

# POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH IN INDIA: IMPACT ON SOCIAL CHANGE

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**Abstract:** As per the Census 2011, the total population of Himachal Pradesh was 68, 64,602. The male and female population was 34, 81,873 and 33, 82,729 respectively. Since the formation of the state, women political participation in politics in Himachal Pradesh has enhanced in the state. However, the impact is more visible in the voting pattern than in other political activities and decision making. The sorry state of affairs is that women are not getting adequate representation in the Parliament, State Legislature and other higher decision-making bodies. However, the position of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions is better in Himachal.

The present study is based on the primary and secondary data collected from the office records of Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha, State Election Commission, State Election Department, Panchayati Raj Department, Census Reports, Statistical Outlines of Himachal Pradesh etc. The relevant books, journals, newspapers, gazetteers etc. have also been consulted.

The latest amendment (2008) has provided 50 percent reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions for women in the rural and urban local bodies. It is observed that because of reservation, political participation of women at the grass root level has significantly increased and is having visible impact on the ensuing social change supplemented with some other factors such as economic participation, literacy, culture, demography etc.

**Keywords:** Political participation, representation, reservation, decision-making

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## Introduction

Political participation is the involvement of individuals and groups in the political process of a political system at various levels. Higher participation of all sections of the people without any discrimination based on sex, caste, colour, creed, region, language, economic inequality etc. is necessary for the healthy development of the democratic institutions. The liberal democracy is founded on reason, law and freedom of choice. However, the position of different social groups in the social and political space where power is located is not always equal in practice. Specifically for women this is very true. Gender equality all over the world continues to be extremely limited in democratic governance.

Political participation of women means to apply the woman's point of view in policy-making which affects the whole society. Presence of women in policy making bodies will at least make a mark in male-dominated patriarchal politico-cultural structures. The levels of political participation of women determine the health of democracy. The objective and aim of the present study is to analyse the nature and extent of political participation of women in Himachal Pradesh. Himachal Pradesh is a hilly state and in the past several features like the environment, topography, the river system, altitude and geology had determined the structure of human habitations and status of women in the state. Political participation of the women has enhanced since the formation of the state and significantly it has increased at grassroots level. However the sorry state of affairs is that women are not getting adequate representation in the parliament, state legislature and other higher decision making bodies. The main focus of the present study is to explore the impact of visible political participation on

social change of women in Himachal Pradesh. The present study is based on the analyses of the primary and secondary data collected from the office records of Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha

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(Legislative assembly), State Election Commission, State Election Department, Panchayati Raj Department (rural governing body), Census Reports, Statistical outlines of Himachal Pradesh etc. The relevant books, journals, newspapers, gazetteers etc. have also been consulted.

Women all over the world have waged a long and valiant battle for political rights. The general experience is that women remain inactive and indifferent in most of the countries of the world. Women all over the world had to wait for long period of time before they were given voting rights. However, women from South Asian Countries were given voting right at the same time as their male counterparts in comparison to women in European Countries.

Quotas and other temporary special measures, such as reserved seats, are proven means for supporting women's engagement in political competition. As of 2018, 18 of the 22 countries that boast 30 percent or more women in national assemblies applied quotas in some form. Countries with proportional representation electoral systems and with quotas can expect to reach the 40 percent threshold on average by 2026 (Dutta and Jha, 2014).

In 1881, the Isle of man gave women the right to vote who owned property. New Zealand was the first country to enfranchise women in 1893. Limited voting rights were gained by women in Finland, Iceland, Sweden and some Australian colonies and Western US states in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The first European country to introduce women's suffrage was the Grand Duchy of Finland, then part of the Russian Empire, which elected the world's first women members of Parliament in the 1907 parliamentary election. Women were enfranchised in Canada in 1917, Britain and Poland in 1918 and the United States in 1920 ([archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm](http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm)).

