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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN SOUTHERN REGION OF TAMIL NADU– CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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Abstract:

This Paper attempts to analyse the political decision making of women leaders through a study conducted among the women leaders in Southern Region of Tamil Nadu covering 9 districts, collecting data to analyse their qualitative participation, the support from family and community, the level of exercising their rights and the interference from the male community, the challenges and barriers, problems and prospects etc. This paper also analyses the participation of women in public and political life especially in the parties and in their powers, the possibility of women reservation within the political parties, strength for the voice of women and the perceptions of women in Politics. This paper analyses and discusses how the women were able to face and overcome such challenges and continue in politics who are in went same as the role models to future women politicians.

Keywords: women, Political Participation, Local self government.

Introduction: It is with all such experience, ills, the reservation bill could be retained and now women could exercise their role in politics by virtue of such reservations. The reservation may not be really helping women to have a decision making role in local governance, it is mainly ruled by men rather than the elected women really commit for the cause to serve the community, and hence reservation need not be exclusively given for women etc are the issues keep reported about the women's reservation in local governance and the same has been given as the reason for not accepting the bill in the Parliament for the women but thanks to women's organizations which really helped the bill to be passed.

Research Methodology: The current study explores the women's admission into political affairs and local governance and also the kind of issues faced by them. Often it is told that women in politics face character assassination. It is this assassination of their character prevents women from getting into politics. The focus of the present study is to analyse critically such issues and offer recommendations as to how to improve the participation of women in political participation.

Objectives:

1. To analyse the socio-economic background of the Women in Local Governance of both existing women in politics and aspire for political participation.
2. To examine the kind of barriers women in politics face to sustain to contribute to the society with a gender perspective of both the respondents group.
3. To analyze the kind of problems faced in addressing the barriers and kind of strategies followed to overcome the problems of both the respondents group.
4. To assess the kind of support system needed for women to participate and sustain in politics for the existing women in politics and recommend the kind of strategies for aspiring women to follow, emerged from the analysis of existing women in politics.

Research Design: The study has focused on both qualitative and quantitative analysis. The following taluks or blocks of various districts were included to get the data on political participation of the women and their issues. The methodology followed is described below. The following blocks from various districts of Tamil Nadu has been chosen and from the taluks chosen, the panchayats and the presidents and other elected members were contacted from the list available from the Asst Director Panchayat available with the District Head Quarters. Another set of women studied are the aspiring women who wants to enter into politics who are already associated with some parties.

Method of Data Collection: The primary sources of data were collected from the elected Representatives from PRI, aspiring members of Political Parties at various levels (National and Regional Parties), Women in Leadership roles and positions, Women activists from Women Movements and NGOs etc.

Analysis and Discussion:

Socio-Economic Characteristics of the Respondents: The relationship among the social and economic variables such as age, education, occupation, marital status, income and landholding and asset position etc are analysed in connection with women's entry, performance and contribution to politics.

Age plays an important role in shaping the behavior pattern of individual. According to the respondents political participation arises in early years and picks up in Middle Ages and falls in latter ages.

A considerable number (11.54 %) of the women leaders were either widowed or separated or unmarried and all the others (88.46%) are married and are living with their family and in many cases the husbands are supporting them in the political field providing the knowledge and information related to politics and current affairs. For married women, the challenge will be double as they have to look after the family, should fulfill the social expectations. The challenge is the society sees a woman even when she is the leader of the party or keeps any other position which may be equally challenging but she is expected to confine her to social role without fully contributing to the chosen career. That is the reason

why several women who come to public life remain single. Their perception that remaining single to work for the society will be better but that is also often criticized and if there is any issue, it is attributed to her singlehood and abuse her right at the face that she does not have family and so she won't understand the issues of family. Such challenges will be absent for men.

Education enables one to act rationally. More than education, the commitment to serve the people understanding the needs of the people, policies, technology, development around the world is important. Many studies found that education of the elected representatives was not a contributive factor for entering and sustaining into politics. It is a healthy fact and happy to realize that there are no illiterates among the women respondents who are being the political leaders as it is a pre-condition that they must have at least primary level education to contest in elections.

Occupation is an important ingredient in moulding participation. It is quite appreciable that nearly one third of the women who were home makers become political leaders and had come out to participate in politics.

