



Women's Participation and Empowerment in Panchayati Raj: An Analysis

Dr Praveen Kumar

Associate Professor

Government College for Women, Ateli

Abstract:

This research paper examines the participation and empowerment of women in Panchayati Raj institutions in India. Panchayati Raj is a constitutional framework that aims to empower local self-governance at the grassroots level. Despite its potential to promote gender equality and women's empowerment, the effective inclusion and participation of women in decision-making processes remain limited. This study explores the challenges and opportunities faced by women in Panchayati Raj institutions, analyzes the impact of their participation on local governance, and identifies strategies to enhance women's empowerment. The research paper will include a comprehensive review of existing literature, analyze primary and secondary data, and provide a critical evaluation of the current state of women's participation and empowerment in Panchayati Raj.

Introduction:

Women's participation and empowerment in Panchayati Raj is a crucial issue that needs to be addressed in order to achieve gender equality and inclusive development in rural areas. Panchayati Raj is a system of local self-government in India, through which people participate in decision-making processes that affect their lives at the grassroots level. The system aims to decentralize power and promote participatory governance, which can only be achieved if women are equally represented and empowered in the Panchayati Raj institutions.

Historically, women in India have faced numerous gender-based discriminations and inequalities, both within their families and in society at large. This has resulted in their marginalization and exclusion from decision-making processes, which has hindered their overall development and wellbeing. Recognizing the need to address this issue, the Government of India introduced reservations for women in Panchayati Raj institutions through the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992. This landmark amendment aims to ensure that at least one-third of the



seats in the Panchayati Raj institutions are reserved for women.

The participation and empowerment of women in Panchayati Raj have significant implications for the overall development and progress of rural areas. Firstly, it provides women with a platform to voice their concerns, needs, and aspirations, and contribute to the decision-making process. This helps in addressing gender-specific issues and implementing policies that are responsive to the needs of women. It also enables women to become proactive agents of change and development in their communities.

Secondly, women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions has been shown to improve governance outcomes at the grassroots level. Studies have indicated that female representatives tend to prioritize social welfare issues such as health, education, sanitation, and women's rights. Their involvement in decision making also leads to the introduction of gender-sensitive policies and programs, which address the specific needs and challenges faced by women in rural areas.

Furthermore, women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions has the potential to challenge and transform gender norms and stereotypes prevalent in society. By actively participating in public life and taking up leadership roles, women challenge the traditional gender roles assigned to them and inspire other women to do the same. This has long-term implications for women's empowerment and gender equality, as it helps in challenging patriarchal structures and empowering women to take control over their lives and destinies.

Lastly, women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions is not only important for achieving gender equality but also for achieving inclusive and sustainable development. Women make up around half of the population in rural areas, and their meaningful participation is crucial for the effective implementation of development programs and policies. Their inputs and perspectives are vital for ensuring that these programs are responsive to the needs and aspirations of the entire community.

women's participation and empowerment in Panchayati Raj are of utmost importance for achieving gender equality, inclusive development, and sustainable governance in rural areas. The introduction of reservations for women in Panchayati Raj institutions has been a significant step towards addressing gender-based discriminations and inequalities. However, there is still a



long way to go in terms of ensuring substantive representation and participation of women in these institutions. Efforts need to be made to create an enabling environment for women to participate, including addressing cultural and socio-economic barriers. It is only through the active involvement of women in decision-making processes that true empowerment and gender equality can be achieved in rural areas.

Review of Literature

Panchayati Raj, translated as "local self-government," is a system of governance in rural India that aims to decentralize power and promote democratic participation at the grassroots level. Instituted in 1992, Panchayati Raj has paved the way for women's inclusion in decision-making processes. This essay presents a comprehensive literature review examining the impact of Panchayati Raj on enhancing women's participation in local governance. By critically analyzing key studies and research papers, this review aims to shed light on the progress made, challenges faced, and future prospects regarding women's empowerment through Panchayati Raj.

