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IMPACT OF POLITICAL RESERVATION ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP EFFECTIVENESS IN GRAM PANCHAYATS OF UTTAR PRADESH: A STUDY OF ALIGARH DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of political reservation on women's leadership effectiveness in the Gram Panchayats of Aligarh district, Uttar Pradesh. Based entirely on secondary data, the study evaluates the level of women's participation, administrative capabilities, decision-making autonomy, and involvement in development activities. The analysis shows a steady rise in women's representation in Aligarh, especially after the implementation of 33% reservation. Although significant improvements are visible in areas such as health, sanitation, water supply, and education, challenges like patriarchal norms, financial illiteracy, proxy leadership, and limited training continue to hinder women's full leadership potential. The study concludes that political reservation is a necessary but insufficient step, and enhanced capacity-building measures are required to strengthen women's effectiveness in rural governance.

KEYWORDS: *Women, Challenges, Reservation, Financial*

INTRODUCTION

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 marked a major turning point in India's democratic evolution by formally establishing Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) as the grassroots tier of governance and ensuring women's participation through mandated political reservation. In Uttar Pradesh, half of all seats in PRIs are reserved for women, offering them significant avenues to take part in village-level decision-making processes. This amendment brought about a historic shift by decentralizing power to rural local bodies and guaranteeing that at least one-third of all positions in PRIs would be held by women—a provision later expanded to 50 percent in several states, including Uttar Pradesh. As a result, India now hosts one of the largest experiments in women's political participation at the grassroots level. The reservation policy has vastly increased the number of women elected to Gram Panchayats, enabling millions to step into formal governance roles for the first time. Yet, a central question persists: Do these women possess actual decision-making authority, demonstrate genuine leadership, and influence village development? The distinction between **descriptive representation** (women's presence in elected bodies) and **substantive representation** (their actual power and influence) becomes crucial in assessing the true outcome of political reservation. Uttar Pradesh, the country's most populous state, is marked by strong patriarchal traditions that shape women's public roles. Within this context, Aligarh district—with its rural diversity, caste variations, and socio- economic challenges—provides an insightful setting to examine whether political reservation translates into effective leadership. Although existing research discusses both the empowering potential and the constraints of reservation policies, district-level analyses remain relatively scarce. With over 850 Gram Panchayats and a substantial number of elected women representatives, Aligarh serves as an ideal case to explore women's participation in governance, their administrative roles, and their contributions to local development.

This study, relying on secondary data, investigates the leadership effectiveness of women in the Gram Panchayats of Aligarh. It examines representation trends, assesses administrative engagement, identifies major obstacles, and evaluates how reservation has shaped governance outcomes. While reservation has certainly broadened participation, the degree of actual empowerment depends on factors such as training, institutional support, and the social environment. Thus, this research seeks to present a comprehensive assessment of the impact of political reservation on women's leadership effectiveness in rural Uttar Pradesh, with Aligarh district as the central focus.

BACKGROUND

Women's participation in political decision-making is an essential component of inclusive governance. Before the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, women's representation in India's rural political institutions was extremely limited due to patriarchal norms, low literacy levels, lack of awareness, and social restrictions. The amendment created a transformative opportunity by reserving seats for women across all three tiers of Panchayati Raj—Gram Panchayat, Kshetra Panchayat, and Zila Panchayat. With Uttar Pradesh implementing 33% reservation for women, a large number of women began to occupy leadership positions at

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the grassroots level. However, increased numerical presence does not automatically ensure empowerment or effective leadership. Factors such as autonomy, administrative competence, training, decision-making authority, and community acceptance shape women's actual performance in governance roles. The rural socio- cultural environment of western Uttar Pradesh, including Aligarh district, poses unique challenges and opportunities for understanding how reservation influences women's participation and leadership effectiveness.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the impact of political reservation on women's leadership in Aligarh district.
2. To examine women's participation, decision-making, and governance efficiency.
3. To identify challenges faced by women Pradhans in Aligarh.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive and analytical research design to examine how political reservation has influenced women's leadership in the Gram Panchayats of Aligarh district. The descriptive part explains the number of women leaders, their social categories, and their roles, while the analytical part helps study trends across different election years and identify challenges affecting their effectiveness. The research is entirely based on secondary data collected from reliable sources such as the Census of India (2011), Uttar Pradesh Panchayati Raj Department, and District Panchayat Office, Aligarh. Additional information is taken from government reports, books, and academic studies. The study

area, Aligarh district, consists of 12 blocks and 852 Gram Panchayats and represents diverse rural conditions suitable for this research. Data analysis is done using tables, percentages, ratios, trend analysis, and comparative analysis to understand changes over time. The scope of the study is limited to women leaders at the Gram Panchayat level and focuses on their roles, performance, and challenges. Although primary data were not collected, the use of official and published sources ensures the reliability of the findings

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The participation of women in local governance has been widely studied in India, especially after the 73rd Constitutional Amendment. Researchers have examined the shift from symbolic to substantive participation and the structural challenges that influence women's leadership in PRIs.

