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WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PANCHAYATI RAJ INSTITUTIONS IN ODISHA: A CASE STUDY OF JAGATSINGHPUR DISTRICT

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Abstracts:

This study explores the impact of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) on women's empowerment in Jagatsinghpur district, Odisha. Through a detailed case study, the research assesses how PRIs have facilitated the active participation of women in local governance, contributing to their social, economic, and political empowerment. The study highlights significant outcomes, such as improved social standing, enhanced economic opportunities, and the development of political acumen among women representatives. However, it also identifies persistent challenges, including patriarchal resistance, limited access to education and training, and the dual burden of household and governance responsibilities. By analyzing qualitative and quantitative data from PRIs in Jagatsinghpur, the research provides insights into the transformative potential of PRIs for women, while also emphasizing the need for continued support and targeted strategies to address existing barriers. This case study underscores the role of PRIs in advancing gender equality and offers recommendations for strengthening women's empowerment in rural governance.

Keywords: Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), Women's Empowerment, Local Governance, Social Standing.

Introduction:

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) play a really important role in how India handles local governance. They give communities power, letting them make choices that change their daily lives. Thanks to the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, rural governance has truly transformed, creating a closer connection between people & decisions that matter most to them. In Odisha, where many folks live in rural areas, PRIs have become vital not just for governance but also for women's empowerment. With reserved seats for women in these institutions, many have found new chances to join public life. This is especially huge in places where old-fashioned gender roles held them back for too long.

Take Jagatsinghpur district—a fascinating example of how women’s participation in PRIs has made a difference. Known for its vibrant culture and unique social landscape, Jagatsinghpur showcases the strides women have made in local governance. Once, women mostly stayed at home. Now, they are stepping up, making choices that impact their entire community. This shift is changing the very fabric of the district—challenging old norms & pushing for gender equality.

The progress of women in Jagatsinghpur through their role in PRIs is pretty clear! Socially, they’ve gained respect and recognition from their neighbors. Economically? Their involvement has opened doors to resources and opportunities—they’re contributing richly to local development. Politically, many are building leadership skills and understanding governance better than ever. Some even aspire to reach higher positions!

Of course, it isn’t all smooth sailing. Women still encounter big hurdles like pushback from men in power, limited education opportunities, and juggling home duties with their public roles. Still, the changes brought about by women’s participation in Jagatsinghpur are remarkable—not just for them but for everyone around them. This situation clearly shows how PRIs can spark social change and highlights why we must keep pushing for more support and sustainability of women's empowerment within rural governance.

Women Empowerment:

Women empowerment means giving women control over their lives so that they can make important decisions & access resources on par with men. It’s about boosting their social, economic, political & cultural strengths! Social empowerment mainly focuses on education and health. Economic empowerment strikes at fair jobs and supporting businesses. Political empowerment? That's all about making sure women's voices are heard in politics with proper representation and rights! Cultural empowerment tackles outdated norms that hold women back and champions their involvement in community activities.

Even with positive strides over the years, hurdles like patriarchy and educational gaps keep getting in the way! We need ongoing efforts so we can reach gender equality & fully empower women for good.

Process of Women Empowerment:

Getting women empowered involves several key steps designed to improve their chances & status:

- **Better Access to Education & Health:** Offering equal chances at education & healthcare to women—this helps improve knowledge plus wellbeing!
- **Boosting Economic Opportunities:** We need to ensure fair job practices & provide resources so women can be economically independent.
- **Enhancing Political Participation:** Encouraging more women's engagement in political matters & decision-making roles supports better representation.

- **Challenging Norms:** It's crucial we address & change outdated ideas that limit women's active roles across society.

Women Empowerment Policy:

The National Policy for Women's Empowerment (2001) came about to tackle many challenges faced by women today! Its goals include creating an atmosphere where supportive financial & social ideas boost women's full growth potential! It insists that women should enjoy human rights and freedoms equally with men across various areas—politics, economy, culture...you name it! The policy stresses how vital it is for women to be included in decision-making processes—this covers healthcare access and quality education too! Plus, it aims to strengthen laws against discrimination while promoting gender-sensitive practices everywhere!

It also puts a spotlight on partnering with civil society—especially female-run groups—to combat violence against girls & discrimination.

