

Beyond the Veil: Unveiling Women's Political Representation and Participation in Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract

Women make up half of the world Population, Apart from that participation of women in policy making are not reached sufficient level. Insufficient reorientations of women is the result of a complex interaction between socio-economic, political and cultural forces. Women participation in mainstream politics has important implications for broader arena of governance. Yet women's representation in Himachal Pradesh is quite not impressive. The number of Women In state assembly is extremely small as compared to men.

Even in the twenty-first century and after many years of independence, political parties and our so-called "progressive society" still do not have a great deal of faith in the ability of women's political representation to lead and succeed in politics. This study aims to comprehend the

problems and obstacles underlying the low representation of women in politics in Himachal Pradesh.

Keywords: *Women, Politics, Representation, Political Parties, Himachal Pradesh*

Introduction

Democracy espouses its values of representation, equality, and freedom. It allows all citizens to participate in the political process and decision-making. Nevertheless, the existence of gender bias in society deprives women of the opportunity to achieve equality in Politics. In politics, women are marginalised not only in India but globally as well. People's ability to participate in politics to the fullest extent possible may be limited by the sheer nature of natural and man-made inequality. Even though there is no way to eliminate inequality caused by natural causes, inequality caused by humans can be eliminated by embracing and upholding democratic ideals.

Nevertheless, women's presence in politics has not kept pace with the needs of a nation such as India, which is regarded as one of the world's largest democracies. Himachal Pradesh has difficulties with this issue, just like a lot of other states in India. India's Himachal Pradesh state is situated in the country's north. The region of Himachal Pradesh is renowned for its mountains. Numerous mountain ranges, like as the Pir Panjal, Dhauladhar, and Great Himalayan ranges, are present in the state, which is tucked away in the western Himalayas. The princely states of Chamba, Mandi, Suket, Sirmaur, and twenty-six other former princely states and territories were combined to form the state of Himachal Pradesh in 1948.

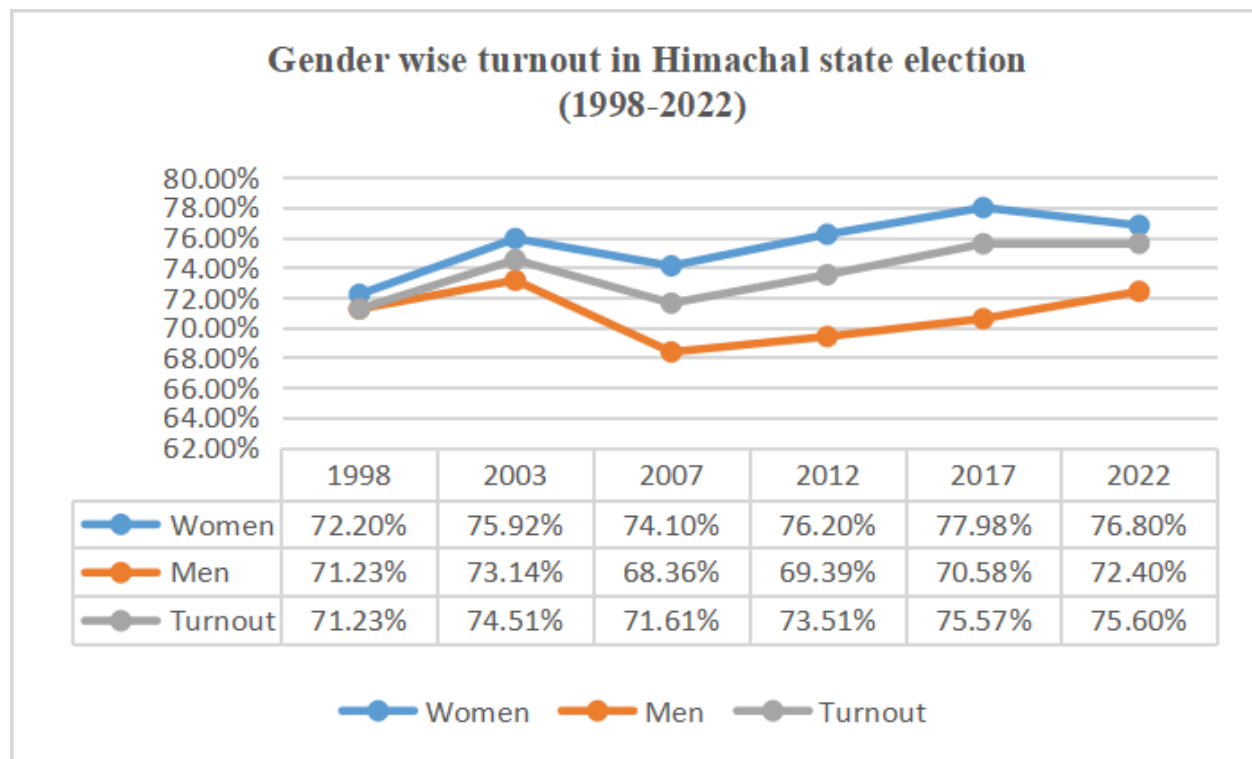
Under its original name, this entity was called the "Union Territory of Himachal Pradesh." Himachal Pradesh, which had its own elected legislative assembly and council of ministers, was admitted as a full member of the Indian Union on January 25, 1971. The re-organization of Indian states based on linguistic and administrative characteristics was suggested by the States Reorganization Commission, and this was the action that ensued.

