



ROLE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS (PRIS) IN WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN KARNAL DISTRICT OF HARYANA

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Abstract

This study has adopted the qualitative research approach to analyse how Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) support women's empowerment in the Karnal district of Haryana. The research examines gender from a sociological perspective and emphasizes the value of women's contributions to the society. The research evaluates the role of PRIs on women's empowerment and explores whether PRIs are failing to fulfil their intended purpose. The study is carried out through qualitative data-gathering methods such as focus group discussions, interviews, and talks with PRI beneficiaries, officials, and expert. The prime objective of the study is to analyse how PRIs played pivotal role in women's empowerment and determine whether the study of PRI's is succeeding in its primary goal of women empowerment. The key findings of the study have revealed that the potential of women and their capacity has substantially improved in the realm of local level governance and society at large. Notwithstanding the difficulties, the women of Karnal have demonstrated fortitude and a desire to break down boundaries and empower themselves. In order to promote sustainable and equitable women's empowerment in Karnal and other comparable places, the study emphasizes the need for improving PRI initiatives and promoting greater gender equality. The study laid emphasis on sociological viewpoints on gender and the place of women in society, and it highlights the significance of promoting greater gender equality to achieve sustainable development. Nonetheless, there is still an opportunity for improvement as certain regions have been slow to implement these adjustments. To ensure that women's empowerment through PRIs is a reality for all women in India, efforts must continue.

Keywords: Empowerment, Exclusion, Governance, Institution

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1. Introduction

The concept of *Panchayatan*, a group of five persons including a spiritual leader, has been mentioned in old Sanskrit scriptures from the Vedic era. However, during British rule, village panchayats lost their autonomy and became weak. After India gained independence, the Constitution recognized the importance of local self-government, and Article 40 made a mention of panchayats. The 3rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments passed in 1992 introduced local self-governance in rural and urban India through Gram Sabhas and Ward Committees comprising all adult members registered as voters. These basic units of the democratic system have been instrumental in promoting local participation and empowerment.

The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are now recognized as a tool for empowering marginalized groups in rural areas, especially women. Women still struggle to access chances for jobs, healthcare, and education in the Haryana district of Karnal. In order to determine if PRIs are serving their intended purpose, this study will look at how they have aided in women's empowerment in Karnal. The study emphasizes the value of women's contributions to society while exploring sociological ideas on gender. A framework for comprehending the difficulties faced by women in Karnal district of Haryana is provided by the theories of social exclusion, marginalization, and relative deprivation. Social exclusion is the deliberate process of excluding particular people or groups from engaging in social and economic activities. The process of pushing people or groups to the periphery of society and denying them access to opportunities and resources is called marginalization. The experience of social inferiority as compared to others is referred to as relative deprivation.

In the above background, the present study is an exploration into the role of women in the local level governance of Haryana and more particularly in the district Karnal. Moreover, the study looks at how women's access to options for employment, healthcare, and education affects how empowered they are. The study is analytical in nature and it adopted the qualitative research approach to fulfil the stated objectives. Primarily secondary data sources including journals and articles, newspaper publications and government reports have been used. All the subject matter collected by secondary data sources has been presented under appropriate themes keeping in view the synchronization and coherency of the content.

2. Literature review

Nandal, V. (2013) in his study has observed that most of the respondents participate in the electoral process as voters, but they have very little awareness about the details of the Panchayati Raj Act. Furthermore, women also lack awareness with respect to the various powers and works of the Panchayats and the reservation of seats for women. Additionally, the survey revealed that many respondents cast their vote for the candidate chosen by their husbands and do not have the right to vote for their own choice. Therefore, the political opinion of women is shaped by the family, more importantly the husband.

Meenu (2016) examined that the representation ratio of women in Haryana assembly is quite minimal as compared to their population share. To uplift the women in the socio-economic and political arena, it becomes important to provide the political space to women in all the hierarchies of governance. The provision for political space will lead to their inclusion in the realm of governance including local level governance.

Lata (2017) in her masterpiece has stated that reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions has led to their empowerment in real terms. Moreover, their social, economic and political conditions have positively encouraged their participation in decision making. The paper suggested that the whole process should be acknowledged by society and there should be training-based programs for women in local bodies. Education can play an important role in their capacity building and can bring a drastic change in their social, economic, and political life. Veerta and Kumar A. (2018) have explored the impact of various government positive interventions in the political sphere. According to the key findings of the study, the Haryana Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Bill 2015 and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992, led to a significant increase in political participation of women at the local level. The researchers argue that this has not only increased women's representation in decision-making bodies but also empowered them to take leadership roles and actively participate in the governance process at the local level. The findings of this study have important implications for policymakers who seek to promote gender equity and political participation of women in similar contexts.

