

Political Representation and Empowerment:
Women in Local Government Institutions in Bihar, India



Pragya Rai, PhD

Stockholm University, Department of Political Science
10691 Stockholm, Sweden

Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore whether a quantitative rise in the representation of women in political decision-making can transform into qualitative changes in the political empowerment of women. The study develops a theoretical view on the multiple effects of gender quotas on empowerment and investigates the factors that facilitate and restrain the entry and participation of women in the political field. This is a study of women representatives in local government institutions in Bihar through qualitative methods, with the purpose to understand the link between women empowerment and gender quotas. The result of the present study shows that the reservation for women can be an important impetus to women's empowerment in India on village level but it is not a guarantee for participation of the elected women. The goal of women's empowerment will not be accomplished by reservations alone. To expedite and speed up this process it is essential to implement some supplementary policies which encourage the self-confidence of women, build women's capabilities and remove operational obstacles. On the basis of the present study we cannot claim that women are categorically empowered but, on the other hand, we cannot deny that they have gained a certain extent of authority and confidence as a direct outcome of the quota. In this respect it appears that quotas can be a feasible apparatus for the political empowerment of women.

Key Words- Women empowerment, Gender Quota, Political participation, Bihar, *Panchayati* Raj, India

Acknowledgements

It might not have been possible to write this report without the help and support of the kind people around me, to only some of whom it is possible to give particular mention hereof all I would like to give my sincere thanks to Dr. Henrik Berglund, Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, for his kind support, guidance and cooperation. His questions, critiques, assistances and priceless suggestions directed my thinking, writing and research. Thanks also go to Prof. Drude Dahlerup who discussed her experiences and guided me. Her good advice and support has been invaluable on both an academic and a personal level, for which I am extremely grateful. Thanks also goes to Lenita Freidenvall, Researcher in the department for her encouraging feedback. I would also like to thanks Prof. Ulrika Mörth the then head of the department for her support.

I would like to thanks the academic and technical support of the Department of political science and its staff of Stockholm University. The library facilities and computer facilities of the University have been indispensable.

I would also like to thanks to my respondents who helped me to understand the impact of quotas on empowerment. They also helped me to understand the problems coming to their way on participation.

My inmost gratitude goes to my family for their love and support and to my daughter who has been my greatest source of strength throughout my research work.

Finally, I am grateful to the Swedish Institute for their financial and general support during my stay in Stockholm.

Table of Contents

Abstract	2
Acknowledgements	3
Table of Contents	4
Explanations of words and names	6
1. Introduction	7
1.1 Aim and objectives	9
2. Meaning and different arguments of Gender Quota.....	11
3. The current state of knowledge.....	15
4. Gender and local governance in India: a background.....	24
5. Gender Quota: Bihar Model	27
6. Conceptual framework	28
6.1 Meaning of women empowerment	28
6.2 Framework for impact of gender quotas	29
6.3 Framework for obstacles.....	32
7. Research method	34
7.1 Selection of geographical area	34
7.2 Selection of respondents.....	35
7.3 Data collection.....	36
7.4 Difficulties in data collection	37
8. Findings	38
8.1 Impact of quotas	38
8.2 Factors that facilitate entry and participation of women in the <i>Panchayats</i> of Bihar.....	61
8.3 Factors that restrain their entry and participation	63
9. Conclusion and discussion	79
References:	83
Appendixes.....	90
Appendix 1- Structure of the <i>Panchayati</i> Raj Institutions	90
Appendix 2- Elected Representatives in the 2006 <i>Panchayati</i> Raj Elections of Bihar	91
Appendix 3- Basis behind selection of respondents.....	93
Appendix 4- List of Interview Questions	95

Appendix 5- Map of Bihar	98
Appendix 6- List of Respondents	99

Explanations of words and names

CEDAW- Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

Gram *Panchayat* - The village level institution of the PRI

Gram Sabha- A body consisting of persons registered in the electoral rolls relating to a village comprised within the area of the *Panchayat* at the village level

Mukhiya - Chairperson of Gram *Panchayat*

Nagar Adhyaksha - Chairperson of urban district level institution of PRI

OBC - Other Backward Castes, legalistic name of the owning castes

Panchayat Samiti - The block level institution of the PRI

Pramukh - Chairperson of *Panchayat Samiti*

PRI's - *Panchayat Raj* Institutions, system of local governance of India

Proxy woman - Concept of an elected woman with only symbolic power

SC - Scheduled Castes, legalistic name of the people from the lowest castes

ST - Scheduled Tribes, legalistic name of “indigenous” or “tribal” people of India

Ward - Part of a village

Ward Adhyaksha - Chairperson of the ward

Ward Sadasya - Ward member

Zilla Adhyaksha - Chairperson of the district level institution of the PRI

Zilla Parishad - The district level institution of the PRI

Zilla Sadasya - member of the Zilla Parishad

1. Introduction

The theory of representation proposes that all citizens should have the same opportunity to participate in political affairs regardless of gender, race and other identities. Therefore the entry of women into political institutions is an issue of equality. For a healthy political system and welfare of the people it is important that women must come forward and perform a vital role in political activities because more opportunities to participate in the political process will enhance their economic and organizational capacities so that they can gain more self-confidence and make attempts for a better share in the political system. Thus their participation in the political process is crucial for strengthening the democratic traditions. Since women are globally under-represented at all levels of governance in relation to their share of the population (IDEA 2006), there is an enormous demand for more representation of women in political bodies and their political participation is now a major objective throughout the global women's movement. Different women's groups and international organizations have demanded for actions and positive steps to upsurge women's political representation through affirmative actions. According to Karen Ross (2002) the demand for greater rights for women including political rights has been at the forefront of many women's agenda for at least three hundred years with campaigning treatises by women such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and Abigail Adams (L. H. Butterfield, ed. 1778) throwing down an early gauntlet for equality. UN Conferences and CEDAW convention have also been especially important for the issue of women's political representation. (Krook, M. L., 2004). Fourth UN World Conference 1995, held in Beijing, also talks about discourse of exclusion, gender balance and affirmative action although the word 'quota' is not used.¹

¹ FWCW 1995, Beijing, under UN

Furthermore, different scholars have justified the increased role of women in politics. For example, Phillips (1993) suggests four fundamental justifications for expanding the role of women in the democratic process: democratic justice, maximization of resources, to represent the special interests of women and as role models. Including all these, Ross (2002) adds two more justifications or arguments: utility and symbolic arguments. Hence it can be argued that representation in decision making bodies is believed to be essential for women to protect the expansion of their rights and opportunities by enshrining them in laws and constitutions. So women are demanding special provisions to enable women to be elected or appointed to high-level decision-making positions, and promoting the idea that 30% of membership is necessary to provide a critical mass that would allow significant changes in policies and procedures. In such special provisions much attention has been given to one particular step the introduction of quotas for women in political bodies.

A large number of countries have also chosen to introduce gender quotas or women's reservation system. Regarding this, Drude Dahlerup (2006) claims that "women" is a politically relevant category that has the right to representation in spite of all philosophical and political objections. According to her, today around 40 countries have introduced gender quotas in elections to national parliaments, either by means of constitutional amendment or by changing the electoral laws (legal quotas), and in more than 50 other countries major political parties have voluntarily set out quota provisions in their own statutes (party quotas). Thus, the use of quota as a tool to make historical leaps or jump starts in women's representation is becoming a global trend and many international organizations are involved in the promotion of gender quotas.

However the use of electoral gender quotas challenges our ideas and theories about the relationship between women's political representation and their socio-economic position, since quotas may lead to unprecedented historical leaps in women's socio-economic positions (Dahlerup, 2006). For example, in a country like India where society is still patriarchal and most women are supposed to be dependent on their family, how can 33 per cent gender quotas, as granted by the Constitution of India at grassroots level (local political institutions) after the 73rd amendment in 1992, empower women? The participation of women in the local government institutions of India is, often described as being surrounded by different obstructing factors and many scholars have used the notion of "proxy women" as an interpretation of elected women with only formal power. Here it can be argued that the presence of women is not necessarily identical with participation and empowerment. Thus the basic research question of this present study is whether women representatives, elected on the basis of gender quotas, are actually empowered?

1.1 Aim and objectives

The aim of the present study is *to find out whether a quantitative rise in the representation of women in political decision-making can transform into qualitative changes in the participation of women, so that it can pave the way for political empowerment of women.*

The study develops a theoretical view on the multiple effects of gender quotas on empowerment and attempts to find out the factors that facilitate and restrain the entry and participation of women in political field. In order to achieve the aim of the study the following research questions are posed:

- 1- What are the effects of gender quotas? What are the impacts of gender quotas on the political attitude and activities of women representatives?

2- What are the factors that restrain or facilitate the entry and participation of women in the *Panchayats* of Bihar, India?

2. Meaning and different arguments of Gender Quotas

Gender quotas can be understood as a multidimensional notion. Electoral quotas or quotas for political assemblies may be defined as a regulation that ensures the presence of a certain number or percentage of a specific group (Dahlerup 2006b), and according to Bird (2003) and Htun (2004) the groups that have benefited from such regulations are women, ethnic or racial minorities, indigenous groups, lower castes, or members of suppressed nationalities. As women constitute 16 per cent of the members of parliaments around the world,² there is a huge demand for increased participation of women in politics by using more efficient measures to correct gender imbalances in political institutions. Gender quota is one such mechanism which is based on an idea to recruit women in political institutions. In this way the introduction of gender quota is a qualitative jump into a policy of exact goals and means, and because of its relative efficiency, almost 100 countries around the world have during the last two decades introduced gender quotas for political assemblies (Dahlerup, 2007).

Zetterberg (2009) argues that “gender quota” is a multidimensional concept and that it is significant to understand some factors related to it. First of all, quotas can be mandated in a country by constitution or by law. These are called compulsory quotas which mean all actors and mainly the political parties in the election process have to accept it. Alternatively, party quotas can be voluntarily included in specific political party laws. The second factor is the division between the types of quota which refers to different phases in election process. According to Matland (2006) there are three different phases in elections. At first phase, quotas can apply to aspirants. The purpose for adopting quotas at this stage is to increase potential candidates. Then the selecting body that selects candidates can decide to select either

² <http://www.quotaproject.org/aboutQuotas.cfm>

a male or female candidate. According to Dahlerup (2007), aspirant quotas are a modest, voluntary, party measure primarily designed for majoritarian electoral systems. But this type of quota is the least demanding for political parties and it only compels party leaders to look for women that are interested in aspiring to a political office. (Zetterberg, 2009) At the second phase, quotas for candidates are the most common types of quotas which call for political parties to place a minimum percentage of women on their candidate lists and according to Matland (2006) this percentage can vary from five or ten per cent. The main reason for candidate quotas is to force the political parties to break with their tradition of recruiting mainly male candidates for their lists and instead to seriously start recruiting women. (Dahlerup, 2007) But according to Htun and Jones (2002) quotas for candidates do not assure the increase in the number of women MPs and female candidates may be placed at the end of the list and thus not have any real chance of being elected. Zetterberg (2009) argues that the only quota type that actually guarantees a definite number of women MPs is reserved seats. He states that this quota applies to the final phase of the recruitment process. In this quota process, a certain number of seats are separated from the rest of the electoral system and are filled with women through sets of special rules that tend to vary from country to country. Dahlerup (2007) also argues that quotas in the form of reserved seats can be a very effective measure in rapidly increasing women's representation or even in jump-starting it in strongly patriarchal countries. In this way it is possible to recognize a number of different quota types: party candidate quotas (usually called party quotas), legislative candidate quotas referred to as legislative quotas and reserved seats. The present study is focused on the third type: reserved seats.

The arguments for implementing quotas in political institutions can be linked with the arguments for increasing women's political representation in these institutions (Dahlerup, 2006a). It can be summarized with Dahlerup's analysis of the quota debate. According to her there are eight major arguments for supporting the system of quotas and five are against it. (Dahlerup 2002):

i) Arguments for Quotas:

- Quotas for women do not discriminate, but compensate for actual barriers that prevent women from their fair share of political seats.
- Quotas imply that there are several women together in a committee or assembly, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the token women.
- Women have the right as citizens to equal representation.
- Women's experiences are needed in political life.
- Election is about representation, not qualifications.
- Women are just as qualified as men, but women's qualifications are downgraded and minimized in a male dominated system.
- It is in fact the political parties that control the nominations, not primarily the voters who decide who gets elected.
- Introducing quotas may cause conflicts, but only temporarily.

ii) Arguments against quotas:

- Quotas are against the principle of equal opportunity for all, since women are given preference.
- Quotas are undemocratic, because voters should be able to decide who is elected.

- Quotas imply that politicians get elected because of their gender, not because of their qualifications and that more qualified candidates are pushed aside.
- Many women, who do not want to get elected, get elected just because they are women.
- Introducing quotas creates significant conflicts within the party system.

3. The current state of knowledge

While reviewing the literature about political representation and empowerment of women, one cannot ignore the contribution of Phillips (1995) who says that the basis of representation should be shifted from “politics of ideas” to “politics of presence”. She offers four key arguments for politics of presence which are: the significance of symbolic recognition, the requirement to tackle those exclusions inherent in the party-packaging of political ideas, the need for a more strong support for disadvantaged groups and the importance of a politics of transformation in opening up a full range of policy options. This concept holds that political representative should display the characteristics such as gender, race etc., of members of underrepresented groups in order to counter the partiality against them. In this way electoral gender quotas are aligned with a politics of presence. But several other studies reveal that reservation itself cannot bring empowerment of women unless there is a positive change in the social structure and mind-set of the people. One of them is Sekhon’s (2006) study which explores women’s participation in *panchayats* with an analysis located in feminist politics and participatory democracy. It is a theoretical study in which the author analyses the role of social movements engaged in participatory action research, training, advocacy, and networking with and for women at grassroots level. She argues that reservations alone is not adequate because women are constrained by a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political factors, for instance traditional gendered believes of the role and position of women in family and community, caste and class inequalities, lack of education, and lack of legal knowledge. She argues that the government of India in principle recognized, some of these limitations when it introduced the reservation of 33 per cent of seats in *panchayats* for women, but later both the government, and especially women’s and other non-government

organizations, realized that more research, training, networking, and advocacy were necessary at the local, state, national, and international levels to enable effective participation. She argues that the Indian social structure is patriarchal, and where women are not fully educated and dependent on their family members, thus they cannot take part in decision making process with full freedom. Moreover they can get a political position by reservation but may work merely as proxies for their husbands or other family members.

Further studies reveal that women elected on quotas face many difficulties during their participation in governmental bodies. For example, Kaul and Sahni (2009), in their study analyses the level of elected women representative's participation in *panchayat* and the difficulties faced by them. They have judged the participation of elected women members on the basis of meetings attended by women members in *panchayats*, decisions taken by these women members and freedom of speech in *panchayats*. The authors also revealed the motivations of women members behind contesting elections, problems faced by them during participation in *panchayats* and their ways to overcome those problems. Their findings illustrates that neither the reservation for women nor their actual presence in the *panchayat* have helped in addressing the problems associated with the common village women. They argue that the elected women are not always treated with due respect and that many elected women complained that their suggestions were not seriously considered and that sometimes they were even not consulted in the decision making. Some elected women representatives felt that their views were ignored merely because of being women and those they were compelled by their husbands or other family members to approve decisions made by the male dominated *panchayats*.

