

From Margins to Mainstream: The Journey of Scheduled Caste Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana, India

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Abstract

Taking into account widespread illiteracy among elected Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in 2010, as 30.06 PRIs were illiterate against the 24.45 per cent general rate of illiteracy in the state, the government of Haryana enacted Panchayati Raj Amendment Act, 2015; under which educational qualifications have been made mandatory to participate in the PRIs elections. This amendment has been based on the premise that educated PRIs will be playing a more constructive role for development at village, block and district levels. Since Scheduled Caste (SC) women are less educated, therefore this study is addressed to assess the impact of the amended Act on the empowerment of SC women. The study reveals that the share of SC women PRIs among the total PRIs increased from 11.32 per cent in 2010 to 13.41 per cent in 2016, while the composite score attained by them increased from 45.65 in 2010 to 129.29 in 2016.

Keywords

Scheduled Castes, Women Empowerment, Panchayati Raj Institutions, Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act, 2015

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Introduction

Empowerment refers to the process of granting power and intervention to marginalized groups within society, encompassing social, economic, political, educational, and psychological dimensions. These aspects are interconnected, collectively contributing to the overall empowerment of individuals. At its core, empowerment involves the redistribution of power, particularly for those who have been historically denied the ability to make choices. The concept can be understood through three interrelated dimensions: resources (preconditions), agency (the process of exercising choice), and achievements (the outcomes of empowerment efforts) (Kabeer, 1999, pp. 435–464). It represents a transition from powerlessness to empowerment, manifesting over time through improvements in education, health, economic conditions, and political participation (Desai, 2010, pp. 1–75). Ultimately, empowerment addresses the issues of social, economic, and political exclusion.

In India, social exclusion is deeply rooted, stemming from longstanding feudal, caste, and patriarchal structures. Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and women have historically faced marginalization, often being deprived of their rights and opportunities (Singh, 2013, pp. 62–71). Empowerment also signifies the authority and ability of marginalized individuals to participate in decision-making processes. It is crucial for the development of society as a whole (Ghosh et al., 2015, pp. 294–314). Recognizing that sustainable development requires the inclusion of all people, regardless of caste, class, religion, region, or gender, has become increasingly accepted (Kaur, 2009, pp. 333–344).

Among marginalized groups, the exclusion of women is particularly critical, as they constitute approximately half of the population. Their empowerment is thus an essential issue. The ongoing exclusion of women lacks justification, given their vital role as agents of political and economic transformation (UNDP, 1995). Women face numerous crises, including dowry practices, female infanticide, gender-based violence, and systemic inequalities in health and education (Sharma & Das, 2008, pp. 815–823). Although many women are educated, they often lack awareness of their rights, leading to ongoing discrimination and violence perpetuated by male family members and societal norms (Agnihotri & Malipatil, 2017, pp. 14301–14308). Men generally have greater access to resources and societal power, reinforcing their dominance over women (Huis et al., 2017, pp. 1–14). Empowering women means rectifying these historical injustices, challenging patriarchal structures, and ensuring that women have access to both material and informational resources (Pradhan & Dutta, 2008, pp. 559–577).

Women's empowerment operates on multiple levels, fostering individual confidence and the collective strength of women to address structural barriers to equality (Kudva, 2003, pp. 445–463). It is essential to contextualize the analysis of women's marginalization, considering how structural factors differ across regions, castes, classes, religions, and cultures (Hust, 2002, pp. 1–27).

Similarly, Scheduled Castes (SCs) also face systemic marginalization and oppression in Indian society. Historically, they have been subjected to discrimination and exploitation, resulting in enduring socio-economic challenges (Inbanathan & Sivanna, 2010, pp. 1–26). Despite governmental initiatives aimed at uplifting SC communities, many remain entrenched in poverty, particularly in rural areas. They often possess limited land, low literacy rates, and suffer from inadequate access to employment and fair wages due to a lack of industrial development (Pai, 2000, pp. 405–422). Even when SC individuals attain positions of authority, they frequently face barriers imposed by dominant communities, preventing them from exerting genuine influence in decision-making processes (Baviskar, 2020, pp. 168–174).

The unique challenges faced by SC women necessitate special attention. They experience compounded marginalization due to their gender and caste, often finding themselves at the bottom of the social hierarchy (Reddy et al., 2009, pp. 11–16). Opposed by dominant communities, SC women face increased obstacles in accessing opportunities and resources (Singh, 2013, pp. 62–71). The hierarchical nature of the caste system further inhibits their ability to operate independently and effectively in society (Sinha, 2018, pp. 34–41).

To harness the potential of women, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act of 1992 introduced a significant policy change by reserving one-third of seats for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). This move marked a pivotal moment for women's participation in local governance in India (Sinha, 2018, pp. 34–41). The reforms aimed to enhance representation from marginalized communities and facilitate greater decision-making power at the grassroots level (Ulrike, 2016, pp. 158–182). The representation of SCs, STs, and women in PRIs has been crucial in amplifying their voices and addressing their specific concerns (Sukumar et al., 2019, pp. 72–88).

