



IMPACT OF RESERVATION POLICY ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS: A STUDY OF HARYANA.

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Abstract

The reservation policy introduced under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act has significantly transformed women's participation in grassroots governance in India. This study examines the impact of reservation policy on women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Haryana. The research analyzes how political reservation has influenced women's representation, decision-making capacity, leadership development, and socio-political empowerment in rural local governance. The study is based on both primary and secondary data collected through surveys, interviews, government reports, and scholarly literature. Findings indicate that reservation has substantially increased the numerical participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions and created opportunities for political inclusion at the grass roots level. However, challenges such as patriarchal dominance, proxy representation, lack of political awareness, and limited administrative training continue to affect effective participation. The study concludes that while reservation policy has strengthened democratic decentralization and women's visibility in politics, greater institutional support and capacity-building initiatives are necessary to ensure substantive political empowerment in Haryana.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj Institutions, Women's Political Participation, Reservation Policy, Haryana, Grassroots Democracy, Political Empowerment,

Gender Representation

1. Introduction

Women's participation in politics is considered one of the most important indicators of a democratic and inclusive society. In a democratic system, equal participation of men and women in governance ensures balanced development, social justice, and effective representation of public interests. However, despite constitutional guarantees of equality, women in India have historically remained underrepresented in political institutions, especially at the grassroots level. Social traditions, patriarchal values, lack of education, economic dependency, and restricted mobility have long limited women's involvement in public decision-making processes. To address this imbalance and strengthen democratic decentralization, the Government of India introduced reservation policies for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). These policies were designed not only to increase women's numerical representation but also to promote political empowerment and active participation in local governance.

The introduction of reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act marked a major step toward inclusive govern an ceinrural India.It opened new opportunities for women to participate in political processes and leadership roles at the village level. Haryana, a state traditionally characterized by patriarchal social structures and gender inequality, presents an important case for examining the impact of reservation

policy on women's political participation. The reservation policy has increased the visibility of women in rural governance, but questions remain regarding the extent of their actual empowerment, autonomy, and participation in decision-making. Therefore, studying women's political participation in Haryana's Panchayati Raj Institutions is significant for understanding both the achievements and challenges of reservation policies in rural India.

1.1 Background of Panchayati Raj Institutions in India

The concept of local self-governance in India has deep historical roots. Traditionally, village communities managed local affairs through informal councils known as Panchayats. These village-level institutions played a role in resolving disputes, maintaining social order, and managing community resources. Mahatma Gandhi strongly advocated the idea of "Gram Swaraj," emphasizing that villages should function as self-reliant units with decentralized governance. According to Gandhi, democracy could become meaningful only when power reached the grassroots level and ordinary people actively participated in governance.

After independence, India adopted democratic decentralization as an important principle for rural development and public participation. Several committees were formed to strengthen local governance institutions. The Balwant Rai Mehta Committee (1957) recommended a three-tier Panchayati Raj system consisting of Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level. The committee emphasized democratic participation and local planning for rural development.

Although Panchayati Raj Institutions were introduced in many states, their functioning remained weak due to irregular elections, lack of financial powers, and excessive state control. To strengthen local governance, the Government of India enacted the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992, which came in to effect in 1993. This amendment provided constitutional status to Panchayati Raj Institutions and made democratic decentralization a constitutional

obligation.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment introduced several important provisions. It mandated regular Panchayat elections every five years, establishment of State Election Commissions, reservation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, constitution of State Finance Commissions, and decentralization of powers and responsibilities to local bodies. Most importantly, the amendment reserved not less than one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, including positions of chairpersons. This provision aimed to enhance women's participation in governance and promote gender equality in political representation.

Democratic decentralization through Panchayati Raj Institutions has strengthened grassroots democracy by bringing governance closer to the people. Local governance enables rural communities to participate in development planning, identify local needs, and monitor welfare schemes. It also creates opportunities for marginalized groups, especially women, to engage in political decision-making and public leadership.

1.2 Women's Reservation Policy in PRIs

The reservation policy for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions was introduced as a corrective measure to address the historical exclusion of women from politics. Before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, women's participation in local governance was extremely low. Political institutions at the village level were largely dominated by men, and women rarely contested elections or occupied leadership positions. Social restrictions and patriarchal attitudes discouraged women from participating in public life.

The provision of one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions significantly changed the political landscape of rural India. It ensured that women could contest elections and hold positions in local governance institutions. The policy aimed to create a platform where women could voice their concerns, participate in development activities, and contribute to community welfare. Reservation also encouraged political awareness among rural women and

challenged traditional perceptions regarding women's leadership abilities.

Haryana implemented reservation policies for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in accordance with the constitutional provisions. Over time, the state witnessed a substantial increase in the number of elected women representatives in Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads. Women from different caste, economic, and educational backgrounds entered local governance, creating greater gender representation in rural politics.

Several Indian states later expanded reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions from 33 percent to 50 percent. This step was taken to further strengthen women's participation and leadership in local governance. Haryana also adopted increased reservation for women, which created more opportunities for women to contest elections and occupy decision-making positions. As a result, women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions increased considerably.

Despite these achievements, the effectiveness of reservation policy remains a matter of discussion. While reservation has improved numerical representation, many women representatives continue to face social and institutional challenges. In some cases, male family members influence or control decision-making processes on behalf of elected women representatives. This phenomenon, often referred to as "proxy leadership" or "Sarpanch Pati," limits women's independent participation in governance. Therefore, it becomes important to assess whether reservation has resulted in genuine political empowerment or merely symbolic representation.

