



**STATUS OF WOMEN IN HIMACHAL PRADESH: AN
OVERVIEW OF THE INITIATIVES TAKEN BY THE GOVERNMENT
FOR THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN**

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Women empowerment is the prerequisite of any progressive society and no nation can claim development without the emancipation of women. Owing to customary male dominance and lack of equal opportunities in political, social and economic spheres of life, the women have been exploited since long and have lag behind their counterparts. But now, with the efforts of the government and the initiatives taken by them has changed the scenario and we see a lot of improvement in the status of women in almost every sphere. Hill states women have different challenges due to antiquated customs, social taboos and tough terrain and geographical conditions. The Himachal Pradesh State Government has launched various schemes and programmes for the upliftment of women. An attempt has been made to study the status of women and initiative taken by the government for their empowerment in this hilly state.

Introduction:

Empowerment is an ongoing and dynamic process which enhances women's abilities to change the structures and ideologies that keep them subordinate. It is a process of making present power structure more inclusive, including men and women, senior citizens, dalits and indigenous people. Empowerment is therefore, clearly concerned with power and distribution of power between individuals and groups. Women empowerment is the natural corollary of democracy. It leads to higher productivity, efficiency and better socio-economic development. This is being increasingly realised now. The empowerment of women is an essential precondition for the elimination of world poverty and upholding of human rights. Women's empowerment is therefore more than simply marginal increases in income—it requires a transformation of power relations. Efforts made during the last two decades have

been proved successful in removing inequality and vulnerability of women in the sectors of economic, socio, political, educational, health care and nutrition.

Status of women in hill states is quite different due to prevailing topographical and geographical condition where women are involved in more physical activities outside home like work in the fields, orchards and rearing animal and also engaged in small cottage industries. Female is both a beneficiary of development strategies and a contributor to the economy. Himachal, as any other society has latent reserves in its human resources, especially women, who generally work for much longer hours than men. The status of woman has gone through many changes since independence. With time, her place in the society has also changed. Earlier she was trained only to become a good housewife, but now she has become a key component in the development of a society.

Sex Ratio of Himachal Pradesh: It is a widely known fact that women live longer than men. At the same time it is also a fact that there is less number of women than men. In the last about 100 years, Himachal Pradesh had shown an increasing trend in the number of women per thousand men barring for the decades 1911-1921 and 1931-1941, when sex ratio dropped from 904 to 902 and from 906 to 897 but the next decades witnessed the recovery and it reached to 976 in 1991. The census results of 2001 had shown decline in sex ratio by eight points i.e. from 976 to 968 which has quite serious socio economic implication if data analyzed more closely. 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. ⁱ

Vital Statistics: 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 56.1 percent live births per 1000 women in the age group 15- 49 years (General Fertility Rate) as compared to about 57.3 live births per 1000 women in the same age group in 2011. The average number of children that a woman is expected to give birth to (Total Fertility Rate), during the entire child bearing age-group, if she experiences the current fertility pattern throughout, has been decreasing over the years. The total Fertility Rate for 2012 was 1.7. Age specific fertility rate in Himachal Pradesh have shown an increasing trend over years in all age-groups. In 2012, there were about 145.3 percent live births per 100 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. ⁱⁱ

Female Literacy: Women's education is one of the most important indices of development of any society. All the major parameters of the development are related to the education. It positively influences the age of marriage, life expectancy, participation in family income and above all women's empowerment and well being.

Himachal Pradesh has shown considerable progress in the field of female literacy. Today the state female literacy rate is 76.60%. The Government has initiated to retain and increase girl enrolment in the schools through various incentive schemes for girls such as:

- a) A girl child scheme was launched on 2nd October, 1997 involving a gift amount besides a scholarship at the age of six years being given to girl children born on and after 15th August, 1997.
- b) Exemption of Tuition fee applicable to all girls irrespective of income of parents
- c) Textbooks and writing material to all SC/ST and OBC girls.
- d) Uniforms are also provided to the tribal girls.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) surveyed the district in 2000, points out that the success in primary education and female literacy has been possible due to highly motivated parents in educating their children. They are aware of the profound effect that education can have on the quality of life.^{iv}

