Women empowerment has become a buzzword, which has different meanings for different persons. To know its real meaning and its implications, the present study is conducted in the Malwa region of Punjab by selecting the Municipal Council of Mansa as a unit of analysis. After defining the meaning and definitions of women empowerment, discussing the significance of the study and transversing the relevant literature, the views of seven women councillors of Mansa Municipal Council and thirty women on the random sampling basis are presented in the three tables. The study, by and large, found that lack of awareness, (40.54%), demotivating attitude of family members, illiteracy (32.43%) and lack of political awareness (37.84%) are some of the impediments confronting the motive of women empowerment. The faulty education system devoid of logical reasoning and independence perpetuate the vestiges of barbarism against women. Besides, parochial mindset and sexual prejudice are the reasons behind exploitation, atrocity and injustice of the women.

INTRODUCTION

NOW-A-DAYS, THE women empowerment has become a buzzword. It has conveyed different connotations for different persons. Because, its meaning depends on different variables that include geographical location (urban/rural), educational status, social status (caste and class), and age. Policies on women’s empowerment exist at the national, state, and local levels in many sectors, including health, education and economic opportunities.

But there exists a great hiatus between policy prescription dictated by the policy makers residing at the capitals and actual performance accomplished at the grassroots level. This situation becomes grim when
the plight of the women is seen in the villages and semi-urban cities, where they have bleak vision about the women empowerment. Instead of learning the art and skills of women empowerment, they accept it as the consequences of their destiny.

In the backdrop of these views, it is imperative to investigate the realistic assessment of women empowerment in the backward region of the advanced state. That is why this study is conducted in the Malwa region of Punjab by selecting the Municipal Council of Mansa as a unit of analysis. Prior to analysing the findings of the study, it is necessary to understand the conceptual meaning of women empowerment.

Conceptual Framework

Any empirical analysis or field study must be backed by conceptual underpinning. So, the meaning and definitions of women empowerment need elucidation. In simple words, the women empowerment is a process to enhance self-confidence of the women, so that she can derive benefits from different social, political and economic opportunities. Wayne Dyer defines the women empowerment as, “Authentic empowerment is the knowing that you are on purpose, doing God’s work, peacefully and harmoniously”. Another author, Louisa May Alcott, quotes: “When women are the advisor, the Lords of creation don’t take the advice till they have persuaded themselves that it is just what they intended to do; then they act upon it and if it succeeds, they give the weaker vessel half the credit of it; if fails, they generously give herself the whole”. Alaka Basu of UN Foundation opined that: “It’s now such an overused word. You are empowered if you have a choice of 10 different shampoos in the grocery store; you are empowered if you have 100 kinds of cereals to buy; you are empowered by virtually anyone wanting to sell you something”.

These definitions revels that for empowering women the individuals, local community, NGO and the state should make efforts to create conditions for peace, happiness, prosperity, well-being and all round development of the women. The locale of the literature shall clarify the meaning of women empowerment as under. Kapur (1979) has shown that the twin roles of women cause tension and conflict due to her social structure which is still more dominant. In her study on working women in Delhi, she has shown that traditional authoritarian set up of Hindu social structure continues to be the same basically and hence, women face problem of role conflict, change in attitudes of men and women according to the situation can help to overcome their problem. Lehrer Sara (1981) studied the effects of a women’s conference on participants attitude towards women’s role in society. It was observed that the conference did not make much effect on changing the attitude of participants towards women’s role in the
development of society. The perception about women in the past has cajoled them to think in the direction of other people. Women has realised their own potentials as entrepreneurs but they need the encouragement from the state. The environment for women entrepreneurs to bloom can be created by the government through policies designed for women entrepreneurs. Shobha Raghuram and Ruth Manorama (1995) stated that women the world over are concerned that Beijing should not remain only as a meeting point in the history of women’s struggles enhanced by the characteristic celebrator space, but also be the time for genuine and committed negotiations when governments will set in motion policies and actions, which will secure the advancement of women as equal social and political citizens of their communities and nations. Stromquist (1995) considered political participation as important determinant of empowerment as political participation develop capacity among women to analyse, organise and mobilise resources for social change. Jejeebhoy (2000) argues that though autonomy and empowerment are fairly similar, the former is a static state and, thus, measurable by most available indicators while the latter is change over time, and not so easily measurable. Any improvement in outcomes cannot be considered as women’s empowerment if not accompanied by the existence of women’s agency. In other words, women themselves must be significant actors in the process of change rather than merely as its recipients that is being described or measured. Kapur (2001), in the study, “Empowering the Indian Women” tried to discuss, analyse and answer the challenging questions as to why, despite all the efforts and progress made, there continues to be so much of gender discrimination and what strategies, actions and measures are to be undertaken to achieve the expected goal of empowerment. She opined that women’s empowerment is much more likely to be achieved if women have total control over their own organisations, which they can sustain, both financially and managerially, without direct dependence on others. Kabeer’s (2001) conceptualisation of women’s empowerment in terms of strategic life choice comprises three inter-related components: resources, which form the conditions under which choices are made; agency, which is at the heart of the process through which choices are made, and achievements, which are the outcomes of choices. Mahmood (2002) indicated that women’s decision-making authority and their locality are correlated; i.e., study explored that in urban area women had greater say in household decision-making as compared to the rural women. Therefore, on the bases of above reviews one can sum up above discussion that social environment changes with the change in locality and this changing environment affects the lives of the residents; therefore, one can say that locality characteristics also bring changes in women’s thinking
and in their status. Mason and Smith (2003) on women’s empowerment and social context: The results from five Asian countries, women empowerment was computed for the different communities of each country separately and highly significant difference in empowerment level of women was found within these communities. Furthermore, authors stated that female empowerment can also be determined by community institutions. They also considered that empowerment was the property of socio-cultural system. S. Kishor and K. Gupta (2004) revealed that average women in India were disempowered absolutely and there have been little change in their empowerment over time. The authors viewed that there were several cogent and pressing reasons for evaluating, promoting and monitoring the level of women’s empowerment in India, not the least of which was that household health and nutrition were generally in the hands of women and their empowerment were necessary to ensure not just for their own welfare but the well-being of households. They also asserted that empowerment was critical for the very development of India, as it enhanced the quality and quantity of human resources available for development.