Notwithstanding significant female literacy rates (74.93% according to the 2011 census) and high women's vote turnout, Himachal Pradesh has low female representation in politics. The marginalisation of women in the political realm of Himachal Pradesh is further aggravated by the discriminatory nature of decision-making procedures. Informally connected groups and deeply ingrained power structures frequently act as obstacles, reducing women's involvement and impact in important conversations and the creation of public policy.

In addition to stifling variety of opinion, the absence of inclusive governance mechanisms calls into question the efficacy and legitimacy of democratic governance.

Women Presence in Political Process

Around the world, women make up a sizable share of voters in democracies. People take part in elections by using their right to vote, influencing the results of elections, and reshaping the political environment with their decisions and preferences. Due to their active participation as voters, women in Himachal Pradesh significantly influence the democratic process. In Himachal Pradesh, women make up a sizable section of the electorate and participate in voting in considerable numbers. Women exercise their right to vote in great numbers during elections, which contributes to democracy and affects election results.



Source: The Times of India & The Indian Express

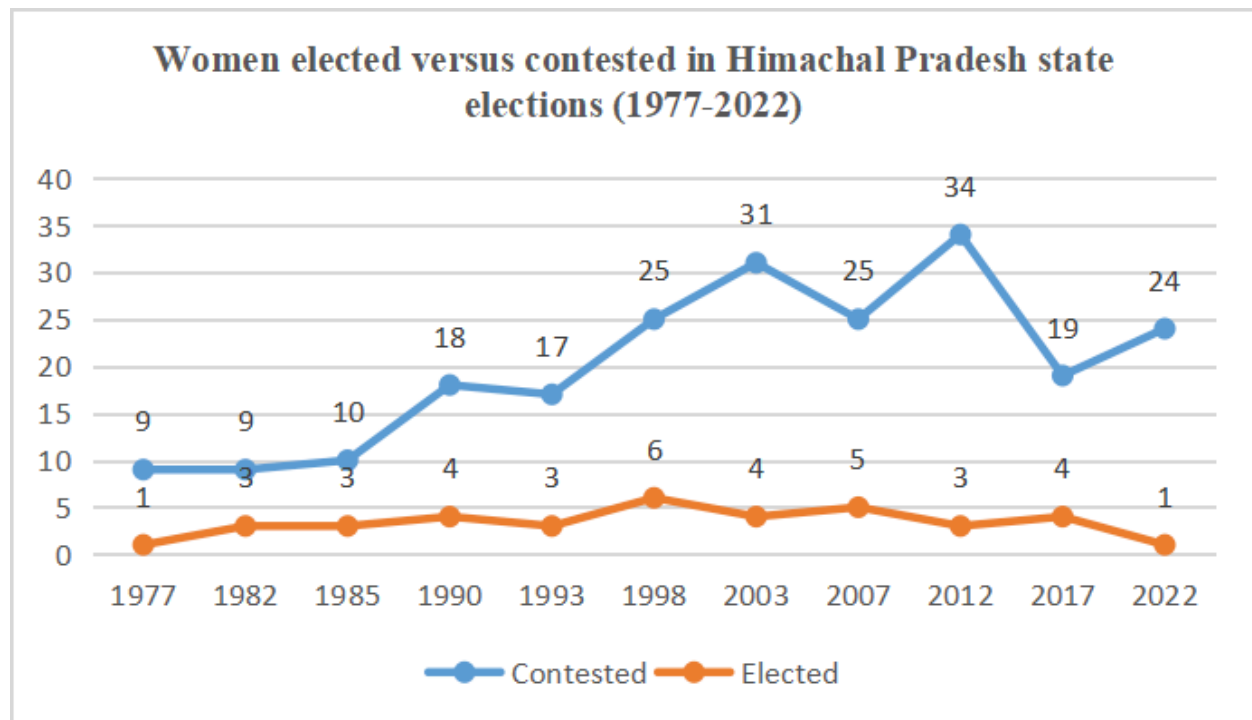
Graphical representation show the percentage of voter turnout of state legislature assembly election of Himachal Pradesh

The voter turnout by gender is shown in the following chart. Despite the fact that women are disproportionately represented in politics compared to men, in 1998, 72.20 percent of women voted in the state assembly; in 2003 that number rose to 75.92 percent. It was 74.10% in 2007; women's voting participation was starting to fall at this point. Men made up 71.23 percent of the voting population in 1998; in 2003, 2007, 2012, 2017, and 2022, it was roughly 73.14%, 68.36%, 69.39%, 70.58%, and 72.40%. This fall in percentage was not as major as that of men. In contrast, women's vote turnout in state assemblies was 76.20% in 2012, 77.98% in 2017, and 76.80% in 2022.

This illustrates the main disparity in state assembly voting turnout between males and females. In this regard, women's circumstances are far superior to those of men.

Women Political Representation in state legislature assembly of Himachal Pradesh

There are 68 seats in the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly, yet there are still few female members. The representation of women in state legislative assembly of Himachal Pradesh is quite low. It has always been low. This statistics shows a matter of serious concern.



Source: The Times of India

Graphical representation shows the numbers of women elected versus contested in state legislature assembly election of Himachal Pradesh

