

---

## **Tribal Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: An Empirical Study of Kinnaur District of Himachal Pradesh**

**Dr.Reena Chaudhary**

Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, USOL, Panjab University, Chandigarh

**Ms. Monika Negi**

Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Panjab University, Chandigarh

### **Abstract**

*Panchayati Raj Institutions have always been considered a means to good governance, and the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment was enacted in the hope that it would lead to better governance and provide political space to the disadvantaged sections of society, like scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and women. Before the enactment of PRIs, the lack of representation for women in politics was an evident truth, and it is widely accepted that the politics and governance of society in India have generally not been the space of female activity and that women have seldom figured prominently in these fields. With the establishment of new PRIs in India, women got opportunities to participate in village-level politics to prove their worth as good administrators, decision-makers, or leaders. The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act is a major step towards the political empowerment of women through PRIs. This has resulted in the entry of a large number of women into decision-making bodies in rural and tribal areas. The participation of women in the political arena is essential to their development; their political participation means not only using the right to vote but also power sharing, decision-making, and policy-making at all levels of state governance. The present study set in a Kinnaur district of Himachal Pradesh is an endeavour to examine the extent of participation of tribal women in PRIs and the challenges faced by them in tribal setting. The present study was an effort to examine the awareness of the Kinnaura women, about their political rights after the 25 years of the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act in new PRIs and, secondly, to investigate the problems and challenges faced by the selected candidates in a male-centric domain.*

**Keywords: Tribal women, Panchayati Raj Institutions, empowerment, awareness and challenges.**

### **Introduction**

*“Women represent half the potential talents and skills of humanity and their underrepresentation in decision-making is a loss for society a whole.”*

– First European Summit on Women in Decision-making (Athens, 1992).

The concept of the panchayati raj system is not new to India. The village Panchayats have been the basic units of administration in India ever since the Vedic period. Panchayats were the most successful local self-governing institutions in the country till the advent of British rule. The Panchayati Raj system had received special attention from the government soon after the country's independence (Kaul&Sahni, 2009). In 1959, the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee recommended that a village-level organisation be established that would not only represent the village's interests but would also take up the government's development programs at its level (Mohanty, 1995). In April 1993, the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act came into force, and accordingly, all the states amended their laws relating to local self-government. Since it was the first time in the political history of India that one-third of the total seats in its local self-government institutions had been statutorily reserved for the scheduled caste, the scheduled tribe, and women (Mathew, 1995), The 73rd Amendment has provided a strong platform for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, and women to come forward and be a part of grass-roots politics. To the caste-ridden society of India, this change is creating a kind of 'silent revolution'(Sharma et al.,2012).

Political participation has been defined as citizens' active involvement with the public institutions, which includes voting, candidacy, campaigning, occupying political office, and/or lobbying, individually or through membership in a group (Arora 1999; Gleason 2001). Women in India are still not well represented in the political sphere, as members of Parliament and of state legislative assemblies; this reflects that Indian women are less likely to take an interest in political participation (Chhibber, 2002). Political participation is a significant route to empowerment of women and their participation in decision-making process. In the matter of decision-making or ministerial positions within legislative bodies, women are conspicuous minority. Their role in public sphere, in reality, is confined to casting votes during the elections (Choudhary, 2018). The women of India have a generally apathetic attitude towards politics; unfortunately, in India, politics is associated with unhealthy competition, the display of physical strength, and a greedy struggle for authority. Indian women have been socialized to believe that politics is primarily a 'male domain', so they should not associate themselves with this field (Khanna, 2009). However, after the establishment of the Panchayati Raj Institutions, Indian women have started taking part in politics at the grass-roots level. The PRIs provide village women with opportunities

for leadership and a chance to take part directly in decision-making in the process of development

In India, for centuries, women have been pushed aside from the race of development in the name of customs, traditions, and religion. As a result, they have been denied the opportunity for their social, economic, and political development leading to a lower status in society (Bhatia, 2000). In Indian society, especially the rural society, women's behaviour is restricted by the private–female and public–male dichotomy. The division of labour is such that household chores, child care, care of other family members, etc., are considered to be women's work. These unpaid and unrecognized full-time activities leave little available time and energy for outside interests. Besides, politics is regarded as a male prerogative and the least suitable vocation for women because women are always portrayed as weak and incapable of making smart decisions (Sukumar et.al, 2019). The women's potential has mostly remained unrecognized and their contributions have often been ignored. There have been various factors responsible for women's low participation in politics, such as illiteracy, traditional beliefs, prejudices, economic dependence, and an unfavourable political opportunity structure (Salgoankar, 2000).

