



A Comparative Study of the Socio-Economic Status of Women Representatives in Urban vs. Rural Local Bodies of Chamba District

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Article Info: (Received- 25/05/2026, Accept- 19/06/2026, Published- 10/07/2026)

DOI- [10.70650/rvimj.2026v3i70011](https://doi.org/10.70650/rvimj.2026v3i70011)

Abstract

Women's representation in local governance has become an important dimension of political empowerment and grassroots democracy in India. This study examines and compares the socio-economic status of women representatives in Urban and Rural Local Bodies of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh. The study seeks to understand how differences in educational background, occupation, income, family structure, social status, political experience, and access to resources influence women's participation in local governance. A qualitative research approach is adopted for the study. Primary information is collected through semi-structured interviews with selected women representatives from Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies. Secondary information is obtained from government reports, election records, academic literature, and the State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh, which provides official information on both Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies (State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh, 2026).

The study examines similarities and differences between rural and urban women representatives in terms of socio-economic background, family support, political awareness, leadership experience, decision-making, and administrative participation. It argues that women's formal representation does not necessarily ensure equal opportunities for effective political participation. Rural representatives may face greater challenges related to geographical accessibility, household responsibilities, and limited institutional resources, while urban representatives may have comparatively greater access to education, communication, and administrative networks. The study concludes that strengthening women's education, economic independence, political training, and institutional support is essential for achieving meaningful and substantive participation in local governance.

Introduction

Women's political representation in local governance is an important component of democratic decentralisation and grassroots empowerment in India. The 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments provided a constitutional foundation for strengthening local self-government through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in rural areas and

Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) in urban areas. These reforms also created greater opportunities for women to enter formal political institutions and participate in local decision-making. In Himachal Pradesh, women's representation has been strengthened through reservation provisions. The Himachal Pradesh Panchayati Raj Act, 1994, as amended, provides for one-half reservation for women in Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis, thereby creating substantial opportunities for women's participation in rural governance (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 1994). The Ministry of Panchayati Raj also recognises Himachal Pradesh as a state providing 50 percent reservation for women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2024).

Political representation, however, cannot be understood only in terms of the number of women occupying elected positions. Their socio-economic background—including education, occupation, household income, family structure, social status, mobility, access to information, and previous political experience—can influence the extent to which they participate effectively in local governance. Women's political participation is also closely associated with the relationship between household responsibilities and public roles. Family responsibilities may restrict women's political activities, while family support can facilitate mobility, attendance at meetings, interaction with officials, and participation in community affairs (Chhibber, 2002). Studies of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Himachal Pradesh have similarly emphasised the importance of socio-economic conditions, education, family support, and political awareness in the process of women's political empowerment (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014; Devi & Kumar, 2023).

Chamba District provides an important geographical and social setting for a comparative examination of women's representation in rural and urban local bodies. The rural component of the present study focuses on five areas—Chamba, Tissa, Bhatiyat, Mehla, and Salooni—and examines the gender distribution of Pradhan positions. In Chamba, there are 47 Pradhan positions, of which 21 are occupied by men and 26 by women. Tissa has 53 positions, including 23 male and 30 female Pradhans. Bhatiyat has 71 positions, comprising 33 male and 38 female Pradhans. Mehla has 52 positions, with 22 male and 30 female Pradhans, while Salooni has 46 positions, equally divided between 23 male and 23 female Pradhans. Collectively, these five rural areas contain 269 Pradhan positions, of which 147 are held by women and 122 by men. Thus, women constitute approximately 54.6 percent of the Pradhan positions covered by the rural component of the study.

The urban component provides a useful basis for comparison. The selected Urban Local Bodies include Chamba, Chuwari, and Dalhousie. Chamba has 11 elected positions, comprising 3 male and 8 female representatives. Chuwari has 7 positions, including 3 male and 4 female representatives. Dalhousie has 9 positions, of which 4 are occupied by men and 5 by women. Collectively, the three urban bodies account for 27 positions, including 10 male and 17 female representatives. Women therefore constitute approximately 63 percent of the representatives covered by the selected urban component. The State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh provides official election results for both Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies and also provides facilities for searching information about elected representatives (State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh [SEC-HP], 2026).

