

Foundation Course

Semester 1

12 : ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

The participation of women in politics is not a new phenomenon. In ancient times during early Vedic period women could become members of Sabha and Samiti. However her position declined considerably after the end of Vedic age as she was not only denied the political rights but was confined to the four walls of the house. She faced many inequalities and was regarded inferior to men. Attempts were made to improve her condition during the 19th century by many social reformers. Gradual improvement was seen thereafter. Many women participated in the struggle for independence as well. However their participation remained less in number.

Role of women in the States:

State Assembly elections were held in May 2011 for four States and it gave us two female Chief Ministers i.e. Mamta Banerjee became Chief Minister of West Bengal, Jayalalitha became Chief Minister of Tamilnadu. Mayawati is another strong woman leader of Uttar Pradesh. At the age of 39, in 1995 Mayawati became the youngest politician to be elected as Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh and the first Dalit woman Chief Minister of any State in India. In addition Sheila Dixit became the Chief Minister of Union Territory of Delhi for the third consecutive term in 2009.

Role of women in Local Self Government Bodies:

After the passing of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, the representation of women at the grass root level has increased by nearly 50%. Pioneering efforts in this direction were taken by the State of Karnataka in 1983 by offering reservations for women at the Panchayat level. Several States like Madhya Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand have increased women's participation in panchayats to 50%. Women members of Panchayats have done remarkable work in improving the conditions of villagers in matters of healthcare, education, sanitation etc.

Obstacles faced by women in the participation of Male Domination:

Male domination mindset is one of the major obstacle for women as politics is regarded as man's area of interest and caliber. There is a lack of family support or co-operation because the political participation is time consuming as one has to attend party meetings, organize workers, gathering mass support for the party by undertaking different activities to promote party, requires women to stay out of the house for a long time. In such scenario women face opposition from her family.

Role of Political Parties:

Many political parties have failed to offer enough representation to women. They are less

likely to involve them in party's organizational bodies. Men are preferred while giving party tickets for contesting elections. At times those tickets are offered to them where party has less chances of victory. After elections, the parties are also not willing to offer key portfolios to women Members of Parliament. Thus political parties also act like a hurdle in women's active participation in politics.

Corruption and Criminalization of Politics:

Politics and contesting elections has been a costly affair in recent times. Corruption in elections and sabotaging of electoral booths are the methods adopted by many. Many criminal minded people are entering politics as they have huge chunk of black money. Women are regarded as misfit in such changing trends in politics.

Approach of Government officials:

The elected members need to meet government officials in order to fulfill the promises to the electorate. However women representatives often face non- cooperation from the government officers due to their biased approaches towards women which causes hurdle in their work and reduces their efficiency.

Poverty, Unemployment and Illiteracy:

Poverty is the major problem faced by India and women's condition is even more bad as the unemployment rate is high among women. Many women work in unorganized sector and hence are paid low wages. Literacy rate is also low in case of women as compared to men. Such issues are the major obstacles in her political growth.

Psychological Barrier:

In general it has been observed that due to all above factors they have low self- esteem and lack confidence in themselves. Many women accept that politics is man's world and they have no role to play in it. The traditional approach of family members as well as their own beliefs stops them from participating in active politics.