

Emerging Patterns of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Punjab

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Abstract:

Women are the backbone of any society but considered lower to men. They are the marginalized section and face difficulties in their lives all over the world. Though, women are half of the population yet they have not improved their status. In developing countries like India, they live in poor condition and face many problems like malnutrition, ill-health, illiteracy, early marriage etc. Centre and state governments have adopted many measures to improve the status of women and empower them. In this process, Panchayati Raj (73rd Amendment) Act, 1993 with women reservation is the major achievement. Many women are elected in Panchayati Raj institutions. They have been participating in decision-making process and give their share to the development of the country. Therefore, it is important to study the emerging patterns and socio-economic background of women who are elected through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). It helps to understand their status and capacity for working in PRIs. Their education, economic status, political influence etc., give adequate knowledge to improve their participation in politics. The present study is on elected women 'Sarpanch'/ Village Panchayat Pradhans of Block Garhshankar and Mahilpur and elected women Panchayat Samiti members of Mahilpur Block, District Hoshiarpur, Punjab.

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Introduction: _____

Mahatma Gandhi, the father of the nation gave the idea of 'Village Swaraj' to implement democracy at the local level.¹ He believed in the decentralization of powers, which is the basic character of democracy. This idea has been working since ancient time and recorded many changes till date. In ancient time, there were five members of panchayat named, 'Panch' who were considered as God. They were responsible for village affairs. At that time, the villages were autonomous in their working. The aftermath of ancient times, villages were losing their autonomy. During the British period, village panchayats were not as strong as the ancient period. British people had not focused to develop these Panchayats.² After the independence of India, the government launched many programmes and various committees were established to develop PRIs in India. With these government level efforts and programmes, Panchayati Raj Act has been adopted with the 73rd Amendment Act in 1993.³ It give the powers to Panchayats by adopting decentralization of powers at the local level. Panchayats have powers and autonomy for the development of people and villages. The main aim of the PRI system is to increase the participation of people and make efforts to increase their participation in the decision-making process. There are many provisions in the Panchayati Raj Act. The most important is to give representation to women in PRIs. Women are half of the total population but enjoy fewer powers in society. They are making efforts to create their place in society and registered their presence in the decision-making process. Many policies and programmes have been implemented to empower women. Panchayati Raj Act also gave them fifty percent reservation to empower them and increase their participation in politics. Many women have been elected in PRIs and they are working for the development of the village as well as society. Two factors which are most important in this process are: their emergence and political participation. Many factors are affecting the women to enter in Panchayati Raj system like demographic profile, social background, education etc; it helps the women to enter into the political arena and make their presence in the political system. This paper is trying to analyze the emerging patterns of women in PRIs in the blocks, Garhshankar and Mahilpur, district Hoshiarpur, Punjab. It is also analyzing the political participation of women as a member of political party. Do they take part in political meetings? To study the emergence of women in PRIs, this paper included the variables like age, caste, religion, education, political participation etc. The socio-economic profile gives us complete information about the individuals and their circumstances which are responsible for nature of their participation. These circumstances, the living standard, socio-economic status, family background etc. reveal their capacity to improve working style and

lives. "Social circumstances affect the social roles and political roles that people play."⁴ This paper is an attempt to analyze the emerging patterns through the socio-economic profile of elected women leaders in Garshankar and Mahilpur Blocks of Hoshiarpur district, Punjab. This research paper is divided into three parts: the demographic profile, socio-economic profile and political participation. Before describing and analyzing the demographic profile of the respondents, researcher firstly discussed the types of respondents who are interviewed in this study.

Type of Respondents:

PRIs have been introduced to increase people's participation in the political process. There are many leaders elected through this system like Sarpunches, Panches, Panchayat Samiti members and Zila Parishad members. The elected women members of Blocks Garshankar and Mahilpur, district Hoshiarpur, Punjab are included in this study.

Table -1
Type of respondents

Sr.No	Type of Respondents	No of Respondents	Visited	Not met
1	Elected Sarpunches (Mahilpur)	43	35	8
2	Panchayat Samiti Members (Mahilpur)	8	8	-
3	Elected Sarpunches (Garshankar)	27	23	4
	Total	78	66	12

Source: Field Survey

Table-1 shows the type of respondents i.e. elected Sarpunches from Gram Panchayats (GP) and elected women members from Panchayat Samiti in Mahilpur and Garshankar blocks. Elected Sarpanch can solve the problems of the village and implement the government policies for the development of the village and people. In the field study out of 78 respondents, 66 respondents were interviewed and 12 respondents were not available to meet with the researcher. Out of 66 interviewed respondents, 35 respondents are elected Sarpunches and 8 BDCs from Mahilpur block. 23 respondents are elected Sarpunches from Garshankar block. Out of 12 respondents who were not available to meet with the researcher, 8 respondents are elected Sarpunches from Mahilpur block and 4 respondents are elected Sarpunches from Garshankar block.

