

IMPACT OF RELIGION ON POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF RURAL WOMEN IN BALLARI TALUKA OF KARNATAKA STATE- A CASE STUDY OF KUDATHINI VILLAGE

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Abstract

In India religion is considered as an essential aspect of Indian tradition since centuries. Its accepted as a way of life of the people. For a majority of Indians, the day begins with religion and ends with it. Its influence on economic and political development cannot be over looked. The rural masses especially women are very sensitive to religious aspects. Taking this as an advantage the major and minor political parties exploit the voters and motivate them to vote for the candidates based on religion and caste leaving aside the socio-economic development of the nation. Though India is a secular country there are many instances where communal clashes are frequently occur. The religion imposes many do's and don't's in the lives of the people. The rural women are very particular about this. Religious traditions in majority of the cases restrict the women folk from actively participating in politics and many religions say that the political sphere is the duty of men folk and not of women. But, the development of the nation in this era of globalisation drastically needs the participation of both men and women in all spheres of life. The women should be encouraged to take appropriate decision to elect the representative government that safeguard their rights, develop them socially, economically, politically and culturally. The success of democracy depends on the active participation of both men and women. Religion should not be combined with politics and it should not be permitted to exploit the innocent by religious politics. Communal harmony should be encouraged and all possible steps should be taken to maintain and implement it throughout the country.

Keywords: Religion, Political Participation, Secularism, Indian Constitution, Communal Harmony, Political awareness, Right to freedom of Religion, Constitutional safeguards.

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Introduction

Supreme Court of India states that Secularism is a part of “Basic Structure Doctrine” of the Constitution of India. The ancient Indian liberality and tolerance of multiplicity of religious ideology are unparalleled in world history.¹ Religion has become an inseparable aspect of the lives of the people in India. It is a kind of belief of the existence of some super natural power. It is mixed in every activity of day-to-day life of the people. In a democratic, multi-cultural and multi-language diversified country like India the politics and religion always exist as two sides of the same coin. In majority of the cases the citizens of India elect the representatives based on religion and even the representatives take the support of religion, caste, region, ethnic and other aspects to win the elections. The political parties in majority of the cases allot the seats based on the belief and followers of a particular religious people and region to the candidate belonging to that religion in order to win the elections. This article highlights the religious issues faced by the rural women that hinder their path for their active political awareness and participation in our country and offers suggestions to overcome them through the involvement of all the stakeholders respectively.

Research Problem:

Religion is often mixed with politics in India. Though there are no proper records of restricting certain religious people, castes, women and so on from actively participating politically, the preachers of religion or exploiters often in the name of religion try to restrict them from political participation. This will hinder their development to such an extent that many generations have suffered and will suffer due to it. So, the present study is an attempt to focus on the impact of religion on political participation of rural women in the study area.

Objectives of the study

This study has the following objectives:

1. To understand the significance of religion in the lives of rural women.
2. To study the role of religion on rural women to participate in the political process of the country.

3. To analyse the impact of religion on political participation of rural women in the study area.
4. To identify the religious issues faced by the rural women from actively participating in the elections.
5. To suggest measures to overcome the religious issues that impose several restrictions on the political participation of rural women through the effective coordination of all the stakeholders.

Significance of the study

India is a secular nation and is neutral and impartial towards all religions. There are atheistic state (anti to religion), Theocratic state (Pro-religion/State religion) and secular state (USA & India). The preamble of India states that India is a sovereign and secular state included through 42nd Constitutional Amendment Act 1976. India is a country where it accommodates many religions, cultures and so on that has given it a separate status in the world. The seventh Chief Justice of India states that “The state does not owe loyalty to any particular religion as such; it is not irreligious or anti-religious, it gives equal freedom to all religions.

In India religion plays a prominent role in politics. The major cause of a particular political party coming to power is based on the religious sentiments of the people. The majority of the population in India belongs to Hinduism so in India many political leaders get elected from the Hindu religion. It has been witnessed that since ages the women are limited to household chores and very few had the opportunity to participate in the political arena that is indirectly been directed the religion they belong. This study will focus on the limited political participation of rural women in the study area and will provide a view that will help the political parties and the government to take effective steps to encourage the active and 100 per cent political participation of women to realise the real meaning of democracy.