The present empirical study is confined to the district of Kinnaur, which is a tribal district of Himachal Pradesh. In this study, an attempt has been made to analyze the status of Kinnaura women after the establishment of PRIs, whether they are actively taking part in the political institutions or still staying away from them. In the state of Himachal Pradesh, the Kinnaura tribe is the second largest tribal population residing in the district of Kinnaur. The inhabitants of Kinnaur are popularly known as the Kinnauras or Kinnaurese. They have their own unique cultural pattern that is quite distinct from the rest of the country. In accordance with their traditions kinnauras largely practiced polyandry as a pre-dominant form of marriage and they still lived in joint families (Verma, 2002). The prevalence of the caste system sharply distinguished the Kinnaura tribe from the majority of Indian tribes. Considering their social hierarchy, all the castes among Kinnauras are generally grouped into two groups: the upper caste and the lower caste. The upper caste comprises Khosia or Rajputs, and the lower caste includes Chamangs, Domangs, and Ores (Negi, 1990). Due to harsh weather conditions and inaccessible and inhospitable terrain, the Kinnaur district has remained isolated until recently. It was a restricted area where no foreigner was allowed

until the 1990s, and even Indians had to obtain permission to enter the district. The Indo-China border conflict of October 1962 brought Kinnaur into focus. Kinnaur as a separate district appeared on the map of Himachal Pradesh on May 1, 1960.

Before the 73rd Amendment, the upper caste dominated village politics in the Kinnaura tribe. The Khoshia were a dominant caste in Kinnaura society, owning the majority of the land and enjoying a high social status. The traditional landlords and the rich people, primarily from the upper caste (Khoshia), dominated the power relations in the district (Sharma & Niranjna, 2001). Before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment (before 1994), i.e., the position of the village Pradhan was enjoyed by the male members of influential families, and the power remained in the hands of the wealthy Khoshias for a long time. It was noticed that before the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment there were hardly any women elected as a village panchayat pradhan in Kinnaur district. The 73rd Amendment Act is a major step towards the political empowerment of Kinnaura women through Panchayati Raj institutions (Majhi, 2017). The 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment, making the provision of allocating one third of the seats for women members in Gram Panchayats, is considered a landmark achievement towards women's empowerment. This has not only promoted gender equality, but has also made democracy more effective and meaningful at the grass-roots level (Singh, 2016). In 2005, the Himachal Pradesh government took steps ahead for the empowerment of women and raised the quantum of reservation from 33% to 50% to ensure the active participation of women at the grass-root level of politics. Reservation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions has given women from the upper and lower castes in villages under study the right to hold the post of village pradhan in the panchayats.

### **Objectives**

The present paper has the following objectives:

- To examine the awareness of the Kinnaura women about their political rights after the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act.
- To explore the problems and challenges faced by elected candidates in male-centric domain.

### **Methodology**

The present study is an exploratory analysis of the political participation of the Kinnaura women in the new Panchayati Raj Institution. At present, Kinnaur district is divided into three blocks: Pooh, Kalpa, and Nichar. It has five tehsils and one subtehsil. The district has

a total of 73 panchayats. Pooh block has 27 panchayats, Kalpa has 24 panchayats, and Nichar block has 22 panchayats. For the purpose of the present study, a total of six villages were selected from each tehsil on the basis of the maximum number of households and maximum female population in the villages to get rich data. These villages were namely Nako, Labrang, Ribba, Kothi, UrniKhas, and KamruKhas. In total, 150 respondents were selected for the purpose of the present study. A multi-stage sampling method was used in this empirical study. Firstly, out of 150 respondents, 120 respondents were selected through a simple random sampling technique, i.e., 20 respondents from each village, to collect the information regarding their awareness and level of their participation in grass-root level politics. Secondly, remaining 30 respondents were identified using a purposive sampling technique, who won the candidacy in panchayat elections in the selected villages after the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act in new Panchayati Raj Institutions from year 1995 to 2019. To collect real and factual information, data was collected by using an in-depth interview schedule, observation techniques, and informal discussion.