Here, we discuss the demographic profile of the respondents:

Section I

Demographic Profile

Age

Age is the most important factor in the demographic profile. Age describes the experience of any person. Age plays a vital role in political participation and it affects the behaviors of the individuals.⁵ It affects the capability as young persons are more energetic to solve the problems and older ones have more experience of life, that too is fruitful for the development. In the panchayat system, Sarpunches should have the capacity to solve people problems. The age profile of the respondents is described here:

Table -2
Age Profile of Respondents

Sr. No.	Age Group	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	21-30	10	15.15%
2	31-40	20	30.30%
3	41-50	26	39.39%
4	51-60	7	10.60%
5	61-70	2	3%
6	Above 70	1	1.51%
	Total	66	100%

Source: Field Survey

The analysis of data in the table-2 shows that respondents those are in the age group of 21-30 years represent 15.15 percent of the total sample and 30.30 percent of them are represented by the women respondents in the age group of 31-40 years. 39.39 Percent are lying in the age group of 41-50 years while 10.60 percent are in the age group of 51-60 years. There are 3 percent respondents are in the age group of 61-70 years and only 1.51 percent women who belong to the age group of above 70 years. Thus, middle age group between 31-50 years have a greater participation among the women in PRI's. Women at this stage are generally free from household responsibilities. Old women have less interest in politics.

Education

Education is a vital means to develop individual's personalities. It is a key to achieve any goal. At the same times, it helps to improve the socio-economic condition of people. The government of India introduced many policies and programmes to spread education among people like the Right to Education (RTE), National Policy on Education (NPE), Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Midday Meal Scheme (MMS) etc. Though these governmental efforts play a vital role to improve education status in India yet, many hurdles are lying in the path. In PRIs, educational qualification of leaders helps them to improve their decision making for the development of people. The 73rd Amendment Act with other schemes gives the responsibility to panchayats to improve the education level of the people by promoting primary and secondary education, technical education and training, non-formal education, and cultural activities as per 11th schedule. It is interesting to see the educational qualification of the respondents which indicate their knowledge and understanding.

Table-3
Educational Qualification of Respondents

Sr.No	Qualification	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Primary	7	10.60%
2	Middle	8	12.12%
3	10 th / High	26	39.39%
4	12 th /Secondary	14	21.21%
5	Graduate	10	15.15%
6	Post Graduate	1	1.51%
	Total	66	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table-3 reveals the educational qualification of the respondents. It shows that few respondents having graduate and postgraduate degrees as 15.15 percent respondents is Bachelors of Arts and only one respondent (1.51percent) is Master of Arts respectively. Some respondents complete their primary and middle-level education i.e. seven respondents (10.60%) primary level and eight respondents (12.12%) middle level. The table also reveals that 39.39% percent respondents complete their 10th standard and 21.21% percent respondents complete their 12th standard. It is good that no one is illiterate. Therefore, the table concluded that most of the respondents have completed their secondary and senior secondary level education.

Occupation

Occupation is linked with the education that helps people to improve their living standard and livelihoods. Better occupation gives more relaxation. In India, unemployment is increasing day by day and people are suffering due to lack of better employment. At the same time, women are also demanding employment to become self-sufficient and independent. Here we look at the occupation profile of the respondents.

Table -4
Occupation profile of respondents

Sr. No	Occupation	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	House Wife	58	87.87%
2	Retired from Govt. job	1	1.51%
3	Private business/shop	7	10.60%
	Total	66	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table-4 shows the occupation profile of the respondents. Majority of the respondents 87.87 percent are housewife i.e. 58. Only 01 respondent is retired from government job and 10.60 percent respondents are involved in private business. The table reveals that most of the women respondents are not self-reliant but seeking their husband's support in financial matters. It shows that most of the women respondents are housewives and they are mainly agriculturist and from the agriculture labour family.

Income

The income of the individual gives him status, motivation and relaxation. It improves the level of working and increase the feeling of self-confidence in people. Well established family and rich status give people more confidence that helps in the decision-making process. It also increases the capacity and willingness to help others.

