

The Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Rural Women's Political Participation and Leadership Development

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Abstract

The decentralisation of power with the introduction of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) through the formal process of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 is one of the most important experiments in participatory democracy in independent India. One third reservation of seats and offices for women is the main feature of this experiment, which was later increased to fifty per cent of the seats and offices by the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 2020, and earlier the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994. This paper discusses the level of reservation and its manifestation in terms of substantive political participation and leadership development in the case of rural women of Haryana state. The paper is based on secondary literature, government data and illustrative field-based statistics brought together from published studies to examine the legal and institutional landscape of PRIs in the state, patterns of women's representation in various tiers of government, and socio-cultural, economic and administrative barriers, particularly the "Sarpanch Pati" or proxy leadership, limiting women's autonomous political voice within the PRIs. The authors conclude that the presence of women on these three boards has significantly increased and is approaching or surpassing the 50 percent mark in some districts, but old patriarchal norms, low literacy, narrow eligibility criteria and limited financial independence constrain the extent of women's leadership. The study ends with policy suggestions prioritizing capacity building, financial literacy, legal measures against proxy representation, and ongoing civic education, framing Haryana's experience as a cautionary tale for other efforts to achieve gender-equality in local governance in India.

Keywords:

Panchayati Raj Institutions, Women's Reservation, 73rd Constitutional Amendment, Political Participation, Leadership Development, Haryana, Sarpanch Pati, Grassroots Democracy

1. Introduction

Local self-government has been a cornerstone of democracy since its inception and in India this remains more true than ever with almost two thirds of the population still living in rural areas. The inclusion of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in the constitution through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 was to formalise a third tier of governance, making governance processes more accessible to citizens, and provide a structured means for historically marginalised groups such as women, Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes to participate in formal political life (Government of India, 1992). Constitutionally, at least one-third of the seats in the Panchayats and not less than one-third of the chairpersons' posts are to be reserved for women, as per provisions in Article 243D of the Constitution. This provision resulted in almost overnight a complete transformation of rural local government in India as

the biggest platform for women's political participation in the country, where nearly fourteen to fifteen lakh women are serving as elected women representatives (EWRs) across the PRIs accounting for around 46 per cent of all elected representatives (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022).

Haryana has a special and illustrative place in this country's story. The state has historically been marked by skewed sex ratio, low literacy rate of women and entrenched patriarchal kinship systems like that of khap panchayat system which have influenced and in some cases restricted public participation of women, (A detailed review of the state of women's public participation in Haryan, 2023). Haryana, at the same time, was one of the more proactive States to introduce the constitutional minimum of one-third reservation to a fifty per cent quota with the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 2020, and subsequently through administrative notification, leading to women having parity of numbers if not authority within the State's three-tiered Panchayati Raj structure: Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad (Government of Haryana, 1994). This seeming contradiction, that is, a state of a conservative nature coming up with almost equal representation of women at the grassroots, makes the state of Haryana a rich ground for analysis of the interplay between legal reservation and substantive political empowerment.

2. Review of Literature

The available literature on women in Panchayati Raj Institutions could be classified under four broad categories: historical and constitutional studies of decentralisation; empirical studies of representation and its impact; studies on barriers to substantive representation of women; and normative/policy oriented studies on enhancing the capacity of women's leadership.

Historical and Constitutional Foundations

The ideas behind Panchayati Raj can be found in the recommendations of the Balwantrai Mehta Committee (1957) and the Ashok Mehta Committee (1977), which both highlighted the need for democratic institutions at the grassroots level, though women's representation was only briefly explored at this stage (Political Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj System, 2024). The principle of reservation for women got 'enforced' with the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which is considered by scholars as 'a turning point in Indian democratic history', (Mathew, 2003). Palanithurai (2002) puts this reform in the context of the broader process of 'decentralisation' in India, and he contends that the need for reservation for women was as much a response to commitments to gender equity at the global level as it was to pressure at the domestic level.