Bhardwaj, P. (2019) has outlined that in developing countries like India, women are lagging behind their male counterparts in the realm of politics. They are usually considered a weaker gender. This gender inequality stands as a large uncertain block to women's liberation.

However Panchayati Raj Institutions has positively changed the attitude of the society and positively affected the process of women empowerment. The goal of women's empowerment cannot be accomplished only by giving reservations, the other social and demographic factors also influence the EWR to participate and work actively in local self-government. These are the bodies where decisions are taken demographically. Village, block, and district-level problems are identified and discussed.

Poonam (2019) in her work has stated that in Haryana specifically 33.3% of seats are reserved for women in PRIs. Moreover, nearly 42% of women are educated with in levels of PRIs. However, not just the women participate but also the society needs to encourage her in order to make her a powerful person. Despite the share of women is 50% in PRIs; they have also undertook concrete efforts for managing their family life and social life.

3. Panchayati Raj and Women Participation in India

During the British Raj, no significant effort was made to improve the status of women in India, and their customs were left untouched. However, Indian women were influenced by Western education and the women's movement in Europe and America, which led to women's rights activists, including Sarojini Naidu, Annie Besant, and Kamala Nehru, fighting for women's rights and empowerment. Although the Indian Constitution guaranteed equal rights for men and women after independence, the actual implementation of these rights took a long time, and the women's movement didn't gain momentum until the 1970s. One of the government's initiatives to empower women was the decentralization of authority through the Panchayati Raj system. In Karnal, the PRI has played a crucial role in empowering women by giving local councils more authority and enabling female members to influence decisions. In conclusion, the PRI has been instrumental in improving the lives of women at the local level and has contributed to the empowerment of women in Karnal.

Furthermore, the government of India has taken several initiatives to address the problem of gender inequality and improve the position of women in the nation ever since the country won its independence from colonial rule. The Haryana Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Bill, 2015, and the 73rd Constitutional Amendment in 1992 have paved the way for increased political participation

of women at the local level. Along with these amendments, various government schemes have been implemented to empower women in rural areas. Self sufficiency and liberty of women in social and economic avenues were termed as key constructs for uplifting the socially, economically and politically. Moreover policy interventions were put in place to uplift women in all socio-economic avenues.

These policies include Swarnjayanti Gram Swarozgar Yojana, Indira Awaas Yojana, Sampooran Grameen Rozgar Yojana, Watershed Development Projects/Hariyali Scheme, Desert Development Programme, Members of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, Rashtriya Sam Vikas Yojana, Total Sanitation Campaign, Swarnjayanti Shahari Rozgar Yojna, Employment Assurance Scheme, National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Integrated Wasteland Development Projects, Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, Bharat Nirman Rajiv Gandhi Sewa Kendra, National Rural Livelihoods Mission/Aajeevika, Backward Region Grant Fund, and Integrated Watershed Management Programme.

These schemes were launched by the Indian government and Haryana government to provide employment opportunities, improve the standard of living, and promote sustainable development in rural areas. They have contributed to women's empowerment by providing them with access to education, healthcare, and financial resources. The Panchayati Raj system, which decentralizes authority and gives local councils more power, has also been instrumental in empowering women.

4. Role of Women in Local Level Governance of Haryana

Karnal is the administrative district of Haryana with 2520 sq km area. The city of Karnal, said to have been founded by Raja Karna, of the Mahabharata fame that spring into prominence in 1739 when Nadir Shah defeated Muhammad Shah at Karnal. Raja Gopal Singh of Jind seized Karnal in 1763, and the Marhathas established themselves at Karnal in 1785. Skirmishes however, followed between the Marhattas and the Sikhs. In 1795 the Marhattas finally wrested it from Raja Bhag Singh of Jind and made it over to the George Thomas, who took part in the fight. Meanwhile Raja Gurdit Singh of Ladwa obtained possession of Karnal. According to census 2011, the district has 1,505,324 population with 707612 (47.01%) as females and 797712 (52.99%) as males.