**Findings**

**Profile of the respondents**

For the present study, it is necessary to understand the socio-demographic profile of the respondents and it has been analyzed in terms of age, marital status, educational qualification, occupation, family type and caste affiliation. Through socio-demographic variables, an attempt has been made to provide clear insight into the background of the respondents.

**Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of Kinnaura women**

Characteristics	Category	Number (Percentage)
Age	18-27yrs	16(10.6)
	28-37yrs	35(23.3)
	38-47yrs	52(34.7)
	48-57yrs	25(16.7)
	+58yrs	22(14.7)
Marital status	Married	115(76.7)

	Unmarried	26(17.3)
	Widowed	09(6.0)
<b>Family type</b>	Nuclear	53(35.3)
	Extended /joint	97(64.7)
<b>Educational qualification</b>	Illiterate	27(18.0)
	Primary to matriculation	49(32.7)
	Higher secondary	56(37.3)
	Graduation	11(7.3)
	Post graduation	07(4.7)
<b>Occupation</b>	Government job	19(12.7)
	Agriculture/Horticulture operations	87(58.0)
	Traditional weavers	32(21.3)
	Buddhist nun	12(8.0)
<b>Caste affiliation</b>	Upper caste	96(64.0)
	Lower caste	54(36.0)

*\*Total number of respondents was 150 for each category/characteristics i.e. age, marital status, family type, educational qualification, occupation and caste affiliation.*

The distribution of respondents according to socio-demographic categories indicates that 34.7 percent of the respondents belong to the 38-47yrs, followed by the age group of 28–37 years, i.e., 23.3 percent of the total respondents. These findings indicate that majority of the respondents were middle-aged.

Marital status and family composition of the respondents revealed that the 76.7 percent of the respondents were married and 64.7 percent of the respondents belonged to joint or extended families. It was found that the Kinnaura tribe was one of the polyandrous tribes

of Himachal Pradesh, and polyandrous families have still been prevalent in this area. Harsh geographical conditions and limited land for cultivation were one of the factors that compelled them to continue with the joint family system. Traditionally, the joint family system was the only family structure prevalent in the Kinnaura tribe, but over time, there has been a gradual shift towards the nuclear family system. However, it was observed that majority of the respondents still preferred to live in joint families.

Educational qualification of the respondents depicts that the 37.3 percent of the respondents were studied up to higher secondary level. According to these respondents, due to the absence of higher educational institutions in the district, majority of the women had failed to attain higher education in their area. Such findings have indicated that women of the Kinnaura tribe were not highly educated, and majority of the respondents had considerably low educational qualification.

While discussing the occupational status of respondents it was found that majority of the respondents i.e. 58.0 percent were engaged in agriculture/ horticulture operations along with household chores, and their income depended upon the quality and quantity of the production. Apart from farming, many respondents were engaged in cattle rearing to supplement their household income; they sold cow's milk and other dairy products on a small scale. According to these respondents, they were more or less financially dependent upon their heads of the household as they did not have an individual source of livelihood. Moreover, 21.3 percent of the respondents were engaged in their family occupation of weaving traditional clothes like *shawls*, *dhorus*, *mufflers*, *juttis*, and many more. They used a pit handloom to weave woollen threads into beautifully designed traditional Kinnauri garments. These respondents sold most of the furnished products to the upper caste women, and a few of them sold their products at *LaviMela* (a district-level trade fair) by setting up stalls to sell their products to earn some money.