Health Status: Women and men have somewhat different kind of health risks throughout their life span. Women were expected to a peculiar and major health risk due to child bearing. Good health and family planning services are important for the general well-being of the women, children and the entire family-giving women, in particular, an opportunity to decide when and how many children do they want. Reduced infant Mortality would give women better chance to have the desired size of the family with few numbers of pregnancies. Discrimination against a female child is evident from the fact that girls experience higher rate of mortality in younger agegroups as compared to the boys. In 2012, the female infant mortality rate was observed to be 38 as compared to male infant mortality rate of 35. Life expectancy at birth has increased continuously over years. For the period 2006-10, the male life expectancy at birth was 67.7 years as compared to 72.4 years for females.^v

Planning the Family: The provision of contraceptives information is fundamental to the ability of women and man to make informed choices about reproductive health decisions. The use of contraceptives and family Planning methods has been increasing uniformly over the

years. This would not only give better chances to women to achieve the desired size of the family with the reduced number of pregnancies but would also help her to ensure desired spacing of the consecutive pregnancies. This would go a long way for the well-being of the mother as well as the entire family.

Female sterilization is the widely know family planning method followed by male sterilization during 2009-10. It has been observed that three out of four users rely on sterilization in Himachal Pradesh. Sterilization accounts for roughly 99% of all modern contraceptive methods used. Although reported by a negligible minority, sterilization is the most common method used even among married women and men.^{vi} According to National Family Health Survey-4 (2015-16) report, about 34.50% of the females in Himachal Pradesh use Female Sterilization method for family planning^{vii}. The reported use of traditional contraceptive methods and male/couple dependent methods is negligible. In the year 2013-14, Out of the total accepters of family planning methods only 1.42 percent adopted vasectomy, 13.07 percent adopted tubectomy, 14.03 percent adopted IUD insertion, 57.54 per cent were users of some kind of method for family planning^{viii} and 13.93 percent adopted oral pills as family planning methods.

Political Participation:

More and more women are also holding jobs in government offices and private sector as well. Besides, their role has become important in decision making, planning and execution of rural development schemes (like MNREGA) after increase in 50 per cent reservation to women under PRIs.^{ix}

TABLE 1: REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS^x

<i>Sr. No.</i>	<i>Title of PRI representative</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
1.	Ward members	58.33
2.	Members of Panchayat Samitis	51.55
3.	Members of Zila Parishad	51.00
4.	Gram Panchayat Pradhans	50.54
5.	Chairpersons of Panchayat Samitis	54.55
6.	Chairpersons of Zila Parishads	50.00

Empowerment of women cannot happen unless they are provided with adequate exposure, facilities and income generating activities through wage and self employment. The Constitution of India not only grants equality to women but also empowers the State to adopt measures of positive discrimination in favour of women for neutralizing the cumulative socio

economic, education and political disadvantages faced by them. Fundamental Rights, among others, ensure equality before the law and equal protection of law; prohibits discrimination against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, and guarantee equality of opportunity to all citizens in matters relating to employment. Articles 14, 15, 15(3), 16, 39(a), 39(b), 39(c) and 42 of the Constitution are of specific importance in this regard.^{xi}

i. National Commission for women: In January 1992, the Government set-up this statutory body with a specific mandate to study and monitor all matters relating to the constitutional and legal safeguards provided for women review the existing legislation to suggest amendments wherever necessary, etc.

ii. Reservation for women in Local Self-Government: The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Acts Passed in 1992 by Parliament ensure one-third of the total seats for women in all elected offices in local bodies whether in rural areas or urban areas.

iii. The National plan of Action for the Girl Child: (1991-2000) The plan of Action is to ensure survival, protection and development of the girl child with the ultimate objective of building up a better future for the girl child.

iv. National Policy for the Empowerment of Women, 2001: The department of Women & Child Development in the Ministry of Human Resource Development has prepared a “National Policy for the Empowerment of Women” in the year 2001. The goal of this policy is to bring about the advancement, development and empowerment of women.

v. Hindu Succession (Amendment) Act, 2005: The Hindu succession (Amendment) Act is to remove gender discriminatory provision in the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and gives the following rights to daughters under Section 6: (a) The daughter of coparcener shall by birth become a coparcener in her own right in the same manner as the son; (b) The daughter has the same rights in the coparcenary property as she would have had if she had been son; (c) The daughters shall be subject to the same liability in the said coparcenary property as that of son; and any reference to a Hindu Mitakshara coparcener shall be deemed to include a reference to a daughter of a coparcener; (d) The daughter is allotted the same share as is allotted to a son; (e) The share of the Pre-deceased son or a pre-deceased daughter shall be allotted to the surviving child of such pre-deceased son or of such pre-deceased daughter; 12 (f) The share of the pre-deceased child of pre-deceased son or of a predeceased daughter shall be allotted to the child of such pre-deceased child of the pre-deceased son or pre-deceased daughter.

