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A STUDY OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL RESERVATION LEADERSHIP IN UTTAR PRADESH

Nagesh Narayan Pandey[1] Prof. Ghanshyam Mishra[2]
[1]*Research Scholar, Department of Sociology, Kashi Narayan Government PG College Gyanpur Bhadohi, MGKV, Varanasi*
[2]*Professor, Department of Sociology, Kashi Narayan Government PG College Gyanpur Bhadohi, MGKV, Varanasi*

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ABSTRACT
The trends of women's political reservation and its influence on their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and local governance in Uttar Pradesh. The objective is to analyze how reservation policies have shaped women's representation across different tiers of PRIs. Adopting a descriptive and analytical design with a mixed-method approach, the research relies on both primary and secondary data. Primary data will be collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with elected women representatives, officials, and community members, while secondary data is drawn from government reports, census figures, and scholarly works. Quantitative analysis through percentages and trend studies, combined with qualitative thematic analysis, provides a comprehensive picture of women's involvement. Findings indicate that while the state-wide average of women's participation has remained at 33.33% due to constitutional reservation, leadership positions show significant growth between 2015 and 2021. Representation of women increased from 45% to 53.7% among Gram Pradhans, from 33% to 54.2% among Block Pramukhs, and from 33% to 56% among Zila Panchayat Chairpersons. However, representation among members stagnated at around 24–25%. Overall, the study concludes that reservation has enhanced women's visibility and empowerment in local governance, though structural and social barriers persist at the grassroots.

KEYWORDS: *Women Panchayati Raj, Reservation, Women leaders, Uttar Pradesh, local governance.*

INTRODUCTION
Women's political participation has emerged as a significant force in strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring inclusive governance. In India, the introduction of political reservation for women in the Panchayati Raj system through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) marked a historic step towards empowering women at the grassroots level. This provision mandated that one-third of the seats in panchayats and urban local bodies be reserved for women, thereby creating opportunities for them to enter the political arena, influence decision-making, and contribute to local development. In the context of Uttar Pradesh (U.P.), India's most populous state with deep-rooted social hierarchies and patriarchal traditions, women's political reservation has played a transformative role. It has not only increased the numerical representation of women in leadership positions but also provided them with a platform to voice concerns related to health, education, sanitation, livelihood, and gender justice. However, the journey has not been without challenges—issues such as proxy leadership, lack of political training, and socio-cultural barriers continue to shape the effectiveness of women leaders.

Studying women's political reservation leadership in U.P. is thus crucial for understanding the extent to which reservation has translated into real empowerment, leadership capacity, and policy influence. It also provides insights into the evolving dynamics of governance, the intersection of gender and politics, and the long-term implications of affirmative action in one of India's most politically significant states.

OBJECTIVE
To analysis the trends of women's political reservation on their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and local governance in Uttar Pradesh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY
The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design with a mixed-method approach to examine the trends of women's political reservation and their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and local governance in Uttar Pradesh. Both primary and secondary data will be utilized: primary data will be collected through questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions with elected women representatives, officials, and community members, while secondary data will be drawn from government reports, census data, and scholarly literature. A purposive sampling method will be used to select districts and respondents, covering women leaders at Gram Panchayat, Block Panchayat, and Zila Panchayat levels, Quantitative data will be analyzed using statistical tools such as percentages and trend analysis, while qualitative data will undergo thematic analysis to capture experiences and challenges. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, will be strictly maintained, though the study may face limitations due to reliance on secondary data and restricted coverage of districts.

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Policy Framework and Institutional Structure in Uttar Pradesh

Policy Framework

Based on the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992), which mandates women's reservation in local self-governance. Uttar Pradesh has implemented one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). Reservation applies not only to membership but also to leadership positions like Gram Pradhan, Block Pramukh, and Zila Panchayat Chairperson. The state follows a rotation system of reserved seats, allowing wider participation of women across different constituencies. Policies are designed to promote inclusive governance and ensure women's voices in local decision-making.

Institutional Structure

Three-tier Panchayati Raj System in U.P.:

Gram Panchayat (Village level): Led by the Gram Pradhan, directly elected by villagers.

Kshetra Panchayat (Block level): Comprising elected representatives from villages within a block.

Zila Panchayat (District level): Governing body at the district, headed by a Chairperson.

Seats at all three levels are reserved for women, Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC).

The structure enables women to participate from grassroots to district-level governance.

Institutional support mechanisms (training programs, awareness campaigns, government schemes) are introduced to build women's leadership capacity.

Zila Panchayat → Governs at the district level, headed by a Chairperson.

Kshetra Panchayat → Governs at the block level, coordinating villages.