Although seats have been reserved for the females to ensure their participation in the electoral system of the country, yet the low level of education, particularly among the SC women is the major impediment towards their political participation. Female education is considered as an index of socio-economic transformation and political advancement of a society. Education paves the way for freedom, fearlessness, productivity, economic earning, authority to take decisions, power and liberalization (Siwach, 2008). The national policy on education recognizes the criticality of education as the most important vehicle for social, economic and political transformation (MHRD, 2016). Education eliminates the social and psychological disparities among the people. Education is fundamental to individuals' and groups' social, economic and cultural progress (Singh & Baghal, 2023).

By mandating women's representation in local government, the governance process is expected to reflect the interests of women, thereby contributing to democratic participation and empowerment (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2008). Gender quotas in PRIs are essential strategies to promote women's involvement in the political system (Kudva, 2003, pp. 445–463). Enhanced participation in local governance is anticipated to improve transparency and accountability while fostering greater social equity (Bryld, 2001, pp. 149–172).

In conclusion, the empowerment of women, particularly in political contexts, is vital for advancing gender equality and enabling them to combat marginalization and exploitation (Pandit, 2010, pp. 1139–1148). The statutory reservation of seats in PRIs has opened avenues for women's active involvement in development and decision-making processes at the grassroots level (Hazarika, 2006, pp. 245–260). This study aims to assess the effect of the Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act of 2015 on the empowerment of Scheduled Caste women through their participation in PRIs during the elections held in 2010 and 2016.

Objectives

The major objectives of the study are:

- To examine the extent of empowerment among Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in 2010 and 2016.
- To assess the levels of empowerment for SC women in PRIs in 2010 and 2016.
- To evaluate the progress in the empowerment of SC women in PRIs from 2010 to 2016.
- To emphasize the variations in empowerment among SC women across different PRIs.

Study Area

Haryana, which accounts for 1.34 per cent of India's area and 2.10 per cent of its total population, is situated in the northwestern region of the country, spanning from 27° 39' 00" to 30° 55' 05" north latitude and 74° 27' 08" to 77° 36' 05" east longitude. The state has a literacy rate of 76 per cent, with 84 per cent of males and 66 per cent of females being literate. In rural areas, approximately 52 per cent of females are literate, but only 34 per cent have completed secondary education. Among scheduled castes, the literacy rate stands at 56.91 per cent, with rural literacy at 55.84 per cent. Of the literate rural scheduled castes, 14.12 per cent have completed matriculation; the rates for males and females are 15.77 per cent and 10.77 per cent, respectively. Agriculture serves as the backbone of the state's economy, with most residents relying on agriculture and its related sectors. About 65 per cent of the population resides in rural areas, particularly in districts like Mewat, Mahendragarh, Fatehabad, and Bhiwani, where over 80 per cent live in rural settings. For administrative purposes, Haryana is divided into 21 districts, 80 tehsils, and 125 community development blocks, encompassing a total of 6,841 villages.

Database and Methodology

The study utilizes secondary data from the reports on General Election to Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Haryana for 2010 and 2016, published by State Election Commission of Haryana. To illustrate variations across the state in the representation

of Scheduled Caste (SC) women in PRIs, the total number of SC women in these positions has been aggregated at the district level, with percentages calculated for both 2010 and 2016.

To assess the empowerment levels of SC women, the difference between the number of elected Scheduled Caste women in PRIs and the seats reserved for them is calculated across all PRI categories. To quantify the hierarchical status of these categories, weightage scores are assigned: 5 points for each additional seat won by Scheduled Caste women Panches beyond their reservation, 10 points for Scheduled Caste women Sarpanches, 15 points for Members of Panchayat Samiti, and 20 points for Members of Zila Parishad. The additional seats won by Scheduled Caste women in each category are then multiplied by their respective scores.

Composite scores at district level are derived by summing scores of all PRIs and dividing by total number of PRIs (four). The index of improvement in empowerment of elected Scheduled Caste women PRIs is calculated by subtracting composite scores of 2010 from those of 2016 at district level and dividing by state average. Results are analysed using tables and figures.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are elected bodies responsible for grassroots governance and local self-government in rural areas. The term “Panchayat” combines two words: “Panch,” meaning five, and “Ayat,” meaning assembly. Historically, villages in India would elect five wise elders to resolve disputes, address grievances, and manage local administration. Elected members of the panchayat are called “Panchs,” while the head is known as the “Sarpanch.” The term “Raj” signifies rule.

The village panchayat system was introduced by the British as a way to address demands for local autonomy. After India gained independence, the Panchayati Raj System underwent various reviews and was formalized by the Lok Sabha through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992. This established a three-tier Panchayati Raj System, consisting of Gram Panchayat at village level, Panchayat Samiti at community development block level (which groups several villages for administration), and Zila Parishad (District Council) at district level. Members of Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad are elected representatives.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act also establishes Gram Sabha (Village Assembly) as foundational element of Panchayati Raj System. States have authority to determine powers and functions of all PRIs, ensuring their election over time.

