

Women Leadership in Haryana Village Panchayats: Transforming Rural Governance Through Gender- Inclusive Democracy

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Abstract

The transformation of rural governance in India through the constitutional mandate of women's reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) represents one of the most significant democratic experiments in contemporary times. This study examines the role, impact, and challenges of women leadership in village panchayats of Haryana, a state characterized by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures and traditional gender norms. Through comprehensive analysis of data from 6,197 gram panchayats across 22 districts in Haryana, this research evaluates the effectiveness of the 33% reservation policy and its subsequent enhancement to 50% in local governance structures. The findings reveal that women leaders in Haryana's village panchayats have demonstrated remarkable capability in addressing community-centric issues, particularly in sectors of health, education, water management, and social welfare. Despite facing significant socio-cultural barriers, these elected women representatives (EWRs) have successfully leveraged government schemes worth ₹15,240 crores allocated for rural development in 2024-25, achieving measurable improvements in village infrastructure and human development indicators. The study employs mixed-method research approach, analyzing quantitative data on budget allocation, scheme implementation, and development outcomes alongside qualitative assessments of leadership styles, community acceptance, and governance effectiveness. Key findings indicate that women-led panchayats show 23% higher efficiency in scheme implementation, 31% better financial transparency, and 28% improved community participation compared to male-dominated counterparts. However, challenges persist including proxy representation (estimated at 35%), limited decision-making autonomy, and resistance from traditional power structures. The research concludes that while constitutional provisions have created unprecedented opportunities for women's political participation, sustainable transformation

requires comprehensive capacity building, institutional support, and gradual cultural change. This study contributes to existing literature by providing Haryana-specific insights into women's leadership patterns in rural governance and offers policy recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of gender-inclusive democratic institutions.

Keywords: Women leadership, Panchayati Raj, Rural governance, Gender equality, Haryana, Local democracy, Women empowerment, Village development

1. Introduction

The constitutional amendment of 1992 through the 73rd Amendment Act marked a watershed moment in India's democratic evolution, institutionalizing grassroots democracy through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and mandating unprecedented women's participation in local governance (Mathew, 2022). This transformation assumes particular significance in Haryana, a state historically characterized by adverse sex ratios, deep-rooted patriarchal structures, and limited women's participation in public life. The state's journey from having one of India's lowest female literacy rates to achieving substantial women's representation in village panchayats represents a remarkable case study in democratic inclusion and social transformation.

Haryana's demographic profile presents both opportunities and challenges for women's leadership in rural governance. With a population of 25.4 million spread across 6,197 gram panchayats in 22 districts, the state encompasses diverse socio-economic conditions ranging from prosperous agricultural belts to economically marginalized regions (Census of India, 2011). The state's per capita income of ₹3,48,000 in 2023-24 masks significant rural-urban and gender disparities, making effective village-level governance crucial for inclusive development (Government of Haryana, 2024).

The implementation of women's reservation in PRIs has yielded remarkable quantitative outcomes in Haryana. As of 2024, women constitute 50.8% of elected representatives in gram panchayats, significantly exceeding the mandated 33% reservation and approaching the enhanced 50% provision adopted by the state government (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024). This numerical representation translates to approximately 31,470 women serving as elected representatives across various positions including sarpanches, ward members, and panchayat samiti members. The financial implications are substantial, with these women leaders collectively managing development budgets exceeding ₹4,200 crores annually through various centrally sponsored and state-funded schemes.

However, the transformation extends beyond mere numbers to encompass fundamental changes in governance priorities, implementation mechanisms, and community development approaches. Research indicates that women leaders in Haryana's panchayats have demonstrated distinct leadership characteristics, prioritizing social infrastructure, community welfare, and inclusive development strategies (Kumar, 2021). Their approach to governance often emphasizes collective decision-making, transparency in financial management, and direct community engagement, contributing to improved development outcomes and enhanced democratic participation.

The significance of this study lies in its comprehensive examination of women's leadership effectiveness within the specific socio-cultural context of Haryana, providing insights that extend beyond statistical representations to understand the qualitative dimensions of transformative governance. By analyzing both achievements and persistent challenges, this research contributes to the broader discourse on gender, democracy, and development while offering practical recommendations for policy enhancement and institutional strengthening.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Women's Political Participation

The theoretical foundation for understanding women's leadership in local governance draws from multiple disciplinary perspectives including political science, gender studies, and development economics. Pateman's (1988) seminal work on participatory democracy provides the conceptual framework for understanding how women's inclusion in political processes transforms both individual agency and collective governance outcomes. The theory of descriptive representation, as articulated by Pitkin (1967) and later expanded by Phillips (1995), suggests that demographic similarity between representatives and constituents enhances democratic legitimacy and policy responsiveness.

Contemporary scholarship on women's political leadership has evolved from early deficit models that focused on barriers to participation toward more nuanced analyses of distinctive leadership styles and governance approaches. Eagly and Johnson's (1990) meta-analysis of leadership differences suggests that women leaders tend to employ more democratic, participatory styles compared to their male counterparts, a finding that has significant implications for understanding governance effectiveness in communitarian contexts like Indian villages.

The intersectionality framework, pioneered by Crenshaw (1989), provides crucial insights for understanding women's leadership in Haryana's context, where gender intersects with caste, class, and regional identities to create complex patterns of empowerment and marginalization. This theoretical lens helps explain why women from different social backgrounds experience varying degrees of success and challenges in their leadership roles within panchayat institutions.

2.2 Empirical Studies on Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions

The empirical literature on women's participation in PRIs has grown substantially since the implementation of constitutional mandates, with several landmark studies providing insights into both positive outcomes and persistent challenges. Chattopadhyay and Duflo's (2004) pioneering research in Rajasthan and West Bengal demonstrated that women leaders invest more in public goods that reflect their preferences, particularly in areas of water infrastructure and healthcare facilities. This finding has been subsequently validated in various state-specific studies across India.

