

POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN:

A study on Political and Civic Participation

Of

Women College Students in Tamil Nadu

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Submitted by

Dilip Kumar. R

Research Scholar (Part -Time)

Under the Supervision & Guidance of

Dr. K. Anbu

Associate Professor

Department of Social Work



Department of Social Work

School of Social Science and International Studies

Pondicherry University

(A Central University)

Pudhucherry-605014

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CHAPTER - V

**FINDINGS,
SUGGESTIONS
AND
CONCLUSION**

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FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The Focus of this chapter would be to highlight the key findings of this research study. Besides this, implications of this study, limitations and directions for future researchers are discussed with the concluding remarks on the study.

5.2. MAJOR RESEARCH FINDINGS

5.2.1. Descriptive summary of socio demographic factors of the respondents:

- On the basis of religious orientation 42% of the respondents were Hindus, while 21.25% and 22.25% are respectively Muslim and Christian. The remaining 14.50% were from other religious communities, of whom the predominant one was Jain population.
- As per respondents' community identity, one fourth of the respondents are from the Forward caste. Nearly half of the respondents are from Backward Community. The Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes cover the remaining 24% and 3% respectively.
- With respect to their residential area 48.75% i.e. 195 out of the 400 respondents were from urban area and the remaining 51.25% i.e. 205 respondents are from rural areas.
- On the basis of their claim about their parent's education, 10.5% of the respondents' parents are illiterate, 32.25% have completed primary education, 23.5 % i.e. 94 completed SSLC and 21.25% have completed higher secondary education. The remaining 12.5% of the respondents' parents have completed graduation and above.
- Data on Family's Annual income suggests that 41.25% of the respondents come from the families that earns less than 2 lakhs per annum, and 32% and 20.25% comes from families that has an earning capacity of 2 to 5 lakhs and 5 to 10 lakhs respectively. The remaining 6.5% of the respondents hails from the so called richer class with an income more than 10 lakhs per annum.

- The four categories of Arts, Social Science, Commerce and law, Engineering, Medical and Paramedical and, other professional, is equally represented by the respondents.
- A vast majority of the respondents are unmarried (91.5%) and only 8.5% of them are married.

5.1.2. Descriptive summary of socialization variables:

- Majority of the respondents' parents (84.25%) are not part of any political organization and only 15.75% of the respondents' parents are part of any political organization.
- About 9.3% of the respondents revealed that their parents discuss socio political issues every day at home, while 23.3%, 31.3% and 25.3% of them said that they discuss Regularly, Sometimes and Rarely respectively. A little over one tenth of the respondents were negative in their response.
- On the basis of respondents' habit of staying up to date with socio political happening, 14.8% said they do the habit of updating themselves of the socio political issues daily. A little more than one fifth and a little more than one fourth responded that they update regularly and sometimes respectively. Another one fourth does it rarely and 10.5% of them responded as never.
- With respect to preferred medium to update their socio political knowledge, out of 358 valid respondents who had the habit of updating, a little more than one third (132 respondents) preferred Tele media, while 48.33% (173 respondents) were used to social media and the internet and the remaining 14.80 % (53 respondents) preferred the traditional print media.
- About 20.2% of the respondents said they started discussing socio political issues during their pre high school days, while a 42.3% of the respondents had started indulging in socio political discussion only during higher secondary i.e. after 14 years of age. The remaining 37.5% have started discussing it only during their college life.

5.1.3. Descriptive summary of Political Attitudinal variables:

- A little more than one tenth of the respondents are ‘highly interested’ towards politics, while 31.7% are ‘interested’. A similar one third is ‘somewhat interested’. The remaining 14.2% and 9% of the respondents are ‘disinterested’ and ‘highly disinterested’ respectively.
- Majority of the respondents (80%) believe that women can fit enough for politics and it is no more a male only game. Of which 15.8% ‘strongly agreed’ while a little less than one third ‘agreed’ and ‘somewhat agreed’ equally. Around one fifth were negative with their response.
- For the question on Political participation as a prerequisite for political empowerment, about 70% affirmed positively. Out of which 18.8% strongly agreed, 20.2% agreed and 32% somewhat agreed. Of the remaining 30% who were negative in their response 16.2% and 12.8% disagreed and strongly disagreed respectively.