1.3 Concept of Women's Political Participation

Political participation refers to the involvement of individuals in political processes and governance activities. In the context of women, political participation includes voting, contesting elections, attending public meetings, participating in policy discussions, influencing decision-making, and assuming leadership roles in political institutions. Women's political participation is an essential component of

democratic governance because it ensures equal representation and inclusion in public affairs.

Women's political participation has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Quantitative participation refers to the numerical presence of women in political institutions, while qualitative participation focuses on the extent of their actual involvement, influence, and autonomy in governance. Merely increasing the number of women representatives does not guarantee empowerment unless women actively participate in decision-making processes and exercise authority independently.

Decision-making participation is one of the most important dimensions of political empowerment. Women representatives should be able to express their opinions, influence policies, allocate resources, and participate in governance activities without external interference. Effective participation also includes leadership development, administrative knowledge, confidence-building, and active engagement with community issues.

Electoral participation is another significant aspect of women's political involvement. Reservation policies have encouraged rural women to contest elections and engage in political competition. Participation in elections helps women gain political experience, develop leadership skills, and increase public visibility. Over time, this can contribute to social transformation by challenging patriarchal norms and encouraging greater acceptance of women leaders in society.

1.4 Need for the Study

The present study is important because women continue to face significant barriers in political participation despite constitutional guarantees and reservation policies. Although the number of elected women representatives has increased in Panchayati Raj Institutions, many women still struggle to exercise effective political authority. Social norms, patriarchal control, lack of education, financial dependency, and limited political awareness continue to restrict their participation.

Rural governance in India also faces

multiple challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, poverty, gender discrimination, and weak institutional support. Women representatives are expected to address local development issues while simultaneously dealing with social resistance and family responsibilities. Understanding how reservation policy influences women's participation in such conditions is therefore necessary for evaluating the effectiveness of democratic decentralization.

Haryana provides a significant case study because of its socio-cultural environment. The state has historically experienced gender inequality, low female workforce participation, and strong patriarchal traditions. At the same time, Haryana has witnessed increasing participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions due to reservation policies. Studying Haryana helps in understanding whether political reservation can create meaningful empowerment even within socially conservative settings.

1.5 Research Gap

Several studies have examined women's reservation and political participation in India, but important research gaps still exist. Most studies focus on national-level trends and statistical representation, while fewer studies analyze district-level experiences and grassroots realities in Haryana. There is limited research examining how women representatives participate in governance after being elected.

Another major gap is the lack of focus on qualitative political empowerment. Many studies measure women's participation only in terms of numerical representation rather than actual decision-making power, leadership capacity, and political autonomy. The issue of proxy representation, social barriers, and institutional challenges also requires deeper investigation.

Therefore, there is a need for empirical research that examines both the opportunities and challenges associated with women's reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The present study attempts to address these gaps by focusing on the effectiveness of women's participation and empowerment in Haryana.

1.6 Research Objectives

The present study is based on the following objectives:

1. To examine the impact of reservation policy on women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana.
2. To analyze the level of political participation among elected women representatives.
3. To identify the challenges faced by women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
4. To evaluate whether reservation has resulted in genuine political empowerment.

1.7 Research Questions/ Hypotheses

The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. Has reservation improved women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana?
2. Does reservation lead to effective decision-making power among women representatives?
3. What are the major social and institutional challenges faced by elected women representatives?
4. Has political reservation contributed to genuine empowerment or only symbolic representation?

The study is guided by the hypothesis that reservation policy has increased women's numerical representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, but qualitative political empowerment remains influenced by socio-cultural and institutional barriers.

2. Review of Literature

The issue of women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has received significant academic attention after the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992. Researchers, political theorists, and social scientists have examined the role of reservation policies in increasing women's representation, strengthening grassroots democracy, and promoting political empowerment. Existing literature suggests that reservation has created opportunities for women to enter politics; however, the extent of their

effective participation and empowerment remains uneven across regions. The literature review for the present study is organized thematically to understand theoretical perspectives, national and state-level studies, issues of empowerment, and research gaps related to Haryana.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Political Participation

The concept of political participation is closely associated with democratic governance and citizen involvement in decision-making processes. Participatory Democracy Theory emphasizes that democracy becomes effective only when citizens actively participate in governance beyond voting during elections. According to this theory, local self-governance institutions provide opportunities for marginalized groups, including women, to engage directly in public affairs and community development. Panchayati Raj Institutions are therefore viewed as instruments of democratic decentralization that encourage grassroots participation and inclusive governance (Pateman, 1970).

Feminist Political Theory provides another important framework for understanding women's political participation. Feminist scholars argue that traditional political systems have historically excluded women from positions of power due to patriarchal social structures and gender discrimination. Women's reservation policies are considered corrective measures aimed at ensuring gender equality and fair political representation. Feminist theorists emphasize that political participation should not be limited to symbolic representation; instead, women must have actual authority, autonomy, and influence in governance processes (Phillips, 1995).

Empowerment Theory also plays a significant role in analysing women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Empowerment refers to the process through which individuals gain confidence, awareness, decision-making ability, and control over social and political resources. Political empowerment enables women to challenge traditional gender hierarchies and participate actively in leadership and governance. Scholars argue that reservation

policies can act as catalysts for empowerment by increasing women's visibility in politics and encouraging social transformation. However, empowerment is considered meaningful only when women exercise independent decision-making power and actively influence policy outcomes (Kabeer, 1999).

