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## EMPOWERING WOMEN AT PANCHAYAT LEVELS THROUGH RESERVATION & EDUCATION: A SPECIAL STUDY IN THE SAMASTIPUR DISTRICT OF BIHAR, INDIA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims at the 'reservation' & 'education' of women particularly in the state of Bihar. The concern of this study is to explore women's participation in Panchayats. We will find out whether the 'education' or 'reservation policy' of Government is able to raise the status of the women who comes from the rural area. 'Reservation' & 'Education' are the two tools for women, which are needed to compensate for the social barriers that have prevented women from participating in politics and thus making their voices heard. The result of the present study shows that the reservation for women at panchayat levels can be an important impetus to women's empowerment in India, but it is not a guarantee for raising the standard of living or empowering women. The goal of women's empowerment will not be accomplished by reservations only. To expedite and speed up this process it is essential to implement some supplementary policies which encourage the self-confidence of women, build women's capabilities and remove operational obstacles. All these things will be achieved only if education will be the primary concern. On the basis of the present study we cannot claim that women are categorically empowered but, on the other hand, we cannot deny that they have gained a lot.*

### KEYWORDS

women empowerment, Samastipur.

### INTRODUCTION

A good society is one which is a gender equal society where gender equality is expressed and it is extremely vital to know the views of both the sexes. Reservation for women would promote policies and measures that are sensitized towards women and are cognizant from the potential dangers that women face in society. The challenges may be stiff and steep, but we must not give up the fight for dignity of our women. The question of women's rights is fundamental to the future of India. To bring about change, the government has two tools: Legislation and education. Legislation is a top-down approach. Education is perhaps a more organic approach to create conducive atmosphere for change. This is because by educating our children, we can hope to create a long lasting impact. Legislation can't change social ills like dowry -- it only drives them underground -- creating a new set of legislative challenges. Educate women -- it is common sense. As M K Gandhi said: 'It is fine if you educate a boy: you create a good man at best. But if you educate a woman, you educate a family and transform society'. When she can care for herself and her family, she will improve her community and change our world. It doesn't take much to help a woman discover her incredible potential Rather than reservation, give women a chance to be born, educated and treated like their male counter parts. I am sure they have equal capabilities as those of man and do not need reservation. Moreover if education can change the lives of women working at panchayat levels, it can also change their lives inside their home. And this is not an assertion. It is borne by facts and figures. Studies in African countries have shown that kids of mother who receives over five years of education have a 40 per cent more survival rate than kids of mothers with less than five years of education. That's because they have a better appreciation of issues concerning health, sanitation, and so many other things. "Kerala's women are more educated, and as a result, birth rate there is 1.7 per cent. Bihar, with a less than 50 per cent education level for women, has a birth rate of 4 per cent.

### IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

Women constitute almost half of the population in the world. But the hegemonic masculine ideology made them suffer a lot as they were denied equal opportunities in different parts of the world. The rise of feminist ideas has, however, led to the tremendous improvement of women's condition through out the world in recent times. Access to education has been one of the most pressing demands of these women's rights movements. Women education in India has also been a major preoccupation of both the government and civil society as educated women can play a very important role in the development of the country. It not only helps in the development of half of the human resources, but in improving the quality of life at home and outside. Educated women not only tend to promote education of their girl children, but also can provide better guidance to all their children. Moreover educated women can also help in the reduction of infant mortality rate and growth of the population. India presently account for the largest number no of illiterates in the world. Literacy rate in India have risen sharply from 18.3% in 1951 to 74.04% in 2011 in which enrolment of women in education have also risen sharply 7% to 65.46%.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the constraints in the empowerment of the elected female members at Panchayat levels.
2. To examine the role of elected female Panchayat members in prioritizing their demands and guiding them for implementation of their own and the wider community.
3. To suggest measures to accelerate the process of empowerment and effectiveness of elected Panchayat members in Bihar.

