



Women political participation in Himachal Pradesh: Post 73rd constitutional amendment scenario

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Abstract

Women political participation is one of the important issues in Indian politics and concern of intelligentsia. It has been more than seven decades of independence still there is a quite diminutive impact on women's active participation in politics. Participation is a collective process in which an individual participates in multiple processes and institution. In present scenario important processes related to the political participation are: voting in different elections, contest the election, active participation in election campaigns, membership and holding party positions, higher level of participation includes: holding position in formal power system in addition participation in Dharanas and protest movements are also variables of political participation. Institutional participation according to the 'group theory' participation in those groups which affects the political decision - making is also part of political participation. Hence in the rural area participation in Mahila Mandals and Self-Help Groups also part of political participation. Political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also co-decision-making and co-policy-making at all levels of governance in the State. In this regard the reform of reservation under 73rd amendment act 1992 has been landmark initiative in the field of broadening the horizons of democracy in India. PRIs are considered as the important pillar of the democracy through which people at the grassroots level can develop themselves as effective citizens and groomed as leaders in the country. Since the enactment of 73rd Amendment, it is perceived that space in local bodies would give rural women space for the political participation. The journey of last twenty -five years indicates mixed trends while women leadership numerically increased in PRIs, voter turnout in different elections enhanced, women participation in informal activities such as Self-Help Groups (SHGs), Mahila Mandals (Women Groups) changed the women attitude in rural areas. She realised her strengths and became more confident. But on the other side women participation as decision makers in the State and National politics is not satisfactory. After twenty -five years women in the state Assemblies and Parliament is seen rare. The present paper is an effort to look in to the issue why there is wide gap in the participation in formal and informal institutions? Why women think that the higher political institution are beyond their reach? Why the male folk is not able to digest her equal political share? Hypothesis is legal procedural dimension needs back up from different stake holders. For this purpose, the sample has been taken from Himachal Pradesh to evaluate the participation and gaps through secondary sources.

Keywords: participation women, leadership, politics and 73rd amendment act

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh came into existence on 15th April 1948. After a long struggle Himachal Pradesh gained full-fledged statehood on 25th January 1971 and become the 18th, state of Indian Union. Himachal Pradesh extends over an area of 55673 Sq. Km. According to 2021 census, the population of state is 7,781,244 out of which 3,946,646 were males and 3,834,598 were females. The Sex Ratio is 972 females per 1000 males. Presently literacy rate of the state is 83.80 percent. Himachal being a hilly state, where about 90 percent people lives in the villages, therefore institution like Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishad are the necessity. At present in Himachal Pradesh 3615 Gram Panchayats, 81, Panchayat Samitis and 12 Zila Parishad playing significant role for the development of rural masses.

Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh

The new State of Himachal Pradesh adopted the Punjab village Panchayat Act 1952. The Himachal Pradesh Act, 1952 was repealed in 1968, when the State Legislature passed a new Panchayati Raj Act. This Act had three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Gram Sabha at village, Panchayat Samiti at block and Zila Parishad at the district level.

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 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 Panch from the block.

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. In 1995, elections of PRIs were conducted by the State Election Commission, set up under the 1994 Act. The Thirty-two lakh electorate in the state were required to cast five votes to elect Panch, Pradhan, Up-Pradhan, Panchayat Samiti members and Zila Parishad members. These elections gave a new identity and responsibilities of women in the rural society in Himachal Pradesh and 7632 women were elected to different offices.

After implementation of 73rd amendment second election of Panchayati Raj in Himachal Pradesh held in 2000, these elections gave a new political status of Women on comparing statistics of the two elections and their numbers increase i.e., 3.82 percent in Gram PRIs and overall 36.78 percent, 33.89 percent and 34.66 percent women were elected respectively as members of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishads.

In 2005 Panchayat election, their share once again increased as against the statutory provision of 33 percent. This has been found more pronouncing in case chairperson of Zila Parishad (58.33) percent followed by BDC Chairperson (45.33) percent.

Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly passed HP Panchayati raj (Amendment) bill on April 8, 2008 and enhanced the reservation for women in PRIs from 33% to 50%. After implementation of 73rd amendment, elections of PRIs in Himachal Pradesh have been conducted in regular terms and representation of women once again good for the terms of 2011-2016. In these elections fifty percent seats reserved for women in PRIs in HP and election for conducted for the total 3243 Gram Panchayats. In this term 1639(50.54%) seats occupied by women in Gram Panchayats and 54.55% in Panchayat samitis.

Table 1: 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 HP.

Above table shows that in Gram Panchayat 32 seats of Gram Panchayat of Pradhan, 20 seats of Up-Pradhan and 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.

