



# Dynamics Of Women Empowerment In Himachal Pradesh

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## *Abstract*

Women constitute an eternal and indispensable component in the growth and development of any nation. With the passage of time, the role of women in society and nation-building has been increasingly recognized and substantially expanded across the world. It is now widely acknowledged that national development cannot be achieved without ensuring the holistic development and empowerment of women. Among the various dimensions of empowerment, political empowerment holds a central position, as it enables women to participate directly in decision-making processes and democratic governance. In India, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) serve as a vital mechanism for promoting women's political empowerment at the grassroots level. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, which mandates reservation for women in PRIs, has significantly enhanced their representation and participation in local self-governance. This study focuses on Himachal Pradesh, where PRIs have emerged as an important platform for strengthening women's leadership and political awareness.

**Keywords:** Women, Empowerment, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Himachal Pradesh

## **Introduction**

Women empowerment is the most important aspect of the concept of empowerment of the powerless. Empowerment of women in its simplest forms means empowering women socially, economically and politically. Participation of woman in political sphere is an integral element for the empowerment of woman that helps to accrue an equal gender society in order to accelerate the progress of nation. The participation of women in politics signifies not only the right to vote but also the sharing of power, co-decision-making and co-policy making at all the levels. The equivalent contribution of women and men in the assertion is an essential requirement of democracy and a positive stride for society, as the unanimous decision taken into an account to the need and interest of the population as a whole.

Women constitute about half of India's population. So, far the success of Indian democracy is concerned both men and women should participate in the democratic institutions of the country. But in the Indian society, the participation of women in democratic institution is not to the expected level. After Independence government took keen interest in the all round development of women in the country for its commitment to the twin ideals of democracy and equality. In this line adult franchise, fundamental rights, fundamental duties, directive and others principles political rights ensured women equal status. Article 40 state that, “ State shall take steps to organise village Panchayats and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to functions as units of self government.” The 73rd Amendment Act is a major step towards political empowerment of women through Panchayati Raj Institutions. The 73rd Amendment of the Constitution in 1993 gave a constitutional status of PRIs and reserved one-third of the seats for women in these institutions. No doubt various initiatives have been taken for the empowerment of women but women have had poor representation in institutional politics. But last two decades these institutions have lead for empowering women in India

## **STUDY AREA**

The present study confined to the Mandi district of Himachal Pradesh. Mandi district is one of them. Mandi district was formed by the amalgamation of the erstwhile princely states of Mandi and Suket at the formation of Himachal Pradesh on the 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1948. The district has a total area of 3950 Sq.Kms. and covers 7.10 percent area of the state. According to the 2011 census the district has a total population of 9,99,777. out of these 4,98,065 were male and 5,01,712 were females. It indicates a higher sex ratio of 1007 females per 1,000 males in the district as against 972 for the state as a whole. The literacy rate in Mandi district is 81.53 %( male 89.56% & female 73.66%) as per 2011 census.

## **Research Methodology**

The study area is confined to the state of Himachal Pradesh. The state has 12 districts and for the present study Mandi district has been selected. The district Mandi has ten development blocks, namely Gopalpur, Dharampur, Gohar, Seraj, Sunder Nagar and Karsog.. Out of ten development blocks for the purpose of study, one block, Chauntra was selected. For the present study, both primary and secondary data was used In order to achieve the intended objectives, elected women leaders of three Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samiti Chautra and Zila Parishad Mandi were selected from Mandi District. For the collection of data questionnaires were prepared and served to elected women of sample of the study.

## **Objectives**

- 1) To examine the current status and dynamics of women's empowerment in Himachal Pradesh.
- 2) To analyze the extent and nature of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions at the grassroots level.
- 3) To evaluate the impact of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment on women's political, social, and economic empowerment.

- 4) To explore socio-cultural and economic factors influencing women's active involvement and leadership in local governance.

### Socio-Economic Background and Empowerment of Women Leaders

Women's empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has emerged as a critical dimension of grassroots democracy and local governance. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has provided constitutional backing for women's participation in PRIs, aiming to enhance their role in decision-making, planning, and implementation of development programmes. Himachal Pradesh is one of the States providing fifty percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It is the result that at present more than fifty percent women elected as member and chairperson of these institutions.

Understanding the socio-economic and political dynamics of elected women representatives is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of these measures. The following table presents a detailed analysis of the profile and participation of women leaders in Himachal Pradesh PRIs, highlighting patterns in age, education, caste, occupation, and active involvement in governance activities.

**TABLE 1.1 Age**

Institution	Age Group					
	21-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Above 60	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	5 (35.71%)	6 (42.86%)	3 (21.43%)	-	-	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	7 (70%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	-	-	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	1 (5.26)	12 (63.16%)	5 (26.32%)	1 (5.26)	-	19 (100%)
Total	13 (30.43%)	20(30.23%)	09(54.05%)	4(20.93%)		43(100%)

The data in the table 1.1 shows that there is more women leaders i.e 54.05% in the age group of 41 to 50. There is lesser number of women leaders in the lower age group of above 60. It is clear that in the rural society, age is an important determinant in deciding the social economic and political role of women. Rural women are bound to follow the culture and emanate their traditional role incessantly. More often, participation of young women are more concerned with Panchayti Raj.