Gram Panchayat → Governs at the village level, led by Gram Pradhan.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework explains how women's reservation policy in Uttar Pradesh shapes their participation, leadership, and empowerment in the Panchayati Raj system. It highlights the relationship between policies, institutional structures, challenges, and outcomes.

Key Components

Policy Inputs

- 73rd Constitutional Amendment (1992)
- Reservation of seats and leadership positions for women (1/3rd or more)
- State-level rules and guidelines for Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)
- Institutional Features
- Three-tier Panchayati Raj structure (Gram, Kshetra, Zila Panchayats)
- Rotation of reserved seats
- Training and capacity-building programs for women leaders
- Mediating Factors (Challenges & Enablers)
- Socio-cultural barriers: Patriarchy, lack of awareness, family control ("proxy leadership")
- Economic constraints: Limited financial independence
- Political support: Party backing, community networks, NGOs
- Capacity-building efforts: Education, training, exposure visits

Increased numerical representation of women in local governance, Active participation in decision-making processes, Policy influence in areas such as health, education, sanitation, and livelihood, Social empowerment and breaking of traditional gender barriers and Long-term impact on inclusive governance and rural development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ahmed. A et al. (2025) the paper investigates the impact of women's political reservation in Uttar Pradesh's Panchayati Raj Institutions, focusing on representation, governance, and social norms. Using a mixed-methods approach—including quasi-experimental design, village-panel surveys, and qualitative interviews—it examines how rotating reserved seats influence leadership practices and citizen attitudes. The study concludes that while reservation increases women's presence and can improve service delivery and reduce gender bias, its effectiveness depends on training, fiscal autonomy, and institutional safeguards to ensure women's de facto authority in office.

Thakuria, A. (2025) This study examines how Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) empower rural women in India through a mixed-methods analysis of 2021–2024 state data and surveys of 450 women representatives across five states. Results show that PRIs boost women's participation and social welfare outcomes but challenges like limited autonomy, knowledge gaps, and cultural barriers remain. The study calls for structural reforms in training, financial independence, and institutional support to strengthen women's empowerment in local governance.

Parveen, S., & Hussain, M. I. (2024). the study reviews women's political participation in India's Panchayati Raj Institutions (1993–2024), focusing on the impact of the 73rd Amendment's one-third reservation. Drawing on over twenty scholarly works, it finds that while women's representation and grassroots leadership have grown, deep-rooted patriarchy and resource gaps still limit effective participation. The paper calls for structural reforms, intersectional approaches, and alignment with the Sustainable Development Goals to achieve truly inclusive governance.

Hoque, A. (2020) this study reviews women's political participation in India's Panchayati Raj Institutions (1993–2024) under the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Through a literature review of legal frameworks, societal barriers, and policy measures, it finds that reservations have boosted women's representation but challenges like patriarchy and resource gaps persist. The paper calls for intersectional approaches and long-term strategies to advance inclusive governance in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

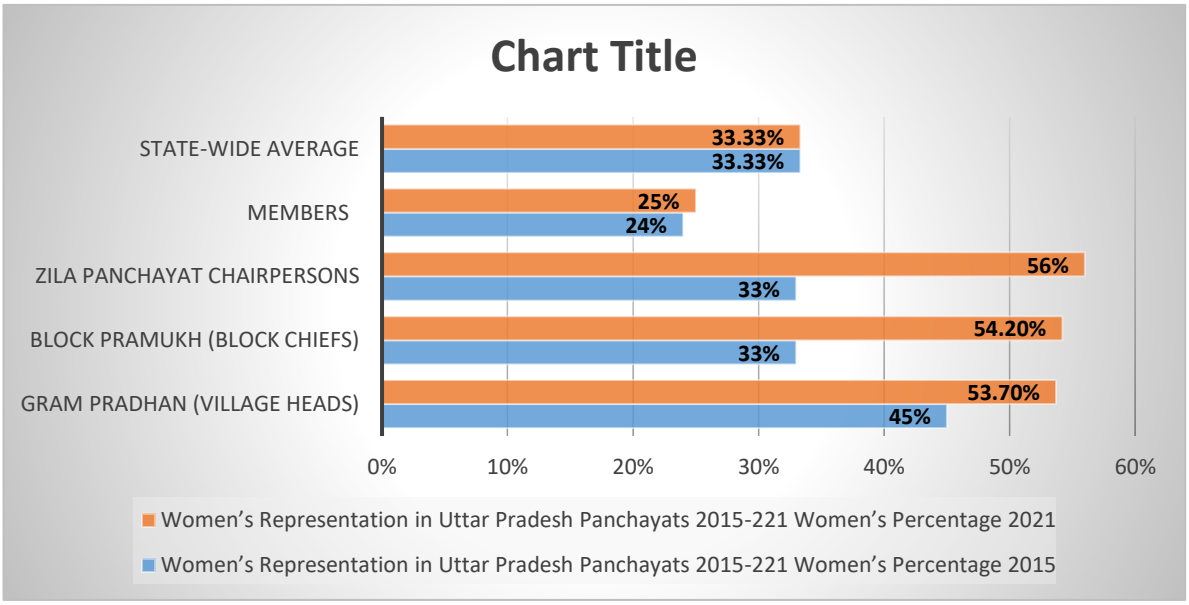
Bag, M., & Jagadala, M. (2016) the study investigates the impact of women's reservation in the Panchayati Raj system, focusing on representation versus actual participation in

