

Political Participation and leadership of women in decision making

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Abstract

This study explores the women's role in the political participation and leadership in decision-making. The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. Every human being has the right to participate in decisions that define her or his life. This right is the foundation of the ideal of equal participation in decision-making among women and men. Women's confidence and self-esteem increase when they have greater knowledge, economic assets and income-earning capacity, and they are more likely to participate in both private and public decision-making. It argues that political participation and leadership of women in decision-making is successful step towards the empowerment.

The study examines the contribution of political participation and leadership of women in decision-making and its importance to their empowerment. The study indicates that women's decision-making power in the expressing their political views should play an important role in achieving gender balance.

Key words: Empowerment, Autonomy, Achievements, participation, leadership etc.

Introduction

Political participation and leadership is broadly defined as being a process through which individual plays a role in political life of his society, has the opportunity to take part in deciding what the common goals of that society are and the best way of achieving these goals. Political participation refers to actual

participation in these voluntary activities by which members of the society share in the selection of rules and directly or indirectly in the formulation of public policy¹. Politics and women have been in a difficult and estranged relationship. Politics, derived from the word ‘polis,’ was employed by the Greeks to evoke a shared context of community living and decision making. Pertinently and not surprisingly, it did not include women. Women were relegated to the ‘supposedly’ a political sphere of the family. The struggle to challenge this assumption has been a long and heroic one, and India has been the theatre of many such struggles.² The Universal Declaration of Human Rights recognizes the right of every person to take part in the government of his or her country. Equal access of men and women to power, decision-making and leadership at all levels is a necessary precondition for the proper functioning of democracy. The Political participation and leadership frames different political agendas to be developed by women taking part in politics through a range of activities such as discussion and debate, lobbying and activism in formal and informal ways.³

Political participation of women in decision making

Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and a condition for social justice and is also a necessary and fundamental prerequisite for equality, development and peace. A transformed partnership based on equality between women and men is a condition for people-centred sustainable development.⁴

True democracy is a system which in Abraham Lincoln’s words is a government of the people, by the people and for the people. While most of the democracies have given a system which has government elected by all the sections of societies, it is debatable whether the government comprises of all the diverse sections and importantly whether the government works for all the people of the democracy. In this context, the problem of low participation of women is of special concern for democracies and without changing that true democracy can never be achieved. Women’s participation in decision-making is essential for women’s interests to be incorporated into governance. It has been widely experienced that governance structures

which do not provide for adequate participation of women, often suffer from state interventions which are neither inclusive nor democratic. Including women, especially in local government is an essential step towards creating gender equal opportunities and gender sensitive policies.⁵

The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. The power relations that prevent women from leading fulfilling lives operate at many levels of society, from the most personal to the highly public. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real

integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is possible.⁶

Political Participation and Representation of Women in Indian Politics

Politics is directly related to governance and management of any society. Political power is necessary to formulate policies, laws and order for a state. Indian constitution provides provision for equal political participation of men and women in the process of formulation of government. But it is certainly not true in the case of women especially in a democratic country like India.

The state and its organizational entities impart equal role to women in decision making and policy formulation but some social and historical factors tends to create obstacles. In a democratic country like India both men and women are equally and legally eligible for political offices, in spite of the fact those women constitute half of the Indian population, the representatives of the women in state and central legislatures are very few. This void prevents the ideas & aspirations of half of the society to be expressed for the

development of women of the whole nation.⁷

By 1930, women had gained the right to vote. Women's participation in the national movement for the freedom of the country benefited them to gain some political and civil rights. They were not directly involved in the creation of new state and their rights in independent India. Constitution guaranteed right to vote to elect the government to each woman of free India but representation of women in political parties, parliament and other decision making bodies remained low even after independence.

The Power of decision making was approximately few and policy making was only limited to giving affirmation to the bill being to it due to tremendous political pressures and majority association with it. There was always a void between the formal idea of women's political participation and their meaningful use of power. The women who have been successfully politician are mostly from the families of great Political leaders or through male political patronage. In spite of that, very few women contest elections. Almost all parties hesitate to field women candidates. Women candidates are

considered to be weak for promoting the interest of party at local, regional and national levels.

Some women leaders have important place in Indian politics. Today Jayalalitha as a leader of AIADMK, Mamta Bannerjee as a leader of Trinamul congress and Mayawati as a leader of Bahujan Samaj party are instances in point. These are the leaders who can influence the decision of their own party as well as the course of national politics. The role of Indra Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi within the congress party is well admired. Both of them well prove the fact that women in power do not confine themselves to women issues only.

The present situation is considered much better as compared to the last. The women from the weaker sections of society are promoted to promote interest of the communities. This positive change in the society is provides new kind of women experiment and intensive political participation at the grass root level. The participation and leadership of women makes a developmental change in the society and also shows increase in the political participation in the form of tables given below.