These theoretical perspectives collectively suggest that political participation is not merely about numerical representation but also about active engagement, leadership, and transformation of gender relations within society.

2.2 Studies on Women's Reservation in India

Several studies conducted at the national level have examined the impact of reservation policies on women's political participation in India. Research indicates that the 73rd Constitutional Amendment significantly increased women's representation in local governance institutions. Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004), in their influential study, observed that women leaders in reserved Panchayats often prioritized issues such as drinking water, healthcare, education, and welfare services. Their findings suggested that women representatives introduced different development priorities compared to male leaders.

Buch (2000) argued that reservation policies created opportunities for rural women to participate in politics for the first time. The study highlighted that women's entry into Panchayati Raj Institutions increased political awareness and encouraged social mobility among marginalized groups. Similarly, Jain (1996) emphasized that reservation enhanced women's visibility in public life and challenged male dominance in rural governance structures.

Several comparative state-level studies have also examined the effectiveness of women's reservation policies across different regions of India. Studies conducted in states such as Rajasthan, Bihar, Karnataka, Kerala, and West Bengal reveal varying levels of success in women's political participation. Kerala and Karnataka are often cited as examples where literacy, political awareness, and institutional support strengthened women's active participation

in local governance. In contrast, studies from northern states, including Haryana and Rajasthan, frequently report the persistence of patriarchal control and proxy representation.

Research by Beaman et al. (2009) found that prolonged exposure to women leaders in reserved constituencies gradually changed public attitudes toward women's leadership abilities. The study concluded that reservation policies not only increased representation but also contributed to reducing gender bias in political participation over time. However, other scholars argue that structural inequalities such as illiteracy, poverty, and social restrictions continue to limit women's effective participation despite constitutional provisions.

Overall, national and comparative studies indicate that reservation policies have succeeded in increasing women's numerical participation, but qualitative empowerment remains uneven across different socio-cultural contexts.

2.3 Literature on Panchayati Raj and Gender Empowerment

The relationship between Panchayati Raj Institutions and gender empowerment has been widely discussed in academic literature. Many scholars consider Panchayati Raj Institutions as platforms for enhancing women's leadership, confidence, and participation in local development activities. Women representatives often engage with issues directly affecting rural communities, including sanitation, health services, education, drinking water, and women's welfare programs.

Studies focusing on decision-making roles suggest that reservation has enabled women to participate in local governance meetings and development planning processes. According to Rai (2011), women leaders in Panchayati Raj Institutions increasingly contribute to discussions on community welfare and local infrastructure development. Participation in governance activities also helps women gain administrative experience and political confidence.

Researchers have also linked political participation with socio-economic

empowerment. Participation in local governance often increases women's public visibility, mobility, and social recognition within rural communities. Some studies indicate that elected women representatives become role models for other women and encourage greater awareness regarding education, legal rights, and gender equality. Political participation can therefore contribute to broader social transformation.

Leadership transformation is another important theme in the literature. Scholars argue that reservation policies have created a new generation of rural women leaders who are gradually challenging traditional gender norms. Exposure to governance processes helps women develop communication skills, administrative knowledge, and leadership capabilities. However, the effectiveness of leadership transformation depends on factors such as education, family support, training opportunities, and institutional assistance.

Despite these positive developments, several studies highlight persistent barriers to women's empowerment in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Proxy leadership remains a major concern in many rural areas as were male relatives exercise authority on behalf of elected women representatives. Lack of financial independence limited political awareness, and patriarchal social attitudes continue to restrict women's autonomy in decision-making processes.

2.4 Studies Related to Haryana

Haryana provides a unique socio-cultural context for studying women's political participation because the state has historically been characterized by strong patriarchal traditions and gender inequality. Several studies focusing on Haryana emphasize that rural women often face restrictions related to mobility, public interaction, and leadership roles. Social institutions such as caste hierarchies and traditional norms significantly influence women's participation in politics.

Research on rural patriarchy in Haryana suggests that women's political participation is often shaped by family control and social expectations. Scholars have observed that many elected women representatives depend on male family members for political

guidance and administrative decisions. The phenomenon of “Sarpanch Pati” is frequently discussed in studies related to Haryana, where husbands or male relatives unofficially exercise authority on behalf of women representatives.

Khap Panchayats and traditional socio-cultural structures also influence women’s participation in public life. Some studies indicate that conservative attitudes toward women’s leadership create obstacles for independent political functioning. Women representatives may face resistance while attending meetings, interacting with officials, or taking independent decisions regarding village development.

At the same time, recent studies show gradual improvements in women’s political awareness and leadership participation in Haryana. Reservation policies have enabled many rural women to contest elections and gain exposure to governance processes. Younger and educated women representatives are increasingly participating actively in Panchayati Raj Institutions and challenging traditional stereotypes regarding women’s capabilities. Although women’s representation has increased significantly, literature related to Haryana indicates that genuine empowerment remains uneven and influenced by socio-economic background, literacy levels, and institutional support systems.

2.5 Identified Research Gap

The review of existing literature reveals several important research gaps. First, while numerous studies examine women’s reservation at the national level, there is limited empirical research focusing specifically on Haryana’s district-level

experiences. Many studies provide statistical analysis of representation but do not adequately explore the practical realities of women’s participation in governance processes.

Second, much of the existing research emphasizes numerical representation rather than qualitative political empowerment. Increasing the number of women representatives does not automatically guarantee effective participation, independent leadership, or decision-making authority. There is a need to examine whether women representatives actively influence governance or remain dependent on male family members and local political networks.

