

A STUDY OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

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ABSTRACT

The paper attempts to analyze the status of women empowerment and women political participation in Himachal Pradesh. The concept of women empowerment not only focuses on giving women strength and skills to rise above from their miserable situation but at the same time it also stresses on the need to educate men regarding women issues and inculcating a sense of respect and duty towards women as equals. Empowerment of women has become one of the most important concerns of 21st century because of their right to participate in political processes which also impact their family and in turn the society. Countries are making attempt to increase women's political participation and leadership in civil society and now political parties want more women to join in political activities. Women around the world are still largely absent from national and local-decision making bodies. Globally about 23% women participate in political activities, for women it is very difficult to participate in the civic and political life of their countries due to lack of support and gender discrimination. Strengthening women's rights and addressing barriers to political participation are critical to achieving gender equality and women empowerment.

Key Words: Political Participation, Civil Society, Global Population, Legislators, Discrimination, Strengthening, Barriers.

INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment in simple words can be understood as giving power to women to decide for their own lives or inculcating such abilities in them so that they could be able to find their rightful place in the society.

According to the **United Nations**, women's empowerment mainly has five components:

- Generating women's sense of self-worth;
- Women's right to have and to determine their choices;
- Women's right to have access to equal opportunities and all kinds of resources;
- Women's right to have the power to regulate and control their own lives, within and outside the home; and
- Women's ability to contribute in creating a more just social and economic order.

The subject of empowerment of women has becoming a burning issue all over the world including India since the last few decades. Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women have also been age-old issue all over the world. Empowerment focuses on mobilizing the self help of the poor and needy. If we look back to our society we can observe very few women took active participation in local politics due to the limitations of being a woman in a patriarchal society. Women did not raise their voice in the family and found it difficult to speak with courage in front of their male colleagues. It is mentioned that though women are very

much active in their house hold job but they have a negligible involvement in the decision-making process in the local politics on account of their low socio-economic status.

From ancient to modern period, women's condition-socially, politically and economically- has not remained same and it kept changing with times. The participation of women in the nation's politics was very low before the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment act. These acts are landmark legislations for women in the history of local government. Since the enactment of the law, a number of rural and urban women have willingly or unwillingly entered local bodies. Local bodies are at the entry level of political participation where women can enter political activities as the cost of election campaigns are very low and it provides an opportunity for the women to participate in political activities, with some help and support from their families and friends.

CONSTITUTION OF INDIA AND WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

India's Constitution makers and our founding fathers were very determined to provide equal rights to both women and men. The Constitution of India is one of the finest equality documents in the world. It provides provisions to secure equality in general and gender equality in particular. Various articles in the Constitution safeguard women's rights by putting them at par with men socially, politically and economically. The Preamble, the Fundamental Rights, DPSPs and other constitutional provisions provide several general and special safeguards to secure women's human rights.

Why need for women empowerment:

The **2011 UN General Assembly resolution on women's political participation** reiterated that "*women in every part of the world continue to be largely marginalised from the political sphere, often as a result of discriminatory laws, practices, attitudes and gender stereotypes, low levels of education, lack of access to health care, and the disproportionate effect of poverty on women.*" Therefore, to eliminate the multi-faceted problem like gender inequality, a multi-pronged approach must be adopted; and among the various initiatives, political empowerment of women could act as a catalyst. Political empowerment could lead to opening more opportunities for women and as a result, create a level playing field for them. Indian tradition has provided a prominent position for women in society. This process started at the Neolithic period. At this stage women were found to contribute maximum benefits in the development of human society. Their role was never neglected or was placed in inferior position.

This practice continued up to the Vedic period, when women were given enough education facility. Gradually the scenario started to change and women were not given basic education and other facilities that may empower them. The status of women in India particularly in rural areas is relatively low and hence, the issue of empowering women. Due to prevalent social customs majority of the female population in rural areas are not empowered and their contribution is under stated.

This is mainly due to the fact that in agriculture and animal care women's contribution is quite substantial but not reflected in their economic earnings. Of the total workforce women constitute almost half of the population, perform nearly 2/3 of the work hours (both domestic and outside work), receive 1/10th of the world's income and own less than 1/100th the world property. The existing studies show that the women are relatively less healthy than men though they belong to same class. They constitute less than 1/17th of the administrators and managers in developing countries. Only 10% seats in world parliament and 6% in national cabinet are held by women and therefore for uplift of any society the women need to be empowered.

Ways to empower women

Women empowerments include some of the following:

- To provide for basic minimum needs like nutrition, health, sanitation, and housing.
 - Changes in women's mobility and social interaction control over decision making, labour pattern, education, employment and career development.
 - Creating awareness about their rights.
- The society's attitudinal change.

