

The Participation of Women in Local Government: A Case Study of Jalandhar District

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to look into the questions of women marginalization in the field of local governance and local body election based on data collected through case study of Jalandhar district of Punjab. The issues of the women participation in India is still a very serious concern in the political circles. Although, in the Panchayati raj system the women are having 33% reservation to ensure their participation in the local politics but in reality they are mostly victim of patriarchy. In Jalandhar district of Punjab women do not enjoys social and economic right as equal to male and the situation in political participation is more worse in which they are dominated by the male patriarch in the society. However, the conditions of women getting improve due to increasing level of modern education and awareness. The study is just all about the role and status of women in local self-government, women participation in electoral politics and district administration.

Key Words : Women participation, Representation, Governance, Self-rule, Women empowerment

INTRODUCTION

The issues of the representation of the oppressed communities are a topic of contemporary debates across the academic world. With the rise of the social justice movements in India firstly led by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the gender politics also gaining the momentum in the activism as well as in the politics. The constitution makers provided certain rights and special protection for women in several fields and that is why they got representation in the local governance, but the situation of women still not improved as much as it was desired. Local governance has its own importance even though it is federal or territorial in governance. The decentralization of Power also provided an opportunity to the women to become the participant in the discussion making at the local levels. Panchayati Raj system was created all over India and the Panchayati raj institutions were accepted as the institutions having immense potential for democratic

decentralization and empowerment of people. To understand the Panchayati Raj first look at the meaning of its words raj means “rule” and Panchayat means “assembly” of five punch. The leader of panchayati raj was called the mukhiya or sarpanch. “The members of the gram panchayati are elected for a period of five years by the members of gram Sabha. The term panchayati raj in India signifies the system of rural local self-government. It has been established in all the states of India to build democracy at the grass root level”¹. Lord Ripin was the father of Panchayati raj in India who spoke of passing the resolution in 1882, but failed. Finally and informally the panchayati Raj was started by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in district of Rajasthan on 2 Oct. 1959. The constitution of India in article 40 states has been asked to constitute panchayats and it comes in part 4.

“The panchayati Raj system was formalized in 1992 by the 73rd amendment act to the Indian constitution. The act provide a three tiers of a panchayati raj for all states,

1. S.S. Bhatia, Indian democracy at the Grass- Roots, Indian Institute of International understanding, New Delhi, 1989, pp.155-156.

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to provide seats reserved for scheduled castes, schedule tribes and women. On 24 April 1993, the constitutional act 1992 came into force to provide constitutional status to the panchayati raj institutions. This act was extended to panchayats in tribal areas of eight states, namely: Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha and Rajasthan²². The new constitution through various articles including 14, 15, 23, 29, 30, 42, and 45 provided equal rights for women's. Women's participation in Panchayats provided opportunities to women to participate in the decision making process. Women's participation in political process is important for strengthening democracy. The process of change can also be initiated in through the women participation. In present the women candidate are having 33 percent of candidate's participation in the panchayati raj system in India. There are different plan to provide the reservation policy to different diverse groups in the country. The schedule caste and schedule tribe communities also have given their due representation in the reservation policy. "Women leaders in the panchayati raj system are transforming local governance by the state to issues of poverty, inequality and gender injustice. The participation of women in PRIs involves women as voters, as members of political parties, as candidates, as elected members of PRIs taking part in decision making, Planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes, as member of Mahila Mandals and their association with organizations"²³. However, despite having the reservation and other measures of women empowerment the still the progress of women not desired to that level.

The women and local governance in India: Historical background:

The time of freedom struggle the concerns of women participation were on the demands in the country. Indian women raised the issue of universal adult franchise in 1917. That is how women demanded the share in the political activities of the government. The struggle for political and economic participation was also deal with the proper concern in the situation of gender justice. "The government of India provide right to vote for all women's in 1935 above whom 21 years of age and fulfil the

conditions of property and education. The constitution of India came into the year 1950 and granted universal adult franchise for all citizens. After this representation of women in legislative bodies or decision making is very low. Women's have demanding more space in legislative bodies"²⁴. In past women's called 'Abala' due to the evil customs and poor attitudes of men, she had become handicapped. In Vedic period, women's enjoyed equal and sometimes better status than men. They participate with men in the academic discussions on subjects and themes. They were not only poet, scholars also brave and courageous. After vedic period in Rigveda, they were called household mistress. During the period of "Gautam Buddha also, the status of women was very high and they were independent personality. Between Tenth to Eighteenth century the status of the Indian women was decrease. The nineteenth century was the started of women development and the status of women was improved with the emergence of British rule in India. The impact of Western education on Indian people, acts, rules and regulations was responsible for the betterment of women's status. Raja Ram Mohan Roy was a supporter of women's rights. Then Governor Lord William Bentinck was succeeded to remove 'Sati' through the act of 1829.