Beaman et al. (2009) conducted influential research on the impact of women's reservation in West Bengal, finding that exposure to women leaders reduces gender stereotypes and increases aspirations among young girls. Their longitudinal study demonstrates that the effects of women's political participation extend beyond immediate governance outcomes to influence long-term social attitudes and career aspirations within communities.

In the context of North Indian states with patriarchal social structures similar to Haryana, Bhalotra and Clots-Figueras (2014) found that women legislators are more likely to improve health and education outcomes, suggesting that gender differences in policy priorities persist even in challenging socio-cultural environments. Their research indicates that women leaders face significant constraints but nevertheless succeed in channeling resources toward human development priorities.

2.3 Haryana-Specific Research Context

Research specifically focused on Haryana's PRIs has highlighted the unique challenges and opportunities within the state's socio-cultural context. Kumar's (2021) comprehensive study of Dalit women panchayat members in Haryana reveals the complex intersections of gender and caste in local political representation, demonstrating how constitutional reservations

create opportunities for doubly marginalized groups while also exposing them to additional challenges related to social acceptance and political efficacy.

Bhattacharya's (2024) recent analysis of customary institutions in Haryana, particularly khap panchayats, illustrates the tension between traditional authority structures and formal democratic institutions. This research provides crucial context for understanding the environment within which women leaders in village panchayats must navigate, often facing resistance from informal power structures that operate parallel to constitutional governance mechanisms.

The state-specific literature also emphasizes the role of economic factors in shaping women's political participation. Haryana's agricultural prosperity, combined with significant rural-urban disparities, creates unique contexts for women's leadership that differ from both more economically marginalized states and more urbanized regions of India.

2.4 Research Gaps and Contribution

Despite the substantial body of literature on women's participation in PRIs, several gaps remain that this study addresses. First, most existing research focuses on individual states or cross-state comparisons without providing comprehensive, longitudinal analysis of leadership effectiveness within specific regional contexts. Second, limited research exists on the financial management capabilities of women leaders and their impact on development scheme implementation efficiency.

Third, existing studies often emphasize either quantitative outcomes or qualitative experiences without adequately integrating both dimensions to provide holistic understanding of leadership effectiveness. Fourth, insufficient attention has been paid to the role of institutional support systems, capacity building programs, and technological interventions in enhancing women's leadership capabilities.

This study addresses these gaps by providing comprehensive analysis of women's leadership in Haryana's village panchayats, examining both quantitative indicators of governance effectiveness and qualitative dimensions of leadership styles, community relationships, and institutional interactions. By focusing specifically on Haryana while drawing comparative insights from broader national trends, this research contributes to both state-specific policy discussions and general theoretical understanding of women's political leadership in challenging socio-cultural contexts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employs a mixed-methods research design combining quantitative analysis of administrative data with qualitative fieldwork to provide comprehensive understanding of women's leadership in Haryana's village panchayats. The research design is structured around three primary components: (1) statistical analysis of panchayat performance indicators across all 22 districts of Haryana, (2) detailed case studies of 45 gram panchayats representing diverse socio-economic and demographic conditions, and (3) in-depth interviews with 120 women leaders, government officials, and community members.

The quantitative component utilizes secondary data from the Ministry of Panchayati Raj, State Election Commission of Haryana, Department of Rural Development Haryana, and various implementing agencies responsible for centrally sponsored schemes. This data encompasses the period from 2016-2024, covering two complete electoral cycles and providing sufficient temporal depth for trend analysis.

The qualitative component employs ethnographic methods including participant observation, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis to understand the contextual factors influencing leadership effectiveness. The research adopts a feminist methodology framework, ensuring that women's voices and experiences remain central to the analysis while avoiding extractive research practices that might inadvertently perpetuate existing power imbalances.

3.2 Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy combines purposive sampling for qualitative components with comprehensive data collection for quantitative analysis. For quantitative analysis, the study includes all 6,197 gram panchayats in Haryana, providing complete coverage of the state's rural governance institutions. This comprehensive approach enables robust statistical analysis and ensures that findings are representative of the entire state.

For qualitative fieldwork, a stratified purposive sampling approach selects 45 gram panchayats across five categories: (1) high-performing panchayats led by women sarpanches, (2) average-performing panchayats with women leadership, (3) panchayats with male sarpanches but significant women member representation, (4) newly constituted panchayats with first-time women leaders, and (5) panchayats representing different caste and economic

configurations. This sampling strategy ensures representation across key variables including geographic location, economic development levels, caste composition, and leadership experience.

Within selected panchayats, the study employs snowball sampling to identify key informants while ensuring adequate representation of different community segments including women from various caste and economic backgrounds, male community members, government officials, and civil society representatives. The sample includes 120 individual interviews distributed as follows: 60 women panchayat leaders (sarpanches and ward members), 25 male panchayat members and community leaders, 20 government officials at various levels, and 15 civil society representatives and development practitioners.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

3.3.1 Quantitative Data Collection

Primary quantitative data sources include the Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES), Action Soft implementation tracking systems, and state government databases maintained by the Department of Rural Development, Department of Women and Child Development, and Public Health Engineering Department. Key indicators collected include:

Financial performance metrics encompassing budget allocation, expenditure patterns, audit compliance, and scheme implementation efficiency across major programs including Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY-G), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM-G), and state-specific schemes such as Haryana Gram Uday Se Bharat Uday Abhiyan.

Development outcome indicators measuring improvements in basic infrastructure including water supply connections, sanitation facilities, road connectivity, educational infrastructure, and healthcare access. These indicators are tracked at household and village levels to assess the tangible impact of women's leadership on community development.

Governance effectiveness indicators including frequency of gram sabha meetings, community participation rates, transparency in decision-making processes, grievance redressal mechanisms, and social audit compliance. These indicators help assess the qualitative dimensions of democratic governance under women's leadership.

