

Political Participation of Women in Punjab

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Abstract

In many Western settings of democracy, women's political participation has increased significantly; in Asian countries, however, women are still left behind in terms of political involvement. This paper examines women's political involvement in a gender divided society where women in a highly patriarchal culture and political structure have unequal social standing. Femininity, political socialization, political interest, political effectiveness and patriarchal political culture have been taken as predictors for evaluating women's political participation.

Keywords: Women, Political participation , government position and decision making power.

The empowerment of women is an important issue in our society. The ultimate aim of empowering women is to provide an increased awareness of their rights, duties and equal participation in all spheres of life. So far as political participation is concerned, it is a process by which women participate in the functioning of Government. It is not merely right to vote but also includes their representation in politics, their involvement in decision making process of governance. The Indian Constitution is firmly, grounded in the Principles of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality and Justice. But these provisions have not translated into the intended status for women in Country, be it in the economic or political front.

In Punjab women are more or less interested in decision making bodies and many issues are left unattended. The study reveals that their presence in politics as voters, candidates, lobbyists and political party office holders, on an equal footing with people, is still a vision. They also have to understand the importance of their political life.

Women are lacking behind and are also under represented not only in higher positions like holding office, civil service, private sector or academics but also as voters. Starting from the local level to the global level, leadership of women and participation in politics are restricted and they are not as independent as the men. This occurs time and again in spite of their proven track record of their consistent performance in leadership roles and as leaders who bring about change, and their right to be equally represented in a democratic government.

Women face various obstacles when it comes to participate in political life. Some laws and institutions that are discriminatory in nature act as structural barriers which limits women's to run for office. The gaps in capacity which means that women are less likely to have education than men, contacts and resources which are necessary to become effective leaders.

The participation of women in all spheres of public life is essential to develop and advance women fully. If the level of participation rates increases it will also be beneficial for women which will also encourage other women to participate in public life and help in crushing down harmful labels and expectations that act as a strong negative wall for women's ability to play a central role in public life, including the processes of peace-building.

Since women have been historically marginalized in all the spheres of social life, to uplift their overall status, women must be well represented at the level of policy formulation and implementation, because Politics is a crucial decision-making arena. Individuals holding official government positions get to determine whether to distribute scarce resources. Politicians make political decisions which can benefit certain citizens to the detriment of others. Political power on the other hand is valuably good. Politicians have control over other social structures such as the family or education and are in a position to codify particular practices into law. They have the power to enforce their decisions, sometimes with force. Moreover holding a political position is to hold a position of authority. That is why, if women are not around when decisions are made their interests may not be served

Rajeshwari Deshpande (2011) talks about women's participation in the election of 2004 about the issues which relate to their participation in public and politics which she regards as a positive pointer towards women's empowerment and strengthening in politics in the future. She also writes that it is not clear whether these pointers would serve to mobilize women over the decisions on social and economic problems, where women of different social groups have

differences in their opinions. It can also be said that women act as a single unit in some particular respects and in some other respects, they do not. She concludes by saying that gendered actuality thus appears to be a covered reality.

In the article “Political participation of women in India” by Manuka Khanna she talks about how India started its journey with liberty, equality and justice as its most important ideals which made the women of India feel secure because it gave them a sense of security with promises of equal treatment, survival and gender justice. She writes that in the present times the women are gaining consciousness of their autonomy and capacity to act as full citizens and that the role of women needs to be recognized in the social, political and economic context. She also says that the inclusion of women is needed in the political process because if not done so then the decisions taken may result in policies only reflecting the perspective of male and may not be in the interest of women.

Renu Sethi in her article “Determinants of women’s active political participation’ raises two fundamental questions which are 1) whether male dominance of power processes derives from female preference or male imposition or both and 2) whether male dominance is natural or conventional. She writes that the fact of few women participating in upper level politics where decision are made cannot determine their low level of participation.

“Female political participation and health in India”, an article by Suzanne Gleason begins with her exploring of the factors that influence the decision of participation and it also focuses on why there is gender gap in the political participation. She writes about the costs of voting which include the time involved in receiving information and visiting the polls which is seen to be lower for the people with higher education level and those who do not care much about the value of time. She also talks about the vote of an individual which is more likely to matter when there is a small voting constituency. Although the individuals know that their vote will play a minor role in decision making yet their votes can still change the outcome of any election. She points out that wealth and social status is what determines eligibility in politics.

OBJECTIVES

- To analyse the factor responsible for low participation in assembly election.
- To provide suggestions to improve the women participation in Politic

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Present research is a qualitative research based on primary and secondary data . Interview schedule, newspapers , journals, magazines , elections manifesto and various elction department and websites have been used to collect data for research purpose. The focus of the study is on Punjab women specially political participation of rural women in different regions of Punjab.

RESULT AND FINDINGS

Punjab as a state of India is known as the land of five rivers and has a particular pattern of culture, tradition, polity and economy based on its historical, and socioeconomic and political settings. The 74th constitutional amendment has not only provided a new panorama to urban bodies through devolution of power but also has become a democratic apparatus with voice of all including urban women to assert their rightful share in the process of urban governance. It is a legislative step to empowering women and to train them for the next higher step in the decision making process with an expectation of gradual rise of women's political participation in future.