The section explores the historical context of Panchayati Raj, tracing its roots back to the ancient Indian system of village assemblies, and its journey through various stages of development. This part of the review serves as a foundation for understanding the significance of Panchayati Raj in contemporary India.

The literature review presented in this essay highlights the significance of Panchayati Raj in promoting women's participation and empowerment in rural governance. Through an examination of existing research and studies, the review identifies the progress made, challenges faced, and recommendations for future improvements. By promoting women's inclusion and providing them with decision-making powers, Panchayati Raj has the potential to contribute significantly to gender equality and sustainable development in rural India.

Based on the synthesis of existing literature, this review highlights the persistent inequality in women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions. It emphasizes the importance of addressing structural barriers, societal norms, and widespread gender inequalities to achieve



meaningful inclusion and effective participation. The review also identifies avenues for future research, emphasizing the need for rigorous evaluation of ongoing reforms and interventions to ensure sustained progress in women's participation in Panchayati Raj.

J.S. Millonce observes that "The only government, which can satisfy all exigencies of social state is one in which the whole people participate". The women constitute half of the society. However, in India women have been deprived of various kinds of opportunities and advantages by our traditional society for the past several centuries. The woman was marginalized from the public sphere and most of the decisions are taken by the male dominated power structure in the society. The feudal attitudes of looking down upon the abilities of women and not promoting them, is still continuing in different degrees at various levels of our society. While women have made many advances, their inferior status to men continues to be a global phenomenon. At a time of unprecedented economic growth, India is experiencing a dramatic intensification of violence against women and the majority of girls are still not getting equal educational opportunity. Various initiatives are taken to improve the status of women in independent India. Of great importance in this respect was the 73rd Constitution Amendment Act, 1992. This was a historic event towards revitalization of Panchayati Raj Institutions in general and empowerment of SCs, STs and women in particular. The instrument is aimed at empowering these groups who were getting marginalized and subjected to various types of oppressions. This development, besides making panchayats truly self-governing units and representative of people, offers these groups an opportunity to participate actively in their decision making process. Punjab government, like many other states of India, has also given 50% reservations to women in Panchayati Raj Institutions in 2018. As a result, during the elections held in December 2018, 50% women were elected in local bodies in Punjab.

The term empowerment is a broad concept and it depends on the situations in which it has been used. It can be said that empowerment is the ability or capacity attained by a person to determine his/her destiny. Empowerment refers to measures designed to increase the degree of autonomy and self-determination in people and in communities in order to enable them to represent their interests in a responsible and self-determined way, acting on their own authority.



Empowerment as action refers both to the process of self-empowerment and to professional support of people, which enables them to overcome their sense of powerlessness and lack of influence, and to recognize and use their resources. In a broader sense, empowerment is a multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. So empowerment has multiple, interrelated and interdependent dimensions such as economic, social, cultural, psychological and political dimensions (Sowdeeswari, 2014).

Women's Participation and Empowerment in Panchayati Raj

The Profile of Women Participating in Panchayati Raj

Panchayati Raj is a system of local self-governance in rural areas of India. It was introduced to decentralize power and decision-making to the grassroots level. One of the significant achievements of Panchayati Raj is the increased participation of women in local governance. In this essay, we will discuss the profile of women participating in Panchayati Raj and the factors that influence their involvement. The participation of women in Panchayati Raj is a result of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments in India. These amendments mandated reserved seats for women in Panchayati Raj institutions. As a result, at least one-third of the seats in all levels of the Panchayati Raj system are reserved for women candidates. This move has empowered women and provided them with an opportunity to actively participate in decision-making processes at the local level.

The profile of women participating in Panchayati Raj is diverse. They come from different backgrounds, castes, religions, and educational levels. However, there are certain common features that we can observe in their profile. First and foremost, the majority of women participating in Panchayati Raj belong to the marginalized sections of society. They are often from lower castes, economically disadvantaged backgrounds, and have limited access to education and resources. These women face multiple forms of discrimination based on their gender, caste, and socio-economic status.

