

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: A STUDY IN SRIKAKULAM DISTRICT

By

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CHAPTER - VI

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Women's role in politics and the study of women in politics are recent trends. The present research study carried out a micro level appraisal of women's political participation in various aspects of political process in Srikakulam district of the state of Andhra Pradesh in India. The study covered the participation of women in movements, organizations and elections. It has also illustrated cases of women activists and leaders in the political field.

6.1 Objectives of the Study

The study was aimed at investigating the role of women in politics. The study started with the conceptualization of the dimensions of political participation and a review of women's political participation in the various countries of the world.

The specific objective was to carry out an in-depth investigation regarding the different dimensions of women's political participation in Srikakulam District. To achieve this, the student surveyed the role of women in movements and organizations in Srikakulam District; scrutinized the role of women in electoral politics in Srikakulam District and prepared case studies of select women leaders of Srikakulam District in different political roles.

6.2 Methodology

This study made use of a combination of exploratory and descriptive designs. Both primary and secondary sources of information were relied upon. Secondary sources were used for information regarding theoretical perspectives, conceptual frameworks and terminological definitions.

Secondary sources were also useful for the review of narrating women's political participation in all the dimensions in various countries with special focus on India and Andhra

Pradesh. The background data with reference to the district of Srikakulam which is the location of our study is also gleaned from secondary sources like: District gazettes, district primary census abstract, district handbook of 2011 and 2012 statistics and narrations from a few unpublished dissertations and published works on the different movements in Srikakulam also served as sources of information. Print and Electronic Media reports, audio visuals like flex banners and hoardings, posters and such political campaign materials on women in movements, elections and individuals were also referred to with regard to women's political participation in Srikakulam. The Reports of the Election Commission of India and Election Commission of State of Andhra Pradesh were major sources of data regarding women's electoral participation.

Data and information regarding the socio-political background of Srikakulam district, role of women particularly in contemporary movements and organizations and materials for case studies was gathered directly through primary sources. Primary sources were also used for gaining insights into some aspects of women's electoral participation mainly of 2014 elections to the Lok Sabha (lower house of the national parliament), and the A.P. State Assembly. Community activists of the district provided some information regarding the caste patterns of the district which was not available from official records. Many local socio-political activists were contacted to gain the first hand information about the political role of women in their regions in regular activities in movements and organizations.

Based on inputs from key persons, the student was able to identify women who had participated in the local movements, organizations and other political activities. (Maps of the location sites of the movements are given in Figure 3.3 and Appendix).

The student also used interview schedules to obtain information from office bearers of 8 organizations; and for the case studies from 6 identified leaders. The interview schedules had

both close ended and open ended questionnaires (see Appendix). The interviews in the local language were recorded and the transcriptions were later translated into English for use in the research analysis. In addition the student, who hails from the same district, was able to observe the local contexts during the interviews and recorded the indicators of patriarchal culture surrounding the respondents as detectable in posters, photos in media, seating arrangements, language and body language as well as the opinions and attitudes of other informants. The student maintained a dairy for recording the details of all the field visits which were conducted in the summer months of 2015.

The presentation of the information gathered regarding Srikakulam women's political participation is organized into two chapters: a) Participation of women in Srikakulam District in non electoral forms of politics that is in movements and organizational activities; and b) Electoral participation of women in Srikakulam district. The data about electoral participation drawn from the Reports of the Election Commission of India and Andhra Pradesh is computed as percentages where necessary and presented in tabular and graphic forms.

6.3 Limitations

The study has a number of limitations: some arising out of the specific constraints of the region of study. Srikakulam covers urban, rural and tribal regions. Some of the respondents are in far-flung tribal regions to which repeated visits were not possible.

The illiterate rural and tribal women, like Biddika Mahalakshmi, the leader of the anti-liquor movement, were unable to give specific dates of events they narrated. The personal problems of some of the women respondents cannot be discussed as that might affect their privacy. Certain details of women's participation in anti government and illegal activities could not be probed deeply nor stated fearing negative consequences for them.

Women office bearers of some organizations were unable to give proper sources or the details regarding their organizations. The leader of BJP Mahila Morcha did not grant an interview.

The scholar was unable to interview one very important regional leader, Mrs. K.Pratibha Bharati, who had won four times as the member of Legislative Assembly and is the current member of Legislative Council despite repeated attempts due to the latter's very busy schedule.

The complete data about elections to the various rural and urban local government bodies is not available from the official sources. The study is constrained by having to use only the information that was accessible.

