



Women In Politics - Challenges And Prospects; A Study On Elected Women Representatives In Mangalore City Corporation At Dakshina Kannada District In Karnataka

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Abstract:

Women occupy half of the population in India, and women need to participate equally with men in all sphere of activities. It is quiet evident that women in politics are not in adequate number, compared to other field of work or profession. Recently, passed Women's Reservation Bill in the Parliament will enable women to get into politics and prove themselves. At the local self-government due to the reservation women got the chance to prove their capability in the public sphere and responsibly utilities their political power. In this era of transition of overcoming age old gender bias against women, which limited women to get into certain field in general and politics in particular. Despite, the issues faced by women this is high time to involve women in powerful positions. Unless women are prepared to occupy their positions in the policy making as the elected representatives of the people, the purpose may not be served. Hence, there is a need to know political interest among women representatives and challenges they come across in course of engaging themselves in their capacity in utilising their power. This paper, attempts to study political interest and knowledge of women in politics at local level and challenges faced by elected women representatives at Mangalore city corporation. The paper also comes out with few suggestions , to enhance the quality of participation of women in politics as people's representatives.

Key words: women, politics, representative, elected, power

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“Elected Women Representatives are key agents for transformational economic, environmental and social change in India”. Rahul Bhatnagar, Secretary for the Ministry of Panchayati Raj.

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 makes up all sort of stories about her and after this, when her name goes to the party bosses, they do not select her name because they fear losing that seat.” – Shrimati Sushma Swaraj, the former Minister of External Affairs of India. Women are occupying positions in decision-making in the fast phase of development, indicating the inclusive growth in the gender perspective. At the local self-government due to the reservation women got the chance to prove their capability in the public sphere and responsibly utilities their political power. Lady corporators in the city of Mangalore could feel the change in their life, as they are now recognised as the women in power with the ability to bring in change in the existing system, which is of course a positive trend in our development process. (S. Hegde and V. B. Hans, 2020)

A reform in the electoral system which is comprised of reduced fee for women nominees similar to those paid by the SCs and STs to encourage more women to join politics.(Marco Faravelli, Umair Khalil and Sundar Ponnuswamy, 2022). Unless there is a law that mandates an end to the men’s disproportionate usurpation of political seats, the natural arcs of politics will not bend towards just representation.(Tara Krishnaswamy, 2023). The importance of female representation is unquestionable in relation to achieving the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5) which emphasises on empowerment of all women and girls with a special focus on leadership and participation in public, political and economical decision making and adoption of policies that further this cause. (Observer Research Foundation (ORF), 2022).

I Political Representation of Women: an overview

On 21st September 2023, the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha both passed the ‘Women’s Reservation Bill’ or the ‘128th Constitutional Amendment Bill’ or now what is known as the ‘Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam’. This Bill seeks to reserve 1/3rd of the seats in Lok Sabha, the State Legislative Assemblies and the Delhi Assembly for women and it also applies to the seats reserved for the SCs and STs in Lok Sabha and State Legislatures. Garnering wide spread attention and criticisms, this Bill aims to increase and improve the role of women in the political arena. Undoubtedly, women have thrived in all their endeavours over the years yet they are frequently met with challenges within these endeavours.

The status of the members of a society can be understood by analysing the form and extent of work, political participation, level of education, state of health, representation in decision making bodies, financial condition, etc. and women do not have equal access to the factors which constitute these indicators of status. The literacy rate of women remains to be a major issue to be tackled despite the measures taken by government due to the existence of traditional practices and beliefs like female infanticide, early marriages,

taboos associated with menstruation and other problems like lack of toilets in schools, and schools being located in far off regions in rural areas.

The brutality of gender role stereotyping exists despite the level of modernization and urbanization we have achieved. In fact, it has assumed new shapes and forms in the contemporary times. The safety of women is a major concern in India due to increasing rate of crime against women. One such example being the inefficiency of government to protect the women wrestlers of India. The women who once wrestled their way to victory on international platforms are now wrestling the corrupt and unjust system to secure their dignity which shouldn't have been the condition given the fact that the safety, equality and dignity of women are a part of fundamental rights and fundamental duties of the Constitution.