Panchayati Raj Institutions in Haryana

In 2010, Haryana had 6,083 Gram Panchayats, 119 Panchayat Samitis, and 21 Zila Parishads. By 2016, number of Gram Panchayats had increased to 6,205 and Panchayat Samitis to 126, while the number of Zila Parishads remained unchanged. Additionally, the number of seats available in these institutions rose from 58,783 for Panches, 6,083 for Sarpanches, 2,771 for Members of Panchayat Samiti, and 374 for Members of Zila Parishad in 2010, to 62,629 for Panches, 6,205 for Sarpanches, 3,002 for Members of Panchayat Samiti, and 416 for Members of Zila Parishad in 2016.

Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act, 2015

Panchayati Raj System offers PRIs opportunity to understand and address the needs of their villages, particularly concerning the economic and social challenges of modernization. Recognizing the high illiteracy rates among elected PRI members in 2010, the Haryana Government enacted the *Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act, 2015*. This legislation established minimum educational qualifications for candidates: matriculation for general category candidates, eighth grade for women (general) and scheduled caste candidates, and fifth grade for scheduled caste women candidates.

Additionally, candidates must have functional toilets in their homes and be free of outstanding power bill payments. They cannot have been charge-sheeted by any court or be loan defaulters. These measures were implemented to enhance quality of leadership and governance in rural areas of the state, with the belief that educated representatives would be more accountable to their constituents than their illiterate predecessors. Consequently, Haryana became the second state in India, following Rajasthan, to mandate educational qualifications and other criteria for candidates contesting Panchayat elections.

Results and Discussion

Magnitude of SC Women in PRIs Empowerment, 2010 and 2016

SC women are considered to be more empowered if there is an increase in the share of SC women in PRIs among the total members of PRIs in state. The study shows that the share of SC women in PRIs increased from 11.32 per cent in 2010 to 13.41 per cent in 2016, suggesting improvement in empowerment of SC women in PRIs during study period (Table 1).

Table 1: Haryana: Percentage Share of SC Women in PRIs to Total members of PRIs, 2010 and 2016

District	Share (per cent)		District	Share (per cent)	
	2010	2016		2010	2016
Ambala	15.56	18.94	Mahendragarh	10.45	12.34
Bhiwani	10.62	11.10	Mewat	5.12	7.79
Faridabad	9.85	10.60	Palwal	9.66	10.58
Fatehabad	12.89	17.49	Panchkula	11.24	12.88
Gurgaon	10.64	11.97	Panipat	11.10	12.55
Hisar	11.70	13.40	Rewari	11.30	12.01
Jhajjar	10.22	11.69	Rohtak	9.94	13.42
Jind	11.07	11.67	Sirsa	12.63	16.00
Kaithal	12.14	13.72	Sonapat	10.44	11.06
Karnal	11.75	14.50	Yamunanagar	14.23	17.15
Kurukshetra	12.57	15.82	State	11.32	13.41

Source: Tabulated from Haryana PRIs Election Reports, 2010 and 2016

Furthermore, Ambala district recorded the highest share, while Mewat district had the lowest, both in 2010 and in 2016. However, with the introduction of educational qualifications required to participate in PRI elections, inter-district variation in empowerment of SC women in PRIs became more pronounced in 2016 compared to 2010. This change can be attributed to significant inter-district gap in rural SC literacy rate in general (19.41 percentage points) and educational status of rural SC females (8.48 percentage points), which are key factors influencing SC women’s participation in PRI elections (Table 3).

In 2010, SC women in PRIs recorded a very high share in Ambala and Yamunanagar districts. By 2016, four new districts—Fatehabad, Sirsa, Kurukshetra, and Karnal—entered this category, indicating a threefold increase in areas experiencing significant SC women PRIs empowerment compared to 2010. Fatehabad, Sirsa, and Kurukshetra improved their status from areas of high empowerment, while Karnal advanced from a moderate level of empowerment in 2010. Among districts previously classified as having a high level of empowerment in 2010—Fatehabad, Sirsa, Kurukshetra, and Kaithal—only Kaithal maintained its status in 2016. Additionally, six new districts—Rohtak, Hisar, Panchkula, Panipat, Mahendragarh, and Rewari—joined this category in 2016 (Fig. 1). Except for Rohtak, which maintained a low level of empowerment, all other districts improved from a moderate level of share in 2010. Consequently, there was approximately a twofold spatial expansion in areas reporting a high level of SC women empowerment in PRIs in 2016 compared to 2010 (Fig. 1). As a result, the percentage of districts registering a moderate share of SC women in PRIs declined from 52 per cent in 2010 to 33 per cent in 2016.