Most of the countries of the world have failed to provide equal political rights, proper representation and political participation to women. Latest statistics show the world average of women in parliament (Both Houses Combined) is 23.4%. The regional average of women in parliament (Both Houses Combined) is Nordic Countries (41.4%), Americas (28.4%), Europe (26.0%), Sub-Saharan Africa (23.6%), Asia (18.6%), Arab States (17.5%), and Pacific (17.9%) ([archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm](http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm)). According to recent phenomena, the proportion of women in executive positions is more or less in parity with the proportion of men in Norway and Sweden (Bauer and Tremblay, 2011).

In South Asia and neighbouring countries of India, the highest representation in the lower/high house of legislature/parliaments is found in China (24.2%), Pakistan (20.6%), Bangladesh (20.3%), and India (11.1%) Myanmar (10.2%), Bhutan (8.5%) Maldives (5.9%), Sri Lanka (5.8%) and Nepal (3.6%) ([archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm](http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm)).

Dynastic succession is the most frequently used explanation for women's rise to political leadership in Asia. Comparative analyses of South and South-East Asian women leaders have frequently brought the dynastic succession account to the fore (Khari, 2009). It has been universally accepted and realized that genuine efforts and commitment needs to be made at the international, national, regional and local level to work towards women empowerment so that they become instruments of social change.

Today despite constitutional provision, women are not enjoying equal status like men in politics all over the world. However, political participation in broader sense is supposed to include involvement in any form of organized activity that affects or likely to affect power relationships. For decades women's participation in politics was narrowly conceived. Women presence in the formal political structure was found deplorable. But now the lines dividing

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Private and public spheres are not so steadfast and political participation needs to be widely conceptualized. In truth, narrower conception will discredit vast range of women's involvement in issues relating to labour, water, dowry, rape, price rise etc. Thus political participation should be taken in wider sense (Mandal, 2003).

Despite development planning and the special status accorded to women in the Indian constitution, there has not been a substantial qualitative improvement in the position of a large majority of women in India. India is privileged to have its first women Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi in 1966 for almost two decade and in 2007, India has its first women President Mrs. Pratibha Devi Singh Patil. Similarly leader of the opposition party was Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and recently she is being replaced by her son. In the previous government Mrs. Meira Kumar became the speaker of lower house of the Indian Parliament and presently Sumitra Mahajan is the speaker of lower house of the Indian Parliament. Many women have held important positions of Governors and Chief Ministers in the states. Besides this the leadership of some of the national and state political parties like Bahujan Samajwadi Party (Mayawati), Trinamool Congress (Mamta Banerjee), People Democratic Party (Mehbooba Mufti), All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (J. Jayalalitha), Congress (Mrs. Indira Gandhi & Mrs. Sonia Gandhi) are/were in the hands of women leaders. All these women leaders are/were the pivot of the powers of their political parties and no one could challenge their leadership qualities within and outside the political parties.

Though it is also true that women are generally given soft portfolios like health, welfare, culture, education etc. But recently trend is changing with some women leaders running successfully important ministers like Defense (Mrs. Nirmla Sitharaman), External Affairs (Mrs Sushma Swaraj), Railways (Ms. Mamta Banerjee) etc.

Thus the above scenario clearly indicates that Indian society has never been hesitant to accept women leaders and politicians as the centre of power. Though percentage in comparison to population is very less, as women constitute about half of the electorate.

India is the largest democracy in the world with its population around 1.2 billion people and is considered as an emerging power of 21<sup>st</sup> century. India represents almost 17.31% of the world's population. Females constitute 48.5% of India's population. In 2011, the sex ratio (number of females per 1000 males) at all India level was 943 and the same for rural and urban areas are 949 and 929 respectively. The sex ratio was highest in Kerala (1084) followed by Pondicherry (1037) and lowest in Daman & Diu (618) followed by Dadar & Nagar Havelli (774) and then Chandigarh (818) ([mospi-nic.in/publication/women-and-men-india-2016](http://mospi-nic.in/publication/women-and-men-india-2016)).

In India sex ratio has declined regularly after independence. Though according to census of India 2011, the sex ratio has shown some improvement in the last twenty years. It has gone up from 927 in 1991 census to 933 in 2001 and 943 in 2011 census of India. (Women and Men in Himachal Pradesh, 2015).