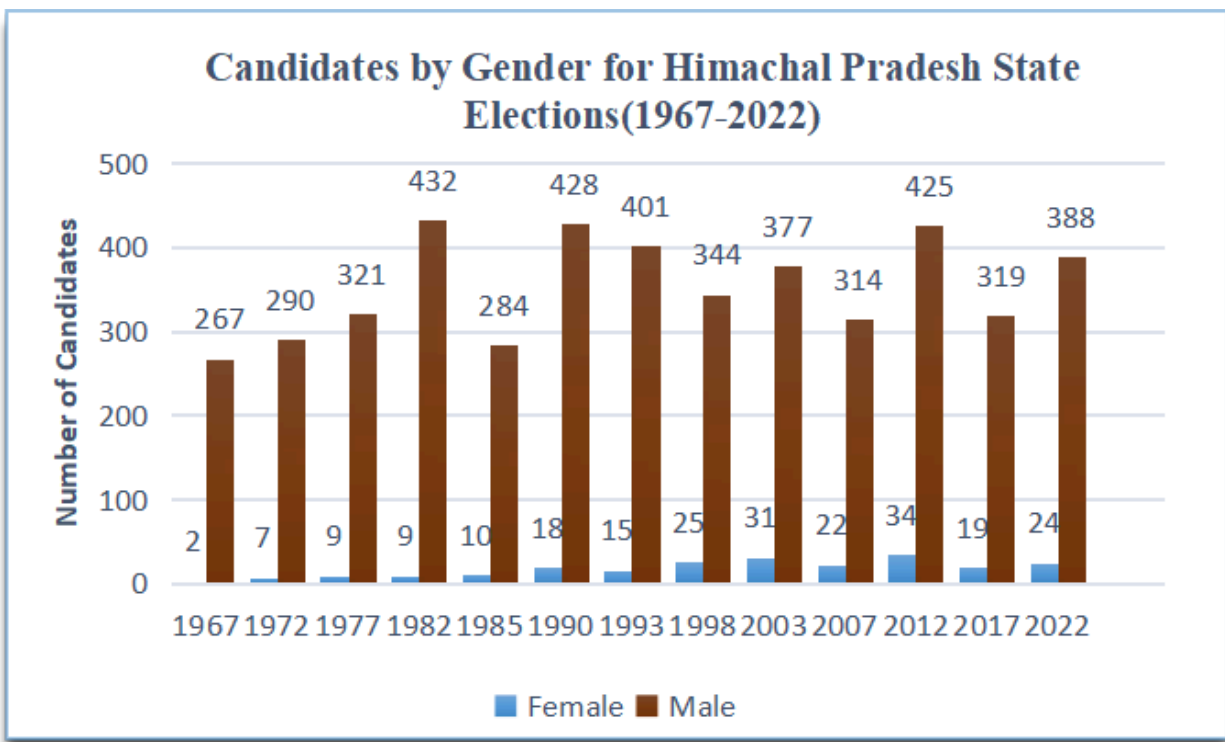
The data presented above demonstrates the poor political representation of women in the Himachal Pradesh state assembly. Representing women in the state assembly is proving to be difficult for the state. Out of nine candidates, just one woman was elected in 1977. In contrast, 3, 3, 4, 3, 6, 4, 5, and 3 women were elected in 1982, 1985, 1990, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2007, and 2012, respectively. Despite a rise in female candidates for the assembly over the past few years,

there was a fall in the number of female candidates and elected women in the elections of 2017 and 2022.

As we can see, the greatest number of women to ever attend an assembly was six in 1998. In contrast, the state saw 34 female candidates for the state assembly in 2012. Here is the data that demonstrates how difficult it is for women to get elected to office and hold elected office even after so many years of independence.

Male Chauvinism in Politics

Politics is frequently viewed as a mirror of the dominant ideologies and power structures in a society since it serves as the testing ground for societal transformation and governance. The political environment in the peaceful hills of Himachal Pradesh is shadowed by the spectre of male chauvinism, where the magnificence of nature conceals deeply ingrained social issues. Even in the face of advances in modernity and progress, deeply ingrained patriarchal standards still have an impact on political systems and impede women's engagement and empowerment.



Source: Scroll.in

This data indicates that male candidates have gained more traction in the political arena over time. Even in the most recent state assembly elections in 2022, of the 412 candidates, only 24 were women, with three running under the Congress banner and six on BJP tickets. The Aam Aadmi Party, which did not field candidates for office in this election, only nominated five women. This demonstrates that politics is still a male-dominated sphere.

Women Contestants by party, Himachal Pradesh State Election 2022

Party	Women Contestants
AAAP	5
BJP	6

INC	3
IND	5
Other Parties	5
Total	25

Source: Scroll.in

Statistics indicate that that not even the nation's largest political parties offered enough tickets to female candidates. They merely speak about women's equality and empowerment, but in practice, they do not take many chances with female candidates when it comes to demonstrating true equality in the political sphere. The recent Himachal Pradesh state assembly election's final

characteristic is the drastically low representation of women. Reena Kashyap (BJP) is the lone female member of the new assembly.