In the same way Cornwall and Goetz (2005) scrutinize the factors that constrain and enable women's political effectiveness in these democratic arenas. It is a theoretical study which suggests that engendering democracy by adding women or multiplying democratic spaces is essential but not enough to address historically and culturally embedded forms of disadvantages. The authors also suggest that an important determinant of political effectiveness which has been neglected is women's political apprenticeship, their experiences in political parties, civil society associations and the informal arenas in which political skills are learned and constituencies built. They argue that there is a need to build new pathways into politics and to foster political learning and to create new forms of articulation across and beyond existing democratic spaces to enhance the potential of women's political participation.

Apart from these, there are some studies which reveal that gender quotas have given mixed results. These studies suggest that women have become more independent in the decision making process but still face many difficulties in the course of their participation. For instance, Kudva (2003) argues that gender quotas in elections are an important strategy to empower women through increased participation in the political system. She judges the impact of gender quotas in the south Indian state Karnataka and asks the question: does engineering elections merely increase numerical strength of women representation or has it actually achieved positive results in terms of women friendly policy outcomes?' She uses women representative's experiences and their performances in *panchayats* as a tool to understand the impact of reservation. According to her the quota provision in Karnataka has yielded mixed results as it has made women more visible and has decreased the levels of corruption in *Panchayati Raj* institutions. Simultaneously it has increased the self-efficiency of women representatives, but it is yet difficult to affirm a substantive change in institutional

priorities and state accountability as women still face opposition from other villagers and their male counterparts in *panchayats*.

Similar results can be seen in the study of Jayal (2006) in which she investigates whether participation in local government institutions has facilitated women to articulate and advance their interests. To evaluate this, she uses the distinction made by Molyneux (1984) between strategic and practical gender interests and reveals that although the articulation of strategic gender interests is moving at a slower speed, there are some signs that support the hypothesis that the quotas have enabled the women to address their practical gender needs and interests. According to her the provision of quota-based reservation for women and disadvantaged groups by the 73rd amendment of the Indian constitution has given them an opportunity to participate in democratic political process but at the same time she suggests that the representation by itself cannot guarantee to represent women's interests effectively in the form of policy outcomes. Her focus is on the motivations of women members behind contesting elections and their performance and she uses age, caste, literacy levels, family occupation/income, landholding, the ways in which women participate, and the various constraints they face, as variables. She says that men frequently took the initiative to convince the women to contest the election but adds that this does not necessarily reflect a wish to promote women's participation in political system. It may rather be connected to a wish to keep the seat in the family or to maintain their control over the *panchayat* by proxies. According to Jayal there are many evidences of tokenism, surrogate or proxy representation by husbands and other male relatives who not only campaign for their women but also printed their own names on the banners during the campaign. But, according to Jayal, there is still some evidence to suggest that the quotas have motivated some women to take their own

decisions to contest the election. Although women hesitate to participate as individuals their desire to participate in political institutions and to make their own voices heard is strong. Regarding the role of women representatives, Jayal argues that they have played an affirmative role in addressing a variety of practical gender needs. Many women have given up their veil after entering the *panchayats* and family. Some studies however more clearly show that reservations have a good impact on women's empowerment, indicating that women have become more visible and confident and that they also try to solve the problems of their communities and work for women interests. This is clearly shown in the study of Clots-Figueras (2005) that uses the panel data from the 16 main states in India during the period of 1967-1999. Her research is focused on the effects of higher women's representation on policy decisions and expenditures in these states and shows that women legislators make different decisions compared to men. Furthermore, she argues that women elected in seats reserved for scheduled castes and tribes make different decisions than women elected in general seats. According to her, scheduled caste/tribe women support capital investments especially on education and irrigation. They moreover support women-friendly laws such as amendments to the Hindu Succession Act which have given women the same rights as men. In contrast, women legislators elected on general seats do not have any impact on women-friendly laws and they oppose redistributive policies such as land reforms and favour pro-rich expenditure.

We can also find some examples that woman representatives do not perform differently than man representatives after entering the political institutions. For example, Ban and Rao (2006) argue that female leaders execute no differently than male leaders and they are no more likely to make decisions in favour of women's issues. Their econometric study is based on survey data of 523 villages of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and Tamil Nadu,

try to determine the effects of women's reservation on women's political and community participation and on issues such as water, health, sanitation, roads, transport and electricity. Their study indicates that institutional factors like experience and caste are much more important for women than for men as they perform better than men when they have more political experience and also perform better in villages less dominated by upper castes and in states where the *panchayat* system is more developed.

In this way a number of studies have empirically assessed the outcome of quotas on women's empowerment. But the major weaknesses of these studies are that they either describes the experiences of individual elected women, or only focus on the socio-economic profile of elected women representatives (Ghosh 1995; Banerjee 1998; Kaushik, 1997; Pai 1998; Santha 1999; Kapoor, 2002). Two other studies Hust (2002) and Chattopadhyay and Duflo (2004) have contributed to our knowledge of the quota system in India. Hust (2002) suggests that the quota for women is definitely an important impetus for women's empowerment but that the procedure will take a long time and that the aim of women's empowerment cannot be reached by quotas alone. To support the process of women empowerment there is a need for extra tactics which can promote the self-reliance of women. Moreover, Hust argues that female representatives also need the support of men, especially at the initial stages of their political careers. So, men need to be invited for the cause of women's empowerment as well.

Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo 's (2004) work is based on political reservations for women in India to study the impact of women's leadership on policy decisions. Using a dataset collected in 265 Village Councils in West Bengal and Rajasthan they compared the type of public goods provided in different Village Councils. Some of those

village councils were reserved for women and some were not. They concluded that the reservation of a council seat affects the types of public goods provided. According to them women elected as leaders invest more in the public goods that are closely linked to women's concerns like drinking water and roads.

Concerning the theories about the factors that restrain the entry and participation of women in political field several studies have identified these obstacles. One of them is Shvedova's (2005) study. Shvedova has created a framework of socio-economic obstacles, psychological/ideological obstacles and political/institutional obstacles where she discusses about the masculine model of politics, a dual burden of domestic chores and professional obligations, lack of support from party and a lack of confidence and self-esteem. However according to Matland (1998) this research has some flaws for example it has not completely argued about the way these obstacles can be valid in a context of low economic development. Matland argues that one of the most important features of the society, connected with women's representation levels, is a country's state of development. Hence development leads to a weakening of traditional values, decreased fertility rates, increased urbanization, greater education and labor force participation for women, and attitudinal changes. According to Matland's assumption when women are different from men in levels of literacy, workforce participation, and university education - and thus not equal to men in the social spheres - they are less likely to be seen as men's equals in the political sphere. There are some empirical studies that also have made attempts to improve the awareness about obstacles of the elected women in Indian PRI's, such as; opposition from family in the involvement of the woman in political work, discrimination in the *panchayat* meetings through seating arrangements, influence of husbands, unwillingness from parties to nominate women on an "open" mandate,

caste-based discrimination, imposed institutional constraints as the strategic use of 'vote of no confidence' for women *panchayat* leaders, lack of education and illiteracy amongst elected women (Baviskar 2003), low or not existing salary to *panchayat* members gives members from a more resourceful background a relative advantage (Rai 2006), frustration among elected women due to lack of control over financial resources, dependence on support from males (Hust 2004), a risk for a high rate of drop out of elected women during their term in office (Sivakumar & Maduresh 2006), and attitudes that women are not supposed to participate in the public sphere (Mahanta 2007). Furthermore, when researchers unfold the obstacles for elected women the picture is more diverse but still many factors seem to be absent. Thus there is a need for a more clear theoretical view on the obstacles for elected women in a context of low economic development. Additionally, in earlier researches discussion of possibilities for participation has been missing. Frequently the depiction is given that on the way towards empowerment there are certain obstacles for elected women but an analysis of factors that facilitate women has been absent.

On the basis of the above literature three main conclusions may be drawn: The first, reservation itself cannot bring empowerment because women are constrained by a variety of social, cultural, economic, and political factors. Second, the gender quota or women's reservation has yielded mixed results. According to this theory after the introduction of gender quotas women have become more independent in decision making process but still they have to face many difficulties in the course of their participation. Women still face opposition from villagers and their male counterparts in *Panchayats*. Third, reservations have had a good impact on women's empowerment as women have become more visible and confident and have had the opportunity to work for more women-friendly laws.

The existing literature explains about the background and strength and weaknesses of the women members. It also reveals that there is a need for in-depth studies concerning women's participation in politics and rural development. Despite valuable contributions by researchers in this field, there are still some gaps:

- A.** Active political participation means not only using the voting rights or contesting elections but also carrying out duties and responsibilities towards the people. To what extent the women members are performing these roles and responsibilities have not been measured yet.
- B.** After reservation women involvement in *panchayats* has been increased, but whether these women have started or supported any new projects especially related to women is unclear.

In the existing research discourse, local governmental institutions in Bihar have not received much attention. According to the data of *panchayati raj* elections of 2006, the reservation of fifty percent is close to achieved at all levels. (See Appendix) A number of questions still remain unanswered, such as whether any public projects has been undertaken by these representatives, as well as the impact of gender quota on the political attitude and activities of women representatives. The present study tries to fill in some of these gaps.

4. Gender and local governance in India: a background

Most parts of India are patriarchal; in the sense that women are being denied to participate in the public life and that important issues associated with local politics have been an area of men (Mishra, 1999). Women are generally engaged in domestic works especially in the rural areas. In the family the husband and father make key decisions and the structure of the family is rested on men's control and subordination of the massive majority of women. According to Berglund (2009) although the Indian government tried to highlight women's issues to some extent with the aspirations of becoming a welfare state, but economic, political, and social obstacles to a large extent laid these expectations to rest.

While understanding the meaning of *panchayat* Mahanta and Sinha (2007) explain that the word '*panchayat*' traditionally means a body of five elders in a village who were accountable to resolve the conflicts and to give punishment to the offenders. In this traditional conception of a '*panchayat*', women and lower castes were not allowed membership. Omvedt (2005) also explains the traditional working of *panchayats* (village level governmental intuitions) as caste communities which were controlled by men from the rural elite.

Mahanta and Sinha (2007) argue that Mahatma Gandhi considered village as the true centre of knowledge and thus after the independence the proposal of village self-administration was included in Part IV of the Indian Constitution known as the Directive Principles of State Policy. However Part IV of the Constitution is not enforceable in a court of law.³ So it was not compulsory for the state governments to implement its provision and set up Panchayati Raj Institutions. The system of self-governance known as Panchayati Raj was introduced in 1959 following the Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report (1957) that proposed

³ Constitution of India Part IV

a three-tier structure of local self-government at village level, sub-district level and district level. The Ashok Mehta Committee (1978) was set up for further investigation and recommended greater decision-making power to the local councils. In this way the Indian Government attempted to create a strong local government system but few women were elected to the *panchayat* and their participation was insignificant. Omvedt's (2005) study claims that many of these women did not even attend the meetings and merely gave their "thumbprint" as a signature to whatever decision that was taken. The 73rd Amendment was passed in 1992 and deals with rural local self-government (Panchayati Raj) while the 74th Amendment, introduced in 1993, concerns urban local-self administration (municipalities) and established the reservation of 33% of all seats in *panchayats* and municipalities for women.⁴ The Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are divided into three tiers⁵. At the bottom of this structure is the Gram Sabha that comprises the entire body of the citizens in a village. Above the Gram Sabha there is the Gram Panchayat which is the first level elected body and covers a population of around five thousand people and may include more than one village. At the district level there is the Zila Panchayat which is linked to the state government.

But Hust (2004) argues that the representation of women in all of these levels is not adequate in itself as it does not offer the possibility of active participation. Hust states that in India most of the women lag behind, because they are uneducated and more dependent on men. This is the reason why many scholars such as Omvedt (2005), Chattopadhyay & Duflo (2003) and Mishra (1999) have used the word 'proxy' or 'token' for the women who are vested only with the formal power while the real power still resided with the male members of

⁴A <http://indiacode.nic.in/coiweb/amend/amend74.htm> b - [http://savegoa.com/Downloads/The%20Constitution%20\(73rd%20amendment\)%20Act,%201992.pdf](http://savegoa.com/Downloads/The%20Constitution%20(73rd%20amendment)%20Act,%201992.pdf)

⁵ Article 243 of the Indian Constitution says '*Panchayat*' means an institution of self-government. Article 243G entrusts the State legislatures to "endow the *panchayats* with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as institutions of self-government"

their family. SAP Network (2003) also defines the term 'proxy women' as "*figurehead elected women representatives who are supposed to do the bidding of male members of the family rather than take their own decisions*". Dahlerup further states that the point of this argument is that the women are dependent on their husbands and families and/or their parties (Dahlerup 2006c:14, Dahlerup 2005:149).

5. Gender Quota: Bihar Model

Following the suggestions of the amendment acts, the state of India reserved 33% of seats for women in the local self-government (Panchayati Raj Institutions). But the state of Bihar has gone ahead of this quota limit and has through the Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance introduced a reservation of 50 % for women in local government institutions:

“13 (2) As nearly as but not exceeding fifty per cent of the total number of seats reserved under Sub-section (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes, the Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Classes, as the case may be. (3) As nearly as but not exceeding fifty per cent of the total number of seats not reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Backward Classes shall be reserved for women.” (The Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance, 2006, Section 13, No. 2 and 3).

The reform in Bihar is the first of its kind in India and according to the information made available by the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) there is no other countries where the local governance has adopted a reservation of fifty per cent (IDEA 2006).

Bihar has a total no of 9032 local government bodies; it includes 8463 Gram Panchayats, 531 Panchayat Semites, and 38 Zilla Parishads. Following the Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance 2006, elections were held and women candidates got elected in the excess of 54%. This is a significant increase in women representation and it is believed that such a reservation policy will have a positive effect on women’s empowerment.

6. Conceptual framework

6.1 Meaning of women empowerment

The concept of women empowerment is not a new one. Its literal meaning refers to giving women maximum participation in decision making process and power sharing in the representative bodies, employment, access to property, productive assets, common land and financial assets etc. (Hatim 2001) Empowerment is often conceptualized as a process (Cueva Beteta 2006; Kabeer 2001; Malhotra and Schuler 2005) which not only visualize but helps to have control over their resources and ideology, greater self-confidence and an inner transformation of one's consciousness to overcome external affairs. Thus an active and multidimensional process to recognize the full potential of the women which would increase the women's ability to shape her and her community is women empowerment. Similarly Huyer and Sikoska (2003) also describe women's empowerment as a process that leads women to distinguish themselves as proficient of undertaking decisions and making choices about their lives, which requires adequate levels of self-confidence and firmness. At the level of development bodies, the concept of empowerment was adopted after the Beijing Conference (1995). The Beijing Declaration (section 13), presents women's empowerment as a key strategy for development:

“Women's empowerment and their full participation on the basis of equality in all spheres of society, including participation in the decision-making process and access to power, are fundamental for the achievement of equality, development and peace”.