Third, limited studies adopt a mixed-method approach combining quantitative and qualitative analysis. Most studies rely either on statistical data or descriptive observations without integrating both perspectives. A comprehensive understanding of women’s political participation requires analysis of representation patterns as well as personal experiences, leadership challenges, and governance roles.

Finally, there is insufficient focus on post-election participation and governance performance. Many studies examine electoral participation but do not analyze how women function after being elected. Questions regarding administrative involvement, policy influence, leadership confidence, and political autonomy remain underexplored, particularly in Haryana.

Therefore, the present study attempts to fill these gaps by examining both the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of women’s political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana.

TABLE 1: SUMMARY OF MAJOR STUDIES ON WOMEN’S RESERVATION AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Author & Year	Area of Study	Methodology	Major Findings	Research Gap
Chattopadhyay & Duflo (2004)	West Bengal & Rajasthan	Comparative Study	Women leaders focused on welfare issues	Limited focus on long term empowerment
Buch(2000)	India	Descriptive Analysis	Reservation increased women’s visibility in politics	Lack of district-level analysis

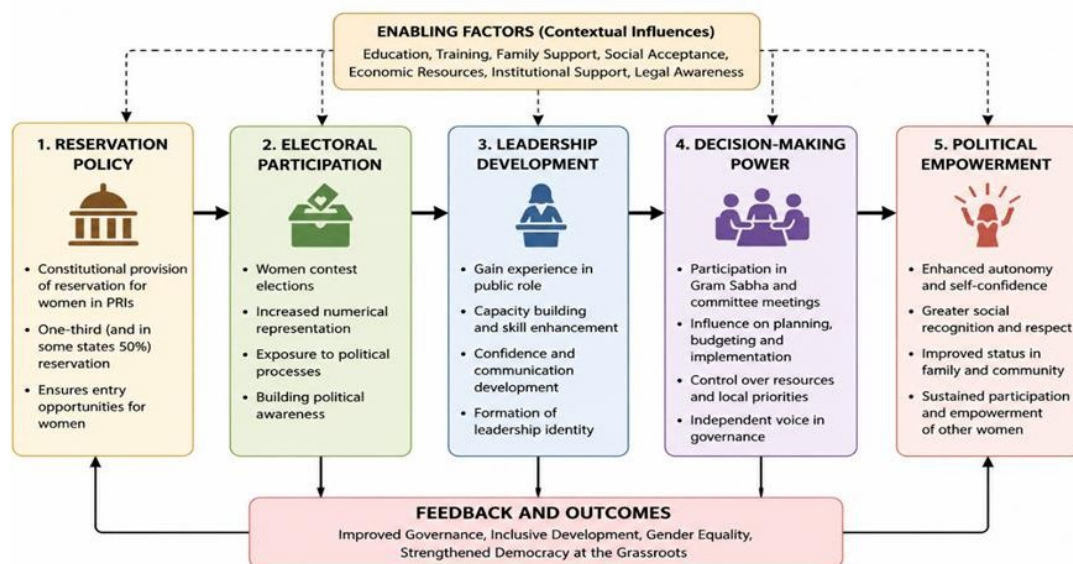
Beamanetal.(2009)	India	Empirical Study	Women’s leadership reduced gender bias over time	Limited rural socio-cultural analysis
Rai(2011)	Rural India	Survey Method	Women participated in local governance activities	Insufficient focus on decision-making autonomy
Sharma(2018)	Haryana	Field Study	Patriarchalinfluence affected women’s independence	Limited mixed-method analysis

Source: Compiled by the Author from reviewed literature.

Interpretation

This table summarizes major scholarly works related to women’s reservation and political participation. It highlights the methodologies adopted, major findings, and existing research gaps. The review indicates

that although reservation has improved numerical representation, issues related to effective participation, autonomy, leadership development, and decision-making authority continue to persist in many rural contexts



Source: Developed by the Author.

FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAME WORK OF WOMEN’S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT THROUGH RESERVATION POLICY

Interpretation

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between reservation policy and women’s political empowerment. It explains how reservation enhances women’s electoral participation, which gradually contributes to leadership development and greater involvement in governance. Increased participation and decision-making authority ultimately promote political empowerment and strengthen inclusive grassroots democracy.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology forms an essential part of any academic study because it provides the framework through which

research objectives are achieved systematically and scientifically. It explains the methods used for data collection, sampling, analysis, and interpretation. The present study examines the impact of reservation policy on women’s political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Haryana. Since the study aims to understand both the numerical representation of women and the qualitative aspects of their political empowerment, a comprehensive methodological approach has been adopted.

The methodology of the study is designed to analyze the role of reservation policy in enhancing women’s participation in local governance, leadership development, and

decision-making processes. The study also seeks to identify the social, political, and institutional challenges faced by elected women representatives in rural Haryana.

3.1 Nature of the Study

The present research is descriptive and analytical in nature. The descriptive aspect of the study focuses on understanding the existing condition of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions after the implementation of reservation policies. It describes the socio-political realities, experiences, and involvement of women representatives in rural governance.

The analytical aspect of the study evaluates the effectiveness of reservation policies in promoting political empowerment among women. It critically examines whether increased representation has resulted in meaningful participation, independent decision-making, and leadership development. The study also analyzes the relationship between reservation and socio-political transformation in rural Haryana.