Economic background with social support and social capital help an individual to enter into politics. In the current context, the politics has become a business and continuous reporting of the scams really serves as a discouraging mark for youngster to enter into politics.

Since Indian population belongs to Hindu majority, in this study more than 90 percent of the respondents belong to Hindu religion. Five percent of the respondents belong to Christian and one percent belongs to Muslim community. In religion like Islam, women cannot come out for any outside occupation in the early 20th Century. However, slowly the provisions of the State for Minority and also encouragement of people in Islamic movement, 33% reservation etc had supported women to occupy positions outside household particularly in Politics. Rokkiaah Malik is the classic example who hails from a family with full of restrictions in a rural area but able to prove by slowly tackling the shackles of obstacles and barriers.

Caste and politics influence each other and plays a significant role next to party affiliation. The electoral process, administration and politics are greatly affected by caste. The participants and contestants are indirectly connected with caste and have a hidden agenda to move to support their own caste to get represented once a person gets elected.

Table.1 District Wise Representation of the respondents

Districts	Respondents	Percentage
Trichy	14	18.07
Pudukottai	3	4 .00
Sivagangai	27	36.00
Coimbatore	9	12 .00
Dindigul	1	1. 03
Karur	7	9.03
Madurai	3	4.03
Thanjavur	6	8.00
Salem	5	6.07
Total	75	100

Source: Compiled from primary data

Political History of the Respondents

Party Affiliation of Women Political Leaders: Tamil Nadu had originally the Regional Dravidian parties which got split into AIADMK later to MDMK, DMDK, PMK from DMK. Similarly Congress, BJP, Communist parties as National parties. Since they got divided the coalition government is actually experienced. Though local body elections need not depend on political parties explicitly, it is implicit that every contestant will be affiliated to some party or the other. Membership in a party and active service on behalf of the party will gain goodwill not only for the party but also for the candidate at the time of election. In the current context, the women are given space in the political party to occupy some positions and same applies to women also to affiliate to some parties and in fact the parties decide whose wife or mother or daughter or sister or daughter in law to contest and accordingly get the chance of being participate in election.

