
Women Ward Members in Urban Local Bodies of Andhra Pradesh: A Study of Factors Contributing or Hindering their Entry and Engagement

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Abstract

Women account for half of the world's population, but their role in decision-making is still a debate with many dimensions. Expressly in politics and more particularly in local politics the participation of women is a story of many bottlenecks. Despite the reservations bestowed for the women in the local bodies, aspiration, encouragement, and participation is a story that still suffers hiccups. The present paper presents the story of factors contributing to or other ways hindering the entry and engagement of women political executives in the urban local bodies of Andhra Pradesh. It highlights why and how women from politically affluent families can dive into political positions and acquire winnability while women find it difficult to take politics as their profession. The paper also highlights the case studies of how women can evolve as leaders and decision-makers while being part of regular political activities along with their family members which is an added advantage.

Key Words: Women Political Executives, Urban Local Bodies, Political Participation, Civic Participation, Social Engagement.

Introduction

Urban Local Bodies play a key role in developing the people, place, and planning of widely expanding urbanization. Given the indicators of education, employment, and working population women can be seen as core contributors in every aspect of the economy and lives. In such a scenario, women's role in the decision-making and activities of the urban local bodies which are bestowed for the service delivery at the grassroots level matters for many reasons. (Barbara Burrell, 1947) The reasons include making the policy and action women-friendly, including their perspectives and ideas which can be more pocket-friendly, eco-friendly, local, and time-saving hacks. The Constitution of India has not just recognized the importance of gender equality at the time of the constitution but also ensured that measures were taken to cross-check (Devi, Rama

V.S, 2000) The landmark 74th Constitutional Amendment Act enacted in 1992 paved the way for women to enter the politics at the grassroots level of Indian politics. (Chattopadhyay, 2017). The Amendment was successful in making sure women entered politics and showing the number of women. (Shakun Sharma, 2016) But their engagement, decision-making, and sustainability in the race and the show depend on the reservations of the seats. (Rai Praveen, 2011). This de-facto representation and participation is not just shadowing the spirit of democracy, the aim of local governance, and the purpose of the reservations but also a hindrance to the political emancipation of women. (Chary, M. R. 2012) The paper is thus an attempt to present the factors that motivate or hinder the entry of women into politics in municipal corporations in AP.

Andhra Pradesh is one of the states of India which has a special place in the history of local governments being the second state to adopt the law on local governments and to take a strong stand on the strengthening of the seventy-third and seventy-fourth Amendment Acts to the constitution of India. In 1933 it became a corporation and was given statutory status under the Hyderabad Municipal Act of 1933. Thus in 1945 Hyderabad Municipality was formed and became a corporation in 1951. In 1965 after the legislature passed the A.P. Municipal Corporation Act all the eligible corporations were elevated into municipal corporations. The Municipal Act of 1981 provided for the reservations of 5 per cent seats to be reserved to women which was later in 1986 increased to 9 per cent. Post bifurcation of AP in 2014, the reservations were increased to 55% making more places for women in local politics. Since then, the government has been projecting its policies of promoting 55% of women into politics of urban governance.

Methodology

This paper adopts a descriptive approach to understanding women's political engagement in the municipal corporations in the urban local bodies (ULBs) in Andhra Pradesh. The descriptive method is utilized in Political studies to gain a holistic and comprehensive understanding of political participation phenomena, without needing to test causal hypotheses or make predictions (Lauer, 2021). The study adopting the method relies on diverse data sources like official statistics, historical documents, media reports, surveys, interviews, and observations to describe and interpret the complexity and diversity of the political reality (Box-Steffens Meier et al., 2009).

Data Sources and Analysis

The primary data source for this paper is the field data on women's role in urban politics in Andhra Pradesh, drawn from a survey conducted on the women ward members in Nellore and Anantapur municipal Corporation of Andhra Pradesh.

The data focus on the following key aspects of women's political engagement in ULBs in Andhra Pradesh:

- **Historical evolution:** This includes tracing the representation and participation of women in ULBs of Andhra Pradesh, from early to the present day. The analysis focuses on major milestones, challenges, and achievements along the way.
- **Current status and trends:** This section examines the current state and trends of women's political participation and leadership in Andhra Pradesh's ULBs. It includes the number of women elected and appointed to various positions (e.g., mayors, councilors, committee members, and department heads) and factors influencing their entry and performance in urban governance.
- **Impact and outcomes:** The paper analyses the impact of factors that contributed to or otherwise hindered the entry of women into the politics of urban local bodies. This paper emphasizes the issues, prejudices, and factors that make or stop women set forward to take part in the politics of the urban local bodies. (like patriarchal mindsets in families, political parties, society, security issues, stability, etc.,).