Thus, the research combines descriptive understanding with analytical interpretation to provide a comprehensive assessment of women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

3.2 Research Design

The study follows a mixed-method research design that combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The use of a mixed-method approach is important because women's political participation cannot be understood only through numerical data. Quantitative analysis helps measure representation levels, electoral participation, and demographic trends, while qualitative analysis helps understand personal experiences, leadership challenges, and decision-making roles. The quantitative component of the study is based on survey data collected from elected women representatives and officials associated with Panchayati Raj Institutions. Statistical methods such as percentages and comparative analysis are used to interpret the findings.

The qualitative component includes interviews and observations that provide deeper insights into women's experiences in

governance. It helps in understanding issues such as patriarchal influence, proxy leadership, social barriers, confidence-building, and political awareness. The mixed-method design therefore ensures a balanced and comprehensive analysis of the research problem.

3.3 Area of the Study

The study is conducted in the state of Haryana, which provides an important socio-cultural context for examining women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Haryana is traditionally known for patriarchal social structures, gender discrimination, and male-dominated decision-making systems. Despite these challenges, reservation policies have significantly increased women's representation in local governance institutions across the state.

For the purpose of the study, selected districts and villages of Haryana are considered. The selection of rural areas allows the researcher to examine grassroots-level participation and understand the practical realities faced by elected women representatives. The study includes women representatives from Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis, and Zila Parishads in order to obtain a broader understanding of political participation at different levels of rural governance.

The choice of Haryana as the study area is significant because it reflects the interaction between constitutional empowerment measures and traditional social norms. The study therefore attempts to examine whether reservation has brought substantial changes in women's political status within a socially conservative rural environment.

3.4 Sources of Data

The study is based on both primary and secondary sources of data. The use of multiple sources helps improve the reliability, validity, and authenticity of the research findings.

Primary Data

Primary data is collected directly from respondents through field work conducted in selected areas of Haryana. The primary sources include:

- Interviews with elected women representatives such as women Sarpanch and Panchmembers.
- Structured questionnaires administered to respondents.
- Field surveys conducted in selected villages.
- Informal discussions with Panchayat officials and local community members.

Primary data provides first-hand information regarding women’s participation, leadership experiences, decision-making roles, and challenges faced in local governance.

Secondary Data

Secondary data is collected from various published and official sources, including:

- Government reports related to Panchayati Raj Institutions.
- Census reports and socio-economic data.
- Haryana State Election Commission records.
- Ministry of Panchayati Raj publications.
- Research journals, books, dissertations, and academic articles.
- Reports published by NGOs and policy

institutions.

Secondary data helps in understanding the broader context of women’s reservation policies and provides supporting evidence for analysis and interpretation.

3.5 Sampling Technique

The study adopts a stratified and random sampling technique for selecting respondents. Stratified sampling is used to ensure representation from different categories of respondents associated with Panchayati Raj Institutions. Women representatives are categorized into groups such as women Sarpanch, Panch members, and officials.

Within each category, respondents are selected randomly to reduce bias and ensure fair representation. The use of stratified random sampling improves the reliability of the data and helps capture diverse perspectives regarding political participation and governance experiences. The study includes a selected sample of respondents from different villages and districts of Haryana. The sample size is determined according to the scope and feasibility of the research.

TABLE2:DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLERESPONDENTS

Category	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Women Sarpanch	40	40%
Women Panch Members	50	50%
Officials	10	10%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Survey conducted by the Author.

Interpretation

The table presents the distribution of respondents selected for the study. It includes selected women representatives and administrative officials associated with Panchayati Raj Institutions. The diversified sample composition helps ensure balanced representation and enhances the reliability of findings related to women’s political participation, governance experiences, and decision-making processes.

3.6 Tools of Data Collection

The present study uses multiple tools for collecting data in order to ensure comprehensive analysis and accurate

interpretation.

Structured Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire is used to collect quantitative information from respondents. The questionnaire includes close-ended and multiple-choice questions related to political participation, election experience, decision-making involvement, leadership roles, and challenges faced by women representatives.

Interview Schedule

An interview schedule is used for collecting qualitative data through personal interactions with respondents. Interviews help the researcher understand respondents’

experiences, perceptions, and opinions regarding reservation policies and governance participation. This method also provides deeper insights into social barriers, family influence, and leadership development. The combination of questionnaires and interviews helps generate both measurable data and descriptive insights, thereby improving the quality of the study.

3.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data is analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative techniques.

Percentage Analysis

Percentage analysis is used to present numerical data related to respondents’ demographic characteristics, participation levels, and perceptions regarding reservation policy. This method helps simplify statistical interpretation and

comparison.