Significance of the Study

Broadly speaking, the women studies is a multidisciplinary phenomenon because the feminist approach took centre stage in political, social, economic, sociological legal and psychological perspectives. But in the discipline of public administration, it has attracted a scant attention of the scholars before 1950s. However, since 1960s the feminist of gender perspective in public policy and administration attracted a great deal of attention. As discussed by Bidyut Chkarabarty and Parakash Chand (2012), the discourse on feminist perspective in public administration has been divided into two categories—descriptive and conceptual. The former deals with feminist theories underlying gender inequalities in public administration on the basis of empirical studies. The later delves into existing philosophy of public administration from lens of the gender. A wonderful book by Strives (2002) entitled Gender Image in Public Administration, legitimacy and the Administrative state is of worth quoting. She espoused the feminist epistemology in the theory and practice of public administration. Feminist theory has shown that women has been subjugated on the pretext of biology, and that gender discrimination is so pervasive because it is socially and culturally embedded. Hence, gender empowerment is recommended to break free the invisible shackles of male domination.

The feminist assertion in public administration was a mid-1970s development. It was basically the outcome of a Symposium on Women in Public Administration in 1976 under the leadership of Nesta M. Gallas, the first female president of ASPA. The symposium organised under the
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VARINDER KAUR AND RAJ KUMAR SIWACH

AUSPICES OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REVIEW, A NOTED JOURNAL OF THE DISCIPLINE, WAS CONCENTRATED ON ISSUES LIKE, HOW AND WHY HAD WOMEN BEEN TRAPPED UNDER THE GLASS CEILING, WHAT KIND OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION WAS NEEDED TO AMELIORATE THE STATUS OF WOMEN, STRATEGIES TO FACILITATE WOMEN ADMINISTRATORS PERFORM BETTER, THE IDEA OF WOMEN’S RIGHT AS A BASIS FOR PUBLIC POLICY, AND THE LIKE. CHAKRABARTY HAS PROPOSED THAT TWO MAJOR ARGUMENTS OF THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION ARE: (A) ACCORDING TO FEMINIST THEORISTS, PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION, LIKE ANY OTHER BRANCHES OF SOCIAL SCIENCES, HAS BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN SYSTEMATICALLY EXCLUDING WOMEN FROM THE PURVIEW OF PUBLIC SPACE ON THE PRETEXT OF BIOLOGY, AND (B) FEMINIST THINKERS HAVE ARGUED THAT IN A PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY, PUBLIC INSTRUCTIONS, BUREAUCRACY, AND SO ON, ARE NOTHING BUT THE STRUCTURE OF SUBORDINATION, AS PATRIARCHAL VALUES ARE ENTRANCED IN THESE INSTITUTIONS.

In India, after enactment of 74th Constitutional Amendment Act 1992, the women have given 33 per cent reservation in elected urban local bodies but on the ground it seems a farce owing to discriminatory socio-cultural values. Hence, they are excluded from the purview of mainstream. The opportunities in participating public affairs, especially urban local governance issues, could not bear the rich dividends and time, energy and efforts are wasted to ameliorate the status of women. This is a gender paradox which is a dilemma for women in the administrative state.

