

**EMPOWERMENT OF ELECTED SC MEMBERS  
THROUGH PRIs IN BIHAR**

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## PREFACE

*The adoption of the 73<sup>rd</sup> amendment to its Constitution by the Parliament in 1993 had a great revolutionary potential to create genuine democracy at the village level. It represents an historic opportunity to change the face of rural India. The amendment mandates that resources, responsibility and decision making power be devolved from central Government to rural grassroots people. Through Panchayati Raj Institutions with election every five years. Its main objectives was to realise Mahatma Gandhi's dream of reaching power to the people through Panchayats.*

*In Bihar the first Panchayati Raj election ordained by the new legislation was held in 2001. Altogether 20509 scheduled castes persons were elected to various posts. Among them 9198 were scheduled castes women. In the present study an attempt has been made to probe the process of empowerment of elected scheduled caste representatives both men and women, in six districts in which state. They have a large a concentration. After detailing the social profile of the respondents, the role played by them in the running of the Gram Panchayat has been examined. The nature and an extent of men and women has been studied repeatedly. The constraints to empowerment have also been brought out. Towards the end nine case histories have been given as they depict the experiences of Panchayat office bearers at different levels. The last chapter discusses the strategy of accelerating the process of empowerment by demolishing structural as well as socio-economic barriers.*

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*(Professor Sachchidananda)*

## **Executive Summary**

**Chapter-I** begins with the brief survey of the demographic situation and socio-economic status of the Dalit in Bihar. It moves on to the emergence of political awakening and mobilization of the Dalit and efforts made to improve the status of the Dalit with special reference to women. This is followed by a brief survey of Panchayati Raj in Bihar since its inception. The Chapter concludes with the statement of objectives of the study and its operational strategies.

**Chapter-II** is a social profile of the six districts covered by the study in the state. This is followed by an ethnographic description of the most important Scheduled castes in the state viz. Chamar, Dusadh, Dhobi, Musahar, and Pasi. The Chapter passes on to describe the profile of respondents, their sex wise distribution by the positions held by them and their break up by age, land holding, main occupation, family income, housing, nature of public activities before contesting the election, source of inspiration for filing nomination and the difficulties faced by them during election.

**Chapter-III** begins with a description of responsibilities given to the Gram Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti, their working through standing committees and the role of the respondents in Panchayat activities, the problems faced by them and efforts made to overcome them, help taken from the local MP's and M.L.A's work satisfaction and effectiveness of the respondents, functioning of the standing committee, benefit accruing to the Dalits to different development schemes, steps taken to improve the status of women and suggestions for improving women participation.

**Chapter-IV** deals with the gender perspectives and details the age, occupation, income, education-wise break up of the elected women representatives, the nature of social work done by them, their role and problem faced by them in the performance of their functions.

**Chapter-V** deals with the Panchayati Raj as an important avenue for the empowerment of disadvantaged sections of Indian society by giving them powers of self governance through active participation. The chapter seeks to examine the orientation training of elected representatives, their nature of participation in the Panchayat activities, the behaviour of government functionaries towards them, rise in their self confidence and level of aspiration, improvement in their socio-economic status and impediments to the process of empowerments of the Dalit elected representatives.

**Chapter-VI** is an assessment of the empowerment of the elected representatives through the eyes of the government functionaries and opinion leaders. It details the reasons for irregular meetings of the Gram Sabha, poor participation of the Dalit members in the Standing Committees, Gram Sabha and the Panchayat Samiti meetings, the reasons of the empowerment of the Dalit representatives and the steps to be taken for empowering Panchayat members.

**Chapter-VII** comprises nine case histories of elected men and women representatives hailing from different castes and categories of office bearers in Panchayati Raj. Five of these are drawn from men representatives and four from women. This includes four Ward members, two Mukhiyas and three Panchayat Samiti members. They are drawn from different districts in our sample. This is based on depth interviews.

**Chapter-VIII** is a rounding off of the study based on collection of data through interview schedule administered to more than 900 individuals and also on the nine case histories. The case histories reveal a more realistic picture of the existing situation leading to a discussion of the tasks ahead and the recommendations to accelerate the process of empowerment.

# Introduction

## Dalit in Bihar

The Scheduled castes, also known as the Harijan, the Antyaja, Dalit, Pancham, Exterior castes or the untouchables, form a substantial segment of the Indian population. They are split into about eleven hundred castes and sub-castes. Some of these groups in different states share a common identity and sometimes a common name. If the list is consolidated by these similarities, the total will be over 400. Each has a name, a separate occupation, its own set of rules and, more often than not, its own mechanism for social control. The scheduled castes are not equal in social status and are arranged in hierarchical order as caste and sub-castes and practice untouchability among themselves. They do not eat together, accept water from the hands of any other scheduled caste groups and do not allow intermarriage among the different groups.

The scheduled castes are at the bottom of Indian social hierarchy. They are characterized by two key words – population and poverty. The stigma of pollution is attached to the groups, presumingly because of their past or present defiling professions with which they eke out their livelihood. The stigma is life long and cannot be eliminated by any rite of expiation. Because of this, even though most of them are no longer in the defiling professions, the stigma continues. Pollution is not just confined to the realm of ritual but it has ramifications in the economic and political fields also. Pollution leads to discrimination. Their interaction with the caste Hindus is limited and they are segregated in settlements outside the village.

The bulk of the scheduled castes are landless and almost destitute. Even if they hold land, it is often in small quantity, infertile, unirrigated and economically unviable. A large segment of the scheduled castes do not have homestead land. They build their huts on the land belonging to landowners who employ them as share croppers and or attached or bonded labourer. Their extreme poverty and unhygienic living condition

make them suffer from malnutrition and onset of diseases. Consequently they are in perpetual debt. Once in debt they continue to be in debt from generation to generation, as they have no means to get out it. This has ensured the continuance of the bonded labourer system, even though it has been abolished by law. In addition to their abject dependence on local landowners for their livelihood, widespread illiteracy has frustrated their efforts to diversify in other occupations.

Since independence, efforts have been made by the government to raise their social, economic and political positions. The government has attempted to deal with their problems in three ways. First, there are numerous constitutional and other legal provisions aimed at removing discrimination against the scheduled castes and to grant them the same rights and privileges as other citizens. Secondly, there are general development programmes to aid landless agricultural, slum dwellers in towns, schemes for low income groups and special schemes for the scheduled castes. Thirdly, the government with the policy of protective discrimination has ensured their representation to Parliament and state legislatures, their claim to jobs, education, scholarship, grants and loan. The state government through ``**Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance, 2006**``, has ensured proportional representation of the scheduled castes to the Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads. 50% of the reserved seats would be represented by their women folk.

Steps taken by the government has ensured social mobility. Many scheduled caste persons have been able to secure jobs in the government as well as in public sector enterprises. They now enjoy certain amount of power. But the benefits of protective discrimination have accrued to certain communities, and in some cases, to certain family clusters in particular communities. The bulk of the scheduled castes in the villages are as helpless as before and depend solely on the mercy of the other landowning communities to eke out their livelihood.

At the political level they become easy prey to oppression by the dominant population groups. Some of them, after being elected to state legislatures or Parliament, have snapped off their contact with the general mass of the scheduled castes. But the influence of their efforts for the development of the scheduled castes in general have engendered some awareness of their socio-economic condition. The Dalit and the Naxalite movements have given the scheduled castes insights to challenge the oppressive socio-economic system and inspired them to move ahead.

In Bihar, 23 castes have been included in the scheduled caste list. They constitute a sizeable section of Bihar 's population. Out of a total population of 1.30 crore, 93% of lives in rural areas. The literacy percentage is 28.5 as against 47% for the state as a whole. The scheduled caste population had gone up by 4,76,908 persons which accounted for 3.79% growth rate. In 2001, their population stood at 1.30 crores which accounts for 15.7% of the total population of the state. About 46% the Scheduled caste population is located in north Bihar.

The scheduled castes are scattered throughout the state. The bulk of them are located in South Bihar. The density of their population varies from district to district. They have a high concentration in the districts of Gaya (29%), Vaishali (20.7%), Nalanda (20%).

Among the scheduled castes, percentage of workers is 37.4% (1991 Census), out of which 35.07% are main workers and 2.33% are marginal workers. The percentage of male workers is 50.11% out of which only 0.33% are marginal workers whereas the percentage of female workers. Among the total main scheduled caste workers, only 8.8% are cultivators, whereas 72.25% are agricultural labourers. The sex distribution of the workers shows that 84.46% female workers are agricultural workers as against 68% male agricultural workers. While 9.4% female workers are recorded as cultivators, 17.8% of male workers are so. It is thus seen that over 81% of the workers are in agricultural sector, while 93.8% female workers depend on agricultural sector, the

number of male counterpart is 76.8%. It is presumed that a large section of the scheduled castes are also engaged in their respective traditional occupation. But since caste-wise information is not available now, it is difficult to ascertain their number.

In education, their level is extremely poor. In 1981, the rate of literacy was 10.4% which had gone up to 19.49% and then to 28.5% in 2001. Although female literacy among them had increased from 1.93% in 1981 to 7.07% in 1991, it was much lower than that among the general population.

Enrolment of the scheduled caste children in primary schools has gone up considerably. But the extent of absenteeism and drop out is very high. The provision of mid-day meals hardly attract the children to education, rather they take the meal and go away from schools. The drop out rate among them is over 70%. The reasons for such a situation is not far to seek. The children - both, boys and girls, are working hands. They help their parents who regard education as a luxury. There is also lack of awareness among the unemployed. An other important reason for high drop out is the neglect that is shown by the caste Hindu teachers who not only deride them but send them out on errands or ask them to engage in manual labour in the school.

The government is keen to promote literacy among the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, extremely backward castes and those below poverty line. Under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, special effort is made to educate girls belonging to these sections of the population. Under a Central scheme, scheduled caste students are offered financial help. But such fund provided to the state often remains unutilised or partially utilised. For example, during 1990-96, the Central government provided Rs. 280.7 crore for disbursement to the scheduled caste students. The state government was able to spend only 5.17 crore. Rs. 100 crore were either diverted to other schemes or posted in civil deposits. The scheduled caste students got only 5% of the sanctioned amount.

### ***Political Awakening and Mobilization***

Social and political awakening of the scheduled castes started to take shape at the turn of the 20th century. The Dusadh among the scheduled caste seems to be the first to grasp the importance of a collective efforts to improve their lot. Being inspired by Kayastha Mahasabha (1887), Pradhan Bhumihar Brahman Sabha (1905), Rajput Sabha (1906) and possibly first backward caste Ravani Kahar Sabha (1906), the Dusadh formed the Dusadh Sabha in 1911. This was followed by the formation of the Ravidas Sabha in 1928 by Shri Jagjivan Ram who was then studying in Calcutta. Shri Jagjivan Ram became an important Dalit leader in course of time. In 1933 the ``**Anti-untouchability Association**'' was renamed as Harijan Sevak Sangh and Shri Jagjivan Ram was appointed its Secretary by Dr. Rajendra Prasad. The same year the Harijan Sevak Sangh had its second conference at Bhagalpur. During the first annual meeting of Ravidas Mahasabha held in Calcutta in 1934, Jagjivan Ram established the `**League of Depressed classes.**'' It was officially formed at Kanpur in 1935 with Rasiklal Biswas as President and Jagjivan Ram and P. N. Rajbhoi as Secretaries. Its Bihar branch was established in August 1935 and Jagjivan Ram became its President in 1936.

In Bihar when the Congress came to power in 1937, Jaglal Choudhury, a Pasi by caste, was made a Cabinet Minister and Jagjivan Ram was appointed Parliamentary Secretary. Jaglal Choudhury in 1938 pleaded for reservations of jobs in government service for the members of the Harijans. He did not however, advocate for permanent reservation. According to him, reservation should be inversely related with the degree of advancement of various communities. He was quite aware that blanket reservation would create vested interest in the community.

Though the Congress ministry remained in power for a brief period, it made serious attempts for the upliftment of the scheduled castes. The party appointed Jagjivan Ram a Secretary of Bihar Congress Committee in 1940, and in the Interim government formed in September, 1946, Jagjivan Ram was made labour minister. After independence, Jagjivan Ram remained minister in different departments. In 1977 he

became the Deputy Prime Minister. He was returned as member of Lok Sabha from Sasaram Parliamentary Constituency from 1952 to 1984.

Two other Harijan leaders – Bholu Paswan Shastri and Ram Sundar Das were representatives of the scheduled castes. Bholu Paswan Shastri became Chief Minister of Bihar three times between March, 1968 and June, 1971. Shri Ram Sundar Das was Chief Minister of Bihar from April, 1979 to February, 1980.

During the political instability and dissolution of the Congress rule at the Centre, a new scheduled caste leadership under Ram Vilas Paswan emerged from Bihar. He won the Lok Sabha seat from Hajipur with record margin and became a minister in the first non-Congress government under the Prime Ministership of Morarji Desai.

In the Vidhan Sabha elections in November, 2005, as many as 39 persons out of 243 were returned from reserved seats meant for scheduled caste candidates. Their caste-wise break up was Dusadh 17, Chamar-8, Dhobi - 2 , Pasi - 3, and Musahar – 7, Rajwar – 1, and Mehtar – 1. This includes 5 women also. The scheduled castes are now conscious of their political rights.

The scheduled caste have formed Dalit Sena and Ambedkar Sena to protest and retaliate against violence and injustice perpetrated on them.

In some areas where Naxalite or other extremist parties have influence, there has been a general awakening about their rights among the marginal scheduled caste peasants and landless labourers. They have also resisted injustice and oppression of the landlords. The work done by the Chaatra Sangharsh Vahini and the Prayas in Gaya and Patna districts has led the scheduled castes men and women to assert and fight for their rights. The scheduled caste women have waged their struggle against the oppressive behaviour of the landlords and against the social system which is male dominated.

### ***Efforts to Raise the Status of Dalit Women***

The government, after independence, has initiated policies and programmes for empowerment of women, specially deprived women. Empowerment of women is conceptualised in different ways by social scientists, social activists and administrators. Empowerment generally refers to the processes by which women take control and ownership of their lives through expansion of their choices. It refers to the improvement of the status of women in the family, in the community and in the society at large. Their status can be raised with the help of education, employment and through political participation.

The policies initiated by the government for the women in general have also benefited the scheduled caste women. These policies address the socio-economic and psychological needs of women with a view to empowering them. They are viz, (a) the National Policy on Education, 1986 (revised in 1992), aims at promoting basic education for all, (b) National Population Policy, 2000, which emphasises the issues related to population stabilisation and on ensuring delayed marriage for girls and enhancing the number of institutional deliveries, (c) the National Agricultural Policy, 2000, which seeks to mainstream gender concerns in agriculture and aims to initiate appropriate structural, functional and institutional measures to empower women and build their capabilities and improve their access to inputs, technology and other farming measures, (d) the National Health Policy, 2001 which aims to ensure greater access of women to basic health care and to achieve an optimal state of nutrition for all sections of society, especially women, mothers and children.

A number of welfare measures have been taken up by the government through the partnership with the local voluntary organisations. These measures encouraged women organisations at various levels, specially at the grass root level to organise themselves. Mahila Mandals were promoted for delivery of essential services, education, health and other services.

Integrated Child Development services scheme, launched in 1974, in the state aims to provide six basic services to poor women and children. Girl child is encouraged through its pre-school education, and other services to pursue primary education when she comes of age. Supplementary nutrition, health and nutrition education to poor women make them aware of social responsibility to the children, family and the society as a whole.

In 1980s special effort was made to promote rural employment and development of women through their own organisations at the grass root level. However, prior to the 9th five year plan, women were treated as target for development programmes but not much attention was given to creating an environment that would enable women to exercise their rights or enjoy their freedom. It put forth the concept of empowerment for enabling an environment for the exercise of their rights and experiencing freedom. Two important steps were taken by the government for empowering women. The plan adopted Women's Component Plan which directed the Central and the state governments to earmark at 30% of the funds in all sectors for development of women. Second was the adoption of the National Policy for Empowerment of Women in 2001. The year 2001 was also declared as the year of women's empowerment. A number of policies and programmes were initiated during this year to ensure participation of women in social, economic and political life.

Taking together all the successive Five Year Plans, efforts have been made to empower women both economically and socially so that they and to become an equal partner in national development. Some of the schemes and programmes related to empowerment of women, especially the scheduled caste and the scheduled tribe women are (a) Mahila Samakhya, (b) Scheme of Assistance to Women's Co-operatives, (c) Women's vocational training programme, (d) Swayamsidha, (e) Swa-Shakti project, (f) Employment and income generation training cum production centres for women (NORAD) programme, (g) Rural women's Development and Empowerment project, (h)

Awareness Generation project for rural and poor women, (i) Indira Mahila Yojana, (j) Rashtriya Mahila Kosh, and (k) Women's Component plan.

Recently some of the programmes for empowering scheduled caste and other poor women have been studied. A brief idea of the working of these programmes would be useful. Since 1999, Swarna Jayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana is the only scheme for self-employment of the poor women. Its main focus is Self Help Group (SHG). SHG is formed voluntarily of homogenous poor women to save small amount of their earning as convenient to and agreed by all the members. The saving is development as common or corpus fund of the group of be lent to its members of meeting their productive and emergent credit needs. SHGs are given assistance in capacity building selection of key activities, infrastructure built up, planning, technology and marketing support. Self Help Groups not only become bankable but also reveal an inner strength to fight against socio-economic injustices. Till the year 2003-04, there are 10816 Self Help Groups in Bihar. Most of the SHGs have been linked with banks. On account of SHGs, there is an increase in enrolment of girl children in primary schools with decrease in the rate of drop outs. They have been benefited under Indira Awas Yojana, Annyapurna and Antodaya scheme. Now the scheduled caste women talk to government officials and take collective decisions. Formation of SHGs has not only been able to deal with economic insecurity but also to improve their quality of life. Scheduled caste women have developed the habit of micro saving and are encouraged to start small enterprises of their own. Some scheduled caste women send their daughters to school. It has motivated many scheduled caste women to participate in Panchayati Raj Institution. Many of them have contested and won the elective posts in the Panchayati Raj Institution. They have now more command over their own life and are shedding helplessness.

The voluntary or non-government organisations have also been doing commendable work towards uplift and empowerment of the scheduled caste women to safeguard their constitutional rights. Some NGOs have played vital role in providing

training and rehabilitation of women scavengers. In Bihar a significant and lasting contribution has been made by Sulabh International founded by Padmabhusan Dr. Bindeshwar Pathak. This NGO has been able to improve the lot of the Bhangis engaged in removing human excreta on their heads from service latrines. It has also started training programme for the members of the Bhangi community so that they can acquire new skills and go for new occupations. Samanvaya Ashram set up by Vinoba Bhave in Bodh Gaya and Prayas under the inspiring leadership of Sister Sudha Verghese, have been working tirelessly for improving the condition of the Musahar and other scheduled caste women.

Women in any society derive their status and rights from the community to which they belong. Empowerment of the scheduled caste women as such can not be conceived without the empowerment of the scheduled castes as a whole. It is well known that the scheduled castes have suffered from exploitation, suppression and oppression for centuries. This has resulted in the creation of a mindset characterised by inferiority complex and very low self esteem. However, considerable progress is made for empowerment of the scheduled castes as a whole. Empowerment of the scheduled caste women has also taken place but at a slow pace. They have still to go a long way to be empowered to become equal to other women folk in the society.

### **Panchayati Raj**

The institution of Panchayat was in vogue in India from time immemorial. It was vested with administrative, legislative and judicial functions. There were changes in its structure and function from time to time. But it was an effective instrument of self rule till the middle of the 19th century. With the colonial administration taking over the control over village economy and society, the Panchayats ceased to be functional.

Mahatma Gandhi's concern for Gram Swaraj pinpointed that it can not be achieved without local self governance in the villages, inspired the Constitution makers

to incorporate Article 40 which directs the state government to constitute Gram Panchayat in the village.

After independence of India, under the guidance of Pandit Vinodananda Jha, then Minister for Local Self Government, the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1947 was framed and promulgated in the whole state in 1948. The Act made the provisions for Mukhiya, Sarpanch and Dalpati to introduce self rule in the villages. These posts were used to be filled up by consensus in the villagers in the presence of Gram Panchayat Supervisor or any other official posted by the government. Under the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act of 1947, Gram Panchayat elections were held regularly till 1978. No elections were held till 2001 although the new legislation was enacted in 1993.

As the functioning of Gram Panchayats in Bihar and in other states fell short of the expectation, the Government of India appointed a Committee under the chairmanship of Balwant Rai Mehta in 1957. The committee in its report submitted in 1958 pin pointed certain shortcomings and suggested remedial measures. According to the democratic decentralization and three tier system suggested Panchayati Raj was introduced in Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh. It was started in two districts in Bihar viz. Bhagalpur and Ranchi in 1964. In 1978, Ashok Mehta Committee reviewed the working of the Panchayat and suggested steps for making it more effective. But these measures were not taken. Later in 1986, Rajiv Gandhi, the then Prime Minister appointed a Committee headed by the eminent lawyer Shri K. M. Singhvi which suggested some radical measures to streamline the functioning of the Panchayati Raj to reach power to the people. This ultimately led to the 73rd Amendment of the Constitution in 1993 which ordained the state governments to institute three tier Panchayati Raj in the rural areas. Some of the important features of the Amendment are as follows:

1. In every Gram Panchayat there should be a Gram Sabha in each revenue village comprising all the voters of the area,

2. Tenure of all the members in different tiers shall be for a period of five years,
3. At least one-third of seats in all the tiers shall be reserved for women.
4. Reservation of seats in all tiers shall be done for the scheduled castes, scheduled tribes in proportion to their population to the total population in the area. Reservation of seats for backward classes would be decided by the state governments.
5. A Finance Commission shall be constituted for a period of every five years for suggesting and strengthening financial position of the organs of the Panchayat Institution.
6. Fresh election shall be conducted before the expiry of the term of the existing bodies.
7. States shall adopt these provisions within one year of the promulgation of 73rd Constitution Amendment Act.

As a follow up of the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, the Government of Bihar repealed all the existing legislation in respect of Panchayati Raj and enacted the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993. Some of the important features of the 1993 Act are as follows:

1. Gram Sabha consisting of persons registered in the electoral roll is an important wing of Gram Panchayat. It shall render assistance in the implementation of all programmes and in maintaining peace and tranquility in the village. It shall constitute a Vigilance committee to oversee panchayat work. This committee shall comprise persons who are not members of the Gram Panchayat.
2. Gram Panchayat shall comprise an area of a village or a group of villages or part thereof with a population of about seven thousand.
3. Gram Panchayat shall have to perform all the functions necessary for unity, integrity and socio-economic development of the area. These functions are

grouped in thirty categories. In addition, the government may entrust any other work to them from time to time.

