



POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO PUNJAB

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ABSTRACT Women are famed in love and sacrifice. They are excelling in every field. Women's welfare and development has been a matter of great concern. Women's participation in our country is very low. Women constitute 48 per cent of the total population of India. The Constitution of India has made certain provisions to protect the interest of the female population. Beside, series of legislation have been enacted from time to time to provide protection to women against social discrimination, violence etc. Unfortunately, due to many reasons, this section of our society has not been able to take full advantage of the constitutional privileges and statutory rights so far. The reasons are the existing social structure, discrimination against women, lack of education, poverty, economic dependency etc. The social institutions, like the family and community, have defined the duties of women but failed to recognize their rights. In this paper I will discuss political empowerment of women with special reference to Punjab.

KEYWORDS :

Meaning Of Political Participation

Participation of citizens—both men and women in public affairs has been subject of abiding interest in political science since the days of Plato. From the days of Aristotle, the emphasis has been on democratic government through sharing of responsibilities of public offices. Aristotle defined citizen as one who shares in the administration of justice and in the holding of office. The declaration of French Revolution of 1789 says that all citizens have the right to take part personally or by their representatives in the formulation of law. Moreover, the meaning of participation changes with the changes of time and the changing role of the state. The role of people's participation was confined only to law-making function in the days of Laissez-faire. The nature and awareness of participation had widened with the emergence of socialist state and the increased role of the state. Marx argued about universal political participation as a means and end of the manifestation of human freedom. Political participation is an educational process, it is the means for the establishment of a Just social order.

People's participation is closely related to democracy and the theory of representation. The success of democracy depends upon the extent of participation specially at local level. In their study of six Nations, Almond and Verba observed, "the citizen unlike the subject is an active participant in the political input process, the process by which political decisions are made."

Political participation is a necessary ingredient of every political system. Although political power in every society is monopolized by a few, the political incumbents in every system are found to be quite keen on ensuring certain degree of political participation by the people. The reason is quite understandable. By involving the masses in the affairs of the state, political participation fosters stability and order by reinforcing the legitimacy of political authority. A society in which a substantial part of the population is denied any participation, whatsoever, is likely to be highly explosive. Consequently, even in modern non-democratic political systems, the ideas of political participation seem to be well mustered.

Women's Participation

Throughout the world, the power relations that shape social, political, economic and cultural life prevent women from participating fully in all areas of their lives, whether it's in the home, or in the public arena. While women's dedicated efforts to challenge the status quo have allowed more women to reach positions of power in recent years, women

- Continue to be under-represented in all areas of decision-making, such as Political, Administration, religion, the media, culture and the law.
- Still face significant barriers to their full and equal participation in the structures and institutions which govern their lives.

WOMANKIND seeks to empower and enable women to overcome the obstacles which prevent them from participating on an equal footing with men, through a combination of education, training, networking and lobbying.

What Do We Mean By Women's Civil And Political Participation?

Women's civil and political participation refers to women's ability to participate equally with men, at all levels, and in all aspects of public and political life and decision-making. It extends to other arenas, such as family life, cultural and social affairs and the economy.

So, whether it's deciding how the household income is spent or determining how the country is run, WOMANKIND believes that women have the right to an equal say in all matters that have an impact on their lives. This right is enshrined in a number of human rights instruments, as well as in national constitutions and laws.

Several human rights mechanisms, including the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights and the International Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, elaborate the nature of women's civil and political rights and the steps required to promote greater equality between women and men in this area. The Beijing Platform for Action, the principal international action plan on women's rights, contains a section on women in power and decision-making, which states that the empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women's social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life.

Women's participation in public life and decision-making depends on several factors, including:

- an awareness of their rights and how to claim them
- access to information about laws, policies and the institutions and structures which govern their lives
- confidence, self-esteem and the skills to challenge and confront existing power structures
- support networks and positive role models
- an enabling environment, meaning a political, legal, economic and cultural climate that allows women to engage in decision-making processes in a sustainable and effective way

What Are The Obstacles To Women's Civil And Political Participation?

There are a number of factors which constrain women's participation in public life and decision-making, including:

- economic dependency and a lack of adequate financial resources
- illiteracy and limited access to education and the same work opportunities as men
- discriminatory cultural and social attitudes and negative stereotypes perpetuated in the family and in public life
- burden of responsibilities in the home
- intimidation, harassment and violence
- lack of access to information".