Objectives of the Study:

This study sets out with some clear goals:

- *To figure out how involved women actually are in Panchayati Raj Institutions within Jagatsinghpur district.*
- *To see how this participation impacts their social, economic & political standing.*
- *To identify what barriers might get in the way of effective participation by these amazing women.*
- *And finally—to suggest ways to enhance their role in local governance.*

Hypothesis:

- Women getting involved in Panchayati Raj Institutions has truly improved their position socially, economically & politically.
- Even though participation is up among them, many hurdles still exist—cultural pushbacks and structural issues often limit full empowerment.

Review of Literature:

Government of Odisha. (2023). Panchayati Raj and Drinking Water Department Annual Report, sheds light on efforts made towards better decentralization through PRIs aimed at uplifting marginalized communities like women via reservations & programs meant to build skills! It shows the journey towards improving infrastructure while acknowledging challenges faced by female representatives.

Mishra, S., & Pattnaik, B. (2021).in their article Women's Participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions: A Study of Odisha. Journal of Rural Development, discuss positive outcomes from reservation policies helping increase women's involvement—all while noting issues like societal resistance or lack of educational opportunities.

National Institute of Rural Development. (2020). Empowering Women through Panchayati Raj Institutions: Case Studies from Odisha examines case studies showing how PRIs empower women by enhancing their social status—the research points out both success stories as well as ongoing challenges like limited support or discrimination.

Sahoo, P. (2019). In his article Gender and Governance: The Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Odisha. Indian Journal of Public Administration, focuses on gender equity through PRIs highlighting how reservations uplifted women's leadership roles despite barriers such as societal resistance.

Singh, K. (2018). in his article The Impact of Reservations for Women in Panchayati Raj Institutions: Evidence from Odisha. Development Studies Research, reviews evidence showing affirmative action promotes gender equality at local governance levels—yet highlights challenges persist in male attitudes hindering progress.

Methodology:

The study was crafted with a hands-on approach using stratified sampling methods. Both qualitative and quantitative data gathering techniques were applied here too. Interviews were scheduled for gathering insights from Gram Panchayat members alongside reviewing relevant books and government documents too!

For this study area—the survey focused on Jagatsinghpur district taking Raghunathpur Block as our sample space which includes 19 Gram Panchayats; 5 were selected including Eradanga among others. From these 5 panchayats—50 female members were chosen; ten from each were invited wisely so no one felt pushed into participating during interviews about gram Panchayat activities.

Interviews allowed ladies flexibility based on availability—which helped yield honest responses regarding experiences working within these structures while using semi-structured formats helped streamline data collection effectively!

Data Analysis and Interpretation:

The survey data were processed through the statistical package for social science (SPSS). The process data was analyzed and interpreted with the support of the existing literature to justify the objectives.

This study employs a case study approach, focusing on Jagatsinghpur district as a microcosm of women's empowerment through PRIs in Odisha. The methodology includes:

- **Primary Data Collection:** Surveys and structured interviews were conducted with women representatives in PRIs across various blocks of Jagatsinghpur district. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were also held with community members to gather insights on the impact of women's participation.
- **Secondary Data Analysis:** Data from government reports, academic articles, and NGO

publications related to PRIs and women’s empowerment in Odisha were reviewed to provide context and support the findings.

- **Comparative Analysis:** The study also compares the experiences of women in different blocks of Jagatsinghpur, highlighting variations in empowerment based on local socio-economic conditions.

Age of the Respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 35 years	11	22.0	22.0	54.0
	35 to 50 years	27	54.0	54.0	76.0
	above 50 years	12	24.0	24.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Age distribution of participant

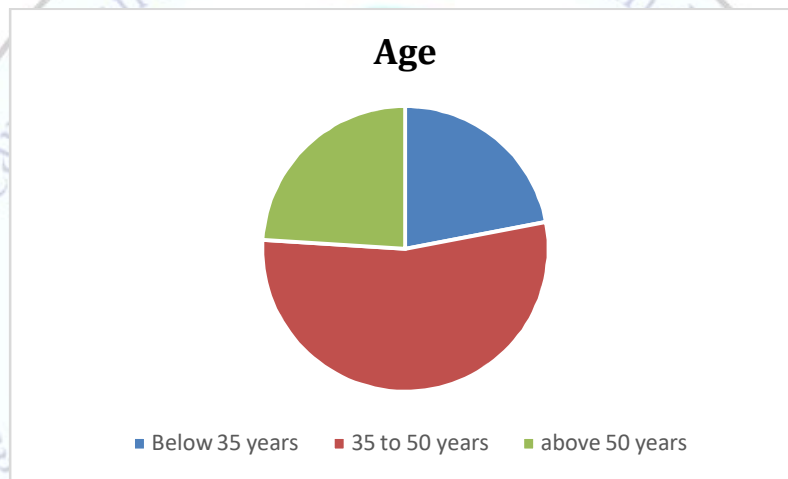


Figure No- 1: Age distribution of participant

The above table depicts the frequencies for different age group of respondents of the Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha. In the above table, the frequency for the 'below 35' age group is 11, '35 to 50' years age group is 27 and for the 'above 50' years of age group it is only 12. The above result depicts that the maximum number of respondents belongs to the age group of 35 to 50 Years of age.

