

Participation of Women Representatives in PRI's of Haryana - A Sociological Study

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Abstract

The paper examines the participation of women representatives in PRI's in Haryana with a particular emphasis on grassroots leadership and gender dynamics. This study was framed around 2020 policy decision by Haryana government, which introduced 50 per cent reservation for women in local governance. Employing a survey-based methodology, the research assesses how increased political representatives of women has influenced women's involvement in political activities, social activities and developmental and decision-making activities. The findings revealed that more than half of the respondents had medium level of participation (53.33%) based on the activities followed by low level (25.00%) and high level of participation (21.67%). These results provide insights into the evolving patterns of women's engagement in PRI's and highlight the ongoing social and institutional factors affecting their leadership roles - underlining the importance of targeted policy interventions for strengthening gender equity in rural governance.

Key words: Participation, Grassroot leadership, Gender dynamics, Local governance

The involvement of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) represents a landmark step toward achieving gender equality and inclusive governance at the grassroots level in India. Historically, before the implementation of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, women's participation in local self-governance was negligible, primarily due to socio-cultural constraints, patriarchal norms, and limited access to political spaces. Prior to 1985, women's presence in PRIs was largely symbolic, with only a few holding positions through co-option or nomination, rather than being democratically elected, which curtailed their influence and autonomy in governance. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of April 23, 1993, transformed this scenario by institutionalizing gender representation through the reservation of one-third of all seats in Panchayati Raj bodies for women, including positions of chairpersons [1]. This historic reform not only ensured women's entry into the political domain but also provided them a legitimate platform to voice their concerns, influence decisions, and participate meaningfully in developmental processes. Over time, this policy intervention has redefined rural governance by fostering women's leadership, enhancing their confidence, and promoting social change. The Act, therefore, stands as a powerful instrument for women's political empowerment, aiming not just at representation but at active and autonomous participation in shaping local development agendas and community welfare initiatives [2]. This amendment represents

a historic milestone in the journey of women's empowerment, as it opened the door for their active involvement in grassroots-level decision-making. It gives women the opportunity to speak up and women in large number participate in administrative and political fields. A large number of women now actively compete with men in local politics, reflecting a remarkable shift in India's democratic landscape and signaling progress toward gender equity in governance [3]. This growing participation demonstrates that women are no longer passive beneficiaries of reservation policies but have evolved into confident leaders who assert their presence in political processes [4]. By contesting elections on equal footing with men, women challenge long-standing gender stereotypes, social hierarchies, and patriarchal barriers that traditionally confined them to domestic roles. Their entry into the political arena not only diversifies leadership but also brings fresh perspectives centered on inclusivity, social justice, and community welfare. Advancing gender-related agendas such as improving women's health, education, sanitation, livelihood opportunities, and protection against discrimination further strengthens the foundation of equitable development [5]. This increased representation ensures that governance structures reflect the needs and aspirations of all sections of society, not just the male-dominated elite. Hence, women's active competition and policy advocacy in local politics represent a transformative step toward achieving gender equity, deepening democratic

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participation, and promoting social empowerment at the grassroots level [6].

Women's empowerment serves as a powerful catalyst that enables their active engagement and influence in all stages of governance decision-making, planning, execution, and evaluation by securing their rightful inclusion within the political framework. True empowerment transcends mere representation; it ensures that women possess the confidence, knowledge, and authority to contribute effectively to the political and developmental agenda of their communities. Political participation, therefore, becomes a multidimensional process that goes beyond the fundamental rights of voting and contesting elections to include vital activities such as campaigning, joining political parties, engaging in voluntary and civic organizations, and holding leadership positions at local, regional, and national levels. Through such dynamic participation, women gain firsthand experience in governance and policy formulation, allowing them to influence priorities, address gender-sensitive issues, and advocate for equitable resource distribution [7-8]. This active involvement transforms them from passive voters into decisive change-makers who contribute to shaping policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of women and marginalized groups. Ultimately, the political empowerment derived from such participation not only strengthens democratic institutions but also fosters a more inclusive and responsive governance system where women's voices are heard, respected, and translated into tangible societal progress.