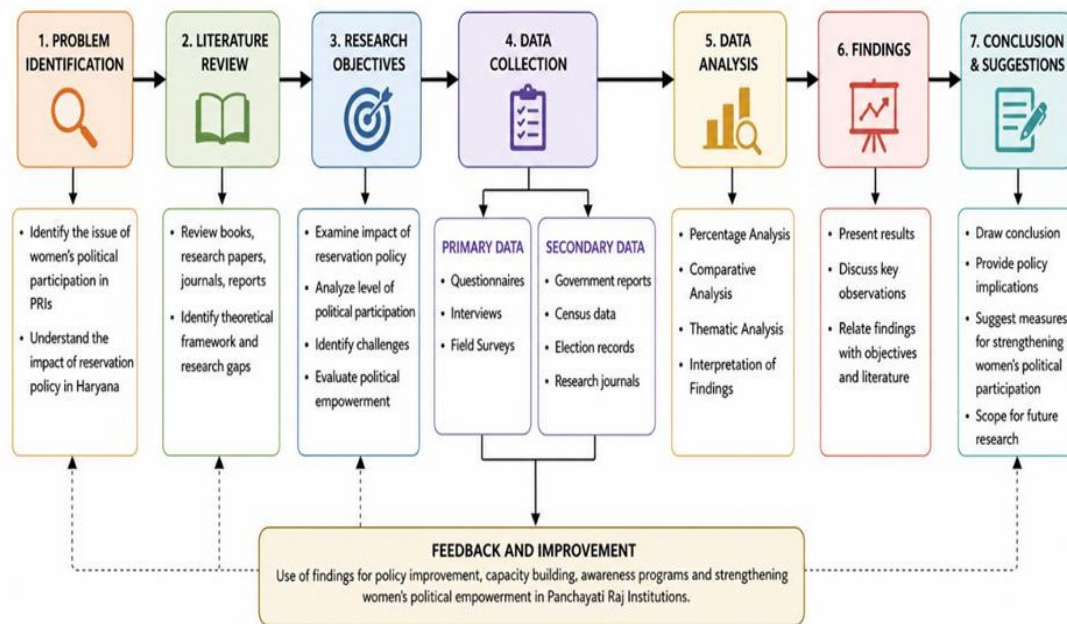
Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis is used to compare different categories of respondents and identify variations in political participation and governance experiences. It also helps analyze differences between representation and actual empowerment.

Thematic Analysis

Qualitative responses collected through interviews are analyzed using the thematic analysis. Common themes such as leadership challenges, proxy representation, social restrictions, confidence-building, and political awareness are identified and interpreted systematically.

The use of multiple analytical methods ensures that the findings remain comprehensive, balanced, and academically reliable.



Source: Prepared by the Author.

FIGURE2: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FLOW CHART

Interpretation

The figure outlines the systematic process adopted for conducting the research. It demonstrates how the study progressed from identifying the research problem to drawing conclusions. The flow chart reflects the logical academic structure followed to ensure validity, reliability, objectivity, and coherence throughout the entire research process.

3.8 Limitations of the Study

Every research study has certain limitations, and the present study is no exception. One of the major limitations is time constraint, which restricted extensive fieldwork across all districts of Haryana. Due to limited resources and time availability, the study focuses only on selected districts and villages. Another limitation is limited geographical coverage. Since the study does not include all regions of Haryana, the findings may not fully represent the

experiences of all women representatives across the state.

Response bias is also a possible limitation. Some respondents may hesitate to provide complete or independent opinions due to social pressure, political influence, or family control. In rural areas, women representatives may sometimes avoid openly discussing issues related to proxy leadership or patriarchal interference. Despite these limitations, efforts have been made to ensure the reliability and authenticity of the study through systematic data collection, balanced sampling, and careful analysis. The methodology adopted in the study provides a strong framework for understanding the impact of reservation policy on women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana.

4. Results and Discussion

The results and discussion section forms the core of the study because it presents the findings obtained from field surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis related to women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Haryana. The purpose of this section is to examine whether reservation policies have enhanced women's participation in grassroots governance and contributed to their political empowerment. The analysis also highlights the challenges faced by elected women representatives and evaluates the extent to which reservation has resulted in effective decision-making and leadership development.

The findings indicate that reservation policies have significantly increased women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana. Women from different socio-economic and educational backgrounds are now participating in local governance processes. However, the study also reveals that numerical representation does not always guarantee substantive participation, as many women continue to face social, cultural, and institutional barriers.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The demographic profile of respondents provides an understanding of the social and educational background of women

representatives participating in Panchayati Raj Institutions. The respondents included women Sarpanch, Panch members, and officials associated with rural local governance in selected districts of Haryana.

Age Distribution

The study found that a majority of women representatives belonged to the middle-age group between 30 and 50 years. Women in this age category were considered socially active and capable of balancing family responsibilities with governance roles. Younger women representatives were relatively fewer in number, mainly due to limited political exposure and social restrictions. Elderly women participated less actively because of educational limitations and dependence on family support.

The age composition suggests that political reservation has encouraged women from different generations to enter local governance, although middle-aged women remain the dominant participants in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

Educational Background

Education emerged as an important factor influencing women's political participation and decision-making capacity. The study observed that women representatives with higher educational qualifications were generally more confident, independent, and active in governance activities. Educated women were better able to understand government schemes, administrative procedures, and financial management responsibilities.

At the same time, a significant number of women representatives had only primary or secondary education. Limited literacy often reduced their confidence in interacting with officials and participating independently in meetings. In some cases, lack of education increased dependence on male family members for administrative and procedural matters.

Occupational Background

Most respondents were primarily engaged in agriculture, household responsibilities, or small-scale rural occupations before entering politics. A smaller number of

respondents were associated with teaching, self-help groups, or local businesses. The occupational background influenced women's exposure to public life and governance activities.

Women who had previous involvement in social work or community organizations appeared more confident in leadership roles compared to those with limited public interaction.

Social Category

The respondents belonged to different caste and social categories, including Scheduled Castes, Other Backward Classes, and General categories. Reservation policies enabled women from marginalized communities to participate in governance institutions and gain political representation. The inclusion of women from diverse social backgrounds indicates that reservation policies have contributed to greater inclusiveness in grassroots democracy. However, social hierarchies and caste-based inequalities continue to influence political participation in rural areas.

