



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN: CHALLENGES

B.N. Sureka

PhD Research Scholar, Department of Public Administration, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Abstract

The paper discusses women's political empowerment and challenges. Women's empowerment has come to be associated with their struggle for social justice, equality, and equality. Empowerment entails transitioning from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. It would emphasise women's inherent power. To truly empower women, it is necessary to enable them to recognize their own strengths and potential, as well as the uniqueness of their freedom of thought, expression, and action, in order for them to fully experience every moment of their lives. Women's participation in political processes is hampered by a variety of social, economic, historical, geographic, political, and cultural issues, resulting in low participation and even exclusion. Women's political participation is still hampered by illiteracy, the triple burden of women, patriarchal norms, a lack of access to and control over income and other resources, restrictions on public spaces, and insensitive legal systems.

Key Words: *Political Empowerment, Challenges, Freedom of Thought, Cultural Issues.*

Introduction

Empowerment refers to the process of challenging existing power relations and gaining more influence over power sources. Women's empowerment has come to be associated with their struggle for social justice, equality, and equality. Empowerment entails transitioning from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power. It would emphasise women's inherent power. To truly empower women, it is necessary to enable them to recognise their own strengths and potential, as well as the uniqueness of their freedom of thought, expression, and action, in order for them to fully experience every moment of their lives. Empowering women entails not only making them aware of their abilities, but also providing them with the opportunities, resources, and external and internal environments they require to maximize their inherent self-esteem, self-reliance, and self-dignity, as well as the ability to speak out against injustice, exploitation, and violence against women. Empowerment entails creating an environment in which people can make the most of their lives. Empowerment can also refer to the development or acquisition of the ability to perform specific tasks and achieve specific goals.

1. Political empowerment of women

Women's empowerment is one of the most important challenges to global growth; 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in abject poverty are women. For these ladies, poverty is more than just a lack of resources. It implies that rights are being denied, opportunities are being restricted, and voices are being silenced. According to the United Nations Millennium Campaign, the world's poverty would have been cut in half by 2015. According to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan, women and men are equal participants in both private and public domains of life and decision-making. Women must be able to influence how decisions are made and their lives are shaped. 1975 was designated as International Women's Year by the United Nations. It was a watershed moment in women's global empowerment. In 1979, the United Nations adopted the treaty on the abolition of all forms of discrimination against women. Despite the fact that the Indian Constitution guarantees equal rights to women, our culture continues to discriminate against women based on their gender. Women's empowerment includes a number of factors, such as economic opportunity, social equality, and personal liberties. Women's human rights are routinely denied as a result of cultural norms.



Their voices are silenced in the absence of power, and there is no simple or quick solution to the issues of women's empowerment. The genuine solution is based on a comprehensive approach that addresses all major interconnected concerns, such as economic well-being, social justice, education, health, and tradition.

2. Women's political empowerment: Challenges

People's level of participation in decisions and processes affecting their lives demonstrates their empowerment. In theory, empowerment and involvement should be two sides of the same coin. In reality, much of what passes for popular participation in development and relief efforts does not empower society's poorest and most vulnerable members. If participation is to generate empowerment, it must be more than a process of consultation on decisions made elsewhere. Women's equitable participation in political life is critical to women's overall development. Equal participation of women in decision-making is not only a demand for basic justice or democracy; it can also be viewed as a necessary prerequisite for women's interests to be taken into account. Women's active participation and the incorporation of women's perspectives at all levels of decision-making are required for the goals of equality, progress, and peace to be realised. Women's participation in political processes is hampered by a variety of social, economic, historical, geographic, political, and cultural issues, resulting in low participation and even exclusion. Women's political participation is still hampered by illiteracy, the triple burden of women, patriarchal norms, a lack of access to and control over income and other resources, restrictions on public spaces, and insensitive legal systems. So far, no specific laws or policies have been enacted to strengthen the foundations for women's political and economic empowerment. There are no mechanisms in place to enable and protect women's political participation, such as a strong supportive constituency or a better understanding of their rights and responsibilities as elected members.

2.1. Cultural aspects

Despite all of the progress made, women continue to be defined by their culturally assigned roles as mothers, wives, and daughters, which remains one of the most significant barriers to women entering national and local politics. Mothers must take the lead in eradicating gender stereotypes by raising gender-sensitive sons and daughters. Cultural norms impede a woman's mobility as well as her participation in the public sphere. These cultural standards are reinforced and sustained by the powerful institutions of family, caste, and religion. Because of inconvenient schedules, location, distance, and a lack of escort, women elected representatives find it difficult to attend meetings. Emergency meetings are occasionally held at inconvenient times, such as late at night or early in the morning, preventing women from attending and, as a result, excluding them from decision-making processes in general. Most women have been socialized to believe that politics is a man's domain with little influence for women. Many women face significant obstacles as a result of societal beliefs about the traditional division of labour, in which women are perceived to be limited to specific functions.

2.2. Factors of socioeconomic status

When women enter politics, they frequently face a triple burden: they must work at home, at their jobs, and in political institutions. Because it is difficult for a woman to bear this triple burden, it can become a hindrance to her political work or interfere with her domestic responsibilities.



2.3. Literacy

Women's socioeconomic status is linked to literacy; however, her gender has an independent and equally significant impact on her access to the domain.