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decision-making. Using personal interviews, case studies, and focus group discussions with elected women representatives from Kharmunda and Tangarpali Panchayats in Odisha, the authors assess socio-economic profiles, willingness to engage in politics, and barriers to effective participation. Despite constitutional safeguards, findings reveal that most women serve symbolically, with real power often exercised by male relatives. The study concludes that reservation alone does not ensure empowerment; deep-rooted patriarchal norms and lack of education hinder meaningful involvement in governance.

Table No.1 Women's Representation in Uttar Pradesh Panchayats 2015-221

Panchayat Level	Women's Percentage 2015	Women's Percentage 2021
Gram Pradhan (Village Heads)	45%	53.7%
Block Pramukh (Block Chiefs)	33%	54.2%
Zila Panchayat Chairpersons	33%	56%
Members	24-26%	24-25%
State-wide Average	33.33%	33.33%



The chart compares women's representation in Uttar Pradesh Panchayats in 2015 and 2021 across different levels of the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The state-wide average shows no significant change, remaining at around 33.33% in both years, which reflects the constitutional one-third reservation. At the member level, women's representation increased only slightly from 24% in 2015 to 25% in 2021, indicating slower progress at the grassroots membership stage. However, significant growth is visible in leadership positions. Among Gram Pradhans (village heads), women's representation rose from 45% in 2015 to 53.7% in 2021. Similarly, women as Block Pramukhs (block chiefs) increased from 33% to 54.2%, and at the Zila Panchayat Chairperson level, their share jumped from 33% to 56%.

This indicates that while the average representation remains steady, women are increasingly occupying higher leadership roles in Panchayati Raj governance, suggesting not only compliance with reservation policies but also greater acceptance and empowerment of women in local self-government.

Factors Affecting Increase in Women's Participation in Panchayat Raj

- **Constitutional Reservation:** The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act (1992) mandated one-third reservation for women in Panchayati Raj seats, later increased to 50% in many states including Uttar Pradesh. This legal guarantee has been the most important driver.
- **Government Policies and Schemes:** Training, awareness, and capacity-building programs (e.g., Ministry of Panchayati Raj initiatives, NGO-led workshops) have encouraged women to take up leadership roles.
- **Education and Awareness:** Increasing female literacy rates and awareness of rights have motivated more women to contest and actively participate in local governance.
- **Support from Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and NGOs:** Women's collectives, especially Self-Help Groups, provide leadership training, financial independence, and confidence that often translates into political participation.
- **Political Will and Party Support:** Political parties nominating women and backing them with resources has made it easier for them to contest and win elections.

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- **Social Change and Community Acceptance:** Gradual shifts in cultural norms and acceptance of women as decision-makers have created a more supportive environment.
- **Economic Empowerment:** With more women engaged in income-generating activities, they gain financial independence, which strengthens their ability to participate in politics.
- **Role Models and Success Stories:** Visible success of women leaders at local levels inspires other women to step forward and participate.

CONCLUSION

The study set out to analyze the trends of women's political reservation and its impact on their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and local governance in Uttar Pradesh. Based on the findings, it is evident that reservation policies have played a decisive role in enhancing women's representation, particularly in leadership positions. While the state-wide average of women's participation has remained constant at one-third due to the mandated reservation, the data from 2015 to 2021 shows a remarkable upward trend in key leadership roles. Women's representation as Gram Pradhans rose from 45% to 53.7%, Block Pramukhs from 33% to 54.2%, and Zila Panchayat Chairpersons from 33% to 56%, reflecting not only policy enforcement but also increasing social acceptance of women's political leadership.

The descriptive and analytical methodology, supported by both primary and secondary data, further highlights that while women are taking on greater responsibilities at decision-making levels, their participation as members has remained stagnant (around 24–25%), indicating persistent structural and social barriers at the grassroots. The mixed-method approach suggests that factors such as education, awareness, training, and community support are crucial for strengthening women's effective participation.

In conclusion, the trends demonstrate that women's political reservation has significantly contributed to their empowerment and visibility in local governance in Uttar Pradesh, especially in leadership roles. However, sustained efforts in capacity-building, social awareness, and institutional support are essential to move beyond numerical representation and ensure meaningful participation of women across all levels of the Panchayati Raj system.

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