Indian Constitution –A secular approach

In Indian Constitution several articles pertaining to secular approach are mentioned below:

Article 25: States that freedom of conscience and free profession, practice and propagation of religion.

Article: 26: states that there is freedom to manage religious affairs in India.

Article 27: states that there is freedom as to payment of taxes for promotion of any particular religion.

Article 28: states that there is freedom as to attendance at religious instruction or religious worship in certain educational institutions in India.

Overview of the Study Area

Kudathini village – Ballari District, Karnataka State:

Kudathini is a large village located in Bellary district, Karnataka state with total 3980 families residing. The Kudathini village has population of 18215 of which 9661 are males while 8554 are females as per Population Census 2011. ²

In Kudathini village population of children with age 0-6 is 2604 which makes up 14.30 % of total population of village. Average Sex Ratio of Kudathini village is 885 which is lower than Karnataka state average of 973. Child Sex Ratio for the Kudathini as per census is 1044, higher than Karnataka average of 948. ³

Kudathini village has lower literacy rate compared to Karnataka. In 2011, literacy rate of Kudathini village was 66.25 per cent compared to 75.36 per cent of Karnataka. In Kudathini Male literacy stands at 77.04 per cent while female literacy rate was 53.74 per cent. ⁴

As per constitution of India and Panchyati Raj Act, Kudathini village is administrated by Sarpanch (Head of Village) who is elected representative of village. ⁵**Work profile of the village**

In Kudathini village out of total population, 8547 were engaged in work activities. 95.66 per cent of workers describe their work as Main Work (Employment or Earning more than 6 Months) while 4.34 per cent were involved in Marginal activity providing livelihood for less than 6 months. Of 8547 workers engaged in Main Work, 904 were cultivators (owner or co-owner) while 2165 were agricultural labourers. ⁵

Methodology

This study comprises of both the primary and secondary data. The universe of the study is one hundred rural women respondents in Paramadevanahalli village of Ballari Taluka in Ballari district of Karnataka state. The research technique used in this study is simple random sampling method. This study is both exploratory and analytical in approach. Interview schedule method

has been used to analyse the perception of rural women about low level of political awareness and to identify the impact of membership in the associations on their political awareness and participation in local, state and national level elections. The collected data has been tabulated and analysed through simple statistical tools and thereby the inferences have been drawn based on this in the study area.

Age wise distribution of respondents

Table: 1

N=100

Age group	% of respondents
Youth (18-31)	63
Middle age (32-50)	24
Aged (50-60)	08
Senior Citizens (60 and above)	05
Total	100

Source: Computed from primary data

Table 1 depicts the distribution of the women respondents in the study area according to their age. The table reveals that the active population in the total respondents of 100, the youth in the age group of 18-31 constitute 63 per cent, middle age respondents in the age group of 32-50 is 24 per cent, aged respondents in the age group of 50-60 is 08 per cent, and the respondents belonging to the age group of 60 and above are recognised as the senior citizens by the Government of India and they constitute 05 per cent. The different age groups were selected for the study mainly to provide an overall scenario of the voter perception with respect to their awareness and participation in the political field and to address their issues individually and collectively for an active political participation in all respects for the stability and development of the nation.

Political Participation of rural women respondents on the basis of religion

Table: 2

N=100

Religion	% of respondents
Hindu	68
Muslim	13

Christian	17
Others	02
Total	100

Source: Computed from primary data

In our country the institution of religion plays a prominent role in the lives of the people that has been passed on from one generation to another generation. It plays an important role in the political decision making, allocation of the seats in the election in particular constituencies, political agenda of the country and so on. The concept of religion and politics are very closely interwoven and it is quite difficult to separate them. In many instances the political parties try to take the support of the religious sentiments of the people to win the elections and form the government. The true democratic spirit of the people is being influenced by the religion of the people. Table 2 state that the respondents in the study area belonging to the Hindu community is 68 per cent, Muslim community is 13 per cent, Christian community is 17 per cent and others constitute 02 per cent respectively.