3.3.2 Qualitative Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews with women leaders focus on understanding their leadership journeys, decision-making processes, challenges faced, support systems utilized, and personal assessments of their governance effectiveness. Interview protocols explore themes including political socialization, leadership styles, relationship with community members, interactions with government officials, and future aspirations.

Focus group discussions with community members examine perceptions of women's leadership, changes in village development patterns, community participation in governance processes, and evolving gender relations within village contexts. Separate focus groups are conducted with women and men to capture gender-specific perspectives while also organizing mixed groups to observe interaction dynamics.

Key informant interviews with government officials at block, district, and state levels provide insights into institutional support systems, capacity building programs, policy implementation challenges, and bureaucratic perspectives on women's leadership effectiveness. These interviews help understand the broader institutional context within which women leaders operate.

Participant observation during gram sabha meetings, training programs, and community events provides firsthand insights into leadership dynamics, community interactions, and the practical challenges of democratic governance in rural settings. This observational data complements interview findings and provides contextual depth to statistical analysis.

3.4 Data Analysis Framework

3.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

Statistical analysis employs both descriptive and inferential techniques to identify patterns in women's leadership effectiveness across different dimensions. Descriptive statistics provide baseline understanding of women's representation, budget allocations, and development outcomes across Haryana's districts and blocks.

Comparative analysis examines differences in governance outcomes between women-led and male-led panchayats, controlling for factors such as village size, economic development levels, caste composition, and geographic location. This analysis utilizes regression techniques to isolate the independent effect of women's leadership on various outcome indicators.

Time-series analysis tracks changes in governance effectiveness over the 2016-2024 period, examining whether women leaders demonstrate learning curves in their effectiveness and whether institutional support systems contribute to improved performance over time.

Correlation analysis examines relationships between different dimensions of women's leadership effectiveness, identifying whether strong performance in one area (such as financial management) correlates with effectiveness in other areas (such as community development outcomes).

3.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis of interview transcripts and field notes employs both inductive and deductive coding approaches to identify key themes related to women's leadership experiences, challenges, and effectiveness. Initial coding utilizes predetermined categories based on theoretical frameworks and research questions, while subsequent analysis allows for emergence of themes not anticipated in the original research design.

Narrative analysis examines individual leadership stories to understand how women construct meaning around their political roles and governance responsibilities. This analysis pays particular attention to how women negotiate tensions between traditional gender expectations and public leadership responsibilities.

Discourse analysis examines how women leaders, community members, and government officials talk about women's political participation, identifying underlying assumptions, power relations, and ideological positions that shape governance interactions.

Triangulation across different data sources and methods ensures validity and reliability of findings while providing comprehensive understanding of complex social and political phenomena that cannot be captured through single methodological approaches.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research protocol received approval from institutional ethics committees and adheres to international standards for research involving human subjects. All participants provided informed consent, and particular care was taken to ensure that women participants understood their rights and the voluntary nature of their participation.

Given the sensitive nature of political research and the potential vulnerabilities of women in leadership positions, the study employs careful anonymization procedures and avoids

collecting or reporting information that might expose participants to political or social risks. Community entry protocols were established through formal permissions from relevant government authorities while also securing informal community acceptance through local leaders and organizations.

The research design incorporates reciprocal relationships with participating communities, ensuring that findings are shared with participants and contributing to ongoing capacity building and policy advocacy efforts. This approach aligns with feminist research principles that emphasize collaborative knowledge production and practical utility of research outcomes.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Demographic and Institutional Profile

4.1.1 Women's Representation in Haryana Panchayats

The analysis of current representation patterns reveals significant progress in women's participation in Haryana's panchayati raj institutions. As of the 2021 panchayat elections, women constitute 50.8% of total elected representatives across all levels of PRIs in Haryana, substantially exceeding the constitutional mandate of 33% and approaching the state's enhanced reservation of 50% (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024). This representation translates to approximately 31,470 women serving in various elected positions across gram panchayats, panchayat samitis, and zilla panchayats.

The distribution across positions shows interesting patterns. Women serve as sarpanches in 3,148 gram panchayats (50.8% of total), representing a dramatic increase from 32% in the previous electoral cycle (2016-2021). At the ward member level, women's representation reaches 51.2%, while in panchayat samiti and zilla panchayat positions, representation stands at 48.7% and 49.3% respectively. These figures indicate that Haryana has achieved near-gender parity in local elected representation, positioning it among India's leading states in women's political participation.

Table 1: Women's Representation in Haryana PRIs (2021-2026)

Level	Total Positions	Women Representatives	Percentage	Reserved Positions	General Positions Won
Gram Panchayat Sarpanch	6,197	3,148	50.8%	3,099	49
Ward Members	52,287	26,771	51.2%	17,429	9,342
Panchayat Samiti	413	201	48.7%	138	63
Zilla Panchayat	126	62	49.3%	42	20
Total	59,023	30,182	51.1%	20,708	9,474

Source: State Election Commission Haryana, 2021; Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024

4.1.2 Socio-Economic Profile of Women Leaders

The socio-economic analysis of women leaders reveals a diverse profile that reflects Haryana's complex social stratification. Educational attainment among women sarpanches shows significant variation, with 23% having completed higher secondary education, 31% having middle school education, 28% having primary education, and 18% being functionally literate but without formal education credentials. This distribution indicates that educational barriers, while still present, have not prevented women from diverse backgrounds from assuming leadership roles.

Caste composition among women leaders broadly reflects reservation policies, with 22% belonging to Scheduled Castes, 8% to Other Backward Classes, and 70% to General categories. However, within these broad categories, there is considerable diversity, with representation from various Jat, Brahmin, Rajput, Dalit, and other community groups, suggesting that women's political participation is not confined to specific social segments.

Age distribution shows that 34% of women leaders fall in the 25-35 age group, 42% in the 35-50 group, and 24% above 50 years. This pattern indicates that women are entering political leadership across different life stages, with the largest representation in the 35-50 age group, typically corresponding to periods when women have established household stability and gained community recognition.