As per the ethics of research, the scholar exercised caution regarding sensitive personal details of the individual respondents to protect their privacy. The student has repeatedly checked the validity of the information and its presentation to avoid subjectivity and attempted to maintain an objective approach.

Lastly, this being a micro level study, it is not possible to unconditionally extrapolate the findings of this local study to the larger universe.

6.4 Summary

Based on the works of Deth Van W.Jon, Lester Milbrath, Normon D. Palmer, Vicky Randall, Nelson Barbara and Najma Chowdari, the scholar conceptualized that political participation included taking a role in elections, movements and organizational activities that exert influence on political decision making. This scholar prepared questionnaires to interview activists on the basis of information from reading books and articles by Rose Marie Tong, Vicky Randall, Tony Cliff, Nelson Barbara Najma Chowdari, Veena Mazumdar, Madan Lal Goyal, UNO, IPU reports, Sudha Pai, Devaki J, Omita Goyel and Election Commission reports. The

historical background of Srikakulam district and the movements that took place were mainly based on accounts provided by Tripurana Venkataratnam, Janaki, K. Apparaao T, Sivarami Reddy, Mamidi Anupama.

In the review of literature, the scholar divided the major works in the field relevant to the thesis into 4 subsections: A) Theoretical works covering theory and concepts of political participation and feminist approaches; B) Works and sources regarding women's participation in various ways in politics around the world; C) works regarding women's political participation in India; and D) Publications and sources on women in politics in Andhra Pradesh, which is the sub national regional unit of India wherein the district of Srikakulam is situated. It also covers general background information based publications and sources about Srikakulam District.

Section two of Chapter II, briefly reviewed the participation of women in politics in various countries of the world and furthermore traced women's role in the various movements, organisational activities and elections, in India and Andhra Pradesh. Women participated in various movements like Social Reform Movements, Revolutionary Movements, Nationalist Movements and Suffragist Movements. Women played a prominent role in all these movements and succeeded in some issues of these movements. Women established women's organisations for raising their demands. They formed associations all over the world where they gathered for discussing their problems like women's right to vote, decrease in working hours, equal wages and demand for laws on violence against women. Women also participated in electoral politics, some women contested in elections, participated in various political activities as voting, propaganda in election contesting and holding positions. Women's political participation as voters, contestants and representatives is increasing year by year but is lower compared with

men's participation. Governments, NGOs, political parties, women's associations and family members should encourage women's political participation for achieving women empowerment.

Chapter III which gives the background of women's political participation In Srikakulam district, provides information needed to serve as the immediate background for situating the empirical study regarding women's political participation in the district. There are many relevant historical and contemporary contexts which are influential on the nature of women's political participation in Srikakulam. The role of women in politics of Andhra Pradesh is summarized in the first section. It gives an idea of the general nature of women's political participation in the region. The major socio-cultural, political, and economical background of Srikakulam, which has a bearing on women's political participation are also outlined in section two of this chapter. Srikakulam was the site of many movements since the 1900s. Some of movements are social reform movement, Ichapuram Anti-Zamindari movement, peasant movement of Bobbili, Mandasa Anti-Zamindari movement and freedom movement. Women participation in these movements was complete and whole-hearted.

All these movements have made the people of Srikakulam more aware. The role of women in these movements has specially influenced women of the region. Organizations like women associations, women wings of political parties have gained from this inheritance, and this is also reflected in how the women of this region take part in various aspects of political activities.

This narration provided an orientation regarding the regional and historical context to women's political participation in Srikakulam. Chapter IV, discusses Women's participation in electoral politics as voters, candidates and as representatives in Srikakulam district regarding general elections to Lok Sabha, Assembly and Local body elections. Srikakulam district has one

Lok Sabha constituency and ten Assembly constituencies. Women population has been consistently more than men population in Srikakulam district. (See Table No. 3.4) The number of female electors was also more than number of male electors. But in last few decades, the sex ratio in the population has declined. The female elector's surplus also showed a gradual decline. So the larger number of females in the electorate and the decline in the female electoral surplus are both a reflection of the actual trends in the population itself.

It was noted that female voter turnout is higher than male voter turnout. In only 3 of the 10 elections (1984, '89 and '91), female voter turnout is lower than male voter turnout. (Table No. 3.4 p.65) This trend of higher female voter turnout is significantly different from the general trend observed in data for all India (Table no.2.4 p.44) and Andhra Pradesh (Table no.3.1 p.60).