Women empowerment can also be viewed as a continuum of several interrelated and mutually reinforcing components which include (Sahay, 1998):

- Having control and gaining further control;
- Having a say and being listened to;
- Being able to define and create from women's perspective;
- Being recognized and respected as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make;
- Capacity building and skill development especially, and ability to plan, make decisions, organize and carry out activities.

Kabeer (2005) argues that the concept of empowerment can be explored through three closely interrelated dimensions: agency, resources, and achievements. Agency represents the processes by which choices are made and put into effect. It is hence central to the concept of empowerment. Resources are the medium through which agency is exercised; and achievements refer to the outcomes of agency. Thus it is clear that the women empowerment is necessary for the development. The present study defines women's empowerment as continuum of several components which (Sahay, 1998) has described. Thus it can be seen as women's attainment of resources and capacities and the ability to exercise power in a context of gender inequality. As it is said by the scholars that it is a process there is need for the continuous effort to achieve the empowerment. Hence large number of countries has chosen to introduce different projects to empower women. However at the same time it is also significant to develop some indicators to judge the empowerment. The present study attempts to judge it by understanding the impact of gender quotas on women's attitudes and activities.

6.2 Framework for impact of gender quotas

To offer a better explanation of the impact of gender quota on the political attitude and activities of women representatives, nine concepts, presented below, have been identified as

the key virtues in a representative democracy; they are of importance for women's political empowerment, being positively correlated to political empowerment (Verba, 1995), and have been used in earlier research to study the impact of electoral gender quota on women's political engagement (Zetterberg, 2009). All these concepts are also related to the meaning of political empowerment by Sahay (1998) which the present study has taken as the definition of women empowerment.

A- Political knowledge: According to Barabas (2002) knowledge has emerged as one of the most important variables in the study of political science. Political Knowledge indicates the extent of information about the surrounding social and political realities which generate the interests of participation in the process of change. (D'lima, 1984) Having the knowledge of political affairs may also be treated as an index of active interest in politics, which is very much needed for developing a suitable strategy for political action. This can also linked with the ability to plan and organize.

B -Political interest: Some classical studies on participation have revealed that a person's interest in politics enhances the possibility that he or she will be involved in the political process (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Furthermore some studies have found that women tend to be less interested in politics than men (Mondak and Anderson 2004; Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). This can also be linked to the ability to plan and carry out the activities.

C- Political participation: Political Participation can be described as any voluntary act with the purpose to influence elections or public policy. It can be in the form of casting a vote or running for office, and has always been taken as an essential indicator to measure

empowerment in the political process. This concept can be linked with having control and gaining further control in decision making bodies as well as in family and society.

D-Political trust: Political trust indicates the faith in a political system in which a person is living. Political trust is also related to the confidence in a person because confidence is an outcome of trust.

E-Political contacts: Contacts are usually thought of in terms of associational life and the work force and according to Inglehart and Norris (2001) women are less involved in terms of traditional political organizations. When people involve in political life they are generally in contact with political parties and organizations etc. to solve problems in their areas. It is related to the skill development in women and carrying out activities in political field.

F-Political protests: Protests have been identified as a mode of active participation in political system, and it shows the capacity of a person to change any particular system. This category also intends to deals with the protests or stand of women representative on issues which they consider undemocratic, unethical, or which there have a negative perception about. It is related to having a say and being listened to which is an integral part of empowerment.

G-Gender role attitude: It is also very important to understand what these women think about their status in the political field. For example, do they consider themselves on equal footage with men in the political arena? It is also linked with the explanation of women empowerment in terms of being recognized as equal citizens and human beings with a contribution to make.

H- Projects: During the literature review it was found that the earlier researches have not taken attention to this particular indicator of empowerment. In order to have a complete picture of the effect of quota on the women empowerment it was tried to find out about new

projects have been started by these women members. Projects can also be a parameter to judge the benefits of reservations. Because it is one thing to come into power and it is another thing to use the power for the betterment of the people. In this category it is important to find out if these women representatives have they started any new project? This concept can directly be linked with the carry out activities and being able to contribute.

I-Confidence: Confidence can be seen as a major factor when assessing empowerment. Thus it is important to find out if women representatives have gained confidence after coming in political arena. This can be linked with being able to define and create and ability to plan and skill development.

6.3 Framework for obstacles

Similarly, to understand the factors those restrain (as there is not any study which is directly related to the facilitating factors) the entry and participation of women in political field three concepts, presented below, have been identified. They have been used by (Shvedova 2005) in earlier research about the obstacles that women elected to parliaments face:

A- Socio-economic obstacles: This concept embodies opinions associated with the elected women's condition of income and occupation, their access to education and choice of professions, division of labour in the family and the dual burden of domestic tasks and professional commitments.

B-Psychological/Ideological obstacles: This is related to the views that are connected to the self-esteem and self-confidence of elected women and the norms, cultural patterns and attitudes of their surroundings. It also includes the lack of media attention to women's contributions and potential.

C-*Political/Institutional obstacles*: This dimension represents observations related to views on the political system and the institutional aspect of the PRI's in general. For example, support from the political party, including economic and other resources to fund women's campaigns and boost their political, social and economic credibility. It also includes the kind of electoral system along with the type of quota provisions and the degree to which they are enforced and the role of women's organizations.

7. Research method

7.1. Selection of geographical area

The unique social political and economic environment of Bihar is the primary reason for selecting it for the study. The population is 103, 80 million (approx.) in which the female population is 49, 61 million (approx.) and the sex ratio 916 females per 1000 males, below the national ratio of 933/1000. The literacy rate is 63.82 per cent, in case of males (73.39 per cent) and females (53.33 per cent)⁶, the All-India figures were 75.26 per cent and 53.67 per cent respectively. An overwhelmingly large percentage of women are either illiterate or educated below primary level, and a majority are employed in agriculture. A large proportion of the population is landless and near landless, and therefore the majority of the rural poor tend to depend on agricultural wages or casual non-farm jobs for income. The vulnerability of women is also reflected by their lower participation rate in the labour market. The labour force participation rate of women in Bihar was only 13.8% in rural areas and 6.5% in urban areas in 2004-05; the corresponding percentages for India as a whole were 32.7% and 16.6% respectively⁷. The percentage of women having technical degree/diploma is only 0.2% in Bihar, whereas the All India percentage being 1.5%. With the urbanisation rate being very low (around 10%), poverty in Bihar is predominantly rural. These figures are alarming and thus compelling researchers across disciplines to take a serious look at the situation and bring some possible measures for policy makers. Another reason for selecting Bihar as the location for my study was the change that has taken place there in the form of 50 per cent reservation for women in elected bodies of local government institutions. It has opened the door for

⁶ Census of India 2011

⁷ This is the most recent data available

women from different social settings and has given them an opportunity to come into power. In this way the old norms of patriarchal society have been challenged. Thus it is a matter of interest to explore whether a quantitative rise in the representation of women in political decision-making can transform into qualitative changes in the participation of women, paving the way for political empowerment of women. The collection of data was completed by a field study in Bihar, adopting a qualitative method, based on the need of information about people's own experiences and interpretation of their own social situation. Interviews were held with thirty elected women in the months of June and July 2009 and September and October 2010.

7.2. Selection of respondents

In this study an attempt was made to understand the link between women empowerment and gender quota. The data for the study is collected both from primary and secondary sources. The study was conducted by interviewing women members from the different levels of the 'Panchayati Raj' system (*Sarpanch*, Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Panchayat Samiti, Chairman and Vice Chairman of Zila Parishad and other members, see Appendix-1). The principle of maximal variation was used to find elected women with different backgrounds,, as the literature suggests that the background for the elected women is an important factor in determining their participation in the PRI's. The thirty women (see Appendix-6) selected had varied characteristics regarding religion, caste, age, wealth, education, political background of the family (see Appendix-3). The interviews were semi-structured as this allows for more flexibility than standardized methods such as structured interviews or surveys, and because this method permits for the exploration of new topics and ideas rather than to depend only on concepts and questions defined in advance of the interview. Also to avoid the risk of

questions being answered by their male family members (husband, father, or son) or assistants, a personal interview technique was the most suitable for this study. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Apart from the data collected through interviews of elected women members from Gram Panchayats, and Zila Parishads, the other sources were official reports of the government of Bihar. The secondary sources were mainly books and articles published in journals and other published literature related to the research work.

7.3. Data collection

The 30 women serving representatives from different level of local self-government institutions have been interviewed about their political participation; their experience in these institutions; the difficulties faced by them during participation and of suggestions to improve their participation. A semi-structured interview schedule was prepared to obtain information about:

- i) The personal life of women members and the reasons for their political participation,
- ii) Their participation in decision making process in *Panchayats*, or *Zilla Parishads*,
- iii) Their role as a Sarpanch, chairman, vice-chairman,
- iv) Projects that have been undertaken by these representatives,
- v) Their awareness of certain general and women specific issues, and
- vi) Their suggestions on an increased and improved participation of women in the political process and in decision-making.

The location of interviews was mostly in Patna, but respondents were from Patna, Araria, Arwal, Gopalganj, Bhojpur, Gaya, Sitamarhi, Kishanganj, Munger, Purnia, Bihta, Mokama, Hajipur, and Samastipur. Interviews were sometimes held in the homes of the interviewee and at the other times at the training camps for the *panchayat* members, also at

the Bihar Rajya *Panchayat* Samiti office in Patna. Follow-up interviews were done over phone. Being a native Hindi speaker it was not a problem for me to take interviews in Hindi so all the interviews were conducted in Hindi and then translated into English.

7.4. Difficulties in data collection

The collection of data was not an easy task. An effort was made to reach more than 30 representatives but many respondents did not answer the questions. At the same time, those who responded did not answer them fully. To arrange the time of meeting with women representatives for interviews was also difficult, but the most problematic issue was that husbands of the respondents in some cases demanded to be present. Thus it was decided that the interviews would be best performed if no other person than the respondent and me were present. However excluding the husband in these cases would have meant losing the permission to do the interview. In one interview the husband wanted to give all the answers. It was obvious that her husband, a former politician himself, thought of the election of his wife as a full authority for his continued use of power. Thus, collecting information became very difficult. But a persistent and continuous effort was made to contact them to attain the best information.

8. Findings

8.1. Impact of quotas

The idea of `the multiple effects of quota or what are the impacts of gender quota on the political attitude and activities of women representatives`, based on the collection of data, can be understood through nine concepts; *Political knowledge, Political interest, Political participation, Political trust, Political contacts, Political protests, Gender role attitude, Public Projects and Confidence*. These nine concepts are, as mentioned, inspired from earlier research on the women's political engagement. However, one of my main contributions is that public projects started by these women can also be related to the issue of reservation and empowerment, a fact which is neglected in previous research. To highlight the fact that reservation has a lot of impact on women's empowerment but there is still a lot of work to be carried out; the nine concepts model is presented below:

A. Political Knowledge

Political Knowledge indicates information about the surrounding social and political realities which generate an interest in participating in the process of change. (Hazel, 1984) Having the knowledge of political affairs may also be treated as an index of active interest in politics, which is very much needed for evolving suitable strategies for political action. (Narayan, 1976) Different scholars have found different results about the political knowledge of women. Some found that women have less knowledge whereas some found that women are knowledgeable. For instance, Mondak and Anderson (2004) ; as well as Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996), have found that women tend to know less about politics, but in contrast, Ban's (2006) study reveals that the women elected through quotas are knowledgeable about political activities. In the course of identifying the level of political knowledge the present study it was

found that the elected women representatives have good knowledge about politics, and regarding the *panchayat*'s work and activities although most of them have only basic education (see Appendix). Consequently it suggests that the women can gain knowledge from work experience if they get chance and thus it supports quota system because it gives a chance to women to work and know about the political field. While discussion with the respondents these women mentioned that they had acquired new knowledge about politics in general as well as about local issues important to their people and constituencies. For instance, respondent no. 5 informed,

“Now I have become aware of political and local issues. Thanks to the reservation which gave me a chance to participate in the political life. I am learning politics and I think it is good for everyone to be aware about their surroundings. It helps us to be a responsible leader and citizen.”

This statement clearly displays that if women get chance to participate in the political field they can know more about the issues and consequently perform for the betterment of the people. This statement also suggests that women are happy to learn about the political system. In this way quota system can be very useful because it provides women a chance to participate in political field.

The women members had also gained good information concerning government programs and were also aware of the development programs started by the *panchayats*. Further, they have information about the schedule of the *panchayat* meetings and of the powers exercised by *panchayats*. They were able to recognize the source of income of their *panchayats* like government funds, *panchayat* property, and collection of taxes etc. and confident enough to share their knowledge.

Respondent no. 28 stated,

“Look, this is a list of the programmes which the government is going to start here. (There was a paper in her hands.) I am going to inform the people here so that they can be aware of these and consequently help us to implement these programmes effectively.”

She further said,

“There are so many problems in implementing the programmes and the most important is the lack of money. I think the government should enhance the amount of funds. The basic problem is here we do not get enough money from the government.”

This statement shows that these women have a good knowledge about the funds as well as the problems in implementing the programmes. Thus there is a strong support for the quota system because it provides women an opportunity to gain knowledge.

The study also reveals that these women have accomplished a higher visibility which can be said a very important development for rural India. For example, respondent no. 7 said,

“I try to talk with everybody in my area. In this way I become aware of their problems. Then I discuss it with my colleagues. I personally try to go everywhere as much as possible. Before the reservation it was not possible for me to go but now with the help of this quota system I can step out of my house and try to understand political field with my own experience.”

It is very optimistic to found that the women who informed to attain political knowledge varied between the age of 30 to 45 where they are more mature to understand the working of political bodies. They are also willing to learn new things. As far as caste and religion are concerned these women stated they have not felt any discrimination in the process of getting new knowledge. Thus it can be referred that the quota has created an opportunity for women to attain confidence, visibility and knowledge of the political sphere. In this respect the study

supports the findings of Ban's (2006) study which clarifies that the women elected through quotas are well-informed and up-to-date about political activities.

B. Political Interest

As said above classical studies have revealed about the reasons, levels and factors supporting and hindering the person's interest in politics. But according to Gidengil (1995) those conclusions may partly result from the view of politics as a man's game, discussed in male terms and focusing on issues that women do not find as leading as men. Thus, it was quite important to find out the level of political interest of these women. When asked about how interested they were in politics, the respondents replied that they were very much interested, and that they had developed a greater interest in politics as a result of their new knowledge and by participating in local politics. One respondent (nr. 5) said,

“For me it is quite interesting to go and participate in the meetings. Although I get less time but still I try to manage it with my household works. I learned many political skills there. Now I watch news and discuss with my family and friends. I think when you start knowing about something new you also attain more interest in that.”