Research Aims and Contributions

This paper aims to provide an in-depth study of women's political engagement in ULBs of Andhra Pradesh. It also identifies remaining gaps and challenges for women to take politics of local governments as a career option to achieve gender parity and empowerment in urban politics in the state. Additionally, the paper provides inferences and commendations for enhancing women's political engagement in ULBs in Andhra Pradesh at both individual and institutional levels, while suggesting avenues for advancing research on this topic.

Review of Literature

'Citizen's political participation', from a gender perspective, has a diversified and multifaceted meaning. It is not just about the right to vote, candidacy, campaigning, occupying office and raising for or against the government individually or in groups, and participation in the

decision-making process; but simultaneously relates to, political activism, political consciousness, etc. (Patrick J. Conge, 1988; Rai Praveen, 2011; Renu Sethi 1988). Political participation of people is the cornerstone of theory and practice in the success of the democratic fabric of a nation and a part thereof. It is concerned with the formal distribution of values and available resources in society relating to the making and executing of the policy for public well-being (Renu Sethi, 1988).

Conway (1991) likewise mentions that “political participation is those activities, of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of government, the selection of governmental authority, or the policies of government”. According to the author, there are two unique ways to engage in politics: traditionally or unconventionally. While the latter, or unconventional forms, are defined by both legal and unlawful protest activities, the former refers to acts like voting, writing letters to elected officials, seeking office, donating money, or campaigning. How people participate is described by Dalton (2017) in terms of the type of influence, degree of conflict, amount of initiative needed, degree of cooperation with others, and type of influence connected to each activity. In the 1990s political participation exposed the gradual diminishment of contemporary society's political and non-political boundaries and the growth of political participation caused by the resurgence of Communitarian methods with “Civil activities” like volunteer work as well as social engagement.

Masood (2006), in his paper on empowering women through reservation in urban local bodies, refers to the 74th Amendment Act which provided one-third reservation of seats for women in urban local bodies. He gives an example of Ghazipur Municipality of U.P and finds that only a few women are active in politics in urban local bodies though there is significant change over the period. He presents a package of recommendations for women's empowerment in urban local bodies. The suggestions include capacity building, engagement of women in municipal services and functioning, encouragement, and promotion of caste and religion-based professions and economic activities, regularization of bazaars and meals, access to market, information, and self-help groups.

A few models have been used to describe different political participation perspectives. For instance, *The Civic Voluntarism Model* had its origin in the writings of Sydney and Verba in 1972. This model describes how an individual's engagement is influenced by their socio-

economic situation, level of education, and line of work. According to Verba, and Schlozman, (1975), the lack of resources, lack of psychological interest in politics, or being outside of the networks that recruit individuals into politics could all be contributing factors to people's passivity in politics. While describing who participates, the contributions of social inequalities have been highlighted in terms of motivational variables like political interest, knowledge, and confidence, as well as resources like educational attainment and socio-economic standing. Alternatively, the resources of this model were mentioned as "time, money and skills, which are conducive for developing civic attitudes".

Subsequently, *The Social Psychological Model* considers the existence of a belief held by an individual that his or her political behavior will effectively contribute to civic duties and have an impact on the political process. According to this model, a person's perception of their political efficacy weighs the predicted advantages of political participation. Greater financial resources (cash, education, and skills), as well as psychological resources (efficacy, political trust, and social bonds), facilitate an individual's engagement. High-statured persons are more inclined to participate in politics than low-statured individuals because they live in social situations that promote and uphold civic virtues, positive attitudes, and participatory norms. Therefore, even while participation has benefits, active participation in politics is only possible for people with strong accomplishment motivation and social acceptance. *The Resources Model* has connected the availability of resources and opportunities with political mobilization. The nature of political engagement is not universal in behavior because the options for participation vary.

A subsequent model such as *The Mobilization Model* promotes involvement by linking a person's involvement to the political opportunities available in their surroundings and by mobilizing others, such as political parties, peer groups, or the community. The focus of is on the function of traditional mobilizing organizations in civic society, particularly the methods used by political parties, labour unions, and religious organizations to identify, gather, and mobilize activists. This model and *The Resources Model* can be connected.