This occurrence of women outnumbering men voters is possibly the corollary to the higher sex ratio in the general population of Srikakulam. Female VTO is lower than male VTO as a percentage of their respective female and male electorate population, from 1980 to 2009. Only in 2014 female VTO is higher than male VTO. This indicates more men from the male electorate are exercising their vote than the proportion of women from the female electorate. This is in tune with the universal trend, of lesser participation by women due to lower awareness levels, and gender biased obstacles to their participation. But in 2009 and 2014 elections the proportion of female VTO has exceeded male VTO by 3.09% and 5.66% points. While in most parts of India also, female VTO increased and narrowed the gap between male and female VTO, (Table 4.3, p.78) here it is significant that female VTO surpassed male VTO. (India (Table-2.4) and Andhra Pradesh (Table-3.1))

The possible explanation is that there has been large scale outmigration of workers, mainly male, from Srikakulam district. They are generally registered in the electoral rolls of their

native place but are unable to return to exercise their vote.

As women outnumber men, there is a high scope for women to determine the outcome of the elections and candidates could strategically be expected to pay due attention to women's agenda. But by 2014 elections the number of male and female in the electorate is almost equal with males having a minute surplus.

In Srikakulam District Women's electoral participation as voters is seen to be very active. Female VTO is above 60% in Lok Sabha and Assembly general elections. In the 2014 general Lok Sabha elections female VTO is higher than male VTO. In 2009 and 2014 general Assembly elections also female VTO is higher than male VTO. This is different from the trends in state and country where female VTO is less than males.

The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments (1994) have provided women reservation of 33% of the seats and of the presiding offices of all the rural and urban local bodies. The government of Andhra Pradesh has increased this quota for women to 50% from 2013. The details of elections to the Village Councils (Gram Panchayats) were not available. The number of females elected as members and presidents to the rural and urban Local Self Government bodies is higher than that provided by the 33% and 50% (since 2013) reservation in every one of the three elections. The percentage of Female MPTC members was 39.86%, 42.83% and 59.73%, in 2001, 2006 and 2014 respectively. The percentage of women representatives of Srikakulam Zilla Parishad in 2001, 2006 and 2014 was 36.84%, 39.47% and 62.85%. The percentage of Female Presidents of Mandal Praja Parishads in Srikakulam in 2001, 2006 and 2014 was 52.03%, 44.74% and 68.42%. Number of Female members in Municipal councils of Srikakulam (2014) was 53.52%. The number of female winners is higher than that of the males in 2014. Obviously, female candidates contested the general seats also and won. Similarly, the number of female

members as Presidents of MPPs is higher than of male members in 2001 and 2014 elections. In 2001 and 2006, they won 7 and 4 more respectively than the number reserved for them, and 10 additionally in 2014. In 2016, at All India level 46% of the elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions are women. The number of female representatives has increased marginally even above the quota given to them. The women's share of 62.85% in 2014 is noteworthy.

While in the municipal councils, the total number of reserved seats was 34 out of the total of 71 seats, females won in 38 seats i.e., 4 more than their quota. Though the trend of females contesting and winning more than their quota is repeated in urban areas also, the surplus is lesser. In the course of her field work, the scholar sought to know the reasons for such a female-oriented trend, through discussion with local key persons. The scholar concluded that often men who are already in higher official power position as an MLA or as Party Office Leader desire to retain their hold over the lower hierarchic position of local government. Hence, they encourage women from their families to contest elections. For example, Mr. Velamala Govind Rao of Yembaram village is elected as ZPTC member. He encouraged his wife Mrs. Kunchala Jayalaxmi to contest as an MPTC member. Presently, he has control over two representative positions. Though the woman has been elected, the men folk exercise the real power of that position. The elected woman representative simply becomes a proxy.

Women contested in general category as per interest of the family male members. According to local women leaders, female representatives depend on their family male members for the management of administration in Panchayati Raj institutions. They do not have freedom to interact with people.

It has been observed that in this district, women candidature depends on the decisions of the male family member. A women candidate's participation in election campaign invariably

focuses on establishing her family background.

Apart from the local elections, the participation of women as candidates in elections to the state and national level legislatures is very less. Only 9 female members got a representative position from this district to state and national level legislative representative bodies; i.e., Lok Sabha-1, and Assembly-8. In the ten Lok Sabha general elections conducted from 1980 to 2014, only five female members contested and of these, only one female candidate was successfully elected as MP. In the 8 Assembly general elections from 1983 to 2014, 52 women contested but only 8 members could win representative positions as MLAs. All of them belong to landlord or middle class families with reputed political background.

