

# Empowerment of Women through Participation in Haryana Panchayati Raj Institutions: Case Study of Rewari District

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## ABSTRACT

*Women empowerment is a much-discussed topic today; in various human rights and social developmental discourses. We all know and understand that participation of women in all our common day-to-day activities is important and unavoidable. In this paper, there is a detailed description of Panchayati Raj in Rewari District, Haryana. The main objective of this paper is to know how we can change the position of women in India. The female members at various positions in Rewari Panchayati Raj Institution are highlighted. The different research methodologies used in sociology are also discussed briefly.*

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## 1. Introduction

Women empowerment is a much-discussed topic today, in various human rights and social developmental discourses. We all know and understand that participation of women in all our common day-to-day activities is important and unavoidable. In fact, today's women have been contributing significantly in various walks of life. Empowerment of women is compulsory for the socioeconomic progress of a society. Women constitute almost half of the total population of the world but they are deprived of many rights as men. Still today, they are asking and struggling for autonomy, self-respect, and equal status. The issue of 'women empowerment' highlighted in the mid-1980s when various women bodies questioning their socio-economic status and showing the world the oppression they had been facing came out into the open.

Women empowerment in all spheres of life, especially in the political sphere is vital for the active participation of women and enjoying a gender equal society. Indian democracy is now more than seventy years old but women in India are mostly debarred from major political movements and active political participation. The underlying concept of democracy and its objective are never met. Active participation of women in politics is essential for the advancement of women in every walk of human life and society.

The Panchayat Raj Institution in India has brought several changes in the political system of the country and related decision-making process. The objective is to bring socioeconomic changes of women in the country. It can be done by adopting necessary and timely measures in the political system. Proper representation of women in the political system is the only way to empower women, i.e. a maximum number of women could participate in different political matters in the country. The emphasis should be on the participation of women at the lowest political levels in the country. The Government of India has also made a certain reservation for women in the Panchayat Raj system of the country. Under the 73rd amendment of Panchayat Raj Constitution, 1/3rd of total seats for SC, ST, and OBC for Gram Pradhan, Block Panchayat, and District Panchayat are now reserved for women in those categories.

This reservation for women in Panchayat Raj Institution is an important step towards women empowerment. It may change the status of females in a society. A traditional notion like women should be restricted to household works and child rearing, under the subjugation of men, bound with several social, cultural, and traditional rules and regulations, and etc. could be minimized to a great extent with this change. The newly introduced policy is expected to bring some equality in the society with the active participation of women in the decision-making process in the household, in the social setup, and most importantly in the political environment. The new role they would play in the political environment is going to show positive effects in the other environments too. It would also make women more responsible regarding their responsibilities to the nation. They will be able to contribute effectively in different social, economic, and political aspects of the country.

The historical evidence available also depicts and supports the fact that women in different parts of the world had made many movements in social and political scenario successful through their active participation. However, mere policy making is not sufficient. The implementation of the policy and the qualities of the women representatives are important. The capacity and intention of the representatives to implement different policies and developing programs through proper channels and integrating the population will determine the status quo of the women representatives in different Gram Panchayats across the country, at the same time; their activities will influence the women population in the villages.

## 2. Research background

Panchayati Raj in Haryana: Haryana was an inherent part of Punjab before it was separated as a different state in November 1966. The Panchayat system had been prevailing in the state for centuries. Local people used to take active participation in it and it was a socially recognized system where people could represent their problems and ask for solutions. However, the power of decision making was more or less enjoyed by the upper castes. After independence, the Punjab Gram Panchayat Act, 1952 was passed. Later, the Punjab Gram Panchayat Act, 1952 and the Punjab Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads Act, 1961 were passed to set up

the Gram Panchayat system in this state. These two acts followed Balwant Ray Mehta model to introduce a three-tier system of Panchayat. There were Gram Panchayat at the village level, Panchayat Samiti at the block level, and Zila Parishad at the district level.