Table –I Women Representation in Lok Sabha

Lok Sabha	year	Total seats (no.)	Members (no.) Males	Members (no.) Females	Percentage of Female Members to total
I	1952	499	477	22	4.41
II	1957	500	473	27	5.40
III	1962	503	469	34	6.76
IV	1967	523	492	31	5.93
V	1971	521	499	22	4.22
VI	1977	544	525	19	3.49
VII	1980	544	516	28	5.15
VIII	1984	544	500	44	8.09
IX	1989	517	460	27	5.22
X	1991	544	505	39	7.17
XI	1996	543	504	39	7.18
XII	1998	543	500	43	7.92
XIII	1999	543	494	49	9.02
XIV	2004	543	499	44	8.1

Source: 'Lok Sabha Members', Lok Sabha Secretariat. New Delhi.

According to table –I women representation in Lok Sabha statistics indicates that number of female participation in 1952 was 4.41%, year by year that percentage increased to

8.1 % by 2004. The lowest participation rate of women in Lok Sabha was in the year 1977 in 6th Lok Sabha i.e. only 3.49%. The highest participation rate of women in Lok Sabha was in the year 1999 in 13th Lok Sabha i.e. 9.02%.

Table –II Women’s Representation in Rajya Sabha

Rajya sabha	year	Total Seats (no.)	Members (no.) Males	Members (no.) Females	Percentage of Female members to total
I	1952	219	203	16	7.31
II	1957	237	219	18	7.59
III	1962	238	220	18	7.56
IV	1967	240	220	20	8.33
V	1971	243	226	17	7.00
VI	1977	244	219	25	10.25
VII	1980	244	220	24	9.84
VIII	1984	244	216	28	11.48
IX	1989	245	221	24	9.80
X	1991	245	207	38	15.51
XI	1996	223	204	19	8.52
XII	1998	245	230	15	6.12
XIII	1999	245	226	19	7.76
XIV	2005	243	218	25	10.29
XIV	2006	242	218	24	9.92

Source: ‘List of Members of Rajya Sabha’, Rajya Sabha Secretariat, New Delhi.

According to table –II women representation in Rajya Sabha statistics indicates that number of female participation in 1952 was 7.31%, year by year that percentage increased to 10.29 % by the year 2005. The lowest participation rate of women in Rajya Sabha was in the year 1998 in 12th Rajya Sabha i.e. only 6.12%. The highest participation rate of women in Rajya Sabha was in the year 1984 in 8th Rajya Sabha i.e. 11.48%.

If we compare both the situation in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha we can easily able to find out the participation level of women in Indian parliament was very minimal or dismal since the ages. It is obvious that the political participation of women is much better. But it is the women's responsibility to increase the participation up to the standard level. At least 50 % of women participation is the need of an hour in Indian democracy.

Increase in the role of Women MPs since the first Lok Sabha

The first Lok Sabha in 1951 had 22 women MPs. The current Lok Sabha has 66. In the span of 54 years and 16 Lok Sabha elections it amounts to a three- fold increase in the number of women MPs that

made their way to the lower house of the parliament. From 5% in 1951, women MPs constitute 12.2% of the Lok Sabha today. The rise in numbers has been steady through the years, both in absolute numbers and percentages. The notable exceptions have been the dip in numbers during the 6th Lok Sabha in 1977, the 9th Lok Sabha in 1989 and most recently the 14th Lok Sabha in 2004. The trends show a marked and steady increase from 1991 onwards to the present Lok Sabha. The 1991 figures show a jump from 5% in the previous Lok Sabha to 7% and the steady increase from thereon (except for 2004). It would be interesting to understand the factors for this watershed year and continuous rise and also the fall in numbers during 2004.⁸

S No	Year	Number of women MPs	Percentage of Women MPs
1	1951	22	4.50%
2	1957	22	4.45%
3	1962	31	6.28%
4	1967	29	5.58%
5	1971	28	5.41%
6	1977	19	3.51%
7	1980	28	5.29%
8	1984	43	7.95%
9	1989	29	5.48%
10	1991	39	7.30%
11	1996	40	7.37%
12	1998	43	7.92%
13	1999	49	9.02%
14	2004	45	8.29%
15	2009	59	10.87%
16	2014	66	12.15%

The average representation of women MPs (12.15%) is higher than the national average of women MLAs in state assemblies, which stands at a dismal 9%. While the numbers have increased over the

years, the percentage of women that make up the Lok Sabha even today is not a figure to be proud of, especially when the ideal number should be at 33% at least. We still have a long way to go.

Panchayat Raj and Participation of women in Decision Making

Indian Constitution made provisions relating to the establishment, powers, and responsibilities of the panchayats through the 73rd Amendment in 1993 with three tier systems, viz, panchayats (village governance bodies) at the village, intermediate and district levels in every state, except provision of skipping intermediate level in states with less than twenty lakh population. The states have been empowered through law for the composition of panchayats. The reform provided for reservation of both seats and leadership positions for the Scheduled Castes, tribes, and women. A normal duration of five years for panchayats has been provided with the authority of preparing the electoral rolls and conducting elections in the state Election Commission. The state government is also empowered to make laws providing criteria for disqualification of candidature from panchayat elections and also to legislate with respect to maintenance of accounts by the panchayats and their audit.