### CASE STUDIES

I will discuss below some of the cases of women, working at Panchayat levels and also what are their opinions about 'Reservation' & 'Education'. Which one is more effective for them. All the women held certain positions in Panchayat and they all belong to the different Panchayats in the Samastipur district. Few are educated and some are illiterate. So we will discuss about them in brief:

#### CASE 1

First one is Sarita devi, working in 'Sivaysinghpur' Panchayat in the district of 'samastipur' as a 'ward member'. got married at the tender age. She is educated. Her husband is engaged in his own business. They don't have any property neither any political background. She has 2 girl children. They both are not studying right now. She gets help from her husband in many cases. She is below poverty line and has been given a house under the Indira Awas Yojana. Her husband motivated her to contest in the panchayat elections. Her family members and friends helped her in the election. The problem of safe drinking water was there, There was no electricity, and roads were broken. nobody bothered about all those problems, not even the mukhya of the Panchayat. Government official's attitude was also not helpful. The Mukhia was not very clear regarding the functioning of the committees and the power of the Ward members had been grabbed.

But the women having great will power instead of letting down, used her own skill and took initiative to get the work done. This happened only because she was well educated and well aware of the schemes, laws and facilities provided by the government to the panchayat. . Although some people opposed and created obstacles in her work but She got success and she says that although I am here due to reservation, but I got success only due to my educational ability. So she was very clear about the fact that every women must be educated.



**CASE-2**

Another case is of madhoo devi, a ward member of Kannauj panchayat of Samastipur district, she is illiterate, landless and daily wage earner. She learned to sign after she won the Panchayat election. She is below poverty line. She has 4 children. 3 daughter & 1 son. All are studying. Her husband and his friends inspired her to contest the elections. She was not confident of winning but she won due to the reservation. she was uneducated and not able to do the paper work.

She said that she had got 3 days training but did not able to grab all the things during training period due to her illiteracy. According to her, SC women representatives of Panchayat have to face many difficulties in their work. They also lack education and do not understand paper work. Thats why she send her husband to inquire about the government schemes and their implementation. she was well aware of the fact that the main problem of SC representatives was illiteracy and economic distress. But beyond her illiteracy, she took initiative to get the work done.

**CASE- 3**

Pavitri Devi, is the Mukhiya of Kalyanpur panchayat of Samastipur district, got married at the tender age. She is educated. Her husband is engaged in his own business. They don't have any political background. They own approx 3 katthas of land. She has 4 children.1 boy studying in 8<sup>th</sup> class & 3 girls are educated. She gets help from her husband & other male members of family in many cases. Her Panchayat has a population of approximately 10,000.

She believes that education, training and economic assistance to Ward members could change their living conditions. The government should organize training camps for them so that they can understand the functioning of Gram Panchayat and their rule and responsibilities. As a Mukhiya she has faced problems in some cases but got success through the help of people.. As she is literate she knows the value of education and also she had started educating the women of her panchayat. On her initiative women are getting the benefits of education under the **Akshar Anchal Yojana**. Pavitri Devi is also working hard for the abolition of child labor. Her plans for future include opening of Primary school and Primary Health Center (PHC).

Going through the cases, Its my own analysis that, without education, reservation is not of great use. Although reservation gave fresh opportunities to the women but they are not able to full their weight. Though women Panchayat representatives would get better social status in the society through participation in the administration of public. Household work load and lack of education for the Panchayati Raj system hamper their participation. Economic assistance, employment, training and education should be provided to them. Only then they can participate in this three tier Panchayati Raj System. Awareness generation is a must for them.