Table -5
Per annual Income of the family

Sr.No	Income of the family	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Below 25000	07	10.60%
2	25000-50000	19	28.78%
3	50000-75000	15	22.72%
4	75000-100000	18	27.27%
5	100000 above	07	10.60%
	Total	66	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table-5 reveals the income of the family of the respondents. There are five categories regarding the income of respondents from all family sources. Out of 66 respondents, 7 have less than Rs. 25000 income from all sources. These respondents come in Below Poverty Line. 28.78 percent respondents have annual income of Rs. 25000-50000 (Just above poverty line). 22.72 percent respondents have annual income of Rs. 50000-75000 (middle range income). 27.27 percent respondents have annual income of Rs. 75000-100000 (higher income group). 10.60 percent respondents have annual income of Rs. 100000 above. Thus, the table concluded that most of the respondents belong to moderate income group. They have good sources to earn income. A few of respondents have more than Rs.100000 income per annum.

Section II

Social Profile

These people are living in a multi-dimensional society. These social dimensions are religion, caste, land, status and nature of the family etc. These social aspects create an influence on people's live as well as on the political arena. Every individual have their social environment that creates an impact on their political sphere. Social life, interactions, circumstances affect the working of political leaders and their decisions. At the same time, social life is linked with the political life of individuals. Therefore, it is vital to analyze the social profile of the respondents.

Religion

Religion is a matter of individual faith. It helps people to increase their self-confidence and create balance in every situation. Religion gives us the message of equality and brotherhood. India is a secular country which respects all religions and sects. Indian Constitution gives protection to people from all religions and sects. Freedom of Religion is a fundamental right in the Indian constitution under Articles 25-28. Here, we see the religious composition of the respondents which indicate the bonding and brotherhood among all religion in Indian society.

Table -6
Religion composition of respondents

Sr.No	Religion	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Hindu	34	51.51%
2	Sikh	30	45.45
3	Buddhist	1	1.51%
4	Ramdassia	1	1.51%
	Total	66	100%

Source: field survey

Table-6 reveals the religious composition of the respondents. There are four categories in this table. (51.51%) percent respondents (34) have faith in Hinduism. 45.45 percent respondents follow Sikhism. It is interesting to see that one respondent registered her religion Buddhism and another respondent registered her religion Ramdassia. Both are SC respondents. The table concludes that most of the respondents follow the Hinduism and the Sikhism.

Caste

In India, caste is the most influential aspect of social life. Caste affects the lives of people and is a parameter to access one's personality. Caste is deep rooted in Indian society. No one can escape from caste. Caste based discrimination is common in rural society. People face discrimination, humiliation and violence due to their caste.

The government launched many schemes and policies to improve the status of Dalits. They are succeeding to improve their conditions. Reservation for Dalits in education, job and politics is an effective step. In PRIs, they are elected in reserved seats. Here, we see the caste status of the respondents which help us to understand the participation of all caste people in PRIs.

Table -7
Caste Composition of Respondents

Sr.No	CASTE	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	General	30	45.45%
2	Schedule Caste	34	51.51%
3	Backward Caste	2	3%
	Total	66	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table-7 describes the caste composition of respondents. 30 (45.45 percent) respondents belong to general category, 34 (51.51) percent respondents belong to Schedule Caste and only 2 (3 percent) respondents belong to Backward Castes. The table shows that General and Schedule Caste women have more representation in PRIs because of reservation for Women in general and Schedule Caste category.

Nature of family

In past, Indian people lived in joint families. They believed in traditional culture. Nowadays, there is a transition from the joint family system to the nuclear family system. People are more interested to adopt the nuclear family system. Structural changes are taking place, which affect the whole Indian family system. In villages, Sarpanches and other leaders too are undergoing this process of change in our family system.

Table -8
Type of family

Sr.No	Type of family	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Nuclear	42	63.63%
2	Joint	24	36.36%
	Total	66	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table -8 shows the type of family of the respondents. It shows that out of 66 respondents, 42 (63.63 percent) are living in nuclear families and 24 (36.36 percent) are living in joint families. The table reveals that people are shifting towards nuclear families. It also shows that women of nuclear families have more representation in politics.

Land

India is agriculture oriented economy. Land plays an important role in people's life. Land is a symbol of richness and good economic status. In villages affairs are most affected by the land. In Punjab, upper caste people have big land holdings in villages and they play a dominant role in village panchayats. In this study, it is vital to take note of land equation among elected women leaders, who take the decisions for the village.

