



Party Structure, Q&A, Manifestoes: Women in Punjab Elections

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Women representatives are heading politics in 28 countries out of 193 countries. It is important to understand that women's participation is important for making democracy viable as their large number of issues are women-centric as individuals participate in the private and public sphere covering issues of health and hygiene, safe drinking water immunization planning etc. All these issues require inclusive policies that promote gender participation gender appraisal and gender equality

Global data on the national Parliament provides us with the input that the women's percentage is 16.7% in South Asia and the average score of Asian countries is 20.9%. The female population of India is 66.29 million (ORFonline.org). However, data on the present Lok Sabha indicates that there are few women representatives i.e., only 78 female members are there out of 542 members. Similarly, the upper house in the Parliament has 224 members of which only 24 are females. There are a total of 102 females with 6 women in ministerial positions. In total, women constitute 14.36% of the members of parliament.

As we traverse the path of democratization, various initiatives have been undertaken at the institutional level. For instance, the introduction of All Women Pink Booths aims to encourage voter participation among women. Women's representation unfortunately remains descriptive rather than substantial as women are used symbolically to garner votes on the seats that are reserved for women rather than enabling their participation in a Holistic manner. However, a dilemma persists when we scrutinize the representation of women at different levels, particularly in Punjab politics.

In this short review article, the authors have tried to examine the role of women and women's issues in Punjab Politics. We have tried to examine the party structure, and manifestos of three leading political parties in i.e. AAP, Congress, and BJP. Also, we have reviewed the Q& A sessions of the Punjab Vidhan Sabha to understand the role of women representatives in politics and the nature of concerns, especially women-centric ones raised by them.

a) When one examines Punjab politics, one can observe that women representatives come from across the party structure. Their social media presence appears deficient; we could identify just a few variables about their educational credentials, marital status, age, and social initiative along with their party affiliation. The governance mechanism in Punjab has initiated numerous committees, such as the Panchayati Raj Constitution, which have one female out of a total 13 male members. Likewise, the committee overseeing the Welfare of SC /ST is headed by female legislator. Out of six women candidates who are contesting the Lok Sabha elections from major political parties, two of the contestants have already played a crucial role in Punjab politics as they belong to families who are associated with dynastic political families coming from regional party and other from national party. In another instance again, the contestant comes from the family of politicians but draws power both from politico-bureaucracy. There are two commoners who have been active in social sphere adhering two political parties but they enjoy rapport with electorate. One of the candidates from national party is contesting election on behalf of her husband candidate who withdrew due to health issues.

Among the 328 candidates who have filed nominations, 26 candidates are women including independent candidates which are around 9.2% of the total candidates who are contesting in the state. The patriarchal setup of Indian polity can be well visualised as women if successful also work as proxies for their better half starting from local level politics to regional and to some extent at national level too.

b) While going through the question-answer session in the Vidhan Sabha one could look at the queries by women representatives on pertinent issues for example:- questions were raised on social infrastructure by two members concerned about widening of roads, strengthening of Road Infrastructure, measures adopted by the government to protect the villages from flood furies along Satluj river. Some of the women representatives raised issues related to teachers' training, re-orienting the status of a constituency as Sub Tehsil, Tehsil, providing Potable water to villages falling within the constituency for example relocating dumping Grounds. Hence, Most of the queries from women representatives largely were centered around infrastructure problems confronting their respective areas, neglecting other issues related to women's well-being.

c) Election manifestos are also attuned to women's issues which are related to their daily chores and domestic responsibilities. For example, PM Ujjwal Yojana, free gas connections, Swachh Bharat Mission focussing on sanitation facilities or focusing upon the nurturing role of mothers when they have to go for immunization under Mission Indradhanush. Selectively, the focus on the women empowerment is highlighted also through the participation of women in organised sector, increasing time of maternity leave from 12 to 26 weeks, providing health care to women through initiatives like Matra Vandana Yojana for Maternity services and empowering women through the legislature by using their metaphor of Nari Shakti Vandhan Adhinyam. Additionally, women who are from marginal sections are covered under Gareeb Parivar Jan. Their food and health care initiatives are being identified under Har Ghar Nal se Jal for ensuring clean drinking water. They are also trying to initiate SHGs for women in areas about IT, health care

and education. To initiate healthy wellbeing some of the diseases have been identified so that focus intervention can be taken for the Welfare of women. They are more so related to placing women at the centre as providers of the services rather than being an initiator.

Another political party tries to see women as vote banks using superlative terms for women's concerns like maternity mandatory leave, creating more vacancies for Asha workers which could cater to the needs of women during their health episodes. For enhancing education for girl children, a proposal to construct a Balika Vidyalaya by considering the state government is there. There will be a separate allocation of funds for women sports persons. There is a proposal for Mahalaxmi scheme to provide 100000 coverage to poor families. Domestic violence and sexual harassment would be strictly enforced, same work- same wages for women to end discrimination, working women hostels for safe shelter all these programs to some extent promote women related issue beyond private sphere catering to their basic rights and accessibility to other privileges. Aapka RamRajya aims to work on issues affecting people like health, electricity, water, free bus travel to women, and 1000 rupees of financial assistance to women.

Hence, it can be drawn from this analysis that women's representation in Punjab politics has increased as compared to the past but women's concerns are not well represented in the party manifestos. Even they are not adequately raised by the women representatives. The predominant focus on infrastructural development highlights the tendency to ignore and marginalize women's concerns and their role as active agents of change rather than mere beneficiaries. It can be said that to make the political landscape more equitable and inclusive women's role as an agency and leader. Hoping against the hope of implementation of Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam 2023 would be long way to provide space to women in politics as trajectory of choosing a candidate by parties for elections is still rooted in primordial echoes whether it is caste, religion or tribe.