In the background, it becomes imperative to examine the phenomena of women empowerment in Mansa Municipal Council of Punjab. This study acquires significance in the light of women empowerment indictors like illiteracy, exploitation, crimes, domestic violence and harassment, which have prominent appearance in such regions like sampling area in comparison to the developed urban regions of the state.

**Research Methodology**

The validity and reliability of any research study depends upon the methods and procedure undertaken by the researcher to collect and present the data and information as per the requirement of research problem. This is an empirical study so the primary data collected from the field shall be heavily relied upon. The data have been obtained from the 7 elected women councillors of Mansa Municipal Council representing their respective wards. The electoral voters list was procured from the election officer of Mansa. By using random sampling, 70 women of the city were uniformly selected from seven wards.

The unstructured interview schedule was administered to solicit the views of the selected respondents. The focussed group discussion was also held with 30 women, who attended a meeting, convened by municipal council of Mansa. Thus, the technique of participant observation was applied in the
study. The discussion was also held with few officers, who played an important role in implementing the women empowerment initiatives in Mansa. Thereafter, the data presented in the tables were analysed and interpreted.

**TABLE 1: AWARENESS OF THE RESPONDENTS ABOUT WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Nature of Response</th>
<th>No. of Respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>32.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>27.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The information and knowledge about the schemes is a major ingredient of women empowerment, the more awareness about schemes means more empowerment of the women but this is not true in the present study. The data presented in the above table shows that 17 (40.54%) women are not aware about the women empowerment strategies and initiatives. Only 11 (32.43%) women are aware, whereas 9 (27.03%) did not reply further inquiry from these neutral respondents reveal that they are also not aware. By taking into account this figure, the broad conclusion of the study is that majority of women, *i.e.*, 67.57 per cent are not having any knowledge about the women empowerment.

**TABLE 2: SOCIAL OBSTACLES IN THE WAY TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Illiteracy and ignorance</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Cultural ethos and inhibiting belief</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>27.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>De-motivating attitude of the family members</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>40.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To know the social obstacles in the way to women empowerment, the researcher obtained the views of 37 respondents of Mansa Municipal Council. Their views were presented in the above Table 2. As per this table, 12 (32.43%) respondents opined that illiteracy and ignorance of the women act as obstacles in the way to women empowerment whereas 10 (27.03%) are of the view that cultural ethos and inhibiting belief prevent women to accrue benefits from the women empowerment process. The family plays an important role in women empowerment which is evident from this table, in which 15 (40.54%) expressed the view that family members do not encourage them to come out from social barriers. The broad conclusion is drawn from this table is that the majority of the women,
i.e., 27 (72.97%) respondents consider illiteracy and lack of support by the family members are some of the women empowerment obstacles.

**TABLE 3: POLITICAL OBSTACLES IN THE WAY TO WOMEN EMPOWERMENT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Obstacle</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Family background</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Lack of political awareness</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Male dominated political system</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>29.73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The political process opens the gateway to women empowerment. To find out this fact, an attempt has been made, whose results are shown in the above table. It is evident from this table that family background of women, as per the version of 12 (32.43%) respondents, is a major ingredient of women empowerment, but 14 (37.84%) respondents considers that lack of awareness act as obstacle to women empowerment. These figures were followed by the variable of male dominated political system which is 11 (29.73%). The main conclusion derived from this table is that 70.27 per cent women perceive the general unawareness coupled with the profile of the women as impediments in the motto of women empowerment in India.

**Major Findings of the Study and Conclusion**

This study was conducted in the Malwa region of Punjab by selecting Mansa Urban Council as a unit of analysis. After collecting the data, tables are presented. On the basis of data presented in these tables we may state that lack of general awareness, social and political obstacles are major reasons preventing the women to be powerful in this patriarchal society. To explain these facts further, the study noted that low level of women literacy in this region (55.68%) and indifferent attitude of the women propelled by their ignorance are some of the reasons at the grassroots level. The intensive discussion with the respondents and observation by the women scholar explore that male dominance is widely known in this backward region of the Punjab. The prejudiced belief system which is hinged upon education system is the root cause of the sorry plight of the women.

Mary Wollstonecraft (1982), the first feminist, also attributes to a false system of education and deeply rooted prejudices clouding reason and logic behind all kinds of vestiges of barbarism against women. She noted that blind obedience, propriety, beauty, shame and chastity, defeat the purpose of best education, habits of virtues and independence and logical reasoning. The women are told to follow blind obedience, which is ever sought by power, tyrants and sensualists, who keep women in the dark.
The nature gave women a weaker frame than man but to ensure affections of husband she performs duties of daughter, wife and mother. The weakness may excite tenderness and gratify the arrogant pride of man. In conclusion, we may states that faulty education, narrow mindset and sexual prejudices are the reasons behind exploitation of the women.

REFERENCES