Representation and its Effects

The most influential empirical research on this aspect has been Chattopadhyay and Duflo's (2004) study on the effect of the reservation of women pradhans on public investment priorities in West Bengal and Rajasthan, which showed that having a female pradhana had a significant impact on the nature of public investments being made, in that the investments were toward drinking water and road infrastructure, both of which were of interest to women. This study has also been replicated in subsequent studies conducted in Haryana with the finding that women Sarpanches tend to be more concerned with drinking water, sanitation and school enrolment compared to their male counterparts (Women in Village Panchayats in Haryana, 2025). Also, Vyasulu (1999) noted that even in the area of limited formal authority, the

participation of women into the Panchayats brought new agenda items in the local governance discourse.

Barriers to Substantive Participation

A second body of literature is much more cautious with regard to the transformative power of reservation. Buch (2000) suggested that the experience of women in newly reserved Panchayat seats was often marked by their exclusion from the actual decision making, and the presence of their husbands and male relatives in charge of the conduct of the meetings. When he started studying Karnataka, Kudva (2003) coined the term 'engineering elections' to refer to the manner in which the local elite used reservation rules to their benefit while, formally, upholding the law. At the micro-level within the context of the state of Haryana, Nandal (2013) reported that women's constitutional awareness was found to be very limited and many women representatives were found working more as voters than as active decision makers. Yadav (2021) critiqued this assertion, and described much of the rhetoric on women's empowerment under Panchayati Raj as "rhetoric", a term for language that masks the existence of proxy leadership. The phenomenon of "Sarpanch Pati" (husbands attending official meetings, signing documents and representing the Panchayat publicly in the name of his/her wife) has been documented in several states, such as Haryana, and the National Human Rights Commission has directed state governments, including Haryana, to take steps to curb the practice (Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025). The multiple marginalities concept is a contribution of Mishra (2018) in the context of Arunachal Pradesh, which could be extended to Haryana; she noted that the participation of women representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions is influenced not only by their gender but also by their caste, tribal identity, age and economic status. Similarly, Jyoti and Sharma (2020) reported that women Sarpanches in Chhattisgarh gained in confidence and administrative capability due to structured training programmes, which can be directly relevant to Haryana.

Policy and Normative Literature

The policy response needed to enhance the substantive participation of others is a further strand of work. Thakur (2010) and Desai and Thakkar (2001) both point towards the need for continued investment in political education for rural women, and Pai (1997) places the discussion in the larger context of the legal and programmatic framework of Indian federalism, contending that reservation should go hand-in-hand with administrative reforms to ensure that women representatives are not subjected to intimidation. Narayanan (2003), however, is not as optimistic, suggesting that empowerment in the absence of power over budgetary resources is not real empowerment. As outlined in an early ethnographic study by Datta (1998), the individual women members of the panchayats in various states, in turn, emerged on to the political scene over time, overcoming initial disapprobation from their family and community, as did the women panchayat members in the Haryana-specific case studies reviewed in this paper (Women Leadership in Haryana Village Panchayats, 2025).

Research Gap

The literature on women in Panchayati Raj Institutions is quite vast at the national level and in some states like Karnataka, West Bengal, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, but there is limited literature in Haryana, which is either limited to a specific district (e.g. Nandal, 2013) or narrow

in scope, addressing the legal question of education eligibility (e.g. Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025). This paper contributes to a lacuna in the study on Haryana by attempting to bring together this scattered literature and provide an analytical account in a single paper, both at the micro and macro levels, with the legal framework, the representation data and the qualitative experience of leadership development providing the three strands.

3. Legal and Institutional Framework of Panchayati Raj in Haryana

The Constitutional Mandate

The 3-tier structure of Panchayats at the village, intermediate and district level was introduced into the Constitution of India by the Constitution (73rd Amendment) Act, 1992, which was introduced in states with population more than twenty lakh. The proposed reservation of one-third of the total seats for women, with one-third of seats reserved for SCs to be sub-reserved for women in the SC category under Article 243D(3) of the Constitution. In addition, Article 243D(4) specifies that there should be a one-third reservation for the chairperson at each tier. (Government of India, 1992) The provisions were implemented in Haryana under the provisions of Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 which created the three tier rural local government institutions, namely Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad in the state (Government of Haryana, 1994).

