

# Women Participation in PRIs: Myth or Reality?? – A Study of Himachal Pradesh

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**Abstract – In a country with a population of 1.3 billion and a sex ratio of 930 females to a 1000 males (48.20% females out of the total population), keeping in mind the population trend it becomes really important to make sure that women has an equal part to play in every developmental aspect. The contribution of women counterpart cannot be ignored at any level of developmental process. The PRIs has provided women with an opportunity to contribute to the developmental process from the very basic level of development that is, the grassroots level of governance. With 33% reservation accorded to the women by the 73rd constitutional amendment act, the women became an integral part of local governance. The study focuses on the trends of women participation in PRIs in the State of Himachal Pradesh and the problems associated with women participation in PRIs.**

**Keywords – Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Development Process, Population, Participation.**

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## INTRODUCTION

The foundation of the present day local self-government roots back to vedic age (1700 BC), there used to be self-governing bodies at the village level known by different names "SABHA", "SAMITI". With passing years, these bodies were renamed with the nomenclature given to them as "Panchayats" (council of five persons). This structure existed in almost every village of ancient India. The history of India has witnessed the existences of these bodies in the reign of every ruler till the recent times.

The formal journey of PRIs started with the recommendations of Balwant rai Mehta committee in year 1957. The committee recommended the three tier structure for PRIs in India. This started the process of Democratic decentralization in Indian Democracy. The recommendation of balwant Mehta committee was accepted by National development council (NDC) in the year 1959. This committee was followed by Ashok Mehta committee in year 1978, GVK rao committee and L.M singhvi committees in 1980s.

But it was the 73<sup>Rd</sup> constitutional amendment act 1992 which gave a new life to the local self-government in India by providing a constitutional status to the PRIs. It has added part IX titled as "THE PANCHAYATS" which contains the provisions from Article 243 to 243-O related to PRIs along with Eleventh Schedule which contains 29 functional

items of the panchayat. The Act has given a meaning to Article 40 (DPSPs) of the constitution which says

"The state should take steps to organize village panchayat and endow them with such power and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government."

The act brought PRIs under the justiciable part of the constitution. It made it obligatory for the state governments to opt for panchayati raj system in accordance with the provisions of the act. Women participation in PRIs was ensured by this Act under following provisions:

- # One third of total seats to be reserved for women who include seats reserved for SC/ST women (Article 243D).
- # Reservation of one-third of the total positions of chairperson at all three levels for women (Article 243D).

## HISTORY OF PRIS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH:

Panchayati Raj Institutions in Himachal Pradesh was established under the Himachal Pradesh Panchayati raj Act, 1952 only 280 Gram panchayats were there before the enactment of the Act. However, after the enactment of the Act, 466 Gram Panchayats were established in the year

1954 and the number of PRIs reached 638 in the year 1962. In the year 1966 the hilly area from the Punjab region was merged with the State which has further increased the number of PRIs in the State to 1695. The area which was merged was having the three tier structure whereas in the state of Himachal Pradesh two tier structure was prevalent it was decided that in order to bring uniformity in the functioning of the PRIs throughout the state it is important to have similar structure for PRIs all over the state . For this, Himachal Pradesh Panchayati raj Act 1968 was enacted in the years 1970 which lead to the two tier Panchayati raj system throughout the State. After 1970 time and again gram panchayats were reorganized in the state, leading to an increase in the number of gram panchayats in the state. In year 2005-06 the State government has added 206 new gram panchayats to the tally taking the number to 3243. However, with 17 gram panchayats being added to different municipalities in the year 2015 the number has now come down to 3226.

The Himachal Pradesh government in an Amendment to the act in year 2008 has increased the reservation for women in PRIs to 50% from the earlier quota of 33%. It was a great initiative taken by the state government in order to fasten up the pace of development by making the overall administrative structure more inclusive, by including more number of women in the decision making process .Many states in the country on similar lines has increased the quota for women in PRIs bt amending the acts in their respective states.

### WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN PRIS IN HIMACHAL PRADESH:

#### Term of PRIs during years 2010-15

Table 1.1 –Number of women in PRIs in year 2010

Total seats	Schedule caste women	Schedule tribe women	Backward class women	General women	Total women	Percentage of women
Pradhan Gram Panchayat						
3243	421	104	127	987	1639	50.54
Member gram panchayat						
19413	3412	622	0	7283	11317	58.30
Chairman panchayat Samiti						
77	13	4	5	20	42	54.55
Member panchayat samiti						
1682	226	56	67	514	863	51.31
Chairman Zila parishad						
12	2	1	1	2	6	50
Member Zila Parishad						
251	34	11	10	73	128	51

#Source- Department of Panchayati Raj Himachal Pradesh.