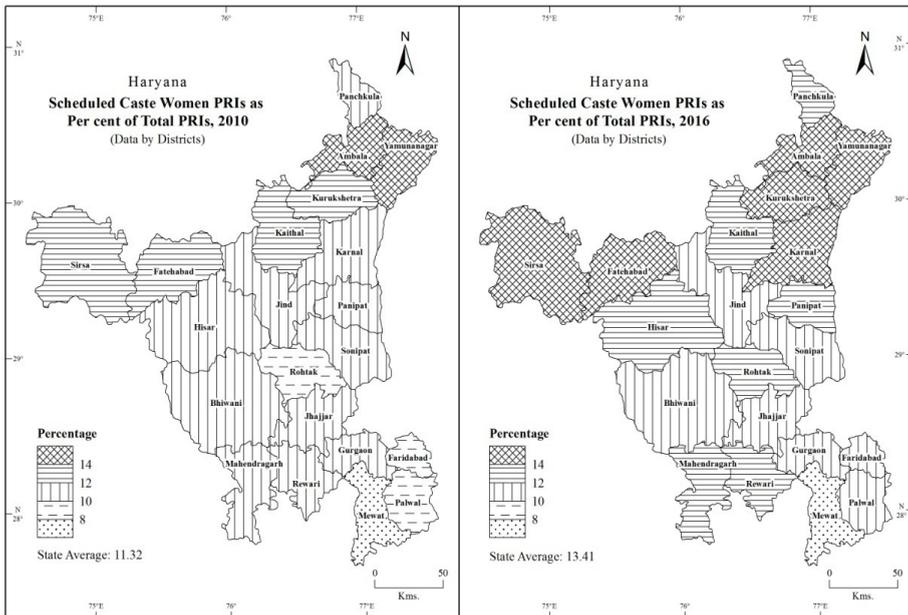


Fig. 1

Source: Table 1

In 2010, three districts—Rohtak, Faridabad, and Palwal recorded a low level of SC women empowerment. However, by 2016, no districts remained in this category. Mewat is the only district that maintained a very low level of SC women in PRIs share in both 2010 and 2016. Although Mewat stayed in the same category, the percentage share of elected SC women in PRIs increased from 5.12 per cent in 2010 to 7.79 per cent in 2016. This study highlights that, following the introduction of educational qualifications for PRI elections, all districts in the state experienced an improvement in the share of SC women in PRIs from 2010 to 2016, with Fatehabad district registering most significant gain.

Levels of Empowerment of SC Women in PRIs, 2010 and 2016

The levels of empowerment of SC women in PRIs were assessed based on the number of additional seats they won beyond those reserved for them in each category of PRIs. The study indicates that SC women in PRIs achieved a composite score of 129.29 in 2016, compared to 45.65 in 2010, reflecting approximately a threefold improvement in their empowerment during this period. Similarly, the inter-district variation in empowerment increased from a composite score of 121.25 in 2010 to 243.75 in 2016, demonstrating significant spatial differentiation in spread of empowerment of SC women over this time (Table 2). This variation is attributed to disparities in educational qualifications of rural SC women (Table 3).

Table 2: Haryana: Levels of Empowerment of SC Women in PRIs, 2010 and 2016

District	Composite Scores		District	Composite Scores	
	2010	2016		2010	2016
Ambala	127.50	266.25	Mahendragarh	17.50	147.50
Bhiwani	45.00	146.25	Mewat	6.25	136.25
Faridabad	15.00	32.50	Palwal	45.00	76.25
Fatehabad	31.25	182.50	Panchkula	17.50	22.50
Gurgaon	20.22	71.25	Panipat	61.25	105.00
Hisar	77.50	168.75	Rewari	21.25	81.25
Jhajjar	40.00	100.00	Rohtak	26.25	137.50
Jind	97.50	72.50	Sirsa	21.25	143.75
Kaithal	65.00	125.00	Sonipat	57.50	98.75
Karnal	51.25	195.00	Yamunanagar	57.50	210.00
Kurukshetra	57.50	196.25	State	45.65	129.29

Source: Tabulated from Haryana PRIs Election Reports, 2010 and 2016

In 2010, only two districts—Ambala and Jind—recorded a very high level of empowerment of SC women in PRIs. By 2016, this number increased to 16 districts, including Ambala, Yamunanagar, Kurukshetra, Karnal, Fatehabad, Hisar, Mahendragarh, Bhiwani, Sirsa, Rohtak, Mewat, Kaithal, Panipat, Jhajjar, Sonipat, and Rewari. This represents an eightfold increase in areas witnessing a very high level of empowerment of SC women in PRIs compared to 2010 (Fig. 2).

In 2016, Ambala retained its position from 2010, while Hisar, Kaithal, and Panipat advanced from high empowerment category. Kurukshetra, Sonipat, Yamunanagar,

Karnal, and Bhiwani moved up from moderate level, and Jhajjar, Fatehabad, Rohtak, Rewari, and Sirsa progressed from low level. Mahendragarh and Mewat improved their status from very low level of empowerment of SC women in PRIs in 2010. This study illustrates how introduction of educational qualifications has encouraged educated SC women to participate in PRI elections in 2016.