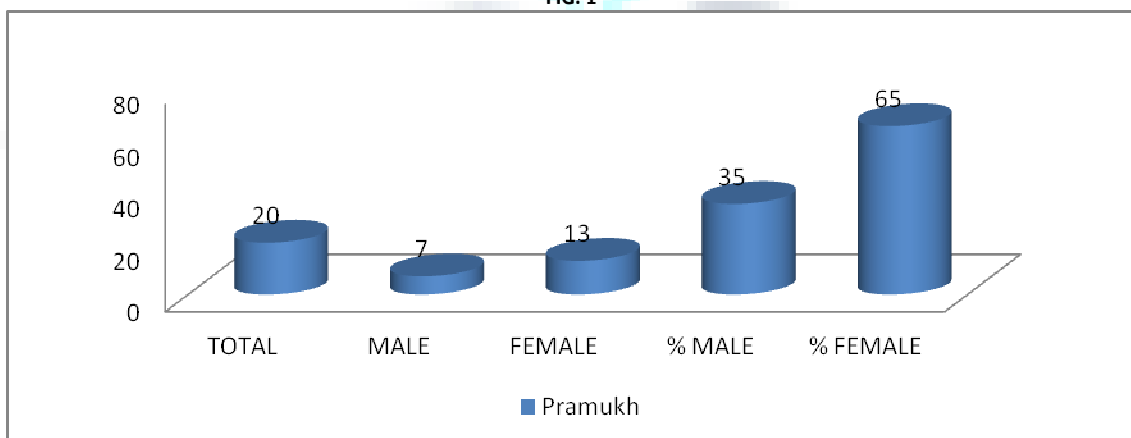
There is no doubt about the fact that development of women has always been the central focus of planning since Independence. However, a clear vision is needed to remove the obstacles to the path of women's emancipation both from the government and women themselves. Efforts should be directed towards all round development of each and every section of Indian women by giving them their due share. The Government policy has been to ensure equal access to education for women and girls. Special measures are taken by the government to eliminate discrimination, universalize education, eradicate illiteracy, create a gender-sensitive educational system, increase enrolment and retention rates of girls and improve the quality of education to facilitate life-long learning as well as development of occupational, vocational and technical skills of women in Bihar. Reducing the gender gap in secondary and higher education and gender sensitive curriculum is the focus area of government

**MAIN FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY**

- (i) Nearly all the SC representative and about 85% of the other women gram panchayat representatives are illiterate with very poor understanding and knowledge of the gram panchayat manuals, their rights and responsibilities, poverty alleviation and employment generating schemes which are currently operational in the rural areas . They are even unaware of the major sources of revenue of the gram panchayats.
- (ii) Almost all the SC women panchayat representatives and nearly 30% of those hailing from other backward classes (OBC), are dummy representatives in the sense that either they avoid participating in the meetings of the panchayat altogether or simply sit through the meetings without any active participation in the deliberations whatsoever.
- (iii) Only those women representatives who belong to the general category and a very small percentage from the backward classes actively participate in the meetings of the panchayat and are involved in the decision making process.
- (iv) Most of the women representative who were sympathetic and conscious towards the problems, plights and issues faced by the village women community were nonetheless pathetically indifferent towards raising the issues in the meetings of the gram panchayat.
- (v) Political participation of women in the local rural bodies has hardly made any noticeable dent in terms of raising their social and economic status, improving the literacy ratio, providing health, maternity and sanitation benefits to women, menace of dowry, rape, discrimination etc.
- (vi) Almost all of the women representative were of the view that lack of education, male dominance, degraded social status, family workload, immobility and ignorance of rules and regulations etc are serious impediments in their performance.
- (vii) Almost all the women representatives agreed that granting reservation and thus paving the way for political participation in the rural local bodies is a praiseworthy step towards women empowerment but about 80% held the view that education, employment and asset generation for women will prove to be a better and a more effective delivery vehicle for empowerment.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

