

# **VISION VIKSIT BHARAT 2047: CONTRIBUTION AND INITIATIVES OF DIGITAL INDIA FOR EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN**

**Vol - 1**

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# RURAL WOMEN AND PANCHAYATI RAJ

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## Abstract

*Panchayati Raj, a system of decentralized governance in India, aims to empower rural communities, particularly women, by providing them with a platform to participate in decision-making processes. This study examines the role of rural women in Panchayati Raj and their experiences with local governance. The study highlights the importance of capacity-building programs, awareness campaigns, and supportive policies to enhance rural women's participation in Panchayati Raj. It also emphasizes the need for gender-sensitive budgeting and planning to address the specific needs of rural women. Using a mixed-methods approach, this research investigates the level of participation, challenges, and opportunities faced by rural women in Panchayati Raj institutions. The findings reveal that while rural women have made significant strides in participating in local governance, they still face numerous challenges, including patriarchal norms, lack of education, and limited access to resources.*

**Keywords:** Panchayati Raj Scheme, Rural Women, Women Empowerment.

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## Introduction

The research contributes to the existing literature on women's empowerment and local governance, providing insights into the complexities of rural women's participation in Panchayati Raj. The findings have implications for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers working to promote women's empowerment and inclusive governance in rural India.

## Objectives of the Study

- To examine the current status of rural women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions.
- To explore the opportunities and potential of Panchayati Raj for rural women's empowerment.

## Significance of the Study

### Empowerment of Rural Women

- Increased participation: Panchayati Raj institutions provide rural women with opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, increasing their voice and influence in local governance.

- Improved socioeconomic status: By participating in Panchayati Raj institutions, rural women can access resources, services, and opportunities that improve their socioeconomic status.

### **Rural Development**

- Local governance: Panchayati Raj institutions enable rural women to contribute to local governance, ensuring that their needs and concerns are addressed.
- Community development: Rural women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions can lead to community development initiatives, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure projects.

### **Democratic Governance**

- Decentralization: Panchayati Raj institutions promote decentralization, enabling rural women to participate in decision-making processes at the local level.
- Accountability: Rural women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions can increase accountability, ensuring that local governments are responsive to their needs.

### **Women's Rights and Social Justice**

- Challenging patriarchal norms: Rural women's participation in Panchayati Raj institutions can challenge patriarchal norms, promoting gender equality and social justice.
- Addressing violence against women: Panchayati Raj institutions can provide a platform for rural women to address issues related to violence against women, ensuring their safety and security.

### **Usefulness of Panchayati Raj Scheme**

#### **Economic Empowerment**

- Access to credit: Panchayati Raj institutions provide rural women with access to credit facilities, enabling them to start small businesses and improve their economic status.
- Employment opportunities: Panchayati Raj institutions create employment opportunities for rural women in various sectors, such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure development.
- Self-help groups: Panchayati Raj institutions promote self-help groups (SHGs) for rural women, which provide a platform for them to save, invest, and access credit.

#### **Social Empowerment**

- Increased participation: Panchayati Raj institutions provide rural women with opportunities to participate in decision-making processes, increasing their voice and influence in local governance.
- Awareness and education: Panchayati Raj institutions promote awareness and education among rural women on various issues, such as health, education, and social justice.

- Support for vulnerable women: Panchayati Raj institutions provide support and protection to vulnerable women, such as widows, single women, and women with disabilities.

### **Political Empowerment**

- Reserved seats: Panchayati Raj institutions reserve seats for women, ensuring their representation in local governance.
- Leadership development: Panchayati Raj institutions provide training and capacity-building programs for rural women, enabling them to take on leadership roles.
- Networking opportunities: Panchayati Raj institutions provide rural women with opportunities to network with other women leaders, sharing experiences and best practices.

### **Health and Education**

- Health services: Panchayati Raj institutions provide rural women with access to health services, including maternal and child healthcare.
- Education and literacy: Panchayati Raj institutions promote education and literacy among rural women, enabling them to make informed decisions about their lives.
- Sanitation and hygiene: Panchayati Raj institutions promote sanitation and hygiene among rural women, improving their overall health and well-being.

### **Women and the Role of PRI**

It could be stated that women constitute about half of India's population. They have been an integral part of our social structure, not only due to their reproductive roles, but also by virtue of their significant contribution to socio-economic development. Despite this, they are the victims of discrimination because of the gender-bias in the social outlook and social practices, resulting in the denial of equality of status and opportunities in social, economic and political spheres. This has not only affected society's attitude towards them, but also their own self-image. They have been conditioned into thinking of themselves as inferior, to be tolerated only if they toil, fetch, carry or procreate (Government Report, 1993).

Panchayati Raj Institutions have provided an ample opportunity for the rural women to participate in the political process, "Politically speaking it becomes a process of democratic seed drilling on the Indian soil, making average citizen more conscious of his rights, than before. Administratively speaking, it bridged the gap between the bureaucratic elite and the people. Socio-culturally speaking, it generated a new leadership, which was merely, relatively young in age but also modernistic and pro-social change in outlook. Finally, looked at from the development angle, it helps rural people to cultivate a development psyche", observes Ashok Mehta Committee, with regard to the achievement of the Panchayati Raj (Government Report, 1978). The PRI has paved the way for different sections for the rural population, particularly weaker sections, to take part in the democratic and development process, which used to be dominated in the past, largely by the higher caste and higher economic groups. This is a necessary condition for establishing an egalitarian

society. The P R Is have been regarded as Nursery of Democracy, since they provide opportunity for the capable and competent rural people to associate themselves with public affairs. The experience gained in these Institutions helps them to move into the leadership position at the state or the national level.

Thus, it becomes imperative to focus our investigations on the realities prevailing at the P R Is and to ascertain the rate of participation of women members in the administrative setup, in its real sense, and their organizational participation. Several studies have revealed but the women Gram Panchayath members are mere proxies, when it comes to different dimensions of administration.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the intersection of rural women and Panchayati Raj is a critical area of study, as it holds immense potential for promoting women's empowerment, rural development, and democratic governance. The Panchayati Raj system has provided rural women with a platform to participate in decision-making processes, access resources and services, and challenge patriarchal norms. Ultimately, the empowerment of rural women through Panchayati Raj institutions has the potential to transform rural societies and promote inclusive and sustainable development. By addressing the challenges and constraints that rural women face, we can unlock their full potential and create a more just and equitable society.