

Women's Empowerment and Development:

A case of Bihar local self-government

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the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

In

Political Science

By

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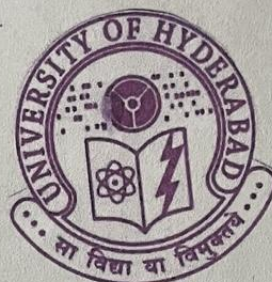
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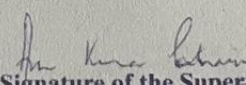
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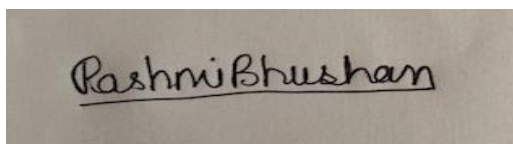
DECLARATION

I, **RASHMI BHUSHAN**, hereby declare that this Dissertation entitled, “Women’s Empowerment and Development: A case of Bihar local self-government”, submitted by me under the guidance and supervision of Prof. **ARUN KUMAR PATNAIK**, is a bonafide research work. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink. The signature is written in a cursive style and reads "Rashmi Bhushan".

Signature of the Student

Dedicated to all womxn i have ever known and embraced.



Acknowledgement

It would have been impossible to finish this work without the presence of love and support of 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 Prof. Arun Kumar Patnaik for his kind support, guidance and cooperation. His questions, critiques, assistance and priceless suggestions directed my thinking, writing and research. I'm so grateful to my co-advisor, Prof. E. Venkatesu, who brought his insightful feedback and comments to each meeting. I would also like to thank other professors at the Department who gave some valuable comments. I am grateful to all the staff at the library and Department of Political Science for their help.

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Explanation of Words, Name, and Abbreviations

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

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

Mukhiya - Chairperson of Gram *Panchayat*

Nagar Adhayksha - Chairperson of urban district level institution of PRI

OBC - Other Backward Castes

PRIs - Panchayat Raj Institutions

SC- Schedule Castes

EBC- Extremely Backward Classes

Ward - Part of a village

Ward Sadasya - Ward member

Chapter-I

Introduction

The debates around the political representation of women are essentially contested. Women's exclusion from the political arena has been justified on various grounds at varied times in history. Women were either absent or had inferior positions as political beings in the canon of political philosophy. There exists an explicit contradiction between the enterprise of politics and the realm of women. The connotation of politics, both as an "ultimate good" and "not-household and not-women," undermined and continues to undermine the political role of women. Historically, political philosophy claims universality is not gendered yet treats feminine things as non-universal and abnormal. The whole discipline of social sciences had not fully accepted women as political beings until feminist scholars intervened. Feminist intervention in the form of activism and an academic endeavor has challenged and reconstructed political philosophy. Different waves of feminism have contributed to the changes that we see now in politics. The women's suffrage movement was a long struggle by women to achieve the right to vote. The first wave of feminism (the 1840s to 1920s) made issues of women's rights a feminist issue. During the first wave of feminism, theoretical endeavors to separate biological and socially-constructed conceptions of women's identity took place. Scholarly works like Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* is one of the groundbreaking feminist works which marked the theoretical relevance of the second wave of feminism which started in the 1960s. She argues that politics is a structural power relation by which one group of people dominates another group. The mid-1990s brought a revolutionary turn into waves of feminism, sometimes called the third wave of feminism. The third wave of feminism is more inclusive than the other two, giving different experiences of women a central position in the analysis. Instead of focusing on the presence/absence of women in certain institutions, it has questioned the gendered structure of institutions. The structures of these institutions are not only gendered but also involved in the gendering process. Power is understood as not just repressive but also as productive.

In a liberal democracy, the debate about women being political is intricately connected to a more significant debate on citizenship. Modern democracy enfranchises its women population; that is, it gives them an equal right to vote. However, the equal right to vote and the equal opportunity to contest elections are not identical issues. The opposition to the latter is more vociferous as it, to

some extent, ensures a direct distribution of power and poses several challenges to male-dominated politics.