In the same year, Palwal, Gurgaon, and Jind were categorized as having a high level of empowerment of SC women in PRIs. Among these, Palwal and Gurgaon improved their status from moderate and low levels of empowerment in 2010, while Jind dropped from very high level of empowerment it had previously achieved. Similarly, in 2016, Faridabad and Panchkula fell into low levels of empowerment of SC women in PRIs category, having transitioned from a very low level in 2010.

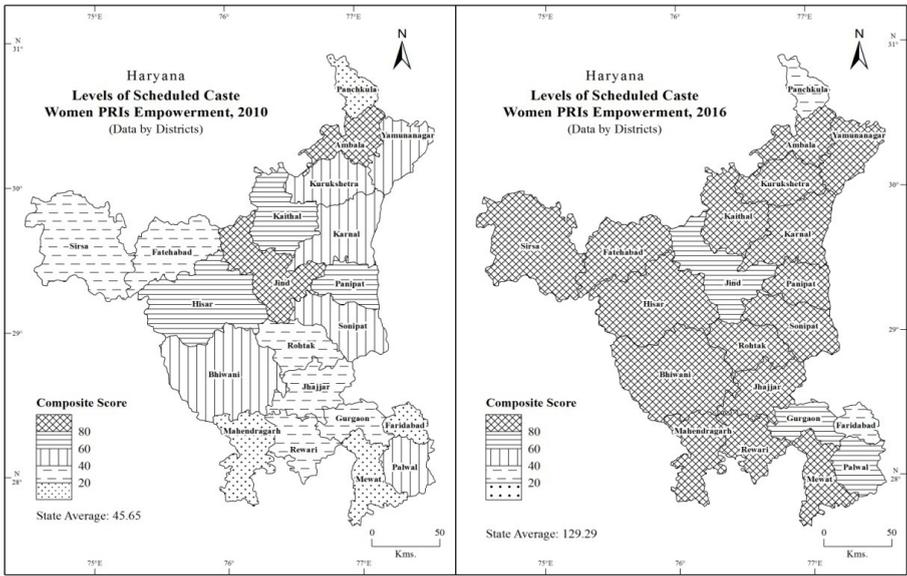


Fig. 2

Source: Table 2

It is noteworthy that in 2016, no districts were categorized as having a moderate or very low level of empowerment of SC women in PRIs, whereas 48 per cent of districts fell into these categories in 2010. This study highlights that, following the introduction of educational qualifications for PRI elections, all districts in the state, except Jind, experienced improvements in empowerment of SC women in PRIs from 2010 to 2016. The most significant advancements were observed in areas classified as having a very high level of empowerment of SC women in PRIs. Conversely, Jind district experienced a slight decline in empowerment of SC women in PRIs in 2016 compared to 2010. This decline can be attributed to low participation rates among SC women in PRI elections, driven by a low literacy rate of 52.04 per cent among rural SC population in general, and particularly low educational attainment among rural SC women, with only 8.83 per cent of literate females in district having completed matriculation (Table 3).

Table 3: Haryana: Index of Change in empowerment of SC Women in PRIs in 2016 with respect to 2010, Rural SC Literacy Rate and Rural SC Female Matriculates as per cent of Total SC Female Literates

Districts	Index	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Matriculates (per cent)	Districts	Index	Literacy Rate (per cent)	Matriculates (per cent)
Yamunanagar	1.82	62.99	12.60	Rewari	0.72	64.73	12.38
Fatehabad	1.81	46.74	7.44	Jhajjar	0.71	52.53	13.59
Karnal	1.72	54.10	10.26	Kaithal	0.71	49.35	8.28
Ambala	1.66	62.80	14.07	Gurgaon	0.61	65.19	13.45
Kurukshetra	1.66	57.11	11.10	Panipat	0.52	57.00	10.31
Mahendragarh	1.55	63.72	12.26	Sonipat	0.49	59.92	12.81
Mewat	1.55	54.83	6.61	Palwal	0.37	54.54	8.13
Sirsa	1.46	45.78	7.54	Faridabad	0.21	58.88	9.78
Rohtak	1.33	58.69	11.25	Panchkula	0.06	61.79	15.09
Bhiwani	1.21	56.67	11.90	Jind	-0.30	52.04	8.83
Hisar	1.09	51.97	9.34	State		55.84	10.77

Source: Tabulated from Haryana PRIs Election Reports, 2010 and 2016 and Census of India data, 2011

Change in Empowerment of SC Women in PRIs, 2010-2016

The change in empowerment of SC women in PRIs following the enactment of the Act has been assessed by calculating an index of change. A higher index indicates greater improvement in empowerment of SC women in PRIs in 2016 compared to 2010. Districts such as Yamunanagar, Fatehabad, Karnal, Ambala, and Kurukshetra achieved an index of improvement greater than 1.60, placing them in category of very high improvement in empowerment of SC women in PRIs in 2016 (Table 3; Fig. 3). Notably, Fatehabad, despite having the lowest rural SC literacy rate in the state (46.74 per cent) and the second lowest percentage (7.44 per cent) of matriculate rural literate SC women, entered this category due to a significant mobilization of SC women for PRI elections in 2016. Consequently, the district's empowerment of SC women in PRIs scores surged from 31.25 in 2010 to 182.50 in 2016 (Table 2).