4.2 Impact of Reservation on Political Representation

One of the most significant impacts of reservation policy has been the substantial increase in women's representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Before the implementation of reservation provisions, women's participation in rural politics was extremely limited. Most political positions at the village level were dominated by men, and women rarely contested elections.

The study found that reservation policies created opportunities for women to enter electoral politics and occupy leadership positions. Many respondents stated that they would not have contested elections without reservation provisions. Reservation therefore act edasan

entry point for women into public and political life.

Increase in Women Contestants

The field survey indicated that reservation encouraged women from different educational and economic backgrounds to contest Panchayat elections. Women who had previously remained confined to domestic roles became involved in political campaigns, public meetings, and local governance activities.

The increase in women contestants also contributed to greater awareness regarding women's rights and political participation within rural communities. In many villages, women voters showed increased interest in supporting female candidates because they believed women leaders were more sensitive toward social welfare issues.

Electoral Success Trends

The study observed that women candidates achieved considerable electoral success in reserved constituencies. Reservation ensured representation not only in Gram Panchayats but also in Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. Many respondents reported that women leaders gained community support because of their focus on local welfare issues such as sanitation, healthcare, drinking water, and education.

However, the study also revealed that electoral success was often influenced by family background, caste support, and political connections. In several cases, women candidates were encouraged by male family members to contest elections mainly to retain political influence within the family. Despite these limitations, the findings suggest that reservation has significantly transformed the gender composition of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana.

TABLE3:PERCEIVED IMPACT OF RESERVATIONON WOMEN’S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage
Highly Positive	48	48%
Moderately Positive	32	32%
Neutral	12	12%
Negative	8	8%
Total	100	100%

Source:Primary Survey Data.

4.3 Participation in Decision-Making

The effectiveness of political participation depends not only on representation but also on women’s involvement in governance and decision-making processes. The study therefore examined the extent to which women representatives actively participated in Panchayat meetings, policy discussions, and development planning.

Attendance in Meetings

The findings revealed that most women representatives regularly attended Gram Sabha meetings and Panchayat sessions. Participation in meetings increased women’s exposure to governance processes and administrative discussions. Women representatives became more aware of local development issues and government welfare schemes through regular attendance.

However, mere attendance did not always guarantee active participation. Some respondents stated that they attended meetings but rarely expressed opinions due to lack of confidence or fear of social criticism.

Policy Influence

A significant number of respondents reported that they participated in discussions related to sanitation, education, healthcare, water supply, and women’s welfare programs. Women leaders often prioritized community welfare issues directly affecting rural households.

In some villages, women representatives successfully influenced decisions related to school infrastructure, cleanliness drives, and health awareness programs. This indicates that reservation policies have created

opportunities for women to contribute to local development planning.

At the same time, several respondents admitted that major decisions were often influenced by male members or dominant political groups within the Panchayat.

Financial Decision-Making

Financial management emerged as one of the most challenging areas for women representatives. Many respondents lacked technical knowledge regarding budgeting, allocation of funds, and administrative procedures. In such situations, women frequently depended on Panchayat secretaries or male family members for financial matters.

Nevertheless, educated and experienced women representatives demonstrated greater independence in handling financial decisions. Training programs and administrative support were found to improve women’s confidence in financial governance.

4.4 Challenges Faced by Women Representatives

Although reservation policies increased women’s representation, the study identified several challenges affecting effective political participation.

Patriarchal Interference

Patriarchal social structures remain one of the biggest obstacles to women’s empowerment in Haryana. Many women representatives faced resistance from male family members and community leaders regarding their political activities. Traditional gender norms often restricted

women’s mobility, public interaction, and independent decision-making. Respondents reported that women leaders were sometimes expected to prioritize household responsibilities over governance duties, which limited their political engagement.

Proxy Leadership (“SarpanchPati” Phenomenon)

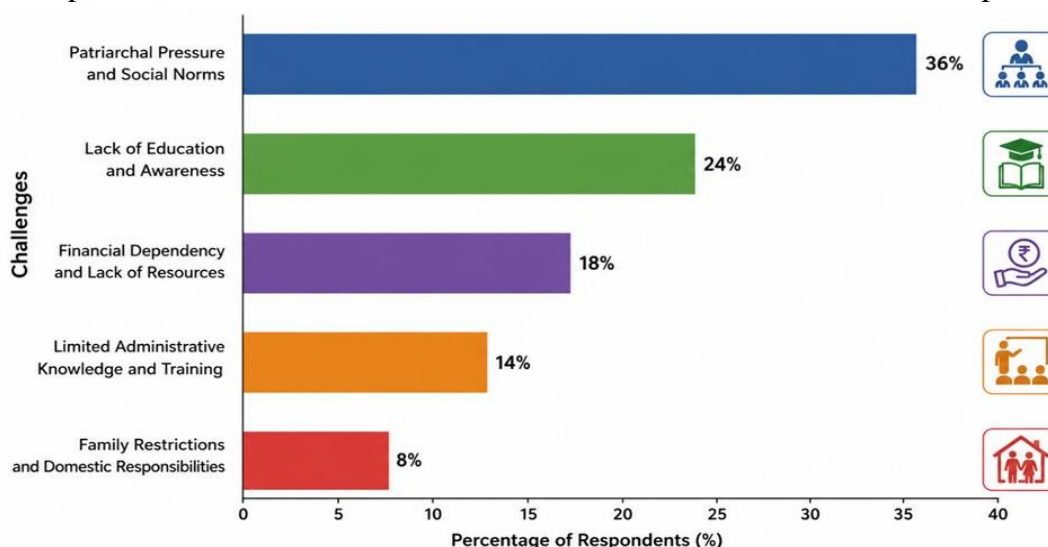
The phenomenon of “Sarpanch Pati” was widely observed in the study area. In many cases, husbands or male relatives unofficially exercised authority on behalf of elected women representatives. Male family members attended meetings, interacted with officials, and influenced administrative decisions.