**TABLE 1.2 Educational Status**

Institution	Education					
	Illiterate	Up to Matric	Plus Two	Graduate	Post-Graduate	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	2 (14.29%)	5 (35.71%)	7 (50%)	-	-	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	-	3 (30%)	5 (50%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	-	6 (31.58%)	6 (31.58%)	5 (26.31%)	2 (10.53%)	19 (100%)
Total	2(4.65%)	14(32.56%)	18(41.86%)	6(13.95%)	3(6.98%)	43(100%)

Table 1.2 reflects that 41.86 percent of the women leaders are educated up to higher secondary and 32.56 percent educated up to matric level. Around 14 percent are graduate and 6.98 percent are post graduates. Remaining 4.65 percent are illiterate. The educational level of rural women leaders is quite good but the level of higher literacy among the Panchayati Raj women leader is poor.

**Table 1.3 Occupations**

Institution	Occupation				
	Agriculture	Business	Service	Any other	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	11 (78.57%)	-	2 (14.29%)	1 (7.14%)	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	6 (60%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	10 (52.63%)	-	6 (31.58%)	3 (15.79%)	19(100%)
Total	27(62.79%)	01(2.33%)	09(20.93%)	06(13.95%)	43(100%)

From the analysis of data in table 1.3, it is clear that 62.79% women leaders are engaged in agriculture work, 20.93% are in services and 13.95% are engaged in other affairs like tailoring, housewives and animal husbandry etc. In the rural area of Himachal Pradesh, agricultural activities are confined to their own fields but working on their own fields does not bring them any financial benefit.

**Table 1.4 Caste Status of Women Leaders**

Institution	Caste Groups				
	Gen	SC	ST	OBC	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	10 (71.43%)	4 (28.57%)	-	-	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	6 (60%)	3 (30%)	-	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	11 (57.89%)	6 (31.58%)	-	2 (10.53%)	19 (100%)
Total	27(62.79%) )	13(30.23 )		03(06.98% )	43 (100%)

Caste plays decisive role in moulding the pattern of leadership at the village, state and national level. From the analysis of data in table 1.4, it is revealed that 62.79% elected women members belong to General Category, because they are socially and economically in a strong position, further 30.23% of members belong to Scheduled Caste, 6.98% of the members belong to OBC. Reservation to the women also reflects the caste configuration and hegemony of the higher castes. Evaluation of new roles and institutions are not free from traditional variable.

**Table 1.5 Family Background**

Institution	Types of Family		
	Joint	Nuclear	Total
Gram PanchayatMember	8 (57.14%)	6 (42.86%)	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	5 (50%)	5 (50%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	8 (42.11%)	11 (57.89%)	19 (100%)
Total	21(48.84%)	22 (51.16%)	43(100%)

Table 4.5 shows that only 51.16% of the women leaders come from nuclear families and the remaining 48.84%from joint families nuclear families. It shows that there is a greater possibility for elected women leaders to take independent decisions regarding their political role at grass root level democracy of the state.



**Table 1.6 Previous Electoral Experiences**

Institution	Previous Experience		
	Yes	No	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	2 (14.29%)	12 (85.71%)	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	1 (10%)	9 (90%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	5 (26.32%)	14 (73.68%)	19 (100%)
Total	08(18.60%)	35(81.40%)	43(100%)

The table 4.6 clearly depicts that 81.40% of the elected women members had contested and won for the first time. Only 18.92% of the elected women members of PRIs of the sample district had contested previous elections as a member or chairperson of PRIs. Hence, it is evident that almost all the women members of PRIs of sample district are elected against reservation for women. Thus, 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act brought a new hope for women and created space for women in PRIs because before the implementations of this Act, there was no effective participation for the women in PRIs.

**Table 1.7 Determining Variables of Women Contestants**

Institution	Reason for Contesting PRIs Election				
	Family	Social Interest	Political Affiliation	Own Wish	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	7 (50%)	3 (21.42%)	2 (14.29%)	2 (14.29%)	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	5 (26.32%)	4 (21.05%)	4 (21.05%)	6 (31.38%)	19 (100%)
	15(34.88%)	10(23.26%)	08(18.60%)	10(23.26%)	43(100%)

Data from the above table 1.7 reveals that 34.88% of the respondents were encouraged by their family whereas 23.26% were interested in social activities. 23.26% women have self interest to contest PRIs election. Table further shows that 18.60% were affiliated to political parties so they decided to contest the PRIs election.

**Table 1.8 Elected Women Participation in PRIs Meetings**

Institution	Attend Gram Sabha Meetings		
	Yes	No	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	14(100%)	-	14(100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	10(100%)	-	10(100%)
Zila Parishad Member	19(100%)	-	19(100%)
Total	43(100%)	-	43(100%)

Attendance in PRIs meeting is an important determinant of the elected women participation. It is clear from the above table 4.8 that all elected women members attended PRIs (Gram Sabha, Gram Panchayat, block, Zila Parishad) meetings regularly. Therefore it may be said that democracy has become more effective now than before the emergence of the grassroots institutions.