To attain these objectives the constitution guarantees certain fundamental rights to all Indian without any distinction on the basis of sex. Article 14 ensures 'equality before the law' and Article 15 prohibits 'any discrimination,' Article 16(1) guarantees 'equality of opportunity for all citizens,' Article 526 stresses on adult franchise. These are

several other Articles that protect and cover equality of women indirectly or by implication like Articles 39, 40, 41, 43, 45 and 47. All these constitutional provisions are backed by various legislations, such as the Hindu Marriage Act 1955, the Hindu Succession Act 1956, the prohibition of Dowry Act etc.

These legislations are supported in each of the Five year Plans. In 1958 the Central Social Welfare Board was established and specifically geared to promote the education, employment and welfare of women. In free India, the status of woman has undergone profound changes. Remarkable progress has been achieved in the field of education because there cannot be educated people without educated women.

It is only through education that women can realise their rights and the laws that have been made to safeguard these rights. In independent India many women have occupied high administrative positions very efficiently but there are several others who are still lagging behind.

Dr. Radhakrishnan once said: the progress of our land towards our goal of democratic socialism cannot be achieved without the active participation of our mothers, wives, sisters, and daughters'.

The realization that real development cannot take roots if it by passes women, who represent nearly half the country, has been the guiding principal in the formulation of our plans from the very beginning.

As regards women's political participation, we have come a long way and women are making a little progress into politics and government, but not yet enough to make a difference. We can say women participation in state politics has just been a non-starter. The number of women members in Punjab Legislative Assembly in terms of percentage of total number of members never crossed fifteen percent, in spite of the fact that women constitute nearly fifty percent of the voters.

Due to this development the responsibilities of political leaders and civil servants are increasing.

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, 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)

Empowerment acquires women to impart knowledge so that they can have the ability to understand 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. 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. 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 vital role in liberating women from all bondages. Education 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).

Women are the axis of our society. If we want to develop any society, we should try to develop the axis of society which means development of women. Society is a two wheeler vehicle whose one wheel is men and the other one are women. When both wheels work equally, only then the vehicle can have a smooth run. India is third world's developing country. It is more important for developing countries to make sure that every person of the country gives their contribution for a faster development.

India is the biggest democratic country in the world having its own written and supreme constitution. It is world's Numero Uno constitution because it constitution applies to all without any discrimination at any ground. In the eyes of constitution, every citizen of India is same. Now the question in place is that if constitution of India is supreme and the best in every sphere, why is the development speed of India not as fast as many other countries in the world. There are many reasons for this, but one main reason is that there is no equal participation of women in decision making for country's development. We are in the 21st century, yet our society is male dominated. Here I'll discuss the status of women in Punjab politics in 21st century.

Though numerically the strength of women members in Punjab Politics has been increasing, their participation in the decision making positions is significantly smaller.

Punjab is a land of great cultural variety. The approximately 80% population of Punjab living in small villages and different communities are there. These villages are cultural and significant element of Punjab. Difference in the rural and urban ways of life are significant. The so many religions, castes, and the great variation in local customs and regional traditions are there. In Punjab society, we have not only talk about the account of regional, religious and caste differences in the rural and urban sections of the population, but also to consider the differential in old traditional and new days of life and thought at different levels.

It is very difficult to write regarding the different roles and statuses of men and women in our society the state like Punjab. The evaluation of a largely the men and women both are play very important role in society, socio-economic development, political activities, decision making and civil service. Participation in contemporary world movements and scientific and technological progress is increasing in Punjab. Because of this development the role of men and women in a some what broad.

Punjab is that state of India that enriched the history of India with its bravery and role in Independence struggle. Punjab is a border state which lies between 29°33' N & 32°31' N latitude and between 73°53' E & 76°56' longitude, and shares border with Jammu & Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh to the North and North-East respectively, Chandigarh to the East, Haryana to the South and South-East and Rajasthan to the South-West. It shares its borders internationally with Pakistan to the west. Today's Punjab has 50362 sq. kms area with 27 million inhabitants.

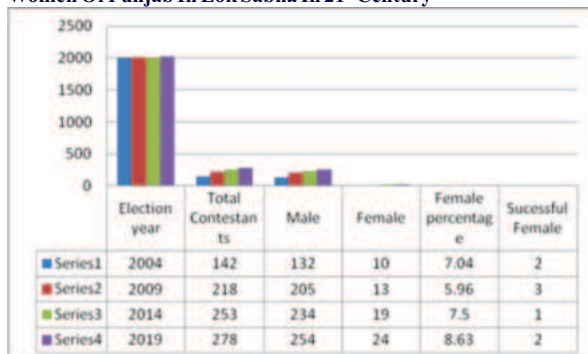
The name 'Punjab' came long after many alterations from Sapta-Sindhu to Pente Potamina. Punjab provides the synthesis of many communities and cultures of Asia as it saw the rise and fall of the Mauryans, Bactrians, Greeks, Sahas, Kushanas and Guptas. It was the gateway for the Mughals and wore the brunt of all invasions. But the advent of Sikhism gave a hope to the people of Punjab under Guru Gobind Singh Ji who founded the Khalsa to liberate the repressed from the clutches of the Mughals. The legacy was continued by Baba Banda Singh Bahadur. Later, Maharaja Ranjit Singh led and formed the mighty kingdom of Punjab which was annexed by the British in 1849.

