



Issues and challenges of women participation in politics

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Abstract

Women equality with men is almost necessary in all aspect of life. Equal voting right in election represents country's initiative to establish equality among men and women in democracy. But the current scenario of policies has witnesses that a woman does not get equal opportunities like men to participate in political affairs. Numbers of constrain affect women participation in politics and decision making. This paper aims to explore issues and challenges faces by women in political participation. This is conceptual paper that based on review the literature from various research generals, articles and case studies to explores important aspect of women's' political participation.

Keywords: women equality, equal voting right, women participation, politics

Introduction

It is very difficult for a woman to make up her mind to enter politics. Once she makes up her own mind, then she has to prepare her husband, and her children, and her family. Once she has overcome all these obstacles and applies for the ticket, then the male aspirants against whom she is applying make up all sorts of stories about her. And after all this, when her name goes to the party bosses, they do not select her name because they fear losing that seat.

Women's participation in politics of any country gives a strong message globally not only in terms of equality and freedom of liberty but also in the space provided for women in the democratic framework of electoral politics. India has one of the strongest laws that provide women a life with full honor and dignity. But the customs, patriarchal set ups and societal norms have always treated them as subordinate to men. They are always taught to be submissive. Because of unequal distribution of resources, women do not have adequate resources, be it economic, material or human. It should come as no surprise, therefore, that women's under-representation in American politics raises grave concerns regarding democratic legitimacy and fundamental issues of political representation. Electing more women increases the likelihood that policy debates and deliberations include women's views and experiences. Political participation means which allows for 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. The prime obstacle that hinders women's representation and participation is patriarchy. It is the very basis that makes most of the society realize and even forces them to think that women are incapable of political participation and representation. And, so they should be restricted inside the four walls to perform household chores. Some of the facets of patriarchy that play major role are (a) public-private divide (b) lack of family support especially husband (c) the belief that

politics is man's arena (d) political parties also believe that women lack the 'win-ability' characteristics.

Literature review

Many researchers including Randall (1987) ^[6], Matland and Taylor, (1997) Rule, (1981) ^[9] explores various factors hinders women participation in politics such as lack of time for politics due to their domestic obligations, their lack of socialization for politics, their lower social capital and weaker asset base than men owing to discrimination in schools and in the market, their under representation in the jobs that favor political careers, their marginalization within male-dominated parties, their inability to overcome male and incumbent bias in certain types of electoral systems. Research by Browne and Barret (1991) found a strong association between female education and socio-economic development at both the individual and societal level. Oduol (2008) ^[13] found access to education and lack of quality education still remains a barrier for many women. That shows education ill-equips women for leadership.

Some of the researcher including Kellerman & Rhode (2007) ^[10], Kiamba (2008) ^[11] found gender stereotype was one of the important barriers for women leadership. That explained women face a 'double edged sword' ascribed to gender role stereotypes, as there is a long-standing and widespread belief that male traits are consistent with leadership. Kunovich, Paxton and Hughes (2007) explained that cultural ideas about women can affect women's levels of representation throughout the political process, from an individual woman's decision to enter politics, to party selection of candidates, to the decisions made by voters on Election Day.

Bari, (2005) ^[1] in a study formulated and narrated some important factors which hinder the women political participation. Ideological factors, political factors, socio-cultural factors, economic factors are very important in this regards. Besides these lack of capital and strategy for women

political participation are also in the same regard. Bano, (2009)^[2] conducted a study to observe the situation of women in Parliament in Pakistan. The focus of this research is on the role of Pakistani women in the political arena. The study observes how this numerical strength in parliament has contributed to the empowerment of women. The study concluded that in relative terms, the status of women has improved in contemporary society with the passage of time, but the ideal of women's empowerment is still a distant dream. McCarthy and Sultana, (2004)^[4] conducted a study to explore the possible hindrance in the women political participation. Domestic violence and other forms of violence are flourishing in families, society and also in the state as a means of controlling women. Their subordinate social and legal status and domination by men in the family, society and state obstruct their participation in public life. Hence the patriarchal mind-set is considered to be a key issue in limiting the women political participation. National Commission on the Status of Women (NCSW, 2010)^[5] in its report suggested that women are not much active despite coming into the field of politics. Although women are brought into political institutions, no effort is made to transform the patriarchal nature and culture of institutions. MoWA (2006)^[8] shows the number of elected women representatives is still low; More and more women are engaged in formal employment, but are underrepresented in middle and higher management positions; The number of women leaders and decision makers at the various level of the decentralized government structure is still very low.

There are numbers of obstacle of women participation in politics such as.

1. **Illiteracy** is one of the main hurdles in making women as politically empowered. Because of lack of understanding they do not know about their basic and political rights. Gender disparities in terms of education, ownership of resources and continual biased attitudes still act as barriers for women leaders. Education influences the social mobility of women. Formal education such as provided at educational institutions created opportunities for leadership, and imparted leadership essential skills (Walters & Mason (1994)^[14].
2. **Work and family**- uneven distribution of house hold work between men and women also one of the important factors in this regards. Uneven distribution of family care responsibilities means that women spend far more time than men in home- and child-care. It relating not just to the time, effort, and medical care of pregnancy and childbirth, but to the far greater maternal involvement necessary for breastfeeding, and to the persistent tendency of women to do a larger share of childcare as the child grows.
3. **Lack of political networks**- The lack of openness in political decision-making and undemocratic internal processes poses a challenge for all newcomers, but particularly for women as they tend to lack insider knowledge or political networks.
4. **Private-public divide** in terms of domain identification and male preponderance in political institutions. Because of their low proportion in inner political party structure of India, they are failed to gather resources and support for nurturing their political constituencies.

5. **Lack of financial support** - Women do not get adequate financial support from the political parties to contest the elections.

6. **Societal and cultural norms** imposed on women bar them from entering politics. They have to accept the dictates imposed on them and bear the burden of society. They also bear their deprivation and undermining status thinking as a culture of the society. Public attitudes not only determine how many female candidates win a general election, but also directly and indirectly how many are considered and nominated for office (Welch and Sigelman, 1982)^[15]

Conclusion

It is the need of the hour in a country like India to have equal participation of women in mainstream political activity. Society needs to deconstruct the stereotype of women as limited to household activities only. Overall political parties' environment too is not women friendly, they have to struggle hard and face multi-dimensional issues to create space for them in the party. it is important for all institutions (state, family and community) to respond to women's specific needs such as bridging gaps in education, renegotiating gender roles, the gender division of labor and addressing biased attitudes

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