Process of Political Socialisation in Children

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ABSTRACT

Political Socialization is the process whereby political attitude and values are inculcated as children become adults and as adults are recruited in roles. It is a political learning formal and informal, deliberate and unplanned at every stage of the life-cycle. It starts from the childhood and continues till the end of life in the several twist and turns. It is the learning which provides him his own political phenomena.

The importance of political socialization lays in the fact that it binds its citizens with political system. It offers how political system achieves stability through the manipulation of socialization norms. The process of political socialization acts in a casual or imperceptible manner. It operates in a quiet or smooth manner without people being aware of it. It is a learning of political culture, facts and patterns through various agencies of society. It is the way in which one generation passes on political standards and beliefs to succeeding generations. Cultural transmission is the phase that best describes this process.

Democratic values in children do not inherit by birth but they learn it through process of political socialization. Children’s socialization to democratic dispositions is studied by their attitudes on specific forms of democracy. Children acquire these values in course of learning and with the growth in age and knowledge etc. Family is the child’s first contact with authority. Its contribution is of vital importance in forming the political personality of a child. Next to family, school occupies favourable position in terms of the pre-conditions for successful socialization. Other agents as peer groups, mass media also play role in developing political beliefs in children.

This research paper will present the Process of Political Socialization in children. It will include how different agencies and factors are responsible in inculcating political norms in children. It will evaluate several shortcomings in the process of political socialization in India.

INTRODUCTION

Political socialization identifies a developmental process through which persons acquire political orientations and patterns of behaviour. It is an important factor in the understanding of the political system. Political Socialization is a process of political learning. It starts from the childhood and continues till the end of life in the several twist and turn. The process of political learning starts when when the child becomes aware of a wide environment, he feels increasingly perspective in response to particular situations and comes to have an outlook that becomes increasingly coherent and total where before it was fragmented and limited. It is at this stage the general attitude of the children towards authority, obedience, resistance; cooperation aggression etc. has its germination.

Every society wishes to maintain itself or to have its stability as a condition precedent to its survival has one of its essential functions in socialization of the young in order to enable them to carry willingly that established values and norms of their collective life. A new born child is not socialized creature; he is socialized by means of a learning process.
Children undoubtedly learn from their parents and other significant adults in their environment. A child may learn to approve of the political authorities because he has been taught to do so by his parents or because he has modelled himself on the behaviour of his older siblings. But his attitude toward the authorities may also be formed partly through direct experiences, unmediated by transmission from others and interpreted in the light of his inner needs. He may learn to dislike all authorities because of what he interprets as unjust treatment at the hands of familiar authorities.

**AGENTS OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION:**

Family can be said as the first agent of political socialisation. The chief contribution of the family in forming the political personality of the individual derives from its role as the main source and locus for the satisfaction of all his basic innate requirements. Role of family is both kind and coercive. Robert lane has suggested that there are three ways in which the foundations of political beliefs may be laid through the family (i) by overt and covert indoctrination (ii) by placing the child in a particular social context (iii) by moulding the child’s personality. Family provides the child with his biological needs and social heritage. Each family with its own peculiarities of living, feeling and attitude presents a unique environment for the child. The earliest environmental forces operating on the child help establish life long patterns of person to person and person to society influence of every kind, including patterns of political influence. There is direct relationship between the attraction of the child to his father and his identification with public figures. The stronger the father’s position in the family, the most likely is that the child will be positively attached to outside public figures. There is difference between the middle and lower class children. Since middle class children usually have more benevolent fathers in contrast to the permissive lower class father. It follows that the child who has strong father tends to be more attached to figures and institutions than the child whose father is relatively weak. The family’s influence in the socialization process extends beyond authority perception. The child imitates the political role performed by the parents. The parental role model influences offspring interest in politics positively or negatively and enhances recruit into the politics. Trust factor in family plays important role in children’s political socialization. It is a continuing mutual obligation. Trust is established well in early childhood. It is an early result of early physical and emotional ties than an individual has learned, in the family and from infancy onwards, that such reliance is predictable and supportive. As it develops, starting in infancy, the polity can develop, as it dies, so dies the polity. Not only is the child the product of his family, but he also brings his family into the schoolroom. What he has learnt and continues to learn at home, colours his attitude towards the school and generally influences how he learn and what he does in the school setting. Thus, the family plays a crucial role by transmitting political values across generations.