The Political participation of women during the fight for independence has been identified as one of the key factors in determining women's political participation in contemporary times. Women were welcome to join the resistance to British colonial rule, but their political activity was encouraged only in so far as to support the traditional gender hierarchy within Indian Society. As long as their political activity supplemented but did not sacrifice their traditional duties as wives, daughters and sisters, their political activism was encouraged (Khari, 2009).

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Half of the population is constituted by women in India. In such scenario, the limited nature of female participation and representation in national decision making bodies has important consequences for the legitimacy of the institutions. Indian democratic state is committed to the protection of individual right.

However, its operation in the context of women reveals that these rights are not accessible in their full potential to all the women in India. Various historical, social and cultural factors are reasons for limited capacity and chances of women to exercise their freedom to participate in the political processes (Dutta and Jha 2014). The evolution of Indian democracy has reflected a low representation of women in Parliament, state legislatures, in political parties and decision making bodies. Moreover the attitude and policy of the political parties towards giving tickets to women to contest constituencies as well as their symbolic manifestation for the participation of women in politics is crucial in determining women's actual participation (Khari, 2009).

However, the fact cannot be denied that Indian women have very actively participated in various mass-movements and protests like Narmada Bachao Andolan (river protection movement), Chipko-movement, Anti-Liquor movements etc. They have always raised their voices against issues like dowry, rape, domestic violence, price rise, food adulteration, drug addiction etc.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha (lower house of parliament) (2014) only 12% of the total members were women (64 out of 534). Out of the 318 first time elected members of the 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, 43 are women (14%). However improvement is recorded in the participation of women electors in the General elections (Lok Sabha) over the years. In 2017, women ministers constituted 12% in central council of ministers (9 out of 75). Percentage of women ministers has remained in the range of 2.6% (in 1996) to 17.8% (in 2015). In the election for 16<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha, the turnout of women voters is more or less equal as turnout of male voters with only few percentage point difference. Representation of women in state assemblies is still less. During 2013 to 2017, for various state legislative assemblies, on an average at all India level, in 2017, percentage of women representation was only as high as 14% (in Bihar, Haryana and Rajasthan) (Women and Men in India, 2017). However no women representation can be seen in the state assemblies of Mizoram, Nagaland and Puducherry. While out of 28 state/union territories, 14 states have equal representation of women and men in panchayati raj (rural bodies) institutions and municipalities. In seven states, share of women is even more than 50 % ( Women and Men in India, 2016).

The above figures clearly state that the political participation of women in the higher bodies of the government (Parliament, state legislative assemblies) is very low. However, a significant improvement can be noticed in the urban and rural local bodies i.e. Panchayati Raj Institutions and local municipalities. A significant reason can be associated with this is the historic 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amendments to the constitution. It has provided at least 33 percent reservations of seats for women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions (rural governing bodies) and Municipalities. While few states like Himachal Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Utrakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Kerala, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Tripura have implemented 50 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and Municipalities.

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Ever since its birth on April 15, 1948, Himachal Pradesh has been in state of becoming than being. Its areas have been enlarging, its constitution changing. Behind this process for the attainment of proper shape and status for Himachal, has been the determined desire of the hill people for the search of a distinct, personality for their Pradesh in the Indian

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Union'- these words were said by Dr. Y.S. Parmar, the first Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh (Parmar, 1970).

Himachal means 'an abode of eternal snow', is situated in the heart of the Western Himalayas. Physiographically the territory can be divided into three zone- outer Himalaya or the Shiwaliks, inner Himalaya or mid-Himalaya and the greater Himalaya or Alpine Zone. To the north of Himachal lies the state of Jammu &

Kashmir whereas Uttarakhand is in the South-East, with Haryana on the South and Punjab on the West. While in the east Himachal forms India's border with Tibet (Singh, 1992).