Caste affiliation of the respondents indicated that the maximum number of the respondents i.e. 64.0 percent belonged to upper caste category. It was found that the upper caste Rajputs were traditionally agriculturist and they were dependent upon the artisan castes for domestic needs like weaving, shoe making, house construction or repairing, making jewellery or agricultural implements etc. Further, it was also found that the concept of

pollution-purity is still prevalent in the Kinnaura society, thus, the lower castes are treated as untouchables. Such findings indicate that the Kinnaura society has always been a caste oriented society.

**Awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institutions and 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act**

The provision of reservations for women in the Panchayats provides remarkable scope and opportunities for women to participate in public life and in the decision-making process at the grass-root level (Singh, 2016). Participation of women in the electoral politics is determined by their social background and the degree of freedom and liberty they experience (Rai, 2011). Voting is the most common form of political participation of women in India, but the Muslims and tribal women show lower participation in voting than the others (Gleason, 2001). Deshpande (2009) explored that in the traditional societies, women had relatively lesser level of political knowledge than men, so their voting decisions and preferences were controlled by the male family members, and particularly married women had the tendency to follow their husbands' voting preferences. Bag & Jagadala (2016) had suggested that government had completed its obligation by enacting an amendment for the empowerment of the women through the reservation in the Panchayati Raj institutions but no such awareness had been created among the women to participate in this electoral process in their own interest. In this regard an attempt has been made to find out the awareness among the Kinnaura women regarding their political rights after implementation of PRIs and 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act.

**Table 2: Responses of the respondents on awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institutions and 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act**

Awareness Responses		Number (Percentage)
Participation in voting	Yes	116 (96.7)
	No	04 (3.3)
Decision taken while voting	Independently	67 (55.8)
	By the choice of husband	36 (30.0)
	By the choice of family member	17 (14.2)
Awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institutions	Yes	53 (44.2)
	No	67 (55.8)
Awareness about the Reservation for the Women in PRIs	Yes	68 (56.7)
	No	52 (43.3)



---

--	--	--

*\*Total number of respondents was 120 for each category.*

Voting is the most important and basic means by which women are assimilated into the political process and they learn how to exercise their voting right. The participation of voters at the time of the elections indicates their involvement in the political process. In the present study it was found that 96.7 percent of the respondents had actively participated in voting during state legislative elections, general elections and the panchayat elections. These respondents believed that casting vote is their moral duty towards the development of their village and their state. They would be instrumental in making the choice of the right representatives. Majority of the respondents were not aware about the leading political parties and their candidates but still they generally cast their votes by remembering the party symbols.

Women who made their own voting decisions were more likely to participate in the political process than the women whose decisions were influenced by their family members. The findings of the present study suggest that 55.8 percent of respondents had cast their vote independently and they generally used their 'right to vote' without any pressure. These respondents were young, well aware, mostly educated and had knowledge about the importance of voting for the selection of the right candidate. However, there were 30.0 percent of the respondents whose husbands decided for whom they should vote. These respondents believed that their husbands had better understanding and knowledge of the politics and candidates, so they chose to cast their vote as per their husbands' choice. There were 14.2 percent of the respondents who agreed that they had cast their vote as per the choice of their family members; these respondents accepted that they had no knowledge of the election process. Moreover, they were not interested in having knowledge of the political rights of the individuals, and it was noticed that the family of these respondents supported party politics, as many respondents shared that their family had been supporting a certain political party and all the members had always cast their votes in favour of that particular party only.

Political consciousness is the stepping-stone of the political participation. Awareness creates interest and interest creates participation so in this regard an attempt has been made to investigate the awareness regarding the Panchayati Raj Institutions among the Kinnaura women and it was found that 55.8 percent of respondents had explained that they had known about the election process in the village panchayat but they had no knowledge and

awareness about the Panchayati Raj Institution or the 73rd Amendment Act. It was observed that the Kinnaura women were less interested in knowing about the political institution and used to give more importance to their day to-day work. They had less awareness and less exposure towards the political rights and opportunities but they had high hopes that in coming future, their daughters would be able to take active part in politics. However, there were 44.2 percent of respondents who claimed that they had knowledge and awareness about the PRIs. These respondents were young and educated and had exposure to the social media and mass media. A few of these respondents were actively participating at the grass root level politics and at the village level associations of the *Mahila Mandals*. These respondents were well aware of their basic political rights and while interacting with these respondents it was observed that these respondents were confident and had courage to raise any question regarding the development of the village in the Panchayat meetings.