In accordance with the provisions of Bihar Panchayat Raj Act of 1993, elections were held in the state in 2001 for the formation of 8471 Gram Panchayats.

Before the Panchayat elections of 2006 which was held in the months of May and June, the state government promulgated an ordinance which is known as Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance, 2006. Some of the important features of the ordinance are given below:

1. 50% of the total seats of members in a Gram Panchayat shall be reserved for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes.
2. The number of seats so reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes shall have as nearly as possible the same proportion to the total seats in the Gram Panchayat as the proportion of their respective population to the total population of the area.
3. The number of seats to be reserved for backward classes shall be as nearly as possible but not exceeding 20% of the total seats and within the overall limit of 50% reservation for all three categories of the population.
4. 50% of the seats so reserved for scheduled castes and scheduled tribes shall be reserved for women belonging to these categories.
5. 50% of the total unreserved seats shall be reserved for women.

6. All reserved and unreserved seats shall be allotted on rotation by the District Magistrate under the direction, control and supervision of the State Election Commission.
7. The principle of reservation and the proportion of reservation shall be applicable for Panchayat Samiti, Zila Parishad and also for the post of Mukhiya, Pramukh and Adhyaksha.
8. The judicial function of the Gram Panchayat was restored by the creation the post of Sarpanch in each Gram Panchayat.
9. Following the ordinance, 2006, Panchayat elections were held in May and June, 2006 for 8471 Gram Panchayats.

## **Objectives of the Study and Operational Strategies**

### ***The Present Study***

It is common knowledge that only a handful of scheduled caste persons have been able to enjoy the fruits of development process in the country. Development has eluded the bulk of Dalits.

Reservation of seats in Panchayat Raj Institution (PRI) to the scheduled castes has been provided with the hope that the elected representatives will not only be empowered themselves but the process will empower their own community. To reach the fruits of reservation for scheduled caste women reservation has been extended to them in the same proportion as men.

It is expected that the elected scheduled caste persons are able to impact implementation as well as the policy making process. As the elected members are to be in regular contact with their community, the latter are aware of their rights and welfare

schemes meant for them. An environment for empowerment is thus created for the elected members as well as for the community at large.

In accordance with the provision of Bihar Panchayat Raj Act of 1993, Panchayat elections in Bihar were held in April, 2001. Altogether 20509 Scheduled caste persons were elected for a period of five years. Among them, 9198 or 44.85% were scheduled caste women.

In the present study is an attempt to probe the process of empowerment of the elected scheduled caste PRI members and their efforts for the advancement of their own community in Bihar. **The major objectives of the study are as given below:**

1. To examine the role of elected PRI scheduled caste members in prioritizing their demands and guiding them for implementation of their own and the wider community.
2. To inquire into the efforts made by them to the upliftment of their fellow caste men and women.
3. To identify the constraints in the empowerment of the elected PRI members at different levels.
4. To examine specifically the role of elected women members in putting forward the agenda of development and empowerment through Panchayati Raj Institutions.
5. To identify the reason for poor participation of some scheduled castes leading to unequal empowerment and attainment of better quality of life.
6. To assess the reduction in exploitation, gains in self confidence / self esteem and social participation through their efforts.

7. To suggest measures to accelerate the process of empowerment and effectiveness of elected PRI scheduled caste members in Bihar.

### ***Research Operations***

The study is based upon primary as well as secondary data. Secondary data have been collected from both published and unpublished literature - Census reports, government records and other secondary sources. Primary data have been collected on the basis of interview from the selected respondents comprising elected scheduled caste PRI members, officials and opinion leaders in the society.

### ***Universe of the study***

The study focuses on the scheduled castes. Hence the concentration of their population in the districts of Bihar has been the main consideration for the purpose of selecting the sample districts and the respondents. The districts with larger percentage of the scheduled caste population have greater number of elected PRI members. Based on this consideration six districts namely, Gaya, Purnia, Rohtas, Samastipur, West Champaran and Gopalganj have been selected.

It has been assumed that interview of 20% of the elected scheduled caste members at the Gram Panchayats and at the Panchayat samitis in the sampled district would be statistically representative to assess the prevailing condition of the population under the study. Accordingly, the sample of persons drawn for interview is as shown below:

### Sample of elected caste PRI members

District	Gram Panchayat		Panchayat Samiti		Total
	Members	Sample size	Members	Sample size	Sample size
1. Gaya	1491	298	150	30	328
2. Purnia	440	88	45	9	97
3. Rohtas	620	124	60	12	136
4. Samastipur	948	133	94	19	152
5. West Champaran	628	126	61	12	138
6. Gopalganj	396	79	39	8	87
<b>Total</b>	<b>4523</b>	<b>848</b>	<b>449</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>938</b>

Among the total sample of 995, the number of woman members from Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis are 319 and 37 respectively. A small sample of the officials and opinion leaders ten from each districts was also interviewed to elicit their view on the entire process.

#### ***Tools For Data Collection***

The sample persons have been interviewed with an interview schedule. Besides this, focus group discussion has also been held. To delve deep into the situation, nine brief case histories have been conducted.

## II

### **Social Profile of the Area and the People**

The state of Bihar comprises 38 districts covering an area of 94163 sq.km. It had a population of 82878796 in 2001. Although it shares only 8.07% of India's population, it is a thickly populated state with the density of 880 persons per sq. km. as against 324 for the country as a whole.

The sex ratio in the state has improved from 907 in 1991 to 921 in 2001. But at the same time, decadal growth rate has increased to 28.43 during 1991-2001 from 23.54 during the preceding decade. The average annual exponential growth rate has gone up from 2.10 to 2.5 during the same period.

Literacy in Bihar has risen to 47.5% in 2001 from 38.5% in 1991. But it still continues to be one of the lowest in the country. Literacy among the males had increased from 52.5% in 1991 to 60.38% in 2001 whereas female literacy from 22.9% to 33.57% during this period.

Over a period of 50 years between 1951 and 2001, literacy rate in Bihar has gone up by a mere 31 percentage point in contrast to an increase of 48.7 percentage point in the country. The slow rate of growth in literacy is a retarding factor for general development.

The population of the state is divided into several castes and ethnic communities. The percentage of the scheduled castes in the total population in the state is 15.74 which is nearly equal to the national proportion.

Bihar population is predominantly rural and agricultural 89.54% of its population resides in villages. The percentage of male and female workers (both main and

marginal workers) in 2001 was 47.7% and 18.8% as against the national average of 51.9 and 25.7% respectively.

In the backdrop of state profile the broad features of the six selected districts, viz, Gaya, Purnia, Rohtas, Samastipur, West Champaran and Gopalganj are given below. These districts have been chosen on account of large concentration of scheduled caste.

### **Gaya**

The district of Gaya lies in the heart of Bihar. In 1865, it became a district. Till 1972 it was intact. In early seventies three of its subdivisions Nawada, Aurangabad and Jehanabad were made separate districts. Recently Arwal district has been covered out of the Jehanabad district.

Gaya is one of the holiest spots for the Hindus and there is a regular flow of pilgrims in the town to offer Pind in the Gaya Kshetra (dham). The flow of pilgrims peaks up during the Pitripaksha, the first fortnight of the Hindi month of Ashwin (corresponding to September –October). Bodh- Gaya which is about 11 k.ms. south of Gaya town is also the holiest spot for the Buddhists. Buddhists from different countries visit the spot frequently. It is at Bodh Gaya that Lord Buddha attained enlightenment.

The district covers an area of 4976 sq. kms with a population of 34,64983 persons. It comprises 18 development blocks. Its five towns house 13.7% of its population. Its population density is lower than that of Bihar.

The sex ratio has increased from 922 in 1991 to 937 in 2001. But the child (0 – 6 years) sex ratio has declined from 983 to 957 during the same period.

According to 2001 Census, Gaya district has 29.6% Scheduled caste population of which 94.6% live in the villages and only 5.4% are in urban areas. This is the highest concentration of Scheduled castes in any district in Bihar.

Literacy rate in the district has improved over the decades. In 2001, it had a literacy of 51% which was higher than the state average of 47.5% . A comparison of literacy in the district shows an increase of 10.6 percentage point. Females recorded a better percentage increase than males.

Literacy among the scheduled castes was 26.3% in 2001 in contrast to 60.2% for general population in the district. Literacy among the scheduled castes in the district was lower than that of the state (28.5%).

Gaya district had 36.8% working population in 2001 out of which 28.6 were main workers and 8.2 were marginal workers. While the percentage of working population in rural areas was 38.7, it was only 25.2% in urban areas of Gaya.

## **Purnia**

The district of Purnia lies in the north-eastern part of the state and shares its border with some of West Bengal districts.

During the British rule, Purnia was known for its bad climate and criminal activities. The criminals from Nepal and other bordering districts operated there. It was for that reason that the commonly quoted couplet got popularity implying that **“if you want to court death, you need not take poison – just go to Purnia and you will meet your death.”** Till recently, any officer being posted at Purnia considered it as punishment. Although the climate has changed since the great earthquake of 1934, the stigma lingers.

According to 2001 Census, the district population was 25,40788 covering a area of 3229 sq. kms. and is densely populated. It houses 787 persons per sq. km. The sex ratio of 916 which is lower than the state average of 921 but higher than its sex ratio of 903 in 1991. The child (0 – 6) sex ratio has marginally improved from 965 in 1991 to 968 in 2001, and it is higher than the state average. The decadal population growth rate during 1991-2001 was 35.23 which was much higher than the state average of

28.43%. This is due to migration of people from Bangla desh. The district comprises 14 development blocks. Its three towns which house 8.7% of its population.

Literacy in Purnia district is, according to 2001 Census, 35.51%. Although literacy in the district has increased by nearly 7 percent from 28.52% in 1991, it is less than the state average.

The percentage of the scheduled population in Purnia district was 12% in 1981 which had marginally increased to 12.3% in 2001. In this population, 93.7% live in the villages and only 6.3% are in urban areas. The literacy percentage of 15.50 is much lower than that of the state.

### **Samastipur**

The district of Samastipur covers an area of 2904 sq. kms which is 3.08% of the total area of Bihar. It comprises 20 development blocks and 4 towns.

According to 2001 Census, the district has a total population of 34,13,413. Of the total population only 3.6% live in urban areas. Population density of 1175 persons per sq. km is much higher than that of the state average. Its decadal growth rate 25.63 is less than the state average. The sex ratio is only 924 as against 921 in the state.

Literacy in the district has been increasing over the decades. In 1991 it had 36.37% literate which had gone up to 45.76% in 2001. Male and female literacy was 57.83% and 32.69% respectively. While over all percentage point increase during the period was only 9, female literacy during the period had increased by 11.52%.

The scheduled caste population in 2001 was 18.5% of which 97.16% live in rural areas. The proportion of scheduled caste population of the total population in rural and urban areas is 18.7% and 14.5% respectively. Literacy rate among the scheduled caste is only 25.1% as against 49.6% among the general population.

Its working population is 31.5% out of which 24.8% are main workers and 6.7% marginal workers. While the percentage of working population in rural areas is 31.8%, it is 25.5% in urban areas.

### **Rohtas**

The district of Rohtas was carved out of old Sahabad district in 1972. The hill areas comprising the plateau of Kaimur split from it is now known as Kaimur (Bhabua). Now Rohtas district comprises mainly the plain area of 3851 sq. kms with 18 development blocks and five towns.

The district has a population of 24,48,762 . Of the population 18.9% are children in the age group of 0 – 6 years. The density of population is 636 which is lower than that of state. The decadal growth rate is 27.71%. 13.3% of the people live in urban areas. The sex ratio is quite low. In 1991 it was only 891 and rose to 909 in 2001.

The Scheduled castes constituted 18.1% of the total population out of which 93.5% live in rural areas. But the percentage of the scheduled caste population in rural and urban population is 19.6% and 8.8% respectively. Literacy among the scheduled caste population is 41.3% in contrast to 66% among the general population. The district has the highest scheduled caste literates. The over all literacy in the district is 62.36% which is much higher than the state average than those of the state.

The district has a working population of 30.3% of which 22.2% are main workers and 8.1% marginal workers. The percentage of working population varies between rural and urban areas. It is 31.4% in rural areas whereas it is only 23.5% in urban areas.

### **West Champaran**

The district was carved out of the old Champaran district in the year 1972. Earlier it comprised Bettiah subdivision of old district.

The district has a population of 30,43,044 persons spreading over an area of 5228 sq. kms. It comprises 18 development blocks and 5 towns. About 10.2% of the total population live in urban areas. In the total population, 20.7% are children in the age group of 0 – 6 years. The district has a high decadal growth rate of 30.4%. The density of population is 582. A large part of the district is covered by forest. The sex ratio in 1991 was only 877 and in 2001 it rose to 901. Hence it is much below the state average.

Literacy rate in the district has gone up from 27.99% in 1991 to 39.63 in 2001. While male literacy has improved by 12.29% from 39.62% in 1991 to 51.91% in 2001, female literacy shows an increase of 11.44% from 14.41% in 1991 to 25.85% in 2001.

West Champaran district has 14.3% scheduled caste population of which 94.3% are in rural areas. Literacy among them is only 22.3%. The district has 37.9% working population among which 27.6% are main workers and 10.3% marginal workers. While rural population comprises 39% working population (28.1 main workers and 10.9% marginal workers), urban population has only 23.6% main workers and 4.6% marginal workers.

### **Gopalganj**

The district spreads over an area of 2033 sq. kms. and has 14 development blocks and 4 towns. Its population stood at 21,49,343. It has a decadal growth rate of 26.11%. Its population density is as high as 1057. Only 6.1% of its population live in urban areas. The sex ratio was 968 in 1991 which increased to 1005 in 2001.

The literacy rate of the district is 48.19%. Female literacy rate is half that for the males.

The district has 12.4% scheduled caste population of which 95% are located in rural areas. Literacy rate among the scheduled caste population is 32.1% which is higher than the state average for the scheduled caste.

The district has a working population of 29.8% only, out of which 21.7% are main workers. The percentage of main workers in rural areas is 21.7% whereas it is 21.6% in urban areas.

**Some demographic and social indicators of the selected districts are given below for better comprehension.**

Indicators	Gaya	Purnia	Samastipur	Rohtas	Gopalganj	W. Champaran	Bihar
Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	4976	3229	2904	3851	2033	5228	94163
Population (in Lakh)	34.6	25.4	34.1	24.5	21.5	30.4	828.8
% of S.C. Population	29.6	12.3	18.5	18.1	12.4	14.3	15.7
Density	696	787	1175	636	1057	582	880
Sex ratio	937	916	924	909	1005	901	921
Child Sex ratio	957	968	945	947	961		
Total Literacy	51.0	35.5	45.8	62.4	48.2	39.6	47.5
S. C. Literacy	26.3	18.5	25.1	41.3	32.1	22.3	28.5
Development Blocks	18	14	20	18	14	18	-
No. of Towns	5	3	4	5	4	5	-
% of Urban Population	13.7	8.7	3.6	13.3	6.1	10.2	10.5
% of Working Population	36.8	37.8	31.5	30.3	29.8	37.9	-

The figures above show that the district vary on different indicators. But among the selected districts, three districts have higher scheduled caste population, higher sex ratio, and higher literacy rate than the state average while the other three districts are below the state average on these indicators.

### **Some Important Scheduled Castes in Bihar**

**Chamar :** The Chamar is a scheduled caste with an all India spread. Their population in Bihar in 1981 was about 30 lakhs. Later Census reports do not provide caste-wise population. But presuming uniform growth rate of the community as of the total scheduled caste population which was 23.49% during 1981-1991, the population of

the Chamar would be around 37 lakh in 1991. The decadal growth rate between 1991 and 2001 cannot be considered for population estimation because of the partition of Bihar in the year 2000. However, being largely landless they are employed as leather tanners and cobblers. Some of them have small land holdings. They also work as labourers in agriculture, forest, industry etc. Most of their women supplement family income by working as midwives. In 1981, about 34% of the total population were reported to be workers. Of them, only 13% were cultivators and 77% were agricultural labourers. Only 3% were in their traditional occupation. Their literacy rate in 1981 was as low as 12% and female literacy was 2.36%. Now they have started responding well to education.

**2. Dusadh :** The Dusadh in Bihar are predominantly agricultural labourers. They were palanquin bearers in the past and they claim to be Gehlot Kshatriya. They were generally employed as village watchmen and choukidars by local landlords and later on by the government also. They are the second largest Dalit caste in the state. They are politically very influential. Their population was estimated to be 32 lakhs in 1991. they were largely rural and less than 8% were returned from urban areas. About 34% of them were reported to be workers. Of them 75% were agricultural labourers and 15% were cultivators. Their literacy rate was less than 13% and female literacy was less than 3%. Their cultural hero is Chuhar Mal and in his honour an annual festival is organised.

**3. Dhobi :** The Dhobi are traditionally the washerman caste. Their population in 1981 was less than 6 lakh of which only 14% were in urban areas. In 1991, their population was projected to be over 7 lakhs. Some of them own land and are engaged in agricultural. In addition to their traditional occupation of washing clothes, they work in different sectors as labourers. In 1981, about 30% of them were returned as workers. Of them 23% were returned under other services which included those workers engaged in their traditional occupation of washing clothes. However, more than 68% were

employed as cultivators and agricultural labourers. Their literacy rate in 1981 was about 19% but their female literacy rate was less than 6%.

**4. Pasi :** The Pasi are toddy tappers and trace their origin to the sage Bhrigu. They are distributed in most districts of Bihar. In 1981 their population was nearly 4.7 lakhs which had become 5.8 lakhs (estimated) in 1991. 30% of them were returned as workers. Of them only 8% were engaged in their traditional occupation. About 60% of the workers were engaged as cultivators and agricultural labourers. The Pasi have taken tremendous stride in development and have entered government service in large numbers.

**5. Musahar :** The Musahar and the Bhuiya are kindred communities found in most districts of Bihar. Musahar literally means rate-trappers and rat caters and their name is derived from it. But Dr. Kumar Suresh Singh contested this general notion by holding that all those who eat rat meat or pork, should have been known by this name. The practice of eating rat cannot be attributed to any particular caste. The Musahar can at best be considered a hunter community like other hunting communities such as Kakmara, Baghmara etc found in different parts of the country.

The Musahar is indeed the most backward caste. Their population in Bihar in 1981 was about 22 lakhs and their projected population was about 27 lakhs in 1991. The bulk of them were agricultural labourers. Of their total population, 47% were workers in 1981. Among them, 96% were agricultural labourers and less than 3% were returned as cultivators.

The Musahar are at the lowest in literacy. Despite the efforts made by the government, education has reached a very small percentage. The caste got its first graduate in pre-independence India in Late Shri Misri Sada who obtained B.A. and L.L.B. Degree. After his B.A., he worked as a school teacher and also as a lawyer. In 1946 he joined the Congress and fought successfully the first General election in 1952

as Member of Legislative Assembly. He continued in that position till 1968. In 1969 election was defeated but won back the seat in 1972 elections and became a Minister.

The Musahar woman representative in the Parliamentary politics was Mrs. Bhagwatia Devi. She was inspired by Ram Manohar Lohia and started her political career with socialist ideology. She became a member of Bihar Legislative Assembly and later member of Parliament from Rastriya Janta Dal. She worked for the upliftment of village schools and rural roads.

Among few Musahar persons working for promoting education among the Musahar and depressed communities, the name of Shri Asarfi Sada is in the forefront. He passed his M.A. examination despite social and economic constraints and he is now associated with the National Literacy Mission for over a decade. He comes from a village in Darbhanga district and his father was an agricultural labourer.

Musahars are very hard working and courageous. The greatest example of this is set by Shri Dasarath Manjhi, born in 1934 in Gehlor village of Atri block of Gaya district. His parental village is in Air Bikaipur village. He is a Kabir Panthi which promotes devotion to karma or action. He was bonded to a local landlord. He decided to make a road across the hills spreading from Bodh Gaya to Rajgir. Because of this hill, the distance between Gehlor and Wajirganj which was about 80 kms has come down to 13 kms. In 1960 when he started the work with a borer and a hammer, there was no other way to get through the hills to the other side. He achieved his mission after 40 years by dint of strenuous daily work of 2 –3 hours without any outside help. On account of his exemplary courage and determination, the Bihar Government awarded him five acres of land. When he came to know that the land was a grazing ground for cattle, he refused to accept it.

The Musahar who are considered the lowliest of the low even today, are pining for dignity and participation in the process of development.

## Profile of the Respondents

The respondents interviewed for the study comprise the scheduled caste elected members of Gram Panchayats and Panchayat Samitis from six districts of Bihar. They are drawn from both sexes and from the posts of Mukhias, Gram Panchayat members, Pramukhs and Panchayat Samiti members. Altogether 938 persons have been interviewed. Their distribution by posts and sex is given in table – 1.

**Table II.1**  
**Sex-wise distribution of the respondents by position held**

Posts	Sex			
	Male	Female	Total	%
Mukhia	8	1	9	0.9
Gram Panchayat Members (GPM)	508	318	826	88.0
Pramukh	2	3	5	0.5
Panchayat Samiti Members (PSM)	62	36	98	10.4
Total	580	358	938	
Percentage	61.8	38.2	100.0	

It is seen from the table that 88% of the respondents are Gram Panchayat members and another 10% are Panchayat Samiti Members. Since the successful implementation of the development programme depends primarily on the effective role performance of the GP members, the overwhelming majority of them have been taken into the sample of the respondents. More than 38% of the female elected scheduled members have also been interviewed to know their role performance. About 89% of the woman respondents are GP members.

Although all the respondents belong to the scheduled castes, there are certain castes which have greater representation in the Panchayats.

**Table II.2**  
**Respondents by Caste and sex**

Caste	Male	Female	Total
Chamar	215 (37.0)	104 (29.0)	319 (34.0)
Pasi	55 (9.5)	50 (14.4)	105 (11.2)
Dhobi	27 (4.6)	20 (5.6)	47 (5.0)
Dusadh	178 (30.7)	84 (23.5)	262 (27.9)
Musahar	102 (17.6)	96 (26.8)	198 (21.1)
Others	3 (0.5)	4 (1.1)	7 (0.7)
<b>Total</b>	<b>580 (100.0)</b>	<b>358 (100.0)</b>	<b>938 (100.0)</b>

It is evident that four scheduled castes viz. the Chamar, Dusadh, Pasi, and the Musahar have high representation in the Gram Panchayats. Musahars are the poorest of the poor but because of their numerical preponderance in the districts of Gaya and Purnia, their representation in the Panchayat is considerably high. In the other districts, representation of Chamar, Dusadh and Pasi is high. The majority of the female members in the sample also belong to these four castes. The Rajwar, Mehtar and Nat have fewer representation in the Panchayati Raj Institution because of their low population. The majority of respondents are in the 31 to 40 age group . Another 30% are in the age group of 41-50 years and only 6.8% are above 51 years.