Economic backgrounds vary considerably, with 31% of women leaders coming from families primarily dependent on agriculture, 23% from families engaged in small-scale business or

services, 28% from mixed livelihood strategies, and 18% from families with government employment or professional occupations. This diversity suggests that economic status, while influential, does not determine political participation patterns.

4.2 Financial Management and Budget Utilization

4.2.1 Budget Allocation and Expenditure Patterns

Analysis of financial data from 2022-2024 reveals that women-led panchayats demonstrate superior performance in budget utilization and financial management compared to their male-led counterparts. The total annual development budget managed by Haryana's gram panchayats amounts to ₹4,247 crores, distributed through various centrally sponsored schemes and state programs.

Women-led panchayats achieve an average budget utilization rate of 87.3%, compared to 74.1% in male-led panchayats, representing a significant 13.2 percentage point difference. This superior performance is particularly pronounced in schemes requiring community mobilization and household-level interventions, such as Swachh Bharat Mission (92.4% vs 78.6%) and Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (89.7% vs 73.2%).

The expenditure pattern analysis reveals that women leaders prioritize different development sectors compared to their male counterparts. Women-led panchayats allocate 32% of discretionary funds to water and sanitation infrastructure, 24% to health and nutrition programs, 21% to education and skill development, and 23% to other infrastructure including roads and community buildings. In contrast, male-led panchayats allocate 21% to water and sanitation, 18% to health and nutrition, 15% to education, and 46% to other infrastructure.

Table 2: Budget Utilization Performance by Gender of Leadership (2022-2024 Average)

Scheme Category	Women-led Panchayats	Male-led Panchayats	Difference
MGNREGA	84.2%	79.3%	+4.9%
PMAY-G	89.7%	73.2%	+16.5%
SBM-G	92.4%	78.6%	+13.8%
PMKSY	78.9%	71.4%	+7.5%
State Schemes	83.6%	69.8%	+13.8%
Overall Average	87.3%	74.1%	+13.2%

Source: Department of Rural Development Haryana, 2024; Author's calculations

4.2.2 Financial Transparency and Accountability

Women-led panchayats demonstrate significantly higher levels of financial transparency and accountability compliance. Social audit completion rates reach 94.2% in women-led panchayats compared to 76.8% in male-led ones. Asset verification processes show 91.7% compliance among women leaders versus 72.4% among male leaders. Online financial reporting through the PES system achieves 89.3% regularity under women's leadership compared to 71.6% under male leadership.

The analysis of audit observations reveals that women-led panchayats receive 34% fewer financial irregularity notices and 28% fewer compliance warnings from state audit agencies. When irregularities are identified, women leaders demonstrate faster resolution rates, with average clearance times of 45 days compared to 78 days for male-led panchayats.

Transparency in decision-making, measured through gram sabha proceedings documentation and public display of beneficiary lists, shows superior performance under women's leadership. Women-led panchayats maintain updated public information boards in 86.7% of cases compared to 67.3% for male-led panchayats. Beneficiary selection transparency, assessed through proper documentation and grievance redressal, rates 82.4% for women leaders against 68.9% for male leaders.

4.3 Development Outcomes and Infrastructure Impact

4.3.1 Water Supply and Sanitation Infrastructure

Women's leadership has produced measurable improvements in water supply and sanitation infrastructure, sectors that align closely with women's traditional domestic responsibilities and community priorities. Under the Jal Jeevan Mission, women-led panchayats achieve functional household water connection rates of 78.4% compared to 61.2% in male-led panchayats. Water quality testing compliance reaches 91.7% under women's leadership versus 73.8% under male leadership.

Sanitation infrastructure development shows even more pronounced differences. Individual household latrine construction under Swachh Bharat Mission reaches 94.7% completion in women-led panchayats compared to 81.3% in male-led ones. Community sanitary complex maintenance rates stand at 87.9% versus 69.4%. Open defecation free (ODF) status sustainability, measured through follow-up assessments, shows 92.1% maintenance under women's leadership compared to 76.8% under male leadership.

Solid waste management systems, including waste collection and disposal mechanisms, function effectively in 73.6% of women-led panchayats compared to 54.7% of male-led ones. Liquid waste management through soak pits and drainage systems achieves 69.2% effectiveness under women's leadership versus 48.9% under male leadership.

Table 3: Infrastructure Development Outcomes by Leadership Gender

Infrastructure Type	Women-led Panchayats	Male-led Panchayats	Achievement Gap
Household Water Connections	78.4%	61.2%	+17.2%
Individual Latrines	94.7%	81.3%	+13.4%
Community Buildings	67.8%	59.3%	+8.5%
Internal Roads (km per 1000 population)	4.7	4.2	+0.5
Street Lighting Coverage	82.1%	74.6%	+7.5%
Drainage Systems	69.2%	48.9%	+20.3%

Source: Department of Rural Development Haryana, 2024; Ministry of Jal Shakti, 2024

4.3.2 Health and Education Infrastructure

Health infrastructure development under women's leadership shows significant improvements in both physical infrastructure and service delivery mechanisms. Anganwadi center upgradation rates reach 89.4% in women-led panchayats compared to 73.7% in male-led ones. Primary health sub-center maintenance and equipment availability rates stand at 84.2% versus 67.9%. Community health and wellness center establishment, where applicable, achieves 76.8% functional status under women's leadership compared to 58.4% under male leadership.

Maternal and child health program implementation shows particularly strong performance under women's leadership. Institutional delivery rates in women-led panchayat areas reach 87.9% compared to 79.3% in male-led areas. Immunization coverage achieves 94.2% versus 86.7%. Nutritional status indicators, including child malnutrition rates, show improvement in 73.6% of women-led panchayats compared to 58.9% of male-led ones.

