



Political Awareness among Educated Women of Anand City of Gujarat

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Abstract

In the present scenario increasingly women of many countries are doing very well in politics. Whether it's Asia or Europe or any part of the world, women in politics are creating fantastic milestones for themselves by making more and more appearances in the elections of different kinds across the world. Indian Women in politics have done a lot in less time. This is one of the biggest reasons of success for the women in the election of different kinds and all the levels. Women play a very important role in the development of the society. Without the assistance and the cooperation of the women there can not be any sort of fair politics in the India. Government of India has reserved the seats especially for the women to contest the elections and make a presence in the movement of the politics. The analysis in this article centers on political awareness among educated women. Political interest and political discussion have an impact on women's level of political awareness. Whether women's level of political awareness influences their participation in electoral activities. The results indicate that a majority of the women have moderate awareness about politics. Their level of political awareness is accounted for by their level of interest in politics, pattern of participation and frequency of political discussion.

Keywords: Political Awareness, Decision Making, Educated Women, Rural Society

Introduction:

Education and its relationship with livelihood, quality of life, increased earnings and social mobility are well recognized. It can transform the masses, as Thompson says, by increasing their awareness of the situation they live and of the possibilities and choices before them' (quoted in Shukla and Kaul 1998:11). Since Independence a massive quantitative expansion of education is evidenced at all levels. The literacy rate has gone up from 18.33% in 1951 to 65.38% in 2001. The literacy rate for women has risen to 54.16% in 2001 from a mere 8.86% in 1951, a growth of about six times. The disparities in educational development may be seen with the help of literacy rates. While

Kerala retains the top slot in 2001 with 90.92% literacy for the total population, 94.20% for the male and 87.86% for the female population, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar occupy the bottom slots with 57.36% and 47.53% literacy for the total population, 70.23% and 60.32% for the male and 42.98% and 33.57% for the female population respectively. The literacy rate of Gujarat is 69.14% of the total population, 79.66% for males and 57.80% for females. The enrolment of girls at primary and middle levels of education is steadily increasing. Education opportunity to girls at the secondary level is confined to middle and upper middle class in urban areas and to upper middle class in rural areas. (Census: 2001)



In order to analyze the changing role of educated women, it is important to understand the changing relationship of the educated women to the political setup of the country. Education, especially higher education, provides excellent opportunities to women for the development of political interest and attitudes through curricular and extra curricular activities like lectures, seminars, group discussions, mock parliaments etc. Occasionally, students' union activities concerning elections, movements and agitations throw up a good number of women activists into wider political arena. Working women, because of their interest and class interest, become aware of and usually participate in activities which are political in nature. They take part in their union elections and also participate in agitations, protests and dharnas along with their male colleagues. Working women often come into contact with public officials and political workers for redressed of their grievances. This invariably develops in them a certain degree of political awareness and attitudes in a wider sense. The changes in political awareness, political participation and attitudes are taking place in women's world.(Bhawana Kaushik :2003:5)

The political awareness and political participation are the need of the hour in the developing countries because women constitute slightly more than half of the world population. Their contribution to the social and economic development of societies is also more than half as compared to that of men by virtue of their dual roles in the productive and reproductive spheres. Yet their participation in formal political structures and processes, where decisions regarding the use of societal resources

generated by both men and women are made, remains insignificant (UNDP Report, 2005).

There can not be true development with half of the population living in ignorance, withdrawn from the main stream unrecognized and unaccounted for. Women rank quite high in any policy of human resource development in a nation. The political status of women can be defined as the degree of equality and freedom enjoyed by women in the shaping and sharing of power and in the acceptance given by the society to this role of women.

One contextual issue in women's political participation relates to the nature of politics in general and the liberal democracy in particular. Democracy has historically served men better than women. As a political system from the ancient Greece to the modern times of the 21st century, it has built on the public-private dichotomy and excluded women from citizenship. Women have been kept outside the public domain of politics as most of the political thinkers and philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, John Lock, Thomas Hobbes and Hegel considered women fit only for domestic roles in the private sphere and maintained that there was no place for women in politics because of their suitability in caring roles as mothers and wives. The public-private divide remains as the foundation of the various forms of world democracies (Phillips, 1998, Rai, 2000).

In the Indian constitution equality and social justice are the basic fundamental rights. Hence in article (14) of the constitution it has been provided that women should be given equal status



in every field and equal pay for equal work. Article 15(1) provides that there will be no difference on basis of sex and women have been given equal rights. Article 16 provides right to equality of opportunity in matter of jobs and public appointments while article 39 (d) provides equal pay for equal work for both men and women. Therefore, women have a positive role to play in the reconstruction of society and the recognition of their equality is an essential step to bring about social justice. Now national development demands that women should be politically aware, they should take interest in political process and participate in it up to their full capability. In this context, this paper examines the level of political awareness, its dimensions and the influence of personal, social and political awareness among educated women.