The above statement shows that women have got a not only increased interest but also they are now more vocal in their family and friend circle about discussing any political, social or local issue. This can be seen as a good development in that type of social structure where earlier women were belonged only to perform domestic tasks and to be quite.

This statement also indicates that there is a direct link between knowledge and interest and they are vice-versa. For better explanation it can be shown from the statement of respondent no. 1,

“I contested elections because of the reservation. When I joined the office I did not know anything. But now gradually I become aware of many things. This has given me new knowledge. When I started knowing many new things I developed interest in politics. After that when I got interested I tried to know more. It is very good experience.”

They said that before quota system they were not so interested in the political sphere because they thought that it was a men’s world but now when they have got an opportunity to come in politics they found it interesting. As another respondent no.25 said,

“Before joining politics I thought that I am not suitable for this. Additionally there was not any chance for women in politics here. But when the government implemented reservation policy this seat has become reserved for women. After some hesitation I stood for the election and won. It gave me a feeling that I am also able to serve my people.”

She further added,

“Now I think politics is not only men’s game. We (women) also have many things to know and do. Thus I strongly support reservation for women. It renders a suitable platform for women to be active in political field.”

Consequently it can be said that quota appears to be associated with increased levels of women’s interest in politics. At the same time on the basis of the present study it also can be suggested that with the women’s experience in the political field the politics will not be only men’s game in the future. It is very interesting to find out that some of the women who developed interest in politics have not acquired good education but still they have interest in understanding the politics thus there is a positive thing that if all of them will be highly educated they will be more interested in the political system.

C. Political Participation

Participation has always been taken as an essential indicator for women representatives to measure their empowerment in the political process. On the basis of the studies of Jayal, Kaul and Sahni and Hust which already have been discussed in the literature review three categories of participation has been identified and apart from those three one more category, “communication with the people”, which the present study suggests that can also be a criterion to judge the participation is included. Thus the four categories are presented below:

- i. Communication with the people
- ii. Participation in meetings
- iii. Participation in scheme implementation
- iv. Participation in decision making process

i. Communication with the people: While reviewing the literature it was found that the “communication with the people” has not been discussed thoroughly in the earlier studies. The present study argues that this can also be seen as a criterion to judge the political participation of political representatives. The empowerment of a representative can also be judged is his/her acceptance by the masses in general. This can be further ascertained by him/her fulfilling the expectations and promises that have been made to the people during election. People perceive their representative as a person who can solve their problems and guide them well, and since times immemorial, people have been seeing men in the role of leaders. But after the reservation system women also got the chance to represent the people, so it is important to know how they communicate with the people. The present study reveals that women in local self-government in Bihar communicate with the people by talking to each household and by meeting people at gram sabha meetings.

Respondent no. 21 said,

“Besides going to the meetings called by panchayat, I go the door to door to know about the problems of my people. I know it is hard but in my opinion it is the best way to be connected with the folks. It is also necessary because there are many women who do not step out because of their domestic responsibilities and traditional norms. When I personally visit their house they explain their concerns and difficulties. In this way I become aware of their even minute problems. Now I am familiar with everybody in this locality. There are many other women representatives who have adopted this strategy.”

Another women representative (respondent no. 6) who also followed the same method said,

“It is very important to mix up with the people. If I do not try to talk with them who would they explain their problems with me? This is the reason behind my tactic to talk with the people at every family as much as possible. Although it takes a lot of time but still it is good. It also builds my image as a caring representative. People respect me. I also go to the meetings of panchayats to talk and discuss people’s problems.”

These two statements explain that women representatives try to be connected with their people to understand the problems. The second statement shows that these women also got respect from the people because of their good communication skill.

But apart from that there were some women who admitted that they communicate with people through their husbands or any other male member of the family. The reason behind that were the domestic workload and the traditional norms and values of the society. Respondent no. 27 explained,

“I cannot communicate directly to the people. It’s a tradition here not to go outside without any mail member of your family. Thus my husband does this. Normally he goes to the

meetings and besides the meetings sometimes he also talks to the people in a small group mostly at evening. Being a woman I cannot mix-up with the common people who are mostly men. But my husband can do this. People know that he is my husband and thus they tell their problems to him. He conveys it to me. Sometimes I also go with my husband to discuss the problems of my area with the common people but I limit myself to the women folk because as a traditional norm I cannot talk to the men. There are other women representatives who work like me”

The above statement shows a clear picture of the traditional norms of the society. For these women it is very normal that their husbands or other male family members of the family perform their duty. But it does not support the concept of “proxy women” because as it can be seen from the statement that the women representatives go to talk with the people but only with the women because tradition hinder them to talk to the men. There is also evidence that the burden of domestic works also restrain them to communicate with the people. For example, respondent no.2 said,

“I want to talk to the common people and to understand their problems but I really cannot find time for it. I have to perform a lot of domestic duties. Thus in spite of me my husband and my brother-in-law communicate with the people. Normally they hear the problems and make a list and then they give it to me. They also help me to solve these problems so that I can give time to my children and my family.”

Again this statement shows that these women are not proxy but they accept the help because they really do not get time for going out and talk to the people. There is also a suggestion that if there is more open society and the domestic works will be shared between the members of the family these women can also attain good communication skill. During the discussion it

was found that the women who could not talk with the people most of them belonged to the lower caste and very few from the upper caste. Normally the upper caste women managed to talk to the people directly. This noticeably shows the impact of caste on the society where lower caste people are not very visible.

ii. Participation in Meetings: The study proposes that most of women representatives attend *panchayat* meetings regularly. But there were also some women who told that they were not able to attend meetings because of some reasons. Those respondents who could not attend the meetings regularly informed me that they always tried to attend general meetings and other meetings called by Gram *Panchayats* but that it was very difficult for them due to their household activities. Respondent no.13 said,

“I am not able to attend the meetings because of household works. I have to spend more time for my family. Sometimes it is necessary to attend then I have to manage a lot of things on my domestic sides. It is very difficult”

Timing is another factor that hinders women from attending. According to Herd and Harrington Meyer (2002) the time and other resources they spend caring for their families take away time from other civic activities. This is also evident from this study. For instance, as respondent no.4, a ward sadasya from Purnia said,

“My problem is that most of the panchayat meetings occur at noon. It is a very awkward time for me because at this time I have to cook and serve food to my family members. My children also come from school at the same time. I have to look after them also. In my case there is nobody at home who can take this responsibility. So I do not find time to attend the meeting”.

Some other women also informed me that as there are costs and other cost of refreshments, they can't attend the meetings regularly because their economic condition does not allow them to do so. As respondent no. 18 explained the problem,

“My earning is not so much that I can spend it on refreshment costs of meetings. The meeting place is also very far from here so that I cannot go by foot. And I am not in such condition to spend money on public transport.”

Thus the study supports the conclusion of Buch's (1999) work that the causes for failure to attend meetings are generally related to domestic work and the inconvenience of distance. It also indicates the deep impact of economic condition of persons on their work. Furthermore it was obvious to know that if they do not attend meetings then who manage their *panchayat* related work. When asked about most of them stated that their husbands manage the work. Here this can be seen as an extension of the previous category where male members of the family help these women to perform the duties. However this is only one dimension of participation in meetings. In the course of research work it was also tried to find out if these women raise issues. This aspect requires more attention. It was found that many women who attend meetings do not raise issues and the reason behind this was the dominance of the male members in the *panchayat* work. Respondent no.2 stated,

“There are so many questions in my mind and want to ask it in the meetings but the male members in the meeting do not give chance to speak. Even if any woman try to speak they (men) start talking with each other and it feels like they have not any interest to know what we (women) want to tell. This type of atmosphere discourages women to raise any issue.”

Another reason that deters women to raise any issues is lack of education. Respondent no. 14 said, *“I normally do not speak in meetings. I feel shy to speak because I am not so good to describe my problems in proper words. This is because I am not well educated.”*

On the other hand there were also some women who said that they speak and raise issues in the meetings and those issues were mainly limited to health, women and child welfare or drinking water. As respondent no. 19 stated, *“I attend meetings and I also try to speak on those issues which I feel are important for the people. There are some hindrances while speaking but now I do not care for them. I always draw attention on the health of the people and especially of women and children. I think there is a lot to be done regarding the health and fitness issues.”* This statement shows that women speak for health, childcare and women issues. Women draw attention on problems and they also know to overcome these problems.

Respondent no. 7 said, *“Here lack of drinking water is the most important problem. I always try to draw attention on it in meetings. Many other women also try to speak but it will take some more time to be more vocal.”*

During the discussion it was found that those women with more education were more vocal than the women who were less educated. Thus it is important to note that education plays a very important role in the process of participation.

iii. Participation in scheme implementation: The present study shows that although it is very hard to participate for women in *panchayat* work, some manages to do it and are very serious and active in scheme implementations, e.g. Self Help Groups⁸, MGNREGA⁹ and

⁸ Promoted by national and state government, and non-governmental organizations, SHGs are voluntary groups engaged in collective saving and thrift activities for the purpose of securing credit. The 1990s saw a proliferation of women SHGs across India. These groups were designed not only as a strategy for poverty alleviation, but also to increase women's access to resources and their power in household decision-making.

⁹ The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (2005) aims at enhancing the livelihood security of people in rural areas by guaranteeing hundred days of wage-employment in a financial year to a rural household whose adult members volunteer to do unskilled manual work.

Sanitation. Specially, women are very much engaged in MGNREGA. They are also active in health scheme implementation. Women stated that before the reservation system they were not so vocal and aware about many schemes. But after the reservation they attained new knowledge, as explained in early section, and now they have got a chance to do something for their people. As respondent no.23, a mukhiya from Patna said,

“In the beginning, I was not so aware and could not come out of the home. I was not used to go outside the house and talk to other people. Works were done by my husband. But now things have changed. I am also aware and I have come out of the home. Now I can talk to the people very easily and discuss with them about the problems and possible solutions related to my area. I have gained a lot of knowledge about local politics and now I want to do something for my people. I really give thanks to this reservation policy”

There are few examples about the women’s engagement in the public projects. Respondent no. 5 stated, *“Women are performing their works coming out from their homes. They are very keen to implement different schemes supported b and started by the government.”*

She further explained, *“As a result of their awareness public toilets have been constructed in this area. It is because of their demand for the school; our children are going to the school. I can say that now they (women members) have become forward.”*

During the research it was found that earlier these women were little shy to come out of the home but gradually they have gained confidence and then tried to solve many problems related to their area. Respondent no. 6, a mukhiya from Mokama described about her situation, *“In the beginning many programs concerning women and child care were unknown to me. I knew little about them. But now I can understand all things entirely. I have done the meetings about the health of women and children in my locality with other members and I am*

also trying to make the women conscious through the consistent Health Awareness Programme.”

Regarding the sanitation respondent no. 22 said, *“I am proud to say that the works of sanitation have been done well in my area. Our members and supporters have motivated the people to clean their homes and surroundings.”*

v. Participation in decision making process: Decision-making is an important parameter indicating the degree of participation. Thus an attempt was also made to understand whether women members have any access to the decision-making process, and if yes, how they participate in this process and if their opinions or demands have any voice in the meetings. In this framework women respondents replied that they raise issues and demands in the meetings and sometimes also give suggestions to overcome the problems. Many women stated that their opinions and demands in the *Panchayat* meetings do not get appropriate attention and sometimes are not even heard. They also pointed out that their works for their constituencies are often ignored. As respondent no. 18, a ward sadasya from Mokama said,

“When I got elected I thought that now everything will be changed. Women will have a strong voice. But my experience tells me something else. In the meetings when I try to give my suggestion, each time my opinion is ignored. Although I cannot come to any conclusion, I think it is because I am a woman. Generally here the situation is that, the opinions of women are ignored because of the male dominance.”

Regarding the development of Gram *Panchayat* plans the interviewed claimed that these plans are made through the people’s participation in village meetings or by various form of decision-making bodies of different political parties. But the main decision making body is political party. As respondent no.2 said,

“There is no space for us to play any role in decision making process. Women members only sign the decisions in the meetings. Those decisions are fixed before by the party. Members only have to support this and sign it.”

Thus it seems that there is not any specific rule for how these plans should be developed, which limits the participation of women. As far as the impact of gender quota on women’s empowerment, it can be said that there is still a big gap to be bridged regarding the participation in decision making process. And the segregation of women representatives from effective decision making in *panchayats* is still there.

D. Political Trust

Political trust can be explained in different ways. In the tradition of Easton (1965) it is equivalent to a reservoir of political support that facilitates actors in a role of authority to attain certain objectives through an authoritative allocation of resources. However, Fukuyama (1995) suggests that political trust represents a degree of endorsement of a society’s central values. Although there may be many aspects of political trust it is definite that it is an important factor to understand the views of an individual. It is the result of individual judgment based on belief in the potential that an institution is worthy of its mission. (Pelletier, Couture, Crête, 2008)

Thus another step was taken to judge the political trust of these elected women. It was divided in two sections: trust in political system and trust in political parties. Therefore when asked about how much trust they have in the political system and the political parties, the women respondents said that they have full trust in the political system. According to respondent no. 22 uttered,

“I have full faith and trust in the political system of my country. It has given us a chance to participate in political field. Sometimes ago women ha not any role to play in political arena but now they can. It can be seen as the development of our political system towards maturity. I can say that the political system of our country is not dead although it has so many flaws but that flaws can be rectified.”

This statement shows the trust towards the political system. Although these women see many flaws in the system but they have hope that these flaws will be disappeared by the time. Similar views can be seen from the statement of respondent no. 5,

“I have full faith in the political system. It is allowing us to do better and I am sure it will do for our betterment in future also.”

Therefore it is no doubt that there is political trust for the political system but these women had not trust in political parties, because according to them political parties always see women candidate as token representatives. Although they got the chance to stand for the elections with the help of political parties, there is still a lot to do to increase the confidence in political parties. During the discussion with the women respondents they told that they were chosen not because of their merit but because of the political parties could not find any women member in their own organization. This can be understood by the statement of respondent no. 30, a zilla sadasya from Bihta,

"In this area the seat was reserved for a women candidate but the Party could not find any women participant. Thus the party was bond to nominate me as a candidate as some of my family members are active in party work. I am sure if this seat was not reserved for a female candidate, my name would never have been proposed.”

Her assertion indicates that the local politics of India is more or less controlled by the political parties who are active in the particular area and a political family background is also an important factor for contesting for elections. She further explained,

“Here people were really not aware of my nomination. Before submission of nomination the party called a meeting and announced my name before the villagers. It is also very strange that people elected me.”

This can be supported by another respondent no.17, a zilla sadasya from Hajipur, who also said,

“Here the party is doing everything and women are members only by name. Party has told me indirectly that I am only for the signature because according to them I am not able to understand the working culture so other works would be handled by the party.”

