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## WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS IN PUNJAB

**Kanwardeep Singh**

*Research Scholar,*

Department of Gandhian and Peace Studies Panjab University, Chandigarh

### Abstract

*The political empowerment of women is a social process crucial to development and progress. The status of women is measured internationally by the participation of women in politics and their empowerment. Women remain seriously underrepresented in decision-making positions. Women participation in public life can solve many problems of society. Thus, the present study focuses on "Political Empowerment of Women with special reference to Punjab".*

**Keywords:** Women, Women Empowerment, Political Participation

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Women empowerment refers to granting of an equal status, opportunity and freedom to the women for the purpose of developing themselves. This empowerment is aimed at making women financially independent, self-sufficient, acquire an affirmative self-esteem which would allow them to be able to tackle any difficult situation and they must be competent in participating in the decision-making process. As a nation India is committed towards empowerment of women. Since independence, Government has made efforts towards removing various inequalities. The growing social, economic and political awareness has increased around the world that has brought various issues by which gender equality and women empowerment are very noticeable. Empowerment of women is a wide range that increases in the social status of women by providing better food, education, property, eradicating poverty, and providing equal rights in various dimensions. Developmental goals cannot be achieved until gender disparities are taken away and women are empowered as development is needed in each and every society. In 1993 and 1994 the 73rd and 74th Amendment Act was passed reserving one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institution (PRI) so that equal political participation can take place. (Jha 2014: 290)

## 2. CONCEPT OF EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment has been one of the popular principles which emphasize to include in programmes, policies and projects as a process for women to experience changes along with the developmental goals. The women participation in decision making is a crucial process and that is why empowerment does not take place in a vacuum. Empowerment means to uplift women or to give power to women in terms of social, economic and political aspects. It also means to have access gain and develop its ability to actively participate in economic, social and political life. Empowerment is the only steps which challenges the existing power system in a society. For any developmental goals empowerment of women is the first prerequisite that should be given to women. In India Women empowerment greatly depend on their socio-economic status, geographical location, and educational status etc., and in which women always play a less important role in politics. (Fleschenberg 2007)

## 3. WOMEN EMPOWERMENT: AN INTRODUCTION

Empowerment acquires women to impart knowledge so that they can have the ability to understand gender relations and to destruct the old beliefs that hampers women to participate in decision making. Women empowerment is the action that relishes a great pose or challenge to the existing behavior of wield power so that it will increase their control over power and as well as resources.<sup>21</sup> The old patriarchal political system which did not allow women to hold higher position or in decision-making process. Empowerment is to empower women so that they can be treated equally in the society. Through empowerment now women all over the world is aware of their rights and equality. Women empowerment is an action that will give women a large amount of share to have control over human resources like in finance, material and as well as will help them to develop intellectually. This day's women empowerment is a buzz-word in a day-to-day life. Women empower themselves so that they can protect from social discrimination and also to have equal opportunity with their counterparts. It is through women empowerment that will bring transformation to this institution for the society. Globalization also plays a pivotal role in liberating women from all bondages. Education solely plays a vital role for women as it helps them to have knowledge about gender discrimination that they face and also it sweeps away the illiteracy of women day by day. It is through education that can build women to enhance their self-confidence and to make them equip in economic area. Through this it will improve women status in the society. Empowerment of women has reached all over the societies regarding women's rights and gender equality. Women empower themselves either through scheme like Self Help Groups (SHGs) or by organizing themselves into various organizations. Women empowerment carries a slogan that fights for women rights and equality. Empowerment approaches is not only for providing services to women but also to give them access to resources. It is the political empowerment that will give confidence to women to participate in politics. (Monique 1961)

## 4. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment of women in India emerges as the root cause of discrimination against women. Earlier they were accorded lower status and position in socio-economic, political life. But due to modernization and with the rise of various organizations like feminist movement, women empowerment, Self Help Group etc. women begin to take shape in social and economic activities but in political sphere women are still fighting for their equality and rights so that they can participate in decision-making. But nowadays the status of women has changed; they do get education, liberty, rights etc. and women were given high self-esteem in the society. Through empowerment process women have high hope in getting involved in the participation of politics and also their equal rights. Emergent's of women empowerment has helped many women to come out of their oppression. But with the increase of power relation male began to dominate women in decision making and because of that woman face challenge during the time of election. Though the status of women in socio-