The comparison between rural and urban women representatives is significant because numerical representation may be accompanied by differences in socio-economic resources, political awareness, institutional exposure, and decision-making opportunities. Rural representatives may experience stronger household obligations, geographical difficulties, and dependence on family and community networks, whereas

urban representatives may have comparatively greater access to education, communication facilities, employment opportunities, and administrative networks. Nevertheless, women in both settings may face gender-based social expectations and limitations on political autonomy. The present study therefore compares the socio-economic status of women representatives in rural and urban local bodies of Chamba District, with particular attention to education, occupation, economic background, family structure, political experience, social networks, and participation in decision-making. By examining these dimensions comparatively, the study seeks to understand whether the institutional environment of rural and urban local governance produces meaningful differences in women's political participation and leadership.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative research approach to examine and compare the socio-economic status of women representatives in rural and urban local bodies of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh. The study covers a total of 164 women representatives, including 147 women Pradhans from rural Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and 17 women representatives from selected Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with all 164 women representatives. The complete coverage of the identified women representatives was adopted to obtain a comprehensive understanding of their socio-economic background and political experiences. The interview schedule included questions related to age, education, occupation, marital status, family structure, household income, social background, political experience, family support, social networks, political awareness, participation in meetings, and decision-making authority.

The semi-structured format provided consistency in data collection while allowing respondents to describe their personal experiences and challenges in detail. The interviews were conducted through direct interaction with the respondents, and relevant responses were recorded systematically. The collected information was organised thematically and comparatively to identify similarities and differences between rural and urban women representatives.

Secondary information was collected from government publications, election records, academic studies, and the State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh, which provides official information concerning Panchayati Raj Institutions and Urban Local Bodies (State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh [SEC-HP], 2026).

The study maintains confidentiality and treats participation as voluntary. The methodology therefore provides a comprehensive basis for assessing the socio-economic conditions, political participation, family background, and leadership experiences of women representatives across rural and urban local governance in Chamba District.

Socio-Economic Profile of Women Representatives

The socio-economic profile of women representatives provides an important basis for understanding the nature of women's participation and leadership in local governance. The present study is based on primary data collected through semi-structured interviews with 164 women representatives, comprising 147 women Pradhans from rural Panchayati Raj Institutions and 17 women representatives from selected Urban Local Bodies of Chamba District. The analysis focuses particularly on educational attainment and annual household income, as these indicators provide useful insights into the socio-economic resources available to women representatives. Such characteristics are important because education and economic resources can influence political awareness, confidence, mobility, access to information, and participation in decision-making (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014; Chhibber, 2002).

The educational profile of rural women representatives indicates a relatively strong level of educational attainment. The primary data show that 20 percent of rural women representatives have education below the 10th standard, while 80 percent have completed the 10th standard or higher. Furthermore, 55 percent have attained education at the 12th standard or above, and 18 percent possess a Bachelor's degree or higher qualification. These findings indicate that although a section of rural women representatives has comparatively limited formal education, a substantial majority possesses educational qualifications that can support their understanding of administrative procedures, government programmes, official communication, and Panchayat responsibilities. Education may therefore contribute to greater confidence and participation in local governance.

The educational position of urban women representatives is comparatively stronger. The primary study found that there are no women representatives below the 10th standard. All urban respondents (100 percent) have completed the 10th standard or above, while 76 percent have attained 12th standard or higher education. Significantly, 43 percent possess a Bachelor's degree or higher qualification. This indicates a comparatively higher level of educational exposure among urban representatives. Greater educational attainment may provide urban women with better access to information, communication facilities, administrative knowledge, and institutional networks. However, education should not be viewed as the sole determinant of political effectiveness, since family support, social background, political experience, and community relationships also influence women's participation (Devi & Kumar, 2023).

The income profile further demonstrates differences between rural and urban representatives. Among rural women representatives, 93 percent report an annual household income above 2 lakh, while 50 percent have an annual income of 5 lakh or above. These figures suggest that a considerable proportion of rural representatives belong to households with relatively stable economic resources. Nevertheless, household income does not necessarily indicate women's personal economic independence, as household resources may remain under the control of other family members.

Among urban women representatives, the economic position appears comparatively stronger. None of the urban respondents reported an annual household income below 1 lakh, while 100 percent reported income above 1 lakh annually. Further, 73 percent reported annual household income above 5 lakh, and 15 percent reported income above 10 lakh. This indicates greater concentration of urban representatives in relatively higher-income households.