**Table II.3**  
**Age group of the respondents**

Age group	N	(Total) %
21 – 30	110	11.7
31 – 40	482	51.4
41 – 50	283	30.1
51+	63	6.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>938</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Although the bulk of the scheduled castes in Bihar are illiterate, the respondents are not so. Only 22.8% of them are illiterate and the rest are literate. As many as 10.8%

are matriculate and another 6.3% are graduates. Education is an important consideration for being elected in a Panchayati Raj Body.

**Table II.4**  
**Land holding of the respondents**

Landholding (acre)	N	%
Landless	569	60.7
Less than 1 acre	223	23.8
1 - 5 acre	132	14.0
5 + acre	14	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>938</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The scheduled castes in Bihar are generally landless. Those who possess land, are mainly Bataidars (sharecroppers) and marginal / small farmers. The same is the case with female respondents also. About 61% of them are landless and most of those having land possess uneconomic holdings. This is also well reflected from their main occupation.

**Table II.5**  
**Main occupation of the respondents**

Occupation	N	%
Agriculture	181	19.3
Business	96	10.2
Domestic work	33	3.5
Wage labourers	628	66.9

Nearly 67% of them eke out their living as labourers. Another 10% are engaged in petty business. About 3.5% of them who are woman representatives are engaged in domestic work. Only 19% are engaged in agriculture as their main stay of life.

Economic condition of the respondents will be best understood from their annual family income. Considering rising prices of essential commodities for living, it is

assumed that families with an annual income of 20000/- or less are below poverty line (BPL) families.

**Table II.6**  
**Annual family income of the respondents**

Income (Rs)	N	%
Less than 10,000/-	156	16.6
10,001- 20,000	448	47.8
20,001 – 30,000	225	24.0
30,001 – 40,000	74	7.9
40,001– 50,000	26	2.8
50,001 +	16	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>938</b>	<b>100.0</b>

As high as 64.4% of the respondents come from BPL families out of which 16.6% are extremely poor having annual income of Rs 10,000/- or less. 24% of the respondents are slightly above the poverty line. Only 3.5% of them have income of more than Rs. 40,000/- per year.

The objective of Panchayati Raj is to involve the weaker sections of the population in self government in the rural area. This has been achieved to a large extent as the bulk of the scheduled representatives are drawn from below the poverty line.

**Table II.7**  
**Type of House of the respondents**

Type	N	%
Brick	453	48.3
Tile roof	146	15.6
Mixed	240	25.6
Hut	99	10.5

Type of houses of the respondents as shown above reveals their living conditions. The majority of them live in mud houses with thatched roof. More than 10% of them live in huts. Those who live in brick houses have been given to them under the Indira Awas Yojana.

The table below reveals the record of social service of respondents before the election by participation in the affairs of the village or solving their problems of the people.

**Table II.8**  
**Nature of activities of the respondents before election**

Activities	N	%
Meeting people to solve their problems	235	25.0
Participation in public affairs	389	41.0
Providing monetary help	141	15.0
Solving disputes	50	5.3
No response	123	13.1

The table suggests that most of the respondents were in contact with the people. They were sharing the problems of the villagers. Only 13% of the respondents did not report any social activity.

On the declaration of Panchayat election, the respondents filed their nomination. It would be useful to know if they did so of their own or were inspired by some one.

**Table II.9**  
**Source of Inspiration for filing nomination**

	N	%
Self	362	38.6
Villagers	375	40.0
Family members	143	15.2
Wife / Husband	58	6.2

This table reveals that more than 61% of the respondents decided to contest election on being inspired by others. The co-villagers were the main source of their inspiration. Family members including wife or husband inspired 21% of the respondents to contest the election. Nearly 39% of them were ambitious and decided to contest the election on their own.

During the election, the respondents came across many difficulties. The table below provides information regarding it.

**Table II.10**  
**Difficulties during the election**

Difficulties	Total (%)
1. Discouragement	20.6
2. Wrong propaganda by opponents	16.1
3. Lack of funds	30.3
4. Pressure to withdraw from the contest	8.6
1. Problems in filling up nomination paper	9.2
2. Lack of conveyance	15.7
3. Convincing voters	1.3
4. Booth capturing	3.5
5. Lack of security	14.1
N	938

It is found that some people (20.6%) discouraged the respondents from contesting the elections. They even put pressure on candidates to withdraw from the election. A handful of persons even campaigned against them. A large number (30.3%) of the respondents reported lack of funds. Lack of conveyance for campaigning (15.7%) and lack of personal security (14.1%). These difficulties were common to both male and female candidates.

The respondents did not fail to mention the help they received during the election. Their responses as given in table below ;

**Table II.11**  
**Help received from people during election**

Nature of help	Total (%)
Help in campaign	46.7
Received co-operation	43.3
Financial help	13.4
Help in filling up nomination	8.0
Boosting confidence	76.2
Requested voters to cast vote in their favour	78.9

they received all desired help, co-operation, and encouragement during the election. Their supporters did boost up their morale and also mobilised voters in their support. Some respondents also got necessary financial help from their supporters.

### III

## Functioning of P.R.I. Elected Representatives

The 73rd Constitutional (Amendment) Act, 1992, was enacted to strengthen Panchayati Raj Institutions in the rural areas of the States. It is in consonance with this mandate that the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act, 1993, was promulgated. The Act has delineated the functions to be performed by the three tiers of the Panchayati Raj system. It transferred specific responsibilities to Gram Panchayats, Panchayat Samitis and Zila Parishads.

In this chapter, an attempt has been made to assess the work performance of Gram Panchayat and Panchayat Samitis on the basis of interview of different categories of their functionaries. For this it is necessary to know the responsibilities entrusted by different government departments to these bodies.

### Responsibilities of Gram Panchayat

#### 1. Agriculture :

- (i) Organization of agricultural fairs and exhibitions.
- (ii) Selection of beneficiaries and distribution of essential commodities to them under public distribution system.
- (iii) Mukhia has to sanction casual leave of Jan Sevak.
- (iv) Jan Sevak has to participate in the meetings of Gram Sabha and Gram Panchayat.

#### 2. Revenue and Land Reform

- (i) Gram Sabha has to recommend to the Gram Panchayat about the use and settlement of government land,

- (ii) Repair, maintenance and development of conventional sources of water, tanks, Ahars, Pynes etc.
- (iii) Maintenance and development of pasture land.
- (v) Selection of house sites for homeless families has to be recommended by the Gram Sabha.
- (vi) Sending proposal to District Magistrate for construction of link roads and acquisition of land for the same.
- (vi) Maintenance and protection of buildings and public properties.
- (vii) Removal of encroachment on public properties.
- (viii) Assistance in the preparation of land records.
- (ix) Mukhia has to certify work dairies of local beneficiaries for salary payment.

### **3. Minor Irrigation**

- (i) Implementation of schemes for minor and lift irrigation.
- (ii) Selection of beneficiaries for the schemes.
- (iii) Mukhia to sanction casual leave of local irrigation workers for salary payment.
- (iv) Mukhia to review job performance of minor irrigation workers
- (v) Minor irrigation Operator/ Lift Irrigation Operator has to participate in the meetings of Gram Panchayat.

### **4. Animal Husbandry and Fisheries**

- (i) Supervision of implementation of distribution scheme and fish marketing scheme.
- (ii) Selection of beneficiaries for the schemes
- (iii) Selection of fishermen and milkmen for training.
- (iv) Prevention of epidemics and contagious diseases of animals.
- (v) Distribution of milch cows.

- (vi) Maintenance of veterinary and artificial insemination centre.
- (vii) Development of grass land.
- (viii) Disposal of carcasses.
- (ix) Maintenance of public properties in this sector.
- (x) Sanction of casual leave of local Animal Husbandry staff by Mukhia.

## **5. Forest And Environment**

- (i) Implementation of projects relating to social and farm forestry with the help of forest officer / forest officials.
- (ii) Selection and plantation of high quality trees.
- (iii) Organization of training programmes for development of farm forestry.
- (iv) Disposal of income from Forestry project.
- (v) Issuance of permit to farmers / villagers for transportation of timber from one place to another within the district.
- (vi) Forest officials have to cooperate in project implementation.

## **6. Industry**

- (i) Participation of Gram Panchayat in motivating and selecting entrepreneurs
- (ii) Selection of beneficiaries for Khadi and Village industries.

## **7. Public Health And Engineering Department**

- (i) Repair of hand pumps.
- (ii) Selection of sites and installation of handpumps with priority being given to primary / middle schools, to areas inhabited by scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward class population.
- (iii) Initiating disciplinary action against PHED workers for non-cooperation with Gram Panchayat.
- (iv) Supervision and control of rural projects.

- (v) Selection of Below Poverty Line (BPL) families for construction of latrines.
- (vi) Maintenance and control of drinking water supply with the help of Public Works Committee.

## **8. Rural Development**

- (i) Planning and implementation of Jawahar Gramin Smridhi Yojana.
- (ii) Gram Sabha to sanction a project of upto Rs. 1.0 lakh for which no administrative and technical approval is required.
- (iii) Gram Sabha to constitute Vigilance committee for supervision and monitoring of project implementation.
- (iv) On the report of alleged irregularities in project implementation, action against Gram Panchayat can be initiated.
- (v) Gram Sabha is to select individual or groups from BPL families for self-employment under Swarna Jayanti Gramin Swarajgar Yojana.
- (vi) Gram Sabha to is select the beneficiaries for Indira Awas Yojana and to send their names to District Rural Development Office through Panchayat Samiti for approval.
- (vii) Gram Panchayat enjoys the similar rights and responsibilities in Prime Minister's Gramodaya Yojana as in Indira Awas Yojana.

## **9. Energy**

- (i) Selection of beneficiaries for bio-gas plant / smokeless chulha /Solar lamp/ solar panel etc and their distribution.
- (ii) Promotion of rural electrification, collection of fund from the villagers and its deposit in concerned department for electrification.
- (iii) Promotion of awareness of electrification scheme among Dalit and poor families.
- (iv) Implementation of electrification scheme.

- (v) Initiate action against officials for non-cooperation in project implementation.
- (vi) Assistance in removal of illegal electric connection, pilferage and in collection of arrears.

## **10. Primary And Adult Education**

- (i) Gram Panchayat to supervise the functioning of schools and to decide school hours.
- (ii) Selection of sites for establishment of new schools and establishment of schools as per the norms prescribed.
- (iii) Assistance in promoting school enrolment.
- (iv) Sending proposal to Panchayat Samiti for maintaining suitable teacher – pupil ratio.
- (v) Efforts for reducing school drop-outs and improving school attendance.
- (vi) Supervising construction of school building etc.
- (vii) Sanction and disbursement to teachers of incentive money received from School Education Committee.
- (viii) Gram Panchayat to appoint para teachers, to pay their honorarium, to supervise and evaluate their performance.
- (ix) Sending recommendation to appropriate authority for termination of primary / middle school teacher,
- (x) Ensuring regular and timely attendance of Principal / Headmaster / teachers.
- (xi) Reporting about irregular attendance or absence of teachers to the appropriate authority.
- (xii) Mukhia to sanction casual leave of teachers.
- (xiii) Mukhia to certify work diary of teachers for payment of salary.

## **11. Secondary, Primary And Youth Education**

- (i) Assistance of Gram Panchayat in establishing, developing and promotion of libraries.
- (ii) Supervision of libraries.

## **12. Arts, Culture And Youth :**

- (i) Selection of play ground.
- (ii) Organising rural sports for man and women.
- (iii) Organising folk songs and folk cultural programmes.
- (iv) Supervision and protection of historic buildings.

## **13. Health And Family Welfare**

- (i) Gram Panchayat has to keep watch on medical services provided by Primary Health sub-centres and also to supervise distribution of medicine by sub-centres.
- (ii) Mukhia has to sanction casual leave of Health staff and to certify their work diary for release of salary
- (iii) Gram Panchayat has to distribute family planning devices, ORS packets, bleaching powder etc for prevention of malaria and other diseases.

## **14. Welfare**

- (i) Gram Panchayat to select students from the prescribed categories for award of scholarship and to supervise distribution of scholarship amount to them.
- (ii) Gram Panchayat to select the site for construction of Anganwadi Kendra and to select Anganwadi Sevika and Sahayika as well as of the beneficiaries for Anganwadi services.
- (iii) Procurement of food for distribution under supplementary nutrition programme as well as supervision of its distribution.

- (iv) Mukhia has to sanction casual leave of Aganwadi workers and to certify their work diary for payment of their honorarium.

#### **15. Social Security**

- (i) Gram Panchayat to keep record of different categories of workers including female, child and bonded labourers.
- (ii) Sending the list of freed bonded labourers with its recommendation for award of benefits to them.
- (iv) Selection of pregnant women for financial assistance under National Maternity scheme.
- (v) Selection of persons for social security pension and supervision of its distribution.

#### **16. Food Supply And Commerce**

- (i) Supervision of activities relating to public distribution system.
- (ii) Survey and preparation of Ration Cards for distribution of essential commodities.
- (iii) Selection of beneficiaries for Annapurna Yojna and other schemes.

#### **17. Relief And Rehabilitation**

- (i) Selection of people requiring relief and sending its recommendation for the same.
- (ii) Supervision of relief work.
- (iii) Mukhia to take appropriate measures for prevention of starvation death.

This brief description of the functions and responsibilities indicates the trust, the Government has on the Gram Panchayat for the development of rural areas in Bihar.

The Gram Sabha, Mukhia and members of Gram Panchayat have to play pivotal role in this regard.

### **Panchayat Samiti**

Functions and responsibilities that have been delegated by the Government Department to Panchayat Samiti are almost similar to those of Gram Panchayat. Panchayat Samiti is to carry out these tasks at the block level. Since it is an intermediate body linking Gram Panchayat with Zila Parishad, it has to play a supervisory role over Gram Panchayats and put forward plans and proposals of Gram Panchayats to Zila Parishad.

### **Interrelationship**

It is needless to say that Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad – three basic organs of Panchayati Raj System are interrelated and interdependent on one another, though the geographical areas of their operations differ.

According to the provision of the Act, Mukhias of Gram Panchayats within a block are the members of Panchayat Samiti. Similarly, all the Pramukhs of Panchayat Samitis within a district are the members of Zila Parishad. Because of this structural linkage, there is not only mutual coordination among themselves but also uninterrupted flow of information from one level to another.

All the three organs are required to prepare annual development plans. Gram Panchayat prepares every year development plan and submit it to the Panchayat Samiti within the prescribed date. Panchayat Samiti, after including development plans of the concerned Gram Panchayats, prepare an annual plan and submit it to the Zila Parishad within the prescribed date. Zila Parishad in turn prepares an integrated development

plan covering the development plans of the concerned Panchayat Samitis and submits it to the District Planning Committee.

As per the provision of the Act, the Finance Commission for Panchayats reviews the financial position of the Zila Parishads, Panchayats Samitis and Gram Panchayats and makes recommendation to the government.

In accordance with the recommendation of the State Finance Commission, grant-in-aid from the consolidated fund of the state is provided and disbursed in the proportion of **93 : 6 : 1** to Gram Panchayats Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad respectively. The quantum of grant-in-aid is decided by the state government and sent to Zila Parishad.

### **Standing Committees**

The act of 1993 and the Ordinance of 2006 have made provisions for constituting standing committees by Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Zila Parishad.

Gram Panchayat constitutes the following committees by election from its members for effective discharge of its functions :

### **Planning, Co-ordination and Finance Committees**

The committee is to perform all general functions including (a) Preparation of annual plans for the development of the panchayat areas (b) preparation of annual budget, (c) coordination of relief work during natural calamities, (d) co-ordination of the work of other committees and (e) all residuary functions not under the charge of other committees.

### **2. Production Committee**

The Production committee is to perform functions relating to agriculture, animal husbandry, dairy, poultry, fisheries, forestry related areas, khadi, village and cottage industries and poverty alleviation programmes.

### **3. Social Justice Committee**

The committee is responsible for functions relating to (a) promotion of educational, economic, social, cultural and other interests of scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other weaker sections, (b) protection of such castes and classes from social injustice and all forms of exploitation, and (c) welfare of women and children.

### **4. Education Committee**

It is to perform functions relating to education including primary, secondary and mass education libraries and cultural activities.

### **5. Committee on Public Health, Family Welfare and Rural Sanitation**

As the name suggests, it is to perform functions relating to public health, family welfare and rural sanitation.

### **6. Public Works Committee**

The committee is responsible for functions relating to constructions and maintenance including rural housing, sources of water supply, roads and other means of communication, rural electrification and related works.

### **Composition of Committees**

- (i) Each of six standing committees consists of not less than three and not more than five members including the Chairman.
- (ii) Each committee can co-opt not more than two members from among experts or public spirited persons for effective discharge of its responsibilities.

- (iii) Mukhia is the ex-officio member and Chairman of the Planning, Co-ordination and Finance Committee. Mukhia nominates a Co-chairman of each committees from its elected members.
- (iv) Mukhia cannot hold charge of Chairman of more than three committees including the Planning, Coordination and Finance Committees.
- (v) Each Committee should have at least one woman member.
- (vi) Social Justice Committee should have a member belonging to the Scheduled castes or Scheduled tribes, if available.
- (vii) As far as possible, no elected members of the Gram Panchayat should serve on more than three committees.
- (viii) Panchayat Secretary is the secretary of the Planning, Co-ordination and Finance Committee. For other Committees, the District Magistrate or any other officer authorised by him nominates a government servant to function as secretary.
- (ix) The standing committees perform their functions under the general guidance, supervision and control of Gram Panchayat.

The Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 1993 has made provision for the Gram Sabha to constitute one or more Vigilance Committees consisting of persons who are not members of the Gram Panchayat to supervise the Gram Panchayat works, schemes and other activities relating to that village and to put up reports related to them in its meetings.

### **Role of PRI Members**

As discussed above the Panchayats have been entrusted with a large number of responsibilities in different spheres of development activities. However, all of them have not received equal attention from the Panchayat authorities. The following table reveals their dominant interests.

**Table III.1**  
**Development work done by Gram Panchayats**

<b>Nature of work</b>	<b>Total</b>
Construction of Indira Awas	79.1
Road Construction/ repair	75.4
Installation of Hand pumps	52.8
Repair of school buildings	30.5
Repair / construction of drains	24.8
Distribution of Red cards	23.4
Antyodaya scheme	23.4
Scholarship to students	17.3
Old age pension	15.6
Construction of community hall	10.5
Annapurna scheme	4.5
Others	1.0
N	938

There are six types of work that have been taken up by most of the Gram Panchayats. These are (i) Construction of Indira Awas which has benefitted the poor scheduled caste and other houseless families, (ii) road construction / repair which seems to have improved transportation and inter-village communication, (iii) installation of hand pumps which has ensured safe drinking water and thereby helps reduction in water-borne diseases and improvement in health care of the people, (iv) repair of school building which is likely to encourage higher attendance of school children and improve the school environment, (v) making of sewers which is likely to improve sanitation of the villages, (vi) distribution of red cards to BPL families and providing benefits under Antyodaya and Annapurna schemes which have been a great boon to the poor.

Besides these six major activities Gram Panchayats have also done such work which would benefit children and women. On the whole it can be said that Gram Panchayats have implemented the tasks entrusted to them. The table below details the actual role of the elected Panchayat functionaries.

**Table III.2**  
**Role of members in Panchayats activities**

<b>Role played</b>	<b>Total</b>
Creating awareness about schemes	56.1
Taking problems to the Mukhia	40.9
Supervision the work implementation	40.8
Helping in selection of beneficiaries	26.0
Help in office work	10.7
Encouraging women's participation in different schemes	6.9
Keeping a watch on income and expenditure	5.1
Others	25.0
N	938

The elected members have played important roles. They have been keen to create awareness among the people about the different schemes given to the Panchayats, taking the problems of the people to the Mukhias, supervising the work being implemented by the panchayats, as well as helping in selection of beneficiaries for different schemes. Some members have helped office staff to complete their work in time. Some of them have encouraged women to participate in different schemes. Some of the members have been watchful over income and expenditure of Panchayat bodies.

**Table III.3**  
**Problems faced by the elected members**

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Total</b>
Construction of funds	22.1
Limited functions of members	23.5
Pressure of powerful persons	24.5
Fear of anti-social elements	12.3
Vested interest	9.9
Negligence by Govt. officials	19.0
N	938

It is needless to say that there are a lot of difficulties in doing development work in rural areas of Bihar, particularly if it is pro-poor. Table above reveals the nature of

difficulties that the members have come across. Pressure of dominant persons and vested interest have been the greatest stumbling block for any development work. It gets further complicated by the involvement of anti-social elements which are so prominent in some of the areas in the districts from which the sample has been drawn. Besides the constraint of funds, apathy of government officials is an important obstacle to development work. The elected members feel helpless because of the limited powers given to them under the Panchayati Raj Act for the implementation of work.

**Table III.4**  
**Efforts made to overcome problems**

<b>Problems</b>	<b>Total</b>
Demand rights for Gram Sabha	23.8
Get problems solved by Gram Sabha	18.2
Help some needy beneficiaries	9.1
Make best use of available resources	21.0
Contact Mukhia / Pramukh	3.0
Demand more funds from block	10.3
No response	14.6
N	938

The Panchayat members overcome the difficulties tactfully. They press demands for more rights for Gram Sabha, get their problem solved by Gram Sabha and at times make contact with Mukhias and Pramukhs for their problems. Since there is shortage of fund for work, they ask for more fund from the Block offices as well as make best use of scarce resources by selected needy beneficiaries.

**Table III.5**  
**Help taken from local M. Ps. and M.L.As.**

<b>Help taken</b>	<b>Total</b>
Help taken	(215) 22.9
Help not taken	77.1
<b><u>Purpose</u></b>	
Road construction	10.5
Making drains	6.3
Hand pumps	3.9
Panchayat Bhavan	0.4
Making Bandh	0.4
Repairing of Ahar	0.4
Repairing of School building	0.7
Repairing of Pond	0.1
N	938

Besides the efforts made by the members to overcome the difficulties from within, some of them (23%) have contacted local M.L.As. and M.Ps. for financial help for doing the intended work in their area. Table above gives the information about the purpose for which they have approached M.L.As. and M.Ps.

It is clear that M.Ps. and M.L.As. do not take the Panchayat representatives into confidence about disbursing the funds allotted to them for the development of their area. Less than one fourth of the Panchayat representatives did not get any help from them.

**Table III.6**  
**Work satisfaction of the members**

<b>Work satisfaction</b>	<b>Total</b>
Satisfied	78.6
Not satisfied	21.4

In response to a question whether they are satisfied with the work done by them, more than three –fourth of them have expressed satisfaction. More than 21% are not

satisfied with their work performance. Reasons for their dissatisfaction are given in the table below:

**Table III.7**  
**Reasons for dissatisfaction of their work**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Total</b>
Adequate power not given to them	100.0
Schemes not implemented by Mukhia	61.2
Caste considerations	73.1
Shortage of funds	72.1
N	201

All those members found to be dissatisfied with their work performance, assign more than one reason for it. All of them speak of inadequacy of power given to them for work, Caste consideration and shortage of funds for work are two major impediments. In most cases the Mukhia does not listen to any member's proposals.