vi. The Protection of women from domestic Violence Act, 2005: This is an Act to provide for more effective protection of the rights of women guaranteed under the

Constitution who are victims of violence of any kind occurring within the family and for matter connected therewith or incidental thereto.^{xii}

VARIOUS SCHEMES INITIATED BY HIMACHAL GOVERNMENT FOR WOMEN EMPOWERMENT:

Himachal Pradesh Government has taken a number of steps to empower women in every sphere of life. For improving sex ratio, the State Government has started schemes of cash incentive for protection of female child. A scheme of awarding gram panchayats for recording favourable sex ratio has been initiated and some panchayats have already been rewarded under the scheme. Both motivational and punitive methods have been started. It is also a fact that in last few centuries women have achieved much as far as their socio-economic and political empowerment is concerned. Himachal Government had launched various schemes to overcome the challenges & for upliftment of women residing in the state:

a) Mukhya Mantri Kanyadan Yojna: 90% of the Himachal population lives in the rural areas and many have to earn their livelihood from the meagre pieces of land and some do not possess that even. For such poor families it is very difficult to spend thousands on the wedding of their daughters. Under Mukhya Mantri Kanyadaan Yojana, Himachal govt. will provide a sum of Rs. 11,001 for the marriage of girls in poor families. The Mukhya Mantri Kanyadaan Yojana, was not just a misnomer but in 2008-09 around 1056 marriages were done with the sum provided by this scheme and about 1.16 crore of total money was spent. Under this scheme, marriage grant of Rs. 25,000 is given to the Parents/guardians of the girls or to the girl herself to solemnize her marriage. Provided their annual income does not exceed Rs 20,000.^{xiii}

b) Widow/ Destitute/ Single women pension scheme: Pension @ Rs. 500 per month are provided to

- i. Widows;
- ii. Destitute Women (Legally separated from husband);
- iii. Single women above 45 year of i.e women (above 45 years of age) whose individual annual income does not exceed Rs.9000 or their family income does not exceed Rs. 15,000.^{xiv}

c) Widow Re-marriage scheme: The State Government is implementing Widow Re-Marriage Scheme for rehabilitation of young widows by increasing them to enter into wedlock. Under this scheme an amount of `50,000 is provided as a grant for the couple.^{xv}

- d) **Mother Teresa Asahay Matri Sambal Yojna:** It becomes very difficult for widows and poor women to uplift their children and provide them food, shelter, necessary education etc. In order to provide financial relief to such poor mothers who are finding difficulty in the upbringing of their children, Mother Teresa Matri Sambal Yojana started by Himachal government benefitted them a lot. Under this scheme Rs 3,000 per child per annum given to the destitute women belonging to the BPL families or having income less than Rs 18,000 for the maintenance of their children till they attain the age of 18 years. Under Mother Teresa Matri Sambal Yojana, about 1.07 cores were given for the upbringing of about 13060 children.^{xvi}
- e) **Matri Seva Yojna:** Under this scheme free institutional deliveries of expectant mothers, irrespective of their income are being done in all Government hospitals in the State.^{xvii}
- f) **Self Employment Schemes for Women:** Under this scheme Rs 2,500 provided to the women whose annual income is less than Rs 7,500 for carrying income generating activities.^{xviii}
- g) **State homes:** For destitute women and wayward girls/women State Home is being run at Mashobra (Shimla) by the department. The inmates of this home are provided free education, clothes, boarding and lodging facilities. Besides, training in various vocation trades is also imparted to them. For rehabilitation of such women, after leaving State Home, financial Assistance of Rs 10,000 per women is also provided.^{xix}
- h) **State Level council for empowerment of women:** State Level Council for Empowerment of women has been set up in the State for effective implementation and monitoring of National Policy for Empowerment of women.^{xx}
- i) **Women Development Corporation:** Women Development Corporation has been set up in the State. This corporation helps needy women to avail loan from banks for setting up self employment ventures on low rate of interest.^{xxi}
- j) **State Commission for women:** State women Commission has been set up in the State for redressal of grievance of women and to make them aware about their legal rights. This commission is providing counselling services and legal aid to women. The Commission also looks into the complaints of violence and atrocities against women.^{xxii}
- k) **Betihai Anmol:** Under the Scheme post birth grant of Rs 10,000 and scholarships ranging from Rs. 300 to Rs 1,500 is provided from class 1 to class 10+2.^{xxiii}
- l) **Kishori Shakti Yojna:** This scheme is implemented to improve the nutritional and health status of girls in the age group of 11-18 years, to provide the required literacy and

numeracy skills through non-formal education to train and equip the adolescent girls to improve/ upgrade home-based and vocational skills and to promote awareness of health, hygiene, nutrition and family welfare, home management/ child care and to take all measure as to facilitate their marrying only after attaining the age of 18 years and if possible, even later; The scheme is being implemented in 8 Districts (46Projects).viz.