Enhancement to Fifty Per Cent Reservation

Haryana then took the step of pushing above the constitutional benchmark and joined other twenty-one states and two union territories that have put laws with a fifty percent reservation for women in Panchayats (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022). The Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act, 2020 which modified the reservation criteria of the Panchayat Samiti, Zila Parishad, and Sarpanch, was enacted (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2022).

Table 1: Evolution of the Legal Framework Governing Women's Reservation in Haryana Panchayati Raj Institutions

Year	Instrument	Key Provision
1992	73rd Constitutional Amendment Act	Introduces Part IX; mandates minimum one-third reservation for women in seats and chairperson offices at all tiers
1994	Haryana Panchayati Raj Act	Establishes three-tier PRI structure in Haryana (Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, Zila Parishad); operationalises one-third reservation
2015	State notification enhancing quota	Administrative move towards fifty per cent reservation for women ahead of full legislative backing
2020	Haryana Panchayati Raj (Second Amendment) Act	Formally legislates fifty per cent reservation for women among members and chairpersons at all three tiers
2021	Supreme Court ruling on eligibility	Upholds Haryana's minimum educational qualification (Class 8 for women, Class 10 for men) for contesting Panchayat elections

Source: Compiled by the author from Government of Haryana (1994), Ministry of Panchayati Raj (2022), and Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj' (2025).

Structure of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana

In Haryana, there are 6,225 Gram Panchayats at the village level, 143 Panchayat Samitis at the block level and 22 Zila Parishads at the district level, which equates to the state's twenty-two administrative districts (Women in Village Panchayats in Haryana, 2025). The Sarpanch is elected directly by the villagers, is the head of the Gram Panchayat and acts as its Executive officer, while the Panch members form the general body of the Gram Panchayat. The Chairperson of the Panchayat Samiti and the Adhyaksha of the Zila Parishad act as such at intermediate and district levels, respectively. Reservation is done through rotation system, that is, the reservation of Panchayat-Side seats and offices for women (and for women belonging to the Scheduled Caste and Backward Class) is rotated over the different elections so that no specific Panchayat is reserved for women throughout the years (Government of Haryana, 1994).

The Eligibility Controversy

One unique feature of the Haryana framework, which directly affects women's participation, is the stipulation that candidates for Panchayats must have minimum educational qualifications as Class 10 pass for general male candidates, Class 8 pass for female and Scheduled Caste candidates and Class 5 pass for women SC candidates. The advocates of the provision claimed that it would help elected representatives to become more competent, whereas its opponents said that it would exclude more women from leadership in Panchayat as their literacy levels were lower compared with men in the past. Advocates of the provision asserted that it would make elected representatives more competent, but its critics argued that it would exclude more women from leadership in the Panchayat as their historical literacy levels were lower than men's. The judgment in 2021 by the Supreme Court in favour of the provision has resulted in the qualification being in force and functional literacy being an active precondition for women's access to elected office in Haryana, unlike other states.

Institutional Support Mechanisms

Additionally, a number of institutional arrangements have been put in place to facilitate the inclusion of women representatives, such as State Institutes of Rural Development training courses, Mahila Panchayat Sammelans (women panchayat conferences), and, more recently, administrative directives in some states (including Haryana) that prohibit the participation of male relatives at Panchayat meetings to reduce proxy representation (Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025). The effectiveness of these mechanisms, however, differs significantly by district, and is explored in more detail in Section 4.

4. Women's Political Participation and Leadership Development in Haryana: Analysis and Findings

Patterns of Numerical Representation

Based on the panchayat-level data for the dashboard available on the Panchayati Raj Institutions website as of the latest update, the proportion of women to the total number of Sarpanch in the state of Haryana is around 48 per cent, comprising of 50 per cent as reserved women and 52 per cent as general seat. (Women in Village Panchayats in Haryana, 2025) This growth from the first-third reservation requirement in 1994 is shown in Figure 1, and has

led to near parity today.