In 1948, Himachal was constituted as a chief commissioner's province by the merger of some 30 hill states. At that time the area of Himachal was 27,018 sq. kilometers. On 1 November, 1966, enabled by the Punjab Reorganization Act of 1966, the hill areas of Punjab were merged into Himachal Pradesh by increasing the area of the state to 55,673 sq.km. With a total population of 28.12 lakh as per 1961 census. Himachal became the eighteenth state of the Indian union on 25 January 1971 as a result of Himachal Pradesh Act 1971 (Chaudhry, 2006).

As per census 2011, the current population of Himachal Pradesh is 68, 64,602 out of which 34, 81,873 are males while 33,82,729 are females. Himachal Pradesh represents almost 0.57% of population of India. The female population constitutes 49.28% (almost half) of the total population in Himachal Pradesh as per 2011 census. As per the census 2011, the average sex ratio of Himachal Pradesh is 972 which are above the national average of 943 females per 1000 males.

Himachal Pradesh had shown an increasing trend in the number of women per thousand men. However, decline was shown in the census results of 2001 by eight points i.e. from 976 to 968. The census results of 2011 has shown an increase in sex ratio by 4 points i.e. 968 to 972 and as regards sex ratio (0-6) years it has improved in Himachal Pradesh i.e. from 896 to 909 during 2001 to 2011 census. The sex ratio is high in Himachal Pradesh as compared to neighbour states like Punjab, Haryana, Jammu and Kashmir, Uttarakhand (Women and Men, 2016).

As per the census 2011 out of total population of Himachal Pradesh, 10.03% people lived in urban regions while 89.97% in rural areas. The total figure of population of urban population was 6, 88,552, out of which 3, 71,528 were males while remaining 3, 17,024 were females. In rural areas of Himachal Pradesh male population was 31, 10,345 while female population was 30, 65,705. The average sex ratio in urban areas of Himachal Pradesh was 853 females per 1000 males. Similarly the average sex ratio in rural areas of Himachal Pradesh was 986 females per 1000 males ([www.censusindia.co.in](http://www.censusindia.co.in)). The bitter truth is that the female sex ratio has remained less than boys till now.

As it has already been discussed that like elsewhere in India, gender discrimination has always been apparent in the politics of Himachal. It can be deduced that although political participation of women has increased after independence in the state. But largely it has remained confined to the voting behaviour. In the assembly elections of 1998, 2003, 2007 and 2012 the percentage of voting turnout of women was more than men.

According to the official figures, in the recent legislative assembly election (2017), the highest turnout (74.61%) was recorded compared to all the previous assembly elections in the state. In this election, more women exercised their franchise than men. As many as 19, 10,582 female voters exercised their franchise against 18, 11,061 male voters. In 48 out of 68 assembly constituencies, the polling percentage of women was higher than men, whereas only in 15 seats the number of female voters was more than men (Times of India).

After 1971, women representation was between 1.4% to 8.8% in the 68 members Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly. One of the main reasons for low representation of women in legislative assembly is a very small number of women contestants i.e. between 2.04% to 6.78%. However, win ability rate of women contestants is quite satisfactory. Since 1972 to 2016, only fifteen women have been included in the council of ministers. Five each have been included as cabinet and state Ministers, one as deputy minister and four as parliamentary secretaries. Out of these fifteen women, some of them have remained in the council of ministers for more than once (Mokta, 2016).

In the twelfth legislative assembly (2012-2017), the number of women members in the state legislative assembly was 3 only 4.41% to the total elected representatives. Recently, in the thirteenth legislative assembly election in 2017, the numbers of women legislative members are only 4. Since 1971 the number of women representatives in the legislative assembly of Himachal Pradesh has always remained less than ten till now (2017).

After the enactment of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment act and Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, three tier panchayat raj systems has been set up at grass root level and in 2008, 50% reservation was provided in the Panchayati Raj institutions and municipalities to Himachali women. This has brought a remarkable change in the magnitude of participation of the women in the local urban and rural governing bodies i.e. panchayati raj institutions and municipalities.