Yamunanagar, Karnal, and Kurukshetra also made significant gains, advancing from moderate to very high levels of empowerment of SC women in PRIs in 2016, thanks to their high rural SC literacy rates and active participation of educated rural SC women in the elections. Ambala demonstrated real improvement by maintaining its status as a district with a very high level of empowerment of SC women in PRIs in both 2010 and 2016, attributed to its high rural SC literacy rate and a significant percentage of educated rural SC women who were already aware of the importance of participating in PRI elections.

The districts of Mahendragarh, Mewat, Sirsa, Rohtak, and Bhiwani experienced a high level of improvement in empowerment of SC women in PRIs in 2016 compared to 2010 (Fig. 3). These districts progressed from very low, low, and moderate levels of empowerment to areas of high improvement in 2016, largely due to their low base levels. Mahendragarh, Rohtak, and Bhiwani benefited from a higher rural SC literacy rate and educated rural SC women who actively participated in PRI elections after amendment of the PRIs Act. In Sirsa, the heightened awareness among SC women led them to winning 33 per cent more seats in the Zila Parishad and 17 per cent more seats

in the Panchayat Samiti than were reserved for them in 2016. This shift indicates that SC women in PRIs became significantly more empowered by capturing higher-tier seats, which are considered four and three times more valuable than those of a Panch.

Interestingly, Mewat, which had the lowest composite score (6.25) for empowerment of SC women in PRIs in 2010, recorded a high level of improvement in 2016 despite having the lowest rate of education among rural SC females in the state, with only 6.61 per cent of literate rural SC females being matriculates. To address this educational gap, families adopted strategies to maintain political power. The amendment to the PRIs Act rendered elderly illiterate women ineligible to contest PRI elections, leading to a surge in marriages where families sought educated brides, even from outside the district if necessary. In cases where elections could be contested unopposed, families sometimes arranged second marriages for their sons to ensure they had an educated daughter-in-law, thereby securing PRIs seats for their families.

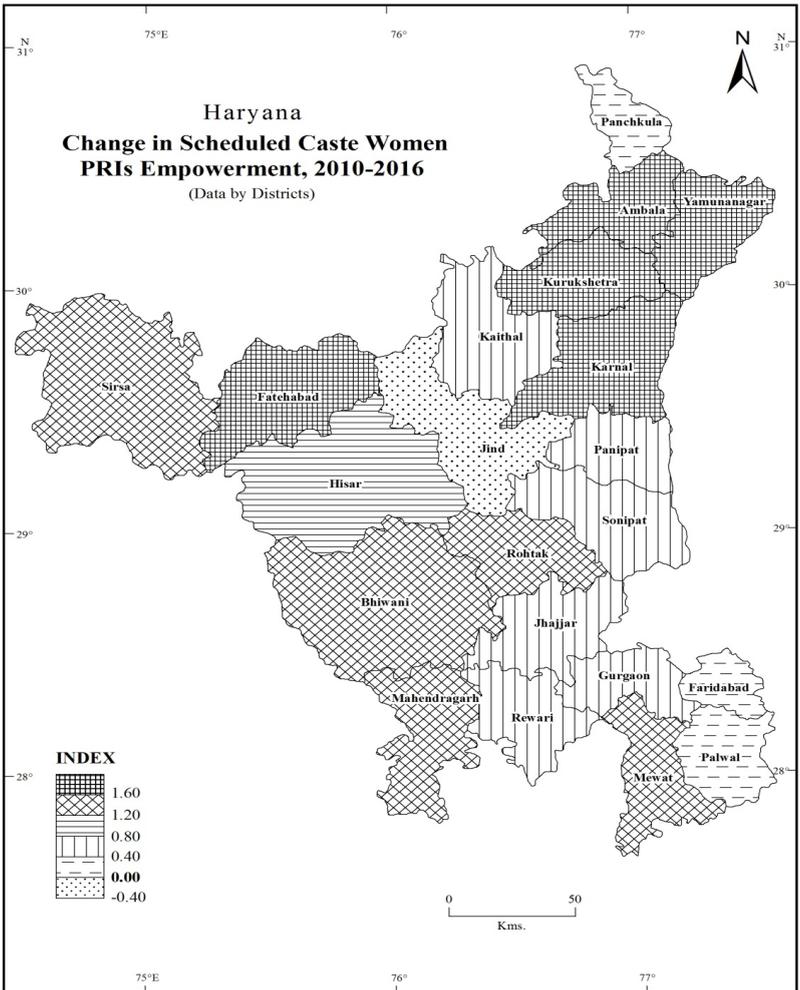


Fig. 3

Source: Table 3

Mewat district has a predominantly Muslim population, where female education levels are notably low, and second marriages are common. At least 50 marriages inspired by electoral participation have occurred in Mewat (Sharma, 2015, p. 6). In instances where families could not find an educated daughter-in-law, they encouraged their daughters to run in PRI elections to retain seats within the family. Typically, daughters do not enter PRIs elections because they are expected to leave their villages after marriage.