School occupies a favourable position in terms of the preconditions for successful socialization. Next to family, the school is mainly seen through its ability to develop the cognitive map of the child. In the school context the child experiences an authority structure different from one encountered in the home. He learns as a member of the group, the rituals of pledging allegiance to the flag which in turn enhances an attitude of submission, respect and dependence manifested in the gesture and world surrounding act. The role of schools in political education exceeds that of home. Through the teacher’s influence, the children are socialized. School teachers and administrators teach much political learning informally by their style of behaviour, their classroom procedures and their attitudes towards children. Political education in schools involves socialization to a lesser or greater extent, depending on the values of educators and those whom they serve. Children learn rules of political participation through classroom activities, discussion and school club activities.
Peer groups occupy a favourable position for influencing the political views of individuals. Peer groups enjoy considerable exposure to the individual and this exposure widens as he or she matures. The peer group agent of political socialization influences students to change in the direction of institutional peer norms irrespective of the social era in which student’s attended college. As the individual begins to spend more time away from their family, their peer group can take on an important role as a socializing agent. Pressures to confirm to group norms can be very powerful and have an impact upon student’s political attitudes and values.

The channels of mass communication exercise their own impact upon the cognitive map of the individual’s personality. By reading newspaper reports, listening to radio talks and watching television films, people develop taste as well as distaste for norms and values. The role of religious institutions and political parties can not be undermined. The direct contact of a child with political system can not be ignored. It will not be wrong to say that nothing can be as influential in shaping the attitudes and orientations of the individuals as their direct contacts with the institutions and processes of the political system under which they live and work.

**VARIOUS FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION:**

(i) **Age:** It is the important independent variable in socialization of children. Child begin to understand his political role in society and basic concepts become clearer as mental stability develops with the growth in age. With the advancement of age one gets politically matured. The attitude behaviour of a person is distinctly changed as he grows old. Age is considered to have the psychic influence of the development of political attitudes. As the child matures he exhibits a greater degree of role differentiation. Children of different age groups have different capacities of political learning. Prior to age thirteen most youngsters do not have the cognitive capacity to perform complex mental operations about political phenomena e.g. Preadolescents are unable to deeply comprehend highly abstract political concept such as government, society, democracy. Preadolescents focus on the tangible and the concrete, they tend to personalize institutions and events. Preadolescents do not have the capacity to build complex network between concepts, they often know details about politics or government, but cannot integrate these data efficiently in terms of conceptual frameworks.

(ii) **Family Background:** Role of each member in the family is responsible for the primary socialization of children. Mother is an important member who affects the child. Educational status of parents also affects the child in process of political socialization. Children are also influenced by their siblings.

(iii) **Education:** Education plays a vital role in shaping the political attitude and behaviour of children. School is the place where child starts to learn about the nature of the social world beyond the primary contacts. Children learn different rules and regulations from schools which help them to become a socialized adult. These rules and regulations inculcate children the political knowledge.

(iv) **Gender:** Greenstein points out the different sex dependent, psychological development and role playing experienced by girls and boys in their formative years. The traits such as aggressiveness, socialability, leisure and intellectual interests take different forms, depending on the sex. Boys even in their early period engage in more aggressive behaviour than girls do. Girls on other hand exhibit a greater degree of interest in establishing personal ties and social interaction with others. The games which introduce the child to different roles are different for boys and girls. Boys imitate adult males and girls imitate adult females. Different games have different rules and procedures. According to Piaget, games provide the child with the first opportunity to engage in regulative behaviour whereby democratic codes are learned. Hyman points that boys are likely to interest themselves with politics and current events than girls, who are normally interested in home type literature.
Rural Urban differences: One of the main fields of political research in US has been the study of difference of conditions in rural-urban settings and its effect on the political behaviour of its dwellers. Such American studies prove beyond doubts that the dwellers of rural areas are politically less mobile, and in them political awareness lag far behind the dwellers of cities. Even with regards to the theorization in the area of political development, categorical references have been made of rural urban differences. Daniel Lerner rightly perceives that in the march of society towards the status of modern nationhood, urbanization plays a vital role. In the process of modernisation, Lerner conceives of urbanization to be the first step which is closely followed by high level of literacy, mass media and finally political development. The movement and mobility of the people from farms to flats is associated with a social chain reactions resulting into increased literacy, exposure to mass media and turn out large scale for voting.

