



## ROLE, PERCEPTION & PROBLEM OF WOMEN LEGISLATORS OF PUNJAB

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**ABSTRACT:** Throughout the world, the issue of women's political participation, role and problems in politics has emerged as the main key issue to determine the status, level and extent of their empowerment. This segment of society cannot be ignored but also requires a special attention. India is one of the few countries where regular competitive elections have taken place. Since the constitutional recognition of this equality more women come forward to participate in electoral politics. Though, some successful women candidates have adorned the seats in various representative institutions, but the number of women in parliament and state legislative assemblies is marginal. There are so many reasons of their less political participation. Generally in Punjab women are more or less too invisible in decision-making bodies. This study reveals that women's role, perception and problems which they have to face in Punjab politics.

**Key Words:** [Democracy, Women, Participation and Problems.]

### Role, Perception & Problem of Women Legislator of Punjab

Politics as a vocation, aims either as bringing about change. It involves both a struggle for power and resistance to it. It's the mechanisms by which people seek through the exploitation of both human and physical resource to achieve control over others. Political activity involves the development of strategies and tactics through bargaining and negotiating, aimed at the protection of personal and community interests.

Elections are like blood of Indian representative democratic politics. People participate in politics through their representatives. Generally many factors like party experience, sacrifices made for the sake of political commitment, caste and sub-caste, political ability, linkage with local self government institutions are the factors that help the aspirants to act as elected

representatives of the people. A truly democratic and representative government cannot be established without women's proper participation. Participation of women is imperative.<sup>2</sup> In the legislature women's participation is not only indispensable for the success of democracy but also for the overall progress and development of the nation.

But politics is generally thought to be unsuitable for a women as it is considered 'dirty' and there is risk of her femininity being tarnished, if she indulge in it. Gender identities at social level; get linked to some traits, which with the passage of time assume stereotypical proportions. Women are perceived to more sincere, hard-working, straight-forward, tender, graceful and soft spoken nature which is unsuited to the rough Indian politics.<sup>3</sup> Instead of all, women have always had a strong stake in Indian democratic politics.<sup>4</sup> The word 'role' conveys the idea of performing such duties

which are expected from that person in his/her position. Generally, perception of the legislators about their roles is not necessarily the same as that of the other people. This could be owing to the multiple and overlapping functions and expected lines.

Punjab is basically an agrarian society where patriarchal values are very strong. In patriarchal structure social conditions demands that women's work is confined to the four walls of the house. Social and political leadership have remained male monopolies. Although women started to take part in politics but they have to face so many problems.

### Methodology

The main units of analysis are women legislators of Punjab. The relevant material collected from primary as well as secondary sources. It's an empirical study based mainly on primary data collected through survey research by questionnaire and interview schedules.

### Objectives

The fundamental objective of this paper is to provide an insight into the level of political maturity, experience and understanding of the women legislator of Punjab. This exercise determine how well-equipped they are to perform their duties as legislator. It also attempts to analyze the perceived role, their performance and opinion about increasing

representation of women in the legislature as well as the problems which the women legislators have to face as a legislator. We could get time only 15 women legislators, that's why a sample of 15 women legislators of Punjab have been taken in this paper.

This paper is divided into three parts. First part of the paper deals with the role of women legislators in their constituency, second part deals with perception of women legislators about their political participation and third part deals with the problems being faced by women legislators in performing their duty.

### Part 1: Role and participation at the constituency level

Women legislators have to perform multifarious roles. They are burdened with the responsibilities of addressing important public issues, working as an actor who challenges gender imbalances in a patriarchal society and also guide other women.

Legislators are concerned with all the political, social, economical and other problems of their area.<sup>5</sup> In order to find out the nature and extent of contact and communication between the legislators and the members of their constituency, some questions were put to women legislators. The respondents were asked how they maintained relations with the people of their constituency. The responses are tabulated below.

**Table 1.1: Methods Adopted by women legislators for contact with the constituents**

Sr.No.	Methods	Number	Percentage
1.	Direct contact with the people	10	66.66
2.	Contact through Male Members of Family	3	20.00
3.	Through party activists of the constituency.	2	13.3
	Total	15	100

**Source: Personal Interview with the respondents**

Data reveals that a vast majority of women legislators maintained direct contact with the constituents, 20 percent met through male members of their family while only 13 percent claimed to met through other means just like through local leaders and party activists of the constituency. It is abundantly clear that a good

number of women legislators placed great emphasis on their face to face and informal contacts with the members of their constituency. Those women legislators who maintained contact through their family also expressed the conviction that politics is not a one person game. All family members had to

involve in this pursuit with sympathetic attitude and support. Sometimes, the constituents can't reach their leader then local leaders and party activists are the best source. Last but not the least, local leaders play an important role in the politics.