Pateman (1988) has argued that democratic freedom needs a paradigm shift from its masculine origin as it is antagonistic to women's experiences. Since the gender-neutrality aspect of democracy, in effect, gives preferential treatment to men, we need to bring some institutional changes in the form of affirmative action to make democracy more conducive to women's political participation. Gender quota acts as an inducement in the democratic structure to have some amount of level-playing field for women in politics. It tries to ensure an inclusive polity where the presence of women contributes to strengthening democratic values. Drude Dahlerup (2006) argues that the introduction of gender-based quotas in politics is a sign of being modern which has attracted many newly democratic countries to adopt some form of gender quotas in politics. She defends gender quota and explains that gender quota is not discrimination against any other community; instead, it is a compensatory move to undo the historical discrimination against women.

The Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development, and Peace (1995) was held in Beijing, China. This conference, convened by the UN, elaborated a comprehensive plan to achieve global legal equality, known as the Beijing Platform for Action. This is one of the most progressive plans that revolves around advancing women's rights. Although there is no explicit use of the word, the gender-quota framework covers women in power and decision-making as one of the 12 concerns. Goal 5 of Sustainable Development Goals: 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.' It aims to end all forms of inequalities and discrimination against women and girls. It targets removing all forms of violence against women in public and private spaces. Women will be provided with universal access to sexual and reproductive rights as agreed upon in the Beijing Platform for Action and Programme for Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. The fifth target of SDG 5 is to 'Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.'¹, which addresses the concern of the present study. However, there is again no mention of gender quota here; SDGs promote a myriad of means to enhance women's descriptive and substantive representation across the globe.

¹ Sawadogo-Lewis, T., Morgan, R., Qiu, M., Magaço, A., Ngale, K., & Robertson, T. (2018). Reaching substantive female representation among decision-makers: A qualitative research study of gender-related experiences from the health sector in Mozambique. *PLoS One*, 13(11), e0207225.

The third goal of the Millennium Development Goals is also about the promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women. It also takes into account the abysmal condition of women representatives across the globe as one of the targets of goal 3.

After liberalization and privatization, many countries have raised the slogans of women empowerment; it has been argued that such slogans of gender equality by government agencies have been used as a prerequisite to attract foreign investment and avoid pressures from international agencies. Therefore, the issue of gender equality has successfully been drawn into public discourse as a legitimate concern.

According to the latest data from IPU Parline, India ranks 145 out of 188 countries in the ranking of women in the national parliament. The Lower House of the Parliament has 14.4 percent women members, and the Upper House has even less—10.3 percent. India stands below Bhutan, Malaysia, China, Nepal, and many more.(see appendix) India has no electoral quota for women at the national level, and the shamefully low number of women in parliament speaks for itself.

Although with the institutionalization of Panchayati Raj through the 73rd Amendment Act of the Constitution, the state government is under constitutional obligation to adopt the new Panchayati Raj System that provides reservation for hitherto marginalized communities—SCs, STs, and Women. It manifests Article 40 of the Constitution, which states that “the State shall take steps to organize village Panchayat and endow them with such powers and authority as may be necessary to enable them to function as units of self-government.” And the act also gives the state government discretionary power to provide reservations for backward classes. This act has provided panchayats with powers and responsibilities to make and implement development programs that ensure economic development and social justice. Although there is no explicit mention of the term social justice, the soul of the act lies in the idea of social justice. In the recent past, we have also seen that many of the state governments have given 50 percent reservation for women, Bihar being one of the first states to do so. Currently, there are 21 states which have provided 50% reservation for women at PRIs: Andhra Pradesh, Assam, Chattisgarh, Gujarat, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, Punjab, Rajasthan, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Tripura, Uttarakhand, West Bengal, and Bihar. The Bihar Panchayat Raj Act, 2006 says:

*"13 (2) As nearly as but not exceeding fifty percent 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 percent of the total number of seats not reserved for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Backward Classes shall be reserved for women."*²

The Panchayat system existed in India even before the 73rd amendment. However, the functioning of the PRIs was at its lowest. The system was wholly redundant and existed for the namesake. There were no regular free and fair elections, insufficient financial resources, and negligible representation of people from marginalized communities: SCs, STs, Women, etcetera. The local governing bodies played no significant role in the federal polity of India. As the local self-government was on the verge of collapsing, several committees were formed, and many recommendations were given to bring it back to life. This section succinctly discusses a few crucial committees formed post-independent to strengthen the PRIs in India. In 1957 a committee– Balwant Rai Mehta Committee, chaired by Balwant Rai Mehta, was appointed by GOI to examine the Community Development Programme (1952) and the National Extension Service (1953). The committee recommended the establishment of 'democratic decentralization' by setting up an agency at the village level with a capacity not just to represent the interests of the village but also to monitor various development programs. The committee's main recommendations were: to replace the 2-tier system of local governance with a three-tier panchayat raj system which is composed of Zilla Parishad (district level), Panchayat Samiti (the block level), and gram panchayat (village level). Moreover, direct election for representatives at the village level, while Zilla Parishad and panchayat Samiti shall be composed of indirectly elected members. Also, block-level representatives should comprise the executive body, whereas representatives at the district level play the role of the supervisory body. For the proper functioning of these bodies, resources must be available to these bodies. Moreover, there shall always be room for further devolution in the future. Later in 1958, the National Development Council accepted these recommendations; however, the council left it to the state governments to evolve their own pattern of local governance provided without disrupting the basic principles. In