In the chapter on the non-electoral forms of participation of women it is observed that women have been participating in the various activities like the tribal movement which evolved into the naxalite and people's war movement over the period of **1958 to 1975**, the anti-arrack movement during 1994, and presently environmental movements and in organisations and leadership roles, with great courage, persistence and grit.

Many women came forward and learnt martial arts and guerilla operations during the tribal/naxalite/PWG activities. Many of them were arrested and jailed several times. The women who participated in these struggles and movements entered the revolutionary path through the men in their families. But it is to be noted that though they were initiated into the movement and activities through the men folk of their families, they later participated and worked with commitment and dedication and evolved as important activists as a result of their own efforts.

In spite of these women's participation in this remarkable historical movement their roles were molded and limited as extensions of their family male members who were Revolutionary activists and leaders of the movement. These women hardly had any opportunity

to exercise actual leadership and decision making. Moreover women activists from very backward socio-economic backgrounds like Paramma, Anakamma, Saraswatamma and Varalaxmi did not even get due recognition for their role and sacrifices.

Women have been actively involved in the programmes of various unions and associations. There are many women's organizations in Srikakulam striving to resolve the issues of women. There are eight different women's organizations that are functioning in Srikakulam district. They are the women's wings of the political parties: All India Mahila Congress-Congress Party; All India Democratic Women's Association-CPI (M); Andhra Pradesh Mahila Samakya-CPI; Stree Vimukthi Sanghatana-CPI (ML) Liberation; Telugu Mahila Vibhagam-TDP; Coordination Committee of working women-CITU; Women's Wing of AIAWU; and YSRCP Mahila Vibhagam. As per the interviews with the leaders of these organizations, all these organizations work to organize and educate women, to resolve the issues of women.

The study of the non-electoral participation of women in Srikakulam district reveals that the participation of women is commendable but women do not occupy decision making positions. Women are active participants in various programs, often successful in achieving their objectives and targets but are sidelined in decision making and marginalized in leadership positions.

The detailed Case Studies of women participants drawn from movements, Organizations, and Electoral Politics proved very informative and insightful. The women leaders covered under the main case studies, worked hard within their restricted circumstances. Five women belonged to dominant caste and one woman, Mrs. Biddika Mhalakshimamma, belonged to tribal community. Of the six women, four women belong to middle class landlord families. They played a prominent role in the various social activities of Srikakulam district. Mrs. Chowdari

Sampoornamma, Mrs. Chowdari Danalakshmi, Mrs. Tandra Aruna and Mrs. Killi Kruparani belong to socially and economically reputed families. Mrs. Chowdari Sampoornamma, Mrs. Chowdari Danalaxmi, Mrs. Tripurana Venkatratnam and Mrs. Killi Kruparani entered politics with the support of their husbands. Tandra Aruna's father was a freedom fighter and her brother was an activist of Srikakulam Tribal Movement. Mrs. Bhoopathi Varalaxmi and Mrs. Biddika Mahalaxmamma entered politics as a response to local situations. The study after due consideration to various aspects of the role of these six individuals as leaders observes that Mrs. Sampoornamma, Mrs. Aruna, Mrs. Varalaxmi and Mrs. Mahalaxmamma participated in a more or less independent manner individually in non electoral politics. Mrs. Killi Kruparani and Mrs. Danalaxmi though having individual potential, have played a limited role in electoral politics. They have completely worked in subordination to their husbands. Mrs. Chowdari Sampoornamma, Mrs. Tandra Aruna, Mrs. Varalaxmi and Mrs. Mahalaxmamma have climbed the institutional ladder and reached the top and are capable of personally and independently performing their leadership roles in their work. Besides these six women, information of ten other active participants were also considered.

The study of the 16 active participants shows that eight are from the locally dominant castes. Five belong to SC and ST categories. The provision of reservation for these sections has facilitated the rise of most of them to electoral leadership. Four of these (under SC and ST categories) are in electoral politics and one, an ST, was the local activist in the anti-arrack movement.

Two of the 16 participants are working as whole time activists and continue with movement based politics. Two other activists who played a militant role in the Tribal movement and in the anti-arrack movement at the grass roots level have returned to their domestic roles.

Among the 11 who participated in electoral politics, six have gone back to their domestic roles after having contested in elections once or twice. Three of the participants have entered politics out of personal interest and conviction. The rest began their political careers under the influence and pressure of their families. Families of eight members were already actively involved in politics.