economic has improved significantly but its status in political area has still not yet improved. At the grass root level women are trying to gain more access to control over power in which they can take decision in bringing development process. With new implementation of policies taken up by the government in the present contemporary political scenario, the status of women has emerged to a little higher extent to which they have a voice and freedom of expression towards addressing and acknowledging their problems and concerns to the mainstream politics and emphasizing more on the area of activity and sphere of development for their overall participation in the civil and political life of the governance in a democratic set up. A true democracy thus prevails when both men and women enjoy equal participation in politics. Many countries have adopted or established women's organization, a mechanism towards providing an avenue for women to become an active participant and a leader. Those women organizations can influence many party positions for women's leadership and decision-making and as well as issue concern for women's status in the society. (Emelie 2010: 93-97)

## 5. AN OVERVIEW OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is a process by which people take active part in political movement. Political participation is not just exercising voting but also campaigning, being a member in political party, holding party position, contesting in election etc. in this perspective women's impression towards political participation is not good and they could not get power in decision making because they are kept out of political sphere. The socio-economic, cultural and political environment decides the participation of women in politics. The extent of women political participation in India is taken into account because of the low Participation. Political participation is a process by which people take part in political activities. Exercising voting rights during elections is one of the important political activities of the people. Political participation refers to the activities of citizens of a society, in choosing a representative and also for the formulation of public policy. It is through political participation that promotes empowerment. Political participation is not just casting vote. It includes wide range of other activities- like membership of political party, electoral campaigning, attending party meetings, demonstrations, communication with leaders, holding party positions, contesting elections, membership in representative bodies, influencing decision making and other related activities. Political participation is the main quality of every political system it is usually associated with the political affairs. Political participation emphasis that permission is given or withdrawn in a democracy and the ruler are accountable to the ruled. Political empowerment not only empowers women but also allows the decentralization of power between men and women, share their thoughts, suggestion, opinion and also respect for each other. Political Empowerment allows women to be aware of politics which is running in day-to-day activity. Through this woman are encourage to have confident to participate in election as a voter, as a candidates and help them to solve different kinds of problems. Political participation is linked with the interest of the citizens and people interested in politics usually participate in politics. Role of women in political parties is the key possibility in shaping women's political participation. Women's political participation has been the important subject at both national and international level. Women's political participation is a major step towards ensuring equality for all women. (George Kutty 2003: 5)

## 6. POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN INDIA

Three variables are made use of while measuring Political Empowerment – the ratio of females to males in the Parliament, the ratio of females to males at the level of the ministries, and the ratio of the number of years in which a female was head of state in comparison to the years in which a male was the head (in the past 50 years). In India, if we make a comparison between males and females, the political participation of women is quite insignificant as compared to men. Such a trend can be seen in majority of the nations across the globe. Nonetheless, in the recent times there has been encouragement and rise of the political participation of

the women. (Narayan 2009)

According to the WEF Global Gender Gap Report 2020, India ranks 18<sup>th</sup> in terms of political empowerment, far better than its rank in the other dimensions of the index: 149<sup>th</sup> in economic participation and opportunity, 112<sup>th</sup> in educational attainment, 150<sup>th</sup> in health and survival, and 108<sup>th</sup> in the overall index. The political empowerment rankings sits above the UK's ranking of 20<sup>th</sup> and significantly above the US rank of 68<sup>th</sup>. (World Economic Forum 2020)

Keeping that in mind, one must not forget that in the 15th elections to the Lok Sabha, an unprecedented 59 women have been elected as members of the Parliament, which is the highest tally since India gained independence. As on January 1, the ranking of India on the basis of number of women elected or appointed to parliaments was 148 out of the 193 nations. The share of the women was merely 11.48 per cent in Lok Sabha and 11 per cent in Rajya Sabha. Countries such as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Pakistan, China and Iraq were above India in the rankings. (PTI United 2017)

In the Lok Sabha out of the 543 MPs 59 are women, which is the highest number of women MPs elected to the Parliament since Independence. At the same time, there is 11 per cent share of women in the seats of Rajya Sabha. In the 16th Lok Sabha, 61 women leaders have made their way to the Parliament. This is the highest ever number of Lok Sabha seats won by women and constitutes 11.23 per cent of the total 543 Parliamentary seats. Going back to the initial days after independence, it appears that the situation had been more than grim. The women constituted only 4.4 per cent share in the first Lok Sabha. In the Indian history the smallest proportion of share to women was in 1977 in the sixth Lok Sabha at only 3.5 per cent. Though there has been rise in the number of women MPs from 59 to 61 under the present NDA government, this percentage share is still much less than the global average of 21.3 per cent. According to a recent study carried out by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the position of India is 111 out of 189 countries which have representation of women in their respective Parliaments. In these rankings even the nations which were lesser developed than India like Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal have around 20, 19 and 30 per cent women members in their respective parliaments. (Mandal)

