



Conceptual analysis on factors affecting political participation of women

M.Mryutyunjaya Rao

Research Scholar, Political Science and Public Administration, Andhra University,
Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh

Abstract: The present paper explains the Conceptual analysis on factors affecting political participation of women. Women's participation in politics is mainly influenced by the attitude of women towards politics, attitude of family and the society's attitude. Illiteracy, economic dependence and backwardness of the majority of women staying in rural areas are responsible for the paucity of women in politics

¹. Almond and Verba also observed that effective participation depends upon opportunities to participate in other spheres like family, school, voluntary organization and work place. A participatory polity rests upon a participatory society

Key words: Women, democracy, Political participation, socialization

Introduction

Political participation is the hallmark of a democratic setup. Nature, success and effectiveness of democracy largely depend on the extent to which equal, effective and actual participation is provided by the system to all its citizens. Politics is essentially an art of acquiring and exercising power the power to effectively influence the decision making processes and policies, to reverse the existing situations wherever. They are disadvantageous and to bring about the necessary social changes. Political socialization is a pre-condition to political participation. One cannot participate in a process, unless he/she acquires the knowledge, orientation and values towards the system to which he/she belongs. Therefore, before studying participation, it is pertinent to make an analysis of the process, extent and agencies of political socialization of the urban women under study. Political socialization is the process by which the individual learns the political culture, beliefs, value systems and behaviour

pattern which are necessary for his/her effective role perception and participation in the political system in which he/she lives.

Factors Affecting Political Participation of Women

Political participation is a dependent variable which depends upon various independent socio-economic and political factors. Verba and Nie observed that a person is more likely to be politically active if he is male, middle aged, relatively wealthy and well educated². Barnes and Kaase also found that interest in politics increases with age at least through middle age, spread of education and employment opportunities for women as well as their growing political mobilization³. Mohler reported that socially determined factors play an important role in determining the varying degrees of political participation. Age, gender and class are particularly influential in determining the political participation of individuals⁴. Allerbeck establishes that political participation



strongly depends on class. The higher is the level of class, the greater is the extent of participation of an individual in politics. The author also found that the political party activists belong to an upper class than to a lower class⁵.

Verba and Nie observed that individuals of higher socio-economic status are found to have the attitudes that motivate them to be politically active. They are also more interested in politics, have greater sense of political efficacy and feel greater sense of obligation to be a participant. These attitudes make the upper status citizens to be more politically active. Further, they also found that the membership of voluntary organizations have a significant effect on the political activities of the individuals⁶. The study of Milbrath on political participation reveals that more educated and more affluent individual is more likely to be interested in politics, have a sense of political efficacy and have the necessary monetary and other resources that allow him or her to be active politically. He argues that all else being equal, citizens at higher socio-economic levels will be more active in politics than those at lower levels. This generalization is consistent with most of the data from a variety of nations⁷.

The political attitudes are shaped and affected not only by one's own personality and the childhood upbringing but also by the multiplicity of other factors like some notable events, necessity of appeasement in regional or national interest, membership of an interest group and potential allegiance to political parties. The several studies revealed that age at entering politics, occupation, education, class, status,

period of operation in politics affect political participation.

Women's participation in politics is mainly influenced by the attitude of women towards politics, attitude of family and the society's attitude. Illiteracy, economic dependence and backwardness of the majority of women staying in rural areas are responsible for the paucity of women in politics⁸. Almond and Verba also observed that effective participation depends upon opportunities to participate in other spheres like family, school, voluntary organization and work place. A participatory polity rests upon a participatory society⁹. Verba and Nie found that political participation depends on one's social circumstances as his 'life space' where he lives, what he does for a living, his education etc. These social circumstances generate sets of attitudes conducive to political participation. The participation in politics also is affected by the institutional structure within which a person finds himself. The other factors include organizational membership, party membership, the nature of community in which he lives and his political beliefs¹⁰.

Angus Campbell and associates reported that women displayed a lower sense of political involvement and a lower sense of political efficacy and were less sophisticated with respect to political conceptualization than men¹¹. The socio-economic advantages and political activity are closely related to each other. The top political activists contain a majority from the upper socio-economic strata of the society. Greenstein and Polsby have pointed out that in India around 60 percent of the political activists come from the socio-economically advantaged group. The



reason for this may be that the higher socio-economic status brings with it a set of motivations which makes it more likely that an individual will become a participant in politics. They also consider political parties as a stimulator in political participation. If party mobilized social groups low on socioeconomic scale, the participation disparity between the haves and have not's will tend to be reduced. On the other hand, if the party stimulates those groups who are socio-economically higher, the disparity will increase between these two¹². Huntington and Nelson have identified some common factors of political participation. These include social status, income, occupation, communal groups and party identification which will influence the political participation¹³.

The socio-economic family background is also closely linked to political participation of the women. Milbrath and Goel assert that the gap between men and women's political participation is widest among lower-status people and narrowest among the upper status. They, however, argue that although socio-economic status affects all modes of political participation but its impact is more on some activities than on the others. Voting and particularized contacting are related less strongly to socio-economic status than other activities, especially communication activities. The socio-economic status is positively related to the unconventional political activities¹⁴.