Table -9
Land Ownership among Respondents

Total Respondents	Yes	No
66	32	34
100%	48.48%	51.51%

Source: Field Survey

Table -9 describes the status of land among respondents. Almost, half of the respondents have land and half have no land. 32 (48.48 percent) respondents have agricultural land in large scale as some have land in 'kanals'. They are landlords from 'Jatt' community who take the decisions for village affairs. It has been noticed that no one has the courage to deny their decisions. Thus, the table concludes, there is marginal variation in the land ownership of the sample respondents in this area.

Section III

Political Participation

PRIs are introduced to increase the participation of people in the political arena. Participation means taking part in all kind of activities such as attending party meetings, rallies etc. Political participation means the involvement of people in political activities which directly or indirectly create an influence on actions of private citizens. They are

trying to influence and support the government.⁶ It gets affected by education, the status of the family and caste. In this study, we see the political party affiliation of respondents and participation in political activities.

Political Party wise Profile

India has a multi party political system, where every political party has its importance. There are many national and regional parties which affect national level politics. Punjab has two major parties i.e. Congress party and SAD. Other political parties like BJP, BSP, CPI, AAP etc have less impact on politics of Punjab. It is interesting to see the political party-wise profile of respondents which will help us to know about the influence of political parties in Punjab, especially in PRIs.

Table -10
Political party wise profile of respondents

Sr.No	Political party	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Congress	40	60.60%
2	SAD	7	10.60%
3	BJP	3	4.54%
4	CPI	1	1.51%
5	AAP	1	1.51%
6	IND	14	21.21%
	Total	66	100%

Source: field survey

Table -10 shows the political party-wise profile of the respondents. Majority of the respondents (60.60 percent) are affiliated with the Congress Party. 10.60 percent respondents are affiliated with Shiromani Akali Dal and 4.54 percent are from Bhartiya Janata Party. Communist Party of India and Aam Adami Party have 1.5 percent respondents each. 14 (21.21 percent) respondents are not affiliated with any political party. They contest the election as independent candidates. Independent respondents (21.21 percent) are the second highest figure in this table. It shows that local representatives are more interested to contest elections independently. This table reveals the fact that the Congress party has a stronghold in this area as Congress party is ruling party in Punjab. Ruling party always influence local leaders who believe that strong relationship with ruling party will helps to get work done.

Political Participation

Democracy lives with the participation of people. Political participation of the people is very important in a democratic system. People participate in political matters, raise their demands before government and make the government accountable and responsible. More participation means more responsible government. Political leaders not only represent the people, but should have the capacity to fulfill their demands. PRIs established to involve the people in politics so that rural society also feels the taste of democracy. It becomes more vital in women's matter. Therefore, here we look at the political participation of the respondents which indicate the success of the PRIs.

Table -11
Political Participation of the Respondents

Sr.No	Participation in Political Activities	No of Respondents	Percentage
1	Yes	43	65.15%
2	No	23	34.84%
	Total	66	100%

Source: Field Survey

Table -11 reveals the political participation of the respondents. Out of 66, 43 respondents (65.15percent) are actively participating in political activities such as attending the political meetings, participating in political rallies etc. 23 respondents (34.84 percent) are not involved in any kind of political activities. Their husbands are attending the meetings on their behalf. Therefore, the table concludes that most of the respondents actively participate in political activities. Some participate less and have proxy participation in political meetings. Proxy participation means to participate in political activities on the behalf of someone else. Some respondent said that we are not attending any political meeting. Our husband attends every meeting on their behalf.

Conclusion:

In Punjab, the position of women in PRI's changed after this Act. Number of Women Sarpunches in Gram Sabha and women members in Panchayat Samiti has increased due to fifty percent reservation (2017) policy of government for women in General and SC women. The above data shows that in these blocks (Mahilpur and Garshankar) women of middle age group are more active in rural local self government than young and old age

group of women. More women representatives are from nuclear families than joint families it also shows that women from joint families have more responsibilities of their families that's why they can't take part in the politics. The data show that most of the respondents have passed their high school and secondary school in this field one thing is good that there is no one illiterate respondent. Caste wise analysis shows that SC women respondents are more in number and General women members are in second number this is because of reservation policy for women in PRI's. Occupation wise analysis shows that most of the women representatives are housewives and from agriculturist families they are dependent on their husband for financial support. Income wise data shows middle class representatives are more active in rural local self government. At last another important point is that in Punjab along with national as well as regional parties there is large number of independence representatives in rural local politics. Available data shows that at present ruling party is more influential in this area. Further more women respondents are take actively participate in political activities and programmes but on the other hand data shows that there is proxy participation in rural politics and some women members never attends meetings of PRI's. This data also shows that women participation and the level of awareness among women have increase. This is very important to empower women.

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