**Table 1.9 Suggest Measures to Improve the Development Activities**

Institution	Opinion		
	Yes	No	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	10 (71.43%)	4 (28.57%)	14 (100%)
Panchayat Samiti Member	8 (80%)	2 (20%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	19 (100%)	-	19 (100%)
Total	37(86.05%)	06 (13.95%)	43 (100%)

It is revealed from the above table 1.9 that 86.05% women leaders suggest measures to improve the development activities, whereas 13.95% don't suggest measures to improve development activities. From the above discussion it is clear that highest percentage of elected women at all the three levels suggest more measures to improve development activities. It has made a miraculous change in rural life. The women of villages have shown that they have a fine ability to work in the political field.

**Table 1.10 Opinions about Variable as Hurdles in PRIs**

Institution	Hurdle in politics				
	Lack of interest	Lack of political knowledge	Lack of education	All these	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	4 (28.57%)	3 (21.43%)	5 (35.71%)	2 (14.29%)	14 (100%)
PanchayatSamiti Member	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	3 (30%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	5 (26.31%)	4 (21.05%)	8 (42.11%)	2 (10.53%)	19 (100%)
Total	12(27.91%)	10(23.26%)	16(37.21%)	05(11.62%)	43 (100%)

Table 1.10, shows the main Hurdles which affect the women participation in politics. From the analysis of the data in the table , it is seen that highest 37.21% of the women leaders expressed ‘lack of education’ as the main hurdle followed by 27.91% who expressed ‘lack of Interest’, whereas 23.26% respond lack of political knowledge and the least 11.62% expressed the lack of support of male members. Hence, from the above discussion it is clear that women active participation in PRIs has considerably increased but even now they are facing a lot of hurdles.

**Table 1.11 Participation of women in PRIs after 73rd Amendment**

Institution	Participation of women after 73rd Amendment					
	Actively participate	Passive members	Influence by Male	In different towards working of PRIs	Can't say	Total
Gram Panchayat Member	6 (42.85%)	2 (14.29%)	2 (14.29%)	1 (7.14%)	3 (21.43%)	14 (100%)
PanchayatSamiti Member	5 (50%)	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	-	10 (100%)
Zila Parishad Member	10 (52.63%)	2 (10.53%)	4 (21.05%)	3 (15.79%)	-	19 (100%)
Total	21(48.84%)	6(13.95%)	8(18.60%)	5 (11.63%)	3(6.98%)	43(100%)

Several aspects were cited by the researcher for studying the participation of women in PRIs after 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Some of them actively participate, they are positive members, influence by the



male folk and are indifferent towards the working of PRIs. As per the data from the above table 48.84% women respondents opined that women become active member of PRIs and they actively participate, while 18.60% women leaders opined that they are influence by male folk in the Panchayat, while 13.95% respondents viewed that women are still passive members of PRIs and they are indifferent towards the works of PRIs. After the above discussion it is seen that if we see women in PRIs, it is the result of 73rd Amendment which has given opportunity for women to become a member of PRIs. So no one can deny the importance of this Act.

## Findings

Women leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions are predominantly from the middle-age group and possess educational qualifications up to matriculation and plus two levels. General caste women continue to dominate leadership positions, while most elected representatives are engaged in agriculture and belong to the medium income group with annual earnings below one lakh. It is encouraging that women leaders actively attend PRI meetings, raise development-related issues, and participate in financial discussions despite having limited prior political experience. Although women's participation has increased significantly after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, they continue to face various institutional and socio-cultural challenges in PRIs..

## Suggestions

To strengthen women's participation and leadership in Panchayati Raj Institutions, concerted efforts are required at multiple levels. Rural women should be actively encouraged to participate in Gram Sabha meetings by creating an inclusive atmosphere and reviewing rigid quorum provisions that often restrict effective participation. Village-wise and ward-wise Gram Sabha meetings should be promoted to ensure broader involvement and better grassroots representation. Exchange programmes for women Panchayat representatives, both within and outside the country, should be facilitated to enhance exposure, learning, and the sharing of best practices. Moreover, reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions should be extended for at least two consecutive terms (ten years) to enable women representatives to gain adequate experience, build confidence, and effectively demonstrate their leadership capabilities.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Panchayati Raj Institutions play an important role in promoting grassroots democracy and women's political empowerment. Although women's participation in PRIs in Himachal Pradesh has increased after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, but their role in decision-making remains limited and ineffective. Social norms, cultural practices, and limited family support often restrict their participation. Persistent patriarchal attitudes also hinder the active participation of women in PRIs. Mere representation through reservation is not sufficient for real empowerment. Therefore, strengthening PRIs requires greater awareness of rights and duties, along with capacity-building and social sensitization, to ensure meaningful and effective participation of women in local governance.

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