5.1.4. Descriptive summary of Political Participation:

- Only 60.75% of the respondents have casted their votes in the recent parliamentary elections.
- Sharing of critical political messages in social media seems to be the most favoured political activity with more than three fourth (77%) of the respondents involved in such activity.
- Only about 44.5% of the respondents have encouraged friends and family to vote in elections.
- A little less than a quarter of the respondents are members of political organization.
- A mere 16% of the respondents have attended meetings of political parties and it turns out to be the least opted political activity.
- Majority of the respondents (69%) have participated in protests and demonstrations.
- A little more than one half of the respondents have indulged in campaigning against government policies among friends and family members.
- A little over one third of the total respondents have petitioned government for action or inaction of government in an issue.

- Apparently there seem to be a high percentage of respondents have shown keenness towards non electoral political participation than in the electoral forms.
- The mean political participation of the respondents is 3.75
- A little more than one third of the respondents had a low level of political participation and almost an equal proportionate were moderately participative.
- A quarter of the respondents were highly participative. Mostly these are the respondents who indulged in 6 or more political activities.

5.1.5. Descriptive summary of Civic Engagement:

- The mean score of Civic attitude of the respondents is 44.56
- The mean score of Civic Behaviour of the respondents is 34.81
- A little less than a quarter of the respondents had a low level of civic attitude.
- Nearly half of the respondents possessed moderate level of civic attitude.
- A little less than one third of the respondents were having high level of civic attitude.
Thus, quiet a good number of college going women showed a good favourable civic attitude.
- With regard to Civic behavior, 19% of the respondents had a low level , half of the respondents were moderate and only 31% of the respondents were highly participative in civic activity.
- Thus quiet a good number of college going women showed civic participation level.

5.1.6. Summary of Inferential Findings:

- There is no significant association between religion and political participation as well as civic engagement of women.
- Community of the respondents too doesn't seem to have association with the political participation and civil engagement of women college students.
- Respondents from urban and rural areas exhibited similar political participation and civic engagement, proving the absence of any significant association between residential area and our main study variables.
- There is no significant association between Parent's formal Education and political participation as well as civic participation of women.

- Family Income level too doesn't seem to be associated with political participation and civic participation of women college students.
- There is no significant relationship between College type of respondents and their political & civic participation.
- Marital status of women college students and political participation does not seem to be associated. Also civic participation too doesn't seem to be associated with marital status.
- Parent's membership in political organization seems to be associated with political participation of women.
- Whereas there is no strong statistical evidence suggesting relationship between Respondents' Parents membership in political organization and civic engagement,
- Parents' habit of discussing socio political issues in home found to have statistically significant association with political participation of women college students.
- Similarly there is also significant association between Parents' habit of discussing socio political issues in home and Civic Attitude as well as Civic Behaviour. Thus civic participation as a whole is associated with this variable.
- Further civil attitude and civic behavior of women whose parents discussed socio political issues in home regularly and daily are high when compared to those who do not discuss often.
- There is significant association between Habit of updating socio political issues and political participation of women.
- Similarly there is also a significant association between Habit of updating socio political issues and Civic Attitude as well as Civic Behaviour.
- Further it was found out that that civic attitude and civic behavior of women who update the socio political issues on a regular basis are high when compared to those who do not do that. Thus this variable of updating socio political issues seems positively related to civic engagement or civic participation.
- There is no significant association between medium of updating socio political issues and political participation as well as civic engagement of women.
- The age from which respondent's start discussing socio political issues seems to be associated with political participation of the respondents.

- Further there is significant association between age groups from which respondent's first started discussing socio political issues and Civic Attitude as well as Civic Behaviour. It was revealed that the civil attitude and civic behavior of women who engage in discussing the socio political issues at school level seem high compared to those who socialize at later age.
- There is significant association between respondents' interest in politics and their political participation.
- The perception that politics is no more an exclusive male game has statistically significant association with the political participation of women.
- The perception on participation as a prerequisite for political empowerment is significantly associated with actual political participation of women.
- The civic attitude of the respondents has a high and positive correlation with civic behavior of the respondents.
- With respect to relationship between political participation and civic participation statistical evidence suggests that there is a association between the two.