Women's Representation in Local Governance

Nair (2010) highlighted that political reservation has significantly increased the numerical representation of women but has not eliminated the influence of patriarchal norms in decision-making. **Bhattacharya (2014)** found that while women's presence has grown, their participation is often mediated through male relatives, commonly termed "proxy leadership."

Leadership Effectiveness of Women in PRIs

Sivanna & Gayathridevi (2012) observed that training, education, and social awareness play major roles in determining a woman's leadership effectiveness. Women with greater exposure to governance processes tend to take more independent decisions.

Administrative and Financial Capacities

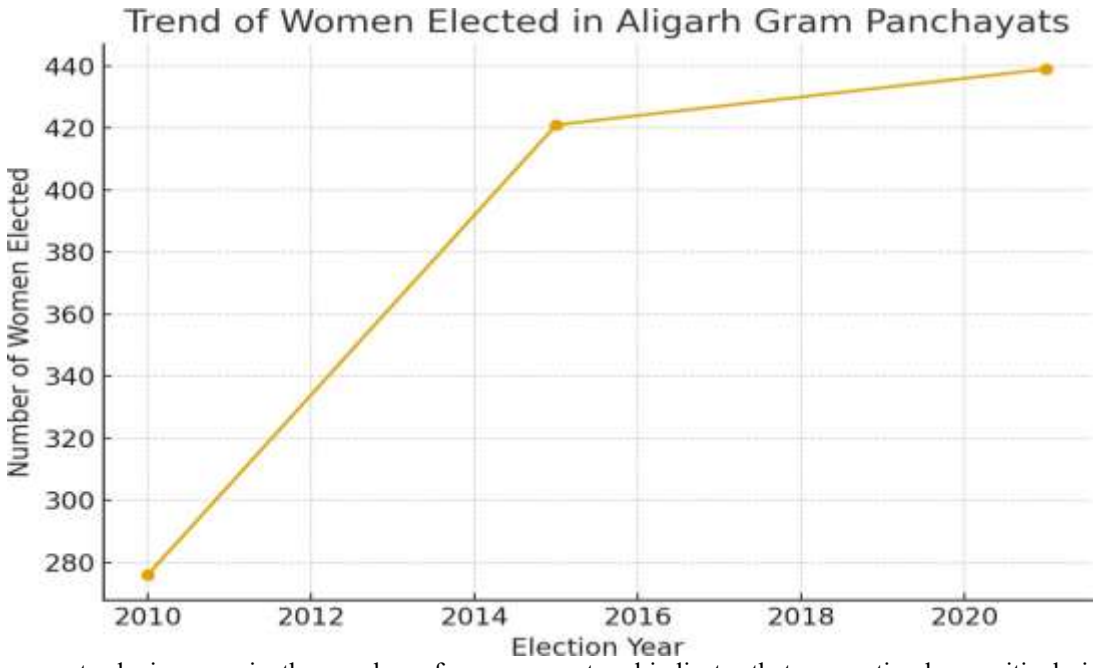
Studies like Mishra (2015) noted that many elected women representatives lack financial literacy and administrative skills, limiting their ability to utilize development funds effectively. Training offered by government departments remains inconsistent and insufficient.

Impact of Political Reservation on Women's Leadership in Aligarh District

Political reservation for women has played a major role in reshaping local governance in Aligarh district. The reservation policy ensures that a fixed percentage of seats in Gram Panchayats are reserved for women, giving them an opportunity to enter local politics, participate in decision-making, and influence development activities at the village level. This has significantly increased the number of elected women representatives (EWRs) across Aligarh's 12 blocks and 852 Gram Panchayats. The impact is visible in several ways. First, the presence of women in leadership positions has brought more attention to social issues such as sanitation, drinking water, health, Anganwadi services, and welfare schemes. Women Pradhans are often more sensitive to community needs, especially related to children, women, and vulnerable groups. As a result, many villages have seen improvements in cleanliness, education awareness, and access to government benefits. Second, political reservation has boosted women's **visibility and confidence** in the public sphere. Many women who had never participated in public meetings or administrative work now engage in Gram Sabha discussions, monitor development projects, and interact with government officials. This has slowly begun to shift traditional gender norms in rural Aligarh. However, the impact is not uniformly positive. Many women leaders face challenges such as low literacy, limited awareness of government schemes, financial management difficulties, and social restrictions. In several cases, male family members— especially husbands—continue to make decisions on behalf of women representatives, leading to "proxy leadership." This limits women's independence and reduces the effectiveness of reservation in empowering them. Despite these challenges, political reservation has undeniably opened doors for women and created a foundation for gender- inclusive governance. In Aligarh district, the rising number of women leaders and their involvement in developmental work indicate positive progress. With better training, institutional support, and social acceptance, women's leadership effectiveness can improve further, making reservation a powerful tool for strengthening rural democracy.