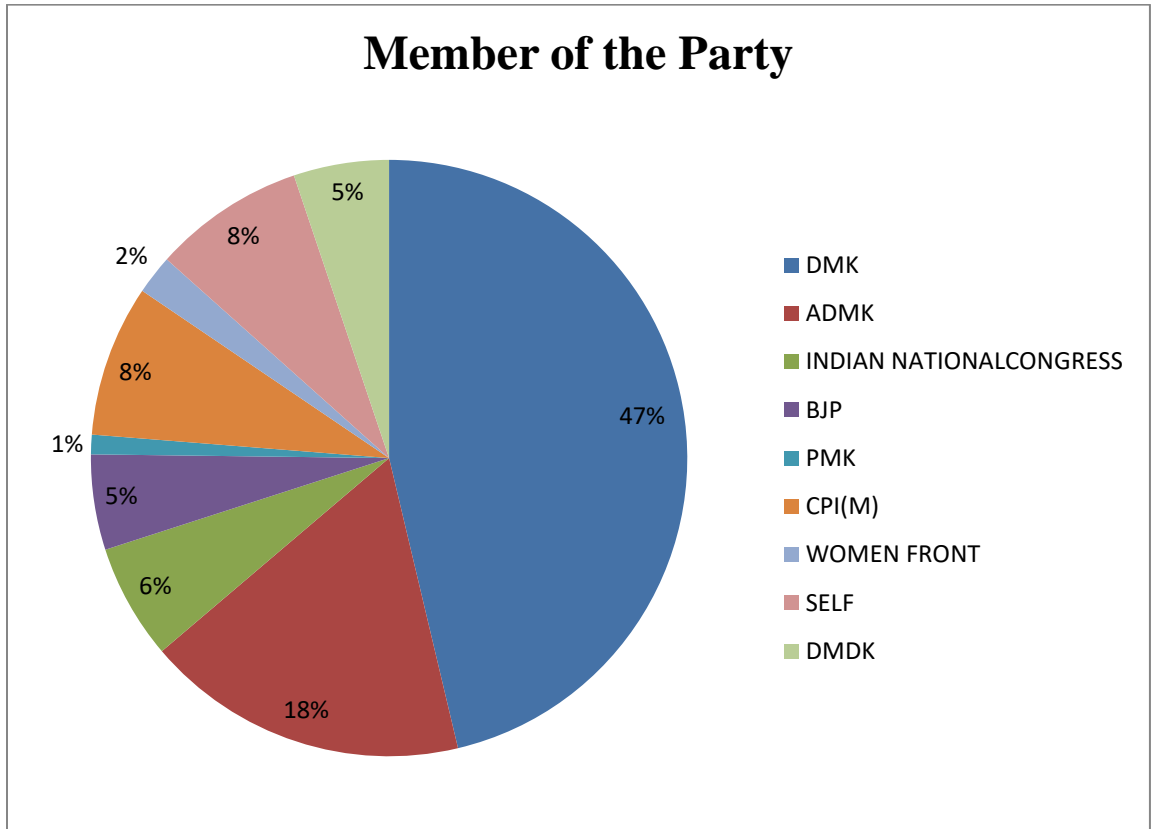


Figure 1: Party Affiliation of women political leaders

Since the ruling party is DMK, it was a coincidence that DMK party got represented more than other parties followed by ADMK which are the dominant regional political parties. This equation changes as per the change in the ruling party. In certain parties like CPM, a woman or a man cannot contest in elections without fulfilling the norms of the party who must have thorough knowledge and adhere to the rules of the party. In other parties generally the goodwill of the party member and the association to the leaders of the party decide the person to be contesting in elections. It is very minimum from other parties except the regional parties. But there are several other categories of aspiring women from other than political parties who wanted to contest in elections. Very few leaders who are advocates especially are affiliated to the newly emerged political parties such as Women Front and some are self nominated. The sustenance in party depends on how best they work with the people and also how best they adhere to the rules and principles of the party and how flexible to the needs of the party in certain cases. If women have qualities to be accommodative on the above heads, it is possible to participate in elections with all support and blessings of the party and possible to win in elections.

Year of joining in party: It is observed that women in this sample have the fortune of having more than 20 years of experience in associating with politics. However, to find adequate number of women to contest in elections was a difficult task and rare phenomenon in early periods. It is evident that women have increasingly participated in politics only in the last two decades from 1990 to till date which constitutes 81.15%.

Thanks to the initiatives taken by the women’s movements for the women’s political empowerment as the women entering into politics would have been a dream if such women’s organizations had not fought for reservation. For many women, it would not have been a reality to join politics without reservation. It is true and also told by many respondents that 33 per cent reservation quota provided them the opportunity to participate in the local body elections and enabled several women, who had never been in power and even those illiterate, to enter politics.

