

Status of women in Punjab Politics In 21st century

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Abstract: *Women are the epitome of generosity, love and sacrifice. They are working shoulder to shoulder with the considered 'Stronger' gender and excelling in every field. It is often quoted that 'A human race is like a bird and it needs both wings to fly'. No society can rely fully on one gender and requires equal contribution and participation from both.*

The Indian constitution provides equal opportunities to all irrespective of their gender, race, caste and creed. However, even in the 21st century, the participation of women in politics and policy making is considerably low in India despite it being the largest democracy of the world. This has resulted in a slow pace of development in the country. The path to achieve gender parity in politics is a long one.

In this paper, I'll discuss the status of women in Punjab politics in the 21st century.

Keywords: *Empowerment, development, elections, women, Legislative Assembly, Lok Sabha*

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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.

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 Lal Dhingra, Bhai Parmanand, Kartar Singh Sarabha, Udham 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 Kumari, Kishan Kaur, Amar Kaur, Dalip Kaur, Sushila Devi, Har Devi, Purani and Pushpa Gujral .¹

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.²

The 73th and 74th Amendments to the Constitution were enacted to provide 33% reservation for women at the grass root level of politics. This has been termed as the ‘greatest social experiment of our time’. India became the first country worldwide to take such affirmative step for ensuring women participation in politics which further enables them to enter the decision making bodies and build a ‘New India’. This ‘silent revolution’ opened more avenues for the meaningful participation and representation of women as also facilitated the women not only to get their first experiences in politics, but also to be more directly involved with the needs of women.³ Women’s empowerment is the process of empowering women⁴.

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

Election year	Total Contestants	Male	Female	Female Percentage	Successful Female Contestants
2004	142	132	10	7.04	02 (15.38%)
2009	218	205	13	5.96	03(23.07%)
2014	253	234	19	7.50	01(7.69%)
2019	278	254	24	8.63	02(15.38%)

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.

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.

Women in Punjab Legislative Assembly in 21st Century

Election year	Total Contestants	Male	Female	% of female contestant	Female in Legislative Assembly out of 117	% of Female in Legislative Assembly
2002	923	852	71	7.69	08	6.83
2007	1055	999	56	5.3	07	5.98
2012	1078	985	93	8.62	14	11.96
2017	1145	1063+ 1 third gender	81	7.07	06	5.12

Source;- Reports of Election Commission of India

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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