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Women Participation in Panchayati Raj Instituions and its Impact on Himachal Pradesh State Politics

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Abstract

Presently India is the substantial democratic country in the world where the women folk constitute almost half of the total population. The provisions of Indian constitution render equality to women political rights by legitimizing their role for contribution in community inside the formal and legal framework. Women political participation is one of the important issues in Indian politics and concern of intelligentsia. It has been more than six decades of independence still there is a quite diminutive impact on women's active participation in politics. Since the enactment of 73rd Amendment, it is perceived that space in local bodies will give rural women space for political participation. The journey of last twenty years indicates mixed results while women voter turnout in different elections enhanced and women participation in informal activities also increased such as Self Help Groups (SHGs), Mahila Mandals (Women Groups) etc. But on the other side women participation as decision makers in the State and National politics is not satisfactory. The proposed paper is an attempt to evaluate this aspect through secondary data. For this purpose the sample has been taken Himachal Pradesh. The question to be analysed the participation of women in PRIs in the last twenty years and its impact on the State Politics.

Keywords: *Panchayati Raj, Women Participation, Politics and 73rd Amendment Act*

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is one of the hilly states of India. It is situated between 30"22'40 to 33"12'20 north latitude and 75'47"55' to 79'04"20' east latitudes. The altitude in Himachal Pradesh is a wholly mountains region in the lap of Himalayas range 350 meter to 6975 meter above sea level. To its North lies the State of Jammu & Kashmir whereas Uttranchal is in the South East. With Haryana on the South and Punjab on the West, in the East it forms India's border with Tibet.[1] India achieved independence on 15th August 1947. The position of princely states vis-a-vis people completely changed with the transfer of power from the British crown to India representatives. The people of hill areas wanted to immediate merger of the hill states with the Indian Union and various local and national leaders issued appeal to the princely rulers to respect the aspiration of their people by joining the union but the efforts remained furtive.[2] The state of Himachal Pradesh came into existence on 15th April 1948 as centrally administered unit by putting together twenty six Shimla hill states and four Punjab hill states.[3] After a long struggle Himachal Pradesh gained full-fledged statehood on 25th January 1971 and become the 18th, state of Indian Union.[4] Himachal Pradesh extends over an area of 55673 Sq.Km. According to 2011 census, the population of state is 68,64,602 out of which 34,81, 873 were males (51%) and 33,82, 729 (49%) were females. The Sex Ratio is 974 females per 1000 males and it is above the national average i.e. 943 as per 2011 census. The density of population is 123 persons per Sq. Kms. The rural population was on the high side 90% and urban 10% the

percentage share of urban population has been increasing continuously over the previous year with figure of 8.69% in 1991, 9.80% in 2001 and 10.00% in 2011 census.[5] Presently literacy rate of the state is 82.80 percent (Male 89.53 percent and Female 75.93 percent). It shows that female literacy is quite good in Himachal Pradesh than that of all India rate. After granting the statehood of H.P., the strength of the state legislative assembly had been increases to sixty eight. Out of sixty-eight constituencies, 19 seats were reserved for SCs and STs, 4 seats of Lok Sabha and 3 Seats for Rajya Sabha were also fixed for Himachal Pradesh. Himachal being a hilly state where about 90 percent of the total population lives in the villages, institutions like Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad are the necessity. At present in Himachal Pradesh 3243 Gram Panchayats, 81, Panchayat Samitis and 12 Zila Parishad playing significant role for the development of rural people.

Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh

The new State of Himachal Pradesh adopted the Punjab village Panchayat Act 1952. Before the enactment of this Act there were only 280 Gram Panchayats. The State Legislature passed the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act in 1952 in order to bring the working of Panchayats in tune with the local conditions and with the growing aspirations of the people for democratization. It came into operation in the year of 1954 when the Panchayts were established in the state. The special feature of this act was that a three tier Panchayati Raj system was introduced in the state. Beside this there was reservation of seats for Scheduled Caste as well as for women in Gram Panchayat. In the year 1954 the numbers of Panchayats were increased to 466 and in the year 1962 with the creation of 172 new Gram Sabha circles this numbers increased to 638. On 1st November1966, after the reorganisation of states, the Hilly areas of Punjab were merged in to state of Himachal Pradesh and consequently numbers of Gram Panchayats were raised to 1695.[6]

Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1968

The Himachal Pradesh Act, 1952 was repealed in 1968, when the State Legislature passed a new Panchayati Raj Act. This Act provided for a uniform system for the entire State. This Act was introduced in November 1970 and provided for three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Gram Sabha at village, Panchayat Sammitti at block and Zila Parishad at the district level.[7] According to H.P. Panchayat Raj Act, 1968 all members of Gram panchayat shall be elected directly by members of Gram Sabha amongst themselves. The Pradhan of Gram Panchayat was also elected directly and there also existed on post of Up-Pradhan. The Gram Panchayat was normally elected for the period of 5 years and members of the Gram Panchayat shall not less than Seven and more than Eleven. The Act of 1968, conferred twenty seven duties on Gram Panchayat.[8] The 1968 Act also provides for representation of women in case there are no primary women members in the Panchayat Samiti. Only two women were to be co-opted among the Panches from the block. This Act conferred twenty seven duties on Gram Panchayat but the funds made available to them were extremely limited.[9] The Himachal Pradesh State Legislative Assembly introduced the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Bill 1991 on March 15, 1991 H.P Panchayati Raj.[10]

The Amendment Act laid down that the primary members would be elected by secret ballot by the members of the Gram Sabha with one member from every two continuous Gram Sabhas subject to a minimum of ten members. The Pradhan and up-Pradhan of Gram Sabha, who were also the Pradhan and Up- Pradhan of gram Panchayat were selected from amongst the members of Gram Sabha, by secret ballot and direct vote. In every Gram Sabha, twenty five percent of total number of seats of Panches, other than Pradhan and Up-Pradhan shall be reserved for women, including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the scheduled caste. (H.P Panchayati Raj.[11]

Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994

Himachal Pradesh enacted a new Panchayati Raj legislation, the Himachal Panchayati Raj Act, 1994

in conformity with provisions of the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act 1992. The Act of 1994, repealing the earlier State Panchayati Raj Act of 1968, became effective from April 1994. This Act provided for a Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad at village, block and district levels respectively and one third seats reserved for women.[12] Presently fifty percent seats are reserved for women in PRIs in Himachal Pradesh. Elections were conducted by the State Election Commission, set up under the 1994 Act.Election were held in 2922 Panchayats to elect 18265 members as many as 2922 Pradhan and Up- Pradhan and 1661 Panchayati Samiti members 252 Zila Parishad Members. The Thirty two lakh electorate in the state were required to caste five votes to elect Panch, Pradhan, Up-Pradhan, Panchayat Samiti members and Zila Parishad members.[13]These elections gave a new identity and responsibilities of women in the rural society in Himachal Pradesh There was high voter turnout for the polls in the election. 7632 women were elected to different offices. [14]

Women's representation in PRIs in Himachal Pradesh 2000-2005

Post	Men	Women	Total	% of women
Panchayat Members	11727	6822	18549	36.78
Panchayat Pradhan	2011	1026	3037	33.78
Block Development Members (BDC)	10960	562	1658	33.89
BDC Chairperson	48	27	75	36.0
Zila Parishad Members	164	87	251	34.66
Zila Parishad Chairperson	8	4	12	33.33

Source : Election Report 2000, State Election Shimla-H.P.

The record election of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh held in 2000 but these elections gave a new political status of Himachali Women on comparing statistics of the two elections,, it is found that there has been increase of 3.82 percent and 0.59 percent in representation of women in gram Panchayat as Pradhan and members and 1.33 percentage increase in zila parishad. But at the block level, there has been an increase of 2.67 percent of women representatives as Chairperson interestingly, women representative 36.78 percent, 33.89 percent and 34.66 percent respectively as members of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishads.

Women's Representation in PRIs in Himachal Pradesh 2005-2010

Post	Men	Women	Total	% of women
Panchayat Members	11951	7462	19413	38.43
Panchayat Pradhan	2131	1112	3243	34.28
Block Development Members (BDC)	1097	579	1676	34.54
BDC Chairperson	41	34	75	45.33
Zila Parishad Members	166	85	251	33.86
Zila Parishad Chairperson	5	7	12	58.33

Source : Election Report 2005, elections to Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads in H.P. 2005, State Election Commission, Shimla-H.P.