Regarding the awareness about the reservation for the women in PRIs, the data presented in Table 2 shows that 56.7 percent of the respondents had knowledge about the reservation for women in panchayat elections. Although these respondents were aware about the reservation for women at grass root level politics yet majority of these respondents were not aware about the importance of these reservations. Moreover, it has been noticed that most of these respondents were not interested in participation, as a candidate. They had shared that there were various constraints which hindered the political representation of the women in the Kinnaura tribe especially for the lower caste women and those women who belong to low income families. During the field visit it was noticed that majority the selected women pradhans belonged to the upper caste and high income families and most importantly their family members had good political backgrounds. However, there were 43.3 percent of the respondents who had reported that they had no awareness about the reservation for women in PRIs.

### **Representation of Kinnaura women in Panchayati Raj Institutions**

With the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions in our country, women got opportunities to participate in village level politics to prove their worth as good administrators, decision-makers or good leaders (Mishra, 2018). It is a well known fact that before PRIs, the representation of the women in politics was negligible and after the implementation of the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Act women have started taking part in the public

domain. In the beginning the instances of women's participation were very few but with time many women have started taking interest in the political participation and they had become active members at the grass root level decision making process (Dash & Panda, 2015). In this regard, for the purpose of the present study an attempt has been made to check the representation of the Kinnaura women in the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

**Table 3: Representation of the respondents in Panchayati Raj Institutions since year 1995 to year 2019**

Representation		Number (Percentage)
<b>Elected as</b>	Gram Pachayat Pradhan	12 (40.0)
	Gram Panchayat ward member	14 (46.7)
	Panchayat Samiti members	3 (10.0)
	Zilaparishad members	1 (3.3)
<b>Motivated by</b>	Own decision	6 (20.0)
	Inspired by husband and family members	12 (40.0)
	By the choice of villagers (unopposed)	7 (23.3)
	Motivated by local political party	5 (16.7)

*\*Total number of respondents was 30 for each category.*

The data presented in Table 3 shows that the total number of elected women candidates was less in number because before 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment Act women were almost absent at village level politics in the tribal regions. In Kinnaura society women had started participating in the public domain ever since they got reservations in seats and after 1995 women became the part of the public decision making process. In the present study, it has been observed that there were 14 i.e., 46.7 percent of the respondents who were elected as the ward members for the village panchayats. At the time of interview out of 14 respondents, only 6 respondents were holding the position of the ward members and rest of them were elected in the previous elections. There were 12 i.e., 40.0 percent of the respondents who were elected as Gram Panchayat Pradhans and out of 12 respondents, only 4 respondents were holding the position of the Panchayat Pradhan at the time of interview. There were only 3 respondents i.e., 10.0 percent of the respondents who were elected as a PanchaytSamiti ward members in the Panchayti Raj Institutions in Kinnaur district. There were only 1 respondent i.e., 3.3 percent of the respondents who were elected as vice president of zilaparishad and she was holding the position at the time of interview. In the present study, it was found that significant number of women started taking part in grass-root politics and majority of the respondents were elected as ward members.