**Table III.8**  
**Work effectiveness after being elected as Panchayat members**

<b>Effective</b>	<b>Total</b>
Effective	81.9
No response	18.1
N	938

The overwhelming majority of the Panchayat members felt that after being elected as members they have been more effective in doing work for the people. Only 18% of them are not sure of this.

The Panchayati Raj Act had made provision for the formation of three standing committees by the Gram Panchayat from among its elected members for effective discharge of its functions.

**Table III.9  
Organisation of standing committee**

<b>Committee</b>	<b>Total</b>
Production Committee	41.6
social Justice Committee	53.8
Public Works Committee	54.0
N	938

Table shows that all the respondents are not unanimous regarding formation of these committees. There are Gram Panchayats in which these committees have not been contributed for effective implementation of work. Only half of the Gram Panchayats covered by the study have these standing committees. This is a violation.

The committees used to meet a number of times a year to discuss the issues brought forward to them. The majority of the respondents say that the committees met four-five times a year. About 10% of the respondents report a lesser frequency. On an average, there were four meetings for the committees.

**Table III.10  
Work done by the Committee**

<b>Work</b>	<b>Total</b>
Selection of beneficiaries	44.4
Planning of activities	29.4
Discussion on income and expenditure	30.4
Selection of Shiksha Mitras	6.1
Disbursement of scholarship	0.9
Others	6.7
N	938

These committees were primarily engaged in three types of activities selection of beneficiaries for different schemes, planning of activities to be done by Gram Panchayats and discussion on income and expenditure of the Panchayats.

It is assumed in the Panchayati Raj Act that proportionate representation of scheduled persons in the Gram Panchayat would bring about sustainable and

appreciable improvement in the conditions of the scheduled caste communities. In the following paragraphs we attempt to see the extent to which this has been realised.

**Table III.11**  
**Benefits given to Dalits through different schemes**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>Total</b>
Indira Awas	72.0
Red Card	19.1
Scholarship	4.5
Annapurna scheme	37.4
Antyodaya scheme	12.1
Hand pump	37.8
Drain / Sewer	14.7
Old age Pension	16.2
Grant of loan from Bank	5.7
N	938

The table shows that the benefits are flowing to Dalits from several schemes. Three schemes served to them have been more beneficial than the others. Indira Awas Yojana, Annapurna scheme, and safe drinking water scheme have large number of beneficiaries. The other schemes such as Red ration card, old age pension and scheme for construction of drains have benefitted some of them. In spite of the difficulties, the elected members have attempted to provide relief and benefit to the scheduled caste families in their respective areas.

The elected members have initiated steps for improving the condition of women in their respective areas. Steps have been taken by them are to make women aware of the schemes meant for their development. Efforts for organising women have also been made by a good number of members. Women have been motivated to participate in the Gram Sabha, to claim their rights and to organise themselves under Self Help Group scheme. In the efforts towards improving the condition of women, elected female members, by and large, have been in the forefront. But males have not been indifferent to the women's causes.

**Table III.12**  
**Steps taken for improving the status of women**

<b>Steps</b>	<b>Total</b>
Motivated women to attend Gram Sabha	23.7
Make them aware of schemes	41.1
Convince them to get their rights	22.0
Motivate them to participate in the political process	20.7
Organise women	24.6
Motivate them to form SHG	15.2
Help in getting old age pension	19.2
Financial help	8.5
Provision for training for trades	2.1
Open school	8.3
N	938

It is also found that the standing committees constituted by the Gram Panchayats have been by and large beneficial for the Dalit . All those respondents who testify the usefulness of the standing committees do not hesitate to say that the benefits of Indira Awas, Red cards, Annapurna scheme, Antyodaya scheme, old age pension, safe drinking water etc to the scheduled castes are due to these committees.

The respondents are divided over the question of participation of scheduled caste women in the Gram Sabha meetings. As many as 54.3% of them, comprising 64.6% male and 35.4% female members, say that scheduled caste women do not participate in the Gram Sabha just because of the lack of regard from the people at large. Lack of awareness and illiteracy (29.3%) is also stated to be other reasons for their non-participation.

Those who attest their participation (45.7%) say that in the Gram Sabha they raise their problems (100%), along with social issues relating to them (83%) and

encourage discussion on issues becoming on development of the village. Some scheduled caste women attempt to understand the schemes in the Panchayat as well as to demand for their rights.

The respondents have suggested more than one way to raise participation of scheduled caste women in the Gram Sabha. These are as given in the table below :

**Table III.13**  
**Suggestions for raising Scheduled caste women’s participation in Gram Sabha**

<b>Steps</b>	<b>Total</b>
Financial help	41.4
Giving education / training	48.8
Making them self reliant	27.1
Positive attitude of Govt. functionaries	15.3
Formation of self-help groups	8.5
Regular meeting of Gram Sabha	37.2
N	938

It is suggested that their participation may be raised by providing them education or motivational training, financial help for sustenance as well as making them self-reliant. It is also suggested that regular meetings of Gram Sabha will encourage them to participate. Unhelpful attitude of the government functionaries towards them discourage greater participation.

The respondents who belong to the scheduled castes, irrespective of sex, are very much in favour of putting up their family members as candidates in future Panchayat elections. They want to do so for the reasons enumerated in the table below:

**Table III.14**  
**Reasons for putting up candidate from their families**

	<b>Total (%)</b>
In favour	82.9
Not infavour	17.1
<b><u>Reasons for favourable response</u></b>	<b>778</b>
For development of the community	86.5
For self respect in society	32.6
Take advantage of reservation	28.1
Greater political participation	23.1

Among the respondents, 778 persons favour participation of family members in Panchayat elections for more than one reason. For the sake of development of their communities, their participation is essential. This will also raise their status in the society. Some respondents think that they should take advantage of the provision of reservation and participate in the political process of the country.

The respondents agree that there are certain scheduled caste such as Musahar, Dom etc. which do not generally participate in politics.

**Table III.15**  
**Reasons for poor participation in politics by some scheduled caste**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>Total</b>
Lack of education	60.4
Poverty	55.3
Lack of awareness	32.1
Fear of dominant persons	31.8

Reasons for their non-participation in politics are stem from illiteracy, ignorance, acute poverty as well as fear of powerful persons.

It is expected that with the representation of scheduled caste members in the Panchayat, there will be enforcement of minimum wages and reduction of land disputes. So far payment of minimum wages is concerned, 13.1% of the respondents (75 male and 48 female respondents) did not to answer the question. The rest report wages have revised but not to the level prescribed under minimum wage rules.

Only 11.5% of the respondents have reported the prevalence of land disputes in their area but they are not sure if there is increase or decrease in the number of disputes over the period. They are also not sure if the Gram Panchayat has played any significant role in resolving disputes.

All the respondents say in one voice that the scheduled castes in their areas do not come across any objection from other communities in utilising public resources such as Ahars, ponds and grazing fields. Representation of the scheduled castes in the Panchayat has partially facilitated the situation.

### **Summing up**

The Gram Panchayats have rendered service to the needy and target population in their respective area by constructing / distributing Indira Awas, making provision for safe drinking water, construction / repair of roads and drains, and selecting beneficiaries for red ration cards, and old age pension.

In the implementation of work by the Panchayats, the elected members have actively helped in creating awareness about different schemes among the villagers, helping in selection of beneficiaries, supervising work, implementation and encouraging participation of scheduled caste persons in Gram Sabha meetings.

The Panchayat members have to face resistance from different vested interests and also from anti-social elements. Limited availability of funds and apathy of government officials affect work performance. To overcome this, they place their problems in the Gram Sabha for resolution some times approach local M.Ps/ M.A.Ls. for necessary funds. Notwithstanding the difficulties, the majority of the Panchayat members feel that they have done their work effectively and satisfactorily.

In some Gram Panchayats, three standing committees, viz, Production Committee, Social Justice Committee and Public Works committee, have been constituted and have worked satisfactorily.

The scheduled caste people have been benefited from the programmes implemented in the Gram Panchayats and the Panchayat members have extended necessary co-operation.

Participation of scheduled caste men is more than that of women in the Gram Sabha meetings. But both, scheduled caste men women have started taking part in the political process in the Panchayat as well as in the country.

Some scheduled castes, however, are still away from political participation because of illiteracy, ignorance, poverty and social neglect.

The scheduled castes do not face discrimination in respect of payment of wages and also in the use of public resources such as ahars, ponds and grazing grounds.

## IV

### The Gender Perspective

“India is poor because the villages of India are poor. India will be rich if the villages of India are rich. Panchayats should be given greater power for we want the villagers to have a greater measure of real `Swaraj' in their own villages.” (Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru).

At the present day we are passing through the greatest social experiment of our time. There is a historic confluence of two forces, the awakening of women and the emerging commitment to local democracy. This is taking decision making power to the people at the village level including one million elected women local government representatives. These women are not only beneficiaries of change they are the key agents of change. Their role in society is not confined to fetch, to carry, to cook, and to wash year after year as a submissive silent slave, sold to life for nothing. This struggle for creating a new future for women encounters harsh opposition from patriarchal and feudal elements. Women who dare to contest electing are victims of manipulation, physical attack, violence and humiliation. Against all odds elected women representatives (EWR) are making a difference. They are transforming the development agenda to address issues critical to village life such as health, education, income generation and eradicating social evils. In this process, they are redefining leadership incorporating values such as honesty, openness, collective support, inclusion and accountability. They are changing village dynamics. Women leaders empower other women to step out of the home, become literate and contribute to the community.

Since independence approaches to women's empowerment have drawn on a variety of policies and influences. From 1947 to 1975 which was observed as a beginning of the International decade for women, the approach towards women was predominantly welfare oriented. Women were treated largely as aid recipients rather than active participants in their own development. Things started to change with the

realisation that the task was not just improving their material conditions. The concept of women's development shifted attention to enhancing their role and raising their status. There was a greater emphasis on equity in three primary areas, reproduction, production and as members of the community. There was also greater stress in state intervention to step up equality for women and also on their involvement in the developmental process.

The empowerment approach emerged in the early eighties. Its three main features were recognition of the practical needs of women focussing on their strategic needs, viewing improvements in the condition of women's lives to be an end in themselves rather being appended to broad development goals and increased emphasis on the importance of participation and self reliance.

Sometime later equity and empowerment approaches were amalgamated to form the gender and development concept. By the nineties the discourse on women's empowerment moved into the realm of human rights. The rights based approach brought together the concepts of welfare, anti-poverty and equity with women's empowerment . In this perspective the state has a critical role in ensuring that human rights are enforced thereby creating an enabling environment for people centred development.

In the Human Development Report in South Asia 2000, empowerment has been defined as a change in the context of a woman's life which enables her increased capacity for leading a fulfilling human life. It gets reflected in external qualities such as health, mobility, education and awareness. Status in the family, participation in decision making, and also at the level of material security. It also includes internal qualities such as self-awareness and self confidence.

The 73rd Constitutional Amendment had the most profound impact on the socio-economic and political empowerment of women. On account of 33% reservation in Panchayati Raj Institutions one million women throughout the country are occupying

considerable socio-political space. While many of these women are inexperienced, a process of social mobilization has already begun. However, there are a number of factors which limit women's abilities to participate fully in the political process. These include societal attitudes towards women and certain institutional barriers. Nevertheless, Panchayati Raj combined with literacy campaign and access to micro-credit are creating synergies that have the potential to transform Indian society and bring about greater gender equality. The process of social mobilization has made women think of reinventing gender roles in private and public spaces. Due to their increased visibility, the gender based distinction between private and public space is becoming blurred.

It is in the light of issues raised above that we proceed to examine the socio-economic profile of the Dalit elected women representatives (EWR) and their response to the challenges faced by them in playing their role in Panchayati Raj in Bihar. The empowerment achieved by them in the process flows out from the analysis.

Altogether 358 EWR have been interviewed. Among them, 88.8% were Gram Panchayat on Ward members, 10.3% Panchayat Samiti members and only 3 were Pramukh. All of them were drawn from the scheduled caste communities. Their castewise breakup is given below :

**Table IV.1**

<b>Caste</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Chamar	101	28.3
Pasi	49	13.7
Dhobi	23	6.4
Dusadh	87	24.3
Musahar	95	26.5
Mehtar	3	0.8

It is evident that four castes viz. Chamar, Musahar, Dusadh and Pasi have a large presence in the Panchayat. Musahar belong to the lowest rung in the hierarchy of the scheduled castes. They have greater representation in the Panchayat as in the

districts from where the sample has been drawn, the percentage of their population is relatively high. Whatever may be the reason for their larger representation, it is good that the women from this caste have found some space the political domain. The other three castes are not socially and economically as depressed as the Musahar. The Mehtar, which is a small caste is at the lowest level of the social heirachy has three female representatives in our sample.

**Table IV.2**  
**Age break up of EWR**

<b>Age group (in years)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
21- 30	40	11.2
31-40	201	56.1
41- 50	94	26.3
51+	23	6.4

The majority (56%) of the female members belong to the age group of 31-40 years and another 26% in the age bracket of 41-50. Relatively young women have also been elected Panchayat members and their percentage is 11.2. Average age of the women is around 39 years.

The following table gives their occupation-wise breakup.

**Table IV.3**

<b>Occupation</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Agriculture	55	15.4
Wage labour	219	61.2
Petty business	36	10.0
House wife	48	13.4

Table shows that except 13.4% of the members who are primarily house wives, all others are engaged in some occupation. The majority of them are labourers and another 15.4% are cultivators. 10% of them are in petty business.

The following table depicts their land holding pattern.

**Table IV.4**

<b>Caste</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Landless	252	70.4
Less than 1 acre	64	17.9
1 – 5 acre	42	11.7

The bulk of EWR come from landless families. About 20% of them are marginal farmers with less than one acre of land. Only about 12% have more than one acre but less than 5 acres of land. Most of these cultivators are in only share-croppers.

**Table IV.5**  
**Annual family income of EWR**

<b>Income (Rs.)</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
10,000 or less	57	16.0
10,001 - 20,000	179	50.0
20,001 - 30,000	84	23.4
30,001 - 40,000	31	8.6
40,001 +	7	2.0

We consider a family with an annual income of Rs. 20,000/- or less as below poverty line (BPL). Thus, 66% of the female members belong to BPL families. Based on the family income, it can be said that at least 10.6% of the female members come from well-to-do families.

**Table IV.6**  
**Educational level of EWR**

<b>Education</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Illiterate	114	31.8
Literate (Without any standard)	218	60.9
Matriculate	17	4.7
Above Matriculate	9	2.6

Compared with educational level of scheduled caste women in Bihar, educational level of EWR in the sample is quite high. Only about 32% of them are illiterate but there are more than 7% who are either Matriculate or above.

The table below gives an idea of their housing.

**Table IV.7**  
**Type of house of EWR**

Type	N	%
Brick house (Indira Awas)	189	52.8
Mixed house	72	20.1
Tiled roof	49	13.7
Hut	48	13.4
N	358	100.0

The majority of the members have got houses under the Indira Awas Yojana which provides brick houses to the beneficiaries. Nearly 38% of them have semi-pucca or tiled roof houses. Only about 13% live in huts.

A comparison of annual family income, educational level and the type of houses of the female members gives the impression that only a handful of them are absolutely poor and have little exposure to outside social forces. The source of inspiration for contesting the election is shown below :

**Table IV.8**  
**Source of inspiration for contesting the election**

Sources	N	%
Self	124	34.7
People's pressure	98	27.3
Family members	78	21.8
Husband	58	16.2

On the announcement of Panchayat elections, the female members in the sample received inspiration and encouragement for filing their nomination from different sources. Except for 34.7% of them who decided on their own to contest the election, all others were inspired to do so by the members of their family (21.8%), husbands (16.2%)

and also the neighbours or co-villagers (27.3). The table suggests that decision to contest election was, by and large, a family affair (nearly 73%). It also suggests that a sizeable section of the scheduled caste women are not shy to fight election and enter public life. This table also gives an impression that EWR are not just confined to their household duties. They have some public contact, at least with the neighbours or co-villagers. The table given below testifies that the majority of them have rendered some social service to the people before being elected to the Panchayat.

**Table IV.9**  
**Nature of social service done by them before election**

<b>Nature</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Participating and public affairs	119	33.2
Solving people's problems	69	19.3
Solving disputes	16	4.5
Providing monetary help	27	7.5
No response	127	35.5

According to the information given above, as many as 35.5% of them were not doing any social service for the people. Prior to their election as member.

**Table IV.10**  
**Kinds of help received from people during election**

<b>Help received</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Voted in my favour	144	40.2
Helped in campaign	276	77.1
Sustained co-operation	108	30.2
Financial help	54	15.1
Raised self confidence	89	24.9
Helped in filing nomination	23	6.4

The female members received people's co-operation in more than one way. The majority of them say that the people campaigned for them. Besides it, many of them got sustained co-operation of the people. Some candidates got financial help and also guidance in filing their nomination papers.

**Table IV.11**  
**Difficulties faced by EWR during election**

<b>Difficulties</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Lack of fund	115	32.1
Lack of conveyance	64	17.9
Lack of security	56	15.6
Problem in filing nomination	44	12.3
Discouragement	44	12.3
Wrong propaganda by opponents	16	4.5
To woo the voters	11	3.1
Pressure to withdraw candidature	8	2.2

In party based elections, candidates receive some fund and band of workers. In partyless elections as the elections to the Panchayat, candidates are required to arrange everything of their own. Nearly one third of the female members faced the problem of fund. Many of them faced the difficulty of conveyance and also of security. A number of them were discouraged to contest the election and some of them were even pressurised to withdraw their names from the contest. However, all these difficulties could not deter them from winning the election.

As mentioned above most of the female members were known to the people as they used to do some social service for them. After winning the election they got greater opportunity to do the same more effectively.

**Table IV.12**  
**Nature of social work done by EWR after election**

Work done	N	%
Made people aware of different schemes	235	65.6
Raised social issues in Gram Sabha	107	29.9
Explained Gram Sabha decision among people	79	22.0
Informed people about Gram Sabha meeting	72	20.1
Settled disputes among people	43	12.0
Pressurised Mukhia to implement schemes	46	12.8
Helped people in opening Bank Accounts	24	6.7
Provided financial help to needy persons	7	1.9
Supervised the work of Panchayat	208	58.1
Provided benefit to BPL families	69	19.2
Helped in issuing caste certificate	26	7.2
Helped in issuing birth certificate	38	10.6
Helped in taking loan from Banks	24	6.7
Helped in issuing identity cards	4	1.1
Helped in women's schemes	101	28.2
Organised labourers	79	22.0
N	358	

It is seen from the table that they served the people in various ways. The majority of them had made the people aware of different government schemes. Many of them raised important social issues in the Gram Sabha meetings and conveyed its decision to the people. They supervised the implementation of the schemes by the panchayat. At times they used to pressurise Mukhia to implement certain schemes at the earliest. Just because of the help of these elected members, the people were able to procure different certificates and get loans from Banks. It can thus be said that the female members became more active in rendering social service to the villagers after election.

### **Development Work**

The EWR like their male counterpart were concerned about the development of the people. They had rendered help in securing through different schemes to the people.

**Table IV.13**  
**Development work done by Gram Panchayats**

<b>Work</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Construction of Indira Awas	281	78.5
Road construction / repairing	233	65.1
Distribution of Red cards	93	26.0
Installation of handpumps	212	59.2
Benefits of Antyodaya scheme	88	24.6
Benefits of Annapurna scheme	13	3.6
Repair of ponds	106	29.6
Distribution of scholarship	51	14.2
Construction / repair of drains	100	27.9
Construction of community hall	47	13.1
Construction of check dams	3	0.8
Benefit of old age pension	59	16.5

It is seen from the table that the Gram Panchayats had implemented a number of schemes for the benefit of the people in the area. The major work done by the panchayat were (i) construction of Indira Awas for the poor, (ii) installation of hand pumps, (iii) repair / construction of roads. Besides three main concerns, repair of ponds, distribution of red ration cards to BPL families, distribution of scholarship to students, construction of drains old age pension under Annapurna schemes and of Antyodaya scheme were also given. In some panchayats, community halls were constructed for the use of villagers.

These activities of the Panchayat had definitely provided succour to the people in general and the poor in particular. The female members, however, were not mute spectators. They played active role in the whole affair.

**Table IV.14**  
**Role of the EWR in Panchayat activities**

<b>Role</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Making people aware about schemes	176	49.2
Help in selection of beneficiaries	100	27.9
Supervision of the work implementation	108	30.2
Taking problems to Mukhia	149	41.6
Help in office work	13	3.6
Becoming aware of income and expenditure	23	6.4
Associating women in different schemes	23	6.4
Others	115	32.1

The EWR made the people aware of the different schemes and selected beneficiaries for the schemes and supervised the work done by the Panchayats. Some of them brought urgent problems to the notice of Mukhia for action.

Although the female members attempted to provide services to the people through the Gram Panchayat, it was not without some difficulties. Apart from the limitation of funds in the panchayat, the main obstacle to their functioning came from local dominant persons, with vested interest and anti-social elements. The situation was further confounded by the apathy of government staff to the problems of the people. They were also constrained by the limited responsibilities given to them as Panchayat members.

**Table IV.15**  
**Problems faced by the EWR in role performance**

<b>Problems</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Constraint of funds	71	19.8
Limited functions of panchayat members	67	18.7
Pressure of dominant persons	60	16.7
Vested interest	37	10.3
Fear of anti social elements	37	10.3
Negligence by Government functionaries	71	19.8
No Response	15	4.2
<b>N</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The bulk of the EWR were not discouraged by the adverse work situation. In order to overcome it. They approached Gram Sabha for authorising them to perform certain tasks. Some of them also put up their problems to Gram Sabha for decision and direction. The constraint of fund was set off with selection of such number of persons as could be benefitted with it.

**Table IV.16**  
**Efforts made to overcome the problem**

<b>Problems</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Demand rights for Gram Sabha	76	21.2
Get problem solved by Gram Sabha	61	17.0
Demand for more fund from Block office	46	12.8
Best use of available resources	75	20.9
Selection of needy beneficiaries	22	6.1
Contact Mukhia / Pramukh	13	3.6
No Response	66	18.4

**Table IV.17**  
**Help taken from local M.P./ M.L.As.**

<b>Problem</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Road construction	38	10.6
Construction of drain	20	5.6
Installation of hand pumps	12	3.3
Construction of Panchayat Bhavan	1	0.3
Construction of School building	1	0.3
Did not seek help	286	79.9

About 20% of the EWR sought help of local M.P./ M.L.A. for getting some development works. They approached them mainly for construction of road, drain and installation of hand pumps.

