

REVIEWER'S REPORT

Manuscript No.: IJAR-57381**Title: A Structural Analysis of Gender Reservation in Panchayati Raj in India****Recommendation:****Accept after minor revision**

Rating	Excel.	Good	Fair	Poor
Originality		✓,		
Techn. Quality		✓,		
Clarity	✓,			
Significance	✓,			

Reviewer Name: Abdul Haseeb Mir

Detailed Reviewer's Report

The research article titled "A Structural Analysis of Gender Reservation in Panchayati Raj in India" provides a comprehensive and timely evaluation of the intersectional challenges facing women in local governance. The author navigates the complex landscape of Indian grassroots democracy by contrasting the significant numerical success of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment with the persistent socio-structural reality of proxy leadership. With over 14.5 lakh women now holding seats in local bodies, accounting for nearly 46 percent of representatives, the paper acknowledges a transformative shift in descriptive representation. However, it centers its critique on the "representation-agency gap," arguing that for many women, particularly in northern and central India, formal office does not equate to the actual exercise of authority.

The core of the paper's argument lies in its anatomy of the Sarpanch Pati or Pradhan Pati phenomenon, where male relatives assume the practical functions of an elected woman's office. The author effectively uses data to show that this is not merely a cultural lag but a result of specific structural conditions: educational disadvantages, patriarchal household authority, economic dependence, and historical institutional invisibility. For example, the paper notes that in Bihar, proxy leadership is estimated to affect over 60 percent of elected women representatives, despite the state being a pioneer in 50 percent gender reservation. This paradox is central to the article's thesis—that legal mandates for presence are insufficient without simultaneous efforts to build individual and institutional agency.

Structural Drivers of Proxy Leadership

The author identifies several layered causes that sustain proxy systems. One primary driver is the literacy and administrative capacity deficit. Managing a Gram Panchayat requires handling complex welfare programs like MGNREGA and navigating digital platforms like e-GramSwaraj, tasks that become nearly

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impossible for women denied basic education. The paper highlights a direct correlation between low female literacy in states like Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh and high rates of proxy substitution.

A second critical layer is the economic dependency of women on male household members. In rural contexts where land ownership and primary earning capacity are overwhelmingly male, challenging a husband's proxy role can lead to severe household conflict and material risk. The author cites research showing that when women do exercise genuine authority, they tend to prioritize more equitable resource allocation, such as in MGNREGA implementation, which further underscores why male gatekeepers might resist relinquishing control over these resources.

Evaluation of Reform Frameworks

The article provides a detailed review of recent policy shifts, specifically the Sushil Kumar Advisory Committee (2025) and the Supreme Court's ruling in *Mundona Rural Development Foundation v. Union of India*. The author correctly emphasizes the judicial shift that frames proxy leadership as a "constitutional usurpation" rather than a mere policy failure. This legal grounding is vital because it mandates that the state move beyond symbolic awareness campaigns toward enforceable statutory prohibitions.

The paper also highlights the role of technology and institutional redesign in closing the agency gap. Recommendations such as biometric attendance for Panchayat meetings and live-streaming of Gram Sabhas—modeled after successes in Kerala—are presented as practical tools to increase visibility and accountability. These measures aim to make it difficult for male proxies to operate in the shadows of official records.

Detailed Recommendations for Article Improvement

The research is robust, but the following enhancements would strengthen its impact and academic rigor:

- The author should expand the section on intersectional design principles by providing specific case studies of Dalit or Adivasi women leaders who have successfully navigated both caste and gender barriers, as the current discussion remains somewhat theoretical.
- While the paper mentions economic empowerment, it would benefit from a deeper analysis of how specific Self-Help Group (SHG) models could be formally integrated into the Panchayat administrative structure to provide elected women with an independent support base outside of their family.
- The author should address the rotation of reserved constituencies in greater detail, perhaps suggesting specific legislative alternatives to the current system that would allow women to build long-term political capital and "incumbency advantages".

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- It is recommended to include a section on comparative federalism, evaluating why certain states like Karnataka or Kerala have lower proxy rates. A more granular look at the specific state-level training modules or local "Watchdog Committees" that worked in these regions would provide a practical blueprint for high-proxy states.
- The author should further explore the "Digital Divide" beyond just smartphone ownership, analyzing how "assisted digital governance" (where a male relative "helps" with digital signatures) might actually be creating a new, modern form of proxy leadership that bypasses current monitoring systems.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This article provides a sophisticated and data-driven analysis of one of the most significant challenges facing Indian democracy today. By moving the conversation from "descriptive representation" to "substantive agency," the author offers a vital roadmap for ensuring that the 73rd Amendment achieves its true intent. The integration of legal, economic, and social perspectives makes this a highly valuable contribution to political science and gender studies.

Recommendation: Recommend for publication with minor revision.