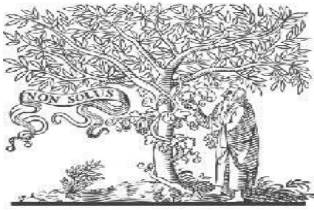


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10.48047/IJIEMR/V10/ISSUE 11/86

Title *BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS*

Volume 10, ISSUE 11, Pages: 532-537

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BARRIERS AND ENABLERS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT:

Women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is a critical component of inclusive and effective governance. Despite constitutional provisions and legislative efforts to enhance women's representation, several barriers continue to impede their active involvement. This research paper aims to comprehensively analyze the barriers and enablers of women's political participation in PRIs. Through a multidimensional approach, this paper identifies socio-cultural, economic, institutional, and individual factors affecting women's engagement and suggests strategies to overcome these obstacles. By examining successful case studies and policy initiatives, the paper also highlights potential enablers that can amplify women's political representation at the grassroots level.

KEYWORDS: - Barriers and Enablers, Women's, Political Participation, Panchayati Raj Institutions

INTRODUCTION:

Panchayati Raj Institutions serve as the foundation of local self-governance in India. The Constitution of India envisions a substantial representation of women in these institutions to promote gender equality and address women's issues at the grassroots level. However, women's political participation remains suboptimal due to various barriers that restrict their involvement. Understanding these barriers and identifying enablers is crucial for fostering gender-inclusive governance.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) represent a vital cornerstone of India's democratic structure, functioning as local self-governance bodies responsible for addressing community-level concerns. These institutions hold immense potential for grassroots development, equitable resource distribution, and participatory decision-making. Recognizing the

imperative of gender equality in governance, the Constitution of India has enshrined provisions aimed at promoting women's political participation within PRIs. Despite these constitutional guarantees and legislative efforts, the effective inclusion of women in these institutions remains a complex challenge.

The participation of women in PRIs is not only a matter of ensuring democratic representation but also a means to address gender-specific issues that often remain sidelined in policy discussions. Women's perspectives and experiences bring a unique dimension to governance, allowing for more comprehensive and inclusive policy formulation. Nevertheless, numerous barriers persist, impeding the realization of women's potential as active participants in local governance.

This research paper delves into the multifaceted landscape of women's

political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions. It endeavors to uncover the barriers that hinder women's engagement, ranging from socio-cultural norms and economic disparities to institutional biases and individual factors. By dissecting these barriers, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges that women face in fully participating in PRIs.

Simultaneously, the paper explores the enablers that can catalyze women's active involvement in PRIs. These enablers include legal and policy frameworks, educational initiatives, community-driven transformations, and innovative best practices. By analyzing case studies of successful interventions from different regions, the paper highlights the transformative potential of these enablers.

This research is not only to identify and analyze the barriers and enablers of women's political participation in PRIs but also to offer recommendations that can guide policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders in fostering an environment conducive to women's leadership and participation. Ultimately, the aim is to contribute to the broader discourse on gender-inclusive governance, recognizing that the enhanced participation of women in PRIs is pivotal for sustainable development, equitable representation, and the realization of democratic ideals.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

Women's political participation is a fundamental aspect of democratic governance that involves the active involvement of women in decision-making processes, policy formulation, and leadership roles within political

institutions. It encompasses their engagement at all levels of government, from local to national, and is crucial for ensuring a diverse, representative, and inclusive political landscape.

In the context of India, women's political participation has gained significant attention due to the constitutional provisions and legal reforms aimed at enhancing their representation, particularly in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) at the grassroots level. The 73rd and 74th Amendments to the Indian Constitution in 1992 mandated the reservation of seats for women in local governing bodies, including PRIs and urban local bodies. This move was aimed at addressing historical gender imbalances in political representation and giving women a platform to contribute to decision-making processes that affect their communities.

However, despite these progressive measures, women's political participation still faces numerous challenges. These challenges include socio-cultural norms that limit women's roles to the private sphere, economic disparities that hinder their participation, institutional biases that perpetuate gender inequalities, and individual barriers like lack of self-confidence and limited exposure to political processes.

Efforts to promote women's political participation require a multifaceted approach that addresses these barriers while capitalizing on enablers such as legal frameworks, gender-sensitive policies, education, awareness campaigns, and supportive ecosystems. Empowering women to actively engage in politics not only ensures their representation but also brings diverse perspectives and priorities

to the decision-making table, leading to more comprehensive and equitable policies.

Women's political participation extends beyond mere numerical representation; it encompasses their meaningful involvement in shaping the direction of their communities and the nation. By recognizing and addressing the barriers that hinder their participation and by creating an enabling environment that encourages their engagement, societies can tap into the full potential of women's leadership, fostering sustainable development, gender equality, and effective governance. As the global discourse on women's rights and gender equality evolves, the realization of women's political participation becomes not just a matter of justice, but a cornerstone of vibrant and inclusive democracies.

BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

The barriers that hinder women's active political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are multi-dimensional, entrenched in socio-cultural norms, economic disparities, institutional biases, and individual challenges. Understanding these barriers is crucial for formulating effective strategies to dismantle them and promote women's meaningful involvement in local governance.