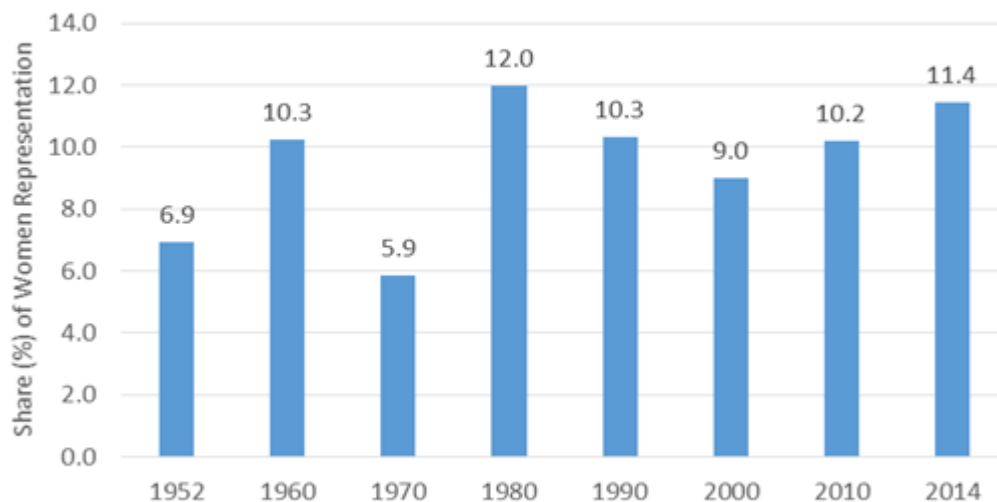
Though the above four are not exhaustive, they represent a beginning towards empowerment. Objectives of this paper is to examine how the concept of empowerment is directly related to social, political and economic factors, to find out how the women of Kangra, both literate and illiterate, are aware of their powers, rights and duties and to evaluate whether women empowerment has helped to develop and advance in social, political and economic spheres and activities.

Political participation of Women in India:

Representation of women in executive government and parliament is extremely low in India, both in absolute numbers as well as globally. Only a miniscule progress is observed in the entire post-independence era. In the cabinet, formed after the general election in 2014, there were **only 5 women ministers out of total 27 ministers. India's global rank is 88 in this regard as per the 'Women in Politics Map 2017'**, published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and UN Women.

Between the First Lok Sabha (1952) and the Sixteenth Lok Sabha (2014) women's representation has increased from 4.4 per cent to 11.9 per cent. Similar trend of low representation of women is also observed in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) during the entire period of post-independence era. Women's representation in Rajya Sabha has increased from 6.9 per cent in 1952 to 11.4 per cent in 2014. Again, these figures are substantially lower compared to the global average of **22.9 per cent and Asian average of 16.3 per cent of women representatives in Upper House**. Considering the share of women (**49.5%**) in the total population of India, their representation in Parliament represents a skewed statistic, which does not befit the world's largest democracy.

Chart 2: Share (%) of Women in the Rajya Sabha (Upper House) - India



Source: Data compiled from the website of Parliament of India, Rajya Sabha. <http://rajyasabha.nic.in/>

India’s performance on female representation in parliament is also not satisfactory compared to the global average of **23.4 per cent** and **Asian average of 19.6 per cent** of women’s representation in parliament, as shown in the Women in Politics Map 2017.

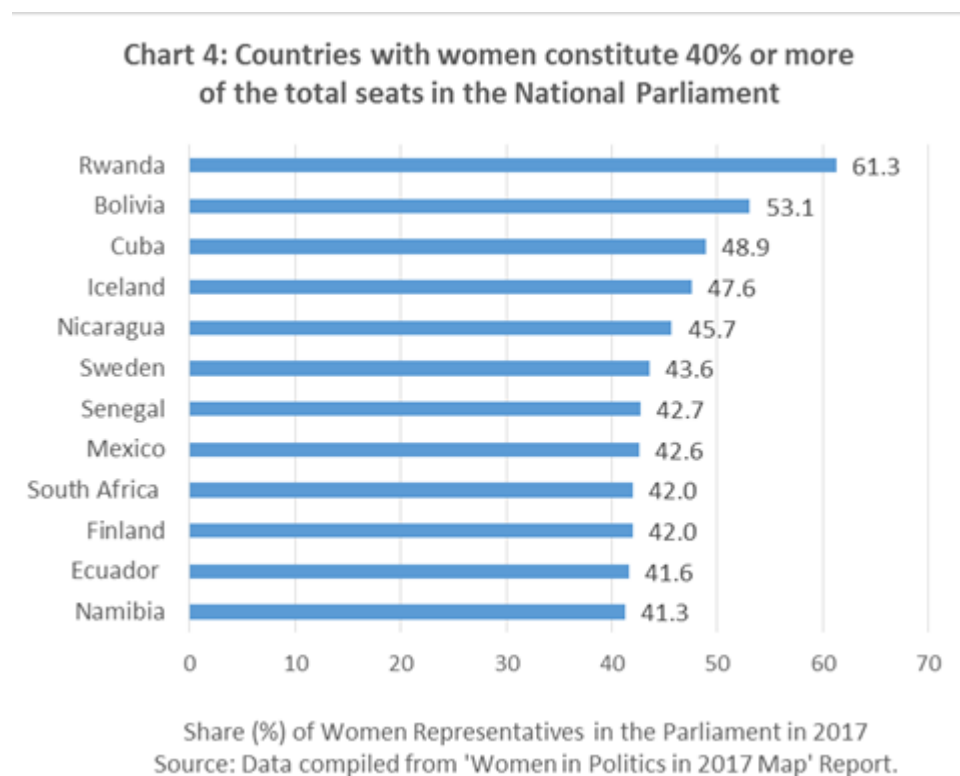
In this global mapping, **India’s 148th rank is very low; and even several Asian countries, viz., Nepal (48th), Afghanistan (54th), Pakistan (89th), Bangladesh (91st), United Arab Emirates (96th), and Saudi Arabia (98th), among others, have fared far better than India.**