This practice weakened the objective of political empowerment because women

remained dependent on male guidance despite holding official positions. Proxy leadership reflects the continuing influence of patriarchal attitudes in rural governance structures.

Lack of Education and Training

Limited educational qualifications and lack of administrative training also affected women’s participation. Many respondents reported difficulties in understanding official procedures, government documents, and financial regulations. Training programs related to governance, leadership, and financial management were found to be insufficient in many rural areas. Respondents expressed the need for regular capacity-building workshops to strengthen their administrative and leadership abilities.



Source: Field Survey Data.

FIGURE3: MAJOR CHALLENGES FACED BY WOMEN REPRESENTATIVES IN HARYANAPRIS

Interpretation

The figure highlights the primary challenges experienced by elected women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Patriarchal pressure and lack of administrative knowledge emerged as major barriers affecting effective participation. The graphical representation demonstrates that despite constitutional reservation, social restrictions and institutional limitations continue to influence women’s leadership and governance roles.

4.5 Reservation and Political Empowerment

The study found that reservation policies contributed positively toward women’s political empowerment in several ways.

Confidence Building

Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions increased women’s confidence and public visibility. Women representatives who initially hesitated to speak in meetings gradually developed communication skills and self-confidence through governance experience. Many respondents stated that political participation improved their ability to interact with officials, address community issues, and express opinions publicly.

Leadership Skills

Reservation policies created opportunities for leadership development among rural women. Exposure to governance activities helped women gain administrative

experience and organizational skills. Women leaders increasingly participated in village development programs and community mobilization activities. Some respondents also reported that political participation encouraged other women in their communities to become more aware of their rights and social responsibilities.

Social Status Improvement

Political representation contributed to improvement in women's social status within families and communities. Women representatives gained greater recognition, respect, and influence in local society. Their involvement in public affairs challenged traditional stereo types regarding women's capabilities and leadership potential. However, the extent of empowerment varied according to education, family support, economic condition, and social background.

4.6 Comparative Analysis Before and After Reservation

The comparative analysis clearly indicates that women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions increased significantly after the implementation of reservation policies. Before reservation, women rarely contested elections or participated in governance activities. After reservation, women became visible participants in local governance and occupied leadership positions across rural Haryana. Reservation also contributed to increased awareness regarding women's political rights and democratic participation.

Reserved vs Non-Reserved Participation Patterns

The study found that women representatives in reserved constituencies participated more actively in governance compared to women in non-reserved areas where political opportunities remained limited. Reserved seats created institutional support for women's representation and encouraged political inclusion. However, differences in participation levels were also influenced by factors such as education, social support, political awareness, and access to training. Women from educated and economically stable backgrounds generally demonstrated greater independence and effectiveness in governance roles.

Overall, the findings of the study suggest that reservation policies have played an important role in increasing women's

representation and participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana. At the same time, challenges such as patriarchal control, proxy leadership, limited education, and inadequate administrative support continue to restrict the achievement of genuine political empowerment.

5. Discussion

The findings of the present study indicate that the reservation policy introduced through the Panchayati Raj system has played a significant role in increasing women's political participation in Haryana. The study reveals that reservation has successfully enhanced women's numerical representation in local governance institutions and created opportunities for rural women to participate in electoral politics and decision-making processes. These findings are consistent with earlier studies which argue that reservation policies have strengthened grassroots democracy and promoted gender inclusion in governance.

At the same time, the study highlights that increased representation does not always ensure genuine political empowerment. Many women representatives continue to face challenges such as patriarchal interference, proxy leadership, financial dependency, and lack of administrative knowledge. The persistence of the "Sarpanch Pati" phenomenon demonstrates that traditional gender norms continue to influence women's autonomy in political institutions. The study further suggests that education, leadership training, and institutional support significantly affect the effectiveness of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. Women representatives with better educational backgrounds and social support were found to participate more actively in governance activities and decision-making processes.

Overall, the findings suggest that reservation policy has created an important foundation for women's political empowerment in Haryana, but long-term social transformation and capacity-building initiatives remain essential for achieving substantive and independent participation in grassroots governance.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

The study concludes that the reservation policy in Panchayati Raj Institutions has

significantly improved women's political representation and participation in Haryana. Reservation has enabled rural women to enter local governance, develop leadership skills, and contribute to community development activities. Women representatives have increasingly participated in issues related to education, sanitation, healthcare, and welfare programs, thereby strengthening grassroots democracy.

However, the study also reveals that genuine political empowerment remains affected by patriarchal social structures, proxy leadership, lack of education, and limited administrative training. In many cases, women representatives continue to depend on male family members for decision-making and governance-related activities.

To ensure effective political empowerment, the government should organize regular leadership and administrative training programs for elected women representatives. Awareness campaigns promoting gender equality and independent participation should also be strengthened. Financial literacy, legal awareness, and institutional support mechanisms are essential for improving women's confidence and decision-making capacity. Such measures can help transform political representation into meaningful empowerment and inclusive rural governance.

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