Social Environment: Social environment of children develop their own competence and civic responsibility. It fosters in them the capacity to understand the changing world around them in terms of places, cultures, use of resources and natural and social system in the past, present and future. Social environment includes the atmosphere in which individual survives. In healthy environment children can explore the values of democratic process, social justice, enabling them to exercise judgement on moral and ethical issues. Empowered with these skills, they will become better thinkers, and decision makers. A child starts to think, act in accordance to the environment, he is grown up. Healthy social environment leads towards healthy socialization of a child.

Media: The media presents information on important political topics. How topics are presented have a major role in opinion formation. Currently the most influential type of media is television. Children acquire knowledge from television which they may not get from their family. Both entertainment and informational programming have important consequences for the child’s development of cognitive and affective orientations towards political actors. The media presents information on important political topics. How topics are presented and which topics are presented have a major impact in opinion formation. Many current political issues are reflected in entertainment shows. While the purpose is to entertain the public, these programmes stimulate discussion of important issues. Sometime media serve as the eyes and ears of the children if it is to be informed about important issues related to governing process. As the media identify public problems, this occurs the transmission of historical information that is important for continuation of the political culture. This function is particularly very important in the process of socialization of children who to be citizens through the transmission of values from television.

IMPACT OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION ON CHILDREN:

During the process of political socialization, children develop their awareness of political world. Children begin to appreciate some of the general values implicit in the various political objects that they acquire early motives and feeling these objects and that they seem to interpret them in general in general and idealized or formal terms. Children acquire general orientations about support and begin to relate themselves positively or negatively to the political community. Children also learn to commit themselves to general range of goals associated with the regime of their system. They become familiar with the notion of democracy and begin to absorb some general impressions about theoretically fundamental regime norms. They acquire minimal knowledge and begin to learn the skills associated with the roles through which these norms can be fulfilled. Few children may have capacity to learn these roles in detail. Children are ready to absorb knowledge and feelings of a general formal sort about many adult political roles. They are probably learning fundamental ways of relating themselves to the political sphere. It is this time the basic commitments about a political system whether they are positive or negative may take place.
Children start linking themselves to prominent figures. As family is the primary agent of political socialization, children develop taste according to their parents. Their likes and dislikes are on their parent’s choice. The change can be seen in children’s behaviour when they are aware of certain rules. They become an active participant and start obeying them which later on develop in them to become a responsible citizen. Harshful, neglectful, abusive treatment of children or indifference on the part of parents can inhibit the development of prosocial behaviour.

Positive signs of political socialization lead children to participate in civic education activities, in class room discussion in which they feel free to form their own opinion on national affairs and participate in the intellectual life school together with those who surround them with different opinions and perspectives. Bringing their own critical thinking dispositions into play, these children are curious, willing to examine multiple perspectives and tend to think critically. These children may develop a sense of curiosity about nation, driven by quest to find accurate and objective information about their nation that they did not feel they were obtaining in school or through watching television or reading newspapers. A sense of curiosity about nation leads children to gather information and opinion about nation on their own.

Negative behaviour also emerges in children if their school atmosphere presents violent behaviour, both within the school grounds and in the classrooms. It appears that most school violence is the result of interpersonal conflicts that lead to desire or revenge.

The children differentiate among the political authorities themselves. There is not just one universal role of political authorities. Children see a variety of political roles and have little difficulty describing their differences. They have varying expectations dependent on the object and the quality.

It is significant that upper grade children acquire a considerable ability to identify and describe varying kinds of political roles and to distinguish them from their parental role. It reveals a relatively high level of socialization during childhood about structural phenomena in politics.

PROBLEMS IN THE PROCESS OF POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION IN INDIA:

India is a country where the population is more than 100 crore but only one-third of them are able to read. Fifty percent of children living in the rural areas leave the school for variety of reasons. Some leave because of lack of interest, most leave so that they can work. A large percentage of dropouts are females. Forced by their parents most girls perform chores and tend the family at home. Due to these problems females in India are illiterate, than those of males. This in turn creates a problem for next generation. Family is said to be most important agent of political socialization, if any member in the family is illiterate, especially the mother it also affects the children. As child remains close to mother so her education had greater impact upon the child. Their illiteracy is a hindrance in the political development of a child.

The use of high tech devices such as computers is very rare in rural schools. Today internet is spreading its hand in the field of study. Where a child equipped with a same facility keep different views, the child deprive of this had low experience of it and his views differ. Another condition of the schools is the inadequate facilities, the classes are actually taught in. Many schools operate without electricity. Due to lack of several facilities children lack interest in study.

