

# Women Leadership and Its Impact on Panchayati Raj Institution: A Study Based on India's 6 Poorest Rural Regions (Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh)

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**Abstract:** A landmark reform was made by India's Government during 1993 at 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of Constitution. The new law formally sanctioned functional authorities for Panchayati Raj Institutes (PRIs) as a subject of State legislature and encouraged easy women participation in grass root politics. However, reality takes longer time to give positive result, which again proved true in this case. Due to a number of socio-economic and political complexities, initially, women participation in rural areas showed slow or no progress in many States of India. Particularly, both women voting and participations were seen to be scanty. Gradually, with great effort from Government and associated Capability Enhancement Bodies, vision of 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment began taking a real form. Our research objective works to justify this constitutional reform. We have chosen six States of India with poorest rural economy for this comparative analysis so that we can identify the most vital key factors that are obstructing or else stimulating rural development by means of women reservation in grass root politics. Our analysis is done using statistical tools to observe the progress of fluctuation trends that are happening in these six rural zones after the implementation of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in Constitution.

**Key Words:** Panchayati Raj, Women Leadership, Participation, Grassroot Politics, Local Governance.

## 1. INTRODUCTION :

Ensuring well being and bringing rural development are functional parts of India's Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) – A Local Governance System as a State Subject. To give it a defined constitutional status and uniform structure, our Government has made 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment effective from 1993 onwards, where the role and operations of PRIs are explicitly categorised.

In our research objective, we wish to study on an important reform of this amendment as a progressive step in rural development – Inclusion of women leadership in PRIs. In this context, let us first explain the constituting aspects in brief that are closely connected with the subject of our research.

**1.1 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment and their Features [10], [12]:** To give structural uniformity and scope of easy functionality to each and every PRIs present in India, 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment include certain significant features. The relevant features for our study are extracted here that observed further deeply at the time we conducted our comparative study.

(a) A new part Part IX, named 'The Panchayats' is added to broadly define the role and responsibilities of PRIs. It describes a Panchayat as a Three-Tier set up, 1. 'Gram Panchayat' at village level, 2. 'Panchayat Samiti' at intermediate level (Between village and district level) and 3. 'Zilla Parishad' or District Panchayat at district level. A 'Gram Sabha' comprised of all the persons registered for voting in the village as members should be incorporated for direct participation of villages in grass root governance.

(b) Reservation of seats for SC/ST/Women for PRI role in each level is sanctions. Seats of SC/ST should be reserved as proportionate to the number of SC/STs in the whole population. Out of which 1/3<sup>rd</sup> should be reserved for women. 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the total number of seats should be reserved for women. (In many States this number is increased to 50%). Seats for SC/ST/Women should be reserved on rotation basis.

(c) Every State should set up Finance Commission for every five years to evaluate the financial status of the Panchayats and provide them required advices on revenue collection, duties, grant of aids and others. The Status report with all these details should be furnished to State Government. Rise in Panchayat Fund should be ensured by State Government as per the decision made with State Finance Commission.

(d) 11<sup>th</sup> Schedule of the constitution is incorporated allowing Panchayats to share responsibilities with State legislatures for 29 operations as enlisted in the schedule.

(e) Panchayat representatives are to be chosen for five years terms. State Election Commission should be incorporated to regulate the Panchayat election procedure.

**1.2 Post 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment Schemes and Provisions for EWR Development [11], [12]:** The beginning of 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment with provision for women participation in PRIs showed not much promising result. Due to a number of socio-economic and political drawbacks, women leadership seemed a far target idea for which major improvements are needed. Realizing the practical gap, Government undertook a few major further development strategies to see a quick rise in women voters as well as representation in rural zone politics.

Some such major improvement programs are, 1. Increase in number of reserved seats in PRIs for women to 50% by 19 States (many of them having poor rural economy, such as, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Jharkhand and others), 2. Capacity Building initiatives for EWRs of PRIs by Ministry of Panchyati Raj (MoPR), 3. Assessment of rural women problems and building customized capacity building initiatives as per NCBF suggestion, 4. Statewise Research and Development initiatives for women role development in Panchayat administration (significant are initiatives from Jharkhand, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and others), 5. Utilization of 14<sup>th</sup> Finance Commission Fund in women capability development in rural zones, 6. Creation of women Self Help Groups (SHG) to build confidence and grow decision making capacity in women and others, 7. Enhancing promotion, security and women well being by MoPR and others.