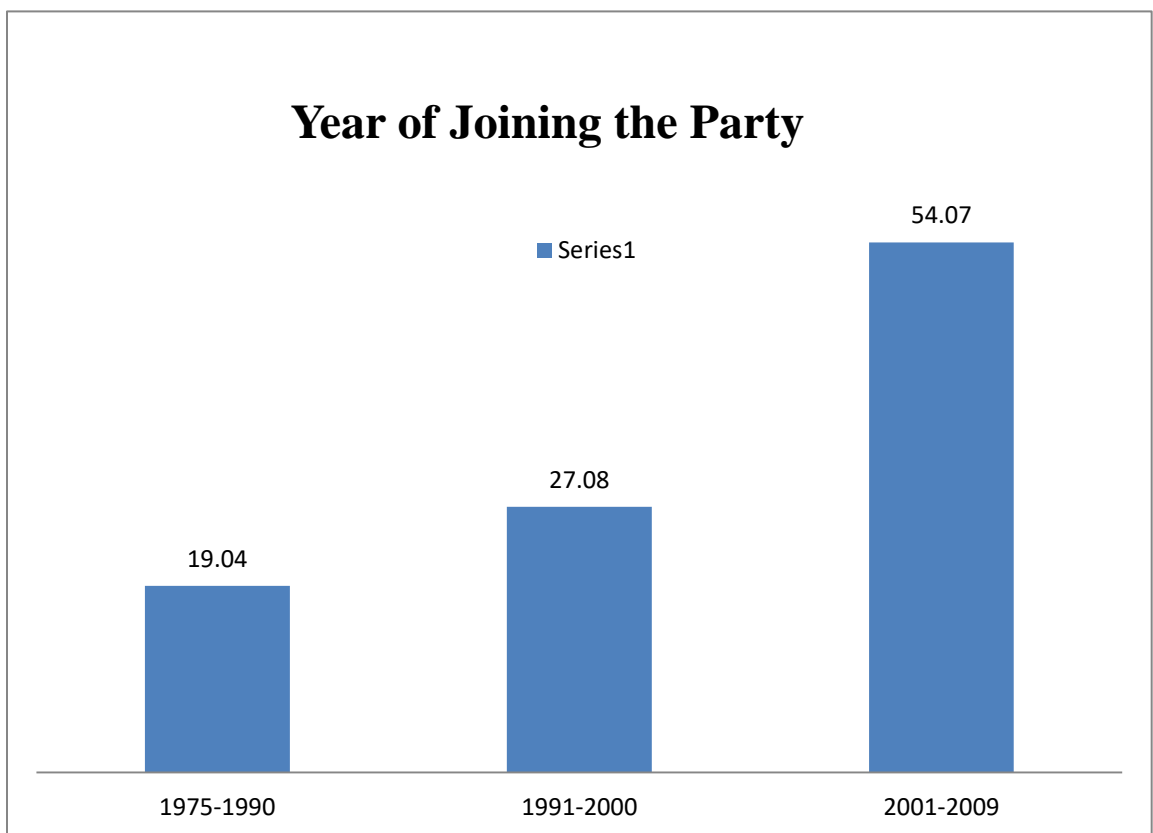


Figure 2: Year of joining the Party

Positions held in Political Parties: The table brings out the details of the respondents which include members from political parties, office bearers of various parties, office bearers of women wings of political parties, Executive Committee members of various parties, and other social and professional associations, which include bar councils, trade

union members etc. Majority of the members are panchayat presidents who intend to contest in elections for a higher position in future. Such a combination of the representation does indicate that women do not directly come to politics but associated themselves with other public and social life, professional associations, and trade unions and slowly gain experience and get into politics. But the reservation for local body election did not experience such process among the women as they were suddenly made to contest in elections and sometimes it was forced and just for the sake to women to contest, it was extended to women. Such sudden entry without any exposure, experience, knowledge really made the women to struggle and failed to work for the position for which the people elected them.

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents by their positions

	Respondents	Percentage
MLA State Mahila President, District Mahila Congress President	1	1.3
State Social Welfare Board Chairperson(Town Panchayat Chairman)	1	1.3
Mayor (AICC, PCC, State General Member)	2	2.7
State Executive Member	1	1.3
(Speaker)PMK	1	1.3
District Vice president (Bar Council, Advocating for party Members)	2	2.7
District Panchayat Presidents	2	2.7
Panchayat President	29	38.7
Panchayat Union Chairman	1	1.3
District General Secretaries	3	4.00
District Joint Secretaries	3	4.00
District women's wing secretaries	4	5.3
Women's wing joint secretaries	3	4.00
Municipal Women's Wing representatives	1	1.3
Chairperson Municipality	1	1.3
Executive Committee Members	18	24.00
Councilor(Ward, Municipal)	2	2.7
Total	75	100

Source: Compiled from primary data

Another observation from the table is that the women were able to occupy leadership positions but they were mostly confining to women's wing not general and mainstream politics and strategically important positions. The voices of the women and participation in decision making space in the parties have been very limited and often women are only observed as passive participants.

Factors helped to reach the Present position and Crucial Factors contributed for reaching such position: To come out politically, reservation for women helped. Equally the family background with the political influence helped them to reach at the present level. Their education and economic positions found had also helped them to reach the present level. Of course the personal qualities like ability to mobilize and organize people, ability to motivate or take up people's causes, oratory skills etc., and contacts with the people helped them considerably. It is difficult for women to come out the shell in the patriarchal society. With the above factors, reservation, family background and the personal qualities were found to be the crucial factors that helped the respondents to reach the present position. Therefore it is only because of the reservation, women could step into politics otherwise they would have been at home managing the home based activities.