Poverty is the hindrance to schooling. Discontinuation rates for the poorest children are also two times higher than for children from the high income households. The intensity of poverty is such that many children above six, attending government schools are working after school hours. They are engaged in full time work during peak seasons, holidays and weekends. The pressure of morning chores is so much that they don’t have time even to eat. Poverty hinders enrolment and completion of
primary schooling of children. It leads to educational deprivation, because children from poorer households find it difficult to access school, attend it regularly and continue and learn for a sustained period of time. Poor children manage to enrol and attend school; they do not escape the burden of work resulting from poverty. As they seek to combine both school and work, the result is that their level of learning and achievement are affected and do not reach their full potential. Most children do not get sufficient time to revise their books, lessons, especially older child whom the responsibility fall. Their poor nutritional status also compounds the problem, by lowering energy levels and affecting concentration levels.

Household or family size, referring the number of children affects schooling of children in a family. Children from smaller families are more likely to attain educational milestones compared to children in large families. There is a consistent and inverse association, between family size and percentage of children who have completed primary schooling. Larger families tend to have older children than smaller families and hence given the educational attrition, older children are more likely to be out off school than the younger ones. Boys in smaller families have a distinct advantage over boys in larger families, while girls of both large and small families are withdrawn from school for work responsibilities in rural areas.

The different gender roles are learned in the family through the process of socialization. Children are taught to think and act in ways appropriate to their sex. K.Channa points out how gender typing of tasks begins early in life. From infancy, girls are socialized to help, be submissive and learn the centrality of their domestic realm. (Channa 1990). In India, the gender gap has persisted schooling rights since independence. Dreze and Saran from their study of Palanpur in U.P., conclude that the vast majority of girls are expected to spend most of their adult life in domestic work irrespective of their educational achievements. Education of girls especially in rural areas is regarded as wasteful investment (Dreze and Saran 1995).The eldest daughter is often the biggest looser, as she has to take over the responsibility of household work (Channa 1990; Jejebhoy 1996; Burra 2001).

SUGGESTIONS FOR MAKING POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION MORE INFLUENTIAL THROUGH DIFFERENT AGENTS:

In order to exert political influence over children family must communicate nearly to the children. As harshful and abusive treatment of children on the part of the parents develops pro-social behaviour, parents should adopt loving and caring attitude towards their children. Family should give equal opportunities to both boys and girls. Differentiation between them has resulted in lack of efficacy in girls, so differentiation should not be done in order to avoid this. It will lead to healthy development of political efficacy in girls. Healthy atmosphere should be created at home which will inculcate moral values in them by the time that will result in developing positive political attitudes.

School must not only transmit knowledge to children but serve agencies of cultural amalgamation, dedicating to breaking down barriers of class and race and fostering a broader community interest. A proper open educational climate should be provided to children as in open educational climate teachers and students feel free to ask controversial questions and to arrive at unorthodox answers, if they can validate these answers. School must make efforts on understanding of the political system and how to use it. It should provide facilities wherein students can interact among themselves and broaden their horizon in social as well as political issues which will help in development of their personalities. Teachers need to be trained in cultural diversity so that they can better understand and work with the increasing numbers of students of colours.

Different programmes like mock parliament played by children will also result in development of political norms in them. Community must focus on civic responsibility and social competence which will develop respect for their own cultural heritage and that of others. It should organize
different social and national events by which children will be aware of their surroundings and feeling of love and respect toward their culture and nation will develop in them. Rural-Urban gaps should be filled up and more facilities should be provided to children living in rural areas.

CONCLUSION:

The impact of the family is paramount in the development of children’s opinion. Political attitudes begin to develop in children and major influence on these early values is the family. Family background affects the primary socialization of children. Children’s perception of politics is largely determined by their early education. It modifies the affects of political socialization made by the family. School have major three components – teacher, classes and text, and culture which work together and are effective agents influencing the development of ideas. Social environment also plays significant role in developing attitudes. Other factors as age, sex and social agents also effect in children’s feeling of involvement in political events. Children also derive some basic understanding of the citizen role from their personal experiences. Thus, political socialization is a process of learning about the political life in which different variables such as social, economic and educational status of family and educational institutions play significant role in determining children’s perception of politics.

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