### Frequency of their visits to the constituency

It is an important indication of their role perception to visit to their constituency. The respondents were asked about frequency of their visits to constituency. There is an account of their responses:

**Table 1. Frequency of their visit in constituency**

S.No.	Responses	No. of respondents	Total no.	Percentage
1.	Daily	13	15	86.6
2.	2 to 3 days in a week	2	15	13.3
3.	4 to 5 times in a month	-	-	-

**Source: Personal Interview with the respondents**

Most of the respondents (13) responded that most of the time they live in their constituencies except during elections or party meetings. Only 2 respondents stated that they visited their constituency 2 to 3 days in a week. These are the people who are more involved in the high political activities. No one was agreeing with the statement of 4 to 5 times in a month.<sup>6</sup>

Thus it can be significant that the women legislators always maintained continual and sustained contact with their people either by visiting the constituencies or by residing therein.

### Nature of Complaints of the people of their Constituency

Perceiving and assessing needs and grievances of the constituency and then finding appropriate solutions are the major functions that the legislative leadership is expected to perform. Seriousness of women legislators can test by asking them to eliminate the major problem faced by the people of their constituency. The respondents were asked what are the main problems of the people of their constituencies. The responses are given below:

**Table 1.3 Nature of Complaints of constituents**

S.No.	Issues	No.of respondents	Total	Percentage
1.	Education	10	15	66.66
2.	Unemployment	7	15	46.66
3.	Agriculture	12	15	80.00
4.	Water	2	15	13.33
5.	Health	6	15	40.00
6.	Poverty	4	15	26.66
7.	Drugs	2	15	13.33
8.	Administration	13	15	86.66
9.	Women Issues	13	15	86.66
10.	Corruption	8	15	53.33

**Source: Personal Interview with the respondents**

This table shows that in the perception of the respondents; problems related with administration have an edge. Majority of the negotiations and interventions are concerned

with the police department, drugs, education and public health. Women's issues are the major problems. Some issues related with police action against individuals, land disputes,

release from police custody and harassment by police or false cases being registered by ruling party. Apart from these, some problems pertain to corruption in governmental departments just like in Disbursal of pensions, delaying in governmental works etc. Matters falling under the ambit of the rubric 'agriculture' include perceived lack of irrigation facilities, shortage of supply of electricity to farmers, water locking, shortage of seeds and fertilizers, difficulty in getting tube-well connections and loans for farmers. There are day to day problems related to educational institutions. Some other common grievances include not getting pure drinking water, shortage of public water and lack of proper sewerage in residential localities. In the issues related to women the most common problems are demand of more dowry, domestic violence, property related fraud, NRI marriages etc. On the basis of the

above table it can be said that the largest number of problem are faced by the people of Punjab. In spite of all this, it can be said that women legislators have to perform all duties which are performed by male legislators.

### **Methods adopted by women legislators to remove the grievance of people**

Generally, possibility of solving problems depends on personality, capability, accessibility, resource availability and the method choose. The study also attempts to explore the purported ways chosen by women legislators to solve the problems of constituents. The question put to them was, "What methods they used to remove the grievances of people". The responses are given below:

**Table 1.4 Methods adopted by women legislators to remove the grievances. (Multiple choice)**

Sr.no	Methods	No. of respondents	Total no. of respondent	Percentage
1.	Contact with concerned Authority	15	15	100
2.	Raising matter in Assembly	12	15	80.00
3.	Mobilizing public opinion	10	15	66.66

**Source: Personal interview with the respondents**

As cited above, most of the women legislators contact with concerned authority for the redressal of the grievances of their constituents. Again, quite a reasonable percentage also preferred to raise the matters in the legislature when problems could not be solved by the usual methods of contact with government authorities. 66% respondents take help of media at that time when other channels seemed less effective. Significantly, this method was mostly adopted by the legislators in the opposition. On the whole it can be said that women legislators of Punjab are intensely active in solving the grievances of the electorates through normal democratic means.

### **Part 2 Opinion and perception of Women Legislators on women related Issues**

Due to different socialization and life

experiences, women are different from men. Thus, women bring to politics a different set of values, experiences and expertise.<sup>7</sup> Women have a considerable understanding the problems faced by women and they can better know the welfare of women. As Racheel Mayanja, the special advisor of the UN Secretary-General on gender issues has pointed out that, "Women participation enriches the process, as women are likely to put gender issues on the agenda, set different priorities and possibly bridge the political divide more effectively."<sup>8</sup>

A woman legislator said that, as women representatives, we have double responsibility. Firstly, we have to work for development and remove the grievances of people and secondly they have to do more for the welfare of women because women are often subjected to discrimination. They shared real condition of women from the ground level and socio-

political discourses of women empowerment. We hear about family problems, dowry and rapes every day. In order to check discrimination against women, it is important to make them economically independent.

### Special requests received from the women of constituency

It would be befitting to try and know how truly

women legislators view themselves as representing the women's interests. Women legislators were questioned about the kind of requests they receive from women. To analyze the degree of commitment of women legislators they were asked about the kind of problems that are brought to them by women and they reply us.....

**Table 2.1 Special requests by the women constituents**

Sr. No.	Special requests and Problems	No. of respondents	Total	Percentage
1.	Domestic Problems	12	15	80.00
2.	Social Injustice	13	15	86.66
3.	Education	9	15	60.00
4.	Jobs related Problems	8	15	53.33
5.	Property Disputes	10	15	66.66
6.	Old age security	11	15	73.33

**Source: Personal Interview**

An overwhelming majority of respondents admitted that they receive more special requests from women. They identify social injustice as a common problem. These included eve-teasing rehabilitation of widows. They stated that domestic, marital disputes, transfer, property disputes, widow pension are major problems of the women. A sizeable section also approaches them with problems related with domestic and marital affairs like wife-beating, dowry disputes, divorce, mental and physical torture by in-laws.