**1.3 Challenges and Scope of Women Representation in PRIs [11]:** Gap in Rural-Urban socio-economic-educational structure is still too high in India. Rural women have a number of challenges in order to get an actual eligibility of becoming capable EWRs of PRI. Major active obstacles are, 1. Imposition of male members in the family, 2. Economical limitations and lack in academic qualification, 3. Lack of cooperation from society and work environment, 4. Lack of awareness and skill, 5. Obstruction in decision making out of pressurization, 6. Two Child Norm, where a few only rural women are compatible (usually they have more children that two), 7. Lack of women associates in working environment and others.

Whereas, from the result obtained through assessment and Government's women capability building programs, it is ascertained that to achieve rural development quicker than the normal pace, it is essential for the women to be aware and come forward as active PRI participant. Through this, women will be gaining confidence, economic power, administrative support, growth opportunity and scope to create an image of role model of development amongst other rural backward women.

In our research, we have tried to make a practical observation of these major aspects and intended to find any other possible area of improvement/development through which women participation in grass root politics increases opening for a better future prospect for women as well as rural development.

## **2. Objective of This Study :**

Our research is conducted with the aim to identify the response and suitability of women group for taking part in Panchayat level political activities. We've chosen 6 States of India with poorest rural population and observed the prominent strength and weaknesses of women representatives who are holding PRI leadership in those regions.

## **3. Related Works :**

**3.1 Ratna Ghosh et al. (2015) [1],** in their research journal mentions promises that are brought for rural development through India's 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment. Recognition of Panchayat and provision to allow 33% women participation in it is seen to be a new beginning for the rural women who are deprived, humiliated and suffering in many ways. A good remedy is emergence of Self Help Group as she has mentioned, where women are learning to be organized and gain required capabilities to be self-sufficient. Education is also a vital concern for women's empowerment. In this journal, these aspects and the ways of improvements are studied and explained broadly.

**3.2 Raghendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo (2003) [2],** in this research, that is an extension of their previous researches on local decentralization, namely, Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2003a) and Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2003b), answer a few question on the prospect of weaker sections of rural society of India. More clearly, they are Women, Scheduled castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) and the actual gain that they are to get from the 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment of India. Further, through practical observations done in the study areas of Rajasthan and West Bengal, they have studied how the decision making power of women leadership in PRI can help in public goods supply in rural areas.

**3.3 Katharina Raabe et al. (2009) [3],** in their research paper published based on the field based study done in the districts of Karnataka, reveals the constrains that are hindering the initiative of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of India's Constitution to bring gender equality through women seats reservation in PRIs. They have shown decision making power for the women are still not sufficient to give them freedom of equal status with their male counterparts, due to the active social

restrictions. Like the research work of Chattobadhyay and Duflo [2], here too, the survey is done to evaluate how supply of public goods and rural services will be enhanced through women decision making power and how they can face hindrances out of social biases, proving the amendment to be insufficient in terms of women's equality.

**3.4 Dushyantraj Sahibram Mallick (2018) [4]**, in this research makes a study on the way women participation in PRIs can bring further progress in women empowerment and rural development. 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in India's Constitution is a big step, yet needs proper evaluation with required modifications, wherever necessary. According to him, one amendment is only one step towards the far way ahead improvement needed to achieve gender equality and women self-sufficiency. His study aims to locate the improvement areas and their remedial approaches.

**3.5 Santosh Kumar and Nishith Prakash (2012) [5]**, in this case study have chosen districts of Bihar to observe the improvement signs of health and hygiene problems of these rural parts after the participation of EWRs in PRIs. Apart from that, they have extended towards noting the amount of women encouragement and support from the society given for the women leaderships in PRIs.

#### 4. Methodology of This Study :

In this research, we have chosen 6 States of India – Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh to conduct our analysis on trait of women's representation and their future scope as PRI Sarpanchs. Our observation, analysis and conclusions are done based on the authentic official records, informations and data obtained from State's official Web Portals, interaction with researchers of similar areas, local authorities and reputed news channels.