In contrast, districts such as Rewari, Jhajjar, Kaithal, Gurgaon, Panipat, and Sonipat exhibited low improvements in empowerment of SC women in PRIs from 2010 to 2016. Despite Rewari, Jhajjar, Gurgaon, and Sonipat having a high percentage of educated rural SC women, and Panipat showing moderate percentages, SC women in these districts did not perform better in the 2016 elections compared to 2010, resulting in minimal improvement in their empowerment during this period. In Kaithal, the educational level among rural SC women is very low, with only 8.28 per cent of literate rural SC females being matriculates, which contributed to their limited participation in PRI elections and, consequently, low empowerment levels.

Similarly, Palwal, Faridabad, and Panchkula experienced very low improvements in empowerment of SC women in PRIs from 2010 to 2016. Palwal's low educational attainment among rural SC females can be attributed to the predominance of the Muslim population. Although Faridabad is the most industrialized district in the state, the educational status of rural SC females remains low, with only 9.78 per cent being matriculates. Thus, the performance of SC women in both the 2010 and 2016 elections was poor, leading to minimal improvement in their empowerment.

Interestingly, despite having the highest educational status among rural SC women in the state, SC women in Panchkula did not perform well in PRI elections in either year. They failed to win any extra seats beyond those reserved for them in the Zila Parishad elections, and in the Panchayat Samiti elections, they could not secure even the reserved seats in 2016. Their performance across other categories of PRIs also showed little improvement from 2010 to 2016, largely due to a lack of motivation and encouragement for SC women to participate in the elections. Consequently, this district, despite its high educational attainment, witnessed the lowest improvement in empowerment of SC women in PRIs during the study period.

Jind is the only district in the state that experienced a decline in SC women empowerment from 2010 to 2016. This decline is primarily attributed to the low educational level of rural SC women, with only 8.83 per cent of literate rural SC women being matriculates. As a result, their participation in PRIs elections was significantly poor in 2016 compared to the 2010 elections. SC women won 10.24 per cent more seats in the Panches elections than were reserved for them in 2010, but this figure dropped to only 6.15 per cent extra seats in 2016, indicating a decline in their empowerment.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates that following the introduction of educational qualifications for PRI elections, SC women improved their empowerment in 95 per cent of districts in state in 2016 compared to the 2010 elections, although

there were significant variations in the magnitude of improvement across different areas.

PRIs-wise, Variations in Empowerment of SC Women, 2010-2016

The functional importance and status of PRIs increase from lower to upper hierarchies within these institutions. Therefore, understanding SC women's empowerment through their performance in elections across different categories of PRIs is essential. The study reveals that SC women in Jind district won 10.24 per cent more seats in the Panches elections than those reserved for them in 2010 (Table 4). However, with the introduction of educational qualifications for PRI elections in 2016, this percentage declined to 6.15 per cent. As a result, their empowerment in relation to Panches decreased in 2016 compared to 2010. In contrast, SC women in all other districts experienced gains in empowerment, albeit to varying extents. The most significant improvement was observed in Mewat district (55.91 percentage points), followed by Fatehabad (24.98), Ambala (22.29), and Kurukshetra. Conversely, the least improvement was noted in Sonipat district (2.91), followed by Kaithal (5.67) and Palwal (6.94). Overall, the state witnessed a 15.10 percentage point increase in the empowerment of SC women within the category of Panch PRIs.

In Sarpanch category, SC women in the state recorded a 14.51 percentage point improvement in empowerment during the study period, although there were significant inter-district variations. Empowerment among SC women in this category declined in Jind (67.75 percentage points), followed by Rohtak (22.37), Palwal (10.88), and Panchkula (1.11) districts in 2016 compared to 2010. In contrast, the highest gains were seen in Kaithal (48.89 percentage points), followed closely by Yamunanagar (48.84), Kurukshetra (40.74), and Mahendragarh (40.43). Ambala and Faridabad maintained their positions from 2010 in 2016, while the least improvement was observed in Bhiwani (2.18), Jhajjar (2.78), and Hisar (5.07 percentage points).

In Member Panchayat Samiti category, several districts, including Panchkula (50.00 percentage points), Palwal (29.12), Faridabad (25.00), Kurukshetra (11.90), Gurgaon (4.17), and Karnal (2.08), comprising 29 per cent of the total districts, could not maintain their 2010 positions, resulting in decline in empowerment of SC women. The highest improvements in this category were recorded by Rohtak (69.32 percentage points), Mahendragarh (62.73), and Fatehabad (55.83). In contrast, the lowest empowerment was noted in Panipat (8.08), Jhajjar (11.12), Sirsa (11.83), and Kaithal (12.63 percentage points). Overall, the state witnessed an 18.40 percentage point improvement in empowerment of SC women within this category during the study period.