### **Impact on Social Change**

Social and economic conditions influence the political life of people. However, it is the proper use of political power that serves as a powerful instrument of social and economic change. Himachal Pradesh is a hilly state and in the past several features like the environment, topography, the river system, altitude and geology had determined the structure of human habitations and status of women in the state. In the past the indigenous settlements were mostly in the fertile valley areas. The distribution of settlements as also the density of population was invariably governed by agricultural productivity. It was high in larger tracts of arable land along the valley floors which diminished to sparse and scattered clusters in the Tethys Himalayas. The census of 1911 reported that the Kangra valley (district of Himachal Pradesh), one of the most fertile tracts, was dotted with villages with a density of 81 persons per square mile. Lahaul & Spiti on the contrary, could not support more than 2.4 persons per square mile on an area twice the size of Kangra (Verma, 2013).

Some social evils and unhealthy customs specially related to women were prevalent in the pre-modern hill society such as polyandry, polygamy, sati, purdah (veil), female infanticide etc. The unhealthiest practice of polyandry was prevalent in the border areas of Himachal Pradesh as well as in the lower region of the Giri valley. In this system a common wife was shared by all brothers. The male children of a polyandrous marriage inherited the property jointly and it remained intact from generation to generation. The most common and popular reason to follow polyandrous system of marriage was to keep the family united as well as to prevent the fragmentation of land holdings (Ahluwalia, 1998). This practice ultimately resulted in the worst health conditions and exploitation of women of this region, as she was expected to take care of big families and more than one husbands. Another social evil was in the form of Sati (Cremation on the Pyre of the dead husband). Fraser has referred that twenty two women became sati with the Raja (King) of Bushahr. Similarly, the practice of sati in the erstwhile Punjab and Shimla Hill states was also confirmed by Vigne (1839). He also witnessed such an event at Mandi. In 1830, William Moocraft personally witnessed the horrible practice of Sati during the reign of Maharaja Sansar chand of Kangra and considered this practice as inhuman. The infanticide and child marriage was also customary throughout Himachal Pradesh during the pre-modern period. Similarly, hill women used to live in purdah (veil) system. Fraser witnessed this system in Bilaspur and mentioned that "one of the many difficulties which the Rani of Bilaspur had to surmount was preclusion from public appearance" (Ahluwalia, 1998).

Himachal Pradesh of 1950 and 1951 was one amongst the poorly developed areas in the country and lagged behind in practically every sphere. To bring the standard of economic performance in step with that of other progressive states, Himachal Pradesh embarked on economic planning along with the rest of the countrywomen empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace. Empowering women by means of education, literacy or modest income-generation projects is clearly insufficient to ameliorate the prospects for a higher quality of life for women. The process of empowerment is taking place at so many levels that it is quite difficult to gauge the actual nature and extent of empowerment in improving the status of women (Mandal, ed., 2012).

There is no doubt that education is one of the most significant milestones for women empowerment. Education enables them to respond to opportunities, to challenge their traditional roles and to change their lives. If basic education forms the preliminary step of women's progress, the higher education is, perhaps, the best medium to ensure social, economic and political empowerment of women. The expansion of educational facilities through legislative and executive measures was a vital factor to start change in the social scenario of the state. The first educational survey was conducted in 1955 in the state. The Himachal Pradesh Compulsory Primary Education Act was passed to focus attention of the people on the education of their children. The results were astonishing so much so that literacy registered more than three-fold increase within a few years. At present, there are almost 1578 colleges and five universities exclusively for women in India.

Literacy rates in Himachal have risen drastically from only 7.98% in 1951 (male 11.94% and female 4.02%) to 82.80% in 2011 (male 89.53% and female 75.93%). Overall literacy rate as well as female literacy has increased since 1951 in the state (Women and Men in Himachal Pradesh, 2015).

According to 1991, 2001 and 2011 census, Hamirpur is the district with highest literacy rate while district Chamba has lowest literacy rate. However like all the districts of Himachal Pradesh a significant increase in literacy rate can be noticed in district Chamba over a period of time. According to census 2011, literacy rates among the scheduled castes population is 78.9(86.2 males and 71.5 female) and literacy rates among scheduled tribes population is 73.6% (83.2% males and 64.2% females). As it is evident that political participation of the women has increased after 33% reservation of seats in 1994 and 50% reservation of seats in 2008.