Political participation is a vital link towards the total empowerment of women. With that empowerment will create a balanced environment with gender just polity and she will be at par with men as partner and equal participant in the progress of the society. However this upsurge of women's power in urban governance with the pace of urbanization and industrialization requires introspection for understanding the ground realities in the course of their actual performance. As empowerment signifies the extent of autonomy and choice in one's life style there is a need for measuring the degree, dimension and nature of participation of women councilors to understand whether their participation is spontaneous or induced one, and how far the role performance is effective and genuine

In India, the constitutional provisions, social laws and judicial provisions are in a direction of changing the status of women from merely being a mother or housewife to an active citizen having rights' and duties in the political system and in the process of decision-making as well as building the nation. From this point of view as well as from feminist consideration which is based on the concept of equality, rights and identity of women, participation of women in the political process has assumed a core area of study in social sciences and in gender studies. Modern gender studies have rightly emphasized upon the women's participation in economic

development as well as in political decision-making which would lead to establish the concepts like 'women in development' and 'empowerment of women'.

Social variables like age, education, income, occupation etc. result in differential impacts of environment in learning. Political socialization is nevertheless a determining factor for participation of the individual in the political process, which is an indicator of participatory political culture on which democracy flourishes and becomes more strengthened. Political socialization also creates political efficacy and there is a close link between political efficacy and political participation. Whereas the former relates to the expectations of the individual's efficacy in politics, the latter manifests itself in its real participation in the processes through which members of a community engage in the selection of representatives and, directly or indirectly, in the formulation of public policies. It is a psychological disposition of an individual towards the political objects like the system, the issues and the process. As women constitute half of country's population, their involvement in the decision-making process is needed for the progress of democracy, society and building of the nation. Moreover, the equality, development and empowerment of women are closely linked with the shaping and sharing of power as well as in making and taking political decisions for allocation of values for the society

The Indian Constitution guarantees political equality, or in other words, equal right of participation in the political process of the country to all citizens irrespective of sex or occupation etc. But still women's participation in politics is found marginal. However, several indicators of political participation have been selected in order to find out the extent of women's involvement in politics. Membership of voluntary associations, groups and organizations, though a non-political one, has got its impact upon the political behaviour of the individual.

When it comes to Punjab we know that Punjab is the most developed state in India but has one of the lowest female population which is lower than the national average. Though we see that the female voters were more in percentage compared to that of the male voters, there is a very huge difference in the number and percentage of seats won in both 2012 and 2017. In Punjab only six women candidate out of the 81 who contested in the election could win the seat, which means only 5% of female became a part of the 117-seat assembly. However in the year 2012, 14 out of 93 women candidates had won, which was 15% of the total women candidates nominated. It is

clear that the percentage of the women in the assembly has fallen to half, with only 7.5% women candidates out of their total being elected this time.

It will not be wrong to say that education, occupation of the husband, financial support plays a major role in determining the participation of the women in politics. All these variables play a very important role because when one talks of elections, it is impossible to go on without talking of the financial status of a candidate. During election campaigns a lot of money is needed and one cannot do away without spending a huge amount of money and so, in the scenario of Punjab it is evident that the women who have participated have a huge amount of declared assets which makes them capable in contesting the elections.

There are also many variables which adds to the low participation of women in politics. They are:

Psychological variables:

This refers to the degree to which the females are interested and concerned about politics and public spheres. Punjab as a patriarchal society gives more importance to the male members and look at politics as a platform for males and this effects the women folk upto a great extent. The societal behavior also plays a major role in shaping the women to become leaders. Family and child-care responsibilities lead to role conflicts during the youth. The women who are interested in pursuing a career in politics enter the political sphere at a later age when they have fulfilled their responsibilities towards the family hence the data shown in *table 4.3* gives an evidence of women participating in the later years and the younger women who are into politics are unmarried which again shows that familial responsibilities also plays an important role. This creates a greater problem for them as they have to devote more energy and struggle hard in order to compete with the men who have made an early start.

Social variables:

Social variables such as age, education play an important role in determining the participation of the women folk in politics. All these factors may act as a barrier the participation differently in different political and cultural contexts, and their effect on participation may not be stable. In general, women with higher education and higher socio economic status have easier access to politics than the uneducated and the persons of lower status (*refer table 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6*).

Practices such as female seclusion and sex segregation and division of labour among the family members itself and many other aspects of gender relations strongly contribute to the shaping of the ideology of women towards politics. The women are often discouraged from participating due to social and familial constraints and responsibilities of being a “female”. Men usually do not encourage women to vote, unless they want votes for the candidate of their choice. Women themselves are also reluctant to go for voting since they have too many household chores. Further, repeated pregnancies, lactation, too many siblings to look after and extremely poor health status also act as barriers for the women folk to participate in the elections.

Economic variables:

Economic status or financial status plays one of the most important role in determining a woman’s chance of participating and winning in the elections because one needs to be financially and economically secure for one cannot spend all his/her assets during the campaigning of elections as there is no guarantee of whether the person will win or not.. Thus, the cost of the elections is a major hinderance to the participation of women since majority of women lack control on financial resources and families usually do not support them . In case they work within the home their work is regarded as "invisible" or "duty" and is not considered to be significant. A woman’s position becomes vulnerable due to increasing unemployment and exploitation, in the form of unequal pay (wage gap) for equal work among males and females. Consequently, she does not have a substantial reserve which she can spend on her campaign and so there are less number of female participants in elections because even if they want to contest these factors pull them back from moving towards the forefront.

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