5.1.7. Respondents' Perception on factors that may contribute to women empowerment

- Elimination of Gender discrimination was strongly agreed upon by the majority of the respondents. About three fourth of the respondents have strongly agreed to that fact that women empowerment could be possible only if gender discrimination is eliminated. Remaining 27% have simply agreed to it.
- Next highly rated factor by the respondents was Equal opportunity by political parties especially in allotting seats during elections. Two third of the respondents strongly agreed while a little more than one fifth agreed to the factor.
- Need for "Political awareness" was strongly agreed upon by 62% of the respondents. While another 20% have simply agreed to it.
- The other critical factor in the path of empowerment of women in India is family support. One third of the respondents strongly agree to the importance of family support or encouragement in women's political empowerment.

- A little more than 27% have strongly agreed and 39% and 34% have simply agreed and somewhat agreed to the importance of financial independence in women political empowerment.
- With respect to reservation in the State Legislature and National Parliament as a key factor for empowerment of women, almost half of the respondents have strongly agreed and one third has agreed to the statement.

5.3. SUGGESTIONS

The study has come up with empirical evidences on the relationship between political participation and some of the key socialization factors and attitudinal factors. Earlier research findings were also suggestive of the similar relationship which was elaborately discussed in the previous chapters. Based on the evidences from this study the following suggestions that, might have implications over the political participation and political empowerment of women in India, are put forwarded.

5.2.1. Positive Attitude and Socialization skills can improve political participation of women

- With respect to socialization and attitudinal variables women's political participation including civic participation significantly differed among those with a "positive attitude towards politics", and a 'positive attitude towards women in politics". Hence women should cultivate a positive attitude towards politics and they should strongly believe that politics is no more a male exclusive game. Women can equally compete in politics with men and can equally be successful.
- The habit of staying updated with regards to socio political issues has a significant influence on the level of political participation including civic participation of women college students. With a better awareness level on the prevailing socio political issues and a better understanding on the political process and political system in our country the chances of a more effective participation is enormous. Hence, women should focus on gaining a fair understanding upon the country's political system and political process. They should strive to be aware of the prevailing socio political issues that this might give

them the urge to contribute to the society. Socio political awareness and civic and political attitude will lead to participation and empowerment.

5.2.2. Family as a Determinant as well as a deterrent in Women's Political Participation and civic participation

With respect to Political participation of women, family emerges as a key factor that determines as well as deters women's political ambitions. Parental attitude towards politics, Parents' willingness towards discussing socio political issues at home had a significant impact on political participation and civic participation of their female children.

There were evidences suggestive of earlier the age of socialization to politics the better the participation. Again family being a primary institution where a child spends a majority of their young age can assist in this early socialization of their girl child towards their civic responsibilities and political duties as a citizen. Hence parents should no more hesitate to discuss and make their women children to understand the socio political issues and the fundamental political process of the country. This will have serious implication in the level of political awareness and political participation of women in the country.

5.2.3. Societal Support an indispensable element for women's political empowerment

The idea of female are not meant for politics is baseless. About three fourth of the respondents have strongly agreed to the fact that elimination of gender discrimination as the major boost for political empowerment in the country. For long in India women are reserved with domestic workload and function as a caretaker of the family. These are backed by the culture of the land. Hence this biased belief system doesn't give women an opportunity to be participative in politics even if she wishes to. Thus this lack of participation due to the social impediment erodes the chances of women's political empowerment in our country. Thus the society should play a positive role by eliminating the gender bias and understand the necessity of women political participation and women's political empowerment.

5.2.4. Positive role of political parties

Two third of the respondents believe that political parties should be less discriminatory especially in allotting seats during election for women. There was also evidence that despite having a better winning ratio, women are not trusted by political parties while allotting tickets during election. This attitude of the political parties seriously hampers women's political empowerment in India. Hence, the political parties should play a more positive role by allotting more seats if not equal seats for women candidates. There should be consensus reached among the major political parties with this regards.

5.2.5. Power wielders to exhibit the Political will

With respect to reservation in State Legislature and National Parliament as a key factor for empowerment of women, almost half of the respondents have strongly agreed and one third has agreed to the statement. Thus women strongly believe that reservation of seats in the national and state legislature can pave way for women empowerment.

- With continuous underwhelming representation in Parliament it is high time the political masters should implement *quota for women in Union and State Legislatures* as it is evidences from the earlier studies too that the reservation in local bodies has made significant positive changes in women's participation and their self development.

Besides the above key suggestion the following were also suggested based on the study results and overall research experience.