Keeping this in view, the Government of Haryana has taken a progressive step by providing 50 percent reservation to women in Panchayati Raj Institutions, thereby strengthening their role in grassroots democracy. The specific objectives of the present investigation are as under:

1. To examine the participation of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions.
2. To know the level of participation of women representatives.
3. To delineate the socio-economic factors affecting the level of participation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out in Haryana state during the year 2024-25 to assess the relationship between socio-economic factors and knowledge levels among local governance representatives. A multistage random sampling technique was employed to ensure a representative sample. Initially, two districts—Sirsa and Hisar—were randomly selected from the state. From these districts, two blocks each were chosen at random, namely Rania and Ellenabad from Sirsa district, and Hisar-II and Adampur from Hisar district. Subsequently, a few villages were selected from each identified block. From each block, 30 respondents were purposively selected, resulting in a total sample size of 120 respondents. The respondents comprised elected representatives such as Panches, Sarpanches, Panchayat Samiti members, and Zila Parishad members. Primary data were collected through personal interviews using a well-structured interview schedule. The collected data were carefully coded, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted to derive meaningful conclusions. Descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, were employed to present the profile and responses of the participants. To determine the association between socio-economic variables and the respondents' knowledge levels, the chi-square test was applied, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of the relationships among the studied parameters.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Political activities

Slightly less than two-fifth of the respondents (39.17%) participated in door-to-door campaign most of time. More than one-fourth of the respondents (27.50%) participated in circulate pamphlet and posters during election most of time. According to Rai [9] women have been increasingly active in election campaign activities. Rarely attended political parties meeting was reported by 35.00 per cent of the respondents while less than one-tenth of the respondents (8.33%) always attended political parties meeting.

Social activities

Supervision of formal and informal education was always reported by 35 per cent of the respondents. Participation in women's and children's welfare programmes most of time was reported by 40 per cent of the respondents. Nearly half of the respondents (45.00%) participation in monitoring of village sanitation most of time while one-fifth (20.00%) always participate.

Developmental and decision-making activities

Most of time, implementation of rural employment scheme like MGNREGA was carried out by 40 per cent of the respondents. More than one-third of the respondents (38.33%) sometimes participating in decisions related to fund allocation while less than one-tenth of the respondents (8.33%) always participated. One-third of the respondents (33.34%) presided over a panchayat meeting or committee discussion most of time [10].

The data in (Table 1) highlights the multifaceted participation of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) across three major domains political, social, and developmental activities revealing varying levels of involvement and empowerment. In the political sphere, women actively participated in door-to-door campaigns (39.17% most of the time) and distributing pamphlets and posters (27.5%), while relatively fewer engaged consistently in attending political meetings (only 8.33% always). This suggests that while women are gradually entering political mobilization roles, cultural and structural constraints still limit their deeper involvement in formal political discussions. In terms of social activities, participation was more pronounced, with a majority of respondents frequently organizing women's self-help groups (50.83% most of the time) and supervising educational and welfare initiatives such as Anganwadi centers (35% always). Their strong engagement in sanitation monitoring (45%) and welfare programs indicates that women prioritize community well-being and social upliftment, reflecting their inclination toward inclusive, grassroots development. In the developmental and decision-making domain, participation was moderate; women were most involved in implementing schemes like MGNREGA (40%) and identifying beneficiaries (45%), but comparatively fewer took direct decisions on fund allocation (only 8.33% always) or presided over Panchayat meetings (5.83% always). This pattern underscores that while women are increasingly visible in operational roles, decision-making authority often remains constrained by patriarchal norms and institutional hierarchies. Overall, the findings illustrate a transitional phase of empowerment, where women representatives are becoming proactive agents of change in social and developmental domains but still face barriers to equal participation in political leadership and governance decision-making. Adhikari [11] reported that women attended meeting most of time. And involvement of women in Panchayat

activities provide them with greater independence and access to diverse development opportunities. Maji [12] reported women play an active role in the decision-making process, with the

majority regularly attending Panchayat meetings. Begum [13] found the high participation in meeting of Panchayat, low participation in decision making activities.

Table 1 Participation of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions PRI's