Inspite of the difficulties in doing development work, the bulk (78.2%) of the female members were found to be satisfied with their role performance. Only 21.8% , not satisfied, assigned four reasons for this.

**Table IV.18**  
**Reasons for dissatisfaction of role performance**

Reasons	N	%
Adequate power not given	78	100.0
Scheme not implemented by Mukhia	78	100.0
Caste considerations	72	92.3
Lack of funds	22	28.2
N	78	

All of them said that Mukhia did not implement schemes and they were not given full powers to do their work. Lack of funds and caste consideration also affected their role performance.

However, as many as 78% of the EWR agreed that their position as panchayat members had enabled them to work effectively for the people.

#### **Standing Committees:**

According to the provision made in the Bihar Panchayati Raj Act of 1993, there should be three standing committees for effective discharge of the functions of Gram Panchayat.

**Table IV.19**  
**Standing Committees**

Committee	N	%
Production Committee	149	41.6
Social Justice Committee	175	48.9
Public Works Committee	180	50.3
No Response	106	29.6

It is evident that these committees were not constituted in every Gram Panchayat. Only half of the Panchayats covered under the study this was done. These Committees seemed to be active in discharging their responsibility as they used to meet several times a year.

**Table IV.20**  
**Number of meetings of Standing Committee**

<b>Number</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Five times	105	29.3
Four times	116	32.4
Three times	16	4.5
Two times	15	4.2
No response	106	29.6
<b>N</b>	<b>358</b>	<b>100.0</b>

These committees discharged a number of responsibilities as shown in the table below:

**Table IV.21**  
**Activities of the Standing Committees**

<b>Work</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Selection of beneficiaries	156	43.6
Planning of activities	136	38.0
Discussion on income and expenditure	111	31.0
Selection of Siksha Mitra	19	5.3
Giving scholarship	2	0.5
Discussion on work done by Gram Panchayat Samiti	2	0.5
<b>N</b>	<b>358</b>	

According to 70.9% of the female members, these committees did useful work. Only 29% of them were not happy with it.

**Benefits to scheduled castes:**

The EWR were of the view that the scheduled caste people were benefitted from the different schemes implemented by the Gram panchayat. They also observed that without Gram Panchayat these benefits could not have reached them. The female members were also watchful that the benefits meant for these depressed people were not misutilised.

**Table IV.22**  
**Benefits made available to scheduled caste persons through various schemes**

<b>Benefits</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Indira Awas	249	69.5
Annpurna scheme	183	51.1
Antyodaya scheme	41	11.5
Hand pump	119	33.2
Old age pension	72	20.1
Drain / sewer facility	67	18.7
Red card	67	18.7
Grant of loan from Banks	26	7.3
Scholarship	12	3.3
Appointment as Shiksha Mitra	20	5.6

The table shows that the scheduled caste persons had received benefits of several schemes. Many of them got houses under Indira Awas Yojana, received red ration cards, old age pension, and benefits from Annpurna scheme and Antyodaya scheme. In scheduled caste pockets, hand pumps had been installed for providing safe drinking water. In some areas, drains have been constructed. Some scheduled caste persons have been recruited as Shiksha Mitra and some have got bank loans to do some business. On the whole, it appears that the scheduled caste EWR were able to render benefits to their community.

**Table IV.23**  
**Steps taken for improving the status of women**

<b>Efforts</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Motivated them to participate in Gram Sabha meetings	122	34.1
Made them aware of schemes	119	33.2
Convinced them to demand their rights	101	28.2
Motivated them to participate in the political process	96	26.8
Motivated them to organise themselves	114	31.8
Motivated them to form SHG	49	13.7
Helped aged pension to get old age pension	85	23.7
Provision for training for trades	11	3.1
Financial help	35	9.8
Motivated girls to attend school	19	5.3

The EWR, as evident from the table, took up several steps for empowering the scheduled caste women. The first step for empowerment is awareness building, and this was done by the female members very well. They motivated the women to participate in the Gram Sabha and to get their rights. They inspired them to form Self Help Groups for economic betterment. Some got financial help for starting business and some got training in tailoring.

The EWR took up four types of activities for empowering the scheduled caste women. First, they made them aware of their rights and of the schemes which would be beneficial to them. Secondly, they motivated women to participate in the Gram Sabha meetings to place their views with their men folk and high caste people. Thirdly, they organised themselves for pursuing economic activities. Finally, they attempted to provide skill training and financial help to carry out certain economic activities. Some female members went a step further by motivating girls to attend school regularly.

The effort made by the respondents to motivate the scheduled caste women to participate in Gram Sabha was not without result. As many as 49.7% of the respondents say that the scheduled caste women used to participate in the Gram Sabha meetings to raise their problems for solution and discuss on development activities relating to the village.

About a half of the female members admit that they could not motivate the scheduled caste women to participate in the Gram Sabha meetings as they considered themselves unequal to the task.

**Table IV.24**  
**Suggestions for improving women's participation**

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Giving training / education	182	50.8
Financial help	123	34.3
Attending meetings of Gram Sabha	114	31.8
Making themselves reliant	104	29.0
Positive attitude of government functionaries	41	11.4
Formation of Self Help Groups	34	9.5

The respondents gave a number of suggestions for improving participation of the scheduled caste women in the activities of Gram Panchayats. They suggested that orientation training, economic self reliance, removal of illiteracy and positive attitude of government functionaries would ensure greater participation of the scheduled caste women in the activities of the Gram Panchayats.

About 80% of the EWR were of the view that extent of exploitation of the scheduled caste had decreased over the time. Only about 20% of them did not agree with it. According to them, muscle men exploited the scheduled caste people. When such incident occurred they approached Mukhia and other government officials for taking action. 86.5% of the respondents said that there has been an increase in wages but minimum prevalence wages were not yet implemented in their areas. Some respondents reported the prevalence of land disputes between scheduled castes and other land owning castes. The concerned Panchayat has taken up the issue for solution. All the female members say that the scheduled castes were not debarred from using public amenities like ahars, ponds and grazing grounds.

The respondents realised the importance of being elected as panchayat members. More than 84% favoured putting up candidate from their family in the future panchayat elections.

**Table IV.25**  
**Reasons for putting up candidates from the family**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
For development of society	250	83.0
For self respect in society	85	28.2
Take advantage of reservation	69	22.9
take participation in politics	82	27.2
<b>N</b>	<b>301</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Those who were in favour of putting up candidate from their family in the future election, gave more than one reason for this. As many as 83% of them said that this would enable them to raise the living condition of their communities. Another 28% said that this would enhance their social status in society. For participation in politics and to take advantage of reservation given to the scheduled castes, they would favour putting up family members in future elections.

They also explained only the scheduled caste people hesitate to participate in the political process of the country. They gave the reason in the table below:

**Table IV.26**  
**Reasons for poor participation of scheduled caste persons**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Lack of education	222	62.0
Poverty	184	51.4
Lack of awareness	89	24.9
Fear of dominant persons	78	21.8

It is evident from the table that besides illiteracy, poverty and ignorance and fear of dominant persons are important reasons for their poor participation in political process.

**Table IV.27**  
**Improvement in status of EWR after election**

<b>Status</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Respect from society	217	60.6
Participation in the affairs of society	103	28.8
Invited in festivals	93	26.0
Solving people's problems	68	17.1
Improvement in economic condition	33	9.2

The EWR reported improvement in their status after being elected as members. They were respected by all sections of the population. They were invited to participate in the affairs of the society as well as in social festivals. They at times negotiated disputes between parties. Some of them reported improvement in their economic condition as they had started some economic activities after taking loan from bank.

Reasons for improvement in their status was not just because of the membership in the panchayat but also for efforts for providing services to the people, their active participation in creating awareness about different schemes, in selection of beneficiaries and for supervising implementation of the schemes. At times they used to bring people's problems to the Block level officers.

**Table IV.28**  
**Behaviour of functionaries towards the members**

<b>Functionaries</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Gram Panchayat Secretary	320	89.4
Mukhia	278	77.6
B.D.O.	283	79.0
Pramukh	243	67.9
Bank Staff	243	67.9
Anganwadi Sevika	297	83.0
Health functionaries	275	76.8
Teachers	269	75.1

Nearly three-fourth EWR reported of cordial behaviour from different functionaries except that of B.D.O. and Pramukh. On the whole it is found that about

one-fourth of the woman members were not happy with the behaviour of the functionaries mentioned in the table.

**Table IV.29**  
**Participation in Panchayat activities**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Preparation of Annual Budget	191	53.3
Selection of beneficiaries	210	58.6
Implementation of schemes	177	49.4

Many EWR did not receive necessary co-operation of the functionaries in the Gram Panchayat and at the Block level. This partially deterred their activities. The table above shows that nearly half of them involved themselves in the different activities like preparation of annual budget, selection of beneficiaries and implementation of the schemes.

Under the circumstances it is pertinent to know if the membership in the panchayat has raised their self confidence. In response to this, as many as 78.8% affirm it. The rest did not answer the question.

Those who thought that there was increase in self confidence after being elected as members, gave some evidence in support of their contention. About 62.7% of them said that the membership has given them an opportunity to raise problematic issues in the Gram Sabha, 44.3% received calls to participate in discussion on development activities and 18.8% got information from Block officials. They were not able to do so before being elected. In spite of the difficulties in performing their functions and inadequate co-operation from the different government staff, the bulk of the female members were willing to contest the next election. Among those willing to contest the next elections, half of them aspired to contest for the post of Mukhia. 32.8% for Samiti membership, and 5% for the post of Sarpanch. Only 13.8% of them wanted to contest for their present position as Panchayat members. This reflects a rise in their level of aspiration and a flowering of their trust with politics.

## **Summing up**

Among 358 EWR interviewed for the study, 88.8% were Gram Panchayat members, 10.5% were Panchayat Samiti members and 3 (0.8%) were Pramukh.

All the EWR were elected against the seats reserved for the scheduled castes. They belonged to the Chamar, Musahar, Dusadh, Pasi, and Dhobi. Only three of them were from the Mehtar caste. 82% of them were above 30 years and below 50 years of age. Their average age was 39 years.

All the EWR except for 13.4% who were housewives, were engaged in some occupation. About 61% of them were labourers and another 10% were petty business women. Only 15.4% were cultivators. More than 70% of them were landless. About 18% had less than one acre of land and only 12% had more than one acre land. Considering that the families with annual income of Rs. 20,000/- or less are below poverty line (BPL), 66% of the women members were found to be from BPL families. Only 10.6% of them came from families with annual income of more than Rs. 30,000/-.

Although illiteracy is widespread among the scheduled caste women, it is not so in the case of the members. Nearly 32% of them were illiterates while above 7% of them were Matriculate or above.

The majority (52.8%) of the EWR lived in the Indira Awas. About 13% of them were living in huts. The rest were in semi-pucca houses.

Information about annual family income, educational level and type of houses of the women members gives the impression that only a handful of them were poor and little acquainted with outside social forces. However, before they decided to contest the Panchayat election, they were known to the people in their areas. The majority of them used to participate in public affairs, to sort out people's problems as well as to resolve disputes.

When the Panchayat election was announced, more than one-thirds of them decided to contest on their own. The rest of them did so on the advice of the people and members of family including their husbands.

During the Panchayat election, they faced difficulties such as lack of funds, conveyance and security. Some of them also faced the resistance from the opponents. But it was the people's co-operation that encouraged them to face odds. The people came forward to campaign for them and also provided financial help to some of them.

After winning the election, the majority attempted to serve the people, by making them aware of the different schemes, by raising social issues in the Gram Sabha and by providing benefits to the poor in the form of old age pension, red ration cards and bank loan etc. The majority of the EWR helped the Gram panchayat in the construction of Indira Awas, road repairing / construction, selection of beneficiaries under different schemes etc.

All these tasks were not easy. They faced resistance from dominant persons, people with vested interest and also from anti-social elements. Limitation of funds, and neglect of government staff made their problems more difficult. When the situation became beyond their control, they used to approach Gram Sabha for support. Some of them also approached local M.L.As and M.Ps. for financial help and work projects.

Notwithstanding the difficulties they encountered in discharging their responsibilities, the bulk of the female members were happy with their role performance. Most of them would contest the future election for the posts having greater responsibilities like Mukhia, Sarpanch and Panchayat Samiti members. Many of them would also encourage the other members of their families to contest panchayat elections.

The female members felt an improvement in their status after they won the election. They got respect from different sections of population and were invited to participate in social festivals and other public functions. The EWR made four types of efforts to empower the scheduled caste women in general. They were made aware of their rights and also of the schemes meant for their betterment. Secondly, they motivated the women to participate in the Gram Sabha meetings. Thirdly, they motivated them to organise themselves for pursuing gainful economic activities. Finally, they attempted to provide bank loans to some scheduled caste women.

The bulk of the EWR were of the view that there was decrease in the extent of exploitation of the scheduled caste men and women. The number of disputes between scheduled castes and the others has also declined. The scheduled castes were not debarred from using public utility services such as Ahars, Ponds and grazing grounds.

In view the responses of the EWR on different issues, it can be said that there is improvement in the condition of the scheduled caste women. They have also started realising their position and importance in the community and in the society at large. They also intend to participate in the political process and do good to their communities. A sense of accommodation between the scheduled castes and the other segments of the population seems to have emerged. Sporadic incidence of atrocities and exploitation of the scheduled caste men and women occur sometimes. The Panchayati Raj with the provision for reservation to the Scheduled castes and other backward communities is likely to build up an integrated rural society in Bihar.

## V

### **Nature And Extent of Empowerment**

The word empowerment has been exercising the minds of different sections of Indian society during the past two decades. Social scientists, legal experts, politicians and the media have been talking about it. It is indeed seen by many of the activists as an effective answer to deeply entrenched inequalities in Indian society and also to oppression, exploitation and injustice. It was also expected to resolve the contradiction between a hierarchical social order and a democratic political system. It was believed that the situation could be eased with the advent of independence. But this did not happen. In fact, the contradiction has become more pronounced.

Besides the substantial inequalities of income and wealth the most deep-rooted forms of inequalities are based on caste and gender. The traditional disabilities due to caste and gender are not only economic but also social. Although the law has changed and the Constitution enshrines justice, liberty, equality and fraternity, social attitudes and mindsets have changed to a much smaller extent. Persons from lower castes and women, in general, continue to suffer from many disadvantages.

Empowerment means different things to different users of the term. The idea of empowerment has been used in different contexts such as human rights, basic needs, economic security, capacity building, skill formation and social dignity. Empowerment is also invoked in the context of economic weakness and insecurity particularly of marginalised, unorganised and other disadvantaged groups. These disadvantaged sections of the Indian population are now regarded as unempowered. The change in language means a change in orientation from the economic to the political domain. The focus on empowerment has stressed the need for building of economic and social capabilities among individuals, classes and communities. Interventions of various kinds have been made including supply of credit on easy terms to farmers, capacity building through craft training and part-time employment for women. The literacy drive and universalisation of primary education is also a move for empowerment. Increasing

member of development specialists in India regard empowerment as a more viable alternative to the tortuous path of citizenship for replacing the traditional social structure by a new one. The essence of empowerment is that it wants to change society through rearrangement of power.

Power is characterised by coercion, domination and manipulation. This can better be understood by the zero sum approach to power. Some sections of society exercise power. Others do not have power; the power of one section can be raised by reducing the power of other section. The empowerment of some sections of society has to be accompanied by the disempowerment of the other section. The redistribution of power is found to have far reaching consequences. Class, community and gender are important components of the social mosaic. But there are other components too. These are various kinds of institutions performing different kinds of specialised functions an administration, finance, education, research, communications etc. There are some radicalists who call for empowerment of people as a whole. They are wary of institutions and see them as obstacles to the aspirations of common people, peasants, workers, Dalits, tribals and women. It is tacitly acknowledged that the empowerment of disadvantaged groups will affect the major institutions of the society, particularly their mode of functioning.

Panchyati Raj in India is one important avenue for the empowerment of the disadvantaged oppressed or depressed sections of the Indian society by giving them powers of self governance through active participation so that they virtually control material assets, intellectual resources and ideology. The material assets over which control can be exercised may be physical, human or financial such as land, water, forests, labour, and access to funds. Intellectual resources include knowledge, information and ideas. Control over ideology signifies the ability to generate, propagate and sustain and institutionalise specific sets of beliefs. In short, empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building to greater decision making power and control and to transformative action. It is also a product and can be perceived in individuals and communities. However, in a specific setting it affects different people

and communities differently. The impact would depend on the psychological preparedness to absorb change, the extent of their attachment to the past, resignation to fate and their capacity to combat entrenched power groups.

Although the Panchayats were instituted in Bihar before the Indian Constitution become operative, it was only in 2001 that a large number of scheduled caste men and women got the opportunity to contest the election and participate in local self governance. These elected scheduled caste panchayat members were victims of social exclusion. They comprised the deprived and depressed sections of society. Their participation in the political domain was low. They had to be prepared for participation by positive attitude of the dominant population and proactive measures of capacity building for the discharge as their functions.

**Table V.1**  
**Orientation training of Panchayat members**

<b>Source of training</b>	<b>Total</b>
No training given	34.5
Govt. Officials	44.4
Voluntary Organisations	21.0
-	N
	938

It is evident from the table that as many as 65.5% of the respondents had one day's orientation training provided by government officials and voluntary agencies. In one day they could have only nodding acquaintance with their role in the programme and the tasks involved. The rest of them did not have any training.

Among 614 respondents (417 males and 212 females) who took the training, only 27.4% found the training useful and satisfactory. It is, however, not known as to how they found the training satisfactory as they had no feed task. This own idea of their role and functions was hazy. 31.9% of male members and 16.5% female members were satisfied with the training. It can therefore be said that for better discharge of their

responsibility as panchayat members as well as for more meaningful participation in the local self-governance, all the elected members are required to have adequate training.

It is often believed that the Scheduled caste members on account of age-old social exclusion, neglect, and ignorance would not be capable of participation in the activities of the Gram Panchayat and would merely remain as silent partners. Even with these handicaps they took part in Panchayat activities as shown in the following table.

**Table V.2**  
**Participation in Panchayat activities**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>Total</b>
Preparation of Annual Plan	55.0
Preparing Budget	47.4
Selection of beneficiaries	48.9
Implementation of schemes	46.2
Inspection and supervision	72.6
Creating awareness about schemes	48.6
Raising issues in Gram Sabha	7.8
Taking issues to the block office	8.0
N	938

The Panchayat members took part in different activities. They prepared annual plan as well as annual budget, selected beneficiaries for different schemes, supervised implementation of schemes. Nearly half of them made efforts to create awareness among the people about different schemes. Some of them also raised problematic issues in the Gram Sabha. Some of them acquainted the Block officials with the important issues for expeditious solution. All the members, therefore, were involved in the Gram Panchayat and worked for the benefit of the people.

For successful participation of the members in the activities of the Gram Panchayat, they need to interact with several government functionaries as well as with Panchayat Secretary, Mukhia and Pramukh. The opinion of the Panchayat members in this regard is given in the following table.

**Table V.3**  
**Amiable behaviour of different functionaries towards the Panchayat members**

<b>Functionaries</b>	<b>Total</b>
Panchayat Secretary	88.4
Panchayat Supervisor	73.9
Mukhia	79.3
Pramukh	71.6
B.D.O.	74.6
Bank Officials	71.6
Anganwadi Sevika	76.4
Health functionaries	72.7
Teachers	80.6
N	938

It is seen from the table that the overwhelming majority the members had amicable co-operation with the functionaries. Only a handful of members say that they functionaries were indifferent to them. More than 20% of them comprising more females than males, complain of unfriendly behaviour of Mukhia. Another 28.4% say the same about Pramukh. On the whole nearly one-fourth of the members were not happy in their interaction with the functionaries.

However, the bulk of members gained self confidence after being elected. This is evident from the table below :

**Table V.4**  
**Gain in self-confidence after election**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Total</b>
Yes	78.7
No	21.3

Only 21% of the respondents comprising almost equally of both sexes, did not experience any change in the level of their self confidence.

**Table V.5**  
**Evidence of rise of self confidence**

<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Total</b>
Opportunity to raise issues in Gram Sabha	60.8
Participate in discussion on development issues	52.4
Get necessary information from Block officials	27.0
N	738

Prior to becoming Gram Panchayat members, they never dared to raise any problems with upper caste people or any other official. Now they can raise their problems in the Gram Sabha which comprises people from different castes and religions. They are also invited to participate in discussion on some problems and can seek information from block officials. All this have happened just because of their election to a particular position in the P.R.I. This has raised their self confidence.

**Table V.6**  
**Improvement in status of the members**

	<b>Total</b>
Respect from all sections of society	64.9
Full participation in village affairs	37.4
Solving people's problem	24.8
Invited in festivals	20.9
Improvement in economic condition	8.9
N	938

It is clear from the table that over 60% of the respondents attest to the fact that their status has improved after becoming panchayat members. They are now respected by all sections of the population. Many of them are also invited to participate in village affairs and in village festivals. People approach them with their problems. some of them say that their economic condition has also improved as they have been receiving economic help to pursue their occupation more vigorously. It is thus seen that the people who have long been marginalised, have now been accepted as agents of social change after winning the election as Panchayat members.

**Table V.7**  
**Wishing to contest next election**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Total</b>
Yes	90.7
No Response	9.3

As they now realise their importance, most of them do not hesitate to express their wish to contest the next Panchayat elections. 93% of the males and 86.9% of the females affirm their desire. Only 9.3% of the respondents did not answer this question. However, it does not mean that they are unwilling to contest. They just hide their inner desire from outsiders. Their level of aspirations has risen

**Table V.8**  
**Positions to be contested in next election**

<b>Position</b>	<b>Total</b>
Mukhia	51.8
Panchayat Samiti Member	27.5
G. P. Member	11.5
Sarpanch	9.2
N	851

It is evident that the majority of the respondents want to contest next election for the post of Mukhia. Another 27.5% will contest for membership of Panchayat Samiti and about 9% for the post of Sarpanch. Only 11.5% will contest for the same post of Gram Panchayat Members. Hence most of the respondents want to move up the social ladder and attain higher status. The elected representatives were able to identify the major impediments in the empowerment of the Scheduled caste women.

**Table V.9**  
**Impediments to empowerment of scheduled caste**

<b>Obstacle</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Poverty	69.5	69.8	69.6
Illiteracy	71.0	65.4	68.9
Absence of Women's organization	18.4	20.4	19.2
Lack of training facility	17.6	17.3	17.5
Presence of Purdah	14.0	14.0	14.0
N	580	358	938

The majority of the respondents, irrespective of their sex consider poverty (69.6%) and illiteracy (68.9%) as the two most important impediments to empowerment. Nearly 19% of them say that though there is programme for formation of self help group, the scheduled caste women are not generally organised for their social and economic betterment. In rural areas there is lack of training facility for upgradation of traditional skills as well as for training ventures in other occupational ventures. This fact is mentioned by 17.5% of the respondents.