Social group distribution of the Respondents

Social group	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
ST	6	12.0%	32.1%
SC	17	34.0%	45.7%
General	27	54.0%	100.0
Total	50	100.0	

Table 2: Social Group of Respondents

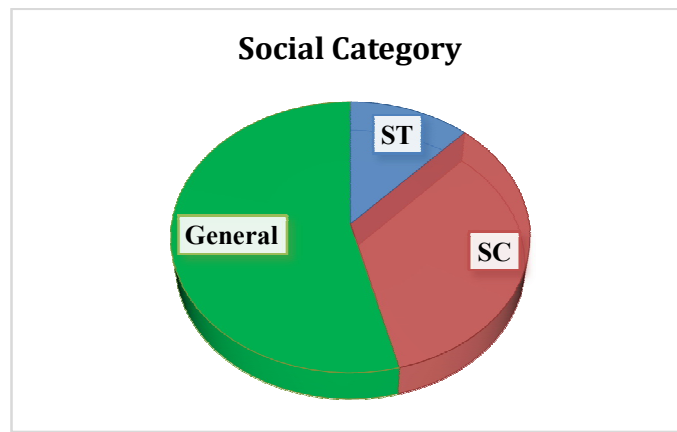


Figure No-2: Social Group of Respondents

The above table depicts the women members of 54.0 (27) percent belong to general Caste. 34.0 (17) percent of women belongs to Schedule caste and 12.0 (6) percent of the women respondents belong to Scheduled tribe category.

Educational status of the Respondents

Education Qualification	Social Group			
	ST	SC	General	Total
Illiterate	3(6.0%)	2(4.0%)	0	5(10.0%)
1st-6th	1(2.0%)	0	0	1(2.0%)
7th-10th	2(4.0%)	9(18.0%)	13(26.0%)	24(48.0%)
+2 and above	0	6(12.0%)	14(28.0%)	20(40.0%)
Total	6(12.0%)	17(34.0%)	27(54.0%)	50(100 %)

Table 3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

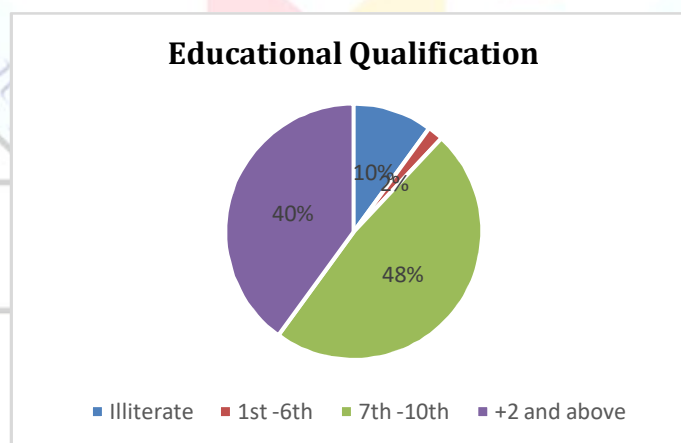


Figure No-3: Educational Qualification of Respondents

The above table represent that in the total Sample 2 (1) per cent each of the women members educated up to 1st to 6th primary school. While others 48.0(40) per cent have completed upper high school level education. 10.0 (5) per cent respondents are Illiterate and 40.0 (20) per cent have completed plus two and above level.