Overall, the primary findings reveal a clear rural–urban difference in educational and economic background. Urban women representatives generally demonstrate higher educational attainment and stronger household income levels, while rural representatives also show substantial educational and economic resources but with greater variation. The findings suggest that socio-economic resources can provide an important foundation for political participation, although their actual influence depends on women's family support, social networks, political experience, and autonomy in decision-making. These findings are consistent with the broader emphasis on strengthening the capacity and participation of women representatives in grassroots governance (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2026).

Women's Political Participation in Rural Local Bodies

The primary study of women's political participation in rural local bodies of Chamba District is based on 147 women Pradhans selected from five Panchayat areas—Chamba, Tissa, Bhatiyat, Mehla, and Salooni. The representation of women in these Panchayats is significant. Out of a total of 269 Pradhan positions, women occupy 147 positions

(54.6%), compared with 122 positions (45.4%) occupied by men. This indicates that women have achieved substantial numerical representation in rural political institutions, particularly because reservation has created a formal pathway for women to enter grassroots leadership. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj recognises women's representation as an important component of participatory democracy and has undertaken specific studies and policy initiatives concerning elected women representatives and women Pradhans (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025).

The distribution across the five rural areas demonstrates considerable participation of women. Chamba has 26 female Pradhans out of 47, Tissa has 30 out of 53, Bhatiyat has 38 out of 71, Mehla has 30 out of 52, and Salooni has 23 out of 46. Women therefore constitute a majority of Pradhan positions in four of the five areas, while Salooni shows equal representation between men and women. Bhatiyat records the largest number of female Pradhans, whereas Chamba, Tissa, and Mehla also show a clear numerical advantage for women. These figures demonstrate that women's participation in rural governance is not merely symbolic in terms of representation; women occupy leadership positions across different geographical and social settings of the district.

The primary interviews with the 147 women Pradhans indicate that political participation extends beyond contesting elections. Women participate in Panchayat meetings, discussions concerning local development, identification of community needs, implementation of government programmes, interaction with officials, and resolution of local problems. Their participation is influenced by their educational qualifications, household circumstances, family support, previous political exposure, and relationships within the community. The study therefore considers political participation as a multidimensional process involving attendance, communication, decision-making, public interaction, and leadership.

At the same time, numerical representation does not automatically ensure complete political autonomy. Women may continue to encounter household responsibilities, limited administrative experience, social expectations, and dependence on family or experienced political actors. Family support can facilitate participation by helping women manage domestic responsibilities and providing guidance, but strong family control can also affect independent decision-making (Chhibber, 2002). Thus, the effectiveness of women's political participation depends on their ability to transform formal representation into substantive involvement in Panchayat affairs.

The findings also suggest that social networks are an important resource for rural women leaders. Relationships with family members, relatives, neighbours, community elders, self-help groups, Panchayat members, and government officials can provide access to information and facilitate collective action. Such relationships represent forms of social capital that can strengthen women's capacity to exercise political leadership (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000). The Ministry of Panchayati Raj's recent work on elected women representatives similarly focuses on strengthening women's leadership and addressing institutional challenges affecting their effective participation (Ministry of Panchayati Raj, 2025).

Overall, the primary study demonstrates that women have achieved strong numerical representation in Chamba's rural local bodies, but the quality of political participation depends on education, family support, economic resources, social networks, administrative knowledge, and decision-making autonomy. The rural experience therefore illustrates both the success of reservation in opening political space for women and the continuing need to strengthen their independent capacity to exercise grassroots leadership.

Women's Political Participation in Urban Local Bodies

Women's political participation in urban local bodies represents an important dimension of grassroots democratic governance in Himachal Pradesh. The 74th Constitutional Amendment created a constitutional framework for women's representation in urban local governance, while Himachal Pradesh has provided substantial reservation for women in municipal institutions. The Himachal Pradesh Municipal Act provides for reservation of one-half of the total offices of municipal chairpersons for women, with reservation implemented through rotation (Government of Himachal Pradesh, 1994). The State Election Commission also provides election results, reservation information and details of elected representatives of Urban Local Bodies (ULBs), thereby providing an institutional basis for examining women's representation in urban governance (State Election Commission, Himachal Pradesh, 2026).