#### Term of PRIs during years 2015-20

Table 1.2 – Number of women in PRIs in year 2015

Total seats	Schedule caste women	Schedule tribe women	Backward class women	General women	Total women	Percentage of women
Pradhan Gram Panchayat						
3226	432	130	122	953	1631	50.56
Member gram panchayat						
20348	3474	906	0	7398	11778	57.88
Chairman panchayat Samiti						
78	13	5	5	19	42	53.85
Member panchayat samiti						
1673	238	62	67	487	862	51.52
Chairman Zila parishad						
12	2	1	1	2	6	50
Member Zila Parishad						
250	34	13	10	69	127	50.80

#Source- Department of Panchayati Raj Himachal Pradesh

Inferences drawn by comparing the two terms 2010-15 w.r.t 2015-20:

1. Women participation in PRIs in the state has increased over the years.
2. The state has increased reservation for women in PRIs to 50 % from 33% by amending the act in year 2008.
3. Each of the three tiers has women participation in decision making.

Problem areas related to women participation:

- **Dual roles to play:** Women traditionally burdened with domestic workers and they face difficulties in balancing the official work with their home.
- **lack of security:** sometimes due to lack of security women members fail to visit remote areas in odd hours or attend meetings in faraway places. The gradual criminalization of politics also affecting their participation.
- **lack of information and knowledge** about government programs especially for both women and child development poses problems. However, again limited exposure to formal education leads to the dependency on second hand information.
- **language barrier** it hinders performance as most of the correspondences, as rules and the regulations are in English mostly.
- **Due to the lack of exposure and experience** women, members face difficulty in asserting themselves because majority of them enters politics because of some family legacy or just to fill up the position that was being created for women via reservation.

**In addition to these some other problems faced by women are:**

- While the women got political representation, the real power was usurped by their husbands, they act as a proxy on their behalf.
- The politics of the day affects the functioning of PRIs, the centre and the state governments acts as nerve centre for local bodies functioning.
- The husbands of elected women intervenes in the functioning of PRIs.
- Lack of political awareness among the women in rural areas.
- Lack of acceptance for women leadership in people.
- Illiteracy or low standard of education among the women in rural areas.
- Lack of training program for women representatives.
- Male elected members of the panchayats are being more dominant when it comes to decision making aspect of panchayats.

**ACHIEVEMENTS:**

- Reservation to women in PRIs has provided women an opportunity to showcase their leadership and contribute towards societal development.
- It has changed the stereotype and broken the shackles of patriarchal society.
- It also provided an opportunity to deprived low caste women to participate in the decision making process.
- It has helped women in gaining self-confidence and engaging themselves in the development of society.
- With the help of PRIs women has worked on creation, development, and promotion of Self Help groups, Cooperatives, MSMEs which has given better employment and livelihood options in rural areas.
- Women's issues have come to the forefront at the local level and consequently state and national level.

- More and more women are coming to forefront leading to better representation of women issue in general.
- Issues like child marriage, child labour, girl child education are stressed upon by the women at a larger level.

**Suggestions to make participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions more meaningful:**

- The interference from the political parties in the election and functioning of panchayats, leads to creation of hostile environment for the women contestants and women representatives. The government should take a strict action in such an intervention of political parties and elections should be conducted free and fair.
- The state government and local administration should educate the women about the political issues and create awareness among them.
- Special training programs and refresher courses for women representatives should be conducted by the government from time-to-time. It gives them confidence and creates political awareness among the women.
- Government should make special provisions for the women representatives and give them more powers as compared to male counterparts and educate them about their powers. It helps them to work efficiently and effectively.
- There should be a provision to give honour and financial rewards to the women members for their exemplary works.
- The rotation term of reserved seats should be made after every atleast 10years. It would help women representatives to understand the social fabric of panchayats in better way.
- The male members of the family should encourage the women of the house to actively take part in meetings and elections of panchayati raj institutions.
- The media can play a vital role by sensitizing women about values like gender equality and gender justice and inculcate within women the desire for political socialization.
- There is a need of attitudinal change, women roles should not be generalized .A

sense of equal partnership between men and women should be there.

73rd-and-74th-constitutional-amendments-india/12525

**CONCLUSION:**

With the establishment of PRIs in our country the women are getting more opportunities to become a part of the social structure with their participation in decision making, leadership and administrative functioning. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 has pushed the boundries for women, it has made it possible for the women to participate in the local governance process and march towards the bigger political picture of the country. It has given women a chance to come out of their households and understand the social fabric of the society. However, in many areas of our country this system has been captured by some elite people. There is a need to put more efforts from governments side to ensure the participation of women in the PRIs so that the basic idea behind women participation can be fulfilled .the government should provide financial, administrative or political assistance to women, training programs should be held for women to make them aware of their rights, duties and responsibilities .Government should encourage research and development in effective implementation of provisions of 73rd amendment.

We must remember that empowerment as a process is slow but self-perpetuating. Providing women with opportunities and support systems (such as reservations & other affirmative action) has the potential to put into motion a sustainable process to change the gender power equation .It is impossible to achieve the National development goals without the active participation of women.

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