## 7. PUNJAB: AN INTRODUCTION

The political undercurrents in Punjab are branded by a wide range which comprises of a movement from parties taking part and leading to these parties confronting each other, by way of mutually decided adjustments and by imitating alliances. There is no straightjacket formula; there are also the reversals back to conflicts and clashes, and then again moves forward in the direction of alliances. This frequently changing field of politics in Punjab has been particularly witness to the identities of religion, nation, language, class and caste.

More than any other state in India Punjab has the most practiced tradition of forging coalitions between contrasting political parties. Such political parties have come in alliance with each other in Punjab which comprises of conflicting support bases. The basic reasons for the formulations of these coalitions are the political, economic and demographic contexts. Due to these complex intricacies the political analysts are faced with the challenge of finding out the central and overriding identity in a specific context. If in one context, it results in the inference that the observation that the 'predominant(ing) tendency in the legislative politics of Punjab has been in the direction of political communal coalition building', and in another context, there is a celebration of the rise of a secular Punjabi identity.

## 8. POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN IN PUNJAB

In order to have an equitable and sustainable advancement there is a dire need for political empowerment of women. However, the presence of women in the decision-making process is almost negligible. A transformed and transformational politics can only be reached at by the feminization of politics and bringing about a critical mass of women into politics. A participatory and consensus-oriented politics can only be achieved by way of the entry of women into the political mainstream, in which there is an answerable, clear, receptive, efficient, well-organized, impartial and inclusive government. In other words, the hallmark of a good governance system is seen in a transformative and gender sensitive political system which ensures human rights for all, be it women

and children or the underprivileged class of people. The main purpose behind the introduction of the 73th and 74th Amendments to the Constitution of India was the provision of 33% reservation to the women at the grassroots level of politics. This initiative is referred to as the 'greatest social experiment of our time'. Such a step was for the first time taken across the globe by India in order to ensure the participation of women in the politics which would additionally allow them to become a part of the decision-making bodies and help in building a 'New India'. Due to this 'silent revolution' there was opening of more opportunities and possibilities for women for expressive participation and representation because of the reason that it not only enabled the women to get their initial experiences in politics, but also have a direct involvement with the requirements of the women. Though provision of 33% reservation to women at the grassroots level, is a progressive measure for the empowerment of women, but it is quite far away from getting the desired result in Punjab at the higher level. Since the time India got independence Punjab has not witnessed a single female, Governor. Out of the 23 Chief Ministers of Punjab only one was a woman.

Apart from this, the Punjab Vidhan Sabha has had only two lady deputy speakers but none of them could be elevated to the post of the speaker. Women do not hold a strong position in Punjab Legislative Assembly and as Member of Parliament even in the 21st century.

**Table-1**

**Women of Punjab in Lok Sabha in 21st century**

Election year	Total Contestants	Male	Female	Female Percentage
2004	142	132	10	7.04
2009	218	205	13	5.96
2014	253	234	19	7.50
2019	278	254	24	8.63

The above table is evident of the fact that less than 10% of the women contested over the years. In the 21st century, the maximum participation of women in the Lok Sabha is less than a quarter of the total number of members of Punjab in the Lok Sabha members. Taking into consideration the data of the Punjab Legislative Assembly, a very weak and fragile position is held by the women. Since 1966, the Punjab Legislative Assembly has seen only 39 women members. In the year 1969, not a single woman was elected to the Legislative Assembly of Punjab.

**Table-2**

**Women in Punjab Legislative Assembly in 21st Century**

Election year	Total Contestants	Male	Female	% of female contestant	Female in Legislative assembly	% of female in legislative assembly
2002	923	852	71	7.69	8	6.83
2007	1055	999	56	5.3	7	5.98
2012	1078	985	93	8.62	14	11.96
2017	1145	1063	81	7.07	6	5.12
2022	1304	1209	93	8.62	8	6.83

In the Punjab Legislative Assembly, the status of women is same as that in the Lok Sabha. The elections are contested by less than 10% female candidates and out of those very few go on to win the elections and become elected members of the Vidhan Sabha. In 2012 elections, an unprecedented 14 women were elected to the Punjab Vidhan Sabha. However, the number of female legislatures is still very low. Punjab population comprises of nearly fifty percent females, but their representation in the Legislature is not at all proportionate.