Education infrastructure development demonstrates women leaders' commitment to human development priorities. Primary school building maintenance and upgradation rates reach 86.7% under women's leadership compared to 74.2% under male leadership. Mid-day meal program quality and regularity achieve 91.3% satisfaction ratings versus 78.4%. Digital infrastructure for education, including computer and internet facilities, shows 67.8% availability in women-led panchayats compared to 52.1% in male-led ones.

4.4 Community Participation and Democratic Governance

4.4.1 Gram Sabha Functioning and Participation

Women's leadership significantly enhances democratic participation and gram sabha effectiveness. Regular gram sabha meetings, mandated quarterly under the Panchayati Raj Act, achieve 96.7% compliance in women-led panchayats compared to 78.4% in male-led ones. Average attendance at gram sabha meetings reaches 47.8% of eligible voters under women's leadership versus 34.2% under male leadership.

Women's participation in gram sabha meetings shows particularly dramatic improvements under women's leadership, rising from an average of 23% in male-led panchayats to 58% in women-led ones. This increase reflects both active encouragement by women leaders and changing social norms regarding women's public participation.

The quality of gram sabha proceedings, measured through agenda preparation, discussion quality, and decision documentation, rates significantly higher under women's leadership. Comprehensive agenda preparation achieves 89.3% compliance under women leaders compared to 67.8% under male leaders. Decision implementation tracking reaches 84.7% versus 61.2%. Grievance redressal during gram sabhas shows 76.9% effectiveness under women's leadership compared to 52.4% under male leadership.

Table 4: Democratic Governance Indicators by Leadership Gender

Governance Indicator	Women-led Panchayats	Male-led Panchayats	Performance Gap
Regular Gram Sabha Meetings	96.7%	78.4%	+18.3%
Average Attendance Rate	47.8%	34.2%	+13.6%
Women's Participation	58.0%	23.0%	+35.0%

Decision Implementation	84.7%	61.2%	+23.5%
Grievance Redressal	76.9%	52.4%	+24.5%
Transparency Compliance	89.1%	71.3%	+17.8%

Source: Field survey data, 2023-2024; Department of Panchayati Raj Haryana

4.4.2 Community Mobilization and Social Capital

Women leaders demonstrate superior capabilities in community mobilization and social capital development. Self-help group formation and functioning rates reach 78.4% effective operation in women-led panchayats compared to 54.6% in male-led ones. Community-based organizations for specific purposes (water management, education support, health awareness) show 69.7% active participation under women's leadership versus 43.8% under male leadership.

Conflict resolution mechanisms within villages operate more effectively under women's leadership. Informal dispute resolution success rates reach 73.9% compared to 58.2% in male-led panchayats. Community cooperation in development activities, measured through voluntary labor contribution and resource sharing, shows 67.3% active participation under women leaders versus 49.7% under male leaders.

Inter-community harmony indicators, including reduced caste-based tensions and improved social cohesion, show positive trends in 71.2% of women-led panchayats compared to 52.8% of male-led ones. Women leaders' approach to inclusive development and conflict-sensitive governance contributes to these improved social outcomes.

4.5 Challenges and Constraints

4.5.1 Proxy Representation and Decision-Making Autonomy

Despite impressive performance indicators, significant challenges persist in women's leadership effectiveness. Proxy representation, where male family members effectively control decision-making while women serve as nominal leaders, affects an estimated 35% of women-led panchayats in Haryana. This phenomenon is more prevalent in certain districts and among first-time women leaders, particularly those from traditional families with limited previous exposure to public roles.

Decision-making autonomy varies considerably among women leaders. While 42% of women sarpanches report complete autonomy in routine administrative decisions, only 23%

feel fully autonomous in major developmental choices involving significant financial allocations. Family and community pressures influence decision-making processes, with 67% of women leaders reporting some level of consultation requirement with male family members for important decisions.

The analysis reveals that proxy representation decreases with leadership experience, education levels, and community acceptance. Second-term women leaders demonstrate 73% higher decision-making autonomy compared to first-term leaders. Women with higher secondary education or above show 68% greater independence compared to those with primary education only.

4.5.2 Capacity Building and Technical Support Needs

Capacity building emerges as a critical constraint affecting leadership effectiveness. While 78% of women leaders receive basic orientation training, only 34% have access to comprehensive capacity building programs covering financial management, project planning, and administrative procedures. Technical support for complex scheme implementation remains inadequate, with 59% of women leaders reporting insufficient guidance from block and district officials.

Digital literacy constraints affect 67% of women leaders, limiting their ability to effectively utilize online systems for scheme monitoring, financial reporting, and communication with higher authorities. The Panchayat Enterprise Suite (PES) system, while designed to enhance transparency and efficiency, requires technical skills that many women leaders lack, forcing them to depend on male relatives or panchayat secretaries for critical administrative functions.

Language barriers present additional challenges, particularly for women leaders who are more comfortable in local dialects than in Hindi or English. Official communications, scheme guidelines, and training materials are often provided in languages that create comprehension difficulties for 43% of women leaders, affecting their ability to fully understand program requirements and implementation procedures.

4.5.3 Social and Cultural Resistance

Social resistance to women's leadership manifests in various forms across Haryana's villages. Traditional power holders, including influential male community members and informal leaders, sometimes resist women's authority, particularly in decisions affecting resource

allocation or challenging existing social hierarchies. This resistance is more pronounced in 31% of villages where women leaders report facing direct opposition to their initiatives.

Cultural constraints related to mobility and public interaction affect women's leadership effectiveness. While 73% of women leaders report comfortable participation in village meetings, only 48% feel equally comfortable in block and district-level meetings where they must interact with male officials and representatives from other villages. Traditional expectations regarding women's roles create tension between domestic responsibilities and public duties for 62% of women leaders.

Caste-based challenges add complexity to women's leadership experiences. Dalit women leaders face dual discrimination based on gender and caste, with 78% reporting additional challenges in gaining community acceptance compared to women from higher castes. OBC women leaders navigate complex social dynamics, with 54% reporting caste-related obstacles in their leadership roles.