Marital Status of the respondents

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Married	38	76.0	76.0	42.7
	Unmarried	12	24.0	24.0	96.7
	Other	0	0	0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 4: Frequency Table for Marital Status

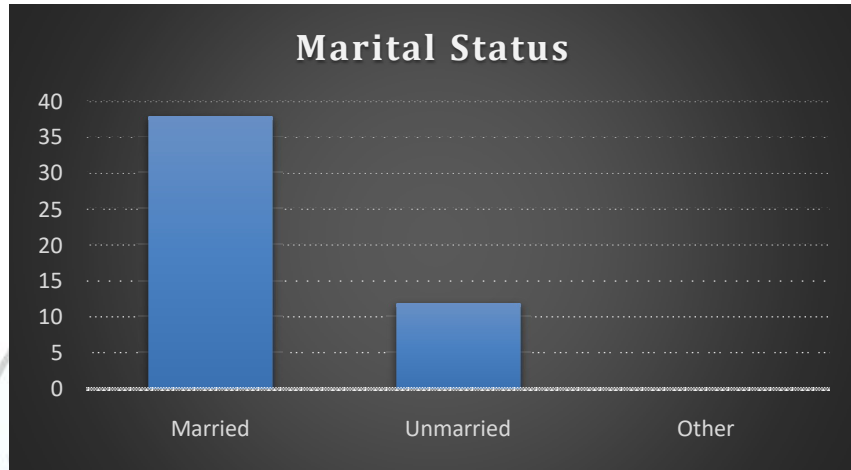


Figure No-4: Marital Status of Respondents

In statistical analysis, the frequency table refers to the two-column table which underlines the different possible outcomes and the related frequencies which are observed in a sample. In the above table, the frequency, percentage and cumulative percentage have been depicted for three different categories of marital status. The frequency shows the number of times a value or an event occurs. In this table, the frequency value refers to the number of times respondents respond about their specific marital status. The above table shows the frequency for the 'married' status is 38 and for the 'unmarried' status it is 12. Whereas, for 'other' marital status it is 0. The above result shows that the maximum respondents of in the Jagatsinghpur district are married.

Type of family

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Nuclear	44	88.0	88.0	67.7
	Joint	06	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 5: Frequency Table for Types of Family

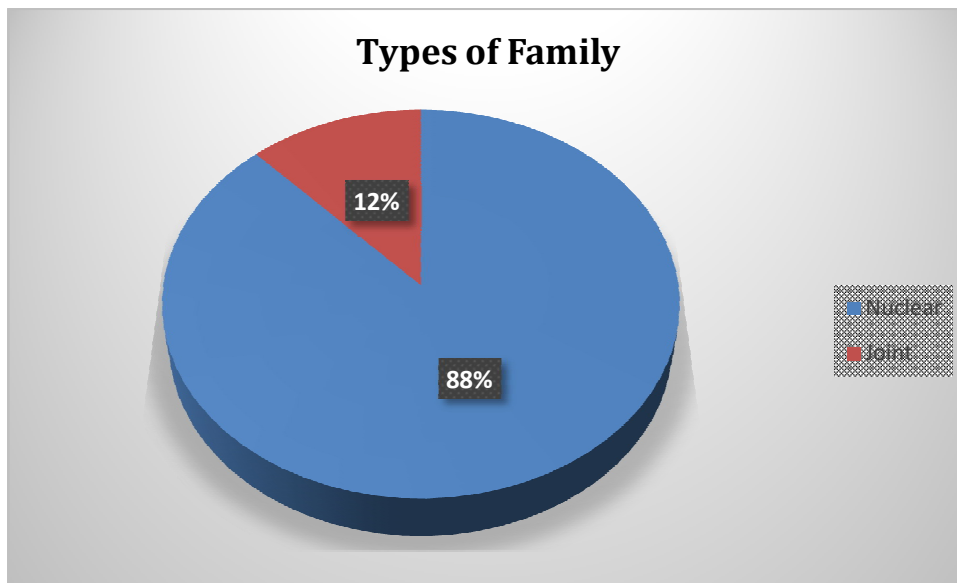


Figure No-5: Types of Family of the Respondents

The above table depicts the frequencies for different types of families in the Jagatsinghpur district of Odisha. In the above table, the frequency for the 'nuclear' family is 44 (88%) and for the 'joint' family it is only 6 (12%). The above result depicts that the maximum number of women in Jagatsinghpur belongs to a nuclear family.