Thus it can be stated that the reservation has not resulted in an increase in the trust of political parties.

E. Political Contacts

It is common for the people who involve in political life to be in contacts with political parties and organizations etc. to solve the problems of their concerning areas. The interviewed were therefore asked if they have contacted political parties, political organizations and elected representatives at any level to solve the problems of their constituencies after getting elected. Few women had taken such initiative and it was common that they assigned for their husbands or other male family members do this. For instance, one woman (respondent no.2) said,

“We wanted to build a public toilet here but we have not enough funds for that. There was a need to talk at the upper level political representatives. I was not sure if I could do that. So my father-in-law took initiative. There are many cases like it.”

Likewise, respondent no.27 also said,

“Sometimes we need to talk with other political representatives, political organizations and political party leaders but the tradition obstructs me to do that. There is also a problem that the head of these are also men who do not take any interest to here women’s voice. So my husband normally does these things.”

Again this shows that the traditional norms and male dominance normally hamper women to make contacts. While discussing with the women members it was clear that these women although want to make contacts for some developmental works in their area but the prevailing tradition and culture stop them to do so.

Another factor that stops them to make contacts is a long process in the office. It is common there that the office process takes a lot of time which these women have not. According to respondent no. 18,

“It always takes a lot of time to get time to talk to any upper level of representative. We have to go many times and to be in touch with their secretaries all the time. It is very time consuming process. I have not such time. So normally I do not go to talk to any leader or organization.”

The result shows that the quotas have little effects on women’s political contacts. But there is a hope that these women really want to solve the problems of people. It will take some time to change this situation. There is a need to ease traditional norms and the inclusion of women in

upper level of political institutions. Thus it supports the idea of women reservation in the political parties, state legislatures and parliament also.

F. Political Protests

In a political system protests can also be a form of participation. When asked about if they protest or take stand on issues, which they consider un- democratic, unethical, or have a negative perception about, these women respondents said that they protest and express their views when need. According to them the reservation system has given them a platform where they can raise many issues which they consider important. When asked about what the main issues are, they said that alcoholism is the most burning issue on which they always protest. As respondent no, 14 who is a nagar adhayksha from Purnia said,

“Alcoholism is a curse for the society and it is unhealthy too. It pollutes the human body and society. People are dying also. I really cannot understand why people are running behind alcohol. In my opinion it should be eliminated as soon as possible.”

Another respondent no.5, a zilla sadasya from Gaya said,

“I can tell you an incident about alcoholism. In my locality some drunken men were mistreating women. When I came to know it I went there and tried to make those men understand that they were doing wrong. After sometime so many people gathered there and when they saw me they also came and helped me”.

Besides alcoholism dowry disputes, divorces and girl- trafficking were other issues which these women have raised. Respondent no. 6 elaborated it in this manner,

“Dowry is a big jinx for our society and culture. I always oppose it. I made some campaigns to make the people aware about it. There is a lot of effort to be done to eliminate this and it will take some time because it is very old tradition. Similar is the case of divorce and girl-

trafficking. These two evils have also become very common nowadays. The reservation has given me a chance and a platform to perform some welfare works for the society.”

This statement makes us quite hopeful that these women have great concerns about the society. Normally they protest against the iniquities regarding women but in future with more experience and knowledge they can also play an important role in eliminating many other evils of the society. Respondent no. 14 said,

“I think there is no harm to protest if you think any particular thing is not suitable for your people. Our democratic tradition has given us right to protest and we should use it whenever it is necessary.”

In this sense it can be said that women reservation system has been supportive to women in their political protests. It was also found that the women who took initiative to protest were not above than the age of 45 which is not so old age to be more vocal.

G. Gender role attitude

It is very important to find out what these women think about their role and position after the reservation. Regarding their role majority of women wanted to do developmental works. They also wanted to use their power in supplying basic minimum needs for the poor and also in economic development of the women. Some of them have exposed their wish to use their power for social development i.e. working for Education, Health etc. But they also informed about the hindrances they face during their work and apart from male dominance political rivalry is one of them. For example, respondent no. 16 described her willingness for developmental work, her problem and experience in this way,

“The reservation has given me chance to serve the people. There are so many planes in my mind to develop this area. I want to do many works for my people, but I cannot because of

political rivalry. There are so many difficulties. Interruptions are being put by the opposition of gram-panchayat and panchayat samiti level. Since there is more opposition at gram-panchayat and panchayat samiti level, they want to do all the planning of gram-pancayats. As a consequence of this political opposition, no work has been done since last 2 years at gram panchayat and the development of this area has been stagnant.”

During the course of field visits it was also tried to find out their views about their position and it was learnt that many women feel that they are not treated equal to men in political arena. According to these women, men did not give any significance to them. They were never informed about anything, and felt that their opinions in the *panchayat* meetings or outside did not get any importance. Respondent no. 2, a ward sadasya from Patna said,

“I do not like when nobody recognize me in panchayat meetings. My problem is that being a woman I find myself in an uncomfortable position in meetings because these meetings are full of men and women are far behind to talk. Most of them do not discuss anything. I think if there are more vocal women in the meetings it would be good for me to be comfortable and to discuss problems. ”

Respondent 28, a zilla adhayksha from Gopalganj said that,

“You will find everywhere same stories. Women are underestimated in every path of life and politics is not an exception. Although we have won the election and we are regularly coming to offices but still we find that there is a big gap to be bridged. I think it will take a long time to be on equal footage with men because politics has always been the field of menfolk and we are newcomers.”

Thus it can be said that although the reservation system has brought an opportunity for women to take part in politics but still there is not too much change in the status of women within the political field.

H. Projects

The main contribution of this study is to find out about the projects that have been initiated or supported by these women representatives. Thus the question which these women respondents faced was “Have you started any new project for your people and especially for the women?” Very few could answer this. They have concentrated on the creation of self-help groups with sanitation issues as a second priority. Respondent no. 14 said,

“We (women members) have created a self-help group named Shaktirupa and I am the president of Shaktirupa Association which includes representatives of all three local self-governmental bodies. I am always available for the help of the people and do whatever I can for them.”

Similarly there are other associations made by these women and their aim is to help common women in all possible ways. These women have concentrated on sanitation issues too. For example, respondent no. 22 uttered,

“Earlier there was a lot of problem regarding sanitation here. We tried to discuss this matter time to time in the meetings and made campaigns about it. As a result now there is a public toilet here. We also organize health camps time to time to make people aware about health issues and encourage them to discuss their problems.”

These women were also questioned about their works for women. Mixed responses were received about their works. Respondent no. 5 explained about the projects started and supported by women representatives,

“Many women representatives and members have started projects for the help of women and common people here. They worked against dowry and early marriages. They made awareness programmes about it. Although I cannot say that the situation is changed now but we can see a gradual change in the mind-set of the people. This is a good sign.”

Another woman (respondent no.21) said,

“Besides all difficulties women have managed to do some work for the people. They also get support from them. There was problem of child labour and alcoholism in this area. We have taken a responsibility to make campaigns about this evil. We also protested on the road. We also got support from the people and especially from women. As a result the police and administration became active and now children are in a better situation.”

Again there was an effect of age because the women who started projects were young and most of them were below 45. While discussion it was found that these women have tried to do many things but still there is a lot of scope for better work. Their works and projects can be summarized as follows:

- Generate awareness against early marriage
- Working against child labour
- Generate awareness against dowry
- Functioning against Alcohol
- Working against girl-trafficking
- Organizing Health Camps

Overall it can be said that the reservation system has limited positive effects on the starting of new projects. But the situation is not hopeless and there is a scope for better work if these women get more support and more time.

I. Confidence

At the personal level women stated in interviews that they have gained appreciation and respect within the community, as well as increased confidence. One of the respondent no. 7, a zilla adhyaksha from Araria said that,

“In my opinion reservation for women is a positive step. Now many women are coming forward with the help of quota and they are gaining confidence. Their conditions in society is also changing and getting better. I think it will change the mind-set of the whole society. Actually it should have happened earlier. But it’s good to see that women are taking interests in political life.”

Respondent no. 24, a zilla sadasya from Munger, who belong to Other Backward Caste explained that,

“I was too shy to mix with the people before my election. It was very difficult for me to come out of the house and leave the domestic works. I can remember when I went to the meeting for the first time, I was very nervous, but after the meeting everything was changed. After that I was very confident and comfortable. Other members also helped me to overcome my nervousness. Now I can also speak to men in the village.”

From above statements it can be seen that before the reservation system women were not so vocal and they almost limited to the domestic works. They also had lack of confidence as they were not aware of the ways of solving any problem. But after the reservation they got chance to understand the political and public life so that they gained confidence. These women also reported about improved status and impact within the family. In fact, relationships within the family transformed as their husbands have begun to take their advice, which is a major departure from past practices in a traditional society like India. They told

that even outside the family, they are now consulted on village matters. These women presented greater awareness of their roles as women and desired for more education and opportunities for their daughters. They claimed that their husbands and family members have gained prestige in the society as well. In some of the cases, these women found a new personality as they come to be known by their own names rather than of their husbands. For example respondent no. 5, a zilla sadasya from Gaya stated that,

“Before the election nobody knew me outside the house and I was a wife, a daughter-in-law and a mother. But after the election people started recognizing me. I am very happy and confident because now I am identified by my name not any other’s name”.

This indicates that the reservation system has a very good effect on women’s confidence. And if they get more chance and continuation they will get more confidence and thus will perform better.

8.2. Factors that facilitate entry and participation of women in the Panchayats of Bihar

Next the study illustrates the factors that are helpful for the entry and participation of women in the political institutions.

A. Women’s reservation

As this study shows, the reservation for women is the most important factor that motivates and facilitates women to come forward into political life. Respondent no. 6, a mukhiya from Mokama:

“There are many cases like mine. My constituency was earlier of my husband who served here for many years. Here people know him very well, but in 2006 elections it was reserved for women and my husband advised me to be a candidate. At first I did not approve as I was

not ready to take this responsibility because I had no idea about local politics. But when my other family members and neighbours requested me and showed their trust in me I agreed with the proposal. I thought that this is a chance to do something for the people. I think this reservation system has given a chance to many women like me. Now I am really very busy to perform the duties for my people.”

Respondent no. 8, ward sadasya from Hajipur, who belonged to a scheduled caste stated that,
“I was socially very active and I always wanted to join politics but was not able to get any chance. But when my constituency was reserved for women I thought that it is a good chance to fulfil my desire. Now I can do something for the people. It gives me satisfaction. Thus reservation is the most helpful factor and I support reservation for the reason that without this system women like me could not come into politics and now as I can see that due to reservation, women from SC/ST family are coming in panchayats.”

It may be inferred that the women members got a chance to come into political life because of reservation, and without it few of them would have had a role to play in grassroots politics.

B. Motivation and support from family

Most of the elected women representatives stated that they have got motivation from their family members and other people to come into politics. Respondent no. 10, a zilla adhyaksha from Munger:

“My family encouraged me to contest elections because I was socially active before the elections, and people trusted me that I can represent them and render good service to the society. Though I was not from a political family I did not face any challenge in getting the support of the local people and my family. My father and my sister encouraged me a lot and supported me throughout my election campaign.”

All the respondents said that they have got support from their husband and other family members. Respondent no. 14, a nagar adhayksha from Samastipur explained it in this manner, *“My husband gave me his full support, both financially and morally. During the election campaign he went with me from home to home and helped me a lot. I never felt that I could not come forward in politics.”*

And respondent no. 26, a zilla sadasya from Araria said that,

“The support from your family is very important. I am very happy and lucky in this matter that my family support me and trust me. No member of my family interferes with my work and decisions and I always get support from them.”

These women often require the assistance of the husband by sharing time consuming responsibilities in the house. Respondent no. 25, a Pramukh from Gaya:

“I am very much supported by my husband. He has adjusted his work with me and taken up household tasks”.

Similarly, respondent no. 19, a mukhiya from Gaya explained,

“I have reached here with the help of my husband. He appreciates me for my work. He cooks food hence I can go to the office and do my work.” When asked about who supported you most in your locality, men or women, respondent no. 14, a nagar adhyaksha from Purnia stated that,

“Here people supported me a lot. I got support from men and women both in my locality, but women gave more support in my election.”

8.3. Factors that restrain their entry and participation

In the course of judging the level of women’s political empowerment and the impact of gender quota on the political attitude and activities of women representatives it is relatively

significant to understand the factors that hinder women to enter or participate freely in the political institutions. A significant work has been done by Shvedova (2005) in this framework. On the basis of Shvedova's (2005) work the present study tries to find out the obstacles that hinder women to participate in politics. To present a better description about the obstacles three broad concepts produced by Shvedova (2005) has been used. These three concepts are: Socio-economic obstacles, Psychological/Ideological obstacles and Political/Institutional obstacles. These three broad concepts are further divided into sub-categories to understand the factors more deeply.

A. Socio-economic obstacles

Shvedova (2005) argues that socio-economic environments play a substantial role in women's political recruitment within both long-standing and new democracies. She promotes that there is no doubt that the social and economic status of women in society has a direct influence on their participation in political institutions and elected bodies. As stated by her the socio-economic obstacles that have impacts on women's participation can be classified in many ways such as: poverty and unemployment; lack of adequate financial resources; illiteracy and limited access to education and choice of professions; and dual burden of domestic tasks and professional obligations. During the research the present study also found out some of these obstacles which can be described as follows:

i - Condition of income and occupation and choice of profession-

In a developing country like India the condition of income and occupation and choice of profession also determine the participation of women in political offices. There are many examples of women who cannot participate fully because of their poor condition of income. For example, respondent no. 18, a ward sadasya from Mokama argues,

“If financial condition is bad then we can’t work. It is not possible to attend the meeting twice in a month on very small amount of money. If I decide to go to the meeting then I have to spend more. There is a need to increase allowance.”

The importance of financial support can be seen by the statement of Respondent no. 30, who said,

“I think in our country the most important obstacle for women in entering the political institutions is the lack of financial resources. As far as financial condition is concerned, here most of women are dependent on their families. If a woman is a house wife like me then she has no money of her own. If she needs money for anything every time she has to ask to her husband or other family members. Furthermore, everybody knows that the running an effective campaign for election needs a lot of money.”

It is found from the study that most of the women members are living in poverty. They are unemployed housewives from peasant’s family of lower income group. To sustain the family they have to give maximum time in their family work or agriculture. In this process they do not find financial support to expend for attending meetings. Thus it can be argued that lower income is also a constraint for women to perform fully their role in political institutions. In some families, they are principal bread earners. In the sample it was noticed that some of the women members are the main bread earners in their family. For example respondent no. 3, a ward sadasya from Mokama stated,

“I live on labor work .If I do not go to my work one day my family may not be able to run. To attend the meeting, I get such a small amount of money per month by which I cannot meet up the transport cost of long distance journey. Thus I have decided not to attend meetings unless it is very necessary.”