Political Awareness:

Political awareness assumes greater importance in a democratic system which indeed demands it. Political activities are the principal means by which consent is granted or withdrawn in a democracy and rulers made accountable to the ruled. Political activities give the citizens a sense of dignity and broadness to their political understanding and make the ruler as well as the ruled alert in their sphere of responsibilities and efficiency. Mathews and Prothro have stated that all behaviour through which people directly express their political opinions covers conventional activities like voting and discussing politics as well as unconventional activities like demonstrations, dharnas and rallies. Thus political behaviour includes three major dimensions: (a) Conventional

political behaviour in such activities as talking politics, joining a political party, taking part, taking part in a campaign, helping a candidate for political office etc. (b) Communication of protest/support by sending protest or support messages to political leaders. (c) Unconventional political behaviour-rioting and demonstrating.

Objectives:

The present study aims to the following objectives-

1. To determine the level of political awareness and its dimensions political Participation, political Responsibility, Political Efficacy and Political Alienation among educated women.
2. To determine the influence of personal, social and economic factors of Political awareness among educated women.

Variables: Variables used for this study have been classified as independent and dependent variables.

(a) **Independent Variables:** To study the process of political awareness among educated women, following variables have been used as independent variables.

- 1) Income, 2) Family, 3) Caste, 4) Religion, 5) Age, 6) Occupation.

(b) **Dependent Variables:** Political awareness and its dimensions (Political Participation, Political Interest, Political Responsibility, and Political Efficacy) have been considered as the dependent variables.



Sampling: The sample of the study constitutes 180 educated women of the Anand City. For this purpose certain institutions and organizations like Shree Bhikhabhai Arts College, Anand Arts College, N.S.Patel Arts College were selected. 180 women Respondents were selected from the list of women studying by the purposive sample method.

Tools to be used in Collection of Data:

This study was conducted as an empirical research. An empirical study of this type requires procedures that will reduce bias and increase its reliability. An interview schedule was prepared in order to call information, from the educated women under the study. At least an interview well constructed pre tested schedule will be used as a tool. According to the supplementary technique for observation method and in-depth interview, will also be arranged to collect the data.

A Brief Profile of Study Area of Anand District:

The state of Gujarat formed on 1st May 1960. The first capital of Gujarat was Ahmedabad; the capital was moved to Gandhinagar in 1970. Anand District is an administrative district of Gujarat state in western India. It was carved out of the Kheda district in 1997. Anand is the administrative headquarter of the district.

The area of the study is district of Anand in the state of Gujarat Anand is famous for Amul Dairy in all over the world and as a milk city. Anand city is situated between 22-23 north latitude and 72-57 east longitudes. The district extends area of 2951.10 is 59km. There are eight Talukas, 633 villages and 4 cities.

According to 2001 census the total population of the district was 1856872 consisting of males 972000 and 884872 females. The rural population of the district is 1348901 and urban population is 50791. Density of population per square k.m. is 631.4 Per 1000 men the number of women is 910. The total literacy of this district were 74% and 86% were males and 61% were women's 9.70% were farmer according to the total census farm worker was 17.78% and total land is 295690 hector. There are many kind of medical and health facilities in this district and for education facilities there are many primary and secondary schools and colleges and also two universities.

Indicators of Political Awareness:

The important indications of political awareness are analyzed below.

(A)Voting: The most widely accepted, significant and influential mode of participation is voting. At present in most of the states, the politics has become confused and the Governments are unstable. The voter is often faced with the dilemma-whether to vote and when to vote. If he decides to vote, he has to choose among a number of all India and regional parties. The steady increase of women's votes at each elections shows that the response of women to the political rights conferred on them by the constitution is improving.

(B) Discussing politics: Taking interest in politics and discussing political matters is also a mode of political awareness. Some people may not discuss politics with others but they keep themselves informed about political events, through various means of



communication as radio, television, newspapers and magazines.

(C) Campaigning and attending public meetings: Campaigning is one of the most significant modes of political participation. Public meetings are major instruments of campaigning. It educates and socializes the people. Voting has little meaning without election campaigning. It is only through campaigns that the voters come to know the major issues, alternative politics of the parties or contestants, their capabilities and credibilities.