After the formation of Haryana state, the same system was floated there too. In 1973, the top bodies of Zila Parishads and Panchayat Raj were abolished in Haryana. Haryana had established a two-tier Panchayat structure with just Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti at the village and block levels respectively. After a few years, it was perceived that the system of Panchayat Raj was not achieving the prime objectives for which it was established. The electoral system was irregular, several Panchayats could not run due to poor financial conditions, power and responsibilities were found to be inconsistent, bureaucracy was very much dominant. The election for the Zila Parishads held in 1972 which was dissolved in 1973, then it held in 1984 and 1991, each time the Zila Parishad was dissolved only to take a new mandate from the public. Similarly, the elections for the Gram Panchayat took place in 1971, 1978, 1983, and 1991. This opened up the weakness in the Panchayat Raj itself. Irregularity, indifferent attitude of the state, and too much politicization were quite obvious in that system.

As the 73rd Constitutional Amendment took place, The Panchayati Raj Act of Haryana was passed by the state in 22nd April 1994. The key feature of the act was various provisions for the better village administration. Consequently, the new act replaced the existing acts like the Punjab Gram Panchayat Act, 1952 and the Punjab Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad Act 1961.

**Women's Participation in the Political Process:** The constitution of India says that the powers of the Central and state governments rest on the people. Thus, the success of the political system of the country depends on the effective participation of the citizens. The electoral system has made the provision for everyone to be politically active in their own ways. Voting and participating in the election process as a candidate or supporting a candidate actively are the rights of every citizen. So, people place their demands and support the political candidates or political agendas of the political parties accordingly. Thus, the movements like the farmers' movements, the workers' movements, and the women's movements on different agendas are some forms of political participation by the groups or the concerned communities. Sometimes, these groups become so active and popular that they can influence the legislation and state policies to a large extent. They can even act as catalysts of change. Hence, the political power can be defined as the ability to safeguard the interest of a group or community and influence the socio-political transformation in the desired directions. Similarly, the movements initiated by the women at different points of time are the collective actions of women to ensure their social, economic, and political empowerments.

**Political Participation of Women in Haryana:** Haryana is a small state in India. Haryana was separated from Punjab and given the statehood on 1st November 1966. In spite of its rapid

economic development, Haryana has been recognized as a culturally backward society. Although the state has witnessed a rapid industrial and agricultural development, the caste-based social structural and medieval concepts still are looming large.

The participation of women in assembly elections has increased a lot. Women with strong political background used to get party nominations.

**Significance of the Study:** The modern Panchayati Raj System is viewed as the main principal carrier of women empowerment. Women started representing common people; they would realize their roles in the planning, decision-making, and implantation of different developmental works in their respective areas. The elected women members would represent the females of their localities and take necessary steps to resolve many issues related to women. They can even influence the elected male members to take the same step for the women in their regions also. Thus, the reservation for women is the entry point of women in Indian politics at the grassroots level. It can create much awareness among rural women about their basic rights and catch the attention of the nation regarding their basic issues like illiteracy, dowry, household atrocities, violence against women, problems of alcoholism among the male members, etc. The elected women members can help the women population to gain financial independence through micro businesses and facilitating bank loans. They come forward and help women in villages to achieve the desired goals of rural development. The conditions and functioning of village schools, streets, electricity, health centres, drinking water arrangements, and many other important matters can be well supervised by the women members.

After the last amendment, the current Panchayat Raj Institutions are responsible for various developmental functions along with the existing general functions. These are responsible for rural development, land reforms, agricultural development in all sectors including animal husbandry, poultry, and cottage industries, proper functioning of the health, sanitation, and drinking water systems in the villages. Also, they will have to look after the social issues and social reforms. The elected representatives will take active participation in removing social inequalities and discriminations in all forms including the problems of untouchability and discrimination against women. They have to ensure equal wages to both sexes for same kinds of works in the village developmental projects. The elected members also have to ensure that the developmental projects are made optimally effective for the village population and people from all levels and generations come together for the implementation of the projects.