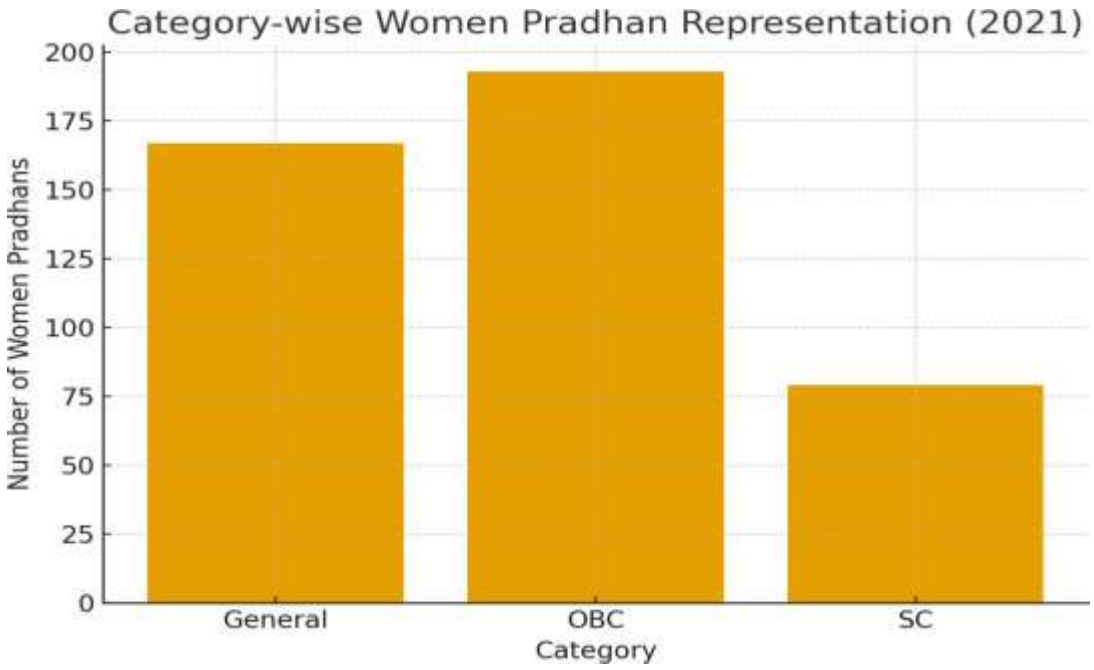
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Trend of Women's Representation in Aligarh (2010–2021)



The graph shows a steady increase in the number of women elected in Aligarh's Gram Panchayats from 2010 to 2021. In 2010, only 276 women were elected, but this number rose sharply to 421 in 2015 after the implementation of 33% reservation for women. By 2021, the figure further increased to 439, showing continued growth in women's political participation. The upward trend indicates that reservation has positively impacted women's entry into Panchayat leadership. The major rise between 2010 and 2015 highlights the strong effect of policy change, while the gradual rise till 2021 reflects stable progress. Overall, the graph suggests that political reservation has effectively strengthened women's leadership in Aligarh district.

Category-wise Representation of Women Pradhans (2021)



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The graph shows the category-wise distribution of women Pradhans in Aligarh district for 2021. OBC women have the highest representation with around 193 Pradhans, followed by General category women with about 167 representatives. SC women have the lowest representation at around 79. This indicates that OBC women are the most active in local political leadership, while SC women remain underrepresented. The pattern reflects both demographic structure and the varying levels of social and political empowerment among different caste groups in Aligarh.

Challenges Faced by Women Pradhans in Aligarh

Women Pradhans in Aligarh face several obstacles that weaken their ability to function as independent leaders. A major challenge is **proxy leadership**, where husbands or male relatives take over key responsibilities such as decision-making, managing finances, and communicating with officials, leaving the elected woman with limited real authority. Many women also struggle due to **low education levels and limited knowledge of administration**, which makes it difficult for them to understand Panchayat procedures, development schemes, and budgeting processes. Social factors like **patriarchal norms, restricted mobility, and low self-confidence** further reduce their participation in public

affairs and village meetings. Financial management is another area where women often feel unprepared because of **poor financial literacy** and lack of exposure to official work. The absence of strong **training and capacity-building programs** means that many women do not receive the guidance they need to perform their roles effectively. Women from SC and OBC groups also experience **caste-based barriers**, which affect their acceptance in the community and their ability to exercise leadership. These challenges collectively limit their capacity to influence decisions, monitor development work, and fully utilize the opportunities created by political reservation.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that political reservation has significantly increased women's participation in the Gram Panchayats of Aligarh district. The steady rise in women representatives from 2010 to 2021 reflects the strong impact of the 33% reservation policy. Women leaders are now more active in public life and contribute to key areas such as sanitation, water supply, health, education, and welfare programs. Their involvement has helped improve basic services and strengthen local governance. However, the findings also reveal that higher representation does not automatically ensure real empowerment. Many women Pradhans still face challenges like patriarchal norms, low education, limited training, financial illiteracy, and proxy leadership. These issues reduce their independence in decision-making. Despite these obstacles, political reservation remains an important tool for promoting gender equality in rural governance. With proper training, institutional support, and social acceptance, women leaders can become more effective and exercise greater authority in village development

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