In some Muslim majority areas such as Purnia prevalence of purdah was mentioned as a barrier to their empowerment.

**Table V.10**  
**Suggestions for empowerment of scheduled caste women**

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
Provision for skill training	72.4	59.4	67.5
Provision for awareness programme	31.9	27.1	30.1
Provision for education	28.8	25.1	27.5
Employment opportunity	19.5	28.5	22.9
Women's organization	19.3	24.3	21.2
N	580	358	938

The respondents have suggested for five measures for empowering women. The majority of them have suggested for skill training. Women may be given training for pursuing traditional occupation in better way as well as in areas having greater income

potentiality. Along with the training, provision for employment in the local areas need to be made for them. As most of the scheduled caste women are illiterate, steps should be taken to educate them, and to make education more meaningful to their living. Attempt for organising them and to make them aware of the different programmes run by the government should also be made, according to some of the respondents.

It is seen that suggestions given by them are inter-linked, though their response to these vary. All the measures suggested by them need to be taken up as a whole and only then the scheduled caste women would come to the road of empowerment.

### **Summing up**

Nearly two third respondents had one day' s orientation training given by government officials and voluntary agencies. Most (72.6%) of those undergone the training did not find it useful and satisfactory.

The respondents hailing from the socially depressed communities, were not just silent spectators. They took active part in the different activities of the Panchayat. They raised awareness among the villagers about different schemes, prepared annual plans and budget. They selected beneficiaries for the different schemes to be implemented through the Gram Panchayat. They also supervised the implementation of the schemes.

In course of discharging their responsibilities, they were required to interact with several government functionaries who extended necessary co-operation to them. There were some functionaries who were not as co-operative as the others.

The membership in the Panchayat has given them a new lease of life. More than three fourths of them have gained self confidence in discharging their responsibility and regard themselves as useful members of the society and command respect from different sections of the population. They are now capable of participating in village affairs as also in village festivals.

Most of them have got the taste of politics and want to move ahead by contesting elections for different positions in Panchayati Raj. They have made a fruitful entry in the democratic process.

Provision of reservation of seats in the Panchayat for scheduled caste men and women holds the promise of a social transformation in rural society affecting the balance of power in Bihar villages. Poverty, illiteracy, absence of women's organizations, lack of training facilities are identified as important barriers to the empowerment of EWR. Empowerment could be speeded up by skill and awareness training programmes education, employment opportunities and setting up women's organization.

## VI

### Empowerment of P.R. I. Elected Panchayat Representatives in the Eyes of Government Officials and Opinion Leaders

#### Government Officials

Apart from Mukhias, Gram Panchayat members, and Panchayat Samiti members, a group of government officials and opinion leaders was also interviewed to assess the involvement and participation of the scheduled caste members in the Panchayati Raj Institution. The distribution of the government officials interviewed for the study is given in the following table;

Table VI.1

Officials	N
District Panchayat Officer	2
Industry Extension Officer	1
Block Education Officer	1
Lady Extension Officer	4
Block Welfare Officer	2
Block Development Officer	2
Gram Panchayat Supervisor	7
Panchayat Secretary	6
Jan Sewak (VLW)	5
N	30

It is seen from the table that the bulk of officials comprising Gram Panchayat Supervisor, Panchayat Secretary and Jan Sewak who are intimately related with the functioning of the Gram Panchayats and of the elected representatives are better placed to assess the prevalent situation.

It is found that 80% of the officials held the view that the scheduled caste elected representatives, irrespective of their sex, are aware of their role and responsibilities. Educated elected members had an edge over illiterate members in this respect was political and could be empowered by training.

60% of the officials say that elected members were given training to acquaint them with their responsibilities. The duration of training differed from one to three days.

According to the provision in the Panchayati Raj Act, 1993, the Gram Sabha comprising the voters of the village ought to meet quarterly to discuss the issues. The meetings would be presided over by the Mukhia or the Up-Mukhia. A notice of the Gram Sabha meeting is pasted in the office of the Gram panchayat and the same is to be brought to the notice of the public by beat of drum or any other means. In case a quorum of the appointed meetings which is 10% of the total members, is not complete, the meeting is adjourned. The adjourned meeting does not require any quorum. However, the Bihar Panchayati Raj Ordinance, 2006, has made changes in the provisions now.

**Table VI.2**  
**Reasons for Irregular meeting**

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
Villagers not interested	2	16.7
Lack of information	2	16.7
Dominance of powerful persons	1	8.3
Arbitrary decisions of Mukhia	1	8.3
Aam Sabha, not Gram Sabha	6	50.0
N	12	100.0

It is seen that 60% of the officials thought meetings of the Gram Sabha are held regularly. There is confusion about Gram Sabha and Aam Sabha. Aam Sabha meeting which is often a adjourned meeting, does not need any quorum. The rest 50% of them give more than one reason for not holding regular meetings. On the whole it appears that the Gram Sabha meeting as per prescribed provision is hardly held. At best, there is the Aam Sabha and not the Gram Sabha meeting. Aam Sabha is often a meeting of a few like-minded persons around the Mukhia.

One of the reasons for the low attendance of villagers in Gram Sabha meetings is the absence or poor understanding among the elected members. Because of this,

members fail to convince the villagers about the importance of their participation in the Gram Sabha meeting. Consequently, the Gram Sabha remains an ineffective institution and the Mukhia and the influential persons act arbitrarily.

**Table VI.3**  
**Nature of participation of scheduled caste members in panchayat bodies**

Nature	Male		Female	
	N	%	N	%
No participation	1	3.3	5	16.7
Infrequent participation	8	26.7	8	26.7
Frequent participation	21	70.0	17	56.7
N	30	100.0	30	100.0

The officials feel that there is not only lack of understanding among the members but also infrequent participation in the panchayats by most of them. Participation of male scheduled caste members in the panchayat is larger than that of women. However, the officials are of the view that scheduled caste members, irrespective of sex, participate regularly in the panchayats.

**Table VI.4**  
**Constraints in regular participation of scheduled caste members**

Impediments	N
Illiteracy	9
Lack of awareness	5
Arbitrary behaviour of Mukhia	4
Interference of dominant persons	5
Lack of social respect	7
N	30

The table above points out the major constraints to their full participation in the panchayats. The officials admit that the Mukhia dominates over the Panchayat and keeps the Dalit members in dark about the different schemes to be implemented in the panchayat. Lack of social respect to Dalit is another important impediments to their full participation.

Notwithstanding the fact that the scheduled caste members are yet to have full participation in the panchayats, their representation in the Panchayati Raj Institutions, according to the officials has empowered them to some extent.

**Table VI.5**  
**Empowerment of scheduled caste members**

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
To a large extent	25	17
To some extent	4	9
Not at all	1	4
N	30	30

The majority of the officials agree that both men and women scheduled caste panchayat members have been empowered to a large extent after being elected as members. They have now some knowledge about their rights and duties and have started raising development issues. Earlier they were just hapless persons. Some officials, however, say that their empowerment is low. Some officials do not see any symptom of empowerment among members.

**Table VI.6**  
**Steps for empowering Panchayat members**

<b>Steps</b>	<b>N</b>
Financial power to members	2
Education, training and awareness	16
Travelling allowance	7
No response	5

The majority of the officials suggest that members should be given education, training and awareness about their duties and responsibilities. Such training would encourage them to participate in the panchayat more effectively. Some officials say that since there is no provision of travelling allowance and the members are not economically well off, it is difficult for them to spend from their own pocket for going to Block office or some other places. Some of them also suggest that the members should

also be given financial power to spend on the implementation of development projects. This power is now vested in the Mukhia only as a result of which the members are not enthusiastic to work for the people.

All the officials except two think that the Scheduled caste members are not discriminated on account of their castes. But they are unable to perform their duties for a variety of reasons which is given in the table below;

**Table VI.7**  
**Reasons for low performance of panchayat members**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>N</b>
Arbitrary decision of Mukhia	2
Lack of awareness	2
Lack of training	12
Poverty	12
Dominance of criminals influential persons	2

Two important reasons for low or non- performance of scheduled caste members are lack of training and poverty. On account of lack or proper training, they are ignorant of their responsibilities. As the members are poor, they cannot afford to spend of their own for going to Block office and other places. Besides these reasons, arbitrary decision of Mukhia and threat by criminals and other influential person affect their performance.

**Table VI.8**  
**Steps for empowering Panchayat members**

<b>Suggestion</b>	<b>N</b>
Organise training / workshops	18
Awareness about government schemes	4
Formation of Standing committees	4
Activisation of Gram Sabha	1
Check arbitrary activity of Mukhia	1
Travelling allowance to members	1
Control of criminals	1
<b>N</b>	<b>30</b>

The majority of the officials recommend that training and workshops should be organised to acquaint the members with their job responsibilities. Some officials think that all the standing committees as provided by the Act should be constituted and should work effectively. Besides, Gram Sabha should be made active by creating awareness about its importance among the villagers. Arbitrary acts of Mukhia and criminal activities need also to be checked.

It appears from the views of the officials that the panchayat members are partially aware of their duties and responsibilities and participate half heartedly in the panchayat activities. The situation can be improved by providing training, creating awareness of their responsibilities, checking arbitrariness of Mukhia and other influential persons and by giving financial power to them. In spite of these limitations, the scheduled caste members are on the road to empowerment.

### **Opinion leaders**

In this section the views to the opinion leaders about the scheduled caste panchayat members, their participation in the panchayat, their endeavours for the improvement of their community people have been explored.

These thirty opinion leaders were drawn from different fields, the detail of whom is given in the following table.

**Table VI.9**  
**Categories of opinion leaders**

<b>Category</b>	<b>N</b>
Local political leaders	4
College teachers	3
NGO functionaries/ social workers	8
Zila Parishad member	1
Pramukhs (non-Dalit)	2
Panchayat Samiti members (non-Dalit)	4
Shiksha Samiti members	4
N	30

The bulk (90%) of the opinion leaders have interaction with the Scheduled caste panchayat members of their own area. The majority of them have been approached by Dalit panchayat members occasionally for advice regarding various matters. Hence their opinion is based on personal experience.

About 60% of the opinion leaders think that the scheduled caste panchayat members are aware of the problems of the village as well as of their responsibilities. When they are asked about the working of the primary school, health sub-centres and Anganwadis, their responses are as given in the following table;

**Table VI.10**  
**Response**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Primary school</b>	<b>Health sub-centre</b>	<b>Anganwadi</b>
Good	8	6	5
Bad	22	24	25
N	30	30	30

The bulk of the opinion leaders have no hesitation in saying that the functioning of these organisations is not satisfactory. Primary schools suffer from shortage of staff and space for holding classes. Attendance of teachers and students is irregular and school hours are hardly maintained.

The condition of health sub-centres is no better. They function without doctor or medicine. Only immunization of children is done occasionally. 83% of the opinion leaders did not find Anganwadi centres working fruitfully.

The Gram Panchayat which is expected to keep watch on the working of these organisations has failed to do any thing positive. The scheduled caste panchayat members whose own community people could get more benefit from these units, have not been able to improve their functioning.

One of the reasons for malfunctioning of these organisations is lack of co-ordination between government department and the Gram panchayat. It is the government departmental staff does not want the devolution of power to the panchayat and interference of the panchayat members.

Although the bulk of the opinion leaders hold that the scheduled caste members participate in the panchayat meetings, they reported that these meetings are not held regularly. Besides, upper caste members do not relish their presence in the meetings. Factionalism and arbitrary behaviour of Mukhia affect their participation. Participation of scheduled caste EWR is also very low. Apart from the factors mentioned above, their husbands do not allow them to participate in the meetings.

**Table VI.11**  
**Impediments in the performance of duties of the Dalit members**

<b>Impediments</b>	<b>N</b>
Indifference of Mukhia, Pramukh and B.D.O.	14
Lack of adequate powers of Panchayat member	7
Lack of awareness	6
Illiteracy and poverty	3

It is needless to say that the scheduled caste members, irrespective of sex, are unable to carry out their duties. The main hurdle is the indifference of Mukhia, Pramukh and the B.D.O. The panchayat members have no power and depend on the whims of the latter. They are also not aware of their responsibility. Illiteracy and acute poverty also stand in their way.

In order to overcome the prevailing hurdles the opinion leaders have given many suggestions. First of all, the members should be provided intensive training about their duties and responsibilities. They need to be made aware of the different government programmes and be vested with financial power. There should be regular meetings of

the Gram Sabha. They also suggest that before implementation, the programmes should be made public in the village.

The opinion leaders think that with the implementation of the suggestions mentioned above, the scheduled caste members would be empowered and they would be able to put up their problems in the Gram Sabha.

The opinion leaders feel that the process of social, economic and political empowerment has started from the day of their election as panchayat members. They find some change in social status and reduction in untouchability. Some of them have started getting education and becoming socially conscious. Some of them also have developed leadership qualities.

Although economic empowerment among them is not very visible, some of them have got Indira Awas and loan from bank for pursuing some economic activity. Some of them have also purchased small plots of land and this has given them better social status.

Political empowerment of the scheduled caste members is on the rise. Many of them have become politically conscious of their rights and are participating in political activities and raising their voice against injustice done to them.

Empowerment of the scheduled caste members has made significant impact on the people of their community. Occasionally Dalit members discuss their problems in meetings put up their grievances to local political leaders and want to get benefits of the different development schemes.

On the whole, the scheduled caste panchayat members and with their community is on the road to equality and social justice.

## **Summing up**

Most officials feel that the elected members are generally aware of their functions. But their level of awareness can be raised by effective training. The opinion leaders are also of the same view. The officials admit that the confusion about Gram Sabha and Aam Sabha has adversely affected the performance of Panchayat members and retarded their empowerment. Participation of Dalit members has been viewed as satisfactory by officials but not by opinion leaders. In any case they have not much role in decision making process at the Gram Panchayat level. Both officials and opinion leaders are agreed that illiteracy, lack of awareness and arbitrary actions of the Mukhia are the road blocks to the empowerment of the elected men and women representatives. The officials feel that Panchayati Raj has empowered them, while the opinion leaders feel that they have only been put the local to empowerment to achieve equality and social justice.

## VII

### Case Histories

#### 1. Tetari Devi (38), Ward member – Rohtas

**Tetari Devi** wife of Shri Krishna Prasad is a Ward member of Mahrajganj Panchayat under Tilothu block of Rohtas district. She belongs to the Chamar caste. She is only literate but her husband is a Matriculate and is working as a tutor in the same village. She has three daughters and two sons. Three of her children are in school. One of them gets a scholarship. She lives in a one roomed tile roof tenement. She has 10 katha of agricultural land.

She is a member of a self help group. She got loan from SHG under Swarn Jayanti Swarojgar Yojana and purchased she-goats. She is a wage earner. She did not engage in social work before Panchayat election. Her husband's friend inspired her to contest the elections. She had no difficulty in the Panchayat election as she got very good co-operation from villagers. The Mukhia of her Panchayat works arbitrary to implement the Panchayat work. He does not share his power with Ward members. He gave contractorship to his own men. Similarly he appointed Shiksha Mitra from his own family. Tetari Devi complained against the Mukhia to the B.D.O. but the latter favoured Mukhia. She wrote to the B.D.O. but he threw away the complaint. Thereafter, Tetari Devi reacted strongly against his behaviour.

Later Tetari Devi organised villagers and went to Block office in a procession against Mukhia and B.D.O. The B.D.O. was present in his chamber. She went in and threw her chappal on the B.D.O. This was published in newspapers.

She was a member of Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti. The Up-Mukhia was made the contractor of school building but as it was constructed with inferior materials, she stopped the work and got public support for her action.

She is an empowered lady. She demanded road from MLA. She warned the MLA 'No road no vote.' The road was not constructed and ultimately MLA lost the last election.

The empowerment of Tetari Devi is manifested from the several incidents and performance in the Panchayats. In one instance a Panchayat Samiti member was given Rs. 10,000/- for construction of a well. But contractor used low quality bricks. She opposed the construction work. Another construction was stopped for the same reason. Later it was constructed with good quality materials. In this the contractor had to pay from his own pocket.

Similarly a road was constructed with inferior materials. She opposed this. Consequently the contractor was changed. But the new contractor was using earth for filling road in place of sand from Sone river. The contractor offered some commission to her but she refused it. Thereafter road was built with better quality bricks. The Mukhia threatened to implicate her in some false cases. Despite pressure and she did not relent. Out of anger the Mukhia filed a case against her husband.

The Mukhia never told her about schemes and Red card. He distributed Red cards without discussing with Ward member. Mukhia forbade beneficiaries of red card to tell her about the purpose of the red card to Tetari Devi. But Tetari Devi expressed her resentment to the Mukhia for distributing red card without informing ward members.

She could not contest the last election due to pregnancy. During her tenure she did praiseworthy work. She helped poor people to get Indira Awas, Red Card, Old Age Pension, Ration card etc. She is satisfied with her work as a Ward member but unhappy with the activities of Mukhia regarding conducting Gram Sabha meeting. The Mukhia

conducted meeting of Gram Sabha two times at his home and two times at Tilothu although Panchayat headquarter is at Maharajganj. This is why she did not attend the meeting regularly. The other reason for not attending the meeting was the non-execution of approved projects of the Gram Sabha. The Mukhia never implemented the decisions of the Gram Sabha. He was interested in getting signatures of the Ward members on the register. Gram Panchayat Supervisor and other government officials supported Mukhia as they are in his pay. The bureaucracy helps Mukhia as he shares Panchayati Raj with them. Regarding the three standing committee at Panchayat level she was unaware about 'Utpadan Samiti.' She revealed that their Samiti was not constituted by him. Only Sukh-Subidha' and 'Samajik Nyaya' Samitis was formed.

She has not been given job card under National Rural Employment Guarantee programme. This is the work of the Panchayat Seak. She is not aware of this scheme. She is dissatisfied with the performance of Government officials.

The main difficulties she faced during Panchayat work were non cooperation from Mukhia and the Block administration. She did not get any training for her work. Government officials should also be trained so that their attitude can change towards Ward members and other Panchayat representatives. Government functionaries do not co-operate with Panchayat representatives.

She felt that Ward members should have power to change then Mukhiya . Power has not been given to Ward member. This why Mukhia acts in an arbitrary member. Ward members should be given financial and other powers for development work.

She reported that Panchayat representatives are not aware of government programmes. Proper training should be given to Ward Members so that they know their powers and responsibilities.

She believes that development can pick up if financial powers are given to the Ward members.

## **2. Meera Devi (32), Ward Member - Purnia**

**Meera Devi** wife of Dinesh Rishi hails from Musahar tola , Kabaiya Panchayat in East Purnia block. She is a Ward Member. She belongs to Musahar caste. She is literate, landless and daily wage earner. Her husband works in Ludhiana in Punjab in a shawl factory for Rs. 2800/- per month. Her three brothers are teachers. Her father was peon in a government office. She is supported by her parents. She is below poverty line and has been given a house under the Indira Awas Yojana. She was elected a Ward member in the last Panchayat election in 2001. She got inspiration to contest from villagers. They co-operated fully with her during election. She did not face any difficulty at the time of election on account of good management by the authorities.

Although her educational level is low she has keen interest in development work. She is the Secretary of Deena Bhadri Self Help Group which was started in 2002. But the situation of the SHG is precarious. She pointed out that members of SHG do not deposit their money in the SHG account timely. This SHG deposit stands at Rs. 10.000/-

The bulk of the members of her caste are poverty stricken. Meera, like others, finds wage employment only for favour months in the year. Her daily wage is Rs. 20/- - 25/-.

She received monetary assistance from her parents for her elections. Her leadership qualities were promoted by her rearing in an educated family. Economically she has not gained by working as a Ward member as she does not receive any compensation. But socially and politically, she feels stronger. Now she is contesting election as a member of the Panchayat Samiti Her husband is keen to see that his wife wins the election and for this he is working hard. He would not go back to Ludhiana if she wins. He feels that he should remain in the village to help his wife in the discharge of her functions as member of Panchayt Samiti.

Meera Devi's level of awareness regarding Panchayati Raj system has gone up, although no deliberate effort was made for capacity building. She was associated with the work of distribution of Red card, construction of toilets, putting up hand pumps and allotment of houses under the Indira Awas Yojana. All this contributed to her social empowerment. She is satisfied that she learnt many things during interaction with the Panchayati Raj Institutions.

She has good relations with Mukhia and the Panchayat Secretary. She has no interaction with Gram Panchayat Supervisor. The Block office is far away and she did not feel any need to meet the B.D.O. Her self esteem has increased and she has participated in Panchayat as well as NGO meetings. She reported that the Mukhia has not discussed with the annual budget of the Panchayat. She participated in the selection of beneficiaries as well as in the implementation of development work.

She had no information about the formation of standing committee like Production Committee, Social Justice Committee and Sukh Suvidha Samiti as enjoined in the Panchayati Raj Act, 1993. It is reported that the Mukhiya has not formed the production committee in the Panchayat. Generally women Ward members do not attend the meeting. They are represented by their husbands. But Meera Devi participates in all meetings. She feels that Scheduled caste people have not been benefited by these standing committees.

She is keen to raise the level of the participation of members of her community in the political process, this can be facilitated if their poverty is alleviated through government schemes and steps are taken to give them funds for self employment.

She did not come across atrocities on Scheduled caste people in her Panchayat. Exploitation of Dalit has been reduced in this Panchayat. She told that Dalit women do not attend meeting of Gram Sabha as they can engaged in wage labour.

Dalit women have been victim of poverty and illiteracy. They have no occupational mobility and lack wage employment. she suggested that animal husbandry including goatary can be main sources for the livelihood. They have to be made aware and educated for the participation in the Panchayati Raj institutions.

She discussed the main problems of the villagers with particular reference to Scheduled castes. She has got a toilet constructed in the Musahar locality of the village. Her son attends a convent school and two daughters are enrolled in a government school in Purnia.

She has visited the Block office three to four times to meet the Panchayat Secretary to help release of old age pension.

Government officials do not explain programme for the development of Scheduled castes. Bihar Co-operative Development Corporation provides loan and subsidy under ANUBINI and GARIMA Scheme but majority of the representatives of Panchyati Raj Institution do not know about these welfare schemes.

She is the Secretary of SHG but group has not been financed by the Bank. Bank authorities do not give advances to SHG group on the plea that husbands of the women members of SHG group have already taken loans in their individual capacity.

In brief, the process of empowerment is very slow owing to poverty unemployment, illiteracy and alcoholism among Scheduled caste.

She suggested that financial power should be shared by the Mukhia with Ward members. Development work in the Ward should not be finalised without the signature of Ward members. It will stand up their empowerment.