Occupation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agriculture related work	12	24.0	24.0	20.7
	Daily labour	8	16.0	16.0	28.3
	Service in private sector	4	8.0	8.0	51.0
	Govt. service	7	14.0	14.0	75.7
	others	19	38.0	38.0	100.0
	Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Frequency table for Occupation

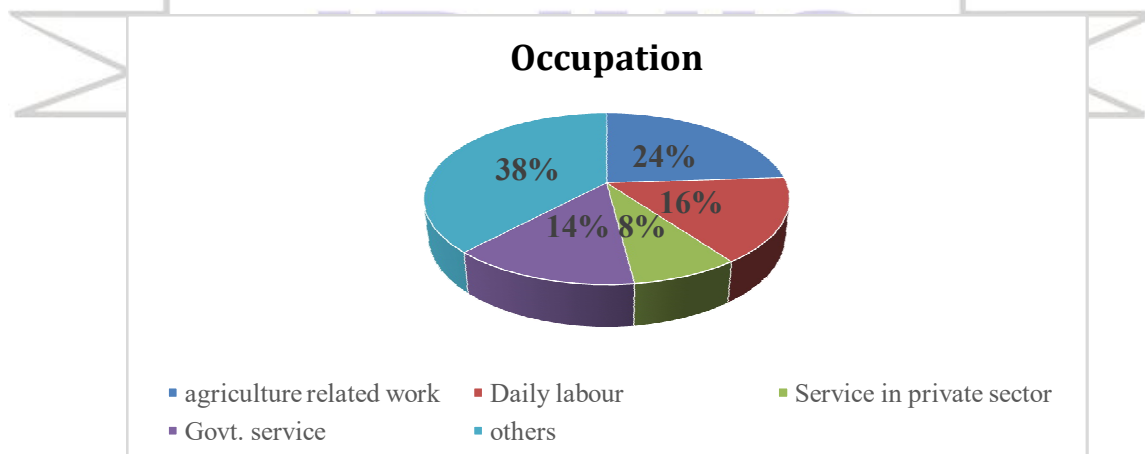


Figure No-6: Occupation of the Respondents

The above table depicts the frequencies for the different types of occupations of the respondents. This table shows that the frequency for the agricultural worker is 12, for food daily labor it is 8, 4 for private sector job, 7 for government service providers and 19 for others. The above result shows that the maximum women of in the Jagatsinghpur District are engaged in the informal sector where as second highest number of women engaged in agricultural sector.

Women's Participation in Panchayat Elections

Participation of Women in Election	YES	NO	TOTAL
ST	2(4.0%)	4(8.0%)	6(12.0%)
SC	8 (16.0%)	9 (18.0%)	17 (34.0%)
General	16 (32.0%)	11 (22.0%)	27(54.0%)
Total	26(52.0%)	24 (48.0%)	50(100%)

Table 7: Political Participation of Respondents

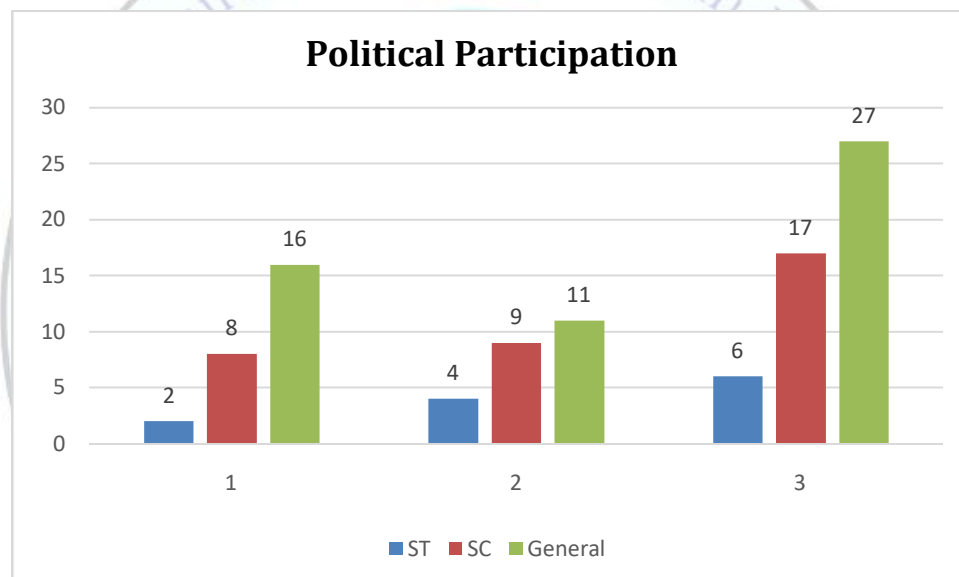


Figure No-7: Political Participation of Respondents

The above table shows that out of the total sample of 50 women respondents of which 52.0 (26) per cent of the women respondents participated in the panchayat election and of which 48.0 (24) per cent of the women respondents are not participated in the Panchayat election.