(D) Contesting election: It is the highest level of awareness and its result is the active participation. A person who contests elections invariably performs almost all the political activities. The majority of women candidates come from relatively well-to-do families and members of old princely houses. There are new entrants with no previous political experience and their entry into the political arena has been through elections only.

Socio-Economic Status of Women Respondents:

After examining the classification of the present study, it is observed that most of the women (65%) belong to the age group between 20 to 35 years, whereas 35% of the women belong to the age group of 35 to 45 years. Women were relatively younger in age. They were mostly married women and majority respondents are Hindus. Age shows a definite trend towards rigidity and susceptibility in accepting or rejecting social and political values.

60% respondents are from upper castes, 21% of respondents are from

backward and 19% respondents are from scheduled castes. Caste is a very basic institution of the Indian society. It seems that in India all politics is caste politics, both at the state and central level. Whether it is the selection of candidates, the mode of election campaign, factionalism within political parties, the relative importance of leadership most things can be explained through the caste factor. The importance of caste has been acknowledged by Kapadiya (1954), Srinivas (1960), Betaille (1965) and Kothari (1970). All of them have mentioned that caste is the key factor in affecting the Indian political system.

76% of the women under the study are higher education, 8% of the women have completed middle education level, and 16% respondents have technical and vocational training. Educational status plays the most important role in job opportunity, living conditions, social and political attitude etc. It makes a deep impact on political thought and political behaviour of an individual. The educational status goes a long way in determining social political attitudes and behaviour. Lipset (1960) Key (1961) have emphasized that education strongly affects political awareness. Of all the demographic variables education has been found to have the greatest effect on political behavior.

46% of the respondents are house wives, 22% respondents are doing service and 32% respondents are studying in college and universities. Occupation provides not only a means of living but a certain social status and prestige in society and is closely related to economic status. Each occupation represents a style of life and a way of living. Occupation is



an important factor in shaping and moldings one's attitudes, thinking perceptions, judgments and in fact the total behaviour. Political participation is most likely to be influenced by occupation.

On examining the annual income of the respondents of the present study, it has been observed that 31% of respondents have the income of Rs.11,000/- or less, whereas 2% of the respondents family have annual income Rs.11,001 to Rs.21,000/-. An another 18% families who have the annual income Rs.21,000 to 30,000. While only 29% of the respondents families annual income of either Rs.31,001/- or more than up. These findings indicate that majority respondents belong to the annual income of lower middle class. Here, there can be seen correlation between income and political awareness.

55% respondents have 5 to 7 members, 30% respondents have 1 to 4 members and 15% respondents have and above members in their families. The respondents in the present study were asked to inform about their forms of family, it has been observed that the majority of respondents i.e. 82% are from nuclear families and 18% respondents come from joint families. The family has shaped and influenced the socio economic activities, political activities and attitudes of the individual who compose it. In the present study, it has been observed that in a nuclear family it is mainly the parents who act as socializing agents. In a joint family it is shared by other members and the parents do not play much vital role in political activity and as well as socialization.

Analysis and Interpretation:

The majority (65%) of the respondents have political interest highest in younger women of 20-30 age groups, while the interest is lower in older age group. However the girls are less interested in T.V. news and other political broadcasts as compared to entertainment programmers like serials, pictures, songs etc. They also do not take interest in political discussions. It may be mentioned here that the present study has been conducted on educated women. It seems that younger women take political interest as they read news papers but they do not bother to know what goes on in the parliament or what government is doing concerning various political issues. The majority of the educated women take interest in news papers. Political interest concerning political news in T.V. and interest in the parliament session is highest in the age group of 29-39. It shows that in leisure time they are more concerned about the policies of Govt. in comparison to younger women. The highest ratio of political interest in all the age groups is shown in election results. Though the score of younger women, 18-28 is higher than the other age groups. It is also evident that women do not take much interest in political discussions and political speeches. The reason may be that our social system and problem of law and order in these meetings do not allow them to participate in these activities.

In present study it is to be noted by investigating the co relation between caste and political interest is that inspire of all the efforts to improve the conditions of backward castes and scheduled castes, they do not take much interest in news papers and T.V. in



comparison to upper castes. In comparison to upper caste backward castes (B.C) and scheduled castes (S.C.) take keen interest in political discussion and political speeches and their awareness is definitely higher than upper caste women. The political interest of the law caste group is the highest as we find their interest in discussion and attending public meetings. It also shows that women of upper caste take a lot of interest in election results to make them aware of the system. It is also possible that B.C. and S.C. due to low income or low standard of living may not have the facility of newspaper and T.V. In the post independence India the political positions were initially monopolized by high castes due to their initial advantages, gradually the B.C. and S.C. groups got into the ruling section and they got many advantages and reservations. This is the reason that they are not only taking interest in political news but they assert their identity and position through politics and show a great interest in political matters.