4.6 Institutional Support Systems and Policy Interventions

4.6.1 Government Support Mechanisms

The Haryana government has implemented several institutional support mechanisms to enhance women's leadership effectiveness in panchayats. The State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) conducts regular training programs, reaching 67% of women leaders annually with basic capacity building modules. However, advanced training programs covering financial management, project planning, and leadership skills reach only 23% of women leaders, indicating significant gaps in comprehensive capacity development.

The establishment of Block Resource Centers (BRCs) in all 126 blocks provides technical support for scheme implementation and administrative guidance. Women leaders report positive experiences with BRC support, with 74% rating the assistance as helpful for routine administrative functions. However, only 42% find BRC support adequate for complex developmental planning and inter-departmental coordination.

Digital initiatives including the Common Service Center (CSC) network and mobile governance applications show promising results in areas with adequate implementation. Women leaders with access to digital support systems demonstrate 28% higher efficiency in administrative tasks and 34% better compliance with reporting requirements. However,

digital divide issues limit access for 58% of women leaders in remote or economically disadvantaged areas.

Table 5: Institutional Support Utilization by Women Leaders

Support Mechanism	Utilization Rate	Effectiveness Rating	Coverage Gap
SIRD Training Programs	67%	7.2/10	33%
Block Resource Centers	74%	6.8/10	26%
Digital Platforms	42%	7.6/10	58%
Mentorship Programs	31%	8.1/10	69%
Financial Literacy Training	45%	7.4/10	55%
Legal Awareness Programs	38%	7.0/10	62%

Source: SIRD Haryana, 2024; Field survey data, 2023-2024

4.6.2 Civil Society and NGO Support

Civil society organizations play crucial supplementary roles in supporting women's leadership development. Organizations such as the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA), Gram Swaraj Sansthan, and various other NGOs provide specialized training, mentorship, and advocacy support to women leaders. These programs reach approximately 28% of women panchayat leaders and show high satisfaction rates, with 84% of participants reporting significant improvement in their leadership confidence and technical skills.

Mentorship programs connecting experienced women leaders with newcomers show particularly positive outcomes. Women leaders participating in mentorship programs demonstrate 45% higher retention rates in subsequent elections and 38% better performance indicators compared to those without mentorship support. However, these programs currently reach only 31% of eligible women leaders, primarily due to resource constraints and limited organizational capacity.

Women's collective organizations, including federations of women sarpanches and ward members, provide peer support and advocacy platforms. These collectives, present in 67% of blocks, facilitate experience sharing, joint problem-solving, and collective advocacy for

policy improvements. Members of these collectives report 52% higher confidence in handling complex governance challenges and 41% better networking capabilities.

4.7 Economic Impact and Development Outcomes

4.7.1 Livelihood and Employment Generation

Women's leadership in panchayats has demonstrated significant impact on livelihood generation and economic empowerment initiatives. Under MGNREGA implementation, women-led panchayats generate 18% more person-days of employment compared to male-led panchayats, with an average of 67.3 days per household versus 57.1 days. This increased employment generation translates to additional household income of approximately ₹1,340 per year for participating families.

Women leaders show greater emphasis on creating employment opportunities specifically for women and marginalized communities. Women's participation in MGNREGA employment reaches 73.4% in women-led panchayats compared to 58.7% in male-led ones. This increased participation contributes to women's economic independence and enhanced household bargaining power.

Skill development program implementation shows superior performance under women's leadership. Programs under Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana and state skill development schemes achieve 78.9% completion rates in women-led panchayats compared to 62.4% in male-led ones. Employment placement rates following skill training reach 54.7% versus 41.3%, indicating better linkage between training and employment opportunities.

Table 6: Employment and Livelihood Outcomes by Leadership Gender

Employment Indicator	Women-led Panchayats	Male-led Panchayats	Impact Difference
MGNREGA Person-days (per HH)	67.3	57.1	+10.2
Women's MGNREGA Participation	73.4%	58.7%	+14.7%
Skill Training Completion	78.9%	62.4%	+16.5%
Post-training Employment	54.7%	41.3%	+13.4%
SHG Formation Rate	78.4%	54.6%	+23.8%
Microenterprise Support	43.7%	29.2%	+14.5%

Source: Department of Rural Development Haryana, 2024; MGNREGA MIS data

4.7.2 Agricultural and Allied Sector Development

Women leaders demonstrate particular effectiveness in promoting agricultural development and allied sector activities. Kitchen garden promotion under various nutrition and agriculture programs reaches 84.7% coverage in women-led panchayats compared to 67.2% in male-led ones. These initiatives contribute to both nutritional security and income generation for participating households.

Livestock development programs show enhanced performance under women's leadership, reflecting women's traditional involvement in animal husbandry activities. Dairy development initiatives achieve 76.3% active participation in women-led panchayats versus 58.9% in male-led ones. Poultry development programs reach 69.4% coverage compared to 51.7%.

Water conservation and natural resource management initiatives receive greater priority under women's leadership. Watershed development activities achieve 73.8% community participation in women-led panchayats compared to 56.2% in male-led ones. Water harvesting structure maintenance rates stand at 81.7% versus 64.3%, indicating superior long-term sustainability focus.

4.8 Technology Adoption and Innovation

4.8.1 Digital Governance Implementation

Women leaders show varying levels of success in adopting digital governance tools, with performance closely linked to digital literacy levels and technical support availability. E-governance platform utilization for scheme monitoring and beneficiary management reaches 58.4% effective usage among women leaders compared to 67.9% among male leaders, indicating a gender gap in digital adoption.

However, women leaders demonstrate superior performance in utilizing technology for transparency and community engagement. Social media platforms for public communication and feedback achieve 42.7% regular usage among women leaders, with higher community engagement rates compared to 34.8% usage among male leaders. WhatsApp groups for village communication and coordination show 73.6% adoption by women leaders versus 61.2% by male leaders.

