ROLE OF WOMEN IN MAKING POLICY DECISIONS – NEED FOR EQUAL REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN LEADEERS IN THE GOVERNMENT OF TELANGANA

Management

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ABSTRACT   *The challenges for women are increasing year after year and their participation is limited only to represent the political wing instead of being allowed to play an active role in overall development of the nation. This paper analyses the importance of women in political leadership and what role they can play in national development by reviewing the work done by some of the women leaders from the Telangana Region within their portfolio. Research on panchayats (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with female-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with male-led councils. Women's representation in informal decision-making processes is often more common than their representation in formal positions and structures, but it tends to be hidden and therefore not as highly valued as it should be. In order to deepen democracy at the local, national and international level, it is important to ensure that women and men are able to participate on equal terms in both formal and informal decision-making structures. The paper analysed the importance of women in political leadership and what role they can play in national development by reviewing the work done by some of the women leaders from the Telangana Region within their portfolio and it is termed important because Telangana is the 29th state of India and the first government of Telangana doesn't represent any women leader in the cabinet of ministers despite the fact there is a national and state legislation in place which demands women representation in the government though there were capable women leaders in the government who could hold important portfolios. Women have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and informal organizations, as well as in public office. However, socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men, including stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men.*

Introduction :

Equality between women and men in politics in industrialised democracies has grown substantially in the past fifty (Briggs, 2008). More women are running for and being elected to national parliaments than ever before, and a record number of women hold executive positions within their nations' government (Lovenduski 2005). However, there remains considerable disagreement within the research literature about a) the nature of the gender gap in political participation and b) the significance of the gender gap. Thus, some researchers argue that women engage, overall, less than men in politics and political activity, others argue that the range of activities against which this difference is assessed is too narrow and misses important ways that women do act politically. For example, Mestre and Marin (2012) argue that women and men turnout for elections and chose political parties in similar ways but differences continue to exist in political knowledge and interest. However, there is widespread consensus that despite progress, the gender gap in political representation persists and 'narrows at a very slow pace' (Norris, 1997). Feminist and other researchers of democracy emphasise the importance of political representation such as being elected to parliament or in other legislative bodies. Having women representatives in political and other decision-making institutions that work on behalf of all citizens has been a topic of interest and policy at the national level for the past several decades. Despite the widespread movement towards democratization in most countries, women are largely underrepresented at most levels of government, especially in ministerial and other executive bodies, and have made little progress in attaining political power in legislative bodies or in achieving the target endorsed by the Economic and Social Council of having 30 per cent women in positions at decision-making levels (North, 2009). The challenges for women are increasing year after year and their participation is limited only to represent the political wing instead of being allowed to play an active role in overall development of the nation. This paper analyses the importance of women in political leadership and what role they can play in national development by reviewing the work done by some of the women leaders from the Telangana Region within their portfolio. The study in the context of Telangana is important because it is the 29th state of India and the first government of Telangana doesn't represent any women leader in the cabinet of ministers.

Participation of women in politics

Women could achieve equal representation in parliaments across the world in less than 20 years, a new study has predicted. The Women in Politics Maps 2014 released by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women shows that women could achieve equality if the current rate of progress is maintained. The map shows that the number of women parliamentarians across the world is at a record 21.8 per cent, following a 1.5 per cent increase over the last year. The Americas, Europe and Africa are outperforming the Arab, Asia and Pacific regions for women reaching executive governmental and executive parliamentary positions (Gander, 2014). As of January 2014, 9 women served as Head of State and 15 served as Head of Government. Globally, there are 38 States in which women account for less than 10 per cent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses. Wide variations remain in the average percentages of women parliamentarians in each region, across all chambers (single, lower and upper houses). As of 1 January 2014, these were: Nordic countries, 42.1 per cent; Americas, 25.2 per cent; Europe excluding Nordic countries, 23.3 per cent; sub-Saharan Africa, 22.5 per cent; Asia, 18.4 per cent; Pacific, 16.2 per cent; and the Middle East and North Africa, 16.0 per cent. Women's representation in local governments has made a difference (Banerjee and Somnathan, 2001). Research on panchayats (local councils) in India discovered that the number of drinking water projects in areas with female-led councils was 62 per cent higher than in those with male-led councils (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002). In Norway, a direct causal relationship between the presence of women in municipal councils and childcare coverage was found (Gander, 2014). However, more women in politics does not necessarily correlate with lower levels of corruption, as is often assumed. Rather, democratic and transparent politics is correlated with low levels of corruption, and the two create an enabling environment for more women to participate. The participation of women and men in formal and informal decision-making structures varies greatly between countries, but is generally in favour of men. Institutional as well as cultural, economic and societal factors limit women's opportunities and abilities to participate in decision making (Chattopdyay and Dufflo, 2004).