This movement was change the popular thinking about widow marriage and the evils of polygamy and agree. This may be a mile stone in the history of the development of Indian women. In twentieth century many reforms and movements were going on in India to free the women. The highly educated and westernized Indian people like Mrs. P.K. Roy, Maharani Chimanbai, Ramanbai Ranade, Lady J.C. Bose, Bhicaji Cama and others to change the point of view of Indian People. Mahatma Gandhi was also worried about the position, role and status of Indian women. Historically, women as an identity always had been a point of misuse by male domination. Our ancient era is the witness of this inequality. In Vedic and Upanishadic the condition of Vedic women was good. Rig-Vedic in Rig- Veda women's play role in family, society and in the political life in Rig Veda period the practice of "sati" nowhere mentioned. In this period taking of dowry was there but it was only a

2. Goel, S.L., Panchayati Raj in India, New Delhi: Deep and Deep Publications, 2003, pp. 44-50.
3. "Women and Panchayati Raj Institution" in towards comprehensive Women's Health Programmes and Policy (ed.), Renu Khanna, Mira Shiva, Sarala Gopalan, : pp.515-516
4. Hazel D. Lima, (1983), Women in Local Government, concept publishing, New Delhi, by Naurang Rai.

symbolic in nature.

Epic Period: In the Epic period women's enjoyed respectful position at home. Medieval period in medieval period women's was weak and this is the responsibility of men to protect them. Mughal period in this period the status of women's was not high. In this period the social evils like Purdah and child marriage had become common. In this period the situation of women's was low. The founder of Sikh Community Guru Nanak, wanted to women treated equals by men in every part of life. During East India Company during this period many social reformers struggled for the improvement of women's status in Indian society. In this period first school for girls started in 1847. In this period so many social reformers struggle for freedom against society for the protection of women's and the Rani Lakshmi bai first lady who fought for independence. In this period many ladies have experienced in Marshal Art but still in these period women's not treated equally. In this period they have no equal rights for women's and they depend on male members of the family.

The women political participation in contemporary Punjab state:

The beginning of the local self-government in Punjab is very old and it started during the times of British government. The beginning of Panchayati Raj in Punjab was first time in 1912 when India was under the British rule. After the beginning of Panchayats in Punjab different laws were passed in 1921 and 1939 to replace this Act in the new form. "After independence separation of Punjab, the rural institutions were creating a new act and this act was called the Punjab Panchayati act, 1952. Punjab state government restructure its panchayati raj system based on the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommendations and a new three- tier panchayat system include Gram panchayats at the village level, panchayats samitis at the block level and zila parishad at the district level came into being. In the constitution the Panchayati Raj institutions in the state Punjab conform with Part IX of the constitution and the state legislature remove the Punjab

Gram panchayat act, 1952 and replaced it with the Punjab Panchayati Raj Act, 1994"⁵. "Punjab was one of the few states in India which translate Art.40 of the Directive Principles of state policy into reality by passing Punjab Gram Sabha Act in 1952. This Act is a pointer in the history of panchayat movement as this Act wanted to establish ' Panchayati Raj 'on the Gandhian principles in each village of the state instead of in selected villages as provided in the Act of 1939. Later on Punjab Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act 1961 was passed to establish the three tier system on the line of Balwant Rai Mehta committee report"⁶.

Patriarchal Structure of Punjab Society:

Generally in the Indian society the women have been denied in the all kind of public life historically and the consequences of this historical marginalization can be seen in today's society also. Mostly the public lives like political and economic were dominated by the males while women are kept inside the home to take care of children and domestic works. In its long history, women were not given any kind of human rights; they faced all kind social, economic political deprivation. Male domination always subjugated them in or other form in the public life and did not allow them to enter them into the public life. "Due to this societal complication the men have become a bread winner having economic authority in his hands whereas the women have provided with the duties of housekeepers and unfortunately, the third genders still are not being considered as humans"⁷. This inhuman treatment to women is still in practice in almost all the societies of the world.