Out of 47 Asian countries, India holds the 31st position. Among 8 SAARC countries, India’s position is 5th and India holds the 4th rank among 5 BRICS countries. A relatively poor performance is evident, if India (11.9 per cent) is compared to the best performer Rwanda (61.3 per cent) in terms of women’s representation in the parliament.

Chart 3: India’s Rank across various group of Countries in 2017 (Lower is better)



As per the situation on January 1, 2017, it was observed that in 12 countries (out of 193) women’s representation in parliament was 40 per cent or more (see Chart 4 for details). Rwanda tops the list with 61.3 per cent women representation in the parliament.



Thus, it is evident that despite our constitutional commitment and several global commitments, India's performance in political empowerment of women is dismal. However, since the early 1990's, the 73rd and 74th amendments, which entail 33 per cent reservation for women in rural and urban local bodies, facilitated the entry of lakhs of women in the political arena. During the next two decades, there has been a dramatic change in women's representation in local administration. It is also a positive sign to note that [many states](#), namely, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Jharkhand, Kerala, Maharashtra, Odisha, Rajasthan and Tripura further raised the women's reservation level to 50 per cent. Resultantly, it has brought more than [1 million women](#) as elected representatives, including many from socially disadvantaged groups and even illiterate, into the political decision making process.

Therefore, it is imperative that the government takes legislative and constitutional reforms to ensure women's fair access to political spheres, especially in the Lok Sabha (Lower House) and Rajya Sabha (Upper House). There is an urgent need to bring back to the table the Women's Reservation Bill guaranteeing 33 per cent reservation to women. An intense parliamentary discussion is necessary to bring the issue to the fore and greater political commitment is the prerequisite for achieving the objective of political empowerment of women.

Performance of Women Candidates

Sl. No.	Assembly Constituency	Name of Candidate	Party	Votes	Status
1	4-DALHOUSIE	ASHA KUMARI	INC	24224	WINNER
2	7-INDORA(SC)	REETA DEVI	BJP	29213	WINNER
3	9-JAWALI	MANJANA DEVI	BSP	266	LOST
4	10-DEHRA	VIPLOVE THAKUR	INC	8289	LOST
5	14-SULLAH	KUMARI VANDNA	IND	166	LOST
6	15-NAGROTA	PINKI DEVI	BSP	344	LOST
7	17-SHAHPUR	SARVEEN CHOUDHARY	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-PAONTA SAHIB	MEENA KUMARI	LOGAP	484	LOST
18	62-KASUMPTI	VIJAY JYOTI	BJP	12664	RUNNER-UP
19	67-ROHRU(SC)	SHASHI BALA	BJP	19726	RUNNER-UP

Hypotheses of the study

Literate woman are more empowered than the illiterate women. Women from privilege sections are better empowered than the women of non-privilege group.

Women are more empowered when they have economic independence. Empowered women participate in political activities.