She is running for office for the first time in the Sirmour district's Pachhad reserved constituency. The underrepresentation of women in politics may continue if political parties do not nominate any female candidates for office.

Roadblocks to Political Representation of Women

The obstacles that prevent women from being represented in politics are many and intricate, frequently having their roots in institutional frameworks, cultural norms, and societal expectations.

Cultural and Societal Norms: Cultural and societal conventions restrict women from entering politics or the public realm, hence exacerbating the gender gap in political representation.

Education Inequalities: Critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving are among the fundamental abilities that education imparts and is vital for successful political leadership. Women with low levels of education face more obstacles when trying to participate in mentorship or leadership development programmes, in addition to having less possibilities to acquire these abilities.

Family Responsibility: Women are frequently given the major responsibility for providing care for the family due to cultural norms and traditional gender roles. Women's engagement in politics is severely hampered by this dynamic. As they balance taking care of children, the elderly, and home chores, women are under tremendous pressure to put their family responsibilities ahead of their political aspirations.

Media Portrayal: The media heavily influences the public's perception of women in politics, emphasising personal attributes, family life, and attractiveness above credentials and policy viewpoints.

Lack of Mentorship and Support Systems: Women frequently do not have access to the same networks of mentors, support systems, and networking opportunities as men do, which impedes their ability to rise in politics.

Financial Barriers: Fundraising, travel, and advertising costs are just a few of the major financial outlays that come with running a campaign. Due to gender prejudices in fundraising networks or their personal financial situations, women encounter difficulties in accessing these resources.

Election Systems: Due to historical underrepresentation, women are less likely to hold incumbent posts. As a result, certain electoral systems, such as plurality or first-past-the-post, tend to favour only incumbents and well-established candidates.

Political Party Structures: Historically, a large number of political parties have been predominately made up of men, with unofficial networks and customs that hinder or exclude women from prospects for leadership roles and candidatures.

Way Forward

- I. We may encourage gender equality in political discourse through the implementation of legislative reforms such as anti-discrimination laws, gender quotas, and improvements in the voting system.
- II. Inclusionary and democratic environments should be encouraged within legislators, political parties, and other governmental organisations, addressing issues of gender-based violence, oppression, and discrimination.
- III. The supply of programmes specifically designed to assist women in developing their political leadership abilities and addressing barriers to running for office should be provided with financial support, guidance, and training.
- IV. Changing public attitudes and perceptions of women's involvement in politics through education, public awareness campaigns, and media literacy initiatives in favour of gender equality and the challenge of gender stereotypes.

Conclusion

It is a problem that women are underrepresented in politics not only in Himachal Pradesh but in many other parts of the world. Like many other Indian states, Himachal Pradesh faces challenges related to this matter. Despite recent improvements, such as an increase in the number of women serving in leadership roles and entering politics, the data still show a sizable gender disparity. The underrepresentation can be attributed to various factors including as cultural biases, entrenched patriarchal systems within political parties, lack of resources, and societal standards.

Nonetheless, initiatives are in place to solve this problem, such as support for women's political empowerment through training and education programmes, gender-sensitive policy implementation, and advocacy for increased participation of women in decision-making processes. Recognising the value of gender diversity in politics and working to create an atmosphere where women have equal opportunity to participate and lead are vital for legislators as well as society at large. India runs the risk of ignoring a variety of viewpoints that are essential for holistic governance due to the conspicuous lack of women in positions of policymaking.

India has to prioritise gender equality in leadership and create an inclusive atmosphere where women's perspectives and expertise are valued in the creation of sound policies if it is to become a "Vishwa Guru" (global leader).

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