Perception of the respondents to the key questions asked in the Interview Schedule

Table : 3

Sl.No.	Rural women respondents	Yes	No
1.	Do you belong to any religion ?	98	02
2.	Is India a secular nation ?	91	09
3.	Do you vote to a candidate belonging to your own religion contesting in the elections ?	81	19
4.	Are you literate ?	23	77
5.	Are you aware of the Right to freedom of religion enshrined in our Indian Constitution?	09	91
6.	Are you aware of your political rights ?	13	87
7.	Do you actively participate in the elections ?	24	76
8.	Do you vote in the elections ?	100	00
09.	In your opinion, should the religion be kept aside from politics ?	36	64
10.	Do you wish to contest in the elections ?	79	21
11.	Do religion influence your political decision making freedom ?	98	02

Source: Computed from Primary Data

Findings of the study

The findings of the study are as follows:

- 98 per cent of them replied that they belong to one or the other religion.
- 91 per cent of them replied that India is a secular nation.
- 81 per cent of them replied that they vote to the candidate belonging to their own religion and later caste within their religion.
- Only 23 per cent of the respondents are literates.
- Only 09 per cent of them replied that they are aware of the right to freedom of religion enshrined in our Indian Constitution.
- 13 per cent of them knew about their political rights.
- 24 per cent of them replied that they actively participate in the elections.
- 100 per cent of the respondents replied that they vote in the elections if they are in their village at the time of elections.
- 36 per cent of the respondents replied that the religion should be kept aside from politics.
- 79 per cent showed interest in contesting elections if sponsored by the political party or philanthropists or well-wishers.
- 98 per cent of the respondents replied that they are influenced by religion in making their political related decisions.

Drawbacks and religious issues responsible for the poor political awareness and participation of rural women in the study area

The following drawbacks have been identified in the study area:

- Majority of the political leaders in India are found to mix religion with politics especially in their speeches in influence voters and this should be prevented by the prohibiting such speeches in their campaigns.
- Poverty is the major reason restricting the rural women from contesting in the elections.
- Illiteracy is posing to be a hindrance for the rural women to understand the dynamic political process existing in India.
- Lack of political training to the rural women is another drawback that makes them listen to influential people to vote for a particular person or restrain from voting.
- Money and liquor distribution has become rampant during the time of elections.

- Age old customs, traditions, superstitious beliefs are influencing the rural women voters in being biased with respect to their political decision making.
- Male domination at the time of elections is creating a sense of fear in the rural women folk from taking their own political decision and actively participating in the elections.
- Religious minorities are not provided adequate security at the time of elections and that leads to communal clashes.

Suggestions

The following suggestions have been offered to overcome the issues of rural women in the study area:

- Convicted people should be barred to contest in the elections.
- Rural women should be provided reservation to contest in the elections.
- Distribution of money before and during the time of elections should be curbed to encourage the rural masses to actively participate in the elections.
- Security should be provided to the rural women contesting in the elections.
- Steps should be taken to curb the black money.
- Political education should be provided by the experts to the rural masses especially women, so that they take their own decisions in electing their representatives and in contesting the elections at the local, state and central level.
- Communal politics involving killing the people of other religions should be strictly addressed by the law making bodies.
- Seminars, conferences and workshops should be organised to educate the rural masses against religious intolerance by all the stakeholders.
- Religious clashes should be curbed by all possible means especially during the time of elections inorder to conduct free and fair elections.
- Rural women should be made the owners of the land they cultivate and should be assured of economic security so that feel secure of being independent of male domination especially in taking and making political decisions.

Conclusion

India is a multi-religious nation. Democracy is the life-line of India and its success depends on the active political participation of the both men and women. Unfortunately in India as has been stated in many reports by the Government of India and the State Governments the political awareness and participation women is very meagre especially in rural areas. To get rid of this political education and encouragement along with economic, social and cultural growth should be achieved in the lives of women. Further, religion and politics should not be combined in a negative way as has been recently being witnessed and highlighted in the newspapers. Political parties allot the tickets to the candidates to contest in the elections based on religion, caste, money and muscle power etc. Dynastic politics is gaining importance in India and they in turn if are able to come to power are further using power to appoint the political appointees based on religion, caste and so on. The common man in spite of his handwork in the political party are just encouraged only to serve on a secondary status and never given a ticket to contest in the elections based on seniority of his service in the political party. To achieve political, social, cultural and economical development of India, communal harmony should be guaranteed and it is the responsibility of all the stakeholders to ensure this for a peaceful co-existence as of now and in future as well.

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