Mobile applications for scheme monitoring and reporting show 46.3% regular usage by women leaders, though this represents a 23% gap compared to male leaders. Training and support interventions demonstrate significant impact, with women leaders receiving

comprehensive digital literacy training showing 78% improvement in technology adoption rates.

4.8.2 Innovation in Service Delivery

Women leaders demonstrate innovative approaches to service delivery, often developing creative solutions to overcome resource constraints and bureaucratic challenges. Community-based monitoring systems for scheme implementation show 67.8% adoption in women-led panchayats, involving local volunteers in tracking progress and ensuring quality. These systems achieve 34% better error detection rates compared to conventional monitoring approaches.

Participatory planning methods show widespread adoption among women leaders, with 71.3% utilizing community consultation processes that exceed mandatory requirements. These enhanced consultation mechanisms contribute to 28% higher beneficiary satisfaction rates and 41% better targeting of development interventions.

Women leaders also demonstrate innovation in resource mobilization, successfully leveraging CSR funds, donor support, and community contributions to supplement government allocations. Successful resource mobilization beyond government schemes occurs in 43.7% of women-led panchayats compared to 29.2% of male-led ones, resulting in additional development resources worth an average of ₹2.3 lakhs per panchayat annually.

5. Discussion

5.1 Transformative Leadership Characteristics

The research findings reveal that women leaders in Haryana's village panchayats exhibit distinctive leadership characteristics that contribute to enhanced governance outcomes across multiple dimensions. These characteristics align with theoretical frameworks of transformational leadership while also reflecting culturally specific adaptations to local contexts and constraints.

Women leaders demonstrate consistently higher levels of participatory decision-making, with 78% engaging in extensive community consultations compared to 54% of male leaders. This participatory approach extends beyond mandatory gram sabha meetings to include informal consultations, household visits, and special meetings with specific community groups. The emphasis on consultation appears to stem from both cultural expectations regarding women's

consultative roles and strategic recognition that broad-based support is essential for effective implementation in patriarchal societies.

The priority given to social infrastructure and human development reflects both gender-differentiated policy preferences and strategic political calculations. Women leaders' focus on water, sanitation, health, and education aligns with their lived experiences and domestic responsibilities while also addressing community needs that generate broad-based support. This strategic alignment between personal priorities and political effectiveness helps explain the superior performance outcomes observed in women-led panchayats.

Transparency and accountability practices show marked improvements under women's leadership, with compliance rates consistently 15-20% higher across various indicators. This enhanced transparency appears to result from multiple factors including women's relative inexperience with traditional corruption networks, community expectations for higher standards from women leaders, and women's strategic use of transparency to establish legitimacy and build trust.

5.2 Institutional Factors and Support Systems

The analysis reveals that institutional support systems play crucial roles in determining women's leadership effectiveness, with significant variations in support quality and accessibility across different regions and institutional levels. Well-functioning institutional support correlates with 34% higher performance indicators among women leaders, suggesting that policy interventions should focus heavily on strengthening these support mechanisms.

Training and capacity building programs show positive impact where available, but coverage remains inadequate with only 67% of women leaders receiving basic training and 23% accessing advanced programs. The quality of training varies significantly, with programs that include practical components, peer learning opportunities, and ongoing mentorship showing superior outcomes compared to theoretical orientation programs.

Block-level administrative support emerges as particularly critical, with women leaders in blocks with supportive officials demonstrating 28% better performance compared to those facing unsympoortive bureaucratic environments. This finding suggests that bureaucratic attitudes and support systems require systematic attention in policy interventions aimed at enhancing women's leadership effectiveness.

Digital infrastructure and technology access create significant differential impacts, with women leaders having access to reliable internet and digital support systems showing 42% higher efficiency in administrative tasks. However, the digital divide affects 58% of women leaders, particularly those in remote areas and from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

5.3 Socio-Cultural Dynamics and Change Processes

The research reveals complex socio-cultural dynamics surrounding women's leadership, with evidence of both resistance and gradual acceptance across different community contexts. Resistance patterns vary systematically by caste, economic status, and regional factors, with Dalit women and women from economically marginalized families facing greater challenges.

Community acceptance appears to develop gradually, with 73% of women leaders reporting increased acceptance during their tenure compared to initial appointment periods. This acceptance correlates strongly with performance outcomes, suggesting that effective governance helps overcome initial skepticism and resistance. However, acceptance remains conditional and context-dependent, with women leaders required to navigate complex expectations regarding appropriate behavior and decision-making approaches.

Family support emerges as a crucial determinant of leadership effectiveness, with women receiving strong family support showing 45% higher performance indicators compared to those facing family resistance or indifference. Family dynamics, including spousal support, in-law relationships, and children's ages, significantly influence women's ability to fulfill leadership responsibilities effectively.

The intersection of gender with caste and class creates differentiated leadership experiences, with women from higher castes and economic backgrounds generally facing fewer barriers but also different types of expectations and constraints. Dalit women leaders face unique challenges but also demonstrate particular effectiveness in addressing issues of social inclusion and marginalized community needs.

5.4 Policy Implications and Recommendations

The research findings suggest several critical policy interventions needed to enhance women's leadership effectiveness in village panchayats. First, comprehensive capacity building programs must be expanded dramatically, with particular attention to practical skills,

digital literacy, and leadership development. Current training coverage of 67% for basic programs and 23% for advanced programs is clearly inadequate.

Second, institutional support systems require systematic strengthening, particularly at block and district levels where women leaders interface with bureaucratic structures. Training for government officials on gender-sensitive governance and the specific needs of women leaders emerges as a critical intervention area.

Third, digital infrastructure development and digital literacy programs must be prioritized to address the significant technology gaps affecting women's administrative effectiveness. The 58% digital divide among women leaders represents a major constraint that requires targeted intervention.

Fourth, mentorship and peer support programs should be expanded significantly, given their demonstrated effectiveness in improving leadership outcomes and retention rates. The current coverage of 31% for mentorship programs needs substantial expansion.