### **3. Subhas Baitha (35), Ward Member- Gopalganj**

Subhas Baitha is a Dhobi by caste and from Singhia Panchayat in the Hathua block of Gopalganj district . He hails from Ahirouli village. He is a matriculate and is engaged in agricultural work as well as wage earning. He has only 10 katha of land. He lives in Indira Awas. He entire future life five years back. He was elected without any contest in the panchayat election in 2001. He has an elder brother, one son and four daughters. All his children go to school. Family members encouraged him to contest election. In his Panchayat.

Gram Sabha has not met . Only Aam Sabha meeting was held. The style of functioning of Panchayat is strange. The authorities do not know the difference between Gram Sabha and Aam Sabha. This is why only Aam Sabha is conducted. Members of Gram Sabha do not know their rights and duties. They are still ignorant about functioning of the Gram Sabha. If they participate in the Aam Sabha the decision taken in the meeting is not recorded in the register in the same day. The Mukhia makes alterations in the proceedings. The decisions are, infact, taken by the Mukhia and he implements those decision. This is why Aam Sabha members are not keen to participate in its meetings. The number of women members is low. They hesitate to participate and raise the problems of the village. Even SC women Ward members do not take part in the meeting regularly. Owing to poverty they have to go to earn their livelihood. Sometimes their husbands attend the meeting. Ward members of the Gram Panchayat have no financial power. They cannot sanction any scheme. Mukhia is all in all in the panchayat. The role of elected member is not clear to the Ward members. They do not know their right and duties. The women ward member do not attend the meeting due to ignorancy and illiteracy .

He felt that zeal and self esteem has increased among the elected SC representatives in Panchayati Raj System. Now they meet government official without

fear. But some women members still hesitate to meet government officials. He never participated in Panchayat meetings to prepare the Annual plan and the annual budget. He never got the opportunity to discuss the income and expenditure of Gram Panchayat. He only participated in the selection of beneficiaries and execution of development works.

No standing committee was formed in his Gram Panchayat. He got two days training for the Panchayati Raj by the government officials. He was satisfied with the training programme but he needs more training for better participation in the execution of development work through the Panchayati Raj.

Regarding National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme he reported that some persons have got job Card but no women was given job card on the ground that women do not go out for work. He was distressed that many poor people have not been included in BPL list. This is important to get benefit from the government programme.

Some scheduled caste women participated in Aam Sabha meetings. They took interest in talking about Indira Awas and old age pension. Reservation has facilitated participation of SC women. He regretted that no MLA /MP comes after winning election. They are seen only at the time of election. MLA /MP have no interest in the development of the village

SC women representatives of Gram Panchayat have to face many difficulties in their work. They also lack education and do not understand paper work. This is why they send their husbands to inquire about the government schemes and their implementation.

He believed that training and economic assistance to Ward members could change their living conditions. The government should organise training camps for them so that they can understand the functioning of Gram Panchayat and their rule and responsibilities.

He is very conscious regarding the functioning of Gram Panchayat. He helped many SC person for the Indira Awas, upgradation of houses, old age pension, Antodaya and road construction. These are the main function of Gram Panchayat. Most of the activities of the Gram Panchayat have not been performed due to non-formation of standing committees like Utpadan Samiti, Samajik Nyaya Samiti and Sukh Subidha Samiti. The Mukhia does what he wants to do for his own benefit. Ward members suggestions are brushed aside.

Government officials do not listen to Ward members. They share the benefits from the development schemes with the Mukhia who acts at their behest.

#### **4. Ashok Rajak (34), Ward Member - Samastipur**

Shri shok Rajak is a Ward Member of Pagda Panchayat of Dalsingh Sarai Block in Samastipur district. He belongs to Dhobi caste and is a graduate. Presently he is engaged in laundry work which is his caste occupation. He has a two-roomed kachcha house. He has no agricultural land. He has three sisters and one brother and all are married. He has two sons and one daughter. Both the sons are in school. The daughter studied upto 6<sup>th</sup> class and she is married. His father and mother are also engaged in the same profession. His father is a Matriculate. His wife studied upto 8<sup>th</sup> class and now engaged in household work.

He contested Panchayat election at the suggestion of his mother. His friends helped d in the election. During election he has to close his loundary. His monthly

income is Rs. 3000/- His family members help him in his work. the problem of safe drinking water is there as the handpumps are not functioned and the water level is going down. There is no elecricity, and roads are broken. Unemployment among youths is rampant . Panchayat does not have adequate financial powers to improve the situation.

He has helped the villagers in the upgradation of houses, repair of Choupal Bhawan and installation of handpumps. He took initiative to get this work done. Although some people opposed and created obstacles in his work but he got success.

Although scheduled castes have been benefited by the Gram panchayat work but Dom and Mochi of his Ward have not been benefited as the Mukhia helped only his own caste-men.

Majority of the beneficiaries are satisfied with his work. He got training in Kewta village by the Circle Officer but it was only for one day. The quality of training was not very good. This was only for name sake. Most of the trainees could not learn about the role and responsibility of panchayat representatives.

Government official's attitude is not helpful for the panchayat representative. Their behaviour has not changed. They do not want the development of the Panchayat . They make money through the Mukhia in the development work. Mukhia does not share his power. He does as he wants. The condition of school has improved and attendance of the teacher in the school has increased. Anganwadi centre is not working properly. The standing committees have not been formed. The Mukhia is not very clear regarding the functioning of the committees. He is interested in construction work rather than other development schemes. Government has provided Panchayat representatives from scheduled castes but middlemen and government officials are still dominant. They have grabbed the power of the Ward members. If the latter complain against Mukhia,

government officials turn deaf. Virtually they have usurped the powers of Panchayat representatives.

The suggestions given by the Ward members are not implemented by the Mukhia. He does not care about the needs of Wards. The main problems such as safe drinking water, defunct handpumps, irregular supply of electricity and unemployment etc are neglected by the Mukhia.

Ashok Rajak expects much from Panchayati Raj. He opined that future is good under Panchayati Raj system and employment should be given through Panchayat. Trained and educated persons should be given employment. Only then the condition of Wards and villages can improve. The main problem of SC representatives are illiteracy and economic distress. They do not participate in the Panchayat activities regularly as they are engaged in making a living. They have no time and money to participate in the meeting. Particularly women members suffer from illiteracy and abject poverty. Although reservation gave fresh opportunities to the Scheduled caste people but they are not able to full their weight.

He was aspiring to contest for the post of Mukhia in the Panchayat election 2006 but it was reserved for women. He felt that opportunity should be given to others also. Now he is happy that Gram Kachahari (Village Court ) has been formed in 2006. This has also raised the self esteem of many SC representatives who have won the post of Panch and Sarpanch. This would boost their morale. Though this process Scheduled caste Panchayat representatives would get better social status in the society through participation in the administration of public.

Household work load and lack of good training for the Panchayati Raj system hamper their participation. He suggested that economic assistance, employment,

training and education should be provided to them. Only then they can participate in this three tier Panchayati Raj System. Not only women but also male Panchayat representatives also face same problems. Awareness generation is a must for them. They are still ignorant regarding government schemes meant for them and their panchayat. Provision of social security like maternity benefit, old age and widow pensions and other welfare schemes are also not known to them.

He stressed that government should arrange awareness camps for them and provide them training for the PRIs functions and responsibilities as well as government schemes for village development. Standing committees should be formed in Panchayats and SC members should be made members of those committees only then the empowerment of scheduled caste panchayat representatives can take place.

#### **5. Nawal Kishore Paswan (31), Mukhia – Samastipur**

Shri Nawal Paswan hails from Dainy Pagda village under Pagda Gram Panchayat of Dalsing Sarai Block in Samastipur district. He is a Dusadh and a graduate. Presently he is engaged in agricultural work in his native place. He owns 5 acres of agricultural land and a Pucca house. His annual income is Rs. 1 lac. He started his political life from 1994 as a Bhartiya Janta Party Cadre. Shri Kamlesh Jha was his political Guru. In 2001 he joined Rastriya Janta Dal and presently he is in Lok Jan Shakti Party. Before contesting Panchayat election 2001 he was engaged in social work in the village. He helped many people in need. Consequently he did not face problem during election. Villagers helped him to canvas support.

He is keenly interested to make his Panchayat a model for development work. He got several development works executed like installation of handpumps, construction of road community halls and 188 Indira Awas, red card (BPL), yellow card (Antyodaya) and white card (Annapurna). For education he started two Lok Shikshan

Kendras. Nine Anganwari centre and were started 99 dilapidated houses were upgraded. He did quality work and there was transparency in the governing of the Panchayat.

In the election of Panchayat in the year 2006 he could not contest as his Panchayat was reserved for women. He set up his wife for the election and she won the seat.

He has grown vegetables in his field. The yield was so high that scientists from Rajendra Agriculture University came to visit the field. This created good impact in the village. Some villagers also adopted this cultivation and Shri Nawal Paswan was hailed as a progressive farmer. Previously the socio-economic condition of Shri Nawal Paswan is not good. But after winning the Mukhia post in Panchayat election, his economic condition has improved. He wants to produce, lemon grass in his field. This will fetch him better returns. As a Mukhia he has faced problems in land related cases but got success through the help of people. He constructed roads, put up electricity pole and installed two transformers.

He has done praiseworthy work for improving of status of women by calling them in Gram Sabha and invited them to participate in politics. Beneficiaries of the government scheme are very satisfied.

He has got two days training on Panchayati Raj by C.O. of the Block. But he is not satisfied with the training. It was only for the paper sake. The quality of training was poor. The trainees did not know many things regarding the functions of Government officials and were confused about the Panchayti Raj system. The instructors did not explain ins and outs of the PRI. They think this will limit the powers of the bureaucracy.

No efforts has been made for the better training for the Scheduled caste, women and marginalised people. Virtually training was confined only to awareness regarding Gram Panchayat. There was no emphasis on the capacity building of weaker section of the society. Even government officials are not equipped with the knowledge regarding the function and powers of the Panchayats. He suggested that there should be arrangement of training for the elected representatives like women, scheduled caste and marginalised and weaker section of the society. There should be expert resource person for the training. There was only one training for two days during last five years. No orientation and follow up training programme were organised by the Government officials as do not want to share many things. They fear that they will lose their control over the system.

Only two Standing committees have been formed in the Panchayat. Nigrani Samiti and Utpadan Samiti have not been formed. Regarding the Utpadan Samiti he reported that there is no factory in our Panchayat consequently there is no production. This is why there is no any Utpadan Samiti. Due to lack of proper training he has not been able to understand the objective, function and importance of Utpadan Samiti. Utpadan Samiti is concerned with any kind of production from agriculture animal husbandry, small scale and cottage industry.

He pointed out that Samajik Nyaya Samiti as well as Sukh Suvidha Samiti have been formed. Sukh Suvidha Samiti has appointed Shiksha Mitra and Health workers. The Samajik Nyaya Samiti was looking after Public Distribution System Shop under the National Health Mission. Scheduled caste people have been benefitted through this standing committee. It distributed scholarship to Scheduled caste students from 2 to 5<sup>th</sup> Class got scholarship.

The attendance of Scheduled caste women remains adequate in the meeting of Aam Sabha. Their participation in discussions is low. Participation of SC women can improve if the more benefit from the Government programmes flow to them. The reason behind the low participation of Scheduled caste people like Musahar and Dom is illiteracy and economic distress. The same problems exist in the empowerment of Scheduled caste women representatives of Panchayat. The majority of women representatives elected to the Panchayats are first timers. They do not have requisite information on development programmes implemented by Panchayat. Sri Paswan suggested that there should be arrangement of loan from bank so that credit can flow to them without payment of commission Bank offices. The best way for empowering the Scheduled caste Panchayat representatives are education and opportunities for the employment.

The main work performed by the Gram Panchayat was provision of drinking water, Indira Awas, Construction of road, drain and pavements, making of BPL list and appointment of Shiksha Mintra and ASHA and Anganwari workers. No effort was made for the development of horticulture, waste land as well as pasture. Animal husbandry , dairy industry, poultry, fishery, forestry, khadi, village and cottage industrie. Many kinds of works assigned to Gram Panchayat have not been done. The reasons for zero performance in these sectors is lack of awareness as well as training, lack of will power of government staff and their ignorance. They do not share the knowledge and power with panchayat representatives.

For the empowerment of SC Panchayat representatives government should provide employment, training and education to SC people. Only then the condition of SC representative can improve. The attitude of Government official must change so that Panchayat representatives can be benefitted in a large measure.

## **6. Bulaki Manjhi (53), Mukhia - Gaya**

Six k.m. south of the office of the B.D.O., Amas there is a village called Bhupnagar. It is surrounded by hills and forests. This small village was settled in 1954. About 251 acres of land was donated to Vinobaji under the Bhoodan movement by a local landlord Bhup Babu. Bhuiya families were settled in this village. This is why the village population comprises only one community.

Bulaki Manjhi is the Mukhia of the local panchayat. His father Bipat Manjhi was earlier a bonded labourer. Although he was completely unlettered, he joined people's struggles when required. This was because he had opportunities of moving with Dr. Ram Manohar Lohia for sometime. He never contested an election but was always addressed as Mukhiaji. Bulaki Manjhi inherited leadership qualities from his father and became an elected Mukhia. There are only nine panchayats in Amas Block. Bulaki Manjhi is the most popular Mukhia in this Block. He is dark skinned and very soft spoken. Although he is now 53 years of age he is bent down. But this abnormality is not due to old age. this is due to presence of fluoride in the locally available drinking water. This has affected many persons in this area. Bulaki Manjhi informed the authorities about this problem. Later on, he organised an agitation. The District Magistrate sent a team of doctors to assess the situation and to take steps for solving this problem. After sometime with the help of UNICEF water filter was made available so that people could be provided with safe drinking water.

Bulaki Manjhi did not receive any formal education. This was on account of the fact that no educational facility was available in the nearby area and Bulaki Manjhi's parents could not afford to send him to school. Vinobaji had established an Ashram in

the midst of hills and forests at Lutwa.. Some French Volunteers were stationed in the Ashram for agricultural development one of them was John Peer. These volunteers made strenuous efforts to level the ground and make it fit for cultivation. They also trained a number of poor youths for the development of agriculture. Two Sarvodaya leaders Diwakar Bhai and Jagdeo Babu were associated with this Ashram. Bulaki came into contact with them and got some training in keeping accounts and in the repair of diesel pumping sets. On account of contact with Sarvodaya leaders Bulaki was deeply influenced by Sarvodaya ideals and began taking steps for constructive development activities in and around his village. From 1974 to 1978 he worked as the Manager of Lutwa Ashram. He was very active in the J. P. movement.

Bulaki Manjhi helped in the distribution of Bhoodan land to the landless. Later he came to be associated with a voluntary organisation called Prayas. He got a road constructed in the forest area through Shramdan (voluntary labour). Now is known in two Blocks Banke Bajar and Amas as a constructive and militant social worker. He also converted a large area covered by bushes into arable land. For irrigating this he got a dam constructed in a local stream with government help. On account of his efforts the Minister in charge of health has assured him of providing better facilities for supply of potable water. He has cultivated good relationship with political leaders and joined the Rashtriya Janata Dal. From the time he became Mukhia of the Panchayat he is trying hard to step up development work.

Bulaki Manjhi has received love and support from people of different castes in his panchayat. He uses Panchayat funds judiciously and has earned the appreciation of the people in the locality. In the 2006 panchayat elections the Mukhia's post in his Panchayat has been reserved for women. He has arranged that his wife will contest for the Mukhia's post this time. He himself hopes to contest the election for the Bihar

Legislative Assembly next time from Gura Assembly Constituency. Meanwhile he will contribute to development work with greater devotion.

Amas Block has been wholly engulfed by Naxalite elements. There is constant pressure on Bulaki Manjhi from them but he has not succumbed due to his deep commitment to non-violence. In spite of this, he enjoys respect from the Naxalite leaders. On account of his simplicity and honesty, he has received praise from high government officials.

#### **7. Roopkali Devi (66), Panchayat Samiti Member- West Champaran**

Smt. Roopkali Devi hails from Barbat Prasarain of Bettia block in the West Champaran district. She belongs to Dusadh caste. She passed middle school and is trained in Nursing. Her husband is a Congress party worker. Her mother was a teacher. Her grandfather was functionary in Bettia Raj. She has two sons and one daughter. Both the sons and daughters are graduates. Her daughters-in-law are also graduate. Both the sons are unemployed.

Originally she belongs to Bharoganj in Bagaha block of the district. She owns 6 acres of land at her native place. Barbat Prasarain is her mother's home but she has her own pucca house.

Some villagers requested to her to contest in Panchayat election in 2001. She was elected without contest. As a member of Panchayat Samiti she became up-Pramukh. She is not happy with the functioning of Panchayat and the Panchayat Samiti.

She does not like the excessive power of Mukhiya and Pramukh given under Panchayati Raj system. The Mukhiya and Pramukh are the main actors in PRI system.

They do not pay attention to Scheduled caste representatives of Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti. She had to face problems due to functioning style of both, the Mukhiya and Pramukh.

Despite difficulties like non-cooperation from Mukhiya and Pramukh, she has helped Scheduled caste people of the Panchayat Samiti to provide Indira Awas and old age pension. She lamented that nothing much was done for the well being of women. She was not satisfied with her own role. The reason behind the proper performance of women and other development workers was lack of funds. She could not become effective as no training was given to her for capacity building.

The social status of Rupkali Devi has improved but economically she is still handicapped. There is no honorarium for working for the Panchayat Samiti and no travelling allowance was given to her. Although the attitude of Panchayat Secretary and Gram Panchayat supervisor is good, Mukhia and Pramukh did not behave well. The Pramukh was in custody. Aganwadi centre was not functioning well. She pointed out that Schedule caste representatives do not participate in the discussions and decision making about the annual budget of Panchayat as well as selection of beneficiaries. They do not play any role in the implementation of development work of Panchayat as well as Panchayat Samiti. The Production Committee has not been formed in the Panchayat. She was not aware about Samkajik Nyay Samiti and Sukh Subidha Samiti. She was unable to discuss regarding the involvement of SC members in the Samiti. The meeting of Samiti was not held in the premises of the Panchayat. The reason for this was arbitrary decision of Mukhia. There was no case of atrocities on women and Scheduled castes in her knowledge.

The Scheduled caste women participate in the meeting of Gram Sabha. They raised their voices against Mukhiya for the payment of Old Age Pension consequently

distribution of old age pension took place. Now Scheduled caste people are ready to raise their voice for other causes. Mrs Roopkali Devi contested for the post of Mukhia. She is an empowered lady but she was afraid as other candidates could use money for getting votes. She remarked that honest people can not win elections.

She was highly dissatisfied with the activities of Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti and Block office. She felt that Mukhiya, Pramukh and B.D.O. share the spoils in the P.R. I. system. Gram Sevak / Panchayat Secretary support strong Mukhia and Pramukh. No Mukhiya / Pramukh wants to share power with the other representatives in Panchayati Raj system.

She expected that SC representatives would be empowered through the efforts of the government. The reason for poor empowerment among SC representatives was lack of education and lack of courage.

She suggested that SC representatives could be empowered by providing education, income boosting schemes and better employment opportunities. Every representative should be given financial power for the implementation of the government schemes. Musahar and Dom have poor representation in Panchayati Raj Institutions due to the terror of powerful men.

The empowerment of elected representatives will take place slowly. Bureaucracy might be an important instrument for empowerment . But presently Government officials do not encourage the SC representatives of Panchayati Raj system. This is the main reason why Mukhia do not share power with Ward members. The standing committees at the Panchayat level have not due continued Meetings of Gram Sabha are not held regularly. This is the main cause behind non-participation of Scheduled castes and women in Panchayati Raj system.

## **8. Azadi Devi (38) Panchayat Samiti Memembr**

Smt. Azadi Devi wife of Shri Lakshman Paswan and a member of Panchayat Samiti hails from Bidishi tola under Thawe Block of Gopalganj district. She is a Dusadh. She is trained graduate. Now she is house wife looking after her children. She has two daughters and one son. Her eldest daughter is studying in I.Sc. and the other is in 10<sup>th</sup> class and her son is a student of 4<sup>th</sup> class. Her father-in-law is a retired government servant. Her husband is a Panchayat Secretary in Barauli Block of Gopalganj district. She has a Pucca building with toilet and handpump as well as mobile set and a motor cycle. She has good family background. She is very much concious and progressive women in her community. The villagers have confidence in her. She is highly co-operative women and helps her neighbours.

She contested the Panchayat election without any inspiration from outside. Being a B.A. B.Ed. she is interested in government job. She applied for the post of Child Development Project Officer but did not get the job. She will apply for the post of teacher in a High school. She helped the villagers in the office related work. She helped some persons to get loan from the bank. Villages also helped her at the time of election. Some of the villagers helped in the publicity work in the village. They canvassed vote for Azadi Devi. She did not face any trouble at the time of election for the Panchayat Samiti (2001).

She is a progressive woman. This is evident from her behaviour and action at home and outside. She is educating her niece also.

She contested for the post of ``Sarpanch'' in the Panchayat election held in 2006 but lost by a small margin. But she was not disappointed. She expects to be selected for the post of teacher in middle or High school. She did not get training for the

Panchayati Raj. This is the main reason of lack of awareness regarding the role and responsibilities of Panchayat Samiti member. This is essential for capacity building of the Panchayat representative for the better performance. Panchayat members would know the power and responsibilities given by the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment of the Constitution. Each and every members of Panchayat will follow the rules and regulation made under PRI. Panchayat representatives of Scheduled caste do not have any role in the decision making process of the Gram Panchayat. All matters are decided by the powerful persons of the Panchayat. The important reason for non-performance of their role and responsibilities are the lack of understanding about the responsibilities of the post they hold.

She holds that elected Panchayat representatives among Scheduled castes has not been empowered. There is some change in social status. So far as economic condition is concerned there is not much change. Under the government scheme of Indira Awas and upgradation of housing some of the members of Panchayat Samiti and Gram Panchayat have got financial assistance for the construction of their dwelling. Politically they have been sensitized but on account of abject poverty and despondency they have no say in the society. As there is a provision to spend 22.5% of the development fund for the Scheduled caste people, they have been benefitted to the some extent. Indira Awas, construction of road, drain and community hall and sheds for cottage industries have been made through the Gram Panchayat.

The condition of Aganbari is not good. It is due to lack of proper monitoring system. The Child Development Officer, Aganwari worker and Mukhia have an unholy nexus. This is why villagers are unhappy with the working of Aganwari centre. As a matter of fact, it is not Panchayati Raj but `Mukhia Raj'. It is the Mukhia who rules not the Panchayat member or Gram Sabha members. The meeting of the Gram Sabha is rarely held. Not even executive committee of Gram Panchayat meets regularly but the

proceedings of the meetings and recorded with the signatures or thumb impressions of the members. Minutes and proceeding book is written not in Gram Sabha meeting but at the residence of Mukhia.

