



Socio-economic and political backgrounds of women legislators in Himachal Pradesh state legislative assembly: A study

Pawan Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, RGM Govt. College, Joginder Nagar, Himachal Pradesh, India

Abstract

Leadership decides the nature and efficiency of the political system. In representative democracy it is one of the important variables that collective leadership should represent the masses. Its composition should also reflect the various colours of that society. According to 'elite theory' power in the democratic system circulate in particular section that comprises election section of that particular society. Present study is mainly focused on the issues of understanding the composition of the women leadership. Questions addressed in the paper are: who are women political leaders? Do they have political lineage? Do they belong to a section of the society which has hold over power in the pre-independence period? What is the location of the common women in the political arena? Hypothesis is structured on the basis of macro, micro and observation bases: women is still politically on the back foot. Her role in the politics still requires toning and boosting.

Although Socio- economic (literacy, sex ratio) conditions of the Himachal Pradesh is better than neighbouring State but if we look at the State Legislative Assembly, we find representation of women steadily increasing. Therefore, it is important to study the socio-economic and political profile of elected women (1998-2022) for the purpose of our present study.

Keywords: women, politics, Himachal Pradesh, legislative assembly

Introduction

Himachal Pradesh is one of the hilly states of India. It came into existence on 15th April 1948 as 'centrally administered' unit by putting together twenty-six Shimla hill states and four Punjab hill states. After the formation of Himachal Pradesh originally it had four districts namely Mahasu, Sirmour, Mandi and Chamba and its area at that time was 25,839 sq. kms. on April 15th 1948 the Shimla hill states (except Nalagarh) and the State of Chamba, Sirmour and Suket were merged in Himachal Pradesh. Mandi state was merged with Himachal Pradesh on 1st may 1948.

In 1948, the people of Himachal Pradesh launched struggle for democratic rule in the hill state. In 1951 it became a part "C" state under a governor with a 36-member Legislative Assembly and a three-member cabinet. After the completion of the first general elections for the Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, a popular ministry under the Chief Ministers of Yashwant Singh Parmar sworn on march 24th 1952.

The State Reorganisation Commission (SRC) (1956) decided to merge the state of Himachal Pradesh with the neighbouring state of Punjab. But the leaders of Himachal Pradesh opposed this decision, therefore, the central leaders agreed to retain Himachal Pradesh as separate entity in the form of a union territory consequently, Himachal Pradesh was designated as Union Territory. The Vidhan Sabha was dissolved and it was replaced by a territorial council in 1957. In 1960, a new border district of Kinnaur was, carved out of Mahasu District. Later on, when the Parliament passed the 14th Constitutional Amendment Bill, the union territory of Himachal Pradesh was again provided with a legislative assembly. In 1963, Assembly was revived and a popular ministry formed. On the reorganisation of Punjab hill areas with Himachal Pradesh on linguistic basis, on 1st November 1966, it was enlarged by merging the district of Lahul and Spiti, Shimla, Kangra and Kullu, and the Nalagarh tehsil of Ambala District, some parts of Una tehsil of Hoshiarpur district and Dalhousie of Gurdaspur district of the then Punjab state. With this merger the total area of Himachal Pradesh increased 55, 673sq.kms. In 1967, the state went to polls for sixty seats of Legislative Assembly passed a unanimous resolution for the recognition of full-fledged state hood for Himachal Pradesh. In 18th December, 1970, the Union Parliament passed the bill namely the state of Himachal Pradesh Act to elevate the status of Himachal Pradesh to a full- fledged state.

Himachal Pradesh gained full-fledged statehood on 25th January 1971 and become the 18th, state of Indian Union. The reorganization of the districts took place on 1st September, 1972 as a consequence of which two more new districts namely Una and Hamirpur were created as a result of trifurcation of the erstwhile Kangra District. Further, new district of Shimla and Solan were formed by re-organizing the boundaries of the then existing district of Mahasu and Shimla. Since 1st Sep., 1972 onwards, there had been no change in the

administrative structure of H.P. except carving our new sub tehsil from tehsils and raising of sub-tehsil to the level of tehsils. Presently there are 12 districts.

State Assembly Election and Representation of Women in Himachal Pradesh

Elections of the State Legislative Assembly were first held in 1952 when Himachal Pradesh became a Part 'C' State of Indian Union. After the dissolution of the Assembly on October 31, 1956, next elections for the Territorial Council which replaced the Assembly were held in 1957 and 1962. After revival of the Assembly on July 1, 1963, elections have been held at regular interval in 1967, 1972, 1977, 1982, 1985, 1990, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2007, 2012 and in 2017.

