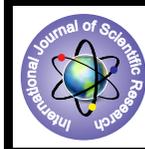


Women, Family And Political Participation: Conditions Determining From Representation to Decision Making Process in Local-Self Government.



Social Science

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**Dr. SUNITHA V
GANIGER**

Assistant Professor, Department of Studies and Research in Sociology, Tumkur University, Tumkur

ABSTRACT

Rural India has witnessed the world's largest experiment in grass roots local democracy, triggered by 73rd and 74th Amendment with also the introduction of 33 % quota for women within the local government system and political reservation has led to stronger impact on women-centric issues to break the shackles of traditional and cultural inequalities to empowerment and emancipation thus empowering local women. A woman can develop a village with patience, amicable intervention, determination and farsightedness. However, to achieve all these she need the active and whole hearted participation of her family members who can support her through-out her endeavors. Thus this paper makes an honest attempt to study about the role of family in womens participation in rural local self government through an empirical study.

Introduction

There is an escalating impetus among the governments and civil society to promote and ensure equitable participation and leadership of women in the political arena and specifically within the Local Self Government and sustainable democracy. No doubt, the 73rd and 74th Amendment have paved a way for active participation of women in local self government and accordingly we find the over the centuries women who were confined within the four walls are now rocking the world and are at par with their male counterparts. However, it is also a reality that women's participation is all not such a Midas touch as when women are fielded in politics it is widely criticized that her true participation in politics is ambiguous as many a time they are accompanied by their family male members it is just the mind and thought of men and the tongue of women. Poverty, Illiteracy, economic insecurity, fear of being ridiculed, prejudiced patriarchal values, lack of support from family and community, lack of appropriate information, gender bias, backlash and traditional mind-set and insensitive legal systems stops a woman to actively participate in politics. Many a time women consider it tedious task to fight against men, and women's role over the years in the sphere of decision making and political participation also is at abysmal level. Political ambience is also male centric and only where the reservation exists women are fielded against any strong male leaders so that she can be easily defeated. She is regarded as decorative pieces, and her words are sidelined due to her feeble voice, weak stature and many other stances. But all these statements should not make us think that women are far from politics but instead politics has also become user friendly compared to our past days. Participation of women gained a momentum and recognition as a women's right. Thus in recent years we find women are creating a space for themselves panchayat to Parliament. It would be apt to quote Gandhiji's words "Real change in India comes when women begin to affect the political deliberations of the nation". The constitutional amendment providing one-third representation to women in elected bodies as well as reserving one-third of the offices of chairpersons for them will have far-reaching consequences in Indian political and social life. More and more women are found to be participating in Indian rural politics.

Statement of the problem

Even after 65 years of democratic governance, it is distressing that the government and policy makers are lulled into contentment by patting their own back that they are fielding women and supporting women participation in politics. Women's participation in political processes is impeded due to various socio-cultural, economic, historical geographical and political factors and thereby resulting in minimal participation. There is no mechanism to facilitate and protect women in political participation training and information, dissemination on governance process, awareness on their rights and responsibilities, gender

sensitization ect. However, the 33 per cent reservation have been proving a boon in recent years as more and more women are actively participating in politics either with or without the help of their family members.

Review of literature

G Palanthurai in his study of Tamil Nadu observed that women have come to positions in the local bodies as provisions have been made in the constitution. The study reveals that the outlook of the society towards women's participation in politics has changed and suggests that women need orientation, sensitization, capacity building and information and counseling.

The National Commission on Women conducted a study in 2001 covering 100 women from each of the six states namely Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh. This study also caught the voice of few male members of gram panchayats. The main research question was about the Men's reaction to the Women participation in politics and in decision making. This report showed that women participation in politics had elevated the status of women inside and outside the family. Elected women representatives got weightage in the community.