Components and their statements	Always	Most of time	Sometime	Rarely	Never
Political activities					
Door to door campaign	25(20.84)	47(39.17)	11(9.16)	15(12.50)	22(18.33)
Circulated pamphlet and posters during election	24(20.00)	33(27.50)	30(25.00)	17(14.15)	14(11.65)
Engage in convincing people during election	20(16.67)	34(28.33)	28(23.33)	18(15.00)	20(16.67)
Participation in public meetings	15(12.50)	27(22.50)	33(27.50)	29(24.17)	16(13.33)
Attended political parties meeting.	10(8.33)	16(13.33)	32(26.67)	42(35.00)	20(16.67)
Social activities					
Organize women's self-help groups in village	28(23.33)	61(50.83)	17(14.17)	9(7.50)	5(4.17)
Supervision of formal and informal education (Anganwadi centres, infrastructure of local school)	42(35.00)	33(27.50)	23(19.16)	11(9.17)	11(9.17)
Participation in women's and children's welfare programmes	21(17.50)	48(40.00)	29(24.17)	13(10.83)	9(7.50)
Monitoring of village sanitation activities	24(20.00)	54(45.00)	17(14.17)	12(10.00)	13(10.83)
Participation in solving social conflicts	20(16.67)	37(30.83)	34(28.33)	14(11.67)	15(12.50)
Development and decision-making activities					
Implementation of rural employment scheme like MGNREGA	17(14.16)	48(40.00)	27(22.50)	14(11.67)	14(11.67)
Identify the beneficiaries for government development schemes	8(6.67)	54(45.00)	20(16.67)	25(20.83)	13(10.83)
Take decision for allocating the funds	10(8.33)	29(24.17)	46(38.33)	20(16.67)	15(12.50)
Improve street lighting and women friendly public spaces	25(20.84)	30(25.00)	34(28.34)	17(14.16)	14(11.66)
Preside over a Panchayat meeting or committee discussion	7(5.83)	40(33.34)	34(28.34)	20(16.66)	19(15.83)

Level of participation

Data depicted in (Table 2) illustrated that more than half of the respondents (53.33%) exhibited a medium level of participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions PRI's affairs. It suggests that most women representatives are regularly involved in activities such as organizing women's self-help

groups, supervision of education, implementation of schemes and contributing to the welfare of women and child but not yet fully empowered to lead or dominate activities [14]. Only 21.67 per cent fall under high participation, consistently engaging and leading across most activities while 25.00 per cent are still in the low participation [15].

Table 2 Level of participation of the respondents

Level of participation	Frequency	Percentage
Low (15-34)	30	25.00
Medium (35-55)	64	53.33
High (56-75)	26	21.67
Total	120	100.00

Association between socio-economic variables and participation of the respondents of Panchayati Raj Institution

The data in (Table 3) revealed that age, education, landholding, annual income, social participation, mass media exposure and socio-economic status were significantly associated with participation. Notably better education, more exposure to mass media, government schemes and NGO's and higher income and social status exhibited more participation. Whereas caste, marital status, family type, family size, occupation and were not significantly associated with participation. Begum [13] reported that there is significant association between age, education and occupation with participation of respondents.

A significant association between several socio-economic variables and the level of participation of respondents in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), emphasizing that personal and social characteristics strongly shape civic engagement at the grassroots level. Participation was found to be significantly influenced by age, caste, education, annual income, social participation, mass media exposure, and socio-economic status, while marital status, family type, family size, and occupation showed no significant impact. Younger respondents (21-30 years) exhibited higher levels of active participation (32.08%

high) compared to older groups, suggesting greater enthusiasm and awareness among the youth. Likewise, respondents from backward and scheduled castes demonstrated relatively higher engagement than those from the general category, indicating the inclusiveness of PRIs in empowering marginalized sections through reservation and representation policies. Educational attainment emerged as a decisive factor those with higher education (graduation and above) recorded the highest proportion of high participation (42.11%), confirming that awareness, literacy, and understanding of institutional processes foster greater involvement. Similarly, respondents with higher income and socio-economic status participated more actively, as financial stability enhances confidence and access to information. The role of social participation was particularly striking; members of more than one organization displayed an overwhelming 62.50% high participation, demonstrating that community involvement and leadership networks significantly strengthen engagement in governance. Additionally, high mass media exposure correlated with greater participation, underscoring the influence of information and communication in promoting political awareness [16]. In contrast, family type, size, and occupation had limited influence, suggesting that individual empowerment and

awareness weigh more heavily than household characteristics. Overall, the findings affirm that socio-economic empowerment driven by education, income, and social capital plays a pivotal

role in enabling individuals to meaningfully participate in local self-governance, thereby reinforcing the democratic ethos of Panchayati Raj Institutions [17-20].