The representation of women in the State legislative Assembly is very low. After becoming the full-fledged state, the representation of women have not exceeded more than 7 (10.29 percent) and it was in 1998 elections. In 1972, soon after attained Statehood, in the first election of state Assembly 5 (7.35 percent) women elected but in the second election in 1977 numbers of women surprisingly decreased and only one woman elected. After that, except in 1998 their representation in the State Legislative Assembly revolved around 3 (4.41 percent) to 5 (7.35 percent). In 1972, four women contested the Assembly elections and interestingly, all the four women won the election. In 1977, nine women contested the election but only one woman got elected. But in next two elections in 1982 and 1985 equal number of women i.e. 3 women were elected to the state assembly. In 1990 election, although number of women contestants increased but winning percentage was not satisfactory and only four women were reached in the State Assembly whereas in the next elections of 1993, the number again was reduced to three. In a bye-election of 1994, one more woman was elected. After implementation of New Panchayati raj system first State assembly election was held in 1998. All eyes were in this election and number of women contestants increased as expected in this election. Women's performance was the best ever in 1998 Assembly elections, when seven women were elected. In 2003 Assembly elections, again four women remained successful. In 2007 five women were elected to the State Legislative Assembly. In 2012 only three women and 2017 only four women were elected in the State Assembly.

The data in the table clearly reveals that the average women contestant in the Himachal Pradesh is low; there were only five to nine women contestants up to 1985. In 1990, the number increase to 17 which further got increase to 25 and 31 in 1998 and 2003 election respectively. The election of State Assembly held in 2007 in this election no of women constants decrease to 25 but in the last election number of women constants once again increase to 34. It is rather a disappointing and discouraging no of women constants in comparison their voting strength. The political parties seem reluctant to give women candidates and very few women are put by them as candidate in the election.

The above statistics present a very disappointing picture of women's representation in the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly. From 1972-2012, women have been elected on 39 seats and some women representatives have been elected more than once. Out of these 39 Congress has so far been able to send 27 women members to the State Assembly. BJP has so far been able to get 10 women elected to the State Assembly. Janata Party had its credit only 2 seat and the remaining 1 women Legislature belong to Janata Dal. Gap between the contestants and elected candidate after the wave of women empowerment also indicates that the political parties do not gave tickets to the strong candidates. Generally, they give tickets to the women candidates where the party has less chance to win.

Socio Economic and Political Profile of Elected Women Members of HP State Legislative Assembly (1998-2022)

Though the State Legislative State Assembly is the highest decision-making body in Himachal Pradesh but representation of women in this body since its inception has been not encouraging. Socio- economic (literacy, sex ratio) conditions of the state is better than neighbouring State but only a few women elected in State Assembly. Therefore, it is important to study the socio-economic and political profile of elected women (1998-2013) for the purpose of our present study.

Vidya Stokes, Daughter of Late Rai Sahib Chand, was born at Kotgarh, Distt. Shimla on 8th December, 1927, and married to Late Shri Lal Chand Stokes (Ex. M.L.A.). She is a social worker, horticulturist and owner of a reputed school in Shimla. She joined politics due to untimely demise of her husband and was elected as MLA in by Election in 1974 from Theog Constituency. She was elected first lady speaker of Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly on March 11, 1985. She was also elected leader of the Congress party in 1990 and again in 2008. She remained minister of state for Rural Development (Independent charge) 1984-85, and was minister of MPP & Power, from March 6, 2003 to December 28, 2007. She was again elected to the state Legislative Assembly for the eighth time in December 2012 and was inducted into council of minister as Irrigation & Public Health Minister with additional charge of Horticulture, Information Technology. She is also associated in sports committee from time to time. She remains President of the Indian Women's Hockey Federation and also represented India in various international sports activities. She was also Vice President of Asian Hockey Federation. She is a social worker of great reputation. She had been General Secretary of Indian council for child welfare for over Eight years. She had started schools, homes for destitute and for blind, deaf, mute and physically handicapped children and running training centres for destitute girls.

Urmil Thakur was born on Ist April, 1958 at village Gharna in District Kangra. She is Graduate and also completed her B.Ed. She was married to Sh. Bhupinder Thakur son of (Late) Sh. Jagdev Chand, Ex Cabinet

Minister of Himachal Pradesh. She joined politics as member of 'Panchayat Samiti' Sujampur, after that she was elected for 'Zila Parishad' Hamirpur. She also held the responsibility of 'President District Mahila Morcha Bhartiya Janta Party'.

After the success of grass-root politics, she successfully contested the State Legislative Assembly election in 1998 and became Parliamentary Secretary from 1998-2003. She returned to the State Assembly in December, 2007 but lost her election for State Legislative Assembly in 2012.