A majority of these issues can be solved when women are given a platform to represent their interests and voice their problems and there is no better platform than that of our Parliament, State Legislatures and the local governing bodies as these platforms enable them to reach the masses and equip them with the power to make changes in the society. This proves the need for the political representation of women as only women leaders can place appropriate weight and focus on issues that concern women.

However, the statistics reveal the poor representation of women in the political arena. There are 82 (15.2%) women Members of Parliament in the Lok Sabha and 31 (13%) women Members of Parliament in the Rajya Sabha. While the number has increased significantly since the first Lok Sabha which was just 5%, it is still far lower compared to many other countries according to the UN women report. Braving all these challenges, many women have stepped in to the political arena however, that isn't accompanied by opportunities devoid of hurdles.

Focusing on these aspects, this paper attempts to understand the major challenges faced by women in politics and their insights on possibilities that could be the potential panacea to these issues with a special emphasis on Mangaluru. The paper also makes a humble attempt to understand the political interest of the women representatives.

II Objectives:

- (i) To find out the major challenges faced by women in politics, the factors that hinder the political participation of women and the appropriate solutions to it.
- (ii) To understand the level of political interest of the women elected representatives.

III Hypothesis:

The women in politics have faced major political and social problems while they carry the responsibility and desire to voice out the needs of the public. These problems can range from illiteracy to under representation. The condition of women in the political field can be improved if they are educated and trained effectively about politics and their rights. Education can embolden them to rise against a majority of hurdles thrown in their path to a successful political career.

IV Methodology:

For the paper titled ‘Major challenges faced by the women in politics with a special emphasis on Mangaluru’ both, primary and secondary data is considered. As a part of the primary data, 10 samples of women political representatives from Mangalore have been taken. A structured questionnaire was prepared and information was collected through interviews. The secondary data was collected from publications and websites of various reports of state, national and international organisations, research articles published in magazines, websites and journals. Collected information will be analysed using simple statistical tools.

V About the Study Area

Mangalore city is the fastest developing city in the state of Karnataka. It is located within the administrative circle of Dakshina Kannada district and is one of the prime coastal centres. At present, there are about 5 lakh population in the Mangalore City Corporation which is divided into 60 wards. The MCC council consists of 60 elected representatives, called corporators; one from each of the city's 60 wards. A corporator from the ruling majority party is selected as a Mayor. MCC's headquarters are at Lalbagh. Mangalore Urban Development Authority (MUDA) manages the planning, urban growth. As per the 2011 census in the city of Mangalore female population is 50.65 per cent, which indicates women occupy half of the population. In the district of Dakshina Kannada, Mangalore taluk has the highest sex ratio compared to other taluks. Likewise, socio-economic status of women seems to be good because of the highest literacy level and enlightened population.

VI Findings and Analysis:

Table 1: Socio-demographic details of the respondents

1. Age	Number of respondents n = 20	Percentage (%)
25-35	0	0
35-45	2	10
45-55	10	50
55-65	8	40
65 and above	0	0
Total	20	100
2. Educational qualification		
Highschool/ SSLC	6	30
Pre-University	2	10
Bachelor's Degree	6	30
Master's Degree	6	30
Doctorate	0	0

Total	20	100
3. Occupation		
Business	4	20
Social worker	4	20
Advocate	4	20
politics	8	40
Total	20	100
4. Marital status		
Married	18	90
Unmarried	2	10
Total	20	100
5. Number of children		
0-1	2	10
1-2	8	40
2-3	10	50
Total	20	100

Out of the 20 respondents, 10 of them were between the age of 45 to 55, 8 were between the age of 55 to 65, 2 were between 35 to 45. 3 respondents had completed their master's degree, 6 had completed their bachelor's degree and 6 had completed their education up to SSLC level and 2 completed their Pre -University education. Out of the 20 respondents, only 8 had chosen politics as their full-time career while 4 respondents were involved in business, 4 were social workers and 4 were advocates. 18 of the respondents were married and 2 were unmarried. 10 respondents had 2 to 3 children, 8 respondents had 1 to 2 children and 2 respondent had 0 to 1 child.