The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act (1992) created space for women in

political participation and decision making at the grass root level by providing that 1/3rd of the seats would be reserved for women all over the country. The 73rd constitutional amendment act (CAA), 1992 says that it provides reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) set up in two ways; for the office of the members and for that of the chairpersons. As per the clause (2) and (3) of article 243(d), not less than one third of the seats meant for direct election of members at each tier of the panchayats are to be reserved for women⁹

Greater participation of women in politics was viewed as independent not just on fulfilling the law, but on the assuring principles, democratic and meaningful administration of government. Women needed to know where and how to direct their concerns so that solutions were found to the problems women faced.

Active Participation of rural women in Panchayat Raj System, India!

By, 73rd and 74th Amendment Acts of 1992; Panchayati Raj System was established in India. This system gave grass-root level democracy. Rural women were not getting their due share in development process. Social and political

backwardness prevented them from taking part in decision making. But these amendments made provision for one-third reservation for women.

Hence, women got due share in policy making. Illiteracy among women could be reduced. Their leadership skill developed. They came out of four walls of houses and played decisive role in development. Gender bias is reduced. They became more aware about their rights. They have started to demand reservation in Parliament also.¹⁰

Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

Women in India are much better represented in the Panchayati Raj Institutions as compared to the Parliament. As per the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, in 2008 the Gram Panchayats had 37.8% women members, the Intermediate Panchayats 37% women members and the District Panchayats 35.3% women members. The total representation of women in all three tiers of the Panchayat amounted to 36.87%. This seems to be a result of Article 243D of the Indian Constitution, mandating at least 1/3rd of the seats in all tiers of the Panchayat. A further Amendment to the Article was

proposed in 2009, increasing the reservation to 50%, but was not passed. Some states such as Bihar have 50% reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj as per the State Legislation, but not all the states in India have adopted similar legislations.¹¹

Status and Quality of Women Participation in Panchayati Raj System

According to the Ministry of Panchayati Raj's mid-term appraisal of the State of the Panchayat 2006-07, 'No less than 10 lakh women are in our Panchayati Raj Institutions, comprising 37% of all those elected and rising to as high as 54% in Bihar, which has 50% reservation for women'.

Increased political accountability to women comes out only from increasing their number amongst decision makers, although this is necessary and important. It must also be linked to improved democratic governance overall, understood as inclusive, responsive and accountable management of public affairs. Therefore several indicators have been identified for determining the status and quality of women participation in the local political process.

1. Participation in the Gram Sabha

Participation has been taken as a vital index for the women members to assess their empowerment in panchyati raj institutions. According to the 73rd Amendment (Part ix), a Gram Sabha may exercise powers and perform functions at the village level as provided by laws enacted by its state legislature.

A large proportion of female is organising and attending the gram sabha meetings. A study conducted during 2008-09 by Ministry of Panchayati Raj showed that a sizeable 93% of male Pradhans reported performing their primary role of organising and attending the Gram Sabha meetings. However, smaller in numbers than male pradhans, a significantly large proportion of male pradhans (86 percent) also reported executing this important role of being a local Panchayati Raj functionary.

2. Interaction with Government officials

According to the statics and data (Ministry of Panchayat Raj) the women folk participate in the Gram Saba meetings; however, there persists hesitation when it comes to interaction with the officials about their problems or developmental works. Sometimes gender

disparity becomes a hindrance towards putting forward their view point. The all India figure shows that more than half the total pradhans maintained good relations with the local police. By contrast, 31% of ward members reported interaction of local police among the elected women representatives, nearly 32% reported regular interaction with the police, in comparison to 45% of men (study conducted by Ministry of Panchayati Raj).

3. Participation in Community Mobilisation

Effective participation is not adequately reflected in statistics on meeting attendance, but may also be tested by evaluating the elected representatives in terms of their articulation, openness to discussion, adopting issues and generally solving problems of the community. They are more effective when they succeed in mobilising the community about various developmental issues and thus, create awareness among the people. A study on the all India level on community mobilisation on health related issues showed that the total of 43% of women representatives and about 47% of men reported taking part in health related campaigns.

Conclusion

The paper discusses the political participation and leadership of women in decision making. Women play an imperative role in making a nation progressive and guide it towards development. Women's participation in decision-making is essential for women's interests to be incorporated into governance. It has been widely experienced that governance structures which do not provide for adequate participation of women, often suffer from state interventions which are neither inclusive nor democratic. The decentralization of governance which is taking place for last two decades has increased the importance of measuring participation of women in decision making. The women also make a great contribution in the political participation and making decisions for government formation. With the passing of time, there come different changes in the form of increase in the number of participants in the Lok Sabha, Rajiya Sabha, Gram sabha etc. And this also proves a progressive development in the society. This article also highlights the political participation of women in Panchayat Raj System. The 73rd constitutional Amendment Act has been

passed to assured women's representation in Panchayati Raj System. This paper discusses the political participation and leadership of women in decision making.

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