#### 5. Study Area :

In our research, we wished to observe the significant areas of development that occurred as a result of women reservation mandate of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment in India's Constitution. Since implementation of 29 subjects as per 11<sup>th</sup> Schedule comes as responsibilities to be shared between State Legislature and Gram Panchayat, we chose 6 poorest States of India to note its progress in terms of the reforms made in the aforesaid amendment. We collected information on State Demography, Population and Literacy, the three main criteria of rural development for these six States as given below:

#### 5.1 Bihar



Fig. 5.1- Districtwise Map of Bihar  
 Source: infoandopinion.com

Demographic Details	Value
Total Area (Sq. km)	94163
Total Number of Villages	44874
Number of Districts	38
Administrative Divisions	9
Number of Gram Panchayats	8387
Number of CD Blocks	534
Population Details	
Total Population	103804637
Total Rural Population	92074713
Total Rural Male Population	48073850
Total Rural Female Population	44267586
Literacy Details	
Total Literacy	54390254
Total Rural Literacy (%)	49
Total Rural Male Literacy (%)	69.67
Total Rural Female Literacy (%)	49

Table. 5.1- Demographic, Rural Urban Population and Literacy Fact sheet of Bihar

5.2 Jharkhand:



Fig. 5.2- Districtwise Map of Jharkhand  
 Source: infoandopinion.com

Demographic Details	Value
Total Area (Sq. km)	79714
Total Number of Villages	32394
Number of Districts	24
Administrative Divisions	5
Number of Gram Panchayats	4370
Number of CD Blocks	263
Population Details	
Total Population	3,29,66,238
Total Rural Population	2,50,36,946
Total Rural Male Population	12775468
Total Rural Female Population	12261478
Literacy Details	
Total Literacy	18753660
Total Rural Literacy (%)	62.4
Total Rural Male Literacy Literacy (%)	74.57
Total Rural Female Literacy Literacy (%)	49.75

Table. 5.2- Demographic, Rural Urban Population and Literacy Fact sheet of Jharkhand

5.3 Orissa:



Fig. 5.3- Districtwise Map of Orissa  
 Source: infoandopinion.com

Demographic Details	Value
Total Area (Sq. km)	1,55,707
Total Number of Villages	53845
Number of Districts	30
Administrative Divisions	3
Number of Gram Panchayats	6798
Number of CD Blocks	314
Population Details	
Total Population	4,59,89,232
Total Rural Population	34970562
Total Rural Male Population	17586203
Total Rural Female Population	17384359
Literacy Details	
Total Literacy	2,71,12,376
Total Rural Literacy (%)	70.2
Total Rural Male Literacy Literacy (%)	79.65
Total Rural Female Literacy Literacy (%)	59.95

Table. 5.3- Demographic, Rural Urban Population and Literacy Fact sheet of Orissa



5.4 Uttar Pradesh:



Fig. 5.4- Districtwise Map of Uttar Pradesh  
 Source: infoandopinion.com

Demographic Details	Value
Total Area (Sq. km)	240928
Total Number of Villages	97941
Number of Districts	75
Administrative Divisions	18
Number of Gram Panchayats	58791
Number of CD Blocks	822
Population Details	
Total Population	199812341
Total Rural Population	155317278
Total Rural Male Population	80992995
Total Rural Female Population	74324283
Literacy Details	
Total Literacy	145863009
Total Rural Literacy (%)	68.8
Total Rural Male Literacy (%)	77.2
Total Rural Female Literacy (%)	57.9

Table. 5.4- Demographic, Rural Urban Population and Literacy Fact sheet of Uttar Pradesh

5.5 Chattisgarh:



Fig. 5.5- Districtwise Map of Chattisgarh  
 Source: infoandopinion.com

Demographic Details	Value
Total Area (Sq. km)	135191
Total Number of Villages	20619
Number of Districts (by 2012)	27
Administrative Divisions	5
Number of Gram Panchayats	10978
Number of CD Blocks	146
Population Details	
Total Population	25540196
Total Rural Population	19607961
Total Rural Male Population	9797426
Total Rural Female Population	9810535
Literacy Details	
Total Literacy	15598314
Avg. Rural Literacy (%)	65.99
Total Rural Male Literacy (%)	76.98
Total Rural Female Literacy (%)	55.15

Table. 5.5- Demographic, Rural Urban Population and Literacy Fact sheet of Chattisgarh