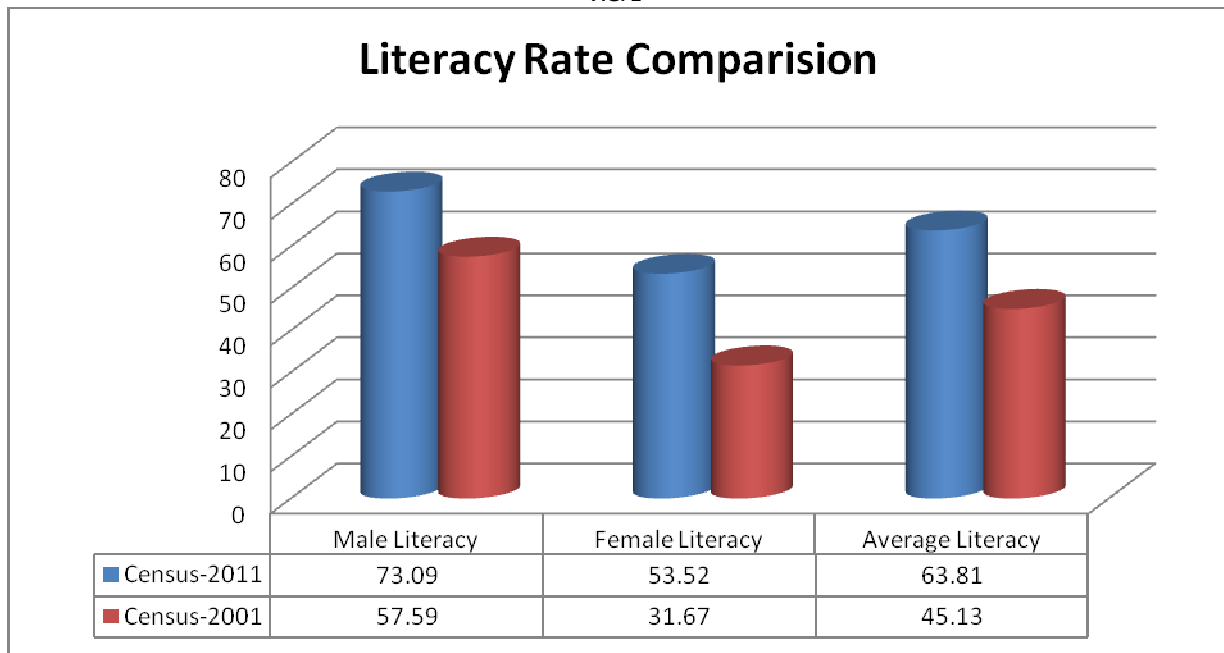
FIG. 1



SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION DATA

From above diagram it is clear that the number of female is more than that of male, means a great achievement in field of empowering women through panchayati raj institutions in the Samastipur district of Bihar. But its only in the case of reservation. Now have a look at the education level of female in comparison to male in Samastipur district.

FIG. 2



SOURCE: CENSUS DATA

However its very much motivating, when we compare the data of female literacy of 2011 to that of 2001. literacy rate of women have grown up to a remarkable extent. But when we compare the literacy rate of women to that of men, its very much embarrassing. Government must take some effective steps to make these literacy rate more better and if possible upto 100%. Then our target will be achieved.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Most of the women are illiterate, lack leadership quality, forced to observe *purdah* and their husbands or fathers-in-law represent them in panchayat meetings and take over functions expected of elected women members. The proxy representation in panchayats has become quite common. Owing to their illiteracy, lack of confidence and *purdah*, their husbands or male family members take over their functions. The low self-esteem and lack of confidence among women combined with their negative stereotypes as illiterate and incompetent tended to obstruct their participation in Panchayats. The studies revealed that reservation cannot empower women beyond a limit; At that point of time, the prime thing that really matters is 'education'. In my view, the prime objective of reservation is being fulfilled, and number of women participating in panchayats has been increased to a greater extent. But is that participation is an effective one? A big No. Its just because lack of education is there. Moreover to bring more girls, especially from marginalized families of BPL(below poverty line), in mainstream education, the government is providing a package of concessions in the form of providing free books, uniform, boarding and lodging, clothing for the hostilities midday meals, scholarships, free circles and so on. With these views I would like to conclude my topic.

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