Thus in such conditions, women participation in the local self-governing institutions does not come to the high level.

ii- Access to education

It is evident from the sample that most of women respondents have only basic education. Lack of proper education is also a very important factor that restrains women to participate freely. Without proper education it is very difficult for women to discuss for their concerns. According to Kabeer (2005) access to education can bring cognitive ability which is essential for women's capacity to question, reflection, action and knowledge. Furthermore, women cannot understand the issues and working of political bodies if they have not ability to read between the lines. Respondent no. 2, a ward sadasya from Gaya stated that:

“As I am not well educated others alternate me. When I show interest in any work they (men) say that you are not able to understand this. The party also puts a lot of limitations and restrictions on me. I think a less educated women like me have no status. Sometimes I feel frustrated because other people are doing all the works on behalf of me and I am ignorant of all. I think this is only because of my lack of education.”

While discussing with the women members it was also found that sometimes they felt embarrassed because they were not educated well. For example, respondent no. 14, a nagar adhyaksha from Purnia explained her difficulties:

“In the panchayat meetings I always feel embarrassment because I cannot study well. I can't read the papers of panchayats due to lack of education. On every important topic and event I have to depend on the panchayat staff or any other member of the party. Sometimes they also ignore me as they are also busy in other works and in that case I have not any other option but to wait. Then I feel ashamed. I don't like to be dependent on others. Thus I have to face so

many difficulties in panchayats due to lack of good education. I think education is very much necessary to perform the panchayat works efficiently and to know and understand the work and responsibilities”.

The statement explains that the lack of essential education naturally affects the self-confidence of women. This leads an inferiority complex in women. Lack of proper education hinders their ability to understand the *panchayat* works. As a result they also cannot perform their works in more effective ways. For instance, respondent no. 2 said,

“Since my childhood I never found time to have proper education. I belong to an agricultural family and I have to spend a lot of time in agricultural works. Besides this I also have to perform domestic works. Moreover, nobody thought seriously about my education because they (family members) think that there is not in dire need of girl education because after all they (girls) have to perform domestic works. I never thought to join politics. It’s because of quota I am here. Now I feel that if I had good education I could understand better and work better.”

Thus it can be argued that the lack of education is an important factor that hinders women to participate in the meetings. Without proper education they feel hard to understand the rules of politics. Thus the education is the most vital channel to encourage women so that they can raise their voices about politics, their problems and issues related to them and to other people.

iii- Division of labor

Women have been excluded from the political field for a very long period. They were prevented from joining the main stream of politics in a male dominated society. The social and cultural constraints as well as the division of work are major factors responsible for such exclusion. A predominant view is that women are to accept the household role in the society,

and this effect of socialization is strong enough to prevent their entry into politics. This is the reason, Shvedova (2005) argues that traditions continue to emphasize and often dictate, women's primary role as mothers and housewives. In many countries a traditional, strong, patriarchal value system favors division of labor which affects the growth and participation of women in any political process. Similar condition was seen during the field work of present study where respondent no.13 described about her difficulties like this,

“When I informed my family that I am going to stand for elections they opposed. According to them I should devote myself for domestic works and not to think for political life. But even though I stood for elections and won. Now I have become very busy because I am performing my traditional works and also doing political works. Nobody at home wants to help me because they think that cooking, washing, cleaning and taking care of children and elders are only my responsibility.”

It is evident from the above statement that there are many works which women have to perform in traditional societies like cooking and taking care of children. Then it is really hard for them to get free time and even to think about coming in public life.

It was also found that the women who have a certain collective image of traditional, apolitical roles which continues to dominate even if they work outside. According to respondent no. 11, mukhiya from Arwal,

“Being a woman it is very difficult to adjust with this new responsibility. It is very hard to get time to participate... I always think about my family and children even when I am in the meetings. But still I am trying my best. ”

iv- Dual burden of domestic tasks and professional commitments-

The dual burden of domestic and professional works and responsibilities are one of those factors that restrain women's participation in the political system. Like many other countries of the world, women in India also are doing a substantial part of domestic work. So it is natural that they have no choice but to devote much of their time to accomplish the basic needs of their families. Respondent no. 11 said,

"I belong to a business family. Our family business is fishing. Now my in-laws are in old age and not in good health so I and my husband have to do all things. I have a one year old daughter who still does not go to school. So I have to take care of her also. Besides all these things I have to be punctual in my political works also. I am Mukhiya so I have some responsibilities toward my people. I also try to render my services to them. It is hard to accomplish all these things together."

Along with some women have full-time careers like teachers, lawyers, doctors etc. Thus starting a political career is like a third job and then it is like overwork. Many women are trying to balance their family life with the demands of their work which is a hard task. For example, respondent no. 6, a mukhiya from Mokama says,

"I am a Mukhiya, mother of two children and a teacher also. In addition to this I have to fulfill all the domestic works because there is nobody at home to do it. You can imagine that how difficult is to manage all these works together. I become very tired and sometimes I think that I cannot do all these things."

Respondent no.8, ward sadasya from Hajipur also says,

"I work as laborer. I am the main bread winner of my family. If I do not go for my job for one day it will be hard to survive my family. So I cannot find time to attend the meetings of

panchayat and to participate in panchayat works although I want to do this but it still I cannot find time.”

B: Psychological/Ideological obstacles:

The study suggests that there are also some psychological and ideological obstacles that restrain women to enter and participate in political life. These obstacles have been identified while talking to the women respondents. In a traditional society like India, women have been nurtured to fulfill the domestic responsibilities first then anything after that. They are not habituated to mingle with menfolk easily. At first they have to overcome their own lack of confidence then they have to fight with the traditional norms and attitudes of their surroundings. At last when they overcome all these obstacles and do something for their people, they do not get any attention by media for their work. So there is always pressure on them to be best in every walk of life. The respondents explained about these obstacles in different ways.

i. Self-esteem and self-confidence-

According to Shvedova (2005) lack of confidence in women members is one of the main reasons for women's under-representation in formal political institutions, including parliaments, governments and political parties. This can be seen while discussion with some women members in local self-government institutions. It was found that before the election they were very nervous and some of them were reluctant to stand for the elections. Respondent no. 29 stated,

“I belong to an agricultural family. I never went out of the house to talk for public works. Honestly speaking, I never thought about joining politics. When my family and other

neighbors discussed about my name for the Mukhiya, I just denied. I thought I would not be able to do this because I do not know anything about the politics.”

This statement clearly shows the lower level of self-confidence in that women member. This is not only one story. There were some other members with same kind of feelings. Respondent no. 23, a mukhiya from Patna also explained,

“I am a house wife. I never did any work except to the domestic works. Joining politics was a thing that I would not dreamed ever. But when this constituency reserved for the women people encourage me to stand for the election. In the beginning I was very shy and nervous. In fact I had no idea about the politics and administration.”

This is another statement which shows that women was very shy and she had a lack of confidence also. But all these things were prior to joining the politics. After joining politics they gained self-confidence as discussed earlier in the paper.

ii-The norms, cultural patterns—

Further, societal restrictions of rural India require that women do not participate alone in public spaces. The customary perception of women’s role being in the house is still strongly prevailing in rural India. Women who talk openly with male colleagues in political meetings are looked down upon as women of doubtful character. Women also have a restriction of timing as they cannot work outside after evening. According to them it is partly because of the tradition and partly because of the security. Respondent no. 7 stated,

“I cannot work outside for a long time because after evening it is not safe for a woman to be out of the house. After evening or in the late night you can find many drunken men. There is also a chance to be robbed. So being a woman it is difficult to face these types of incidents.”

There is also a daughter-in-law factor which works very strictly in rural India. It is a common tradition in many villages that the daughter-in-laws of the house who generally belong to a different village are not allowed to talk to the men of her husband's village. A quote from respondent no. 27, a zilla sadasya from Purnia illustrates this problem:

"I have to consider the tradition. I never feel problems in talking to men in the Panchayat meetings because they do not belong to my village. But after the meeting and outside the panchayat office I do not talk to other men because they belong to the same village where I am married. As a result, after the meeting I go home immediately. Generally I do not go to the gram sabha meetings because the men there belong to this village and being a daughter in law in the village I have customarily no liberty to talk to them."

iii- Attitudes of their surroundings – On the basis of discussion with respondents, it can be divided into two broad categories.

· *Lack of support from the family*

It is very interesting to find out that the women who contested elections on their own initiatives faced more problems within and outside the family in comparison to the women who contested elections on the initiative of their husbands or family members. Respondent no, 12, mukhiya from Bihta stated that,

"Those women who got support from their family are very lucky. I do not belong to that category. I faced obstacles by my husband and other family members regarding Panchayat elections but still, I won and came to the gram panchayat. I want to do so many things for my people but I am not sure I will be able to do this."

Respondent no. 22, a Pramukh from Patna also said that,

“When I decided to contest for elections nobody in my family liked it. They did not encourage me but I decided to come forward and as a result I am working with so many difficulties. I feel no liberty. My husband always interferes in everything and I have to obey his orders...If he is willing to perform all the tasks then what is the meaning of my election?”

· Adverse treatment from bureaucracy:

The interviews reveal that the adverse treatment by the bureaucracy has been a hurdle for participation for women. Respondents reported that they feel disregarded by the clerks in the administration. This feeling is voiced in the following quote of respondent no. 18, a ward sadasya from Mokama:

“I think something has to be done by the government about the bureaucracy. If I compare to men I feel women are not treated with due respect. The bureaucrats will not talk to you unless you are a very important person. The thing become more adverse if you are a woman and uneducated as then they even don't greet you.”

Respondent no. 20, a zilla sadasya from Sitamarhi said that,

“I never get support from persons who are on official posts, which are more or less filled by males. They don't treat me well. I cannot do many things which I want to do for my people. I think there should be some checks on government officers.”

iv-The lack of media attention-

Shvedova (2005) argues that the media in any society has two roles: to serve as a chronicler of current events and as an informer of public opinion, thereby fostering different points of view. But it is unfortunate that the mass media often have a tendency to minimize the exposure of occasions and organizations related to women. According to Shvedova (2005) women are largely isolated from the political decision-making process is also ignored by the media. Some

women members complained about the lack of media attention. Respondent no. 16, a Pramukh from Bhojpur said,

“There is a lack of appropriate attention about the activities of women members here. Because of this there is a lack of public awareness about women’s issues and development works done by women.”

Similarly, respondent no. 1 stated,

“Nobody from media came here when we protested against the alcohol. We struggled a lot to close that alcohol shop. Media person only goes to that member who can give a lot of promises but they do not see our works.”

C. Political/Institutional obstacles-

Women are limited in political arena by the political and institutional obstacles also. As Shvedova (2005) argues that masculine model of politics restrain women in politics. According to her men dominate the political arena; men formulate the rules of the political game; and men define the standards for evaluation. In addition, political life is structured according to male norms. For example, the political model, as Shvedova (2005) argues, is based on the idea of winners and losers, competition and confrontation, rather than on shared respect, teamwork and consensus building. This environment is habitually unfamiliar with women. Thus, according to Shvedova (2005), the presence of this male-dominated model of politics results in women rejecting politics altogether or rejecting male-style politics.

The present study suggests that the obstacles related to the political system proved to be many. In relation to earlier research all these obstacles can be well-matched with the obstacles that Shvedova mentioned. Thus the present study makes those aspects more strong.

i -Support from the political party, including economic and other resources to fund women’s campaigns and boost their political, social and economic credibility-

Shvedova (2005) argues that women play important roles in campaigning and organizing support for their parties, hitherto they rarely occupy decision-making positions in these structures. She further says that even though political parties possess resources for conducting election campaigns, women do not benefit from these resources for instance, parties do not provide sufficient financial support for women candidates. The research suggests that gender bias on the part of the electorate is usually presented as one of the main reasons for the fact that political parties resist selecting female candidates. (Sacchet, 2005) Further, according to Shvedova (2005), the selection and nomination process within political parties is also biased against women and male characteristics often become the criteria in selecting candidates. This condition was evident from the responses of women members as many women members complained about the behavior of political party. According to the respondent no. 15,

“Some people support me. On the other hand some of the party leaders always oppose me. Most of them are senior to me. Consequently I am facing obstructions to do something new.”

Respondent no. 2, a ward sadasya from Patna explained it in a different manner,

“The government has tried to decentralize the power and the memorandum of decentralization has been distributed through administration. But this is a bad luck that it has not been extended to the local level representatives. This starts right from the political party leader to the grass-root level workers. What I see here that the members are not given there due respect or importance.”

ii. Kind of electoral system along with the type of quota provisions and the degree to which they are enforced-

While the government has successfully launched the quota system in the local self-government institutions it is also very important that there should have some supplementary policies that can support the system. The present study suggests that there is a lack of proper training and capacity building programs for the elected women members. Respondent no.26, a zilla sadasya from Araria states,

“Although the government has applied reservation for us (women), but I think it has no concern to make the women members trained. Although some of them (women members) may not perform up to the mark, but it is evident that women members are more responsible than the male members.”

She further argues, *“It is the government as well as Panchayat department responsibility to render proper training to them.”*

According to respondent no. 10, zilla adhyaksha from Munger,

“There is a paradox. As a result of the reservation such candidates have been selected who do not know about the external and political world. These women members need training. It is misfortune that most of them have not got any training. I think if there will be proper training, these women members can be more active and can understand the panchayat works more efficiently. There is a need of training related information technology, health, education.”

iii- Role of women’s organizations -

In many countries women's organizations are working with political and governmental institutions to facilitate women's nomination and election. It results in increased women's representation within legislative bodies. Yet, according to Shvedova (2005), in recently developed or partially developed democracies there is a limited connection and collaboration between women politicians and women's organizations or other broad interest organizations

such as trade and labor unions. Additionally, in these parts of the world women's groups have a tendency to keep distance from women politicians and they do not participate in communication and lobbying on women's issues. While talking to the women political representatives of local self-governmental institutions in Bihar it was found that there is also more or less the same condition. Respondent no.10, zilla adhyaksha from Munger explained, *“We have not any well-defined or well organized connections with any women organization. I think if we had good communication with them it would be a great opportunity to discuss about women issues and then we can have more strong voice.”*

Respondent no. 19, a mukhiya from Gaya also said,

“No women organization approaches us. Although we are working hard to improve the living condition of women here but if we get any support from women organization it will give more positive effect.”

iv- Prevailing political culture:

During the research it was found that the political culture prevailing there also hinders the women to enter and participate in the political institutions. It was found something new besides Shvedova's result. When asked about political constraints the informants stated that intervention by male members is the key problem in participation. Pointing out this problem respondent no. 3, a ward sadasya from Mokama said:

“It is very hard. They (men) don't want us to speak. They think that we cannot understand anything and says that you are newcomer in this field and it will take long time to understand all things. My point is that if I will not get chance to participate how can I learn panchayat works?”