Table 3 Association between socio economic variables and participation of the respondents of Panchayati Raj Institution

Socio-economic variables	Participation			
	Low	Medium	High	Total
Age				
21-30	8(15.09)	28(52.83)	17(32.08)	53(44.17)
30+ - 40	14(29.17)	27(56.25)	7(14.58)	48(40.00)
Above 40	8(42.11)	9(47.37)	2(10.53)	19(15.83)
Total	30(25.00)	64(53.33)	26(21.67)	120(100.00)
$\chi^2=9.693^*$				
Caste				
General	15(34.88)	20(46.52)	8(18.60)	43(35.83)
Backward class	9(20.93)	24(55.81)	10(23.26)	43(35.83)
Schedule caste	6(17.65)	20(58.82)	8(23.53)	34(28.34)
$\chi^2=9.693^*$				
Marital status				
Unmarried	0(00.00)	0(00.00)	1(100.00)	1(0.83)
Married	30(25.42)	63(53.39)	25(21.19)	118(98.34)
Widow	0(00.00)	1(100.00)	0(00.00)	1(0.83)
$\chi^2=4.511$				
Education				
Primary	3(42.86)	3(42.86)	1(14.29)	7(5.83)
Middle	11(52.38)	8(38.10)	2(9.52)	21(17.50)
High School	7(14.29)	33(67.35)	9(18.37)	49(40.84)
Senior Secondary	5(20.83)	13(54.17)	6(25.00)	24(20.00)
Graduation and above	4(21.05)	7(36.84)	8(42.11)	19(15.83)
$\chi^2=19.19^*$				
Family type				
Nuclear	10(18.18)	31(56.36)	14(25.45)	55(45.83)
Joint	20(30.77)	33(50.77)	12(18.46)	65(54.17)
$\chi^2=2.73$				
Family size				
Small (up to 4 members)	15(31.91)	25(53.19)	7(14.89)	47(39.17)
Medium (5-8 members)	10(19.23)	30(57.69)	12(23.08)	52(43.33)
Large (above 8 members)	5(23.81)	9(42.86)	7(33.33)	21(17.50)
$\chi^2=4.58$				
Occupation				
Service	1(25.00)	2(50.00)	1(25.00)	4(3.33)
Farming	5(26.32)	9(47.36)	5(26.32)	19(15.83)
Housewife	24(24.74)	53(54.64)	20(20.62)	97(80.44)
$\chi^2=0.44$				
Annual income				
Up to 1,00,000	13(27.08)	27(56.25)	8(16.67)	48(40.00)
1,00,001 – 3,00,000 /-	14(33.33)	22(52.38)	6(14.29)	42(35.00)
Above 3,00,000 /-	3(10.00)	15(50.00)	12(40.00)	30(25.00)
$\chi^2=10.36^*$				
Social participation				
Nil	25(35.71)	39(55.72)	6(8.57)	70(58.34)
Member of one organization	4(11.76)	20(58.82)	10(29.41)	34(28.33)
Member of more than one organization	1(6.25)	5(31.25)	10(62.50)	16(13.33)
$\chi^2=28.37^{**}$				
Mass media exposure				
Low (5-8)	15(41.67)	15(41.67)	6(16.67)	36(30.00)
Medium (9-12)	13(26.00)	28(56.00)	9(18.00)	50(41.67)
High (13-15)	2(5.88)	21(61.76)	11(32.35)	34(28.33)
$\chi^2=12.94^*$				
Socio-economic status				
Low (5-8)	10(40.00)	10(40.00)	5(20.00)	25(20.83)
Medium (9-12)	16(24.61)	40(61.54)	9(13.85)	65(54.17)
High (13-16)	4(13.33)	14(46.67)	12(40.00)	30(25.00)
$\chi^2=12.31^*$				

Figures in the parentheses denote percentage

*Significant at 0.05 level; **Significant at 0.01 level

CONCLUSION

The overall findings of the study highlight that women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions are actively participating in diverse political, social, and developmental activities, though the depth and nature of their involvement vary across domains. Women demonstrated stronger engagement in social and community-oriented activities, such as organizing self-help groups, supervising education, promoting sanitation, and implementing welfare schemes, reflecting their commitment to social welfare and inclusive development. Their participation in political and decision-making processes, while improving, remains relatively limited, especially in attending party meetings and making key financial or policy decisions, indicating persisting structural and gender-based barriers. The analysis of socio-economic factors revealed that education, income, social participation, mass media exposure, and overall

socio-economic status significantly influence women's level of participation, whereas family type, size, and occupation were not determining factors. Younger, better-educated, and economically stable women were found to be more proactive and confident in PRI functions, supported by exposure to information and community networks. These results affirm that women's empowerment in local governance is in a transitional phase they are evolving from passive participants to influential contributors in grassroots democracy. To further enhance their role, continuous capacity building, awareness programs, leadership training, and institutional support are essential to overcome socio-cultural constraints and ensure equitable participation in decision-making. Strengthening these aspects will not only consolidate women's political empowerment but also reinforce the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the Panchayati Raj system as a vehicle for sustainable rural development.

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