2.4. Caste

Caste has played an important role in drawing attention to issues affecting women who are more marginalized. In a highly hierarchical society, women from lower castes have less access to public forums, which is exacerbated by their gender. As a result of their exclusion, these women find it difficult to represent and articulate the concerns of their constituents, and their demands are frequently ignored or swallowed by the dominant segments of society.

2.5. Economic

Poverty is regarded as a major impediment because it indicates that women are, or have become, more concerned with earning a living than with keeping up with political developments.

2.6. Election-related Spending

As a result of the women's movement, women's issues became a focal point in the manifestos of many political parties. When it came to their representation, however, it was primarily a show of support.

2.7. Awareness

Because of a lack of awareness, women are not unaware of the impact of politics on their lives. Political participation would benefit them because it would alleviate the difficulties that women face and elevate their social standing. As a result, increasing women's awareness of the importance of participating in political activities will lead to empowerment.

2.8. Personal/familial

The family is the primary site of oppression, where patriarchal ideals are imposed and women's personhood is rarely questioned. Women are viewed as liabilities in the family, resulting in gender discrimination in all aspects of their lives. On a personal level, the private and public dichotomy causes a lack of self-esteem and confidence in women as a result of the socialization process reinforcing her subservient status. This is one of the most significant barriers to their development and participation in public life and activities.

2.9. Family involvement in the past

When a woman's family is already politically interested, it can help her gain the necessary exposure and possibly gain admission into the political sphere. When a woman comes from a political family, she is more confident and believes she needs less training than a woman who does not come from a political family.

2.10. In accordance with the law

In-law opposition is another major impediment for women seeking to enter politics. The main reason for voting for her is to ensure that the seat does not move and that the family/party retains power.

2.11. Support from the community

Community support is critical in encouraging women to participate in panchayats, which benefits the entire community and, as a result, promotes behavioural changes. Family support for women:



Women's families provide only rudimentary assistance. This assistance is typically in the form of encouragement to run for office, but it rarely extends to assisting them in carrying out their responsibilities as elected representatives. Women have fewer resources at their disposal than men, which could be used in electoral campaigns.

2.12. Corruption and criminalization

Politics has recently become a breeding ground for illegal activity. Women can play a positive role in decriminalizing politics, which would create a more favourable environment for their admission and effective engagement in politics, thereby facilitating substantive equality for women. As a result of the women's movement, women's issues have become a focal point in the manifestos of many political parties. However, it was primarily as a show of support for their representation.

2.13. Control over resources and data

Control over decision-making in elected bodies: When elections are contested and won by a woman elected representative in her individual capacity, she has significantly less control over the decision-making process. Women's exclusion from decision-making has the effect of negating recognition of women's decision-making abilities, as well as the challenges women face in negotiating finances, programmes, and schemes for their constituency while exercising their rights as elected leaders.

2.14. Earnings authority

Women do not have authority over their wages in most Indian homes, and it is customary for them to pass up their earnings to their husbands or family head. Despite the fact that women hold 33% of the seats in local self-government bodies, the situation remains unsatisfactory in general. Women in India are currently granted legal and constitutional equality with men. However, the ostensibly legislative and developmental initiatives have benefited only a small proportion of educated women in cities and dominant caste women in rural areas. The issue of indigenous women's political standing is still a serious one that needs to be addressed by society. Gender equality is undemocratic, inequitable, autocratic, illegal, and unethical. The ideal of equality may be realised when women can freely exercise their political rights and use their political weapons.

Conclusion

Women's empowerment is a global phenomenon that has been discussed with varying degrees of seriousness in many countries. Women's empowerment has been a hot topic in India since the country's independence but it gained prominence after economic liberalization began in 1991. However; there are a number of challenges and opportunities associated with women's empowerment in different parts of the world. Political empowerment is a major challenge for women today; it can have both positive and negative effects on their lives, especially if they are poor or vulnerable. Political empowerment has an impact on women's education levels as well as access to health care facilities in a variety of areas such as poverty alleviation, population control, and maternal mortality rates. Women's empowerment is the process by which they are given the ability to make decisions in their lives. It also refers to a set of actions and policies aimed at achieving empowerment for women, regardless of their social status. Education, healthcare, employment opportunities, and political participation can all lead to empowerment.



References

1. Pande, Sneha Latha 'Political empowerment of women', journal of rural development Vol.4, December, 1997.
2. J.P. Singh 'Indian democracy and empowerment of women' Indian journal of Public Administration Vol. XLV1, October – December, 2000.
3. P. Eswaraiyah 'Reservation for women in parliament and legislation: an antidote to their Marginalization' social action Vol.53 April – June, 2003.
4. S.N. Sahu, N. Laxmi 'Indian journal of Public - Administration' Vol . 1L1,Jan-Mar 2005.
5. R. Limbadri 'Grass root democracy: the experience of Dalits in PRIs' Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. LIII, No. 4, Oct.-Dec. 2007.
6. Charanjeev Singh 'Diminishing male dominance and Resurgence of women leadership in PRIs: an empirical study of Himachal Pradesh' Indian Journal of Public Administration, Vol. LIII, No.2, April-June 2007.
7. Anil. S. Sutar 'The emerging women leadership – Panchayat's in Karnataka' social action Vol.58 January – March, 2007.
8. NipurTiwari 'Women in Panchayats' Indian journal of Public Administration Vol. L1V, January – March, 2008.
9. Dr.K.Muthalagu 'Indian women in development perspective?' Kurukshetra Vol.52, September, 2008.