Smt. Vinod Kumari Chandel was born on 30th January, 1951 in Dharamshala. As far as education is concerned, she is only matriculate. She was married to (Late) Sh. Ram Pratap Chandel (Ex. M.L.A.). She is actively involved in social services and remained Member, state Executive B.J.P. She was elected to State Assembly in December 2007.

Renu Chadha Daughter of Sh. Harbans Lal Amba, was born on 11th August 1949 in New Delhi. She is Graduate from Delhi University. She was married to (late) Sh. Ashok Chadha. She is multi-faceted personality. She is agriculturist, horticulturist, political & social worker and hotelier. As social worker, she worked for the welfare of poor and downtrodden people by organising medical camps and by contributing liberally towards the welfare of widows and for the marriage of poor girls. She was member of State Executive BJP, was President of District Chamba BJP and Secretary, Pradesh BJP. She was elected to the State Legislative Assembly in December 2007.

Smt. Anita Verma, daughter of (late) Col. S.C. Katoch, was born on 19th October, 1954 at village lahat in District Kangra. She is B.Sc. and holds Diploma in Journalism. She was married to (Late) Ramesh Verma (Ex. member of State Legislative Assembly). She is social and political worker. She evinces keen interest in interest in women's empowerment and upliftment. She has founded Bal Baris to help destitute & orphans and also organised Mahila Mandals in District Hamirpur. She was vice President, State youth Congress from 1986-87, was Joint Secretary Indian youth Congress from 1987-90, was General Secretary All India Mahila Congress from 1990-93, was Vice-president, Himachal Congress committee from 1998-2003 and was Secretary All India Congress Committee from 2003.

She was elected to State Legislative Assembly in a bye-election held on May 26, 1994 and was appointed Parliamentary Secretary on October 20, 1995. Again, she was elected to State Assembly again in March, 2003 and remains Parliamentary Secretary from 18-04-2005 to 18-08-2005

Asha Kumari, daughter of Shri Madneswar Saran Singh Deo (Retd. Chief Secretary, Madhya Pradesh), was born on 23 September, 1955 in New Delhi. She is Graduate from University Bhopal and was married to (late) Sh. R. K. Brijendra Singh 19 April, 1979. She is horticulturist, social and political worker.

She is President's Medal awardees for being A Girls' Guide. She actively participated in student politics, was founder member of NSUI in 1972, was General Secretary of MLB Girls College Bhopal from 1975 to 1977, was elected President of Bhopal University Students Union from 1978-79 and was arrested during an agitation in favour of late Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in September 1978.

She was elected to State Legislative Assembly in 1985, 1993, 1998 and 2003 from Banikhet Assembly Constituency and she was again elected to State Legislative Assembly from Dalhousie in 2012.

She remained Minister of State for Primary Education (Independent charge) from 18th October 1995 to March 1998 and was Education Minister from 6 March, 2003 to 8 February 2005. She also remained in Panel of Chairman of HP Vidhan Sabha and Chairman of Various House Committees. Presently she is of All India Congress Committee.

Smt. Chandresh Kumari, daughter of (Late) Sh. Hanumant Singh, was born on 1st February, 1944 in Jodhpur. She has completed her B.A. from Jodhpur University and married to Sh. Aditya Dev Chand Katoch on 4th December, 1968. She is social and political worker. She worked continuously for the poor and downtrodden.

She was elected to HP Vidhan Sabha for first time in 1972 and again in 1982. She remained Deputy Minister in 1997 and Minister of State in 1984. She was elected to Lok Sabha in 1985 and to Rajya Sabha in April, 1996.

She was member 1), Consultative Committee for the Minister of Communications; 11), Joint Committee on Empowerment of Women; 111), Committee on Science and Technology, Environment and Forests; 1V), Consultation Committee for the Ministry of External Affairs. She remained Deputy Chief Whip of Congress Party in Rajya Sabha From 1998-1999 and was President All India Mahila Congress from January 2000. Once again, she was elected to State Vidhan Sabha in March 2003, and inducted as Cabinet Minister for Health and Family Welfare

Krishna Mohini, daughter of (Late) Pandit Krishan Chand was born on July 24, 1940 at Layalpur in Pakistan. She is B.A. (Hon's), M.A., B.T. She is unmarried. She is Journalist and Social and Political Worker

She served for 15 year for lieutenant to the rank of Substantive Major, remained Commandant, Home Guards (women's wing) and officer commanding, N.C.C. HP girls Battalion, Solan. She was Vice-President, State Unit of Congress for Democracy from 1997-78, was Joint secretary of All India Mahila congress and State Congress committee, was Secretary and Convener of Ex-Servicemen Cell, was President of State Congress Seva Dal, Vice Chairman of Co-operative of Super Bazar (Ministry of Food and Civil Supplies) and was Chairman of HP Board of School Education. She was elected to State Legislative Assembly in 1993 and was re-elected in 1998.