Education has a direct causal effect on political participation. As education increases civic skills and political knowledge, which function as the causal mechanisms triggering participation. However, recently a number of studies have started dealing with the question of whether education is a direct cause for political participation or merely works as a proxy for other factors, such as pre-adult socialization or social network centrality (Relationship between Education and Politics and Political Participation).

In this context it can be analysed that no doubt education has direct causal effect on political participation in Himachal Pradesh but evidently increased political participation due to reservation of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has increased the awareness of the women at grassroots level and they have realized the significance of education in their lives. For instance, Hira Devi of Gongri village in Solan, Himachal Pradesh was gram pradhan (head of village). She said that being the head of the village had made a difference in reaching out to people and raising issues of concern. Hira had helped a lot of widows and poor women with various government schemes like Indira Awas Yojna etc. In her five year tenure she had brought a road to the village and always had been taking personal interest in solving domestic feuds between husband and wife. Hira turned out to be a confident pradhan, but felt that her biggest shortcoming was her being illiterate (Dutta and Jha, 2014). In spite of being an illiterate woman, she became a successful village head.

However, it is to be noted that the outlook of women has changed considerably due to the expansion of education during the last four decades. Young women are not dependent on their parents and husbands as were their mothers and grandmothers and they are neither afraid of moving out of their homes to be economically independent. They are prepared to fight for their rights and to assert their individuality (Sharma, 2004).

Realizing the importance of education, since 1971, the state government had accorded high priority to its development. Consequently, the number of educational institutions increased considerably from 4960 in 1970-71 to 10, 579 in 1995-96 (Tiwari, 2000). Presently the student enrollment in higher education is highest at 79.32 percent up to under graduate level (The Indian Express, 2018).

Under the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution of India, health and family welfare is one of the key roles assigned to Gram Panchayats. For promoting good health practices amongst people, and for ensuring good service delivery from the health facilities and functionaries at the village level, the standing committees and sub-

committees are formed in the Gram Panchayat. Provision of these standing committees on health has been included in almost every state Panchayati Raj Act. Generally, a standing committee on health would need to perform the roles like to discuss health matters on regular basis, collect and analyse data and information on health, nutrition & sanitation in Gram Panchayat area and maintain database on public health, coordinate with the Health Sub-centres and Anganwadi centres in the Gram Panchayat area, linkage and coordination among the ASHAS (Accredited Social Health Activist), ANMs (Auxiliary Nurse Midwife), AWWs (Anganwadi Workers) and members of the Village Health, Sanitation & Nutrition Committees (VHSNC) in the Gram Panchayat areas. Similarly, Gram Panchayats are responsible to share periodic progress of development activities and achievements and income expenditure statement to the people in the Gram Panchayat area. It is also the responsibility of the Pradhan/Sarpanch of Gram Panchayat to organize Gram Sabha on regular basis, as per the provision of state Panchayati Raj Act. In this Gram Sabha, various issues including yearly income, expenditure and plan for the coming year, and various development schemes including those on health, nutrition and sanitation are discussed ([www.panchayat.gov.in](http://www.panchayat.gov.in)). National Health Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission (cleanliness mission) and a number of central and state sponsored schemes are available for addressing health issues in Gram (village) Panchayat areas.

Provision of health facilities both in quantity and quality terms was considered one of the objectives under social sector development plans in the state. During 1971 there were 620 hospitals and dispensaries which increased to 738 in 1981 and further went up to 1029 and 1193 in 1991 and 1996 respectively. Availability of medical facilities in relation to population also improved significantly. In comparison to the all India position, it was ahead in the availability of hospitals and dispensaries and hospital beds in relation to population in 1991 ([www.panchayat.gov.in](http://www.panchayat.gov.in)).