5.6 Madhya Pradesh:



Fig. 5.6- Districtwise Map of Madhya Pradesh  
 Source: infoandopinion.com

Table. 5.6- Demographic, Rural Urban Population and Literacy Fact sheet of Madhya Pradesh

Demographic Details	Value
Total Area (Sq. km)	308252
Total Number of Villages	54903
Number of Districts	51
Administrative Divisions	10
Number of Gram Panchayats	22817
Number of CD Blocks	313
Population Details	
Total Population	72600000
Total Rural Population	52557404
Total Rural Male Population	27149388
Total Rural Female Population	25408016
Literacy Details	
Total Literacy	50820000
Total Rural Literacy (%)	63.94
Total Rural Male Literacy Literacy (%)	74.74
Total Rural Female Literacy Literacy (%)	48.49

Note: Above Data are collected from the official websites of Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR), Census Commission India - Ministry of Home Affairs, State Government Official Portals of – Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh.

6. Data Collection :

To conduct our study on women participation in PRI administrative activities and analyse how this reservation based procedure has augmented rural development rate, we chose information from authentic sources, such as, government's official portal, suggestions from researchers and reliable national news media.

7. Sample Observation and Analysis :

7.1: We made comparative analysis on (a) Urban-Rural Population, (b) Rural Poverty Rate and (c) Rural Literacy Rate (with respect to national literacy percentage) for the rural zones of our chosen Study Area, i.e., Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh. As we know, these are the three decisive aspects on which the rural development programs depend upon.

Table 7.1(a) – Data of Urban-Rural Population percentage  
 Source: Census of India 2001 and 2011 (Provisional Population Total)

Country/State	2001 %age of population		2011 %age of population	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
INDIA	72.19	27.81	68.84	31.16
Bihar	89.54	10.46	88.7	11.3
Jharkhand	77.76	22.24	75.95	24.05

Orissa	85.01	14.99	83.92	14.08
Uttar Pradesh	79.22	20.78	77.72	22.28
Chattisgarh	79.91	20.09	76.76	23.24
Madhya Pradesh	73.54	26.46	72.37	27.63

We observed that, for each of these States more than 50% population lives in rural area. Also, this rural population is more than India's net average rural population. These facts are emphasize towards necessity of social and economic security in the rural areas, a major work of grass root governance where women participation is necessary to bring desired awareness, security and economical growth.

**Table 7.1(b) – Data of Percentage of Rural Population BPL 2009-12**

*Source:* RBI

Country/State	2009-10 (Based on MRP consumption)			2011-12 (Based on MRP consumption)		
	Population (in 1000s)	%age of population	Poverty line (Rs.)	Population (in 1000s)	%age of population	Poverty line (Rs.)
<b>All India</b>	<b>278210</b>	<b>33.8</b>	<b>672.8</b>	<b>216658</b>	<b>25.7</b>	<b>816</b>
Bihar	49870	55.3	655.6	32040	34.06	778
Jharkhand	10220	41.6	616.3	10409	40.84	748
Orissa	13550	39.2	567.1	12614	35.69	695
Uttar Pradesh	60060	39.4	663.7	47935	30.4	768
Chattisgarh	10830	56.1	617.3	8890	44.61	738
Madhya Pradesh	21690	42	631.9	19095	35.74	771

From this data, we found that both Chattisgarh and Bihar have more than 50% rural population under BPL. That is an alarming figure, when we compare them with the rural population of these States as given above. Also, each of these States have more population percentage than India's net rural population under BPL, which should be overcome as a part of PRI responsibilities by generating livelihood opportunities.

**Table 7.1(c) – Data of Rural Literacy Rate**

*Source:* National Statistical Office and Census of India 2011

Country/State	Total Literacy (%)	Adult Male Literates (%)	Adult Female Literates (%)
<b>INDIA</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>82.1</b>	<b>65.5</b>
	<b>Rural Literacy (%)</b>		
Bihar	49	69.67	49
Jharkhand	62.4	74.57	49.75
Orissa	70.2	79.65	59.95
Uttar Pradesh	68.8	77.2	57.9
Chattisgarh	65.99	76.98	55.15
Madhya Pradesh	63.94	74.74	48.49

This data showed significant educational gap between male and female rural population. Also, none of the State equals or is more in rural literacy rate than the national rural literacy as computed by Census in 2011.

