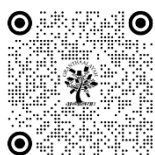


ROLE OF PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN EMPOWERING WOMEN: A STUDY OF RURAL AREAS IN INDIA

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ABSTRACT

In order to evaluate the critical role that Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) play in empowering women in rural India, this research does a thorough comparative analysis. As local self-government organizations required by the constitution, PRIs are essential to the decentralization of government and the advancement of social inclusion. This study assesses how much PRIs in various rural areas of the nation support women's social empowerment, economic development, and involvement in decision-making processes. The study looks at the dynamics of PRIs in several states, highlighting obstacles and achievements and providing insightful information for the creation of policies and programmes promoting women empowerment.

Keywords: Organizations, Decentralization, Empowerment, Policies and Programmes

1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the intricate and multidimensional field of evaluating the contribution of Panchayati Raj Institutions to women's empowerment in rural India's varied landscape. In a nation where gender inequality is still pervasive and rural women frequently experience ingrained social, economic, and political marginalization, the issue is extremely pertinent. Investigating the effects of PRIs as local government entities on women's status is crucial, since they have benefited from them individually as well as acting as a group to bring about change.

In this setting, empowerment takes on several forms. It encompasses women's involvement in local decision-making processes, economic growth through the creation of income and the development of skills, and social empowerment—which deals with problems pertaining to healthcare, education, and the breakdown of oppressive conventions and practices. This research aims to comprehend the roles played by PRIs in each of these areas, and more significantly, it compares various states and regions.

The realization that India is a nation with enormous variety led to the idea to conduct comparative research. Every state and area have distinct political, cultural, and socioeconomic characteristics. Operating within these contexts as

organizations of local government, PRIs' efficacy in empowering women might differ greatly. In order to guide policy choices and actions that may be customized to local conditions and requirements, this research attempts to identify the best practices, difficulties, and lessons gained from various locations.

2. BACKGROUND

In India, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are a unique and revolutionary force in the fields of rural development and governance. PRIs, which strive to decentralize authority and empower communities, have been the cornerstone of local self-governance in rural regions since their formation by the 73rd Amendment to the Indian Constitution in 1992 (Ananth, 2014). Given that women make up a sizable percentage of the population in rural India, one of the most important outcomes of this decentralization movement has been the realization of the necessity of empowering them.

2.1. OBJECTIVES

- 1) To examine the extent of women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) and its impact on local governance, and to evaluate how PRIs facilitate women's economic and social empowerment (through initiatives in income-generation, education, healthcare, etc.) in rural India.
- 2) To identify the key challenges and barriers faced by PRIs in empowering women, and to highlight effective practices and policy recommendations derived from a comparative analysis across different regions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The influence of women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions' decision-making processes on local development and governance Since their founding, panchayats have served as the foundation of numerous Indian communities. The 73rd Amendment Act, often referred to as the Panchayati Raj Act, brought Mahatma Gandhi's vision of Panchayat Raj to fruition. With the designated seats for SCs and STs, this statute gives women a total of one-third of the seats. Additionally, it designated one-third of the total number of chair positions for women. According to Sharma et al., 2021, women play a variety of roles in the panchayat, including election participation, acting as a catalyst for social change, lowering corruption, decreasing violence against women, and more. Women encounter a multitude of obstacles, including but not limited to governmental interference, unfavorable public perceptions, inadequate education in rural regions, a dearth of training programs, violence against them, and more.



Figure 1 Women participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions

[Sources:<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/centre-launches-programme-to-empower-women-panchayat-leaders-curb-sarpanch-pati-phenomenon/articleshow/118716774.cms>].

PRI's role in advancing women's economic growth

In India, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are crucial in advancing women's economic growth. PRIs are local self-government organizations with provisions for women's representation. Their goals are to empower rural communities and decentralize governance. As per the view of Ramya, 2014, PRIs play a number of important roles in supporting women's economic development, including seat reservations, financial inclusion, planning and budget

allocation, resource allocation, entrepreneurship and skill development, monitoring and accountability, social and gender equity, capacity building and training, community engagement, and so forth.



Figure 2 Women education

[Source: <https://northeastnetwork.org/furthering-womens-participation-in-the-local-governance-system-formal-informal/>].

Contribution of PRIs to Women's Social Empowerment by Analyzing Their Effects on Education, Health, and Social Issues Awareness In India, the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) have been instrumental in promoting women's social empowerment in a number of critical domains, such as healthcare, education, and public awareness of social concerns.

PRIs have played a key role in advancing girls' education in the field of education. Within PRIs, women representatives have actively backed school development, fought for the hiring of female instructors, and helped put programs in place to boost the enrolment of females. They put forth a lot of effort to lower dropout rates, particularly for girls from low-income families, by supporting programs like midday meal and scholarship programs (Ghosh et al., 2015). PRIs' female members also take part in community outreach and awareness-raising activities to emphasize the value of education for females.

PRIs are responsible for managing the upkeep and enhancement of nearby healthcare institutions. Women's representatives have played a critical role in promoting the establishment and upkeep of health centres, guaranteeing the availability of medical personnel, and providing essential healthcare services. Additionally, they are leading the charge in initiatives for child care, maternal health, and family planning. They also have a responsibility to promote hygienic restrooms, clean drinking water, and healthy food for women and children.