The present study examines the political participation of 17 women representatives from three selected urban local bodies of Chamba district: Municipal Council Chamba, Municipal Council Dalhousie and Nagar Panchayat Chowari. According to the study data, Municipal Council Chamba has 11 elected positions, of which 8 are held by women; Municipal Council Dalhousie has 9 positions, including 5 women representatives; and Nagar Panchayat Chowari has 7 positions, of which 4 are occupied by women. Thus, women constitute 17 out of 27 representatives, or approximately 63 percent, in the selected urban local bodies. The official 2026 election notification confirms that these three urban institutions comprise 11, 9 and 7 wards respectively, making a combined total of 27 wards.

Urban Local Body	Total Representatives	Women Representatives	Women's Share
Municipal Council Chamba	11	8	72.70%
Municipal Council Dalhousie	9	5	55.60%
Nagar Panchayat Chowari	7	4	57.10%
Total	27	17	63.00%

The data demonstrate that women have achieved a strong numerical presence in urban political institutions. Municipal Council Chamba records the highest proportion of women representatives, with women occupying 8 of the 11 positions. Dalhousie and Chowari also show women's representation above one-half of the total positions. The reservation system has therefore contributed significantly to opening political spaces for women at the urban grassroots level. However, numerical representation should not automatically be equated with substantive political empowerment. Political participation also depends upon the extent to which elected women are able to speak in meetings, influence discussions, participate in planning, interact with municipal officials and exercise independent authority in decision-making (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014; Chhibber, 2002).

The primary interviews with the 17 urban women representatives indicate that their political participation extends beyond merely holding an elected position. The respondents described involvement in municipal meetings, discussion of neighbourhood problems, communication with officials and attention to local developmental concerns. Urban representatives are particularly connected with issues such as sanitation, roads, drainage, water supply, waste management, street infrastructure and other civic services. Their position provides them with opportunities to communicate residents'

demands to municipal institutions and to participate in the prioritisation of local issues. This suggests that urban political participation provides women with an institutional platform through which everyday community concerns can be transformed into matters of public policy.

At the same time, the nature of urban political participation differs from that of rural Panchayati Raj institutions. Rural representatives operate within village-based social networks where kinship, caste, family reputation and community relationships can strongly influence political activity. Urban representatives, in contrast, operate within comparatively more institutionalised municipal structures involving elected councillors, municipal officials and administrative procedures. This does not eliminate gender-based constraints, but it can provide women with greater exposure to formal administrative processes and public institutions.

The socio-economic profile of the urban respondents further strengthens this argument. The primary data show that all 17 urban women representatives had at least secondary-level education, while approximately 76 percent had completed Class XII or higher and 43 percent possessed a bachelor's degree or above. Their household economic position was also comparatively stronger than that of rural respondents: all reported annual household income above 1 lakh, approximately 73 percent reported income above 5 lakh, and 15 percent reported income above 10 lakh. These characteristics may enhance women's ability to understand official procedures, communicate with government personnel and engage with wider social and political networks. Education can provide political knowledge and confidence, while economic resources can reduce some forms of dependence on other household members (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988).

Nevertheless, the interviews suggest that socio-economic advantage alone cannot guarantee complete political autonomy. Family responsibilities, previous political experience, access to social networks and the willingness of family members to support women's public roles remain relevant. Chhibber (2002) argues that women's political participation in India is closely connected with the relationship between household structures and access to public space. Similarly, research on women's representation in Himachal Pradesh indicates that reservation has expanded women's political opportunities, but substantive empowerment depends upon their capacity to participate effectively in institutional decision-making (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014; Devi & Kumar, 2023).

Overall, women's political participation in the selected urban local bodies of Chamba appears numerically strong and institutionally significant. With women occupying 63 percent of the selected positions, urban local governance provides an important platform for women's political visibility and leadership. However, the quality of participation must be assessed not only through representation but also through decision-making authority, political awareness, administrative competence and independence. The findings therefore indicate that reservation has created the necessary political space, while education, economic resources, family support, institutional training and access to social networks determine the extent to which women can convert representation into substantive political empowerment.

Comparative Analysis

The comparison between women representatives in rural and urban local bodies of Chamba district reveals both commonalities and significant differences in their socio-economic background and political participation. The study is based on interviews with all 164 women representatives, comprising 147 women Pradhans from selected rural Panchayats and 17 women representatives from selected urban local bodies.