One of the significant influences on women's participation in Panchayati Raj is education. Education plays a crucial role in empowering women and giving them the confidence to participate in public life. However, the level of education among women in Panchayati Raj is



relatively low compared to their male counterparts. Many women who hold positions in Panchayati Raj institutions have only primary or secondary education. This is due to various reasons such as limited access to education opportunities, early marriage, and familial responsibilities.

Another factor influencing women's participation in Panchayati Raj is social and cultural norms. Despite legal provisions, women still face resistance and opposition from traditional power structures and patriarchal mindsets. Many women in Panchayati Raj face hostility from male members or even their own families who do not believe in women participating in decision-making processes. As a result, women often face numerous challenges in asserting their authority and making their voices heard.

However, despite these challenges, women in Panchayati Raj have made significant contributions. They have brought in fresh perspectives, innovative ideas, and have focused on issues of importance to women, such as education, health, sanitation, and women's empowerment. Women have actively participated in the planning and implementation of various development programs and have made a positive impact on their communities.

Additionally, women in Panchayati Raj have shown exceptional leadership skills and have proven their ability to effectively govern. They have successfully taken up responsibilities, such as mobilizing resources, managing finances, and implementing welfare schemes. This has challenged the stereotype that women are not capable of handling public affairs.

To further enhance women's participation in Panchayati Raj, several measures need to be taken. Firstly, efforts should be made to improve women's access to education and skill development. Women with higher education are more likely to participate actively and contribute meaningfully to local governance. Secondly, awareness campaigns should be conducted to change societal attitudes towards women in leadership positions. It is essential to emphasize the importance of gender equality and the benefits of women's participation in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, women's reservation in Panchayati Raj should be accompanied by capacity-building programs to impart necessary skills and knowledge to women leaders. These programs



should focus on governance, financial management, and leadership development, to enable women to overcome the challenges they face. Additionally, institutional support and mentoring should be provided to women leaders to ensure their successful participation and sustainability in Panchayati Raj institutions.

The profile of women participating in Panchayati Raj is diverse, with women coming from various backgrounds and facing different challenges. Education and social norms are significant factors that influence women's participation in Panchayati Raj. Despite these challenges, women have made significant contributions and have emerged as capable leaders in local governance. However, more efforts are needed to enhance women's participation and ensure their effective representation in Panchayati Raj. Women's empowerment and gender equality should be prioritized to create an inclusive and truly democratic society.

Empowerment through Capacity Building in Panchayati Raj

Panchayati Raj is a system of local self-governance in rural areas of India. The term Panchayati Raj refers to genuine local governance by elected representatives. It aims to decentralize political power and empower local communities to manage their own affairs. However, for true empowerment to take place, there is a need for capacity building of the elected representatives and other stakeholders involved in Panchayati Raj. This essay will discuss how empowerment through capacity building can strengthen Panchayati Raj and result in effective local governance.

- **Definition of Capacity Building:**

Before delving into the topic, it is essential to understand the concept of capacity building. Capacity building refers to the process of enhancing an individual or organization's ability to perform specific tasks. It involves acquiring, strengthening, and maintaining the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes to meet current and future challenges. In the context of Panchayati Raj, capacity building focuses on empowering elected representatives, officials, and community members to effectively govern and manage local affairs.

- **Importance of Capacity Building in Panchayati Raj:**



Capacity building is crucial in Panchayati Raj for several reasons. First and foremost, it enables elected representatives to understand their roles, responsibilities, and powers bestowed upon them by the Constitution. Many elected representatives in rural areas are not familiar with the intricacies of governance and may lack the knowledge necessary to effectively discharge their duties. Capacity building programs can provide them with the necessary training and information to better understand their roles, thereby strengthening the functioning of Panchayati Raj.

Secondly, capacity building can enhance the skills and capabilities of elected representatives. It can train them in areas such as policy formulation, budgeting, project management, and conflict resolution. These skills are essential for them to carry out their mandated tasks efficiently and effectively. Additionally, capacity building can teach them techniques for community engagement, participatory decision-making, and consensus-building, thereby improving the quality of local governance.