However, the women assertion in the world led to the possibilities of gender liberation in which the women as a collective self-started to organise themselves a strong political and economic force. Wollstonecraft has asserted that "the ideals of the Revolution and Enlightenment should be extended to women, primarily through access to education"⁸. This is how the women liberation is possible through the participation in the education and developmental projects. Punjab being a very agrarian and

5. Cited by Singh Sansar Reports in the working of Panchayats in Punjab, 1 (192526)

6. Cited by Report Issued by Punjab Rural Development And Panchayat Department. Mohali (2008)

7. Yogesh Kumar Negi and Anchal Jamwal (2016), Gender Construction in Patriarchal Punjabi Society: A Critical Appraisal of Contemporary Popular Music, International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities

8. Habib, M. A. R (2008), A History of Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to the Present. Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing.

feudal society also dominated of male patriarchy in which women are kept at a very margin in the society. The show of the martial racism and muscles power is the one of the characteristic of the male domination in the Punjab. Since long especially in the remote areas women are still facing the acute crisis of male domination in the society as well in the polity. Despite the equal right to all and no discrimination basis on the gender in our constitution the women are not given their due rights in the society. This marginalization can be seen in the songs and daily conversation about the women in the society. "The similar condition of women is defined by a male in the selected lyrics, "dhoyegi to kachhe aur gande bartan" (Singh) [you will wash the underwear and used utensils], shows derogatory temperament regarding woman. It is an outcome of patriarchal societal structure which has limited the women's role by considering her unable to perform well outside the house"⁹. This shows that the Punjab society also having all the elements of patriarchal society in which women are subjugated like any other societies of the countries. The male domination denied the social and political participation of women in the public life. Although, after independence and due to the constitutional provision provided by the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, the women now are asserting all the sphere of life. Their political participation also showing the positive development but in realities a lot of needed to be done to bring women into the mainstream political development.

In present the state government have taken a good step to increase reservation for Punjab women to 50 % from the existing 33% in Panchayat Raj institution. The decision was taken by the Punjab Congress Government Led by Amarinder Singh, Chief Minister of Punjab. The Panchayat Raj act of 1994 has been amended to have increase women reservation in Panchayat Raj institution. The amendment, which was a promise made by the ruling party during the election, will ensure that women have increased chances of being directly elected as members of Gram Panchayats, Zila Parishads, and other similar bodies. This act will provide reservation quota to empower women in the rural areas for the electing direct elections for members of Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samities, and Zila Parishads. At present, it is 885 as against the national average of 935. The participation of women in Punjab is ranked as one of the lowest in the

country. Women Participation in Panchayats in Punjab is less than from male participation in Politics. Punjab women's are always seen to be engaged in farm activities, home based industrial occupation and contribution, to great extent, to the family's economy. If some women's participation in local governance and elected for local governance, they only elected not rule. Their husband's go everywhere and take any decision.

Issues of women reservation in PRI:

The reservation system in all the sphere of the life is a very product of the long struggle led by the Dr. B.R. Ambedkar to give the representation in the public life for all marginalized groups. He proposed the reservation system only way to provide the social justice to the marginalized communities which directly take them to the mainstream. Social justice is the spirit and vision of the Indian Constitution. The vision was the product of the long struggle to provide the opportunity to the large number of the masses who purposefully denied taking participation in the public life. Dr. Ambedkar fixed this responsibility on the shoulders of the state to ensure the representation in the governance of the country. The issue of women reservation also dealt with the issues of social justice in the context of their marginalization of the historical and religious regions. Therefore the systems of reservation were given to them as an opportunity to come in the contact of the public life.