The spirit of Punjab, however, remained unvanquished, and Punjab became the sword-arm of India. Punjab and Punjabis played an important role in the freedom struggle. Notable are the 66 Kukas who were brutally blasted by canon in 1872. The names of towering Punjabi revolutionaries like S. Ajit Singh, Lala Lajpat Rai, Madan Lai Dhillon, Bhai Parmanand, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Udharn Singh, Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru shall remain etched in the national consciousness for centuries to come. Nor did the women lag behind in the freedom struggle. Some outstanding women freedom fighters of Punjab were Raj Kumari Amrit Kaur, Gulab Kaur, Adarsh Kurnari, Kishan Kaur, Amar Kaur, Dalip Kaur, Sushila Devi, Har Devi, Purani and Pushpa Gujral.

But now-a-days, when we are living in 21st century in a big democratic country, the status of women in Punjab politics is not satisfactory. Status of women can be determined by equality and freedom enjoyed by women to shaping and sharing of power. Theoretically, there is gender parity, but practically the picture is not the same. The political empowerment of women is critical for equitable and sustainable development. Nonetheless, women are absent and unheard in the decision making process. It is asserted that only by feminization of politics and bringing a critical mass of women into politics can a politics that is both 'transformed' and 'transformational' be brought about. Only the entry of women into the political mainstream can achieve a politics based on participatory, consensus-oriented approach, wherein the government is accountable, transparent, responsive, effective, efficient, equitable and inclusive. In short, a transformative and gender sensitive political system ensuring human rights of all, be it women and children or the marginalized and downtrodden people, becomes the hallmark of a system based on good governance.

Although, by providing 33% reservation at grass root level, is a step forward to empower women, but it is far away in Punjab at higher level. Since independence no women could bag the position of the Governor of Punjab. There has been only one lady CM of Punjab out of 23. In addition, there have been only two lady deputy speakers and none could become the speaker. Women do not hold a strong position in Punjab Legislative Assembly and as Member of Parliament even in the 21st century.

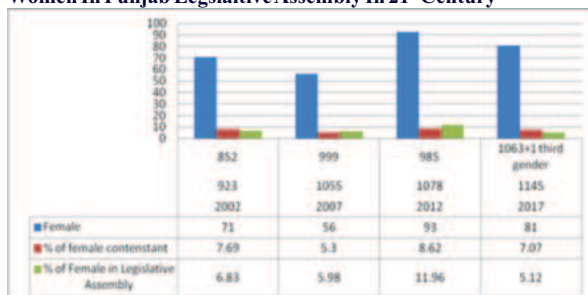
Women Of Punjab In Lok Sabha In 21st Century



Source: report of election commission India

From the above table, it is evident that less than 10% of women contested over the years. In 21st century, maximum participation of women in Lok Sabha is less than 1/4th of the total number of Punjab Lok Sabha members.

Women In Punjab Legislative Assembly In 21st Century



Source: Reports of Election Commission of India

If we take into account the data of Punjab Legislative Assembly, women hold a very fragile position. Since 1966, only 39 women could become the members of Punjab Legislative Assembly. In 1969, there was not a single woman elected in the Punjab Legislative Assembly.

The status of women in Punjab Legislative Assembly is the same as in Lok Sabha. Less than 10% female candidate contest elections and only a few women win elections and are elected members of Legislative Assembly. First time in Punjab, in 2012, Punjab Vidhan Sabha elections, 14 female members were elected for Punjab Vidhan Sabha. This was a big number of females who entered Punjab Vidhan Sabha, but that was only 11.96% of total Legislatures. So the number of female legislatures is very low. Almost half of the Punjab's Population are female, but in Legislature the number is very low. According to the population it must be 48%.

Summing up, it is quite evident that although our constitution provides parity in every field, yet it cannot be seen in the real world. To ensure a country's development women should have an equal say as men in decision making bodies. It can be seen that women in Punjab continue to be left out of the decision making in politics. This scenario needs to be changed. Women should be educated and made politically sound to make sure they can participate not only as voters but also as contestants who turn out to be successful.

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