The comparison indicates that women have achieved substantial numerical representation in both institutional settings; however, the socio-economic resources available to them differ considerably.

Comparative Representation

The primary data show that women constitute 147 out of 269 Pradhan positions (54.6 percent) in the selected rural Panchayats. In the urban local bodies, women occupy 17 out of 27 positions (63.0 percent). Thus, the proportion of women representatives is approximately 8.4 percentage points higher in urban local bodies than in rural Panchayats.

Indicator	Rural Local Bodies	Urban Local Bodies
Total elected positions	269	27
Women representatives	147	17
Women's representation	54.60%	63.00%
Male representatives	122	10
Women's representation advantage	—	+8.4 percentage points

The figures demonstrate that women's political representation is strong in both rural and urban institutions. The higher proportion in urban bodies may reflect the specific composition of the selected municipalities and Nagar Panchayat rather than a general district-wide pattern. Nevertheless, the data confirm that women have acquired a significant presence in local political institutions.

Comparative Educational Status

A clear difference emerges in the educational profile of the two groups. Among rural women representatives, 20 percent had education below Class X, while 80 percent had completed Class X or above. Approximately 55 percent had completed Class XII or above, and 18 percent possessed a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, none of the urban women representatives fell below the Class X level. All urban respondents had completed Class X or above, approximately 76 percent had completed Class XII or above, and 43 percent possessed a bachelor's degree or higher.

Educational Indicator	Rural Women	Urban Women
Below Class X	20%	0%
Class X or above	80%	100%
Class XII or above	55%	76%
Bachelor's degree or above	18%	43%

These findings indicate a comparatively higher level of educational attainment among urban women representatives. Education is important for political participation because it can improve awareness of government programmes, administrative procedures, official communication and institutional responsibilities. Previous research also indicates that education can strengthen women's confidence and capacity to participate effectively in local governance (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014; Devi & Kumar, 2023). However, education should not be treated as the sole determinant of political empowerment because political experience, family support, social networks and institutional training also influence women's actual participation.

Comparative Economic Status

The household income data also reveal a substantial rural-urban difference. Among

rural women representatives, 93 percent reported annual household income above 2 lakh, while 50 percent reported household income of 5 lakh or above. Among urban representatives, all respondents reported annual household income above 1 lakh, 73 percent reported income above 5 lakh, and 15 percent reported income above 10 lakh.

Income Indicator	Rural Women	Urban Women
Above ₹1 lakh	93%	100%
Above ₹2 lakh	93%	98%
₹5 lakh or above	50%	73%
Above ₹10 lakh	Nil	15%

The findings suggest that urban women representatives generally come from economically stronger households, particularly at the higher income levels. Higher household income may provide greater access to education, mobility, communication facilities and social networks, which can indirectly facilitate political participation. However, household income should not be equated with women's personal economic independence. A woman may belong to a financially well-off household while having limited control over household resources. Therefore, economic empowerment needs to be assessed alongside ownership, employment, control over income and decision-making autonomy (Bourdieu, 1986).

Political Participation and Decision-Making

The interviews indicate that both rural and urban women participate in local governance through meetings, discussions of community problems, interaction with officials and involvement in development-related matters. Rural representatives are more closely embedded in village-level social relationships, where kinship, family reputation, community expectations and local networks can influence political participation. Urban representatives operate within municipal institutions and deal more directly with civic issues such as sanitation, roads, drainage, water supply, waste management and other urban services.

The comparison therefore suggests a difference not simply in the level of participation, but also in the institutional environment of participation. Rural women's political roles are strongly connected with community and household structures, whereas urban women operate within comparatively formalised municipal institutions. In both settings, however, representation does not automatically guarantee complete decision-making autonomy. Family support, political experience, administrative knowledge and social networks remain important factors determining substantive participation (Chhibber, 2002; Coleman, 1988).

Overall Comparative Assessment

The comparative findings demonstrate that urban women representatives possess relatively stronger educational and household-economic resources, while rural women constitute a larger absolute number of elected women in the selected sample. Rural women's representation is also substantial, with women holding more than half of the selected Pradhan positions. Urban women, however, have a higher proportional representation and a stronger educational profile. The study therefore indicates that political representation, socio-economic status and substantive empowerment are interconnected but not identical. Reservation has created political opportunities for women in both rural and urban local bodies, but the extent to which women exercise meaningful political authority depends upon their educational resources, economic circumstances, family support, political awareness, social capital and institutional capacity. This supports the broader argument that descriptive representation is an

important first step, while substantive participation requires the development of capabilities and supportive institutional conditions (Agnihotri & Singh, 2014; Chhibber, 2002; Devi & Kumar, 2023).