SOURCES OF DATA:

To refute or validate the hypotheses the researcher collected data through survey research. Primary data was collected through survey of literate, semi-literate and non-literate women in District Kangra Himachal Pradesh. This was supplemented by secondary sources that include books, journals and web references. In all 400 respondents from the age group of 18 to 70 were administered structured questionnaire the sample was selected using stratified random sampling - stratified on the basis of education, income, social background, employment/vocation and geographical area. It was also observed that out of 400 respondents, 120 respondents did not state their social background and therefore they were put under the general category. Thus the total of 280 respondents in general category also include 120 respondents who did not state their social background and another 31 respondents were belonging to non-Hindu religion

Analysis the following tables (Table-1 to Table -6) provide the background of the respondents:

Table 1 Age group of respondents

Age-group	Respondents	%
18-30	122	30.5
31-40	154	38.5
41-50	86	21.5
51-70	38	9.5

TABLE 2 Social backgrounds

AGE-GROUP	GEN	SC	ST	OBC
18-30	87	08	07	20
31-40	109	06	10	29
41-50	58	04	04	20
51-75	29	03	02	04
Total	283	21	23	73

Table 3: Marital status

Age-group	Widow	Married	Unmarried	Widow	Divorce
18-30		68	28	03	03
31-40		130	07	05	03
41-50		69	06	13	12
51-75		32	05	14	02
TOTAL		299	46	35	20

Table 4 : Education Background

Age-group	Widow	Illiterate	Other	Up to 5th	Up to 10th	Graduate	Post Graduate/PhD Oth
18-30		06		14	52	26	02
31-40		08		11	86	34	08
41-50		08		25	26	16	12
51-70		25		14	08	12	06
TOTAL		47		64	172	89	28

Table 5: Economic Background

Age group	<5000	5000-10000	10000-20000	Above 20000	Other
18-30	56	22	19	08	16
31-40	61	28	24	05	29
41-50	08	08	05	04	28
51-70	07	14	10	06	22
TOTAL	152	72	58	23	95

Table 5.1: Privileged and Non-privileged economic background groups

Income level	Privileged	Non-Privileged	Marginal
Less than 5000	Nil	152	Nil
5000 to 10000	Nil	Nil	95
10000 to above	65	Nil	Nil

In this case, the researcher classified the privileged and the nonprivileged group on the basis of educational and economic background – that is those whose income is above 10000 and whose educational background is 10th standard pass and above as privileged and the rest as non-privileged group.

Table 5.2: Privileged and non-privileged groups – On the basis of economic and educational background:

Privileged group (income >10000 and education 10th Standard pass and above)	Non-privileged group (income <10000 and education below 10 th standard)	Other
95	217	88

Table 6: Area-wise distribution of respondents:

Age group	Adajan	City light	Godadra/ Parvat	Limbayat	Vesu
18-30	19	13	34	28	14
31-40	27	22	63	17	15
41-50	09	24	26	13	10
51-70	08	09	27	18	04
TOTAL	63	68	150	76	43

It can be observed from the above tables that the 400 respondents represent different age-group, coming from varied socio, economic and educational backgrounds and the sample has been drawn from different areas of Kangra City, adequately reflecting the demographic profile of the city.

Table 7: Empowerment:

	Respondents	% age
Employment	86	21.5
Independence & Freedom	65	16.25
Decision making in family & workplace	65	16.25
To do anything	184	46

To the question on what empowerment means to the respondents, the responses are as shown in Table 7. Women consider decision-making in both family and workplace as a primary feature of empowerment.

Table 8: Factors contributing to empowerment:

	Respondents	% age
Education	119	29.5
Work Experience in any field	67	16.5
Both of combination is literacy	182	45.5
None of these	32	8

To another question on what makes women empower, majority of the respondents stated that both education and work experience (i.e., employment) empower them.

Table 9: Different ways to empower the women:

	Respondents	% age
By giving training	191	53
Skill training	45	11
Vocational training	39	12
Personalized training	85	24

From Table 9 it is observed that respondents view training as a primary reason that help empowerment of women.

Table 10: Views about the independence of empowered women:

	Respondents	% age
yes	232	58
No	121	30.25
Some	47	13

Table 10 is the response of women to the query whether empowered women are independent and free in making decisions. While 56% of respondents say in affirmative, the rest do not agree and have stated that through education and employment ideally help empower women, in reality it is not. It can be inferred from the above tables (Table 7 to Table 10) that education and employment help empower women and it provides them

independence and freedom to decide, both at home and workplace. However, it is also a social reality that empowerment through education and employment alone does not guarantee freedom and independence. It is therefore a reflection of social attitude rooted in patriarchal society.

Conclusion and suggestion:

One of the key challenges faced by women is lack of education which hinders their political involvement. We recommend bridging this gap by providing quality education to women in the country. Awareness about their rights and privileges as mentioned in the Constitution can only be ensured once women are appropriately educated. The issue of gender-based violence and provision of safety and security of women should also be addressed on a priority basis to promote gender equality in the social and political arenas. Although the Government of India has initiated the National Mission of Empowerment of Women in 2014 with the broad objective of gender empowerment, the progress of this project is not up to the mark. It is thus imperative to strengthen its functioning and implementation.

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