When asked what they think is the reason behind this respondent no. 4, a ward sadasya from Purnia replied that, *“I am not sure about this but I think there are vested interests. They (men) don’t allow women to participate because they think that women may object to the men’s decisions, which they cannot endure.”*

They also said that party intervention is the most prominent problem. Respondent no.16, a Pramukh from Bhojpur said, *“There are so many constraints and interventions by the political parties. I don’t want to stand for the elections next time due to the political chaos here. There is so much intra-party clash in my party that I can’t work. I feel uncomfortable in such type of environment.”*

The prevailing political culture is also a major deterrent factor for women. In the present political setup the qualities of commitment and honesty are considered to be out dated and crafty strategies are adopted to win elections. In this atmosphere, even women who are already in the political field rarely give vent to their feelings of disgust and frustration. Violence has also come to dominate the PRI elections, thus making participation of women more difficult and problematic. Most of such violence is consequential of the caste differences where people belonging to lower castes are tortured and murdered for standing against upper caste candidates. Booth capturing have emerged as an accepted norm of the electoral process. Added to this, criminalization of politics is another unpleasant element prevailing in elections. All these things prevent women from joining politics.

9. Conclusion and discussion

The aim of this study was to find out whether rise in the numerical representation of women in political decision-making can lead positive changes in the participation of women so that it can pave the way for political empowerment of women. The study developed a theoretical view on the multiple effects of gender quotas on women empowerment and found out the factors that facilitate and restrain the entry and participation of women in political field. To evaluate the impact of gender quota to the women's political empowerment nine concepts were prepared which included: *Political knowledge, Political interest, Political participation, Political trust, Political contacts, Political protests, Gender role attitude, Public Projects and Confidence*. The data of the present study reveals that the gender quota had a very positive impact on the political knowledge of women as most of the elected women representatives have a good knowledge about the political activities and *panchayat* works and after gaining a good knowledge about political activities these women become more interested in political works. Political knowledge seems to be accompanied with increased levels of women taking interest in politics which is very important for the political empowerment, and in this sense the reservation has had a strong impact on empowerment. The reservation system has also effected positively on women's confidence which is an important sign, the not only for politics but for the overall empowerment of women. The system has given a platform to the women to interact with social and political entities, resulting in that they have become more visible and gained the confidence to perform their duties for the betterment of their people. The women reservation system has also been supportive to women in protesting on issues like alcoholism, dowry disputes, divorces and girl- trafficking. But there are some other areas

where it seems that reservation has not been very effective. As far as the political participation is concerned, the overall related data in the present study reveals that women are very keen to learn about the participation techniques but that there is still a big gap to be bridged regarding the participation in decision making process. As we can see from the data, the reservation has not resulted in increased political trust in the political parties, although these women have trust for the political system. The reason behind this, as found in the discussion with the women representatives, is a process where political parties are bound to nominate a woman because of reservation and this process resulted in the distrust for the party. Similar result can be found in the category of political contacts where the data shows that the gender quota system seems to be far away from having a positive effect on women`s political contacts.

The main contribution of the present study is that it suggests a different dimension to measure the impact of reservation on empowerment by adding a new category which has not get attention by the previous researchers: the initiation of new public projects started by the women representatives. The data of the study reveals that apart from routine activities of the *panchayats* these women representatives have tried to start some public projects but there is a need for the support from government so that they can get more funds. Concerning the gender role attitudes in the political field the women representatives indicated that they feel that they are not treated equal to men in the political arena. According to these women, men did not give any importance to them, and women were never informed.

When inquired about the factors that facilitate the entry of women in the political arena the women members identified that reservations for women is the most important factor that motivates and facilitates them to come forward into political life. Secondly, these women stated that they got the motivation from their family members and other people to come into

politics. These women often required the help of their husband in sharing time consuming responsibilities of the household.

Constraints or the obstacles during women's political entry and participation were judged by using the three broad concepts produced by Shvedova (2005). These three concepts are: Socio-economic obstacles, Psychological/Ideological obstacles and Political/Institutional obstacles. As far as socio-economic obstacles are concerned the present study found out some of the same obstacles which Shvedova has described. These include poverty and unemployment; lack of adequate financial resources; illiteracy and limited access to education and choice of professions; and dual burden of domestic tasks and professional obligations. While psychological/ideological obstacles are concerned lack of self-confidence, traditional norms, negative attitude of their surroundings and lack of media attention were found out that clearly supports Shvedova's work. It is very interesting to discover that the women who contested elections on their own initiatives faced more problems within and outside the family in comparison to women who contested elections on the initiative of their husbands or family members. In the category of political/institutional obstacles the present study suggests one more obstacle that is 'prevailing political culture' besides Shvedova's obstacles which includes the role of political party, kind of electoral system and the role of women organizations.

In summery it can be said that the government of India is trying to empower the women through various economic/socio/political policies and programs but there are still some gaps to be bridhed. The result of the present study shows the reservation for women in the *panchayats* motivates them to come forward in political field. In conclusion, it can be stated that the reservation for women can be an important impetus to women's empowerment in

India on village level but that it is not a guarantee for the participation of the elected women. The goal of women's empowerment will not be accomplished by reservations alone, and there are a number of obstacles identified by the respondents. It can be noted that there are more restraining than facilitating factors for the entry and participation of women in political arena, and it is equally interesting to find out that the restraining factors are so many and so diverse. Steps are being taken to overcome these hindrances, but it is a very time-consuming process. A structure, which has been created over centuries, cannot be dismantled within a short span of time. To expedite and speed up this process it is essential to implement some supplementary policies which encourage the self-confidence of women, build women's capabilities and remove operational obstacles. There is a need to change many aspects of the existing gender relations, power distribution and to take hard decisions concerning power-sharing. While it cannot be claimed that women are categorically empowered through these reservations, it cannot be denied that they have gained a certain extent of authority and confidence as a direct outcome of the quota. In this respect it appears that the quota can be a feasible tool for the political empowerment of women.

References:

Ashok Mehta Committee (1978)

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_panchayati_raj_in_India

Bacchi Carol, 2006, 'Arguing for and against quotas: theoretical Issues', ''*Women Quotas and Politics*'' , ed. Dahlerup, D., London and New York, Routledge.

Balwant Rai Mehta Committee Report (1957) http://www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/decn/comm_update/res-32-270209-01.doc

Banerjee M. 1998, 'Women in local governance: macro myths, micro realities'. *Social Change*, 28 (1), pp. 87-100.

Ban Radu and Rao Vijayendra, 2006, 'Tokenism or agency? The impact of women's reservations on *panchayats* in South India'. <https://editorialexpress.com/cgi-bin/.../download.cgi?db...id> (accessed on 2009-October-01).

Barabas Jason, 2002, 'Another look at the measurement of political knowledge', *Political Analysis*, 10:2 (R)

Baviskar B.S. 2003: Impact of women's participation in local governance in rural India, paper presented at the Rural Network Conference, Inverness
BeijingConference 1995
<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/beijing/pdf/Beijing%20full%20report%20E.pdf>

Berglund Henrik, 2009, "Gender Relations and Democracy: The Conflict between Hindu Nationalist and Secular Forces in Indian Civil Society", *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 15:141–159,

Bird Karen, 2003, 'The political representation of women and ethnic minorities in established democracies: a framework for comparative research', working paper presented for the Academy of Migration Studies in Denmark (AMID), Aalborg University

Buch Nirmala, "From Oppression to Assertion: A Study of *Panchayats* and Women in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh" (New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies, 1999).

Chattopadhyay Raghavendra & Duflo Ester, 2003: 'The impact of reservation in the *panchayati raj*: Evidence from a nationwide randomized experiment', Nov 2003, IIM Calcutta and MIT

Chattopadhyay, Raghavendra and Esther Duflo, 2004, 'Women as policy makers: evidence from a randomized policy experiment in India.' *Econometrica*, 72(5), pp. 1409-43.

Clots -Figueras I, 2005, 'Women in politics: evidence from the Indian States'. Discussion Paper in Political Economy and Public Policy, *STICERD*, n 14.

Cornwall Andrea and Goetz Anne Marie, 2005, 'Democratizing democracy: feminist perspectives', *Democratization*, Vol.12, No.5, December, pp.783–800

Cueva Beteta, Hanny (2006) 'What is missing in measures of women's empowerment?', *Journal of Human Development* 7 (2): 221–41.

Dahlerup, D. 2002, 'Using Quota's to increase women's political representation', International IDEA, 2002, Women in Parliament, Stockholm (<http://www.idea.int>)

Dahlerup D. 2005, 'Increasing women's political representation: new trends in gender quotas', 'Women in parliament: beyond numbers', eds. Julie Ballington and Azza Karam., Stockholm: International IDEA, 141-53

Dahlerup D. 2006, (ed): 'Women, quotas and politics', London: Routledge

Dahlerup D. 2006a, 'Conclusion', in *Women quotas and politics*, London and New- York, Routledge.

Dahlerup D. 2006b, 'Introduction', in *Women quotas and politics*, London and New York, Routledge.

Dahlerup D. 2006c: 'The Story of the theory of critical mass', *Politics & Gender* 2(4), Cambridge Press

Dahlerup, D. 2007, 'Electoral gender quotas between equality of opportunity and equality of result', *Representation* 43 (2): 73-92

Dahlerup and Freidenvall, 2005, 'Quotas as a fast track to equal representation for women: why Scandinavia is no longer the model', *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 7(1):26-48

D'lima Hazel, 1984, *Women in local government: a study of Maharashtra*, New Delhi, Concept Publishers, P.103.

Delli Carpini, Michael X and Scott Keeter. 1996, *What Americans know about politics and why it matters* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Easton, D. (1965), *A Framework for Political Analysis*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall.

Fukuyama, F. (1995) *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, New York, Free Press

Ghosh D.K. 1995, 'Women *panchayat* members as heads of offices: a study in West-Bengal', *Journal of Rural Development* 14(4), pp. 357-66.

Gidengil Elisabeth, 1995, 'Economic man - social woman - the case of the gender-gap in support for the Canada-United-States free-trade agreement', *Comparative Political Studies* 28 (3): 384-408.

Goetz Anne Marie, 2003b, 'Women's political effectiveness: a conceptual framework' in *No shortcuts to power. African women in politics and policy making*, eds. Goetz, A. M. and Hassim, S. London and New York, Zed books

Hatim Shadima, "Empowerment of Women : Problems and Prospects", *Indian Journal of Politics*, Uttar Pradesh, Aligarh Muslim University, Dept. of Political Science, Nos. 1&2, January-June, 2001, P.43

Herd Pamela and Madonna Harrington Meyer, 2002 'Care work: invisible civic engagement', *Gender and Society*. 16(5): 665-688.

Hust E. 2002, 'Political representation and empowerment: women in the institutions of local government in Orissa after the 73rd amendment to the Indian constitution', Heidelberg Working Paper No. 6.

Hust E. 2004, *Women's political representation and empowerment in India: a million Indiras now?*, New Delhi, Manohar Publications

Htun Mala, 2004, 'Is gender like ethnicity? The political representation of identity groups', *Perspectives on politics*, 2 (3): 439-58

Htun Mala and Mark P. Jones, 2002, 'Engendering the right to participate in decision making: electoral quotas and women's leadership in Latin America', ''*Gender and Politics of Rights and Democracy in Latin America*'' ed. Craske, N. and Molyneux, M. Basingstoke: Palgrave

Huyer S. and Sikoska T. (2003), *Overcoming the Gender Digital Divide: Understanding ICTs and their Potential for the Empowerment of Women*, United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW). Available at http://www.uninstraw.org/en/research/gender_and_ict/virtual_seminars.html.

IDEA 2006: *Facts about worldwide quotas*, continuously updated www.idea.int/quota/index.cfm

Inglehart and Norris, 2001, *Rising tide: gender equality and cultural change*. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge International IDEA, 2006, "Women in parliament: beyond number, obstacles to women's participation in parliament", <http://archive.idea.int/women/parl/ch2b.htm>

Jayal Niraja Gopal, 2006, 'Engendering local democracy: the impact of quotas for women in India's *panchayats*', *Democratization*, Vol.13, No.1, February, pp.15-35

Kabeer Naila (2001) 'Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment', in *Discussing Women's Empowerment, Theory and Practice*, Sida Studies 3, Stockholm: Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency.

Kabeer Naila, 2005, 'Gender equality and women's empowerment: a critical analysis of the third Millennium Development Goal' *Gender and Development Vol. 13, No. 1*

Kapoor N. 2002, 'Women and governance,' *Participation and Governance* Vol. 8, No. 23, pp. 7-11.

Kaul Shashi and Sahni, Shradha, 2009, 'Study on the participation of women in *panchayati raj* institution', *Stud Home Comm Sci*, 3(1): 29-38

Kaushik S. 1997, 'Women panches in position: a study of *panchayati raj* in Haryana' New Delhi: Centre for Development Studies and Action

Kudva Neema, 2003, 'Engineering elections: the experiences of women in *panchayati raj* in Karnataka', *Indian Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 3, (Spring)

Krook M. L. 2004, 'Promoting gender-balanced decision-making: the role of international forum and transnational networks', Christensen, H. R. Halsa B. and Saarinen, A. (eds), *Crossing borders: re mapping women's movements at the turn of the 21st century*, Odens University Press, pp. 205-20

Mahanta Upasana and Sinha Samrat, 2007, 'The political empowerment of women through *panchayati raj* institutions: a critical assessment of India's experiment with affirmative action', Paper Prepared for The Third International Congress of the Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA), <http://www.dcrdu.org/apisa%20website/PAPERSThird%20APISA%20Congress,%202007/Upasana%20Mahanta%20and%20Samrat.pdf>

Malhotra Anju and Sidney Ruth Schuler (2005) 'Women's empowerment as a variable in international development', in Deepa Narayan (ed.) *Measuring Empowerment: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives*, Washington, DC: World Bank.

Mansbridge Jane, 1999, 'Should blacks represent blacks and women represent women? A contingent "Yes"', *Journal of Politics* 61(3):628-657;

Matland Richard E., 1998: 'Women's Representation in National Legislatures: Developed and Developing Countries'. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 23, no. 1, pp. 109-125.

Matland Richard E. 2006, 'Electoral quotas: frequency and effectiveness', *Women quotas and politics*, London and New- York, Routledge

Mishra Anil Dutta, 1999, 'Empowerment through political representation', Mishra, Anil Dutta, (eds.) 1999, *Gender perspective: participation, empowerment and development*, New Delhi: Radha Publications

Mondak Jeffrey J. and Anderson Mary R, 2004, 'The knowledge gap: a re-examination of gender-based differences in political knowledge', *Journal of Politics* 66: 492-512.

Molyneux Maxine, 1984, 'Mobilisation without emancipation? Women's interests, state and revolution in Nicaragua', *Critical Social Policy* ,4; 59

Narayan Iqbal, 1976, *Rural elites and elections in an Indian state*, New Delhi, National Publishing House, P.79.