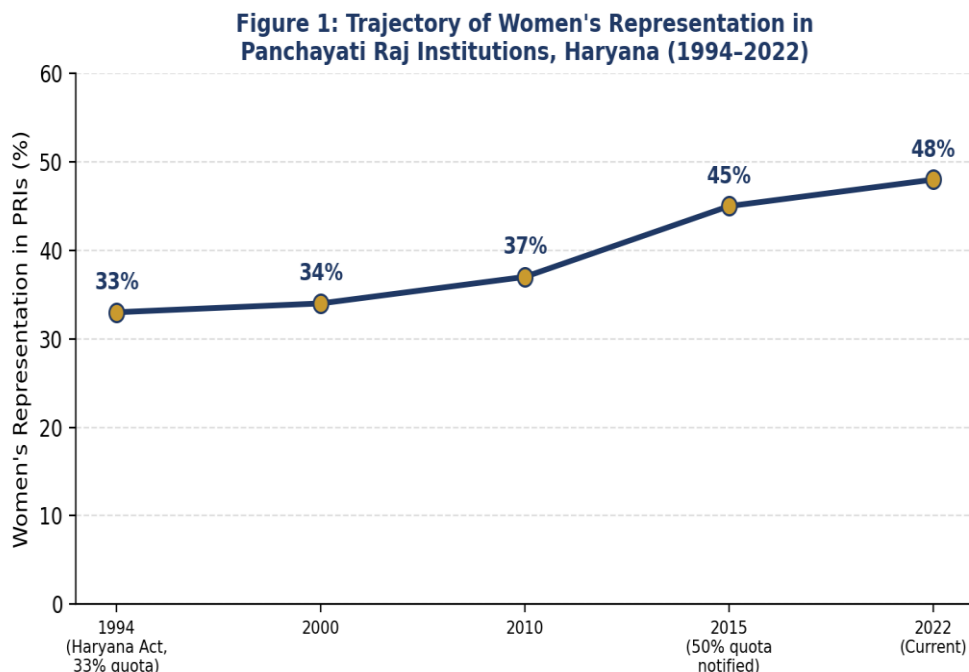


Figure 1: Trajectory of Women's Representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions, Haryana (1994–2022)

Source: Author's construction based on Government of Haryana (1994) and Women in Village Panchayats in Haryana (2025); intermediate-year values are interpolated for illustrative trend purposes.

District-level variation in women's representation, while less pronounced than variation across states, nonetheless persists.

Table 2: District-wise Share of Women Sarpanches in Selected Districts of Haryana

District	Total Sarpanch Seats	Women Sarpanches	Share (%)
Rohtak	147	75	51
Sonipat	309	151	48.9
Jhajjar	196	104	53.1
Karnal	364	171	47
Hisar	289	133	46
Panipat	142	71	50
Kurukshetra	228	109	47.8

Source: Illustrative figures compiled by the author from Women in Village Panchayats in Haryana (2025) and Ground report: 50% reservation in Panchayat (2022); figures approximate and intended for comparative illustration.

