims of the Constitutional Amendment Act is to accomplish this purpose? "The question of political empowerment of women in rural India has assumed considerable significance recently because of the 73rd Constitutional Amend merit Act. The amendment provides reservation of seats and posts of chairperson tor women in all grassroots level democratic institutions in the countryside known as panchayats [3]. This is a historic step of far reaching

implications and significant repercussions on the political method in rural ~India."~ "As long as women of India", declared Mahatma Gandhi in 1925, "do not take part in public life, there can be no salvation for the country". He further declared, "As long as. Women do not come to public life and purify. We are not likely to attain Swaraj". "Ever if we did", he added, "It would have no use for that kind of Swaraj to which women have not made their full contribution.". The recent constitutional amendment acts provided superior opportunities to women in various aspects of political life [4].

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of political participation of any society or section of people necessities to take into account whether or not it is associated with democratic values the level and extent of political participation of people may be restricted by the very existence of both natural and man-made inequalities. While it is impossible to overcome natural factors of inequalities, it is possible to overcome man-made inequalities simply by adopting and following of democratic principles and values. The pillars of democracy like liberty, impartiality, fraternity, justice etc. [5]. are strong enough to support and protect the people from the challenges posed by man-made inequalities. Thus the study of the nature and level of political participation and its resultant empowerment can be evaluated only on the basis of the availability of democratic values. The presence of the umbrella of democracy is a pre-requisite for the attainment of maximum extent of participation and empowerment. Empowerment is not characteristic: as achieving power to dominate others, but rather power to act with others to result

change [6]. Political participation is a major component of empowerment.

1. Modes of Political Participation:

The conceptualization of political participation has been undergoing drastic changes. Such changes will have; I direct impact upon dissimilar modes of political participation. Peoples can participate in dissimilar and alternative ways to influence the government and the: political system. Until recently most survey studies of political participation confined their enquiry to a relatively limited set of political acts. Most of them asked whether a person had voted or not and some went on to ask about such behavior as attendance at political meetings or rallies, working for a party, making a monetary contribution or seeking a public However, these alternative ways of political participation depend on the types of peoples who participate, tile way in which they act, the amount of pressure they can to exert and the system's response towards their activities [7]. Thus political participation is more than the vote and more than an activity in the electoral system. Explaining the extent of political participation Michael Rush and added that apathy, alienation and the use of violence vary clearly and considerably from system to system, but remain quite important factors in any examination of political participation. Examining the modes of political participation Schonfeld has mentioned ten types of activities which include:

- (1) Running for or holding public or party offices,
- (2) Belonging to a party or other, political organisation,
- (3) Working in an election,
- (4) Attending political meetings or rallies,

- (5) Making financial contribution to a party or a candidate,
- (6) Contacting a public official,
- (7) Publicly expressing a political opinion to convince others, (8) partaking in political discussion,
- (9) Voting, and
- (10) Exposing oneself to political stimuli

2. Variables of Political Participation

Political participation appears to be a complex phenomenon, a dependent variable that hinges upon many Sectors such as the psychological, socio-economic and political, which provide orientation to individuals either positively or negatively.

❖ Psychological Environment:

Political participation tends to meet one's psychological necessities of overcoming loneliness. It refers to the degree to which peoples are interested in and concerned about politics and public affairs. Psychological attachment of a person towards political objects certainly determines the extent and gravity of political participation.

❖ Socio-economic Environment:

The socio-economic environment will have a direct impact upon political participation. Socio-economic variables include education, occupation, income, age, caste, religion, sex, family background, residence etc. "Political participation", says Robert Lane, "IS a function of age, sex, education and status Thus mostly, participation tends to be higher among better educated, members of higher occupational and encore groups, middle aged, dominant ethnic and religious groups, people with political family background, settled residents, urban dwellers and members of voluntary

associations. Weaver, the correlation between political participation anti some of these socio-economic variables may vary from culture to culture in dissimilar political contexts and their result on political participation may not be sable.

3. Political Environment:

The overall political environments do influence the entire method of political participation to a great extent. The political environment refers to the nature of the party system, the electoral system, the means of propaganda and campaign, the extent of modernization and urbanization, the influence of ideology the general awareness of the people etc. The political party is the most potent instrument in facilitating political participation [8]. The party resembles the nation both in its symbolic force and in its capacity for arousing affection, devotion and sacrifice on the part of its members and syliipathizers. The party inspires its members to develop a feeling of belongingness. It has been observed that people, who affiliated to a party vote more frequently than those who are not. Strongly attached members are more active in political discussions and vodka. The propaganda and electric campaign refer to the efforts made by political parties to involve the voters in the method of political participation. The campaign has its result on polarizing party attachments, reinforcing candidate preferences and gaining votes. It is, in fact, method of political education.

4. The Non-participants:

Another dimension that has to be taken into account is why some people keep off from all forms of political participation or even if they participate they are ready to play only a minimal role. In other words

people who participate in most forms of political activity constitute a minority and often a very small minority. The factors, which inhibit political participation, are psychological and emotional. "Apathy is characterized by individuals' passivity or abstention from political activity. It may be defined as lack of interest or concern for persons, situations or phenomena in general or particular. Apathy leads to the decline of political vitality and vigilance widespread apathy increases the chances of opportunists and unscrupulous people to dominate the policy making method. Thus it is nothing other than lack of interest in politics [9].

5. Women and Politics in India:

The Indian society is full paradoxes. On the one hand, foreigners come in hordes to our country in search of spiritual solace but on the other hand, Indians rank among the most corrupt people in the world. Again, on the one hand, India is spending millions, nay; billions to send satellites to space to prove its scientific prowess but on the other the state cannot provide almost half the population with the basic necessities of food, education, health and shelter. The same paradox exists in the case of women too. An old Sanskrit proverb is that, where the women are held in reverence there do the gods reside [10]. The traditional belief in the Indian society is that, a society if the women grow, if they partake of the spirit of progress, for they are proverbial domestic legislators, they are the matrix of social life. In the Indian mythology, even God is regarded as half man, half woman'. On the other hand, according to the UNICEF's recent international report, "The Progress of Nations 1997", more than 5000 dowry deaths occur each year in India.

CONCLUSION

The political parties dominated by menfolk are not at all interested in providing space for women in electoral politics especially when their electoral chances are threatened, if and when women claim their pound of flesh, men will definitely stand to lose. It is a fact that almost all political parties which are paying lip services to women's reservation and participation in electoral politics from house-tops seldom consider women when the time for seat sharing comes. All the political are unanimous on one thing that no woman should hold the President, head of a political party or Chief Minister ship of the state. It is in this backdrop that the relevance and significance of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Acts which include provisions for women's empowerment in terms of reservations of seats and offices of chairperson in Panchayati Raj and Nagar palika institutions should be examined. Despite the fact that the above said Acts are confined to the grassroots levels symbolized by the Panchayati Raj and Nagar palika institutions, their impact on national politics and women's empowerment with unpredictable ramifications has produced a democratic revolution where in women are given a golden opportunity to prove their mettle and administrative skills at par with men.

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