Constitutional Provisions and women political provisions in India

On attaining Independence in the year 1947, India became a republic. The Constitution of India adopted a parliamentary form of government. The

government functions at different levels. At the apex level, there is the national government and governments at states and union territories. At the centre, the parliament consists of two houses i.e. the Upper House called the Rajya Sabha or the Council of States and the Lower House called the Lok Sabha (House of People). At the state level, the Upper House is called the Legislative Council and the Lower House is called the Legislative Assembly. Each state has its own local self-governments known as Panchayati Raj Institutions both at urban and rural areas Rural Panchayati Raj Institution has three tier structures consisting of the Zilla Panchayat at the district level, Taluk Panchayat at the taluk level, and Gram Panchayat at the village level.

The Constitution of India, one of the greatest documents ever produced came into force in the year 1950 guarantee justice, liberty and equality to all citizens. The preamble of the Constitution of India resolved to secure to all its citizens justice, social, economic and political, liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and to worship, equality of status and opportunity and to promote among them fraternity assuring the dignity of individual and the unity of nation. To attain this, the Constitution guarantees fundamental rights. Specific articles and amendments have been enacted to ensure that women and children enjoy the Constitutional rights. The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to adopt measures favoring women neutralizing the socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages that they face. The following are the various provisions in the constitution which ensures equality



between men and women. Article 14 guarantees equality before law and equal protection of law within the territory of India. This Article stands for absence of any discrimination by law or in their administration.

Article 15 prohibits discrimination on the basis of religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth. It is a guarantee against every form of discrimination. According to article 15(3), nothing shall prevent the state from making special provisions for the benefit of women and children.

Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity for all citizens in matter relating to employment or appointment to any office under state. Secondly no citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex, decent, place of birth, residence or any of them, be eligible for, or discriminated against in respect of any employment or office under the state.

Article 39- a) guarantees right to an adequate means of livelihood for all citizen. Article 39 b) guarantees equal pay for equal work for both men and women. c) that the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizen are not forced by economic necessity to enter occupations unsuited for their age or strength.

Article 42 guarantees just and humane condition of work and maternity relief. This is in accordance with Article 23 and 25 of Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Article 51-A clause (e) says that it shall be the duty of every citizen of India- to promote harmony and sprit of common brotherhood amongst all the people of India, transcending religious, linguistic

and religious or sectional diversities, to renounce practice derogatory to the dignity of women¹⁵.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment has added the following articles to the Constitution providing reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Article 243-(D) (2) states not less than 1/3 of the seats reserved under clause (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to S.C or as the case may be S.T. Article 243-(D) (3)-extends political reservation to women not less than 1/3 of the total number of seats to be filled by direct election in every panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a panchayat.

Article 243-(D) (4) extends reservation to elected offices as well. The office of the chairpersons in the panchayats or any other level shall be reserved S.C and the S.Ts and women in such a manner as legislature of a state may, by law provide. The legal Constitutional framework in India would appear a combination of Communitarian perspective on one hand and that of liberal democracy on the other hand. In spite of such provisions in the Constitution, the decades following independence witnessed a decline in the women's participation in politics. These rights appeared illusionary as there was a shift from the aims of the Constitution. Gap started widening in all political spheres. Article 325 and 326 guarantees political equality, equal right to participate in political activity and right to vote, respectively. While the latter has been accessed and enjoyed by large number of women, the right to equal participation is still a distant dream. The lack of space for participation in political



bodies has resulted in their presence in meager numbers in this decision making bodies.

Women in Indian politics

In India, the position of women in society has been expected to be improved due to the constitutional provisions of equal rights. However, more than half a century of political democracy in the country with planned economy activities for development has not brought significant reductions in the miseries of women. The constitutional sanction of political equality to women is enjoyed only to a limited extent in reality. The level of representation of women is low in the state legislature and in Parliament. India goes to polls regularly every five years and voters' turnout is uniformly high at around 64%. The recent trends indicate that though more and more women are eager to participate in politics, their share in representation is seriously undermined. All political parties whether national or regional continue to undervalue women as voters and as representatives. These political parties never bother to give party tickets to women. Tickets are allotted most undemocratically by the party President based on some parameters favoring those having well established political links.

The political participation of women is not very encouraging in India. The political empowerment of women in Andhra Pradesh is equally pathetic. In the state, the male participation has always been higher than women. Despite the increase in women's representation, the evidence suggests that there are still many challenges for elected women representatives in local government (UNICEF Report, 2007)¹⁶. To provide training and practice in the process of

decision-making, the rural democratic institutions are the ideal structures to begin with. One of the aims of the 73rd 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 Amendment Act. The amendment provides reservation of seats and posts of chairperson for women in all grassroots level democratic institutions in the countryside known as panchayats. This is a historic step of far reaching implications and significant repercussions on the political process in rural India. It lead to empowerment of women is essentially the process of upliftment of economic, social and political status of women, the traditionally underprivileged ones, in the society (Planning Commission Report, 2013)¹⁷. However, gender analysts must pay special attention to the wide ranging frameworks regarding the perspective, approach and strategies advocated at different forums for understanding & combating women's unfavorable placement in the society if we have to get rid of gender discrimination.

Conclusion

Women's participation in politics is mainly influenced by the attitude of women towards politics, attitude of family and the society's attitude. Illiteracy, economic dependence and backwardness of the majority of women staying in rural areas are responsible for the paucity of women in politics. The political participation of women is not very encouraging in India. The political empowerment of women in Andhra Pradesh is equally pathetic. In the state, the male participation has always been



higher than women. The Constitution not only grants equality of treatment to women but also calls upon the state to adopt measures favoring women neutralizing the socio-economic, educational and political disadvantages that they face.

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