A study of the women elected representatives to Karnataka Panchayati Raj institutions between 1987 and 1990, conducted by the Institute of Social Sciences, gives an insight into women's present position in the panchayats as elected members and the possibilities this holds for the future. The study also gives an insight into the nature of their participation, their present sociological and cultural compulsions and their leadership role in society. Since it has an all-India bearing, it is important to go into these findings in some detail. (Jain, L. C., 1994)

Manu Bhaskar in an article entitled 'Women and Grass-root Politics' (2000) views that gender equality is a prerequisite for effective participation of women. Domesticity of women, masculine nature of political activity, backward consciousness, existing political culture, lack of economic security are the major obstacles and deterrents for women's fuller participation in politics.

Vijayalakshmi V. and B.K. Chandrashekar in 'Gender Inequality, Differences and Identities: Women and Local Government in Karnataka' (2000) states that, gender inequality and differences among women are important for our understanding of their participation process in local governance. They argue that the involvement of women in the public and private spheres give them 'dual identity' often giving priority to the latter. Caste and class identity, low education levels was perceived as other two important factors in women representatives' marginal participation or nonparticipation

Methodology

The study "Women, Family And Political Participation: Conditions Determining From Representation To Decision Making Process In Local-Self Government", aims to understand about the level of political awareness and their intention of village development among the elected women representatives in Grama Panchayat. For this purpose 100 elected members were chosen for the study from Dharwad district based on the convenience sampling method.

Analysis and Interpretation

The studies found that majority of the respondents were between the age of 25 to 50 years while a negligible were found above the age of 55 years. This reveals that the age old dictum that only older person can enter politics does not hold true here as majority were found in productivity age criteria.

Majority of them were members constituting of 65 % while few of the women representatives were found to occupy the President post with 15 % and rest of the members were in other positions.

In terms of education while an ample number of females were found to be high school educated 67 % while 10 % were PUC, 4 % degree and the rest were either below or above.

Majority of the representatives husbands were in agricultural work and a few were in business while few attended to their family occupation.

Majority of the women representatives were from non-political background. They did not have any god father to guide them and many agreed that it was solely their efforts or their family members support and before entering politics they had discussed with their family members and only after their assent they entered into politics. However they were not backed by any political leaders or community.

Family Structure of the respondents

Majority of the women representatives were from Nuclear family 40 % while the rest were from Joint family which says that even in the times of modernization joint family still exists and they are encouraging the active participation of their women folks in village politics.

Political Background of the respondents

75 % of the respondents were from non political background while the remaining had political backup. This part reveals that women are naïve to politics.

Inspiration for respondents entry to politics

It was found during the study that 48 per cent of the respondents were self motivated, while 28 per cent were motivated by their parents, 22 percent were propelled by their husbands and remaining took the support from others.

Discussion to join politics

78 per cent of the respondents discussed with their family members, while 10 per cent discussed with friends and 08 per cent did not discuss with anyone. This facts reveals that joining politics is not a feather touch, instead many of the women representatives has discussed with many before joining politics. It also further found that majority of the respondents were not fielded by politicians fought for the GP elections independently.

Support by family members

While 68 per cent agreed that they got full support from their family, few said they were often snubbed and blamed that her political life was interfering with her personal life and thus discouraged them from participating in political issues.

Accompany of male members during meetings

Almost 80 percent denied that they were accompanied by their family members instead they said that they went all alone to attend the meetings while 5 per cent of them answered that their family members only dropped them upto the site but did not interfere in administrative affairs

Handling of personal income

Nearly 60 per cent of the respondents personally handed all their income while the remaining sought the help of others. This shows that even today though women may be empowered but when it comes to financial aspects it is decided by their family members.

Suggestions and Conclusion

Political empowerment of women is possible only when she takes an active participation in politics and a village can develop well only through emancipations of women. The study reveals that family members support women folk to politics and also do not interfere in their political affairs. The paper suggests there must be a change of attitude of men towards the capability of women and this can be done by inculcating awareness through media and other sources, Need based training in administrative and financial affairs is the need of hour and also can make women stronger.

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