Table 2: Political experience, political knowledge and challenges faced by the women in politics

1. Years of political experience	Number of respondents n = 20	Percentage (%)
0-10 years	2	10
10-30 years	16	80
More than 30 years	2	10
Total	20	100
2. On a scale of 1-10, how would you describe your experience working in your field?		
1-5	4	20
6-10	16	80
Total	20	100
3. What is your opinion about reservation for women in politics?		
It is necessary	20	100
No strong opinions	0	0
May or may not be necessary	0	0
It is unnecessary	0	0
Total	20	100
4. What in your opinion are the social problems faced by women in your field?		
Gender discrimination	8	40
Under-representation	6	30
Unbalanced work and family life	2	10
Lack of support and opportunities	4	20
Total	20	100
5. According to news reports, the women candidates are being denied tickets by political parties because of the notion that men are more capable of winning elections. What are your opinions on this?		
I agree with that it takes place	18	90
I disagree with the statements	2	10
I would agree if those women are ineligible to represent	0	0
Total	20	100
6. Why do you think very few women step into the political arena?		
Lack of education or skills	6	30

Lack of opportunities	6	30
Because it is a male dominated field	2	10
Preference to other fields	6	30
Total	20	100
7. What can be done to encourage women to join politics?		
Provide mentorship and training programs	12	60
Provide positive role models	0	0
Promote work environment that caters to the needs of women	6	30
Increase media visibility of women representatives	2	10
Total	20	100

In terms of political experience, majority of the respondents, i.e., 16 of them had 10 to 30 years of experience, 2 respondent had more than 30 years of experience and 2 of the respondents had an experience of 0 to 10 years. Based on their experience in the politics field, we asked the respondents to give a score between 1 to 10 with 10 being the highest/best score expressing complete satisfaction and 1 representing the lowest score expressing dissatisfaction. Majority of the respondents are satisfied with their experience as 16 of them have given scores between 6 to 10 while only 4 of the respondents have given a score between 1 to 5. All the respondents have completely agreed upon the utmost necessary of reservations for women in the political field. Women politicians across parties unanimously agree that reservation for women is the only way out of the deadlock they find between the male and female candidates. There are many factors in the society that can either break and make an individual's personality and can foster elements that will either encourage or discourage an individual in every step of his/her life. Similarly, the women in politics have to face their share of social problems. 8 of the respondents say that the major social problem faced by the women in politics is gender discrimination, 6 say that under representation of women in various aspects of life discourages the women in politics, 4 respondents say that women lack opportunity and support unlike they male counter parts and 2 respondent said that finding balance between work and family life is a major social problem.

Recently, many newspaper articles have brought to light the reason as to why the political parties hesitate to give tickets to the female candidates. The party bosses give tickets on the basis of winnability and they believe that women are less capable of winning when compared to their male counterparts. When questioned about this condition, 18 of the 20 respondents say that it is a true situation as the parties prefer candidates with high level of winnability which is measured by money and muscle power and the women lack in these aspects. They also opine that unless they have the complete support of the party and the male candidates, they cannot hope for a ticket. However, 2 respondents said that this isn't true. The number of women in politics is very less compared to men in politics. 6 of our respondents opine that it is due to lack of education or skills, 6 of them say that it is due to lack of opportunities, 6 of the respondents say that it because the

women given more preference to other fields and 2 respondent said that it is because of the fact that politics is a male dominated field. In order to increase the participation of women in politics, it is very essential to the country's progress and 12 of our respondents say that training and mentorship program for women aspiring to be political leaders could increase their numbers in the long run, 6 respondents say that it is necessary to create a work environment in the political field that caters to the needs of the women which can further encourage them to join politics, 2 respondent said that we must increase the media visibility of the current women political leaders to as to inspire more women to step into politics.