Women's representation and leadership tend to be confined to areas that are traditionally 'feminine' such as social welfare. Women's representation in informal decision-making processes is often more common than their representation in formal positions and structures, but it tends to be hidden and therefore not

as highly valued as it should be. In order to deepen democracy at the local, national and international level, it is important to ensure that women and men are able to participate on equal terms in both formal and informal decision-making structures. Poor levels of participation and representation in decision-making bodies is exacerbated, for both men and women, by intersecting discriminations relating to ethnic group, socioeconomic status, religion, disability and sexual orientation (Norris and Inglehart, 2000).

Women leaders of Telangana

Telangana, India's newest State is among a few States in the country where women have zero representation in the State Cabinet. At a time when all political parties are supporting the demand for 33 per cent reservation for women in the legislative bodies across the country, the government has neglected the important role played by women leaders in achieving the state cause. In stark contrast, Government of India has seven women ministers who are holding important cabinet berths portraying the belief of the government that women can play an important role in the national development.

Prior to this government, there was important role played by the women in government formation and they were aptly rewarded with ministerial berth in the government. Smt. Sabitha Indira Reddy (Home), Smt. Geetha Reddy (Tourism), Smt. D.K. Aruna (Information and Public Relations), Smt. Konda Surekha, and others were some of the women leaders representing the previous government with important portfolios and responsibilities.

Smt. Sabitha Indira Reddy took important decisions pertaining to crime, law and order, traffic and other measures to prevent organised crimes across the state. Smt. Geetha Reddy was influential in developing and marketing the brand 'Andhra Pradesh' as a tourist destination and by taking measures to develop and identify new destinations. Smt. D.K. Aruna implemented various policies and enhanced the media structures both print and electronic suiting to the advanced market and growing diverse populations. While the experts rightly suggests that women representation is below the reservation allowed, and make domination is visible in decision making process involving women leaders; the case among these ministers of Telangana region who performed well during previous government is quite different urging the government to include more women leaders in their cabinet.

As far as recent elections are concerned, women candidates who have emerged victorious include one Member of Parliament, (06) Member of Legislative Assembly out of total 63 MLAs. It is pertinent to note that though there is reservation and quota in place, no berth has been given to women candidate and one among the 6 MLAs is Smt Konda Surekha who held the portfolio for disability and welfare. While previous government had deposed faith in women leaders by allotting important portfolios, the situation has drastically changed as far as reservation of women in government is concerned since the formation of new state which is state of serious concern.

Women in Decision Making

Decision making is a social process that selects alternatives for implementation and execution from among the many that may be available. It denotes the dynamic process of interaction among participants who determine a particular policy choice. However, for the present purpose, decision- making shall be taken in its widest connotation, as understood in the Country Report for the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995 (Pande, 2005). Urban local self-government has offered the Indian women in the post-independent period, a 'space' to actively participate in the decision-making process. The women belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes communities who constitute the peripheral groups among the Indian women got a considerable opportunity to participate in the decision-making process especially in the aftermath of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Let us now examine the provision of the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 (Swamy, Knack, Lee, and Azfar, 2001).

Why is women's participation in policy and decision-making important and how does one go about improving it? This has to -be seen in the present context of women's marginalisation through development policies and the ineffectiveness of constitutional and legal provisions for gender equality. The formulation of development policies and special programmes for women and the actual operation of implementing machinery at all levels - Central, state, local, the police, the judiciary and the courts have demonstrated insensitivity to gender issues (Roy, 1999). This in sensitivity can be overcome only when there is a clear understanding of the role of women, their contributions to different sectors of the economy and the way tradition weighs on women to uphold their unequal status in society. Special departments or special components have the effect of relegating women to a narrow category, a minority status preventing efficient and effective inter linkages between departments on women's issues (EPW, 1991)

