



## **Women Empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions - A Case Study of Solan and Kandaghat (Himachal Pradesh), India**

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**ABSTRACT:** India is a country where about 70 per cent of total population lives in villages. Founding father of Indian Constitution in article 40 has rightly enshrined “The state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local government”. The result of the study clears that secondary (middle and matric) educated women have a greater representation. But illiterate and primary educated women are also occupying the political seats in the Panchayat. The illiterate is still having a negative impact as the illiterate respondents face troubles while doing their official business/work. The electoral process, administration and politics are greatly affected by caste and religion in India. Women from the reserved category are participating in greater number which may change the equation in Panchayat electoral politics. Reservation of seats and posts for them has been the main reason for the prominence of SCs.

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

India is a country where about 70 per cent of total population lives in villages. Founding father of Indian Constitution in article 40 has rightly enshrined “The state shall take steps to organize village Panchayats and endow them with powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of local government” Guided by the spirit of directive principals of state policy, Panchayati Raj System was introduced in India in 1959, on the recommendations of Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report. However, the participation of women in PRIs remained low and only up to cooption level till the 73rd constitutional amendment was passed which ensured 33 percent reservation to women in local bodies. Women who comprise about 50 percent of the nation's population also need to be equally developed. Their overall development would only be ensured by their active participation in national activities.

Empowerment means giving to individuals of power to take decisions in matters relating to themselves especially. As regards women's empowerment, it consists greater autonomy in decision-making to enable them to have greater control over their lives which involves them to have greater control over their lives which involves many aspects such as economic opportunity, social equality, political representation, etc. Women empowerment also means equal status to the women and freedom to develop them.

The study is confined to Solan district only and data collected from its two blocks, i.e. Solan and Kandaghat. The focus of the study is Women Empowerment in PRIs with special reference to 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Study is confined to women representatives (Members and Pradhans) elected in December, 2005- 2010 PRI's elections in Kandaghat and Solan block of Solan district. Himachal Government has taken a decision in 2008 to give 50 percent reservation for women in PRIs. Due to reservation gradual increase is found in women participation in 2011 PRI's election (57%) to lead political empowerment in Himachal Pradesh (Table 1).

### **II. CONCEPT OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

The concept of women empowerment throughout the world has its roots in women's movement (w.w.w. unifr .org.). Different scholars define women empowerment differently. A comprehensive definition states that empowerment of women is construed as providing them with a sufficient degree of control, to give them decision-making powers to enable them to raise the level of consciousness of their class and enhance their status and rightful entitlements.

Empowering women requires a fundamental and dynamic change in perception of women, expectations from women in the society and a scientific and rational understanding of women's problems and needs.

**Table 1: Comparative Analysis of Women's performance in all Panchayati Raj Institutions elections in 2005 and 2010 after 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act in Himachal Pradesh.**

Post	2005		2010-11	
	Total Women	Women %	Total women	Women %
Pradhan	1112	34.28	1639	50.54
Ward member	7462	38.43	11317	58.33
Chairperson P.S	34	45.33	42	54.55
Member P.S	579	34.54	863	51.55
Chairperson Z. Parishad	7	58.33	06	50.00
Member Z. Parishad	85	33.86	128	51.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>9279</b>	<b>37.61</b>	<b>13995</b>	<b>56.71</b>

**(Ward Members) 2005**

Sr. No.	Name of Block	Total No of G.P.	Total Seats of member	SC Women	ST Women	General Women	Total Women	% of women
1	Solan	35	203	33	-	49	82	40.39
3	Kandaghat	24	132	18	-	35	53	40.15

**(Ward Members) 2010**

Sr. No.	Name of Block	Total No of G.P.	Total Seats of member	SC Women	ST Women	General Women	Total Women	% of women
1	Solan	35	203	49	0	70	119	58.62
3	Kandaghat	24	132	28	-	50	78	59.09

**(Pradhans) 2005**

Sr. No.	Name of Block	Total Seats	SC Women	ST Women	OBC Women	General Women	Total Women	% of women
1	Solan	35	5	0	0	7	12	34.28
3	Kandaghat	24	3	0	0	5	8	33.33

**(Pradhans) 2010**

Sr. No.	Name of Block	Total Seats	SC Women	ST Women	OBC Women	General Women	Total Women	% of women
<b>1</b>	<b>Solan</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>51.43</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Kandaghat</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>50.00</b>

Source: Directorate of Panchayati Raj and State Election Commission Reports of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla.

**III. POSITION OF WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH**

The position of women and for that matter of women representatives is far better in Himachal Pradesh, unlike the Panchayati Raj Institutions of many States. The Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 in the spirit of the 73<sup>rd</sup> constitutional amendment, provides that whenever a woman Pradhan is removed by no confidence motion; she shall be replaced only by a woman Pradhan and not by her deputy. It has also been observed that though male representatives play somewhat dominating role in the PRI's, the female representatives have got workable freedom and sufficient say in developmental programmes. They are not at all helpless to sign on dotted lines. As far as tribal women representatives of Himachal Pradesh are concerned their position in perhaps better since they have more open system where women enjoy greater freedom and social status. The custom of veil has totally vanished from Himachal Pradesh and women freely participate in the democratic affairs.