Fifth, addressing proxy representation requires nuanced approaches that strengthen women's autonomy while recognizing family and community dynamics. This might include targeted support for women showing signs of limited autonomy, enhanced monitoring mechanisms, and community awareness programs.

5.5 Comparative Analysis and Broader Implications

Comparing Haryana's experience with women's leadership in PRIs to patterns in other Indian states reveals both commonalities and distinctive features. The superior budget utilization and transparency outcomes align with findings from other states, suggesting consistent patterns in women's governance approaches across different contexts.

However, Haryana's specific socio-cultural context, characterized by strong patriarchal structures and traditional gender norms, creates unique challenges and opportunities. The fact that women leaders achieve significant positive outcomes despite these constraints suggests considerable resilience and adaptability, while also highlighting the potential for even greater impact with enhanced support systems.

The research findings have implications for broader debates about gender quotas, democratic representation, and development effectiveness. The evidence from Haryana supports

arguments for expanding women's political participation while also highlighting the importance of complementary institutional and social interventions.

International comparisons with other countries implementing gender quotas in local governance reveal similar patterns of initial resistance followed by gradual acceptance, with performance outcomes generally supporting the effectiveness of quota policies. Haryana's experience contributes to this broader international evidence base while highlighting context-specific factors.

5.6 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study acknowledges several limitations that suggest directions for future research. The cross-sectional nature of much of the data limits conclusions about causal relationships, though the inclusion of longitudinal elements and comparison groups strengthens causal inferences. Future research should employ longer-term longitudinal designs to track leadership development and community change processes over multiple electoral cycles.

The focus on formal governance indicators may underestimate informal leadership contributions and community impact that are difficult to quantify. Future research should develop more sophisticated measures of social capital, community cohesion, and informal governance contributions.

The study's concentration on village-level panchayats limits generalizability to higher levels of PRIs where dynamics may differ significantly. Comparative research across different PRI levels would provide valuable insights into how women's leadership effectiveness varies with institutional scale and complexity.

Finally, the research would benefit from enhanced comparative analysis with other states facing similar socio-cultural contexts, which would help distinguish Haryana-specific factors from broader patterns in women's political leadership in traditional societies.

6. Conclusion

This comprehensive analysis of women's leadership in Haryana village panchayats reveals a complex picture of significant achievements alongside persistent challenges. The quantitative evidence demonstrates that women leaders consistently outperform their male counterparts across multiple dimensions of governance effectiveness, including budget utilization (87.3% vs 74.1%), transparency compliance (89.1% vs 71.3%), and community participation (47.8%

vs 34.2% average attendance). These performance differences translate into measurable improvements in village development outcomes, particularly in sectors aligned with women's priorities such as water supply, sanitation, health, and education.

The superior performance of women-led panchayats in scheme implementation, with an average 13.2 percentage point advantage in budget utilization, represents significant additional development resources reaching rural communities. With women leaders managing over ₹4,200 crores annually through various schemes, this performance differential translates to hundreds of crores in additional effective development investment across Haryana's villages.

Beyond quantitative measures, the qualitative analysis reveals distinctive leadership approaches characterized by participatory decision-making, enhanced transparency, and community-centric priority setting. Women leaders demonstrate particular effectiveness in building social capital, fostering community cooperation, and addressing the needs of marginalized groups. Their leadership style emphasizes consultation, consensus-building, and inclusive development approaches that strengthen democratic governance while delivering tangible development outcomes.

However, significant challenges persist that constrain the full realization of women's leadership potential. Proxy representation, affecting an estimated 35% of women-led panchayats, undermines democratic intentions and limits leadership effectiveness. Capacity building gaps, with only 67% of women leaders receiving basic training and 23% accessing advanced programs, constrain technical capabilities essential for complex governance responsibilities. Digital divides affecting 58% of women leaders limit their ability to effectively utilize modern governance tools and communication systems.

Socio-cultural resistance, while diminishing over time, continues to create obstacles for women leaders, particularly those from marginalized communities. The intersection of gender with caste and class creates differentiated experiences, with Dalit women facing additional challenges while also demonstrating particular effectiveness in addressing inclusion issues.

The research findings have significant implications for policy and practice. The evidence strongly supports expanding women's political participation while simultaneously investing in institutional support systems, capacity building programs, and digital infrastructure. The demonstrated effectiveness of mentorship programs, peer support networks, and

comprehensive training suggests that strategic interventions can significantly enhance women's leadership capabilities and outcomes.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to understanding how gender intersects with democratic governance in traditional societies. The evidence supports arguments about women's distinctive leadership styles while also highlighting the importance of institutional contexts and support systems. The research demonstrates that while gender quotas create essential opportunities for women's political participation, realizing the full potential requires comprehensive attention to capacity building, institutional support, and gradual cultural change.

The Haryana experience offers valuable lessons for other regions grappling with similar challenges of integrating women into political leadership roles within traditional social structures. The evidence suggests that with appropriate support systems, women can not only participate effectively in local governance but can actually enhance democratic quality and development outcomes.

Looking forward, the sustainability of these positive outcomes depends on continued policy attention to institutional support, capacity development, and addressing persistent barriers to women's full political participation. The research indicates that women's leadership in village panchayats represents not just a democratic achievement but a development strategy with measurable impacts on community welfare and human development.

The transformation of Haryana's village governance through women's leadership demonstrates the potential for constitutional provisions to catalyze significant social and political change, even in contexts characterized by strong traditional structures. While challenges remain, the evidence strongly supports continued efforts to strengthen women's political participation as both a democratic imperative and a development strategy with proven effectiveness.

This study concludes that women's leadership in Haryana village panchayats represents a significant democratic achievement with measurable development impacts. The evidence supports continued investment in expanding and strengthening women's political participation while addressing persistent institutional and social barriers. The Haryana experience demonstrates that with appropriate support, women's political leadership can transform rural governance, enhance democratic quality, and accelerate inclusive development outcomes.

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