The highest ratio for political participations is of middle income group. The next inline are higher and lower income groups. Almost all the educated women vote regularly. All the educated women from lower income group are voters but they vote according to the directions given by the men folk and other members of their family. They do not follow their own conscience and they certainly do not try to influence others. 71% of the educated women of middle income group have claimed that they follow their own decisions and 64% have claimed that they influence others to vote for a particular candidate. Almost all the education women of the higher income group vote according to their own

freewill. But they do not waste their time and energy to influence other's voting behaviour. Hence the educated women of the middle income group top the list and the educated women of higher and lower income group follow them. Because the educated women belonging to higher income group are self centre and they are concerned with their own comforts, facilities and income. They do not think about the society as a whole. The same is the case with lower income group. They have to struggle for their existence. They do not have sufficient time to take interest in political problems. Most of their time is taken up for finding the means for meeting their basic needs.

In this study the majority of the (63%) respondents are very much conscious of the corruption prevailing in Indian society. It attracts the attention of the educated women. They think that corruption in the political system obstructs the progress of the country and thus affects the whole society, especially women as they are emerging in different fields. India is the country with different religions and beliefs. Its constitution stands for secularism. The respondents are also in favors of secularism and they feel their responsibility to support the cause of unity in diversity. The present day politics are surrounded by criminals and criminalization. Criminals are coming up as politicians to get protection. The political parties also shelter them and use them as they provide money and muscle power at the time of election. The educated women are aware of the consequences of this criminalization and they feel that these practices should come to an end. Regionalism also plays important role in politics, even the representation in political activities depends upon it. The respondents are



aware and are against it. 42% respondents concerns casteism. This is somewhat surprising, because casteism is spoiling the chances of ability and in India casteism is the most important factor affecting political system. The respondents, it seems have taken caste as less dangerous to democracy than the other factors.

The students whose time is occupied in studies have the highest of political interest. The women in different field of services have middle level of ratio the lowest is housewives political interest. The analysis points out that much higher percentage of women studying in higher education take interest in politics as they have more time, more freedom of mobility and less responsibility. The impact of unionism is also the cause of arousing political interest. Print media and electronic media also create interest in younger mind. They are influenced by the glamour of our politicians. It can also be said that in present context the problems of unemployment is also the reason for taking interesting in politics. The students are aware of their voting right and they know the power politics and want to be one of them though they are not interested in political speeches or discussions or meetings because the parents do not allow their daughters to go to these places. On the other hand political interest of housewives is the lowest because in Indian families, they are guided by their husbands or the dominating male member. They also do not get time. Working women come in the middle, because they have to play the double role, as an employee and as wife and mother, In India families working women are allowed to go to their work place but for other places they still

depend upon the permission of their husbands. But they also take interest due to their concern of government's different policies such as promotion schemes and pay scale and other facilities provided to them by the government. This is the reason they take interest in election result.

It is noted investigating the family structure and political interest that political awareness about the nuclear family is higher than the joint family. The reason appears to be their social mobility and interaction as they are comparatively free to mix up with other groups for gaining information and knowledge. It can be said that the members of joint family system are so engrossed in family affairs that they get little to take interest in the affairs outside the family. There is a different side of the coins. As far as corruption and civilizations is concerned, the members of joint family system are more aware. Though the respondents from both the system are against corruption and civilizations. It shows that educated women. Whether she comes from joint or nuclear family is aware of her responsibilities towards society. One other interesting observation that feeling of efficacy is a little stronger in nuclear family than the women of joint family system, but the difference is less, it indicates that in the present political system a person cannot have confidence to influence the decision of policy makers. In nuclear family women have opportunity to mix with others and they discuss about the representatives and feel concerned about the malpractices going on in our elections, but in joint family the women members of the family are full of house hold responsibilities and they do



not care whether they are effective or not.

In present study it is to be noted by investigating the co-relation between Religion and political awareness is that Hindus and Muslims both the religious communities interest in polities. The Hindus show more political interest than Muslims. Though both groups take interest in newspapers, they do not take much interest in political news. Both the religious communities take more interest in election news. If we compare Hindu and Muslim women, we come to conclusion that Hindu women take more interest in comparison to Muslim women. Hindu women to be more active in politics and its process. Even Hindu women take interest in political speeches, meetings and parliamentary procedure it is evident that they want to know which party will favor their religious leanings and not interfere in their religious beliefs and tradition. However the majority (66%) of Hindu educated women have claimed that they are active in motivating and influencing others to vote in a particular way. Muslim educated women are close behind because Muslims being a minority community.