In the Member Zila Parishad category, the highest tier of PRIs, SC women experienced a 100 per cent decline in empowerment in Mewat and a 50 per cent decline in Kurukshetra (Table 4). Conversely, there was a remarkable 150 per cent improvement in Palwal, with 100 per cent improvements in Bhiwani, Jind, Mahendragarh, Rewari, and Rohtak. Improvements of 50 per cent were noted in Karnal, Sonipat, Fatehabad, and Yamunanagar, while a 33.33 per cent increase was observed in Sirsa. Other districts maintained their positions from 2010 to 2016. The state as a whole recorded a

17.68 percentage point improvement in empowerment of SC women in this category during the study period.

Table 4: Haryana: PRI-wise, Percentage of Extra Seats Won by SC Women than Seats Reserved for them, 2010-2016

District	Panches		Sarpanches		Member P. Samiti		Member Z. Parishad	
	2010	2016	2010	2016	2010	2016	2010	2016
Ambala	10.77	33.06	64.29	64.29	20.00	40.00	100.00	0.00
Bhiwani	6.22	17.60	5.71	7.89	6.25	26.32	0.00	100.00
Faridabad	4.63	18.64	22.22	22.22	25.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Fatehabad	3.13	28.11	11.76	21.05	6.67	62.50	100.00	50.00
Gurgaon	5.73	22.92	7.14	33.33	16.67	12.50	0.00	0.00
Hisar	8.66	23.11	16.67	21.74	23.81	40.91	33.33	0.00
Jhajjar	4.62	21.24	25.00	27.78	44.44	55.56	0.00	0.00
Jind	10.24	6.15	90.48	22.73	15.38	35.29	0.00	100.00
Kaithal	12.54	18.21	11.11	60.00	23.08	35.71	0.00	0.00
Karnal	6.30	26.17	11.54	46.43	18.75	16.67	0.00	50.00
Kurukshetra	8.95	30.81	0.00	40.74	33.33	21.43	0.00	-50.00
Mahendragarh	2.73	20.00	3.57	44.00	10.00	72.73	0.00	100.00
Mewat	3.57	59.48	0.00	34.78	0.00	40.00	0.00	-100.00
Palwal	7.11	14.05	26.67	15.79	50.55	21.43	0.00	150.00
Panchkula	9.47	17.92	11.11	10.00	25.00	-25.00	0.00	0.00
Panipat	14.97	27.40	8.33	20.00	55.56	63.64	100.00	0.00
Rewari	1.44	22.99	4.00	27.27	18.18	62.50	100.00	100.00
Rohtak	4.76	16.94	45.45	23.08	12.50	81.82	0.00	100.00
Sirsa	3.21	18.57	0.00	17.39	5.56	17.39	0.00	33.33
Sonipat	9.86	12.77	13.04	20.83	15.38	57.14	0.00	50.00
Yamunanagar	6.80	19.74	7.41	56.25	20.00	41.18	0.00	50.00
State	6.95	22.05	17.36	31.87	19.92	38.32	21.21	38.89

Source: Tabulated from Haryana PRIs Election Reports, 2010 and 2016

Overall, the study indicates that districts such as Bhiwani, Fatehabad, Mahendragarh, Rewari, Sirsa, Sonipat, and Yamunanagar saw improvements across all categories of PRIs. In Hisar, Jhajjar, Kaithal, and Panipat, SC women experienced empowerment gains in three categories, while in the Member Zila Parishad category, they could only secure the seats reserved for them in 2016. In Ambala, Gurgaon, Jind, and Palwal, empowerment was gained in only two categories. In Faridabad and Panchkula, SC women saw improvements only in the Panches category. At the state level, SC women gained empowerment in all categories of PRIs during the study period, with the most significant improvement seen in the Member Panchayat Samiti category, followed by Member Zila Parishad, Panches, and Sarpanches. The study, therefore, suggests that SC women's performance is better in higher categories of PRIs, which hold greater status and offer more opportunities for empowerment.

Conclusions

This study evaluates the effects of the Haryana Panchayati Raj Amendment Act, 2015, on the empowerment of Scheduled Caste (SC) women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) by comparing election data from 2010 and 2016. It reveals an increase in the share of SC women in PRIs from 11.32 per cent in 2010 to 13.41 per cent in 2016,

indicating enhanced empowerment. All districts showed improved performance, with those reporting a high share rising from 29 per cent to 62 per cent. The composite empowerment score for SC women tripled, from 45.65 to 129.29, and districts with very high levels of empowerment increased from 24 per cent to 90 per cent.

The findings suggest significant progress, especially in districts like Yamunanagar and Karnal, while highlighting Mewat's notable improvement despite historically low education levels among SC women. However, several districts, including Jind and Kaithal, still struggle with low educational attainment, hindering SC women's participation in PRIs. The study emphasizes the need for targeted educational initiatives, particularly in Mewat district with high Muslim populations, along with Jind and Kaithal districts to encourage female participation.

Despite gains in representation, the study underscores that increased seat capture does not guarantee SC women's involvement in decision-making. Therefore, further research is needed to assess their actual influence and performance in leadership roles within the villages where they serve as Sarpanches.

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