It is unfortunate that Gram Sabha has been totally marginalised and only 'Aam Sabha' meets. Neither Panchayat members nor Government officials have a clear idea regarding 'Gram Sabha'. This is one of the major reasons for the inadequate participation of the Panchayat representatives in Panchayati Raj. Petty bureaucracy at the local level wields much power. Most of those who are elected to run the Panchayati Raj are not educated. They lack previous training. Some of the women members feel shy to attend the meeting consequently. They send their husbands to participate in the meeting and other Panchayat activities. She related her experiences of a Mukhia bypassing the rules in the selection of members and Secretary of Vidyalaya Shiksha Samiti. Mukhia did not organise the meeting of villagers but selected Secretary as well as members of his own choice. He did not consult others for this purpose. When people complained to the B.D.O. of Thawe Block he turned deaf ear. He always supports the Mukhia blindly because he expects some consideration from the Mukhia for this obliging him.

Azadi Devi was earlier Secretary of the Vidyalaya Samiti but Mukha selected some other person for that post. Now she is frustrated with the functioning of the Mukhia. She wanted to fight against the officials but her father-in-law asked her not to get involved in any kind of fight. He advised her that as she has to join government service it is not prudent to take additional burden without any substantial benefit.

For the empowerment of Scheduled caste Panchayat representatives she suggested training, employment, better environment and economic assistance. Only then they can muster courage and use their talents to improve the Panchayati Raj in

Bihar. Owing to extreme poverty, illiteracy, economic hardship and lack of awareness good participation in the PRI system by the Musahar and Dom caste is not possible. They feel neglected by the wider society. MLA and MP do not help the Dalit representatives of PRI system.

After a long gap of 23 years PRI system has emerged in Bihar, Scheduled caste people feel better owing to formal participation through the reservation policy. Now they have opportunity to be elected in P.R. Institutions. The future of PRI is good if government functionaries encourage them to work properly.

#### **9. Satyendra Kumar Bharti (35), Member of Panchayat Samiti- Gaya**

Shri satyendra Kumar Bharti son of Shri Baleshwar Das hails from Manainee village in Wazirganj Block of Gaya district. He passed B.A. with History honours in 1991. He belongs to the Chamar Caste. He is engaged in agriculture as a share cropper. His father is a cobbler in Kolkata. He owns 3 bigha of unirrigated land. His family income is Rs. 15000/-. His house is built partly with mud and partly with bricks. All his four brothers are graduates. He has 3 sons and 2 daughters. One of daughters is married. All his other children are enrolled in government schools. His sons are getting scholarship from government.

Shri Bharti is a dedicated cadre of Communist Party of India (Marxist) from last ten years. Politically he is a dedicated man. He has done social work in his area. He helped many patients to get medical help from doctors. Poor people do not know about the doctors and their clinics. He helps patients to reach renowned doctors and see them treat poor patients at concessional rates.

Being unemployed he had applied twice to Bihar State Scheduled Caste Development Corporation for loan but he could not get succeed due to corruption and red tapism. This was the case five years before. He still wants loans to start some business. On account of his failure to get government help he has lost faith to the government officials.

He observed that Government officials do not have a helpful attitude towards Scheduled caste members of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Bihar. So far as the empowerment of SC representative of Panchayati Raj Institution is concerned, he regretted that no capacity building programme has been implemented for them. Mr. Bharti is a progressive and popular representative in his Block. He has good understanding of the social realities in the area. For the people he fought with Pramukh. Development is the main priority with him. Previous Pramukh did not cooperate with the members of Panchayat Samiti. By the efforts of Bharti one scheduled caste member of Panchayat Samiti became Pramukh. This replacement stepped up the implementation of development schemes. He has keen interest in development work. Due to conflict with the previous Pramukh, development work suffered for the last three years.

He faced many problems in performing Panchayat Samiti work. He alleged that government functionaries claim amount from the scheme for their execution. He reserved the indifference of the government staff.

Although he is member of CPM from last ten years, he felt more empowered when he became member of Panchayat Samiti. He got inspiration from CPM party member for contesting for the post of Panchayat Samiti. Party members and villagers also helped him to win the election. He lamented that he could not get full support from all the members of the society. He faced problems from the big landlords as well as governmental officials.

He reported that the socio-economic and political condition of elected representative of Scheduled caste has improved. He pointed out that scheduled caste people have been benefited through Indira Awas, Red Card, Antyodaya, Annapurna, Maternity benefit scheme etc.

Awareness among representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions has increased. He felt that money and muscle power dominates village society. This is why the condition of Aganwadi and school has deteriorated. Government officials do not share power and information with the representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs). The participation of Scheduled caste women representatives in PRIs is nominal. He reported that SC women do not speak up in the meeting of Gram Sabha. They have no awareness regarding government programmes meant for them. There is provision of Utapadan Samiti, Nyaya Samiti and Sukh Subidha Samiti at Panchayat level but only Sukh Subidha Samiti has been formed. Owing to lack of awareness about government programmes, Dalit women do not speak in the meeting.

Capacity building programme has not been organised for the members of Panchayat and Panchayat Samiti. There is lack of full participation by the elected representatives due to ignorance about the functioning of Panchayat at Panchayat Samiti. Dominant people always suppress them. This is the cause of the low participation in the political process by the weaker section of Scheduled caste i.e. Musahar and Dom etc.

The main constraints in the empowerment of women representative of scheduled caste are lack of money, education, fear of dominant castes and lack of knowledge regarding government programmes.

On account of abject poverty, Scheduled caste representatives of Panchayati Raj Institution pay more attention to earn their livelihood. They prefer to work for daily wage rather than attending meeting at Panchayat or Block level. This is more true if the PRI elected forum is the only bread earner for the family. The weak socio-economic condition inhibits their participation in Panchayati Raj Institutions.

He suggested that if Scheduled caste Panchayat representatives have to be empowered they should be trained and power should be transferred to them by the officials. No scheme should be finalised without the participation of Scheduled caste representatives.

He felt that Mukhia was least interested in helping the Scheduled caste persons. He added that Scheduled caste people are being harassed by the complex procedures and the indifferent attitude of the government staff.

There is immediate need for the positive intervention by the state in this regard. There should be proper capacity building of scheduled caste representatives of Panchayati Raj Institutions. They should be properly educated and be made economically self-reliant . Their powerlessness should be removed by providing more powers and funds to them.

Administration should promote their participation in the choice and implementation of schemes for development. Only then participatory democracy through Panchayati Raj Institutions can be established.

## VIII

### Tasks Ahead and Agenda for Action

#### Poverty and Deprivation

This study seeks to assess the extent of empowerment of the Dalit elected representatives in Panchayati Raj institutions in Bihar. This task cannot be viewed in isolation. It is part of the overall vision for the future of the Dalit. The entire process of empowerment depends upon many factors of which Panchayati Raj is one. The Dalits have been victims of destitution, deprivation and debt bondage for a very long time. An economically backward society such as Bihar lacks all those dynamic qualities that engender, support, sustain and speed up socio-economic growth. Removal of all the road blocks is a prerequisite for empowerment.

All these factors cannot be controlled by an individual or a group of individuals. The state has to come forward and intervene to remove these roadblocks and to create positive conditions necessary for empowerment. The nexus between social structural factors and the motivational behavioural handicaps in a society suffering from economic backwardness tends to freeze the pattern of unequal distribution of societal resources. This results in a state of persistent poverty. People caught in a trap of poverty and helplessness find it very difficult to cross over the other side of poverty and deprivation. Even if there are new opportunities for status mobility, they remain out of reach for the poor due to the lack of requisite resources necessary for availing these opportunities. This inability also prevents them from participating and acting effectively in other areas of life. Disability breeds disability and inequality in the economic field creates cumulative inequality.

It is in this context that there is insistence on empowering the poor to get their due share in and access to societal resources. Even the state-sponsored process of

development has made only a slight dent in the dense structure of inequality, exploitation and oppression that have incapacitated marginalised people for centuries. One solution for this problem should be to allow the people to take forcibly what they cannot get amicably. Many extremist groups are in favour of such action. However, in our country the empowerment of marginalised section of the society must be sought within the framework of democratic politics.

### **Psychological Mobilization**

Empowerment is not a thing or an object which can either be gifted or picked up. It has to be cultivated through transforming the state of helplessness and passivity into a state of hope and action. This can be achieved through psychological mobilisation of people which would result in the rejection of those values and beliefs that support and re-enforce inequality and institutions created to perpetuate it in different forms. This is necessary for demolishing the edifice of inequality, injustice and exploitation. It induces a radical change in one's personality resulting in a new approach to the prevailing situation and also in doing things. However, the state particularly in its democratic political set up, cannot take up this task. It has to be left for the civil society organisations and social leaders as well as the forces like industrialisation.

Several recent studies on the problems and prospect of development of the Dalit in Bihar have demonstrated how they succeeded in throwing away the shackles of the culture of poverty. Their voices are becoming assertive. They are not prepared to stay in silence and raise strong protests. They are determined to do something to improve their quality of life and raising their levels of living. What frustrates them is the lack of resources and assets. It is thus clear that political empowerment has to be supported by economic empowerment. Without this elected Dalit representatives are not able to participate in the decision making process for promoting collective good.

## **Conscientization and Identity Formation**

The process of demolition of the existing structure of subordination and redistribution of power is not automatic. It involves a participatory approach that enables people to emancipate themselves. It is a process of conscientisation. Empowerment is viewed not as an end in itself but a means to an end a strategy to bring liberation from all domination. Conscientisation is a deepening of the attitude of awareness. By achieving this awareness the oppressed come to perceive reality differently. Most of the Dalits are terribly afraid of powerful men in the village who have exploited and oppressed them for ages unless they shake off their dependency on such persons they cannot banish fear. The socio-economic bases of their marginalisation and powerlessness are institutionalised. As a process of empowerment aims to demolish the structure of the society. This leads to creation of a new identity which has the potential of challenging the existing social order. It is in this scenario that the NGOs can play a vital role. However, most of their development initiatives have been top down induced social process. Microplanning and participatory programme planning have not been built in the rural development planning process on a large scale.

Panchayati Raj Institutions possess all the potentials for the creation of new social identities. It is an indigenous institution with historical roots and fits in with the existing socio-cultural arrangement of society. It is a formal and institutionalized arrangements but it provides a platform for grassroots action. At many places in India it has emerged as an instrument of liberation, education, collective intervention and critical thinking of marginalised groups to shape their future in terms of their own world view. It has provided the oppressed and enabling provision to be masters of their own destiny.

## **Interface with Bureaucracy**

One of the important causes for the poor performance of Panchayati Raj has been the conflict between officials and elected representatives. Pandit Nehru in one of his speeches in 1959 observed **“We do not want the officials to interfere too much in the life of the village. We want to build Swaraj right from the village up”**. Unfortunately what has happened is just the reverse. Balwant Rai Mehta bemoaned the role of bureaucracy in distancing PRIs from the development process. He was averse to their being entrusted with additional functions and would not easily get adjusted to working under the supervision of elected representatives. **L. M. Singhvi** had identified the bureaucratic unfriendly approach towards Panchayati Raj Institutions and noted that bureaucracy was becoming alienated and had begun to resort to systematic bypassing of PRI. **Kuldip Mathur** stated that administrators did not like flourishing local leadership and viewed it as a serious threat to their authority influence and power.

Indian bureaucracy still carries with it certain attitudes and values of the colonial past. It conceives itself to be a class apart from the people and has to maintain distance from the masses. The justification for this is sought in the three attributes of the bureaucratic machinery, anonymity, impartiality and impersonal attitude to work. These attributes may have been valuable for regulatory administration but may be speed breakers for development administration. When the goal of governance is human development or empowering people, the perspective has to change.

State-level politicians and state – level bureaucracies are generally regarded as the main obstacles in the path of decentralised governance. Bureaucracy is known for its resistance to change. This becomes more obvious when the change involves the bureaucratic machinery itself. The changes would cause net reduction in the amount of resources under their control. This will considerably limit their power. Their argument is that the PRIs will misuse the resources, violate financial discipline and act against the

interest of the weaker section. It starts a whisper campaign that if anything is entrusted to the PRIs beyond agency functions the state government will become powerless. The views of state level politicians are almost the same as those of the bureaucrats. They are afraid that people will get closer to panchayat functionaries who will disburse small favours to them and this will create some kind of dependence on the leaders of the PRIs. The combination of bureaucracy and state level politicians who share the threat of losing power will make the functioning of PRIs difficult. The petty state functionaries also prefer to be under the remote control of their own departmental bosses rather than subjecting themselves to the local control by the PRIs. The state level politician appears to be more at home with the bureaucracy at district level rather than with the elected representatives working in the PRIs.

The elected representatives in the PRIs view the new system as an exercise in involving transfer of power from a reluctant bureaucracy to the political leadership at the local level. Sometimes they tend to become assertive or even abrasive in dealing with local level government functionaries.

The principal responsibility to ensure smooth interface lies with the lawmakers at the state level. Severest controls have been introduced to see that PRIs do not abuse their powers and making everyone of their decisions subject to review and revision by the officers of the state government. Such laws and rules have the inherent potential of creating misunderstanding between the local bureaucracy and the elected representatives. The elected representatives have to be properly briefed about their role and limitations. Local officials if handled carefully can become efficient tools to deliver the goods. Training, awareness and motivation programmes have to be organised not only for the elected representatives but also for the local level functionaries. These programmes can be arranged both independently and jointly not only to equip them for the tasks but helping them to coexist harmoniously. If the bureaucracy has adjusted

itself to the system of democratic governments at the centre and in the states there is no reason why it should not be able to do so in the case of Panchayati Raj Institutions. There may be some resistance in the beginning but if the state government has the political will and sincerity to transfer power to the PRIs it can make the bureaucracy adjust itself accordingly. Experience in West Bengal, Karnataka and Kerala has been very positive. However, the mutual support and co-operation between elected representatives and officials cannot be ensured through government orders and circulars. It can be ensured only through continuous process of discussions, conferences and training.

### **Involvement of Ward Members**

88% of elected representatives in Panchayati Raj Institutions in Bihar were Ward members or members of the Gram Panchayat. It is necessary to empower them so that they are fully involved in Panchayat work. At present their involvement is minimal. According to the provisions of the Bihar Panchayat Act, 1993 all decisions in the Gram Panchayat have to be taken by the Gram Panchayat body headed by the Mukhia. However, the Mukhia sidelines the Ward members and takes all the decisions himself. The Ward members resent this but are unable to pressurise the Mukhia so that he accepts their advice and thereby there is a token sharing of power. Most of the case histories of the Ward members are a testimony to this better experience. This is all the more true of Dalit Ward members both men and women who have been elected for the first time. This is their first tryst with politics and their frustration is natural since they have no chance of gaining power which is the assence of politics. But in a way, they are themselves to be blamed for this state of affairs. They are largely unaware of their powers and responsibilities. They are ill-equipped for opposition to the Mukhia. The level of their education even if they are literate is low. They are not able to comprehend the intricacies of official procedures. This is more so in case of women. If a woman conducts Panchayat affairs on her own and fully participates in the decision making

process and gets things done for the community by interacting with outside agencies, she is fully empowered. At the other extreme, if a woman does not come out of her house and signs or gives her thumb impression on the dotted line as directed by her husband acting as Pradhanpati it is a case of zero empowerment. Proxy women in PRI represent the inchoate empowerment. A more nuanced view is that it heralds the entry of women in the political arena, a phenomena which will inevitably change politics in new ways; women would become more capable and rational agents of change not as dependent and ignorant victims as assumed by the proxy concept. In course of time they will become fully empowered.

### **Awareness, Training and Education**

The immediate task for making empowerment a reality, there should be a vigorous campaign for awareness building and a crash programme for eradicating illiteracy among the non-literate men and women elected representatives. This has to be followed up by a continuing education programme so that in course of time they reach a critical level of understanding of their own powers and potential.

### **Energizing the Gram Sabha**

Empowerment of Dalit elected representatives can be made operational if the Gram Sabhas are energised. The Gram Sabha has been conceived as an effective instrument for the real exercise of people's power at the grass-root level. The Ward member's role in this task is extremely important. The area they have to move about is small and the people who have to be involved are familiar. If the Ward members are motivated they can organise Gram Sabha meetings at frequent intervals and convert it into a vibrant body for initiating development interventions necessary for upgrading the quality of life of the people. With this effort they would not only be instrumental in empowering themselves but they would also achieve the real goal of Panchayati Raj reaching power to the people.

### **Compensation for loss of income due to working for the Panchayati**

It has been mentioned above that one of the reasons for the poor attendance of Dalit elected representatives is their poverty. Regular attendance at meetings of the Gram Panchayat, standing committee and move frequently of the Gram Sabha means loss of wages for several days every month. It is, therefore, necessary to compensate them for this loss. Social and political work at the Gram Panchayat level cannot be done by sacrificing their hard earned income. There have been cases in which Ward members have taken up employment outside their own areas and even outside the state and given up their membership.

### **Organization of Training Programmes**

In order to make the participation of Dalit representatives in Panchayati Raj meeting effective and fruitful it is necessary to provide for at least a three day orientation training so that they get acquainted with the nuances of Panchayati Raj particularly about the role of functionaries at different levels, tasks set for them, the role of government functionaries at the Panchayat level as well as the relationship between them and the departmental staff placed at their disposal by the various government departments. After the initial orientation training they should be invited to attend shorter refresher courses in which they can share their experiences, problems and solutions with their counterparts in neighbouring area. Such peer group interaction will lead to a better comprehension of the tasks and the various alternative modes of going about them. Uptil now the training programmes organised for them were mere formality. This training was imparted by government officials who themselves were unprepared and ill equipped for the task. In course of the field work done there was a persistent demand for training from respondents. The absence of training provided an opportunity for manipulators and middlemen to make money and for the Mukhias to act arbitrarily.

## **Focus on new areas of work for Dalit and women representatives**

Even after five years of their existence Panchayats continue to be merely utilised as implementing agencies of the government and not as agents of social change at the level of local governance. The Dalit representatives can make a difference in this given situation. They can focus their attention on Dalit problems such as their land rights, atrocities, payment of minimum wages safeguarding cottage industries etc. women can pay more attention to women and child centred issues. They can ensure the attendance of their children in schools, check drop-outs, take care of the girl child, look after and monitor the working of the ICDS centre cooperated with the national health mission. Uphold child rights ensure the working of the drinking water outlets, and propagate the idea of environmental sanitation. Uptill now they have confined themselves to routine activities at the Block level. They should also press for gender budgeting and ensure that at least 10% of the Panchayat budget is devoted for the betterment of women.

Besides suggestions given above, some more steps can be taken up for the empowerment of elected women representatives. These are given below:

1. Introduce regular sensitive orientation programmes for MPs, MLAs and bureaucrats about funds, functions and functionaries of the Panchayat.
2. Ensure that preference is given by Gram Panchayat to women self help groups in awarding contracts for village level construction work.
3. Ensure that due consideration is given by authorities at all levels to the proposals of the Gram Sabha relating to issues of women and children.
4. Ensure adequate number of women Panchayat secretaries./ sevaks
5. Provide a sub-quorum for women in the Gram Sabha.
6. Provide for strong punishment to those committing violence against women candidates during and after elections.
7. Property rights to land and housing should be in the joint name of spouses.

8. Give awards for outstanding performance by women representatives at all levels of Panchayat in the state.

It is clear from the analysis above that election to a PRI does not mean empowerment. It only puts elected representatives on the road to empowerment which they will attain slowly. They can claim to be empowered if they possess the power to take a decision and have the capability of implementing it. There are three levels of empowerment. In the first level a person has to depend upon others to take a decision on his behalf. At the second level he has to become self represent and self reliant and take decision on his own. At the third level he understands the importance of inter-dependence among various individuals in society and work together as a community. All this will require removed of the various constraints referred to above as well as the political will of the government of the day. Finally it must be added that the process of Dalit elected representatives empowerment can only be speeded up unless the PRIs are themselves empowered and the Dalits as a community are empowered by an alteration of the existing social order.

## IX

### Recommendations

- 1) The Dalit have been trapped in poverty and deprivation for a long time. They are victims of destitutions, deprivation and debt bondage. An economically backward society such as Bihar lacks all those dynamic qualities that support, sustain and speed up socio economic growth. Removal of all the road blocks is a pre requisite for empowerment. The Dalit must get their due share in and access to societal resources. The development process has made only a slight dent in the dense structure of inequality, exploitation and oppression. This process has to be speeded up.
- 2) Empowerment has to be cultivated to transform the state of helplessness and passivity into a state of hope and action. This can only be achieved through psychological mobilization necessary for demolishing the edifice of inequality, injustice and exploitation. It induces radical change in one's personality resulting in a new approach to the prevailing situation. However the state in its democratic set up cannot do this. It has to be left to civil society organizations. Their conscientization is necessary.
- 3) Panchayati Raj possesses all potentials for the creation of new social order. It provides a platform for grassroot action. In many places, it has been an instrument of liberation, education and collective intervention and critical thinking of marginalized groups to shape their own future.
- 4) The interface with the bureaucracy particularly at the grassroot level has to be improved. Efforts should be made to arrange for their training in dealing with Panchayati Raj functionaries.

- 5) Most political leaders lack faith in Panchayati Raj and view it as a rival axis of power. Its success might make a dent in their own influence and power. Their attitude will change if the political will of the state government is made explicit both through as a spirit and action.
- 6) The bulk of the elected representatives of Panchayat members need fuller awareness of their functions. This can be imparted through effective training programme. There should be a programme for literacy for non-literate men and women elected representatives. Once they are educated and aware they can assert their rights in the Gram Sabha meetings.
- 7) The Gram Sabha which are virtually non-existent should be activated as it is there that ward member can be extremely useful.
- 8) Since the bulk of the Dalit elected representatives are poor and depend upon daily wage income, they are not regular in attending meeting. It is, therefore, necessary to compensate them for their loss. Social and political development action at Gram Panchayat level can not be done by sacrificing their hard earned income. There have been many cases in which ward members have taken employment outside their own areas and even outside the state by giving their membership.
- 9) There should be focus on new areas of work for the Dalit and for women representatives such as land rights, atrocities, child labour, payment of minimum wages and child centered issues.
- 10) Besides the suggestions given about some more steps can be taken up for empowerment of elected women representatives. These are detailed below:
  - a) Introduce regular sensitive orientation programme for MP's, MLA's and bureaucrats about funds, functions and functionaries of the Panchayat.

- b) Ensure that preference is given by Gram Panchayat to women self help groups in awarding contracts for village level construction work.
- c) Ensure that due consideration is given by authorities at all levels to the proposals of the Gram Sabha relating to issues of women and children.
- d) Ensure adequate number of women Panchayat Secretaries /Sevaks.
- e) Provide a sub-quorum for women in the Gram Sabha.
- f) Provide for strong punishment to those committing violence against women candidates during and after elections.
- g) Property rights to land and housing should be in the joint name of spouses.
- h) Give awards for outstanding performance by women representatives at all levels of the Panchayat in the state.