Himachal Pradesh is ranked the second best state in the country in reducing neonatal Mortality rate. On recommendation of state level award committee & Govt. approval under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan, the Kayakalp award for hospitals in Himachal Pradesh is awarded for best facilities and cleanliness in the hospitals (National Health Mission). Health department of Himachal Pradesh has launched a free of cost transportation service to the pregnant women to the hospitals for delivery on 15<sup>th</sup> September, 2010 ([agisac.gov.in](http://agisac.gov.in)).

According to the National Rural Health Mission, Himachal Pradesh under the scheme of Janani Suraksha Yojana (mother protection scheme), cash benefits were given to all BPL (Below Poverty Line) women above 19 years of age, all schedule caste and schedule tribe women and all slum dwellers and up to two live birth. This scheme was launched to help poor women in rural and urban areas. Decentralization in improving service delivery in the case of health care. It is true that local governing institutions has scaled up the number of sub centers, primary health centers and improved service facilities at district level hospitals.

As fifty percent reservation has improved the political participation of women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions and local urban bodies, it has also enhanced their involvement in health related issues and problems at grassroots level. Through political participation, women get exposed to all governmental policies associated with women health and welfare.

Since majority of the population in Himachal live in villages, hence Panchayati Raj Institutions play a significant role in their lives. Enhanced political participation of women tends to change the joint family structure as the women get empowered with better political exposure. Joint family living is still predominant in rural areas and may be due to the reason that education, occupation; industrialization has not made much dent into the socio-cultural life of rural people. It can be claimed that expectations from women are also more in joint families in rural areas. As they are expected to follow the traditional norms of the families and live according to the expectations of elder one in the families. Work load is also more on them. However, slight change with a moderate pace is apparent with regard to authority pattern, decision making, husband-wife relationship and participation of men in performance of domestic tasks. Traditional functions of the family are also changing slowly. People in rural areas tend to keep joint family pattern intact in order to have the property intact. The

interesting fact is that brothers function as joint units on a number of socio-economic and religious occasions and fulfillment of kinship obligations even after separation. It is observed that though appearance of the joint family system may have changed considerably but the family unit continues to be a very stable one and its values have for the most part remained unaffected (Chauhan, 2010).

Education, occupation, urbanization, industrialization etc. have brought changes in the outlook of life among urban people. At the same time, various factors like decline in community sentiments, fulfillment of kinship obligations, increase emphasis on individual interests, career aspirations, race towards modern living and freedom etc. have been responsible for changing family system in urban areas. Young women are generally more interested to shift to urban areas to live life independently and freely. Thus increased egalitarianism in respect of the connection of the people living in urban areas with their place of origin in rural areas has led to the slow and steady change in the social system of the rural areas. As people in rural areas are also accepting changes in their outlooks and welcoming the positive change in the society. As a result, women living in rural areas are not living as miserable lives as they used to live in the past.

Similarly, with greater awareness about the family planning, increased availability of the family planning methods and more freedom in its use, the age specific fertility rates have shown an increasing trend over years in all age groups. In 2012, there were about 145.3 live births per 1000 women in the age group 20-24 years as compared to about 127.6 live births per 1000 women in the 25-29 age groups. Good health and family planning services are important for the general well-being of the women. Reduced infant mortality would give women better chance to have the desired size of the family with few numbers of pregnancies. However, discrimination against a female child is still evident from the fact that girls experience higher rate of mortality in younger age-groups as compared to the boys. The desire for male child and less care of girl child is more prominent in the poor section of the society. However, a gradual change can be noticed among this section also. Though various governments sponsored schemes like Beti Hai Anmol, Beti Bachao (girl protection) etc. and participation of women through the local bodies in popularizing these schemes are successful in reducing discrimination.

Monogamy is prevalent both in urban and rural areas except in few cases in tribal and interior regions and mostly among poor and illiterate section. A significant change is visible now as prospective spouses participate in their marriage decisions. Even young girls are becoming more assertive about their decisions. The change is due to the influence of education, occupation, changed outlook of life and increasing covert and overt political participation. Though surprisingly inter-caste marriages have not become popular except in a few cases. This may be due to the impact of age old caste prejudice toward the scheduled castes. However, examples of inter-caste marriages can be seen more among educated and urban living people. To promote inter-caste marriages and reduce caste based discrimination, government of Himachal Pradesh has started providing cash incentives for it.