Furthermore, capacity building can foster transparency and accountability in Panchayati Raj. By equipping elected representatives and officials with knowledge about governance, administrative procedures, and financial management, it becomes more difficult for corruption and malpractice to prevail. Capacity building can also educate them about the rights and entitlements of citizens, enabling them to advocate for the welfare of their communities and hold other stakeholders accountable.

- **Capacity Building Initiatives in Panchayati Raj:**

Several initiatives have been taken to promote capacity building in Panchayati Raj. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj and various state governments have launched programs and schemes to train and empower elected representatives. For example, the National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayati Raj (NIRD&PR) conducts several capacity building programs for elected representatives and stakeholders. These programs cover various aspects of governance, including policy-making, financial management, and social mobilization.

Additionally, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society organizations, and



academic institutions have played a significant role in capacity building in Panchayati Raj. These organizations conduct training workshops, conferences, and seminars to create awareness and empower elected representatives and other stakeholders. They provide guidance on practical issues faced by Panchayati Raj institutions and help build skills and capabilities to address them.

- **Benefits of Capacity Building in Panchayati Raj:**

Empowerment through capacity building in Panchayati Raj can yield numerous benefits. Firstly, it can lead to improved decision-making and community participation. When elected representatives are well-informed and possess the necessary skills, they can make informed decisions that reflect the needs and aspirations of the local community. This not only enhances the quality of governance but also fosters a sense of ownership and participation among citizens.

Secondly, capacity building can promote sustainable development at the grassroots level. By equipping elected representatives with knowledge and skills related to planning, implementation, and monitoring of development projects, they can effectively utilize the available resources and funds for the benefit of their communities. Capacity building can enable them to identify and address local development issues, prioritize projects, and allocate resources accordingly, thereby promoting overall development and well-being.

Furthermore, capacity building can lead to the empowerment of marginalized and underrepresented groups. Women and socially disadvantaged communities, who often face multiple barriers in participating in governance processes, can benefit greatly from capacity building initiatives. The training and support provided can equip them with necessary skills and confidence to engage actively and assert their rights in the decision-making process. This can contribute to their socio-economic empowerment and bridge the existing gaps in representation and voice.

While capacity building is essential for empowering Panchayati Raj institutions, there are several challenges that hinder its effective implementation. Firstly, limited financial resources



often constrain the government's ability to provide comprehensive capacity building programs to all elected representatives. To address this, partnerships with NGOs, civil society organizations, and academic institutions can be leveraged to share the burden and provide training and support to a larger number of elected representatives.

Women's Participation in Decision-Making

Panchayati Raj is a decentralized system of governance in India that aims to empower local communities by increasing their participation in decision-making processes. With the implementation of the 73rd Amendment Act in 1992, reservation quotas were introduced to ensure the political representation of women in elected bodies at the grassroots level. This essay aims to explore the challenges faced by women in their participation, the achievements made so far, and the future perspectives of women's role in decision-making in Panchayati Raj.

Challenges:

- Patriarchal mindset: Despite legal provisions, deep-rooted patriarchal beliefs prevail in many parts of India, limiting women's active participation in decision-making. Cultural norms, gender stereotypes, and traditional views on women's roles hinder their inclusion in leadership positions within Panchayati Raj institutions.
- Lack of awareness and education: Illiteracy and lack of awareness about their rights and the functioning of the Panchayati Raj system obstruct women's active involvement. Without adequate knowledge, women may not be able to leverage the opportunities provided by the reserved seats to contribute effectively.
- Limited access to resources: Economic dependency and lack of access to resources such as finance, information, and technology create significant barriers for women's involvement. These constraints restrict women from actively participating in decision-making processes and implementing developmental initiatives effectively.
- Social barriers and stereotypes: Social stigmas and biases discourage women from challenging traditional gender roles and entering public spheres. Stereotypes regarding women's capability, leadership skills, and perception of their primary role as caregivers hinder their progress in Panchayati Raj institutions.