The Panchayat election was held in 2005. Their share has increased as against the statutory provision of 33 percent. This has been found move pronouncing in case chairperson of Zila Parishad (58.33) percent followed by BDC Chairperson (45.33) percent. A comparative analysis of women representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions shows higher increase in Chairperson Zila

Parishad (25 percent) while at block level their representation as a Gram Pabnchayat Pradhan and Members also increased.

Number of seat of Women in PRIs in H.P. (2011-2016)

No of seat	Seat Reserved for SC Women	Seat Re-served for ST Women	Seat Re-served for OBC Women	Seat Re-served for Gen. Women	Total seat Reserved for Women	Percentage of Reserved seat
Member of Gram Panchayat						
19413	3412	622	0	7283	11317	58.30%
Pardhan Gram Panchayt						
3243	421	1041	127	987	1639	50.54%
Member Panchayat Samiti						
1682	216	56	67	514	863	51.31%
Chairman Panchayat Samiti						
77	13	4	5	20	42	54.55%
Member Zila Parishad						
251	34	11	10	73	128	51%
Chairman Zila Parishad						
12	2	1	1	2	6	50%

Source: Panchayati Raj Department, H.P.

From above table it is found that the total number of PRIs in HP at all six levels of PRIs where the reservation of women is 24,678 among which 13,995 seats is reserved for different category of women which consists 56.71 of the total sets. It shows that more than half of the Panchayat representatives are women in HP PRIs.

Women Elected on Un-reserved Seat in PRIs in HP (2011-2016)

Gram Panchayat		
Pardhan	Up-Pradhan	Members
32	20	352
Panchayat Samiti		
Chairman	Vice-Chairman	Members
3	11	25
Zila Parishad		
Chairman	Vice-Chairman	Members
2	2	4

Source: Panchayati Raj Department, in H.P.

Above table shows that in Gram Panchayat 32 seats of Gram Panchyat of Pradhan 20 seats of Up-Pradhan 352 seats of Panchayat member also elected in un-reserved seats. In case of Panchayat Samiti 3 women chairperson seats 11 as Vice-Chairperson and 25 women elected as Panchayat Samiti member in Un-reserved seats. In Zila Parishad 2 seats of Zila Parishad chairman and 2 seats of vice-chairman occupied by women against un-reserved seats and 4 women elected as Zila Parishad member in un-reserved seats.

Participation of Women in Voting in HP State Legislative Assembly

The voting is the most common mode of political participation among the women. The number of women voters has been almost equal to the men voters and sometimes even more in different elections to the H.P. State Legislative Assembly.

Participation of Women in voting in Different H.P Legislative Assembly Election (1998-2012)

Year	Voter (in lakhs)			Voting Percentage			Different In Men and Women Voting Percentage
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	
1998	36.28	18.27	18.01	71.23	70.24	72.23	+1.99
2003	41.01	20.81	20.20	74.51	73.14	75.92	+2.78
2007	46.04	23.36	22.68	71.61	69.67	74.55	+4.88
2012	46.08	23.76	22.32	73.05	70.09	77	+6.1

Source: State Election Commission, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla-9

From an analysis of the data contained in the table, it is evident that the total voter turnout in State Legislative Election satisfactory .Further data in the table also show that voting percentage of women has increased since 1998 Election. During last four State Assembly Elections of H.P. 1998, 2001, 2007 and 2012 the trend shows that women have exercised their franchise more than that of men. The Increase in the voting percentage of women indicates that their interest in politics in increasing and this may be good sign of strengthening of political democracy in the State. The increase in the voting percentage of women in different election may also be attributed to the fact that women representative in PRIs and other women political activists are mobilizing the women voter to take part in voting during the Elections.