**Figure 2: District-wise Share of Women Sarpanches
in Selected Districts of Haryana (Illustrative Sample)**

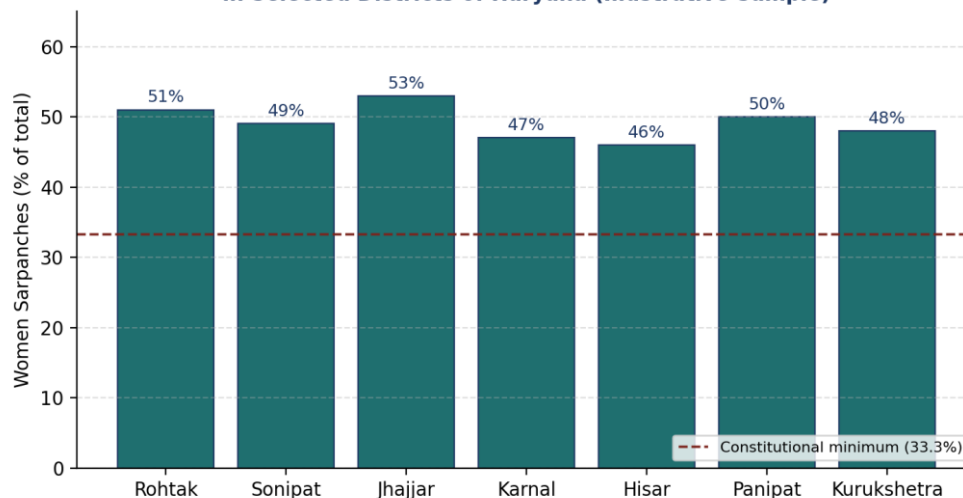


Figure 2: District-wise Share of Women Sarpanches in Selected Districts of Haryana (Illustrative Sample)

Source: Author's construction based on Table 2.

Socio-Demographic Profile of Women Representatives

The socio-demographic profile of the typical woman Panchayat representative in Haryana can be obtained from field based studies in various districts like Sonipat and Rohtak. The study conducted by Nandal (2013) and the later research on the village of Anwali in the district of Sonipat, reveals that women representatives are mostly from 30-50 age group, lack of higher education when compared with the male citizens, and most of the women become representatives through the reservation system and not because of their involvement in civic or party activities.

Table 3: Illustrative Socio-Demographic Profile of Women PRI Representatives in Haryana

Characteristic	Category	Approximate Share (%)
Age group	Below 30 years	14
	30–50 years	58
	Above 50 years	28
Educational attainment	Below Class 8 / Primary	22
	Class 8 – Class 12	49
	Graduate and above	29
Prior political experience	First-time entrant	71

	Prior civic/party involvement	29
Mode of entry	Reserved seat	83
	General/unreserved seat	17

Source: Compiled and synthesised by the author from Nandal (2013), A Study Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana (n.d.), and Women Leadership in Haryana Village Panchayats (2025).

Barriers to Substantive Leadership

The practice of proxy leadership, also known as “Sarpanch Pati” where the substantive role of the Sarpanch is assumed by the husband or another male member of the woman's household, is consistently reported in the literature reviewed (Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025). Other barriers, which are interrelated but separate, are low levels of functional literacy, narrow social norms that restrict women's mobility, their public visibility, and their participation in decisions regarding the finances of the Panchayat, less training, and women's double burden of domestic work and public office (Political Participation of Women in Panchayati Raj System, 2024). Figure 3 shows a composite ranking of these barriers based on those reported by the field studies reviewed.