Addressing these barriers requires a holistic approach that involves concerted efforts at various levels – societal, familial, institutional, and individual. Strategies that solely focus on legal provisions and quotas are necessary but insufficient. Instead, a combination of awareness campaigns, capacity-building initiatives, economic

empowerment programs, and the promotion of gender-sensitive policies is essential to create an environment conducive to women's political participation.

1 Socio-cultural Barriers:

Deep-rooted patriarchal norms, gender stereotypes, and discriminatory practices limit women's participation. Social stigma, family expectations, and restricted mobility also deter their active involvement.

2. Economic Barriers:

Socio-economic disparities hinder women's political participation. Lack of financial independence, unequal access to resources, and limited opportunities for skill development affect their capacity to contest elections and engage effectively.

3. Institutional Barriers:

Inadequate support mechanisms, lack of gender-sensitive policies, and biased decision-making processes within PRIs discourage women from participating. Power dynamics and resistance to change also impede their integration into decision-making bodies.

Individual Barriers:

Low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and fear of public speaking prevent many women from actively engaging in political activities. Limited exposure to political processes further exacerbates these barriers.

ENABLERS OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION:

Overcoming the barriers to women's political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) requires a concerted effort to harness enablers that can empower women and create an environment conducive to their active

engagement in local governance. These enablers encompass legal frameworks, educational initiatives, supportive ecosystems, and sociocultural changes that collectively enhance women's representation and impact in PRIs.

By leveraging these enablers, PRIs can effectively counter the barriers that hinder women's political participation. A comprehensive approach that combines legal measures, education, and a supportive ecosystem can create a transformative environment where women's voices are not only heard but also valued in the decision-making processes. The empowerment of women in PRIs goes beyond numerical representation; it entails fostering a culture of gender equality, inclusivity, and participatory governance that benefits society. As women contribute their unique perspectives and experiences, PRIs can evolve into dynamic platforms for holistic and equitable development at the grassroots level.

1. Legal and Policy Framework:

Constitutional amendments mandating reservation of seats for women have been crucial in increasing their representation. Gender-sensitive policies, training programs, and capacity-building initiatives also enhance their effectiveness as leaders.

2. Education and Awareness:

Promoting education among women helps in raising awareness about their rights and potential contributions. Informative campaigns highlighting the importance of women's participation can shift societal perceptions.

3. Supportive Ecosystem:

Establishing networks, mentorship programs, and women's collectives within PRIs can provide a conducive environment

for skill development and knowledge sharing.

4. Socio-cultural Change:

Engaging with communities to challenge traditional norms and stereotypes is vital. Advocacy efforts that involve men, religious leaders, and community influencers can foster attitudinal shifts.

5. Case Studies and Best Practices:

This section highlights successful case studies from different states in India where innovative strategies have addressed barriers and empowered women in PRIs. Examples include initiatives promoting financial inclusion, women's leadership training, and community dialogues to challenge stereotypes.

CONCLUSION:

Women's active political participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions is essential for democratic governance and social development. While barriers persist, there are proven enablers that can be harnessed to ensure increased representation of women in local decision-making processes. By addressing these barriers and leveraging enablers, India can pave the way for a more inclusive and equitable political landscape at the grassroots level.

The active and meaningful participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) is an essential component of a vibrant democracy and inclusive governance. Despite constitutional provisions and legislative efforts to enhance women's political representation, barriers persist that hinder their engagement. This research paper has delved into the multifaceted landscape of women's political participation in PRIs, examining both the barriers that impede their involvement and the enablers that can

empower them to overcome these challenges.

Socio-cultural norms, economic disparities, institutional biases, and individual factors collectively contribute to the barriers faced by women in PRIs. These barriers not only limit women's access to political power but also perpetuate gender inequalities that hinder the holistic development of communities. However, through a concerted effort, these barriers can be addressed and dismantled.

Enablers such as legal frameworks mandating reservation, gender-sensitive policies, education, awareness campaigns, and supportive ecosystems offer pathways to overcoming these obstacles. By implementing these enablers, PRIs can foster an environment that encourages women's active engagement, ensuring their voices are heard in decision-making processes. Such efforts have the potential to not only empower women but also transform the nature of governance at the grassroots level, making it more representative, equitable, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities.

While progress has been made, there is still much work to be done. The journey towards gender-inclusive governance requires collaborative efforts involving government agencies, civil society organizations, community leaders, and individuals. By adopting a holistic approach that addresses socio-cultural norms, provides equal opportunities, and supports women's leadership development, PRIs can become true platforms for participatory democracy and community development.

In conclusion, the barriers, and enablers of women's political participation in PRIs are

interconnected, representing a complex interplay between societal norms and institutional structures. Through sustained efforts, policy reforms, and a shift in cultural perceptions, women can be empowered to take on leadership roles, contribute to policy formulation, and shape the trajectory of their communities. The realization of this vision requires unwavering commitment to gender equality, ensuring that women's voices are not only counted but also valued in the democratic discourse of India's grassroots governance.

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