In the election of PRIs in 2016, women apart from contest from the 50% seats for them, have given tough fight to men in PRIs not reserved for them. It is good for women empowerment at grassroots level that more than 58 percent women have been elected in PRIs in Himachal Pradesh in 2016.

Table 2: District wise detail of PRIs in Himachal Pradesh in 2021

Sr.NO.	Name of District	No. Of Zila Parishad Wards	No. of Panchayat Smiti Wards	No. of Gram Panchayats	No. of Gram Panchayat Wards
1	Bilaspur	14	97	176	1140
2	Chamba	18	136	309	1771
3	Hamirpur	18	125	248	1436
4	Kangra	54	359	814	4785
5	Kinnaur	10	45	73	389
6	Kullu	14	103	235	1389
7	Lahual Spiti	10	30	45	227
8	Mandi	36	249	559	3271
9	Shimla	24	201	412	2302
10	Sirmour	17	120	259	1601
11	Solan	17	118	240	1524
12	Una	17	113	245	1555
	Total	249	1696	3615	21390

Source:- <https://hppanchayat.nic.in>

In the last election of PRIs which was held in 2020, numbers of elected women once again increased which is suggestive of the fact that more and more women are now emerging victorious in wards that were not reserved for them. In spite of Covid-19 pandemic, society was also witness of highest voter turnout of 80.40 per cent with 39.19 lakh rural people. The voter turnout was 82.10 per cent among women, 78.70 per cent among men, and 13.70 per cent among others.

Table 3: Participation of Women in Voting in HP State Legislative Assembly

Voting Percentage			
Year	Total	Men	Women
1998	71.23	70.24	72.23
2003	74.51	73.14	75.92
2007	71.61	69.67	74.55
2012	73.05	70.09	77.00
2017	74.61	71.55	77.76

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

From an analysis of the data contained in the table, show that voting percentage of women has increased since 1998 Election. During last four State Assembly Elections of H.P. 1998, 2001, 2007, 2012 and 2017 the trend shows that women have exercised their franchise more than that of men. The voting percentage of women indicates that their interest in politics is increasing and this may be good sign of strengthening of political democracy in the State.

Table 4: Performance of Women Contestants in HP Assembly election 2017

S.No.	Assembly constituency	Name of candidates	Party	Votes	Status
1	4-DALHOUSIE	ASHA KUMARI	INC	24224	WINNER
2	7-INDORA(SC)	REEAT DEVI	BJP	29213	WINNER
3	9-JAWALI	MANJANA DEVI	BSP	266	LOST
4	10-DEHRA	VIPLOVE THAKUR	INC	8289	LOST
5	14-SULLAH	KUMARI VANDANA	IND	166	LOST
6	15-NAGROTA	PINKI DEVI	BSP	344	LOST
7	17-SHAHPUR	SARVEEN CHAUDHARY	BJP	23104	WINNER
8	18-DHARAMSHALA	NISHA KATOCH	SWAP	133	LOST
9	19-PALAMPUR	INDU GOSWAMI	BJP	19928	RUNNER -UP
10	23-KULLU	RENUKA DOGRA	RADM	469	LOST
11	26-KARSOG(SC)	ANITA ALIAS NITU	IND	362	LOST
12	33- Mandi	CHAMPA THAKUR	INC	21025	RUNNER-UP
13	33-MANDI	ROSHANI SHARMA	IND	73	LOST
14	35-SARKAGHAT	PARO DEVI	LOGAP	101	LOST
15	36-BHORANJ(SC)	KAMLESH KUMARI	BJP	27961	WINNER
16	39-BARSAR	SAROTI DEVI	BSP	281	LOST
17	58-PAUNTA SAHIB	MEENA KUMARI	LOGAP	484	LOST
18	32-KASUMPTI	VIJAY JYOTI	BJB	12664	RUNNER -UP
19	67-ROHRU(SC)	SHASHI BALA	BJP	19726	RUNNER -UP

Source:- State Election Commission, 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. Although the numbers of women contestants in state assembly election continuously increased but their winning percentage is not satisfactory. 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 to 7.35 percent. 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.

Conclusions

The participation of women in the politics and decision-making process is necessary for a healthier democratic society. Political participation means not only using the right to vote, but also co-decision-making and co-policy-making at all levels of governance in the State. In this regard the reform of reservation under 73rd amendment act 1992 has been landmark initiative in the field of broadening the horizons of democracy in India. PRIs are considered as the important pillar of the democracy through which people at the grassroots level developed themselves as effective citizens and groomed as leaders in the country. Since the enactment of 73rd Amendment, it is perceived that space in local bodies would give rural women space for the political participation But Indian

Women have been struggling for self-identity and autonomy. The last 25 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 numbers 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. It should be ensured that participation of women to provide leadership and hold decision-making position at state and nation.

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