The Institutional Model has concentrated on how the state's organizational framework determines participation opportunities. In 1986, Powell and Jackman made the case that party structures, electoral laws, and constitutional frameworks all contribute to understanding participation disparities between different countries. When there is a change in the franchise or

modifications to the campaign or spending regulations, trends in participation can also be taken into account.

Participation in political matters is crucial because it increases the likelihood of democracy in a system where there is typically substantial participation by group members. However, there is a lot of ambiguity surrounding the issues of who should engage in political activity, why, and to what extent. (Kamana, 2017). A society can be classified as either a participant modern society, where citizens are more involved, or a non-participant traditional society, where individuals are less involved. Both a degree of voice and equality are necessary for a democracy. It has been mentioned that “the political space belongs to all citizens. Politics is everyone’s business.” Therefore, if involvement in a political system is limited or restrained, individuals become disinterested, which is detrimental to the democratic operation of the political system. Democracy cannot exist without popular engagement, which also serves as a yardstick for how well democracy is working. Moreover, the model for participation is best explained by Pippa Norris in his book *Democratic Phoenix*.

The literature unfolds that the participation of women is impacted by the above-mentioned models and also has many practical implications where there are problems from families, a society that doesn’t accept women to actively participate in politics due to personal and professional reasons. (Kiranmayi K, Hemalatha S, Bhagyalakshmi M (2018). The traditional norms, household chaos, care work, and many other personal commitments and responsibilities make women demotivated to choose politics as a career. (Manuka Khanna, 2009) Hence, despite the constitutional guarantees, and policies the state of women and their role in politics is still a proxy game with induced candidatures. (Prasad, D. R. 2014; Raheena. P.A(2016)

Insecurities

The review of the literature shows that women and their families always prefer secure jobs that give them some stability in life and careers. In these cases, women the work or workplaces will be preferred minding their security and their wellbeing. Several factors drawback women from choosing their career in politics. Firstly, lack of standard income will drive women away from politics as politics is not a standard job or source of income. Secondly, it is seen as a hurdle to the care work women are responsible for in households. Thirdly, the change in location due to marriage, childbearing, and household responsibilities at home will not let women spend time in

public. Fourthly, the rivalry is seen as a threat or risk for the politicians, especially for women as mentioned by the respondents in the survey during the campaigns and when there is any conflict there is a huge hate talk that goes viral and also the character assassinations that happens rarely to female contestants will show impact on the women to choose politics as a profession. Fifthly, lack of job security when compared to the other professions which give financial stability too is a bottleneck. Lastly, a lack of social awareness, political consciousness, and feeling of responsibility boosted by the families' guidance is forcing women away from politics in general and municipal corporation politics in particular.

Conclusion

Women's part in urban local bodies plays an integral role in the development of the community and helps women to become inclusive in the game of politics which has many advantages personally, politically, and socially. The review of the literature reveals that there are many arguments for the necessity of women in politics at the urban local level. The paper unfolds the scenario of the factors that motivate or hinder women's entry into urban local bodies. The family's patriarchal beliefs are coupled with insecurities in the profession as there is no sufficient income and incur losses with unstable positions. The nature of work which is not secure and time-bound, demands more social/public time which will make women unavailable for the care work they are responsible for. The nature of politics where they need to be more socialized and be always for hate talk, criticism, and often character assassination from rivals and opposition groups. Added to this is the attraction of alternative career options available which are much more secure and promising in financial and professional terms making the females not choose politics at the urban level in Andhra Pradesh.

Contrary to the above scenario the women who are running for the election are from the political well-settled families who have family support assistance, and guidance and will help in every activity in the pre-settled platform making it easy for the women to join and perform their duties. Their families have the following cadre and also the leader they are attached which is an added advantage at the initial level to get a ticket from the party proving their winnability and showcasing their family's political trajectory, experience, and winnability in the wards. Even at the time of investing finances, campaigns, and conducting the routine the families are helpful and are assisting the women ward members. Since the family is into politics and has a habit of getting socialized and understanding of the work culture the women were able to manage as they

were able to handle their occupations like homemaker or business or any others easily. Thus the 74th Constitutional Amendment act has brought a good number of women into politics at urban local bodies of Andhra Pradesh which drew a good number of women into the game. But the dots of true political empowerment of women at the local level still have to be connected to make politics at the urban level effectively gender inclusive.

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