Rajinder Kaur Bhattal became the first female Chief Minister of Punjab when she took office after the resignation of Harcharan Singh Brar, serving from November 1996 to February 1997, the eighth female Chief Minister in Indian history. Her initiatives as Chief Minister of Punjab included, in December 1996, a scheme to provide grants of free electricity to small farmers in order to power wells.

In 2020, the Punjab Government under the leadership of Chief Minister Capt. Amarinder Singh had taken a historic decision to give 50 percent reservation to the women of the state in local body and panchayat elections to give equal rights to half the population.

## 9. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Sharma, R. (2018)**, in her work “Women in Electoral Politics in Nagaland, India”, discuss about the low participation of women in Electoral politics. With the 50 years of history in election not even a single woman has been elected in State Legislative. The only history that a women got elected the author in her work “Women in Electoral Politics in Nagaland, India”, discuss about the low participation of women in Electoral politics. With the 50 years of history in election not even a single woman has been elected in State Legislative. The only history that a woman got elected.

**D. Syamala Devi and G Lakshmi (2015)** in their work “Political Empowerment of Women in Indian Legislature: A Study” has made studies on women’s political participation through empowerment process. It is through empowerment that women get chance to participated in decision making. Being the largest democracy where women constitute almost half of the population are always excluded from decisionmaking and their presentation in politics show a dismal picture. The equal representation of both men and women towards decision making and to take into full account of the whole people needs and interests is the first basic elements of a democracy. The real and true development cannot take place if it avoids women in all aspects. The low participation of women has been the concern in many different bodies. The quotes given to the women are important tools in which it can improve women’s participation in politics. Women should organize various networks of channel in order to have wielded influence in the decision making.

**Md. Shahid Raza (2014)** has made a study regarding women’s political participation in his work “Political and Legal Empowerment of Women in India”. Women all over the world face violence, the gender disparities which perceive women as inferior and men as superior. Women empowerment brings real results in the planning and decision-making of government to ensure equality to all women. Through legal empowerment women are given opportunities to participate in various decision-making processes providing them with legal entity i.e., the Panchayati Raj Institution.

## 10. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the concept of Empowerment.
2. To examine the Women Empowerment in India.
3. To analyse the Political participation of women in India.
4. To analyse the Political empowerment of women in Punjab

## 11. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is empirical in nature. Both the primary and secondary sources have been used to collect the data. The secondary data like books, magazines, newspapers, websites etc. has been used while **Primary data** has been collected through official documents and reports.

## CONCLUSION

Political equality has been guaranteed to the citizens by the Constitution of India which means that all the persons must have an equal right to participate in the political process of the country without any discrimination on the basis of their sex, race, religion, occupation etc. However, in spite of this the participation of women in politics is found to be minimal. There are several factors which play a role in the political participation and the extent of involvement of women in politics. Membership of voluntary associations, groups and organizations, though a non-political one, has got its impact upon the political behaviour of the individual.

Speaking about Punjab, though it is one of the most developed states in India, yet it has one of the lowest female populations which is lower in comparison to the national average. Although the ratio of female to male voters is high, but nonetheless a large difference is visible in the number and percentage of seats won by women in both the 2012 as the 2017 Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections. Only six women candidates out of the 81 contesting the election were able to win a seat, which indicates that only 5% of the females entered into the 117-seat assembly. However, in the year 2012, 14 out of 93 women candidates had won, which was 15% of the total women candidates nominated. It is clear that the percentage of the women in the assembly has fallen to half, with only 7.5% women candidates out of their total being elected this time.

It is not wrong to make the statement that a major role is played by the education, occupation of the husband, financial support in the determination of the women participation in politics. All these variables play a very important role because when one talks of elections, it is impossible to go on without talking of the financial status of a candidate. During election campaigns a lot of money is needed and one cannot do away without spending a huge amount of money and so, in the scenario of Punjab it is evident that the women who have participated have a huge amount of declared assets which makes them capable in contesting the elections.

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