Thus study has been successful in achieving its objectives. It has shown that political awareness is 41% a lower middle level of political awareness. The results show that women are interested in polities, they read newspaper, take interest in T.V. News feel that system is corrupt and should be changed, they also feel that mass has power to change the system, but their feelings and interest do not extend to participation. Thus it is concluded that women are emerging as political by aware day byway but they are not actively participating. The

findings of the study are that Age and Occupation influences the political awareness. This shows that younger generation is taking active interest and feels the responsibility of the nation. The effect of family structure, religion and caste is statistically negative; it shows that educated women are not much different in thinking with respect to the caste and religion. Though the voting behaviour is different. All the respondents claim that they vote regularly, but they are not the members of any party or any political wing. The findings are little inconsistent with respect to income.

On the whole we can say that political parties have neglected their task of politically educating and mobilizing women. Women do not come as contestants in adequate numbers due to the increasing expenses of election threats of violence and character assassination. There is a strong need to build self confidence and to develop a strong sense of equality between men and women. If women come out of their shells to participate in politics and share the power they will have to work twice as hard as their male counter parts in order to be recognized and to make their presence felt. Strengthening the linkage between women politicians and women organizations is also needed.

Factors Hindering Women's Political Awareness:

The common pattern of women's political exclusion stem from (a) social and political discourses (b) political structures and institutions (c) the socio-cultural and functional constraints that put limits on women's individual and collective agency.



Patriarchy as a system of male domination shapes women's relationship in politics. It transforms male and females into men and women and construct the hierarchy of gender relations where men are privileged (Eisenstein 1984).

The gender role ideology is used as an ideological tool by patriarchy to place women within the private arena of home as mothers and wives and men in the public sphere. This is one of the vital factors that shape the level of women's political participation globally. However, this ideological divide is not reflective of the reality. The boundaries between public and private are often blurred in the daily lives of women. Women have to negotiate their entry into and claim on public space according to the discursive and material opportunities available in a given culture and society.

The nature of politics is an important factor for the inclusion or exclusion of women in politics. This conception of politics restricts political activity only in public arena and the private sphere of family life is rendered as apolitical. This public-private dichotomy in traditional definition of politics is used to exclude women from public political sphere and even when women are brought into politics they are entered as mothers and wives.

Male domination of politics, political parties and culture of formal political structures is another factor that hinders women's political participation. Often male dominated political parties have a male perspective on issues of national importance that disillusion women as their perspective is often

ignored and not reflected in the politics of their parties.

Politics is increasingly becoming commercialized. More and more money is needed to participate in politics. Women lack access to and ownership of productive resource, limiting the scope of their political work.

The chief cause of political apathy is that as compared to other human activities, political activity is less rewarded. For example, helping the relatives and friends or gathering means of material enjoyments providing a satisfaction it is more than the reward of the political participation. This devaluation may be psychological or social. From the social view point class conflict does not grow in the societies lacking economic.

A significant cause of political apathy is the consciousness of political helplessness among some people. Voters sometimes neglect to vote because they feel that one vote won't change the outcome. Thus, whenever the citizens feel that their political activity does not give significant results, they reduce political participation. Most of the persons feel that political influence depends upon income, social status, political experience, educational attainment and the not hope to achieve any political influence.

Enabling Environment for Women's Political Awareness:

Interlocking layer of gender inequalities are rooted in the power structures at the national level. Development and the globalization policies have led to increased poverty, exclusion and marginalization. Structural forces must be challenged and transform



by linking them with the rights of people. Without changing socio-cultural, political and economic structural barriers at the national level, the goal of gender equality or women's equal participation in politics and development will remain impossible to attain.

Another important element in the enabling environment relates to the nature of democracy and the level of democratization in society. The participative and decentralized form of governance creates greater space for citizens to participate in governance processes and structures. It also creates space for greater interaction between the state and the society.

Human capacities are dependent on the availability of resources such as education, health and employment that build capabilities and enlarge human choices. Access to education and employment is directly linked with women's ability to create space for themselves in politics and development.

Women's consciousness of their political rights is another critical element for women's individual and collective agency. Political consciousness through building transformative communities is the sustainable way to transform politics and development.

A strong women's movement and civil society is another condition of enabling environment that can influence the direction of politics in favor of women.

Triple roles of women in productive, reproductive and community management spheres must inform the

efforts for creating supportive environment for women's political participation. Provision of childcare and care work is vital to enabling women to participate in the development processes.

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