Thus, it is clear that women leaders receive a

wide variety of problems from the women of their constituencies.

### Methods adopted by Women Legislators to solve the Problems of Women

In order to understanding the role perception of women legislators it is equally important to find out the methods which are adopted by women legislators to solve the problems of women. This table shows the responses of the respondents:

**Table 2.2 Methods adopted by women legislators to solve the problems of women (Multiple choice)**

Sr.No.	Methods to solve Problems	Total no. of women legislators	No. of respondents	Percentage
1.	Contact with the concerned authority	15	15	100
2.	By raising the matter in assembly	15	10	66.67
3.	By mutual understanding	15	11	73.33
4.	Any other	15	8	53.33

**Source: Personal Interview with the respondents**

As reflected in the above data every women legislator chose to form a contact with the concerned authority to solve the problems. 66

percent use the option of raising matter in assembly. On the other side, 73 percent preferred to solve the matter by bringing about

mutual understanding. Only 53 percent use some other means to solve the problems. On the whole, therefore, most women legislators of Punjab contributed in solving their problems and they declared their prime focus is on making women aware of their socio-political, economical and legal rights and empowering them to stand up against injustice.

### Part 3 Problems faced by women legislators

In spite of visible empowerment of women they face many problems which are the barriers that inhibit the entry of women in the political process.<sup>9</sup> In today's political landscape, motherhood is often deployed as a tool to highlight the 'sacred' nature of subject, ranging from the gau mata to Bharat mata and ganga mata. At the same time, issues around women's rights and empowerment, varying from triple

talak to beti Bachao Beti Padhao are regular topics of conversation. But do the men in Indian politics only want to talk about women, or are they also willing to make an effort to share power with them? According to Geeta Mukherjee, a parliamentarian, it is the absence of social security measures that have forced women to go back to their families. "Women want their families but that is not the only thing they want."<sup>10</sup>

Punjab is characterized by deeply entrenched gender inequalities. These include social problems, anti-women oriented political culture, lack of finances, lack of family support and household burden. In order to identify the problems being faced by women legislators they were asked about the kind of problems which they are facing. The responses are given below:

S.No.	Problems	Number	Percentage
1.	Social Problem	3	20.00
2.	Family Problem	2	13.33
3.	Economic Problem	-	-
4.	Lack of education in People	2	13.34
5.	Nothing	8	53.33
	Total	15	100

**Table 3.1 Problems faced by women legislators**

### Source: Personal Interview with the respondent

As indicated above, only 20% female legislators perceived that social constraint is a major hindrance. Social problem include the conservative thinking, mindset of people, male dominated society, hesitating in going outside during nights, to handle the behavior of people. One respondent stated that senior male political elite expect her to join them for the party deliberations late in the night. She found it very difficult to decide either to keep away or to participate in such political gatherings.<sup>11</sup>

3 respondents said they faced family problems. It revealed the problem of looking after small kids. 3 respondents claimed to face big problem of illiteracy. So they spend their more time and money to educate the people of their constituency. However, this data contradicts the

general perceptions about gender in the patriarchal structure of Punjab. It can be deduced that women respondents are not comfortable in expressing their problems. During informal conversation, it came out that practically speaking women face a large number of social, political and economic problems.

Generally women do not participate in political activities because it has become unpalatable for women; for instance criminalization of politics is on increase.<sup>12</sup> Instead of all, majority of the respondents stated that being a woman did not make much difference to them as they have not faced any problem. Although numerical disadvantage can often lead to a number of problems but there was no discrimination on the basis of gender of the legislators in PLA. Those who are completely new to the House

didn't have knowledge about the rules, regulations and procedure of the House due to no training programme for them to be familiar with the procedure of the House.

This table shows that women legislators in Punjab perception are quite comfortable with most of them have not faced much problems. They have been treated quite fairly.

## CONCLUSION

However, it remains a fact that though women are under-represented in the legislative leadership but Punjab has accepted women's leadership in theory. Though majority of Punjab women legislators have face so many problems just like social, economic, administrative problems as leader but now they have a honorable place in politics. They always seek solutions of problems through normal democratic means. Now, they are focusing their attention on the problems of administration, economic issues, corruption and unemployment, it is clearly evident that their performance does not have major qualitative differences with male members. It has seen from the study that, very few women legislators make regular interventions. But on the other side, some of them participated very actively. Women leaders indicate a healthy attitudinal change in the character of male-dominated society. Even Patriarchal culture as well as conservative mind set of the society creates obstruction in the path of women's involvement in political activities is not validated.

Taking a cue from global experiences, there are various mechanisms which can be adopted to ensure adequate representation of women. A change need to be brought for the transformation of the place of women in the political domain. Women themselves have to come forward for their participation in public work and attain the position at political leadership.

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