Public awareness campaigns (PRIs) play a crucial role in community mobilization when it comes to social concerns. Women's representatives are especially engaged in combating female foeticide, child marriage, domestic abuse, and gender-based discrimination. Through awareness campaigns, workshops, and training programs, they spread knowledge while promoting women's rights, legal literacy, and community dispute resolution. Their dedication to social empowerment is a pillar of development in rural India, promoting gender parity and raising living standards.

Obstacles and difficulties PRIs encounter in empowering women

When it comes to empowering women, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India confront a number of difficulties and obstacles.

Cultural norms of society: Women may find it difficult to effectively participate in PRIs due to deeply ingrained patriarchal attitudes and customs. Gender stereotypes frequently restrict women's access to leadership positions and decision-making abilities.

Limited Education: Women often lack access to education in rural regions, which makes it difficult for them to comprehend and participate in the intricacies of development initiatives and government (Barik, 2023).

Political Opposition: A few male PRI members oppose women's active involvement because they worry about a change in the balance of power. This may show up as resistance to women assuming leadership positions.

Resource Constraints: PRIs frequently face challenges related to a lack of infrastructure and funding, which might limit their capacity to successfully execute programs for women's empowerment.

Absence of Training: Women in PRIs may not have access to opportunities for capacity-building or appropriate training, which may limit their ability to participate in decision-making.

Violence and Harassment: Threats, acts of violence, and harassment against women in PRIs might deter them from fully engaging in governance-related tasks.

Recommendations for policymakers, development practitioners, and stakeholders involved in gender empowerment and rural development by highlighting successful models and initiatives:

According to Ghosh et al., 2015, there are a number of suggestions that can be applied to the empowerment of women, including capacity building, financial inclusion, legal literacy, community engagement, inclusivity, reserved seats, awareness and sensitization, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, collaboration, health and sanitation, empowerment programs, and so forth. These recommendations can be used to create policies that will aid in the empowerment of women.

3. METHODOLOGY

Descriptive Research: This study needs a descriptive synopsis in order to examine the function that PRI plays in empowering women. This kind of study primarily offers a thorough summary of the policies and practices of PRI, as well as how they are implemented and connected to the processes of women's empowerment (Nassaji, 2015).

Analytical Research: it might look at the connection between women's participation and the effective running of panchayats. This will go beyond categorization and assessment to investigate the interpretation of data in order to spot trends and determine the causes of the social standing of women (Lim et al., 2013).

Applied Research: This will always be centred on finding solutions to real-world issues and addressing certain unique business constraints. Through this study, the researcher can pinpoint useful suggestions for enhancing HRM procedures to raise project management success.

Quantitative research: this might entail gathering and using statistical techniques to analyze numerical data. To measure the link using several measures including project cost, stakeholder satisfaction, and quality, quantitative research is carried out (Watson, 2015).

Qualitative research: This can investigate non-numerical data from sources like case studies, interviews, and observation. The study methodology works well for learning the project manager's mindset and in-depth knowledge (Nassaji, 2015).

Because the researcher is doing this study for knowledge goals, the focus of the research will be on qualitative research. Using theories and methodologies to assess appropriate outcomes, qualitative research will help the researcher gather data from earlier investigations.

Primary and secondary research are the two main categories of study. Utilizing corporate websites, annual reports, and other public and unpublished sources including newspapers, scholars, and journals, the researcher will gather data from secondary sources.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The research's data collection will aid in achieving the goal. The researcher will gather the data and locate pertinent sources, such as government papers, academic journals, company reports, and so on. The study will examine the data collection strategy to identify potential sources of information that are undesired and may have unintentionally been included in data collection in order to eliminate unwanted information from the data that has been obtained. In order to arrange the gathered data into some pertinent topics, the researcher develops a coding system. Data pertaining to ongoing programs for women's empowerment will be gathered, together with an examination of various educational initiatives, from which conclusions will be drawn.

5. EXPECTED RESULTS

The following are the anticipated outcomes of the study on the contribution of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) to women's empowerment in rural India:

Women's Involvement in Decision-Making: The study is probably going to show that women participate in PRI decision-making processes to differing degrees in different geographical areas. It could draw attention to how much

women participate in local governance and how their involvement affects the creation of policies and development projects.

Economic Development: The study should identify the ways in which PRIs, such as income-generating activities and skill development, support women's economic growth. It could offer perceptions into effective programs and methods that have given women in various rural contexts economic empowerment.

Social Empowerment: It is anticipated that the study will clarify the ways in which PRIs have impacted women's social empowerment. This covers advancements in social awareness, healthcare, and education. The results could highlight effective tactics that PRIs have been using to deal with these issues.

Difficulties and Obstacles: The research ought to pinpoint particular difficulties and obstacles that PRIs encounter in empowering women. These could include violence against women, resource limitations, and sociocultural standards. Developing successful solutions to overcome these obstacles requires an understanding of these issues.

Regional Variations: It is anticipated that the comparative aspect of the research will draw attention to differences across regions in the degree to which PRIs are successful in empowering women. Localized strategies might benefit from the distinct difficulties and achievements that each state and area may have to offer.

Best Practices: The study may pinpoint effective models and best practices used by PRIs in various locations, providing insightful information that may be replicated and modified in other contexts.

Policy Implications: The study is probably going to have an impact on policy, giving state and federal legislators a better understanding of how to improve PRIs' contribution to rural development and women's empowerment.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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