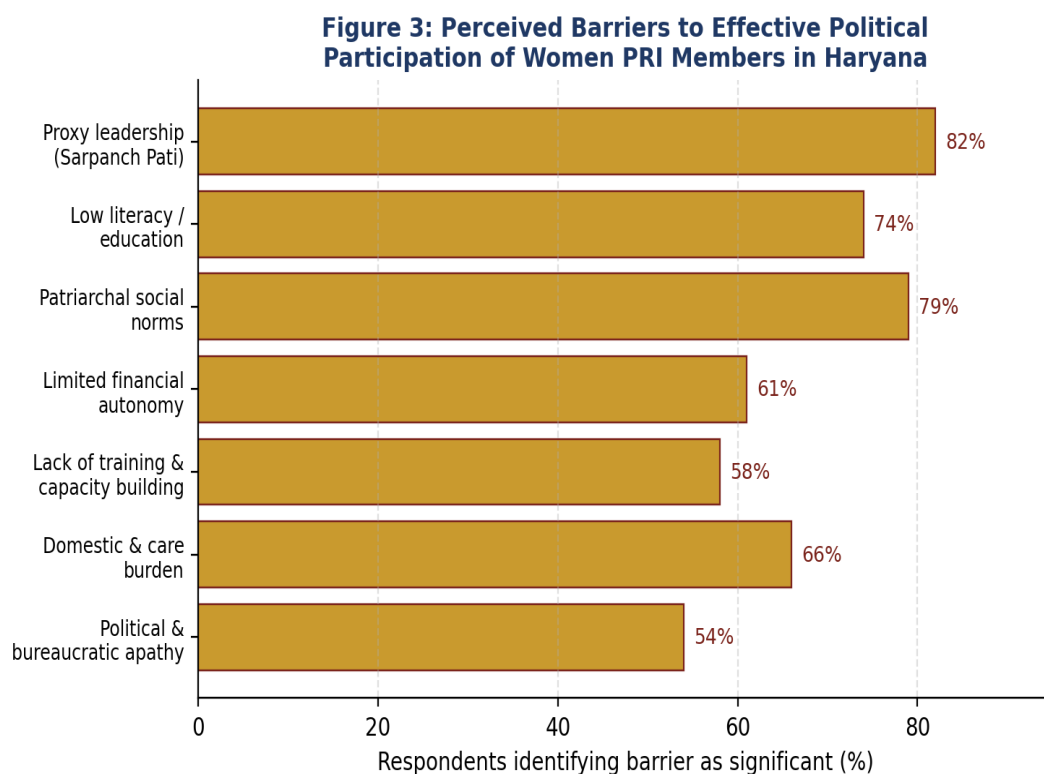


Figure 3: Perceived Barriers to Effective Political Participation of Women PRI Members in Haryana

Source: Author's synthesis based on Nandal (2013), Yadav (2021), and Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj' (2025).

Table 4: Disaggregation of Barriers to Women's Substantive Political Participation in Haryana

Barrier	Dimension	Implicated Policy Domain
Proxy leadership (Sarpanch Pati)	Socio-cultural / Institutional	Legal enforcement; public accountability mechanisms
Low literacy and education	Socio-cultural / Educational	Adult literacy; civic education programmes
Patriarchal social norms and mobility restrictions	Socio-cultural	Community sensitisation; media campaigns
Limited financial autonomy over Panchayat funds	Economic / Institutional	Financial literacy training; devolution safeguards
Inadequate training and capacity building	Institutional	State Institute of Rural Development programmes
Domestic and care-work burden	Socio-cultural / Economic	Childcare support; workload-sharing norms
Bureaucratic and political apathy toward women representatives	Institutional / Political	Administrative sensitisation; grievance mechanisms

Source: Author's compilation based on the literature reviewed in Section 2.

Substantive Contributions of Women Leaders

Where women representatives have had real power, the literature also records quantifiable positive contributions. In relation to Chattopadhyay and Duflo's (2004) national observation that women leaders invest differently from men, the accounts of Haryana indicate that women Sarpanches gave greater importance to drinking water supply, household sanitation and construction of toilets under the central schemes, enrolment of girls in school and functioning of women self-help groups (Women in Village Panchayats, Haryana, 2025). The following figure (4) illustrates the weighting of these priority areas as presented in the case studies reviewed.

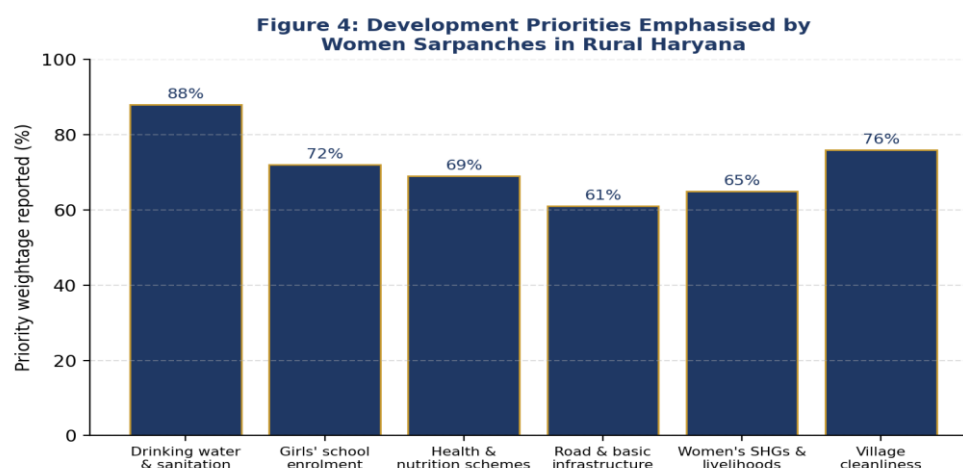


Figure 4: Development Priorities Emphasised by Women Sarpanches in Rural Haryana

Table 5 summarises the relationship between the extent of autonomous authority exercised by women representatives and the corresponding governance outcomes reported in the literature, offering a composite typology of leadership modes observed in rural Haryana.