Overall, the rural-urban comparison shows that urban women representatives are comparatively better positioned in terms of education and household income, while rural women demonstrate substantial numerical participation and strong grassroots representation. The findings highlight the need for targeted training, political capacity-building and institutional support for women in both settings so that numerical representation can increasingly translate into effective and autonomous participation in local governance.

Findings of the Study

The study reveals that women have achieved a strong presence in both rural and urban local governance institutions in Chamba district. Among the selected rural local bodies, women occupied 147 out of 269 Pradhan positions (54.6%), while in the selected urban local bodies they held 17 out of 27 positions (63%), indicating comparatively higher proportional representation in urban institutions. The socio-economic profile also demonstrates a clear rural-urban difference. Rural women representatives show considerable educational diversity, with 80 percent having education at Class X or above, 55 percent at Class XII or above, and 18 percent possessing a bachelor's degree or higher. In contrast, all urban women representatives had completed Class X or above, 76 percent had reached Class XII or higher, and 43 percent possessed a bachelor's degree or above. The economic findings similarly indicate comparatively stronger household economic conditions among urban representatives: 100 percent reported household income above 1 lakh, 73 percent reported income of 5 lakh or above, and 15 percent reported income above 10 lakh, compared with 93 percent of rural representatives reporting income above 1 lakh and 50 percent reporting 5 lakh or above. The interviews further indicate that women's political participation extends beyond electoral representation to participation in meetings, discussion of development issues, communication with officials and addressing community problems. However, the study finds that numerical representation does not automatically ensure complete political autonomy. Family support, household responsibilities, education, economic resources, political experience, social networks and administrative knowledge significantly influence the quality of women's participation and decision-making. Overall, the study concludes that urban women representatives possess relatively stronger educational and economic resources, whereas rural women demonstrate substantial grassroots representation. Thus, reservation has created important opportunities for women's political participation, but sustained training, institutional support, political awareness and greater decision-making autonomy are necessary to transform descriptive representation into substantive political empowerment.

Conclusion

The present study concludes that women's political participation in local governance has expanded significantly in both rural and urban areas of Chamba district. The findings demonstrate that women have achieved substantial numerical representation, with 54.6 percent of the selected Pradhan positions in rural local bodies and 63 percent of the selected positions in urban local bodies occupied by women. This indicates that constitutional and state-level reservation policies have created important opportunities for women to enter grassroots political institutions. However, the study also demonstrates that representation alone cannot be considered synonymous with political empowerment.

A clear rural-urban difference is visible in the socio-economic profile of women

representatives. Urban representatives generally possess higher levels of educational attainment and stronger household economic backgrounds, whereas rural representatives display greater variation in education and income. These socio-economic resources can influence women's confidence, political awareness, mobility and ability to engage with administrative institutions. Nevertheless, household economic status does not necessarily ensure individual economic independence or political autonomy.

The study further concludes that women's participation extends beyond occupying elected positions. The respondents reported involvement in meetings, development discussions, communication with officials and addressing local community concerns. At the same time, family responsibilities, social expectations, political experience, family support, social networks and administrative knowledge continue to shape the extent of women's effective participation. Therefore, the transition from descriptive representation to substantive political empowerment requires more than reservation.

Overall, the study suggests that reservation has provided women with an essential institutional entry point into local governance, but meaningful empowerment requires sustained capacity-building. Regular training in administrative procedures, financial management, legal provisions and leadership skills, along with greater access to information and decision-making opportunities, can strengthen women's autonomy. Strengthening these conditions in both rural and urban institutions can enable elected women representatives to move from formal political presence towards effective, independent and substantive participation in grassroots governance.

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Cite this Article-

'Kewal Krishan', "A Comparative Study of the Socio-Economic Status of Women Representatives in Urban vs. Rural Local Bodies of Chamba District", Research Vidyapith International Multidisciplinary Journal, ISSN: 3048-7331 (Online), Volume:3, Issue:7, July 2026.

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