Table 3 also delineates information about the respondents' source of inspiration for contesting election and it was found that majority of the respondents i.e. 40.0 percent of the respondents were motivated by their husbands and family members to participate in the Panchayati Raj elections. Majority of the first time elected women candidates accepted that the decision to participate in the election was not their own, for the first time the seat was reserved for the women candidates and their politically active male members of the family had convinced them to contest the elections. There were 23.3 percent of the respondents who were elected through the choice of the villagers, these respondents were elected without being opposed and no one filed nomination against them. In the Panchayat elections if Panchayat pradhan was chosen unanimously the state government would provide 10 lakh rupees as special grant for the development of the village. These respondents shared that earlier they were not very interested in contesting elections but when all the respectable people from their village approached them for contesting elections and had a chance to win 10 lakh rupees for the development for the village so they agreed to take the responsibility. There were 20.0 percent of the respondents who accepted that they genuinely wanted to contest elections and they were keenly interested in politics. There were only 16.7 percent of the respondents who had accepted that they were inspired by the local political leaders and party members to contest elections. Although the local political parties have an insignificant role in the Panchayat elections as the political parties do not participate in elections at the village level but the local political parties have significant role in motivating women to participate in the electoral processes.

### **Problems and challenges faced by elected women representatives**

It is a commonly accepted notion that in the Panchayati Raj Institutions if the seat of the village Pradhan, was reserved for a woman, then the men who were politically active convinced their wives, mothers or sisters-in-law to contest elections, in order to keep their dominance and hold in Panchayat and the elected women Pradhans were mere 'namesake' representatives of the male members of the family (Pai, 2000). The conservative environment, poor exposure to the world outside, economic dependency on men and patriarchal nature of the family along with a lack of knowledge, training, leadership disability limited the women from participating effectively in the political process. The elected women representatives encounter a number of challenges, including financial dependence, administrative interference, male dominance and lack of cooperation, etc.

Many studies have revealed that in Panchayati Raj Institution women members had been facing a lot of problems such as male members did not cooperate with the elected women ward members, in many cases women members were not informed or invited to the panchayat meetings (Palanithuri, 2001; Nambiar,2000). In the present study an attempt was made to understand the problems and challenges faced by elected women respondents in their tribal setting.

**Table 4: challenges faced by elected women representatives in PRIs**

Challenges		Number (Percentage)
Administrative challenges	Lack of funds from government.	12 (40.0)
	Delay in sanctions and permission for development work.	10 (33.3)
	Insufficient honorarium to elected representative	8 (26.7)
Technical challenges	Lack of training for women representatives in PRIs	15 (50.0)
	Lack of knowledge regarding development schemes and programmes	9 (30.0)
	Lack of cooperation and unity among elected members	6 (20.0)
Personal challenges	Predominance of male representative.	13 (43.4)
	No freedom of speech and expression.	10 (33.3)
	Existence of caste discrimination in PRIs.	7 (23.3)

*\*Total number of respondents was 30 for each category.*

The data presented in the above table regarding administrative challenges faced by elected respondents shows that 40.0 percent of the respondents faced multiple challenges due to lack of funds from the government. These respondents shared that during their tenure they initiated developmental work but were not able to complete it due to a lack of funds, and after their tenure these projects were never completed. Regarding this, one of the respondents shared that she demanded the funds to build a water tank to store water to extinguish the forest fire and use for irrigation in that area, but her proposal was not accepted by higher authorities. There were 33.3 percent of the respondents who faced challenges getting approval from higher authorities to sanction much-needed development

work and funds for proposed projects. Regarding this, one of the respondents shared that during her tenure she wanted to conduct a free health checkup camp for women and elderly people. According to her, it took almost 6 months to get permission for this public welfare work. Moreover, 26.7 percent of the respondents complained about the insufficient honorarium given to elected ward members. Further, it was observed that most of the elected women were not able to attend all the meetings outside the village due to financial dependency on family.

Regarding the technical challenges faced by elected women respondents, the data shows that the majority of respondents, i.e., 50.0 percent of representatives, agreed that they had faced numerous constraints, including illiteracy, a lack of confidence, and a lack of experience due to inadequate training on the functioning of PRIs. According to them, if women representatives would get proper training and workshops regarding the PRIs, women would perform better than men in grass-roots-level politics. There were 30.0 percent of the respondents who faced difficulties understanding the development schemes and programs due to lack of knowledge, education, and information. According to these respondents, without proper training, the whole process is very complex, and they failed to get full information about the schemes and programs for rural development during Panchayat meetings, and they hardly got any idea about its funding. Furthermore, there were 20.0 percent of the respondents who felt challenges due to a lack of cooperation and unity among elected members. According to these respondents, lack of teamwork often leads to conflicting priorities and inadequate communication, this hinders effective implementation of development initiatives.