Among the 16 participants, 13 belonged to upper class landlord families with established political background; most of them belong to higher caste. The activist leaders in movement based politics also are from similar upper class families with political background. But they entered politics at a much younger age and worked more independently.

The scholar observes that, as the women political participant gets her role or position based on the socio-economic and political status of the family rather than due to recognition of her own efforts, she is a proxy to the dominant family male members in performing her role.

6.5 Findings

To satisfy the objective of reviewing women's political participation in all the dimensions in various countries, an overview of women's political participation in the various countries discussed how Women participated in Social Reform Movements, Revolutionary Movements, Nationalist Movements and Suffragist Movements. Women played prominent role and succeeded in achieving their demands. Women formed associations, gathered for discussing their problems like right to vote to women, decreasing of working hours, equal wages and demand for laws on violence against women. They also participated in electoral politics; contested in elections, participated in voting, election campaigns, contested elections and held official representative positions. Though Women's political participation is increasing gradually, it is lower compared with men's participation.

The in-depth investigation regarding the different dimensions of women's political participation in Srikakulam District yielded the following information:

- Women voter turnout is found to be generally lower than men voter turnout as per national level and state level data. But here the number of women electors and voters is higher than number of men electors and voters in most of the election in Srikakulam District.
- In this context it is mentioned that the sex ratio for 1000 male according to the Srikakulam District Census has been favorable to women (1981-1023 females, 1991-1012 females, 2001-1014 females and in 2011-1015 females) as against the low sex ratio in the country.
- In local body elections, women representation has been above the quota reserved for them. The excess is found to be due to the fact that men leaders, who move up to other higher positions, let the woman of their family occupy the lower or local level positions.
- Women are almost always introduced to electoral politics by the family male members. But the men continue to always treat them as subordinates. They do not allow women to play an independent role.
- Women were a proxy for their family male members in the electoral politics of this district.
- Male members do not cooperate for the autonomous role of women. Women also cannot act independently due to lack of education and financial resources.
- A few of the women representatives who were educated and were employed were able to exercise their roles slightly more independently.
- Sudha Pai classified the role of women in electoral politics into three types of leadership: dynastic succession, institutional climbers and proxy leaders. In this study we note that Choudari Danalaxmi and Boddepalli Satyavati are examples of dynastic succession; while Kavali Prathibabharathi is an example of institutional climber; and Choudari Danalaxmi is an example of proxy leader.
- Women have played a more independent role in non-electoral forms of politics.
- Most of the women in movement based activities faced many serious hurdles but they stood by their ideology and their goals.
- With regard to movement based politics also, it was the male members of the family who introduced women relatives (daughters, wives and sisters) to such activities; after some time these women participated in the activities more independently.
- This district has been through many movements since the British rule like Mandasa Zamindari movement. Therefore, it is seen that rural women also have some leadership qualities.
- Women's efforts to organize unions for conducting various women related activities is facilitating them to imbibe leadership qualities.

- According to Ramachandra M, Janaki K, Veena Mazumdar, Sneha latha panda, Omita Goyal a woman's political participation is dependent on her family's socio-economic background. In our study most of women politicians belonged to dominant caste and land lord family background.
- Some women who belonged to ordinary family background participated in movements actively but they did not achieve leadership positions.
- According to UNO, IPU & Neera Desai women faced obstacles in politics due to lack of education, financial support and party support. The complications of everyday life and lack of time due to the priority accorded to family are very difficult to overcome. The women in our study area too faced similar hurdles.

6.6 Recommendations:

In light of the findings and observation from the study the following solutions are proposed:

- Women should be given 50% reservation in all legislative bodies.
- Opportunities for girls' education should be improved.
- Chances for increase in employment of women should be enhanced.
- All concerned agencies should encourage women leaders to play their roles independently.
- Government should strictly enforce the rules for curbing the unofficial interference by the male relatives.
- Government should provide financial support to women for contesting in elections.
- Government should conduct political training programs for women.
- Government should conduct awareness campaigns for women on various government welfare programs.
- Government should start political training centers at village level.
- Government should make provisions for the rehabilitation and livelihood of women who lost their livelihoods, and were alienated from their families because of their participation in movements and struggles.
- Government should support documentation of life stories of activists.

6.7 Concluding Remarks

This research studied various aspects of women's political participation at the district level. The study perceived that political participation is not only electoral politics, but that it is inclusive of non-electoral forms of participation. The observation of passive to dynamic roles of women in the multiple dimensions of political activity at the sub regional and grassroots level was insightful. The scholar hopes this study will be useful for future researchers in women studies and political science.

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