Need for increased participation in political arena

Women have demonstrated considerable leadership in community and informal organizations, as well as in public office. However, socialization and negative stereotyping of women and men, including stereotyping through the media, reinforces the tendency for political decision-making to remain the domain of men. Likewise, the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions in the areas of art, culture, sports, the media, education, religion and the law have prevented women from having a significant impact on many key institutions. Relative to their population share, women are underrepresented in political leadership positions throughout the world. In June 2000, women comprised only 13.8% of all parliament members in the world, up from 9% in 1987 (Bhan, and Singh 2001). Compared to economic opportunities, education and legal rights, political representation is the area in which the gap between men and women has narrowed the least between 1995 and 2000 (Norris and Inglehart, 2000). This gender gap in political representation coexists with a well-established gender gap in political views: women and men have different policy preferences with women more likely to support liberal policies, in particular spending on child care and other child related expenses (Lott and Kenny (1999), Edlund and Pande (2001) and Edlund, Haider and Pande (2003). Increasing the political representation of women is often thought to be a "win-win" proposition. Women and men have different political agendas, so it would improve equity, by ensuring a better representation of women's needs, and efficiency, because women are supposed to be better politicians (less likely to be corrupt, more altruistic), and because the political agendas of women are thought to lead to investment in child health and education, which have positive long term consequences on growth. Alleviating deprivation and inequality in the political realm can thus have far reaching consequences, not only for women, but for everyone (a point made most forcefully by Amartya Sen in Development as Freedom (Sen 1999). Recognizing this fact, many governments are taking active steps to encourage the participation of women in policy making, notably by establishing quotas for women in parliaments or in local governments. Because women's representation in the political sphere advances slowly, and does not seem to be greatly affected by economic development, political reservations for women are often proposed as a way to rapidly enhance women's ability to participate in policy making. Reservation policies clearly have a strong impact on women's representation. This does not necessarily imply, however, that they have a impact on policy decisions. In stand-

ard "downsian" political economy models, where candidates can commit to a specific policy, political decisions reflect the preference of the electorate (Rudman, 1998).

Women as agents of change

Women's meaningful participation in politics affects both the range of policy issues that are considered and the types of solutions that are proposed. Research indicates that a legislator's gender has a distinct impact on policy priorities, making it critical that women are present in politics to represent the concerns of women and other marginalized citizens and help improve the responsiveness of policy-making and governance (Ghatak and Ghatak, 2002). And as more women reach leadership positions within their political parties, these parties tend to prioritize issues that impact health, education and other quality of life issues (Pande,2003). There is strong evidence that as more women are elected to office, there is also a corollary increase in policy-making that reflects the priorities of families, women, and ethnic and racial minorities. Women's political participation has profound positive and democratic impacts on communities, legislatures, political parties, and citizen's lives. When women are empowered as political leaders, countries often experience higher standards of living with positive developments in education, infrastructure and health, and concrete steps being taken to help make democracy deliver. Using data from 19 member countries of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), researchers found that an increase in women legislators results in an increase in total educational expenditure (Norris and Inglehart, 2000). In India, research showed that West Bengal villages with greater representation of women in local councils saw an investment in drinking water facilities that was double that of villages with low levels of elected women, and that the roads there were almost twice as likely to be in good condition. The study also revealed that the presence of a woman council leader reduces the gender gap in school attendance by 13 percentage points (Roy, 1999).

Conclusion

Institutional, socioeconomic and cultural barriers limit women's effective participation in democratic elections. Politics is often viewed, by both men and women, as a male domain where women will struggle to make a contribution. In addition, party politics tends to be dominated by men, making it more difficult for women to get on party lists for election. Women's representation and leadership therefore tend to be more at the grassroots level and in social welfare positions. In order to get elected, many female candidates choose to downplay the fact that they are concerned with 'women's issues', for fear this may alienate male voters. Quota systems have been used in a number of countries to advance the representation of women. These have taken various forms, including sandwiching of party lists and reserved seats. While this has increased the number of women in political positions, they remain a minority in most countries. There is mixed evidence that quotas have resulted in issues of

concern to many women, such as childcare and health care, featuring more prominently on the agenda. Women's leadership positions tend to be confined to organisations set up by and for women. Women often have informal roles of influence, recognition and power within the community – as mothers, teachers, volunteers, entrepreneurs, as well as community leaders. However this has changed as far as women leaders of Telangana State is concerned as known from their previous outings as leaders holding important portfolios and playing an active role in regional and state development by taking decisions. At present, there are no women ministers in Telangana government, but, it is necessary that the government takes cognizance of national and state legislations pertaining to women representation in the state assembly.

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