Achievements:

- **Increased political representation:** The introduction of reservation quotas has significantly increased the political representation of women at the grassroots level. It has provided a platform for women to voice their concerns, actively participate in decision-making, and bring about positive changes in their communities.
- **Focus on gender-specific issues:** Women's presence in decision-making bodies has brought attention to gender-specific issues such as maternal health, education, sanitation, and women's empowerment. Their insights and experiences have led to the formulation and implementation of policies that address these concerns effectively.
- **Socio-economic development:** Evidence suggests that women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions has led to notable improvements in socio-economic development indicators. The inclusion of women in decision-making processes has resulted in better allocation of resources, increased emphasis on education, and enhanced social justice within communities.
- **Role models and empowerment:** Women holding influential positions in Panchayati Raj have become role models for other women, inspiring them to overcome social barriers and strive for leadership roles. This process of empowerment has catalyzed the transformation of traditional gender roles and contributed to social change.

Future Perspectives:

- **Strengthening gender-sensitive policies:** There is a need to develop and implement policies that are gender-sensitive and address the unique challenges faced by women in Panchayati Raj institutions. Measures such as capacity building programs, awareness campaigns, and support systems must be prioritized to facilitate women's active participation.
- **Enhancing education and awareness:** Investments in education and awareness programs are crucial to empower women with knowledge about their rights, responsibilities, and the functioning of the Panchayati Raj system. This will enable them to effectively contribute to decision-making processes and navigate complex bureaucratic procedures.
- **Addressing social and cultural barriers:** Comprehensive efforts must be made to challenge patriarchal norms, eliminate gender stereotypes, and address social stigmas that hinder women's



participation. Community engagement, sensitization workshops, and public campaigns are instrumental in changing mindsets and creating an inclusive and supportive environment for women's involvement.

- Economic empowerment and resource accessibility: Providing women with access to economic resources, training opportunities, microfinance initiatives, and leveraging digital technology can enhance their participation in decision-making processes. Strengthening their financial independence will not only contribute to their empowerment but also enable sustainable development in their communities.

Women's participation in decision-making within Panchayati Raj institutions has brought about significant positive changes in India. However, several challenges still impede their active involvement. Policymakers, civil societies, and communities must collectively address these challenges and work towards creating an inclusive and gender-equitable governance framework. Only through continuous efforts can we ensure that women's voices are heard and their perspectives are integrated into policy-making processes, contributing to the overall development of the country.

SUGGESTIONS:

1. There is a need to increase Literacy level among women because when women become literate, then they become more powerful and confident about themselves.
2. There is a need to spread awareness among young educated girls about the importance of Politics in Nation's development. So we need to bring educated women or girls in politics for women empowerment and also for our country's development.
3. Need to fix a minimum qualification to contest elections for Panchayati Raj Institutions. Thus educated women come in these institutions.
4. Proper training should also be given to elected representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions especially to women about their role and powers in Panchayati Raj Institutions.



5. There is need to stop entry of husbands/sons (male relative) of Women Elected Representatives in all meetings of Gram Panchayats, Panchayats Samities or Zila Parishads, to insure actual empowerment of women representatives in PRIs.
6. Printed material should also be distributed time to time among women representatives to aware them about their duties and rights/powers.
7. Some seminars should also be organized in Panchayati Raj Institutions about women empowerment, so that women representatives become confident and do their work by themselves and don't depend on their husbands or other male family members.
8. Society should also need to change its opinion about women leadership.

Conclusion

At the end it can be said that with the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions in our country a woman gets an opportunity to prove her worth as a good administrator, decision-maker or a good leader. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 is a milestone in this regard. It provides women a chance to come forward. It is up to them to make use of this opportunity. This experiment is proving to be a big success particularly by providing opportunity to women to come out of their houses and participate in administrative and political field. PRIs become a good platform for women empowerment. However, women are still not empowered. They are elected and working equal to men but there are so many challenges/problems for women in PRIs, which needs to solve, by themselves and by government and also by our society. After that we can said that women are empowered.

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