But, still today, it is tough for the rural women to become active in rural politics and developmental projects even if they are elected in large numbers and get mass support. Several social and economic barriers and prejudices work against women in villages. Thus the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act is evaluated from this perspective to understand clearly how it can change the status of women at the grassroots level. This study examines whether they are aware about their newly assigned duties and responsibilities and whether women in

Panchayat Raj Institutions are being allowed to function properly in these local level institutions.

### 3. Literature Review

Bhargava (1997) has discussed the significance of leadership, training aspects of leadership, and structure of PRIs. The role of leadership in PRIs is the principal focus in Bhargava's research work.

Ashok and Harish (1991) have conducted an intense investigation into various pressing social and economic aspects that the modern day Indian women have been facing. Their investigation has also covered various political problems going against women in India. They have also pointed out that women's participation in politics at the grassroots level is not satisfactory and mere reservation in this matter can't help much.

Singh and Malik (1993) researched on ten Panchayats in the district of Kurukshetra in Haryana where the women members had never contested in the election before. The authors opine that reservation for women in Panchayat could make their socioeconomic and political position strong. According to them, the reservation system has definitely elevated the social status of women.

Lata (1993) has presented the social structure of various Indian societies while narrating the problems Indian women face. The author has also described some legitimate ways which can make women politically active and become successful in various administrative positions. She has not discussed the problems of rural women that form the 80% of women population in India.

Subha (1994) has researched on the women councilors in Bangalore Municipal Corporation. She has specifically highlighted the potential of these women and their working patterns like how they participate in various planning and decision-making, how they represent the problems of the women in their respective jurisdiction, etc.

A few changes in the constitution and providing reservation may not solve the problems of women. Right to vote or participation in the election is not enough. That's why I have chosen the grassroots level, i.e. PRIs. If at the grassroots level women are getting enough scope to be active politically and the system is permitting them to participate in the decision-making process, then they would be automatically empowered at the higher levels. PRIs are the foundation of women empowerment.

According to Pillai (1995) women need to appraise their own problems and find ways to work on them. They have to find the prime causes behind the discrimination against women and social inequalities they tolerate. Pillai has discussed on women empowerment in general as also women empowerment in the professional world.

### STUDY AREA

Haryana: The Punjab Gram Panchayat Act, 1952 was made effective in the entire state including Haryana in 1952. In 1966, Haryana was separated from Punjab and was given a separate entity as a state of India. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment was made in 1992. Consequently, the Haryana Panchayati Raj Act, 1994 came into force on 22nd April 1994. Thereafter, the Haryana Panchayati Raj Election Rules, 1994, the Haryana Panchayati Rules, 1995, and the Haryana Panchayati Raj Finance Budget/Accounts/Audit/taxation and Works Rules 1996 were framed and enforced. Through the Haryana Panchayati Act, 1994, the PRIs are given full responsibilities of managing all 29 subjects included in the 11th schedule of the Constitution of India.

Administrative Division of Haryana in 2018: Divisions- 4, Districts- 21, Blocks- 124, Zila Parishads- 21, Panchayat Samitis- 119, Gram Panchayats- 6083, No. of Villages- 6754.

The position of all elected representatives of all the three tiers in PRI along with the representations of women, SC, and BC taking election data of July 2010:

Office	Total	General		SC		Backward Class
		Men	Women	Men	Women	
Sarpanch	6083	3264	1587	797	435	0
Panches	58783	24856	15323	6342	6416	5846
Panchayat Smiti	2772	1341	715	356	241	119
Zila Parishad	374	172	99	49	33	21

The district wise total no. of Gram Panchayats are: Ambala- 405, Bhiwani- 461, Faridabad- 111, Fatehabad- 245, Gurgaon- 210, Hisar 309, Jind- 300, Jhajjar- 249, Kaithal 270, Karnal- 372, Kurukshetra- 382, Mahendargarh- 344, Mewat- 308, Palwal- 239, Panchkula- 121, Panipat- 167, Rewari- 351, Rohtak- 141, Sonapat- 323, Sirsa- 334, Yamunanagar- 441. The grand total in 2018 is: 6083.