Table 4 also delineates information about the elected representatives' personal challenges that they faced in PRIs, and it was found that 43.4 percent of the respondents faced male dominance in PRIs. These respondents revealed that the attitude of the male members was not always encouraging; a general notion that 'women do not know anything' has been cultivated deliberately. It was commonly seen in the meetings that the women members spoke a few words, and whenever they would say something, it was deliberately ignored. One of the respondents had shared that she was elected unanimously as the village Pradhan because she had the highest educational qualification and had good experience as she had retired from the State Education Department. She further shared that in her tenure (2010-

2015), all the members of the Panchayat were women and were elected unanimously except the panchayat secretary (Panchayat Sachive). She had further revealed that although all the members of the panchayat were women, yet they faced domination, the panchayat secretary dominated them at the village level and the other male members of the PRIs in the block and ZilaParishad level. She shared that in her entire life she had worked for the state development programs, but as she did not have sufficient experience at the grass-roots level, she noticed that the male members did not provide the female members with equal space in the public decision-making process. Furthermore, there were 33.3 percent of the elected respondents who felt that there is no freedom of speech and expression in PRIs and expressed that they were not free to put forth their views in panchayat meetings. Gender disparity was found to be the major reason for not entertaining their view points, as male members view points were preferred in male-headed panchayats. Moreover, there were 23.3 percent of the elected respondents who faced caste discrimination in PRIs. These respondents explained that many of them belonged to the lower caste, and they did not have the opportunity to learn new things and to participate without any hindrance. They hardly even got an opportunity to make public decisions, and they faced discriminatory behaviour even in panchayat meetings because of their lower caste status. It was found that in the village under study, not a single village Pradhan had been elected from the lower caste since independence.

### **Suggestions and recommendations**

- 1) In rural and tribal areas, political awareness among the women is negligible. The government should organize awareness camps in tribal areas with the help of local administration to educate the women about the political issues and create awareness among them.
- 2) Special training and refresher courses for women representatives should be conducted from time-to-time. It gives them confidence and creates political awareness and power.
- 3) Government may also provide additional honorarium to lower-caste and elected women representatives from lower-income families. Because they have to work for their livelihoods in addition to carrying out daily household chores, they find it difficult to devote the necessary time to manage the affairs of panchayats.

- 4) There should be regulations against caste-based discrimination in the PRI at all three levels to maintain a harmonious work environment.

### **Conclusion**

It may be concluded that women in the Kinnaura tribe were not interested in politics, but during elections they actively participated in voting, and it was found that most of the respondents cast their votes independently; however, a significant number of respondents cast their votes according to their husbands choice. Kinnaura women had no knowledge or awareness about the functions of Panchayati Raj Institutions. Only a significant number of respondents had some idea about the reservation for women in village panchayats. With respect to the respondents' participation in grass-root level politics, the majority of the respondents were disinterested in political participation, and only a few respondents were engaged in grass-root level politics. These respondents were elected as Gram Panchayat pradhans, Ward members, and PanchaytSamiti Ward members. These respondents were motivated by their husbands and family members to contest the election for reserved seats for female candidates. According to the findings of the study, elected Kinnaura women faced many challenges, such as financial dependence, administrative interference, lack of cooperation, caste discrimination, and male dominance in PRIs. It was also observed that the male members did not provide the female members with equal space in the public decision-making process. The attitude of the male members was not always encouraging; a general notion that 'women do not know anything' has been cultivated deliberately. The findings of the present study explored that whenever a woman candidate was elected as a Panchayat Pradhan, Up Pradhan was always a male candidate to support or dominate the elected woman candidate; however, there was not a single woman candidate who was elected as an Up Pradhan while the male candidates were elected as the Panchayat Pradhans in the area under this study. Therefore, the above discussion leads to the fact that the male dominance is still present in Panchayati Raj Institutions in tribal area.