Shimla, Sirmaur, Kinnaur, Mandi, Hamirpur, Bilaspur, Una and Lahaul& Spiti. ^{xxiv}

m) **Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls:** This scheme has been started in 4 districts viz Solan, Kullu, Chamba, and Kangra in place of Kishori Shakti Yojna and also Nutritional Programme for Adolescent Girls (NPAG) in Kangra District.

11-14 years age – Out of school adolescent girls.

15-18 years age – all Adolescent girls (school going plus out of school). ^{xxv}

n) **Indira Gandhi Matritava Sahyog Yojna:** Main objective of the Scheme is to improve the health and nutrition status of pregnant and lactating women and infant by promoting appropriate practice, care and service utilization during pregnancy, delivery and lactation period. ^{xxvi}

o) **Mata Shabri Mahila Sashaktikaran Yojna:** This scheme has been benefitting women belonging to BPL families of SC category. Under the scheme, 50 percent subsidy, subject to a maximum of Rs1,300 is given to eligible women for purchase of gas connection. ^{xxvii}

p) **Vishesh Mahila Uthan Yojna:** There is a provision to provide stipend @ Rs 3,000 per month per trainee and test fee of Rs 800 per trainee through the department of Women and Child Development. Further, for those women who intend to start their own self employment projects, a back ended subsidy is provided @ 20% of the project cost subject to maximum of Rs 10,000 per beneficiary, on loan arranged through HP Mahila Vikas Nigam. ^{xxviii}

q) **Self Help Groups:** These Self Help Groups are doing income Generating activities. So far, 66,106 Self Help Groups have been formed out of which 64,451 Self Help Groups have been linked with banks. ^{xxix}

r) **Financial Assistance and Support Services to victims of Rape Scheme:** An affected woman shall be entitled to financial assistance and restorative support/ services adding up to a maximum amount of Rs 75,000. Additional assistance of Rs 25,000 can also be given in special cases. ^{xxx}

s) **Prevention of sexual Harassment of women at work place:** Mechanism has been created in the State by forming committees for prevention of Sexual Harassment of women at work Places as per the direction of the Hon'ble Supreme Court. ^{xxxi}

Above mentioned schemes had played an important role in boosting the morale & motivate the people that not to kill the girl child at the time of birth & to give equal rights to girl child. Due to certain schemes parents of girl child are able to give quality & higher education the girl and even able to bear all the marriage expenses of girl under MukhyaMantriKanyadanYojna.

In spite of many good initiatives, the journey of women empowerment is not that smooth in hill state due to difficult geographical conditions. However, involvement of common citizen at various levels can make a big difference. Intervention of common citizen and NGOs for effective implementation of existing schemes is essentially required. Old outdated customs and social taboos which are creating hindrances need to be broken. The change in societal attitude including parents, is essential for ensuring their empowerment. Unless women are not given economical benefits along with social and political opportunities, the women empowerment will be a distant dream.

References:

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- ⁱⁱ Ibid, p 20
- ⁱⁱⁱ Himachal Pradesh Human Development Report, 2002, Government of Himachal Pradesh, Shimla, p 162
- ^{iv} Ibid, p 163
- ^v “Women and Men in Himachal Pradesh”,op.cit., p22
- ^{vi} Ibid, p 23
- ^{vii} National Family Health survey (NFHS-4) Report of 2015-16.
- ^{viii} Ibid.
- ^{ix} Gopal Karishan Sanghaik, “Women Empowerment In Hill States : A Case Study Of Himachal Pradesh”,Indian Journal Of Public Administration, Vol. Lx, No. 3, July-September 2014, p 530
- ^x Ibid, p 530
- ^{xi} “Women and Men in Himachal Pradesh”,op.cit., p 11
- ^{xii} Ibid, p 12.
- ^{xiii} Ibid.,p 12.
- ^{xiv} Ibid.,p 12.
- ^{xv} Ibid.,p 13.
- ^{xvi} Ibid.,p 13.
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