Results and Discussion:

The study conducted in Jagatsinghpur district reveals that women's participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) has had a transformative impact on their empowerment, with several key outcomes:

Increased Social Standings:

The involvement of women in PRIs has significantly elevated their social standing within their communities. As they take part in decision-making processes, these women have started to

challenge traditional gender roles, fostering a gradual but noticeable shift in societal attitudes toward female leadership. This newfound respect and recognition have empowered women to assert themselves more confidently in both public and private spheres.

Economic Empowerment:

Participation in PRIs has opened up new economic opportunities for women, granting them better access to resources and government schemes. This has contributed to their economic independence, as they can now more effectively engage in and benefit from various development projects. Women leaders have been instrumental in implementing initiatives related to health, sanitation, and education, directly improving the quality of life in their communities.

Political Awareness and Leadership:

Many women representatives have developed a keen political awareness and leadership acumen through their roles in PRIs. This experience has not only enhanced their governance skills but has also inspired some to aspire to higher political positions. The exposure to local governance has broadened their understanding of political processes and has prepared them for more significant leadership roles in the future.

Challenges:

Despite these advancements, women in Jagatsinghpur still face substantial challenges. Patriarchal resistance remains a significant barrier, often limiting women's influence and effectiveness in their roles. Limited access to education and training further hinders their ability to fully engage in governance activities. Additionally, the dual burden of managing household responsibilities alongside their governance duties adds to their challenges. Political manipulation and tokenism also pose issues, with some women representatives being overshadowed or controlled by male family members or political figures, undermining their autonomy and effectiveness.

These findings underscore the complex dynamics of women's empowerment in rural governance, highlighting both the progress made and the ongoing barriers that need to be addressed to achieve true gender equality in PRIs.

Conclusion:

The study on women's empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in Jagatsinghpur district, Odisha, underscores the transformative impact of women's participation in local governance. The introduction of reserved seats for women in PRIs has not only facilitated their entry into public life but has also significantly elevated their social standing within their communities. Women who were once confined to domestic roles are now recognized as leaders, actively involved in decision-making processes that affect their entire community. This shift has begun to challenge deep-seated patriarchal norms, gradually fostering a more inclusive societal attitude toward female leadership.

Economically, the involvement of women in PRIs has been a catalyst for their financial independence. Their participation has provided them with better access to government schemes and resources, which has enabled them to implement development projects that directly benefit their communities. Women leaders have been particularly effective in driving initiatives related to health, sanitation, and education, areas critical to the overall well-being of rural populations. This economic empowerment has not only improved the quality of life for these women and their families but has also contributed to the broader development of their villages.

Politically, women's roles in PRIs have served as a powerful platform for developing leadership skills and political acumen. Many women representatives have gained a deeper understanding of governance processes, which has inspired some to aspire to higher political positions. This exposure has broadened their perspectives and prepared them for more significant roles in the political arena, potentially paving the way for greater female representation in higher levels of governance.

However, the path to full empowerment is not without significant challenges. Patriarchal resistance remains a formidable barrier, often restricting women's influence and effectiveness in their roles. Despite their formal positions, many women continue to face opposition from male counterparts, who may undermine their authority or limit their participation in decision-making. Additionally, the dual burden of managing household responsibilities alongside governance duties places a considerable strain on women, making it difficult for them to fully engage in their roles as public leaders.

Education and training also pose significant challenges. Limited access to these resources hinders women's ability to effectively navigate the complexities of local governance and restricts their capacity to lead with confidence. Moreover, the practice of political manipulation and tokenism persists, with some women representatives being overshadowed or controlled by male family members or political figures. This undermines their autonomy and reduces their role to a mere formality, detracting from the true potential of women's leadership in PRIs.

In conclusion, the case of Jagatsinghpur district illustrates both the remarkable progress and the ongoing challenges in the journey toward women's empowerment through PRIs. While significant strides have been made in enhancing women's social, economic, and political standing, the persistence of socio-cultural and structural barriers indicates that much work remains to be done. To fully realize the potential of PRIs as a vehicle for women's empowerment, it is essential to implement targeted strategies that address these challenges. This includes increasing access to education and training, providing stronger support networks for women leaders, and fostering a cultural shift toward genuine gender equality in governance. By doing so, PRIs can continue to drive social change and contribute to the broader goal of empowering women in rural India.

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