### **References**

---

- Arora, B. (1999). Women in Politics/Governance in Patriarchal and Non-Participatory Culture. *Guru Nanak Journal of Sociology*, 20(1-2), 111-118.



- Bag, M., & Jagadala, M. (2016). Women Empowerment: Issues and Challenges through the Lens of Reservation in Panchayati Raj System. *ACME Intellectuals International Journal of Research in Management, Social Science & Technology*, 13(13).
- Butch, N. (2000). Panchayat and Women. In George Mathew (Eds.), *Status of Panchayati Raj in the States and Union Territories of India*, Institute of Social Science. New Delhi: Concept Publishing Company.
- Bhatia, A. (2000). *Women's Development and NGOs*. India: Rawat Publications.
- Chhibber, P. (2002). Why are Some Women Politically Active? The Household, Public Space, and Political Participation in India. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 43(3-5), 409-429.
- Choudhary, R. (2018). Issues and Challenges of Women Participation in Politics. *National Journal of Multidisciplinary Research and Development*, 3(1), 344-346.
- Dash, U., & Panda, S. (2015). Women Participation in Rural Politics of Odisha: A Study. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 76(3), 565–572. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26534888>
- Deshpande, R. (2009). How Did Women Vote in Lok Sabha Elections 2009? *Economic and Political Weekly*, 44(39), 83–87. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25663600>
- MATHEW, G. (1995). The Paradox of Kerala Women's Social Development and Social Leadership. *India International Centre Quarterly*, 22(2/3), 203–214. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23003947>
- Gleason, S. (2001). Female Political Participation and Health in India. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 573(1), 105-126.
- Kaul, S., & Sahni, S. (2009). Study on the Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institution. *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 3(1), 29-38.
- Khanna, M. (2009). Political Participation of Women in India. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 70(1), 55–64. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856495>
- Majhi, S. (2017). Empowerment of Tribal Women through Panchayati Raj. *The Researchers'-International Research Journal*, 3(2), 6-12.
- Mishra, A. (2018). Multiple Marginalities: A Study of Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Arunachal Pradesh. *Social Change*, 48(4), 558-574.
- Mohanty, B (1995). Panchayati Raj, 73rd Constitutional Amendment and Women. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 30(52), 3346–3350. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4403611>

- Nambiar, M. (2001). The Civil Society and Panchayati Raj Institutions. *Journal of Rural Development*, 20(4), 615-634.
- Nandal, V. (2013). Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Sociological Study of Haryana, India. *International Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 2(12), 47-50.
- Negi, D. (1990). Jajmani Relation in Tribal World: A Study of Kinnaura Tribe. *Man in India*, 70(2), 131-143.
- Pai, S. (2000). New Social and Political Movements of Dalits: A Study of Meerut District. *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, 34(2), 189-220.
- Palanithurai, G. (2001). The Genre of Women Leaders in Local Bodies: Experience from Tamil Nadu. *Indian Journal of Public Administration*, 47(1), 38-50.
- Rai, P. (2011). Electoral Participation of Women in India: Key Determinants and Barriers. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 46(3), 47-55. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27918039>
- Salgoankar, S. P. (2000). Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Case Study in Goa. In K. Saksena (Eds.), *Women and Politics* (pp. 141-155). New Delhi: Gyan Publishing House.
- Sharma, K., Devi, J., & Verma, A. (2012). Impact of Religion, Caste and Political Parties on Tribal Voters of District of Kinnaur of Himachal Pradesh. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 73(1), 175-184. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41856574>
- Sharma, S. K., & Niranjana. (2001). *Social Structure and Fertility Behaviour*. Jaipur and New Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Singh, S. (2016). Empowerment of Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Area of Mandi District of Himachal Pradesh: An Empirical Investigation. *IORS Journal of Economics and Finance*, 7(1), 63-78.
- Sukumar, N., Lal, L. D., & Mishra, V. K. (2019). Inclusiveness in the Panchayati Raj Institutions. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 5(1), 72-88.
- Verma, V. (2002). *Kanauras of Kinnaur a Scheduled Tribe in Himachal Pradesh*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing Corporation.