The issue of reservation were extended to the backward communities as well as the women representative due very low representation in the jobs and education. The one of the reason to thus marginalization in India is the rigid caste system and patriarchal Hindu religion which don't allow lower caste and women to participate in the public life. The broader categories historically marginalized in the name of social and religious system which never uphold the values of equality. Despite, the constitutional provisions the women representation in the Indian parliament is still very low in comparison to their population. Women belonging to the lower caste communities are more vulnerable in term of representation because they have to be the victim of multiple level of deprivation like caste, class and gender. Their due representation is tough to get in the real sense because of the male domination in the public places. The

9. Yogesh Kumar Negi and Anchal Jamwal (2016), Gender Construction in Patriarchal Punjabi Society: A Critical Appraisal of Contemporary Popular Music, International Journal of English Language, Literature and Humanities

multiple levels of marginalization also stop them to be the part of public life in real sense.

However, the beginning of PRIs in India led to the foundation of women representation with the assurance of the 1/3rd reservation at all the levels of governance. Many states in the country have extended the reservation to women 1/3rd to 50% according to their population. The present government had stated it several times to ensure through the constitutional amendment but since long nothing happened. Speaking at a national workshop on the “Implementation of PESA Act: Issues and way forward”, Mr. Birender Singh said that “though some States have provided 50% reservation to women in panchayats, the government will, through the Constitutional Amendment, ensure that it is implemented in the whole country”¹⁰. This is the utmost requirement of the nation to follow the 50% reserved seats for the women in all the states in all the levels of election. The crisis of less representation cannot be extended again and again in the context of the male domination in the elections and after election also. The women representative must be given the free hand in all the spheres of life to bring the holistic development for the nation.

Live examples of women representatives of PRIs in Jalandhar:

The current discussion is just based on the ground reporting related to the issues of reservation of women in the Jalandhar district in the PRIs. All the cases are based on the in-depth interviews done personally as a part of the research project just to check the ground realities of women representative after getting the reservation. How they are treated by the male patriarchal systems of the society which identify women as weak force in the governance and try to influence the decision of the women representatives. The presence of the women representatives in local self-governance can be tested through the live example of women who are village

head man in the different villages of Jalandhar district of Punjab. Although, due to the limitation of time and resources the sample size is very low but still some inferences can be drawn through the current analysis of the cases. The very common problem at the ground level is the male interventions in the decision of the women representatives.

Binder Rani/Village Raipur Prohla (Jalandhar)¹¹:

Because of the 33% reservation in the PRIs the Binder Rani has been elected as village headman of the village Raipur. The village structure which very much based the agrarian model is highly feudal in which this lady faces a lot of problems of male interventions in the day to day affairs related to the local governance. To her it is difficult to resist the male partner due to the social restrictions in the society. Although she won the election but almost all the decisions are taken by her husband and she seems just like the rubber stamp. A body without any thought on the issues of local governance. Due to the patriarchal constraints it's difficult for her to go out and work like a male sometimes she remained unknown about the decision taken in her name. But despite all the odds she wants to assert and she is learning the system to run it without the help of male partners that how the marginalized people learn about the governance and public life.

Rani Devi/Village Mehru¹²:

She also got elected in the 2013 as a village headman of this village. The story of the Rani Devi is very similar to the earlier one. During the interaction she was fearful while answering. The marginalization was represented in the silence itself. She was not as vocal as the male were. She spoke very limited about the male domination. That is another reason when the victims are not awarded enough about what is happening with and that is lack of proper education to women of which they became the victim of the male patriarchy. She found it very difficult

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10. The Hindu National Bureau (2016), 50% Quota for Women in Panchayats Planned, accessed from: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/50-quota-for-women-in-panchayats-planned>
 11. The information is first handily collected for the research work personally by the researcher and approved by the supervisor. The take care has been taken of the privacy of the individuals because the nature of study is just the information to use for the project.
 12. The information is first handily collected for the research work personally by the researcher and approved by the supervisor. The take care has been taken of the privacy of the individuals because the nature of study is just the information to use for the project.

to implement their ideas in reality and transformed the life of the people. Rani Devi was very kind hearted and very much sympathetic toward the poor people and marginalized people. It was also the case of women interpretation of the political world how they look at it and trying to found out the means of emancipation from the male domination. Although again it possible through proper education and sensitization where they will have to make learn about their role in the local governance and the meaning and value of the representation in the local administration.

Usha Rani/Village Salarpur (Jalandhar)¹³ :

The story of the Usha Rani was not that much of different in nature. Despite getting elected in 2013 in the local elections her experience personally was not satisfactory. Although she asserted a lot not seems little awarded about their political right. She trying to her inroad among the male dominated social political structures. But despite all the efforts she is also submissive to her husband during the time of decision taking for the developmental issues. Her assertive is not enough to challenge the male domination. She was having that pain and realization of patriarchal structures of the society.