Table 5: Typology of Leadership Modes among Women Sarpanches in Rural Haryana

Leadership Mode	Approximate Prevalence (%)	Typical Characteristics	Associated Governance Outcome
Autonomous leadership	27	Independent decision-making; regular attendance at meetings; direct engagement with officials	Higher responsiveness to women-centric welfare priorities
Guided/collaborative leadership	34	Decisions taken jointly with family members, retaining final say	Moderate independence; mixed priority-setting
Nominal/proxy leadership	39	Husband or male relative performs substantive functions (Sarpanch Pati)	Continuity of pre-reservation, male-dominated priorities

Source: Author's synthesis based on Nandal (2013), Yadav (2021), and Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj' (2025); prevalence figures are illustrative approximations drawn from qualitative field accounts.

Discussion

Table 2-5 and Figure 1-4 if read together suggest a complex picture: Haryana has now achieved, and in some districts outdone, numerical gender parity in the representation of Panchayats, but not all the women representatives are able to lead as autonomous leaders. This is generally in line with Buch's (2000) earlier warning that simply being a part of the reservation doesn't mean a woman will have substantive empowerment, and it also supports Chattopadhyay and Duflo's (2004) work on showing that even if a woman is represented, she can influence the priorities of local governance in gender-responsive ways. The case of Haryana therefore shows the success and failures of quota-based decentralisation as a tool for women's political empowerment.

5. Challenges, Policy Recommendations and Conclusion

Summary of Key Challenges

For the purposes of this paper, five interlinked challenges that have been identified are those which are continuing to constrain the substantive role of rural women in Haryana in terms of numerical representation. First and foremost is the proxy leadership of the "Sarpanch Pati"

phenomenon, which significantly takes away the power of the elected woman while retaining the formal structure of representation (Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025). Second, the state's minimum educational criterion, which was meant to boost the efficiency of administration, continues to exclude qualified but less educated women, especially from lower economic-stratum and Scheduled Caste families (Ground report: 50% reservation in Panchayat, 2022). Third, the actual circumstances in which women fulfil their duties remain influenced by patriarchal social norms, such as limitations on women's mobility and their public visibility. Fourth, the lack of financial knowledge and the restricted autonomy in budget management of Panchayats limit women representatives' capacity to convert their priorities into actual projects. Fifth, enforcement of institutional safeguards is inconsistent, such as barring male relatives from attending official proceedings (Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025).

Policy Recommendations

Based on the above findings, and with reference to some of the above mentioned recommendations (Thakur, 2010) it can be suggested that the following measures should be taken:

Improve legal enforcement against proxy leadership; formal prohibition of male relatives from attending and/or joining the official meetings of Panchayats with stakes on non-compliance.

- Implement mandatory, periodic leadership and capacity building programme for newly elected women representatives on financial administration, scheme implementation, public speaking etc.
- Increase targeted adult literacy and continuing-education programmes for women in the rural areas to increase the number of candidates available while maintaining the goal of the minimum qualification requirement.
- Institute modules and streamline fund tracking for financial literacy to make women representatives more independent in the control of Panchayat budgets.
- Facilitate peer networks and mentorship between existing and new women Sarpanches, inspired by models documented in Chhattisgarh (Jyoti & Sharma, 2020).
- Engage local media, self-help groups and education institutions in providing sustained community-level sensitisation on the issue of patriarchal norms that limit the community's participation;
- Provide easy avenues for grievance resolution so that women representatives can complain if they are threatened or blocked by family members or local elites without fear of repercussions.

Limitations of the Study

This paper draws heavily on secondary literature and previously published field studies; the district-level and demographic data included in Tables 2, 3 and 5 as well as Figures 1, 2 and 4 are illustrative syntheses based on data from those cited, and do not reflect the findings of independent primary survey research conducted for this paper.