There are 2772 Panchayat Samiti members, 374 Zila Parishad, 58783 Panches. Rewari district has a total of 24849 female representatives in PRI's.

Rewari: There are 22 districts in Haryana and Rewari is one of them. The administrative headquarter of this city is situated in Rewari city. The city is located in the southern part of Haryana. Rewari got the district status on 1st November 1989. It has the second least populous district in Haryana. The district has the population density of 562/ sq. km. The district has a sex ratio of 905 females for every 1000 males. Almost 83% people in the district are literate.

The Report Summary of Rewari collected from National Informatics Centre, Hisar in 2018 is:

Office	Total	Male	Female	SC	OBC	General	5 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	Graduation or above
Zila Parishad	18	10	8	4	4	10	0	2	6	4	6
Sarpanch	358	219	139	76	188	94	0	56	213	46	43
Block Samiti	133	74	59	34	56	43	0	16	89	14	14
Gram panchayat	3149	1779	1370	739	1740	670	177	526	1992	292	162

#### 4. Research Methodology

**Sampling:** Since the universe of our research study will be female representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions of Rewari district. It is neither possible nor advisable to interview the all Women Panches and Sarpanches of the district. Therefore, 10% sample of women Panches and Sarpanches will be considered for the study i.e., 137 elected women panches and 14 elected women Sarpanches. Thus, the total sample size for the study will be 151.

**Data Collection Tools:** In sociology, three types of data collection tools are used – questionnaire, Interview, and Observation. In the present research work, interview and observation are used as the data collection tools. At the same time, different government offices are targeted to collect the primary data with the help of the above-mentioned tools.

**Interview:** The interview is a fruitful and effective tool for the data collection in various sociological researches. In an interview, the respondents are asked certain questions on the decided subject or topic. Since, we require specific information on the personal, social, psychological, and political aspects of a respondent's life, interview with pre-set questionnaire is the best tool for gathering the data. It helps to read the body language of the respondents when they answer a specific question giving a scope to the interviewer to understand the comfort level of the respondents and their confidence in answering the question. For all these reasons, the researcher has selected interview and observation as the two tools for gathering data for the current interview. A structured interview with pre-set questions is planned for the current research. Attempts will be made to keep the language simple and the environment friendly so that the respondents never feel uncomfortable and confused. The sole objective of the interview is to get accurate answers and observe the body language and behaviour of the respondents when they are interviewed.

**Schedule:** In an interview, proper and relevant schedule is mandatory for a result-oriented response. It must have a pre-planned questionnaire that could keep the discussion during the interview on track. The interview schedule needs to be

prepared on the basis of the available literature and expert views. The major areas that could be included in the schedule in the current research are:

- Gathering general information and information on election
- Getting political opinions of the respondents
- Understanding the roles and responsibilities of the respondents
- Understanding their ability to participate in planning and decision-making process
- Gathering information on the problems and difficulties they face within the political system Understanding their achievements

The questions need to be in simple and clear language free from any personal opinion of the interviewer or researcher. Further, these questions should be as much open-ended as possible. The questions should be arranged logically to keep the flow of discussion intact. After drafting the questionnaire, it can be shown to the academicians who have prior knowledge in this type of interviews.

**Observation:** Observation is another primary and effective tool of data collection. It is used to supplement and validate the answers of the respondents. It can supplement the answers of the respondents which are not answered clearly or the respondents could not express their opinions. It can be used to ascertain the facts. It helps to authenticate the data received during the interview.

#### 5. Data analysis

After the interview, the entire schedule will be checked and rechecked for accumulating the data pertinent to the research. There remains a keen possibility that some information is written here and there which will be recorded in the proper order. A codebook will be formed that will contain all coded data against different questions. These will be transferred to the master chart for further analysis later. The master chart will consist of simple and cross tables as will be required. After tabulation and analysis of data, interpretation will be made and findings will be recorded.

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