Omvedt Gail, 2005, 'Women in governance in south Asia', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 40, no. 44 – 45, October 29 – 4 November, pp. 4746–4753,

Pai S. 1998, 'Pradhanis in new *panchayats*: field notes from Meerut district', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 2, May, pp. 1009-10.

Pelletier Réjean, Couture Jérôme, Crête Jean, 2008, Identity and Political Trust in Minority Nations, Paper presented at the PSA Specialist Group on British and Comparative Territorial Politics

Phillips Anne, 1993, *Democracy and difference*, Polity Press, Cambridge, U.K.

Phillips Anne, 1995, *The Politics of Presence*, Oxford and New York, Clarendon Press.

Rai M. Shirin; Bari, Farzana; Mahtab, Nazmunessa & Mohanty, Biduyt 2006: South Asia: Gender quotas and the politics of empowerment – a comparative study, in Dahlerup, Drude 2006 (ed): Women, quotas and politics, London: Routledge

Ross Karen, 2002, (ed), *Women, politics and change*, Oxford University Press, p. 190

Sacchet Teresa, 2005, "Political Parties: When do they work for Women?", EGM/EPWD/2005/EP.10 Sahay Sushama, *Women and Empowerment: Approaches and Strategies*, New Delhi, Discovery Publishing House, 1998, P.22.

Santha E.K. 1999, *Political participation in panchayati raj: Haryana, Kerala and Tamil Nadu*, New Delhi: Institute of Social Sciences

SAP Network 2003: summary of workshop in "Women's empowerment in the context of local government in India", New Delhi on October 20-21, 2003.

http://action.web.ca/home/sap/india_resources.shtml?x=48752&AA_EX_Session=88d7f8d350980bba1d32cf3d6f0fcf35

Sekhon J. 2006, 'Engendering grassroots democracy: research, training, and networking for women in local self-governance in India', *NWSA Journal*, Vol. 18 No. 2 (summer)

Shvedova Nadezhda 2005: Obstacles to Women's Participation in Parliament, in Ballington, Julie & Karam, Azza 2005 (eds): *Women in parliament: Beyond numbers*, revised edition, Stockholm: International IDEA, Publications office

Sivakumar Sowmya Kerbert & Madhuresh 2006: Study of 97 women elected chairpersons in Bihar's *Panchayati Raj*: Summary of findings, for The Hunger Project, March 2006

Squires Judith, 1996, 'Quotas for women- fair representation?', *Parliamentary Affairs* 49(1): 71-88 The Bihar *Panchayat Raj Ordinance, 2006*,
http://sec.bih.nic.in/Docs/english_ordinance.pdf

Verba S. Schlozman, K.L. and Henery E. Brady, 1995, *Voice and equality: civic voluntarism in American politics*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press

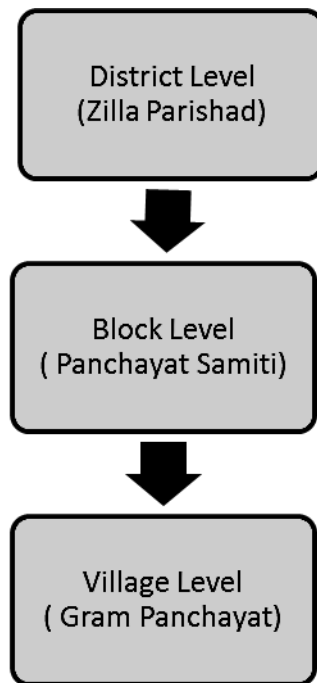
Verba and Nie, 1972, *Participation in America: political democracy and social equality*, New York: Harper and Row

Young Iris Marion, 2000, *Inclusion and democracy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

Zetterberg Pär, 2009, *Engineering equality? Assessing the multiple impacts of electoral gender quotas*, Dissertation presented at Uppsala University,
(<http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:uu:diva-100822>)

Appendixes

Appendix 1- Structure of the *Panchayati Raj* Institutions



Appendix 2- Elected Representatives in the 2006 *Panchayati Raj* Elections of Bihar

Source- Ministry of *Panchayati Raj* 2006

Table 1

Gram Panchayats

Number of *Panchayats* – 8463

Number of elected representatives

General Categories	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Total	Women (Nr. And Percent)
99672	16941	784	117397	64152 (54.64%)

Table 2

Panchayat Samitis

Number of *Panchayats*- 531

Number of elected representatives

General Categories	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Total	Women (Nr. And Percent)
9139	2307	91	11537	5671 (49.2)

Table 3

Zilla Parishad

Number of *Panchayats*-38

Number of elected representatives

General Categories	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Total	Women (Nr. And Percent)
956	192	9	1157	577 (49.9)

Table 4

Grand Total

Number of Local Government Institutions-9032

Number of elected representatives

General Categories	Scheduled Caste	Scheduled Tribe	Total	Women (Nr. And Percent)
109767	19440	884	130091	70400 (54.1)

Appendix 3- Basis behind selection of respondents

Age: India has a hierarchical setting of family structure in which women have a different level of authorities according to their age and this can also affect their behavior and perception in political life. Kaul and Sahni (2009), Jayal (2006) and Ban and Rao (2006) have used this variable in their studies and drawn valuable conclusions. Thus in my opinion age can be an important factor to understand the empowerment of women.

Caste: There are important differences between castes in India. It is not only a division of labor it also affect the behavior and influence of individuals. Ban and Rao (2006), Kaul and Sahni (2009) and Jayal (2006) have used caste as a variable in their studies whereas Sekhon (2006) argues caste as a factor which limits the women's participation in traditional Indian society. According to Ban and Rao (2006) women perform better who live in villages less dominated by upper castes. Jayal (2006) used caste as an important form of social constraint. Thus this factor can be an important to understand that how elected women see their possibilities of influence.

Religion: India is a multi-religious country. Women from dominant religion in any particular area are more visible than women from other religion. Thus the religious belonging may be an important factor to comprise a variation in during selection.

Wealth: The economic conditions determine the working behavior and elected representatives are not exceptions. Jayal (2006) and Ban and Rao (2006) have used this variable in their studies. According to them it is a very important factor to understand the background of the respondents. Thus wealth can be an important factor of selection.

Education: Education can be a qualification of an active involvement in the work of the *panchayat*. Keeping this in mind education must be considered as an essential factor. Kaul and Sahni (2009), Jayal (2006) and Ban and Rao (2006) have also used this variable in their studies. According to Kabeer (2005) access to education can bring changes in cognitive ability which is essential for women's capacity of question, reflection, action and knowledge.

Political background of the family: This can be very important factor while selecting the respondents because it is very often that women from politically involved families are more interested in joining the politics and on the other hand sometimes these families also pursue women to contest elections because they do not want to lose their political power.

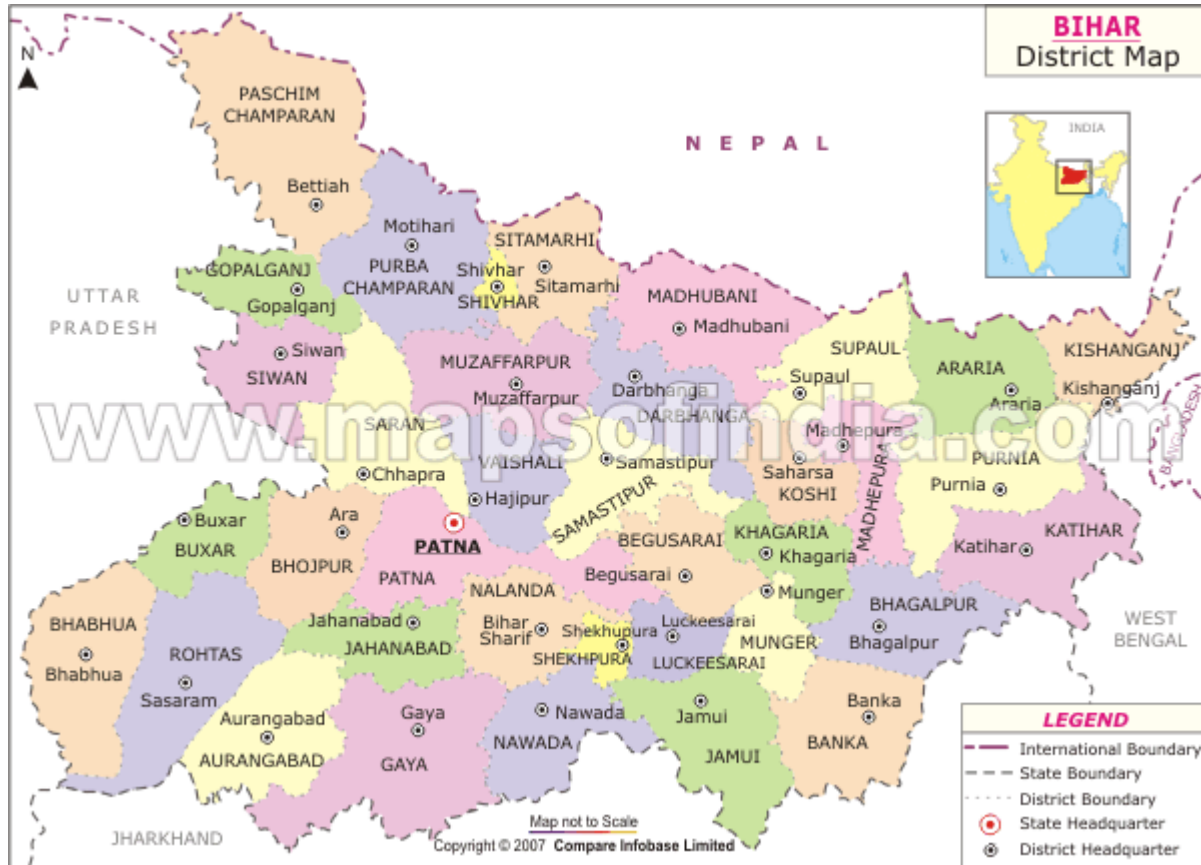
Appendix 4- List of Interview Questions

1. Age
2. Religion
3. Profession
4. Education
5. Marital status
6. Family structure
7. Do you know about the composition of Gram *Panchayat*?
8. What do you think about women's role in society? Only bearing and rearing children and domestic works or they should participate equally in politics and public life?
9. Were you active in the party before?
10. What was the main network for you to enter into the politics?
11. What was your main motivation for entering into politics?
12. Who supported you to run for election?
13. Were there obstacles?
14. How often did you participate at the *Panchayat* meetings?
15. Were the time of the meetings adjusted to take account of the needs of the women?

16. Did you feel that you were taking part in the decision making concerning the issues raised in Gram *Panchayat*?
17. What were the main responsibilities and issues raised by you? What response did you get considering these issues?
18. Do you think that caste is an hindrance to reach a stronger position in Gram *Panchayat*?
19. Were there any difficulty? (How did you handle them?)
20. Did you get support from your neighbors and friends when you were entering in to politics?
21. Did your relationship with neighbors and friends change after being elected?(How)
22. What was the response of your family concerning the fact that you became politically engaged in Gram *Panchayat*?
23. In what way did your party support you during your participation?
24. Is your husband/ family politically active?
25. Did you need your husband's/ family's consent while going to meetings?
26. Were your husband / family involved in your decisions concerning political issues raised in Gram *Panchayat*?
27. Do you think that prevailing values as to the roles of women and men limits women's role in politics?

28. Do you think your confidence has increased since your political involvement?
29. Would you consider running for elections again? If no why not and if yes why?
30. Would you encourage other women to run for elections? What advice would you give to them?
31. Have you started any new project?
32. Which type of project was it? For general people, for women or for development?
33. Have you also got support from your husband / family in starting project?
34. Did you able to tackle the government officers in getting start any new project?
35. Have you face difficulties in starting a new project? What and how did you handle them?
36. What were your priorities regarding raising issues and making rules- general people development, development of women, education, sanitation, water, electricity or anything else?
37. Did you get support from other *Panchayat* members while presenting your priorities?
38. What do you think is the reason for low participation of women in politics?
39. When active in Gram *Panchayat* did you take responsibilities for your domestic services? Were there any problem? Did you get help from your husband?
40. In your work, have you had contact with civil or government organizations?

Appendix 5- Map of Bihar



Appendix 6- List of Respondents

Nr.	Age	Caste	Religion	Education	Wealth	Occupation	Political Family	Election layer of the PRI's
1	40		Muslim	5th Class	50000	House wife	Yes	Mukhiya
2	56	General	Hindu	Literate	240000	Agriculture	No	Ward Sadasya
3	29	SC	Hindu	5th class	18000	Labour	No	Ward Sadasya
4	58		Muslim	5th Class	28000	Agriculture	No	Ward Sadasya
5	35	SC	Hindu	Literate	50000	House wife	No	Zilla Sadasya
6	33	General	Hindu	Intermediate	18000	Teacher	Yes	Mukhiya
7	45		Muslim	Post Graduate	80000	House Wife	No	Zilla Adhayksha
8	25	SC	Hindu	Literate	18000	Labour	Yes	Ward Sadasya
9	26	OBC	Hindu	High School	100000	Business	Yes	Zilla Sadasya
10	43	General	Hindu	Post Graduate	1700000	Job	No	Zilla Adhayksha
11	38	General	Hindu	Graduate	100000	Business	Yes	Mukhiya
12	31	OBC	Hindu	High School	20000	Agriculture	No	Mukhiya
13	23	SC	Hindu	Graduate	25000	House Wife	No	Nagar Adhayksha
14	45	OBC	Hindu	Literate	90000	Agriculture	Yes	Nagar Adhayksha
15	40	OBC	Hindu	5 th Class	140000	House Wife	No	Mukhiya
16	45	SC	Hindu	High School	12000	House Wife	No	Pramukh
17	32		Muslim	5 th Class	45000	Business	Yes	Zilla Sadasya

18	27	General	Hindu	Intermediate	75000	House Wife	Yes	Ward Sadasya
19	30		Muslim	Post Graduate	-----	Business	No	Mukhiya
20	30	SC	Hindu	High School	200000	Agriculture	No	Zilla Sadasya
21	25	General	Hindu	Intermediate	96000	Agriculture	Yes	Pramukh
22	33	General	Hindu	Intermediate	25000	Agriculture	No	Nagar Adhayksha
23	26	SC	Hindu	7 th Class	50000	House Wife	No	Mukhiya
24	34	OBC	Hindu	Literate	56000	Agriculture	Yes	Zilla Sadasya
25	30	General	Hindu	Literate	70000	Agriculture	Yes	Pramukh
26	31	OBC	Hindu	High School	45000	Business	Yes	Nagar Adhayksha
27	41	OBC	Hindu	7 th Class	80000	House Wife	No	Zilla Sadasya
28	30	OBC	Hindu	High School	60000	House Wife	Yes	Zilla Adhayksha
29	45	SC	Hindu	Literate	85000	Agriculture	Yes	Mukhiya
30	28	SC	Hindu	Intermediate	40000	Housewife	No	Zilla Sadasya