- More emphasis can be given in school curriculum for imparting civic awareness and political knowledge
- Media being a key player in imparting awareness, the Government should strive to educate civic consciousness and political rights and duties through print medium and tele-medium.
- Legislation may be enacted to make it mandatory for political parties to give equal chances for women candidates in elections
- Gender discrimination should be strictly checked in local government institutions and measures be taken for free participation of women in political activities.

5.4. IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

As discussed in the scope of the study, the political participation of women has numerous implications in the society. Women representative were found to be effectively tackling the social issues like alcoholism and water management. Women representatives were also found to be more sensitive to women issues. Thus proving women's political participation and empowerment can transform the society in a big way. This warrants an active intervention from the social work community to engage themselves and also engage the society to catalyze the process of political empowerment of women.

- With a significant association between socio political awareness and political participation, Social work professionals working in the field of women empowerment can focus on creating a sense of civic and political awareness among young women.
- The result of this study has brought out strong positive relationship between civic attitude and the civic behavior. Hence social work professionals should indulge in infusing positive attitude towards community involvement among young women. This may enhance their involvement in the community.
- With low percentage of voting, the social workers should engage with the community regarding the electoral involvement especially of the women.
- With results suggesting association between the civic attitude and civic involvement and political participation, the social work fraternity shall ensure more focus is given to the civic syllabus of the school curriculum. There by women get socialized to civic and political objects and system at an early age..
- Community based organizations working in the field of women empowerment should create awareness among the people in the society regarding the elimination of barriers especially the rudimentary cultural bias of “women not fit for politics” that halts women's political participation.
- Community Based Organizations should ensure that the political parties allot equal seats to women in elections. Social Action as a method of social work can be employed in this regard.
- Social work fraternity should act as a pressure group in securing the long due reservation for women in State and National Legislatures.

- Social work research can be encouraged in the field of political participation with regard to positive implication of political participation and political empowerment upon the society at large.

5.5. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study was done in the Chennai Metropolitan Area and prevailing socio-cultural phenomenon in this region is somewhat unique compared to rest of state of Tamilnadu for that matter the whole of India except for similar cosmopolitan regions. The interplay of Caste, Class and Religion (Predictor Variables) among the people of this region may not be the same as in the other areas of the state. Hence generalizing the results will be subject to the socio-cultural characteristics of the region. The themes political participation and civic participation (Latent political participation) studied here are in itself not a direct measure for political empowerment but nevertheless these are prerequisites for women's political empowerment. Thus the path to political empowerment begin with being aware of one's political system and process and being participative which would enable the capacity of women that could eventually lead to efficient decision making in political arena and thus politically empowered.

5.6. DIRECTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the research experience and the results of this study, the following suggestion are put forwarded for researchers who wish to pursue studies in the field of political participation of women.

- Research outcomes suggested that respondents preferred non electoral activities over electoral activities. Exclusive in depth studies may be conducted as to probe the reason for this behavior to figure out the empirical reasons that are associated with it.
- Research on women's participation in political organization may be conducted, i.e. those other than political parties, some of which are under the watch list of the security agencies, to bring to the fore the role played by them in such organization and impact it created in them.

5.7. CONCLUSION

Having installed some of the finest principles in the Constitution and its legal system that guarantees equal representation for women, the realization of true political power for women has still been elusive. With just 14% and 10% representation in Lower house and upper house of our Parliament and a dismal ranking of 143 in Inter Parliamentary Union Report. With this background, the study intended to find out the actual political participation and the factors associated with it among women college students in Chennai region. This region which consists of five parliamentary constituencies including three constituencies in the city limits, incidentally records the lowest voter turnout in the previous election. The empirical evidences of the study suggested only a quarter of the respondents had high political participation. On an average they were found to be participating in three to four political activities out the eight activities that were studied in the research. With respect to civic activities, one third of the respondents were found to be highly engaged in civic activities. Further, statistical evidences also surfaced proving Parents' involvement in politics and their attitude towards politics turned out to be the key catalyzing agent in shaping women's political attitudes and their participation. With such promising outcomes from the study, it is high time Indian political master too get involved in empowering women politically. Taking the success of reservation of seats in local government as an inspiration, implementing the quota for women in the Union and State Legislature would be a major stride towards political empowerment of women in India. All that is needed at this crucial juncture is a concerted effort from different stake holders to realize the need and importance of women's political empowerment and put in a whole hearted effort in achieving true and fair representation of women in Indian political system.