

‘Women should take active part in Politics’

17th October 2012



David Gainer, Public Affairs Officer, US Consulate, speaks at the video conference meet held at Stella Maris College | R SATISH BABU

Jyothimani Sennimalai is special. She contested and won the panchayat elections when she was just 21. All that she wanted was water supply for Dalits in her village. Now, 16 years later, the current national secretary of the Indian Youth Congress is all set to assume the same role for the women’s wing of the Congress.

“I was fresh out of college and wanted to transform our village; that was the primary reason why I contested. The foolhardiness of youth gave me courage, I doubt if I would do the same now and defy my family to follow my own path,” says Jyothimani.

Speaking at a digital video conference organised by the US Consulate at Stella Maris College on Tuesday, she said that even if young women did not want to take active part in politics, they should involve themselves by enrolling with a political party of their choice. “It is not going to harm anybody; women must make their presence felt. In a democracy, it is all about numbers,” she adds.

The economic and political empowerment of women in society is critical to economic development and sustaining peace and stability, said Jennifer McIntyre, Consul General, US

Consulate, who also participated in the interaction that focused on the role of women in politics, as the US presidential elections are just three weeks away.

The Consul General said that South Asia was special, as several nations like India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Pakistan have had women leaders at the helm for many years.

“Globally, although women comprise 40 -50 per cent of members of political parties, they hold only about 10 per cent of party leadership positions,” said Jennifer, adding that the US was no exception.

Lalitha Kumaramangalam, national executive of the Women’s Wing of the Bharathiya Janata Party, said that the most important thing women could do was to take part in the voting process. Addressing women students, she said, “For the most part we have never had to fight for anything. Working at the grassroots level, I have seen the enormous gender bias; they become involved as they are fighting for a cause or an issue.” She added that basic and essential issues like sanitation and education were hardly addressed in politics.

Priti Rao, executive director of the Massachusetts Women’s Political Caucus (MWPC), joined the conference from Boston.

Highlighting the work of her group, she said, “The challenges faced by women who go to office are several. First, they need a lot of encouragement even to go to office. Second, their lives are highly scrutinised and they are also not seen as politically viable.”

The MWPC provides training and strategic support to candidates and have had several women elected to various positions in Massachusetts. Lalitha and Jyothimani conceded that while women who were elected got the required training, those who wish to enter the political arena in India should also be provided with such training.