Women's mean age at marriage at all India level was 22.3 years and the same in rural and urban areas are 21.8 years and 23.2 years respectively. In 2014, in Himachal it is 23.1, better than at all India level. In rural area it is 23.0 and 24.4 years in urban area respectively, which is better than at all India level. According to recent survey conducted by government agency, 5.23% marriages were held between the age group of 15-19 while 72.21% marriages were held in the age group of 30-31 (Shimla Kesari). Through various awareness schemes, good literacy rate and participation of women in local urban and rural governing bodies, women are becoming aware of the disadvantages of early marriages and child-hood marriages. Old practice of child-marriage is almost negligible in the state.

The female workforce participation rate (WPR) on an average in 2001 was 43.67% which has increased to 44.82% in 2011. Similarly the male workforce participation rate (WPR) on an average in 2001 was 54.62% which has increased to 58.69% in 2011. In respect of women employment in the government services it reveals from the Census of Himachal Pradesh Government Employees 2012-13 that only 20.4% of total government

employees were women. However, this share of woman government employees during 2013 has moderately improved to 21.2%. In rural areas various employment schemes like MNREGA etc. are functioned by Panchayati Raj Institutions to ensure employment to poor sections including women of the rural areas.

Similarly, a considerable increase in income brought about by agriculture and horticulture has resulted in quite marked social change. Providing good education to children both boys and girls became the top priority of the parents. Increased flow of a cash income and a greater capacity to pay for wage laborers has improved the status of woman to a managerial level. They no longer had to do intensive hard labour as they did in the 1970. Now house management has become the priorities of female. Even women's political participation has increased as they have started participating in political matters directly and indirectly because of better exposure and good education in this region. At the same time increased political participation has also helped them to improve their economic status.

Various schemes like Mother Teresa Asahaya Matri Sambal Yojna, Balika Samridhi Yojna, Indira Gandhi Balika Suraksha Yojna, Himachal Pradesh Mahila Vikas Protsahn Yojna, Mata Shabri Mahilla Sashaktikaran Yojna, Mahila Vikas Nigam, Widow Re-marriage Scheme, State Home for Women, Vishesh Mahila Uthaan Yojna, Financial Assistance and Support Service to Victim of Rape Scheme, 2012 etc. are executed by Panchayati Raj Institutions for the women empowerment of the women at grassroots level. The number of educational institution had continued to grow year after year. Roads, postal facilities, generation of electricity, primary health centers, growth in the human capital resources etc. received better attention at the hands of the union and state government. People of Himachal have adapted to a scientific temper while preserving their cultural and social heritage. For one instance, the people of Himachal took to the idea of family planning more vigorously than people in some advanced states. The result has been a perceptible slowing down of the population growth rate from an average of over. 24 percent this came down to 21.76 percent during the 1961-71 decade (Ahluwalia, 1998).

## **Conclusion**

Great social change has been witnessed due to the discard of many of the rigidities of the caste system. The reservation of a definite share for, ST and SC in panchayats (rural) and urban local bodies, the legislative assembly and in Parliament as also in the service has created a new sense of identity amongst them. The status in society has come to be determined more by the economic and political clout of an individual or family, rather than by caste or community (Verma, 2013). The seventy third and seventy fourth amendments to the Indian constitution in 1992 and 1993 has provided 33 percent of reservation for women in panchayats (rural) and urban local bodies. Similarly the latest amendment in 2008 has provided fifty percent reservation of seats for women in panchayati raj institutions (rural governing bodies) and urban local bodies. This has ultimately enhanced political participation of women and has resulted in the social transformation of women in the state. Thus a social transformation aimed at changing role of women and empowering them in the Himachali society can be achieved by more and more political participation of women at grassroots and higher level of decision making bodies.

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