India hosts the diversity in terms of culture and other avenues. Being home to 1.4 billion populations, India also hosts nearly 50% of female population. Females are integral to the socio-economic and political settings of the country. The modern era has witnessed a leading role of women in all the avenues. Politics is no exception to women as they have occupied the higher positions at the helm of Indian governance. Moreover, the mechanism of decentralization has

paved the way for inclusive participation of women in governance. In the realm of local level governance, women are actively participating as voters and contest the elections at larger scale. Women play a dual role: at makers of governance and as drivers of governance. In this background, it becomes important to analyse the role of women in the local level governance under the larger framework of PRIs in the state of Haryana.

Table 1: Reservation of Seats in 2016 Election of Panchayats in Haryana

Offices	SC	SC(W)	BC	Women	Unreserved	Total
Panch	7273	6854	5945	16082	26312	62466
Member Panchayat Samiti	415	274	126	755	1432	3002
Member Zila Parishad	56	36	21	108	195	416

Source: State Election Commission of Haryana

The table 1 has outlined the reservation of seats in the 2016 Panchayati election of Haryana. According to the above data, 16082 seats were reserved for women in the Panch category, 755 seats in Panchayat Samiti level and 108 seats at Zila Parishad Level. Therefore, it can be inferred from the data that government is aimed at

bringing inclusivity of women in governance mechanism including all the levels of rural governance. Furthermore, the reservation mechanism increases the decision making avenues for women and makes them active participants in the deliberations of government.

Table 2: Reservation of the Offices of Chairperson in 2016 PRI Elections

Offices	SC	SC(W)	Women	Unreserved	Total
Sarpanch	283	45	1642	3273	6193
Chairman Panchayat Samiti	11	13	33	69	126
President Zila Parishad	2	2	5	12	21

Source: State Election Commission of Haryana

Table 2 outlines the reservation of women in the office of chairperson in Haryana local level elections. During the fifth panchayat election out of 6193 Sarpanch seats, 126 chairman panchayat samiti seats and 21 President zila Parishad, 1642 sarpanch ,33 chairman Panchayat Samiti and 5 President zila parishad is reserved for women .

While as out of 21 seats at zila parishad level, 5 were reserved for women. Therefore, since the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment it's clear that working on the active participation of women in local level governance has helped the women to take lead in deliberations and decision making.

Table 3: Male and Female Contestants for Elections in Haryana (1967-2014)

Year	Male Contestants	Female Contestants	Seats Won by Women
1967	471	8	4
1968	338	12	7
1972	371	12	4
1977	651	20	4
1982	1068	27	7
1987	1287	35	5
1991	1844	41	6
1996	2515	93	4
2000	916	49	4
2005	923	60	11
2009	1153	69	9
2014	1235	86	13

Since 1967, when Haryana became a state, the women participation is comparatively low. In 1967 only 8 women has contested in the assembly election and this number remain same till the election of 1991. After the 73rd constitutional amendment by P. V Narasimha Rao in 1992, there is significant increase in the participation of women in 1996 assembly election. This increase is the result of the various reforms at local level by the 73rd and 74th amendment.

Table 4: Reservation of Seats in 2005 Election of Panchayats in Karnal district of Haryana

Offices	SC	SC(w)	women	BC	Unreserved
Panch	418	418	943	369	1556
Member Panchayat Samiti	25	16	43	16	85
Member Zila Parishad	3	2	6	1	11

In Karnal district of Haryana, the third panchayat election (year 2005) witnessed the reservation of seats for the female populace. In this election, a total of 943 Panch seats, 43 Panchayati Samiti seats and 6 Member zila Parishad seats were reserved for women. Therefore, the reservation attribution for women is prominent at all the levels of local governance. This reservation is termed as a remedy to empower the women in

political terms. Political empowerment of women inherently leads to the socio-economic upliftment of women that paves the way for egalitarian and just society.

Conclusion

In Karnal, Haryana, the study looks at how Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) promote women's empowerment in socio-economic and political terms. The study evaluated the effect of PRIs on women's empowerment using qualitative data collection techniques. According to the study, PRIs have been essential in increasing women's access to chances for employment, education, and healthcare, which has given them more power. Yet, societal attitudes and cultural customs are just two of the many barriers that still stand in the way of women's empowerment. To sustainably empower women, the report suggests enhancing PRI activities and advocating for more gender equality. The study also emphasizes how important it is to advance gender equality in order to achieve sustainable development. The report also highlights the significance of the 1992 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments to the Indian Constitution, which underline the significance of including women in the design and implementation of regional development initiatives aimed at empowering women.

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