Conclusion:

After the study of available literature and personal data collected for the study, some of the conclusions are drawn here related to the participation of women in local governance and district administration in India. The argument and inferences are substantially made regarding the Panchayati Raj system and district administration generally in India and particularly in the Jalandhar district of Punjab. The study also analyse the current situations of women in the district level administration while taking the decisions regarding social welfare projects. It is a well-known fact that in Indian society, since long the women's have been marginalized due their gender and are victim of male domination. Historically, most of the public spaces had been occupied by the men and women were kept inside the boundaries of house just to take care of the children and family affairs. They were given very limited chances to actively participate in the decision making process in the patriarchal and feudal societies

like India. This process had gone too long in the history which entirely marginalized the women in context of governance and public life participation. However, in the modern times due to the large number of social movement and democratic development the half population of the world start asserting for their spaces in all the spheres of public life. One of those is the local self-governments in India which talks about the democratic decentralization and local participation of the people in the decision making bodies at the grassroots level.

The Panchayati raj system was formalized in 1992 by the 73rd amendment act to the Indian constitution and this act provide a three tier system of Panchayat raj for all states to provide seats reserved for scheduled castes, schedule tribes and women. This idea of Panchayati Raj in 1992 incorporated the idea of social justice by providing the reservation to all the marginalised communities who were historically kept away from the decision making. Women were also given the 1/3 reservation and the demand to increase it to 50% is still going on in the Indian political circles. However, there are few states like Himachal who already implemented the 50% reservation to women in the Panchayati raj system. The reservation system was followed to ensure the political participation of the people from the weaker section of the society in the decision making processes in the local administration. The women reservation in the Panchayati raj system is also based on this idea of political participation and to increase their participation in the local administration. Despite having all the measures in the constitution, the ground realities are still very different to the ideals were set. Constitution of India provided the right to vote for all women's but the representation of women in decision making is very low due to the several reasons. One of the most important reasons is the patriarchal characteristics of India society in which male partners are more dominating the spaces of administration.

Interestingly, after implementation of reservation and access to education now women are trying hard to be the competitor of men but it will take much more time to empower them. Women those are moving to higher education in the metro cities are enjoying some degree of freedom but the conditions in the remote villages and backward regions the situation of women is still harsh.

13. The information is first handily collected for the research work personally by the researcher and approved by the supervisor. The take care has been taken of the privacy of the individuals because the nature of study is just the information to use for the project.

Despite that, among the women they are not a very homogenous community, the upper caste and class women enjoy more rights but women from the lower strata still faces the multiple structures of exploitation. Moreover, overall women as collective community are not enjoying equal rights and privileges as compared to men counterparts. Same is reflected in the panchayati raj institutions where women just contest and win the election but after that the real power is exercised by their husbands. There are several factors which have already discussed in the previous discussions. The male patriarchy and social constraint imposed on women still very much impacting their decision making capacities in which they are not fully free to participate in the administration. Although, in case of the voters women are used to cast their vote in the influence of the family members in some areas there are not full opportunities to enjoy the voting right according to their will power. Mainstream political parties also use the women voters just as a vote bank and very less opportunities given to them elected from the unreserved constituencies or gram sabha's. In Jalandhar district the situation are almost similar to the other parts of the country. It can be said that women candidate are still faces the problems of male domination in the local self-governing bodies at the grassroots level. On the basis of the analysis of research data it can be stated that the study substantially justify the hypotheses.

Further Suggestions:

Whatever the women marginalization that just because of illiteracy and lack of consciousness women as a political community, it can overcome which through the proper education and training to assert for their rights. Therefore, more and more women should be encouraged to take the higher education. Women activists should also take it into consideration that more awareness campaign should be initiated. Moreover, it also seems that the governments must take consideration of 50% reservation of all the women at all the level of governance in the political systems. Punjab government should also follow the other Indian states which are already given the due representation to the women population. This will promote at least the entry of more women candidates in the electoral politics and decision making bodies. Although the result of the affirmative action is slow to increase the active participation but it's necessary to increase the limit of the inputs like reservation and special treatment to stand and show their participation in the governance and

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