7.2: We collected the data of elected women representatives (EWRs) in PRIs as published for 2018 and 2020.

**Table 7.2 – Data of Total Elected Women Representatives in PRIs**  
*Source: Ministry of Panchayati Raj Record 2018 and 2020*

State	2018		2020	
	Total PRI Representatives	Total EWRs	Total PRI Representatives	Total EWRs
Bihar	127391	57887	136573	71046
Jharkhand	60782	30757	59850	13224
Orissa	107487	53551	107487	56627
Uttar Pradesh	826458	272733	913417	304538
Chattisgarh	170285	93287	170465	93392
Madhya Pradesh	392981	196490	392981	196490

The data showed that there is a significant increase in the participation of EWRs in Bihar, while Jharkhand record reduced in number.

7.3: We collected survey information, district reports, rural public responses on the women Sarpanchs/Members/EWR Training/Women Voting and others obtained for our chosen 6 States and classified the facts as Impressive (Positive) or Depressive (Negative).

#### **7.3.1- Impressive (Positive) Indicators for Rural Development and EWR Participation:**

- According to 2019 Gender Report Card, PRIs have 70,400 women in the position to take decision for PRIs. In percentage, it is 52%. [6]
- As per voting record of Bihar obtained in 2010, 54.49% female voters cast their votes, which is a 7.5% rise from the 2005 record of 2005 [7].
- According to PRI participant data of Bihar collected in 2015, 4,535 EWRs hold the position of Mukhia (President). [7]
- As per Pahal Project Report (2015), women PRI members have gained sufficient decisive senses to give their opinion on public health, school midday meal, raising PRI funds and others. [7]
- To give suitable recognition to the participation of EWRs and women PRI members to combat in Covid-19 prevention program, International Women's Day, March 8, 2021 is celebrated with a global theme 'Women in leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID19 world.' [8]
- As per 2016 Uttar Pradesh PRI Election Report, 39% elected EWRs out of the total 44% elected EWRs come in the age group 21-35. This figure is a rise in percentage from the 2006 PRI elected EWR report. [9]
- From the reports of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, there is a notable improvement in infant mortality from 2000 to 2012. In Bihar the rate reduced from 64% to 43%. In Uttar Pradesh, it reduced from 84% to 53%. [9]

#### **7.3.1- Depressive (Negative) Indicators for Rural Development and EWR Participation**

- According to National Sample Survey 2017, Bihar's labor force participation rate is 4.1% in comparison to India's national average of 23.3%. [6]
- As per Report of Bihar (2015), Bihar Institute of of Public Administration and Rural Development (BIPARD) is training EWRs for past nine years, yet it is not regular or has been able to make more expansion in this faculty.
- According to Pahal Report, EWR knowledge on financial committees is poor – 15% know about Financial Audit Committee and 23% have idea on Financial Planning and Coordination. [7]

### **8. Findings and Conclusions :**

On comparing the data analysis report with the public opinions from the PRIs of the States that we have chosen, it indicated that,

- Rate of participation of women in PRI as well as number of rural voters are increasing. But not in uniform rate.



2. Training and capability building programs are putting their effort to evolve skilled EWRs and women members. However, the record is not consistent.
3. Technical/Financial awareness amongst women participants are found to be low.
4. Gender biases, male dominance, husband/father's assistance/influence, illiteracy, external/social pressurisation or objections are some major critical issues that women Sarpanchs/Members are to deal with.

On the basis of these findings, we arrived in the conclusion that stable impressive responses for India's 73<sup>rd</sup> Constitutional Amendment will take time to show its figures depending on the performance of PRIs and women capabilities, which are showing growth, but in a non-uniform manner.

## 9. Recommendations and Suggestions :

To get desired outcome of PRI performances in terms of women representation/participation, sufficient support and capability building provisions with advance infrastructure are required. Women should be ensured with social and economical security to be open with her voice, choice and capability.

## 10. Acknowledgement :

In our research, we needed data and information from authentic sources to get reliable statistical results and carry out necessary comparative studies. We are thankful to the official websites of State Governments (Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh), Census, RBI, MoPR, Election Commission and open access survey and report portals. For graphics, we're grateful to the open access portal infoandopinion.com.

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