Table 3: Support expected to overcome the problems

Support expected to overcome the problems	Respondents	Percentage
Education	45	60.00
Economical freedom	42	56.00
Support from the family	60	80.00
Good approach from the head of the party	12	16.00
Rapport building between the public and the head of the party	57	76.00
Support of the women's movements and organizations	49	65.3

Source: Compiled from primary data

Perception of Others on them: There is a general perception of the public on women's participation that women cannot perform on their own rather they need to be helped by the male members and the male members too intervene in their decisions and other actions. Although they could perform well many times and less perform at times. It all depends on how others respond to them. The general women feel proud of the women candidates and they approach them without any hesitation. Some are appreciating their efficient work and they want women to be in the position as they will respect older people, help women especially etc. But few women are jealous and criticize their work and say they are more selfish.

The men look women candidates as a competitor and object the women's entry into politics otherwise they find fault in their performance or feel jealous. But some men recognize the continuous work of the women candidates and appreciate and encourage them. They do respect and treat equally. At times they guide them for their good performances. Male society in general want women to be under the control of men which we need to break.

Table 4: Perception of others (both men and women) on the respondents

Perception of the men whom they have interacted	Percentage	Perception of the women whom they have interacted	Percentage
Encourage	10.7	Encourage	58.7
Equal treatment	20.00	Talented	74.7
Suggesting	18.7	Respect	66.7
decision making capacity	20.00	Social Responsibility	65.3
Innovative thinking	21.3	Problem solving	93.3
Jealous	10.7	Leadership qualities	78.7
Pessimistic	24.00	Jealous	15.0
Male chauvinistic attitude	85.3	Criticize their work	23.0
Talentless	52.00	selfish	11.0

Source: Compiled from primary data

Perception on women leaders in general by both women and men especially those in Similar Post: It differs from Region to region. Rural areas it is not taken seriously but in urban it is recognized better while canvassing for vote, people receive better. Women in general appreciate women leaders' performances and recognize their work. In contrast they said that men don't appreciate and do not recognize their contribution rather they criticize their performance and individuality. But few men are really appreciating and recognizing women coming up in all the fields and some times guide them for their better performances.

Findings & Conclusion: The summary of the findings and the possible recommendations on the basis of the findings will be discussed in this chapter. An analysis of the Training Needs Assessment of women in politics revealed the following findings:

1. It shows that the women are given good positions but still they are given positions for the women's wing within the party and not in the mainstream politics and the women's voice are very less in the mainstream party meeting which reveals their mere participation and not qualitative participation.
2. The respondents in the sample are the first generation women to politics and they felt that they require qualities such as personal (Respect for others, Cooperate with others, Confidence, Hard working, Active, Honest, Punctuality, Simplicity, Taking efforts, Courage), Social (Understand people's issues, Self dependent, Social consciousness and commitment, Accessible and approachable) and Psychological (Positive approach, Tolerate, Patience, Helping others etc. Similarly they require skills such as Communication (Oratory and Counseling skill, Language), Leadership (Decision making, Governance, Administration, Knowledge about constituency, Knowledge about politics, Coordination) and interpersonal relationship (interacting with people, problem solving among people) etc.
3. They are confident of being assertive but seek some inputs to enhance their leadership styles. The participants felt conscious of their education level, oratory

skills and the interacting skills when compared with other leaders and concerned with improving the same for sustenance.

4. They look forward to family support, particularly that of husband's and capacity building training to overcome these weaknesses. Strategies suggested to overcome the weaknesses are reservation with a commitment, involvement in tackling difficult tasks, sharing experiences with successful leadership.

Recommendations:

5. Intensive Training for elected women leaders to know the rights and duties and powers of the position
6. Creation of positive images on women through education, media so as to treat women equally with men, not viewing them as sex objects.
7. Women need to be educated with the electoral process, method of campaigning and how to mobilize resources for the campaigning.
8. Government need to bear the election campaign expenses as women are financially dependent which is the major barrier for women's political participation
9. Political parties should give 33 percent reservation within the party so as to bring more number of women into politics rather considering women only for women's wings of the party. Similarly 33% reservation both at the Raj sabha and Lok sabha will help women to enter into mainstream politics.
10. Elected women leaders can be taken for periodical Exposure visits to successful women leaders to build their capacities
11. Continuous meeting with the women leaders and sharing of experiences will create positive self image for them.
12. Women leaders should make a network among women and unite irrespective of various segregation viz class, caste, religion etc., and should enhance their capabilities and qualities which will lead to strengthen democracy.

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