Representation of Women in H.P. Legislative Assembly (1972-2012)

Year	Total Seats	Total Contestants	Women Contestants (% to the total contestants)	Seats Won by Women (%age to the Total Seats)	Party-wise Distribution of Winning Women Contestants			
					Cong.	Janta	BJP	Janta Dal
1972	68	-	5	5(7.35)	5	-	-	-
1977	68	330	9(2.72)	1(1.47)	-	1	-	-
1982	68	441	9(2.04)	3(4.41)	2	1	-	-
1985	68	294	8(2.72)	3(4.41)	3	-	-	-
1990	68	454	17(3.74)	4(5.88)	1	-	2	1
1993	68	416	16(3.85)	4(5.88)	4	-	-	-
1998	68	369	25(6.78)	7(10.29)	4	--	3	-
2003	68	408	31(7.60)	4(5.88)	4	-	-	-
2007	68	336	25(7.44)	5(7.35)	1	-	4	-
2012	68	459	34(7.41)	3(4.41)	2	-	1	-

Source: State Election Department, Govt. of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla-9

The data of the above table reveals that the representation of women in the State legislation Assembly is very low. Their number never exceeded 7 (10.29 percent) and that was in 1998 and it was the first election of state assembly after implementation of New Panchyati Raj Act. But except 1998 their representation in the State Legislative Assembly revolved around 3 to 5 i.e. 4.41 - 7.35 percent. Women's performance was the best ever in 1998 Assembly Elections, when in all seven women were elected. In 2003 Assembly Elections, again four women remained successful. In 2007 five women were elected to the State Legislative Assembly. But in 2012

only three women were elected in the State Assembly. The data in the table clearly reveals that the average women contestant in Himachal Pradesh is not impressive , there were only five to nine women contestant up to 1985. In 1990, the number increase to 17 which further got increase to 25 and 31 in 1998 and 2003 election respectively. The election of State Assembly held in 2007 in this election numbers of women constants decrease to 25 but in the last election held in 2012 numbers of women constants once again increase to 34. It is rather a disappointing and discouraging numbers of women constants in comparison their voting strength. The Political Party seem very reluctant women candidates and very few women are put by them as candidate in the election.

The above statistics present a very disappointing picture of women's representation in the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly. From 1972-2012, women have been elected on 39 seats and some women representatives have been elected more than once. Out of these 39 Congress has so far been able to send 27 women members to the State Assembly. BJP has so far been able to get 10 women elected to the State Assembly. Janata Party had its credit only 2 seat and the remaining 1 women Legislature belong to Janata Dal .

Women in the State Council of Ministers

Women's representation in the Council of Minister also remained very low in the State. In last four elections only one to three women included in council on ministers. In 1998, two women, Urmil Thakur and Sarveen Chaudhary were made Parliamentary Secretaries. In 2003, in the Virbhadra Government, for the first time three women Vidya Stokes, Asha Kumari and Chandresh Kumari were appointed as Cabinet Ministers and 2005, Anita Verma was made Parliamentary Secretary. In 2007, Dhumal Government, only one woman, Sarveen Chaudhary included in the Council of Minister as a Cabinet Minister and the present Government only one woman Vidya Stokes awarded to Cabinet rank minister.

Conclusion

The participation of women in the politics and decision making process is necessary for a healthier democratic society in the present scenario. The last 20 years of New Panchayati raj system in India have seen women strength in terms of their political participation. Rural women have shown much interest and have proved their talent in the functions of PRIs, but beside this, on the basis of research result shows that representation of women in State Assembly remains not satisfactory, a few number of women were elected and attained the status of Cabinet rank ministers in the state. In Himachal Pradesh women are welcome as voters but not welcomed in taking direct decision making role as expected. No doubt after the implementation of 73rd Amendment electoral participation of women has increased in the state but their representation in the formal politics has not increased. Electoral process is a process that is affected by the various variables such as social, cultural, economic, political system, and nature of political parties. Secondary data indicate that various variables may be the reasons for the desperate configuration of the issue of women political participation. This trend indicates that reservation at the grassroots level still is not enhancing the numbers of women in state and national politics as expected. Although all the states and national political parties support equal participation of women in politics through their ideologies and manifesto, but it has seen that it is not in practice in the state. There is need for qualitative change in the socio-economic and political system in our society, so that more women can increase their participation in Parliament as well as State Assembly. Reservation may be another effective step for the increasing the number of women in State and National electoral politics as PRIs. Beside this political parties and leaders should motivate women to involve in politics so the dream of Swami Vivekananda, Gandhi and Nehru can be fulfilled

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