VII Issues and Challenges faced by Women Representatives

The respondents have mentioned the following problems:

- (i) Lack of support, capacity being doubted upon by the male members of the local political parties and associations.
- (ii) Accused of misuse of funds and irregularity in public works.
- (iii) Lack of opportunities to prove themselves.
- (iv) Inability to work efficiently due to the works being dictated by male counterparts.
- (v) Criticised by the society for joining politics as a woman.
- (vi) Due to politics being a male dominated field, the women representatives are not taken seriously unless they express knowledge.
- (vii) Ill treatment by the male candidates and character assassination of women.
- (viii) Difficult to balance work and family life.

VIII Government Schemes for women

The respondents have mentioned the following schemes, programs, provisions etc:

- (i) Pension for widows
- (ii) Education loan for women
- (iii) Scholarship and hostel facilities for women
- (iv) Health benefits for women
- (v) Mahatma Gandhi Nagara Vikasa Yojane
- (vi) Repair of houses under the Kuteera Bhagya Yojane
- (vii) Programs conducted by the Dakshina Kannada Mahila Congress like bike rally
- (viii) Provisions for women who work under beedi industry
- (ix) Gruha Lakshmi
- (x) Some of the respondents mentioned the recently introduced schemes for women by the Congress party, while some said that no programs have been introduced at all.

IX Women representatives as puppet in the hands of male members in family

The respondents opine that the above situation is very much true. However, they also say that in the process they must gain sufficient knowledge to take independent decisions and actions. They say that education can help women to free themselves from the control of their family members. Some respondents are also of the opinion that the family members should step in only if the woman representative is ineligible or unqualified. Few other respondents say that a system should be established to check who is actually exercising the power.

Surprisingly, one of the respondents is also of the opinion that family members or husbands do not take over the political power at all. In conclusion, majority of the respondents believe that education and appropriate training can help the women representatives exercise power independent.

X Suggestions

Some of the possible measures that can be taken to increase the participation of women in politics and improve the condition of women politicians and their political education are :

- Mandatory pre-electoral training of women candidates that focuses upon campaigning skills and knowledge of political rights.
- Training modules can be created with the help of organisations like UN women and dispersed through Associations focusing on women empowerment and even through political parties.
- The women politicians from national, state and local levels across various parties must be encouraged to meet and discuss their problems in a periodic manner.
- Public seminars can be conducted to teach women about politics and inspire more women to enter politics.
- Conduct workshops for the women politicians at local levels to enable them to take independent actions and decisions to eliminate the problem of families using them as puppets in their quest to attain political power.
- Political parties must be discouraged from fostering the notion of less-winnability of women candidates and must be encouraged to provide the same financial and moral support to the female candidates as given to the male candidates.
- The Women's Reservation Bill must be implemented effectively and in a timely manner considering the changes that are essential to make it all encompassing.
- The work environment in politics must be sculpted in such a manner that it is devoid of gender discrimination, sexism, character assassination, under estimation of the women representatives and is transformed into a field that equally caters to the needs of the male and female representatives.

Conclusion:

Our nation has made great strides when it comes to inclusion of women in politics since we gained independence in the year 1947. Efforts such as the women's reservation bill have the potential to make a great impact by amplifying women's voice in politics. But despite that, India still has a long way to go if we wish to call ourselves a politically inclusive nation as far as gender is concerned. The 1990s saw a big breakthrough for women's representation in politics. The 73rd and 74th constitutional amendments were passed in 1992 paving the way for reservation in panchayati raj institutions. Political parties also started giving more representation to women by setting up specialized women's wings which focuses on giving women a platform to contest elections and gain real political power. This also motivates more women to join politics as real change makers. It was a slow and gradual development but women's representation has grown tremendously especially at the grass root level. From the research conducted we can understand that women

do enjoy working in politics despite facing problems like gender discrimination and harassment. Subsequently they consider it a necessity for achieving fair representation that women's reservation should be mandated. The respondents opine that lack of education or skills, lack of opportunities and preference towards non-political fields are the main causes behind the lack of representation of women in politics. This is a detriment as, to increase the participation of women in politics is very essential to the country's progress.

Our respondents say that training and mentorship program for women aspiring to be political leaders, creating a work environment in the political field that caters to the needs of the women, increasing the media visibility of the current women political leaders are some sustainable ways to ensure fair representation of women in politics. The political education of women political representatives should be prioritised.

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