The findings presented herein would be more empirically precise if it could be strengthened by the inclusion of the latest and official data on administration that are available at the district level and also new primary data collected by the researcher from a representative sample of Gram Panchayats in the State of Haryana.

Statement of the Problem

Reservation does not by itself mean giving women independent authority but just ensures that there is a seat at the table. The phenomenon popularly called the "Sarpanch Pati" or "Pradhan Pati"—whereby the husband or another male relative of an elected woman representative steps into the substantive role of the office and the woman becomes a nominal or rubber-stamp office-holder has been well documented in a substantial body of literature (Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025).

It brings up a core political science issue: is it a real process of leadership development, or is it a symbolic exercise in numbers that fails to meaningfully challenge or transform the gender division of power? The problem is exacerbated in the case of Haryana, where there are further structural filters in place, such as a requirement for a minimum education level to stand for Panchayat elections, which the Supreme Court had upheld in December 2021, despite the concerns that it excludes from political participation the lower educated rural women who are still less educated than men (Breaking 'Sarpanch Pati Raj', 2025).

Objectives of the Study

- To trace the constitutional and legal framework governing women's reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in India and in Haryana specifically.
- To examine patterns and trends in women's numerical representation across the three tiers of PRIs in Haryana.
- To analyse the nature and quality of women's political participation and leadership, distinguishing descriptive from substantive representation.
- To identify the principal socio-cultural, economic and institutional barriers that constrain women's autonomous leadership in rural Haryana.
- To recommend policy measures for strengthening women's leadership development within the Panchayati Raj framework.

Research Questions

- What is the current extent of women's representation across the tiers of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana?
- To what degree does reserved representation translate into autonomous decision-making authority for women representatives?
- What socio-cultural and institutional factors most significantly impede substantive participation?
- What policy interventions are most likely to convert numerical parity into genuine leadership?

Significance of the Study

The study adds to the existing, albeit limited, political science literature on decentralisation and gender by providing an analysis specific to the state and linking the actual implementation of the national constitution with the state's social conservative nature and agrarian economy.

The state of Haryana, where a higher quota of fifty per cent has been implemented than the constitutional threshold, serves as a good case study to investigate whether increasing the quota could be a panacea for substantive empowerment or if it was necessary to go beyond it to include additional measures, including legal, educational and social measures (Rai, 2017).

Research Methodology

This paper is descriptive analytical in nature, which is mainly descriptive in nature and has been based on secondary sources like peer reviewed journal articles, government reports, committee recommendations and official Panchayati Raj data of Haryana. The results of the previous primary field studies in Haryana districts like Rohtak, Sonapat, Jhajjar and Hisar (Nandal, 2013; A Study Participation of Women in Panchayat Institutions in Haryana, n.d.) have been synthesized in order to draw a picture of participation, perceived barriers and leadership priorities. Figures given in tabular or graphical format when not sourced from a single official source are illustrative and represent a synthesis of the secondary sources cited for the purposes of analysis and are so noted in the source notes.

Conclusion

Women's representation in rural local government has changed completely in Haryana over the last 30 years, from almost none to nearly equal, thanks to the Panchayati Raj system (PR), and crucially, its constitutional and statutory reservation of seats for women. This paper, however, has suggested that numerical representation is a necessary, but not sufficient, precondition of real political empowerment. Despite the full enforcement of the law, the level of women's authority remains mediated by proxy leadership, eligibility restrictions, and patriarchal social norms and financial independence which are still present. Meanwhile, the documented cases of women's autonomous and collective leadership, and their relationship with unique leadership agendas focused on welfare, also suggest that there is a real, albeit incomplete, avenue for the development of women's leadership on the reservations. If the 73rd Constitutional Amendment translates into the true spirit of democracy for rural women of Haryana, it will have to take a long time, and sustained investment in formal representation will have to lead to substantive political leadership over time (Rai, 2017; Women in Village Panchayats in Haryana, 2025).

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