**IV. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

For the purpose of present study field survey has been conducted from Solan and Kandaghat Blocks of Solan district, here tried to go through the literature on Panchayati Raj Institutions reservation policy, reservation for women and concept of empowerment of women from various books, magazines, journals and articles.

Singh (2004) found that in Haryana relatively younger women have begun to replace older ones. Reservation of women has led to formal empowerment of women in panchayats and the emergence of new women's leadership. These women have been able to participate considerably in deciding day-to-day activities.

Sharma (2004) also observes that after the year 2000, with panchayat elections in Himachal Pradesh, there has been an increased participation of women in grass roots governance. The state government is also committed to reservations in the leadership structure of the community to give women their long overdue share of power so that they can exert pressure and exercise authority in the decision making process.

Mandal (2003) Assesses Social and Political Background of Women Members in One District of West Bengal, evaluates various facets of their participation and role performance in PRIs, ascertains the nature, their social acceptability and informs both the positive and negative aspects of reservation policy for women. The study brought forth few exclusive and absorbing features: women members are not dummy or docile; their participation both at formal Panchayat process and informal levels is no less exalting.

Anupama Singh (2008), in a study conducted on *Rural Women in Shimla, Himachal Pradesh*, reveals that full development may not be achieved unless women and the resources they represent are fully integrated into the development and women empowerment as a tool to sustain the development as an ongoing process. Dr. Singh also highlights the problems of the concept of Pati Panchayats or proxy rules by husbands.

## **V. IMPORTANT STEPS TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT**

Himachal Pradesh Government is committed for the empowerment of women. Government has announced holidays on Bhaiyaduj , Raksha Bandhan, Karwa Chowth for women employees; and all the women are given the facilities of free travelling in the H.R.T.C. buses on Bhaiyaduj and Raksha Bandhan (*Directorate, Information and Public Relation Department, Government of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla*). In order to change the negative attitude of community towards girl child and mother at the time of birth, Beti Hai Anmol scheme has been started w.e.f. 05.07.2010.

## **VI. SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL PROFILE**

**Findings:** It is essential to analyse the socio-economic background of the respondents to understand the pattern of relationship between the leader and the environment.

- (i) The age wise analysis of respondents shows that middle age group has dominance over the Panchayat leadership.
- (ii) Education wise analysis shows that middle and matric women are in majority. Surprising figure in parts of this study shows that illiterate women are very few in numbers. Graduate and Post graduate women are also doing participate in political activities.
- (iii) Caste factor plays a vital role as the study shows that scheduled caste category dominates in both the blocks. Reservation plays an important role in this context.
- (iv) Occupation wise analysis shows that more than 70 per cent of the families of the respondents are involved in agriculture. 15 per cent of women respondents are housewives.
- (v) The political party affiliations of women leaders show that about 47 per cent of respondents are not affiliated to any political party and do not believe in the strict political bias. Study also reveals that in Himachal Pradesh there is no scope for the third party.
- (vi) Participation in Panchayat meetings shows that there is a surprising that 90 per cent attendance of elected women representatives who regularly participate in their routine meetings in their Panchayats. This shows that the march towards political empowerment of women is on right track.
- (vii) Opinions about reservation in Panchayats, Parliament, State Legislative elections, are in its favour. But, some educated women said that there is no need of reservation because reservation shows the weaknesses of women, and need of some support.
- (viii) Opinions about party base elections, shows that about 72 per cent women respondents are against party -base-election.
- (ix) Majority of women know their duties. Only two cases are found as proxy case.

## **VII. CONCLUSION**

From the study data, it is clear that secondary (middle and matric) educated women have a greater representation. But illiterate and primary educated women are also occupying the political seats in the Panchayat. It has also been noticed that illiterate is still having a negative impact as the illiterate respondents face troubles while doing their official business/work.

Caste, religion and politics influence one another. The electoral process, administration and politics are greatly affected by caste and religion in India. Women from the reserved category are participating in greater number which may change the equation in Panchayat electoral politics. Reservation of seats and posts for them has been the main reason for the prominence of SCs. But, how many SC women have been elected from the unreserved seats can

only establish the phenomenal presence of reserved women. But reservation may be the only way to ensure the presence of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

### VIII. SUGGESTIONS

(i) Political empowerment of the women is not to be viewed in isolation. Structural changes in the formal power institutions, economic independence, increasing awareness through education and gender equality in the social and cultural ethos are important prerequisites for political empowerment of women.

(ii) Upgradation of status of women in her family is must for women empowerment. Women should not only work in the family but take part in decision-making also.

(iii) It is suggested that the training should be provided to the PRI functionaries for capacity building enabling them to perform their duties more efficiently and effectively and to make them conversant with the Panchayati Raj Acts and rules, maintenance of records especially cashbooks and judicial functions.

(iv) The better honorarium and facilities should be provided to the Panchayati Raj functionaries so that they may perform their duties honestly and with interest.

(v) In order to build a sustainable society, it is suggested that women should be empowered to act and contribute freely. In this regard the efforts should be made at administrative and community levels by maintaining social values and social cohesiveness.

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