Smt. Nirmla Devi, daughter of (late) Sh. Maula Ram was born at village Mui in District Kangra on 15th May 1950. As far as her Education qualification is concerned, she is simply middle pass. She is agriculturist, social and political worker. She was elected and remained Pardhan of Gram Panchayat Bani Distt. Kangra from 1995 to 1998. She was elected to Pradesh Vidhan Sabha in a by election held in June 1998.

Smt. Viplove Thakur, daughter of (late) Comrade Paras Ram was born on 4th October, 1943 in Dharamshala District Kangra. She is post graduate. She is social and political worker. She has been associated with Congress party for long time. She was elected to State Legislative Assembly in 1985, 1993 and 1998. She remained member: of the state high powered tourism advisory Board, member of Pong Dam Advisory Committee, Member of State Co-operative Council, Member of R.T.A. Dharamshala, Member of 20 Point Programme Implementation committee, Member Women's involvement in co-operative Movement of India, She was also joint Secretary, State Congress: Chairperson of State Table Tennis. She represented Himachal Pradesh in Rajya Sabha from 2006-2012 and she was also President of Himachal Pradesh Congress Committee.

Smt. Sarveen Chaudhary was born in Dharamshala on 21st January, 1966. She did her M.A in Classical Dance and also acquired Diploma in Yoga, Painting and Cookery. She was married to Col. Pawan Kumar. She is active worker of R.S.S. She joined politics in the year 1992. She was Mandal Pradhan- Mahila Morcha BJP, she also remained president of District Kangra Bhartiya Janta Party from 1995-97.

She was elected to State Legislative Assembly on BJP ticket in 1998 and became Parliamentary Secretary. She was elected again to State Assembly in December, 2007 and was appointed Minister for Social Justice & Empowerment. She was elected to the State legislative Assembly in 2017 for the fourth time.

Kamlesh Kumari was born on 6th March, 1968 at Kashmir, Hamirpur. She was Matriculate and Diploma in Craft Instructor. She was member of Zila parishd in 2001-2005 and Panchayat Pradhan in 2016. She is associated with BJP from long time. She was member of Member, BJYM Distt. Hamirpur, 2001-03; General Secretary: i) BJP Mahila Morcha Bhoranj, BJP Mahila Morcha Distt. Hamirpur, 2007-09. She was elected to the thirteenth Vidhan Sabha in December, 2017

After the discussion of the short profile of elected women in State Legislative Assembly from 1998 to 2017 the following observation was found:

- All the women entered in the state politics in the middle or later age.
- Women elected in State Assembly from 1998 to 2012 from General Category except Nirmla Devi who belongs to the Schedule Caste category and Sarveen Chaudhary who belong to Other Backward Classes (OBC). It shows caste is dominating in the Himachal Pradesh Politics.
- In most of the cases, the women legislatures had come from families those had been associated with the political activities in the past. A few come from those families which although not actively associated with political parties but interested in social welfare activities. It indicates women who were elected to the State Legislative Assembly were economically well off.
- All the women legislature were married and most of them were married to the persons who themselves in politics & in the state politics. Though they were elected in their own individual capacity, their role was primarily supportive to their family; those were leading position in the politics of Himachal Pradesh and sparsely of their respective area.
- Most of the women legislatures in HP were educated and some of them were highly educated.
- It is Proportion of women as ministers from time to time during 1971 to 2012 abysmally low. Only one or two women got the opportunity to serve as Cabinet rank minister in this long period, otherwise the rest were at lower rank of minister i.e. Parliamentary Secretary.

Conclusion

Leadership is necessary not just to govern but to change the nature of governance. Participation of the women in the politics and decision-making process is necessary for a healthy democratic society. Women political participation is also subjective. It is evident that after seventy-five year of independence patriarchy, class and caste has dominant role in deciding the women leadership and role. With the passage of time evolutionary process of change is taking place, It is clear from the above discussion that the most of the women legislators have developed leadership quality. They understand their role and play their role efficiently in the political institutions. Most of the women legislature have been elected twice- thrice, (few also for the fourth times among them). On the basis of numerical data representation of the women in State Assembly remain stagnant. Less than five percent average women were elected for the state assembly except in 1998 elections when seven women were elected and attained the status of Cabinet rank ministers in the state. Gap between the contestants and elected candidate after the wave of women empowerment also indicates that the political parties do not give tickets to the strong women candidates. Generally, they give tickets to the women candidates where the party has less chance to win.

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