² *The Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance, 2006, (Section 13, No. 2 and 3).*

1959, Rajasthan became the first state to establish a PR system. In 1977 Ashok Mehta Committee, chaired by Ashok Mehta, was appointed to revive and strengthen the PRIs, which appeared to be working as an agency rather than an institution. First of all, the committee proposed for constitutionalization of Panchayat Raj through a constitutional amendment. Another important recommendation that the committee suggested was the introduction of affirmative action in the form of reservation for SCs and STs at the PR level. Although none of the recommendations were given practical shape as the Janta Government collapsed, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, and West Bengal followed the recommendations of the Mehta Committee to revitalize their Panchayat Raj system. In 1985 Planning Commission formed G.V.K Rao Committee, a committee formed to review the Administrative Arrangements for Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation Programmes. The committee concluded that the development programs were estranged from the panchayat raj system, and bureaucracy had completely taken over the development process. As a result, the PRI was called nothing but 'grass without roots.' It suggested that Zila Parishad should play the highest and most pivotal role in decentralization. Importantly, it also suggested that regular elections should be held.

Despite the formation of several committees and recommendations, there were no effective structural and functional changes in the Panchayat Raj system of India. In 1989, then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi-led government appointed a committee that L M Singhvi chaired. The committee was formed with a motto: 'Revitalisation of Panchayat Raj Institutions for Democracy and Development. It demanded the constitutionalization of PRI, and to protect and preserve it; a new chapter shall be added to the constitution. It also recommended making Gram Sabha robust in its structure and function as it embodies democracy at the lower level. Financial autonomy for village panchayats was also sought. The recommendations of the L M Singhvi Committee were not welcomed by the Sarkaria Commission (1998). Sarkaria Commission was formed to look into Center-State Relations. The commission criticized the constitutionalization of PRIs as any laws on panchayats should have been enacted exclusively by the state government. Reservation for women was recommended by the Thungon Committee (1988) and reiterated by Gadgil Committee.

The Rajiv Gandhi-led government introduced the 64th Constitutional Amendment Bill to institutionalize the Panchayat Raj system. This bill was passed by Lok Sabha (lower house of the Indian Parliament) but rejected by Rajya Sabha, Upper house of the Indian Parliament). Finally,

under Narasimha Rao's government, the PR system was constitutionalized through the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992 and came into action in 1993. There is no reservation for women at the national or state level in India. Attempts were made to extend this reservation to parliament, with 3-4 unsuccessful attempts. WRB is still pending as the 108th constitutional amendment bill. WRB was introduced purely as a women's issue; however, Menon (2000) argues that, over time, it certainly cannot only be understood as a women's issue. It involves questions of citizenship, representation, and, interestingly, a wide area for feminist politics. In India, feminist scholars, activists, and politicians stand divided on the issues of WRB. Against gender quota, Madhu Kishwar argues that India does not need any such bill as the cultural tradition of India suffices the need for fulfilling the development of Indian women. Leaders who supported gender quota at the local level have vehemently rejected WRB: some said it undermines the capability of women to win from an unreserved seat, which perpetuates the belief that women are not capable enough to be a leader and others, especially male leaders from backward castes, said that WRB would only enhance political opportunities of elite upper-caste women. One famous leader went on to say that WRB would be nothing but an entry passage to "parkati mem" (elite women). Scholars have reflected upon this statement, and, like others, the researcher also argues that such statements are undoubtedly misogynist, but we shall not reduce them merely to their sexist tone. There is a valid suspicion and a fair amount of possibility that WRB, in its present form, would likely enhance the presence of upper-caste women in politics. Furthermore, in order to challenge the constraints that come in the way of women's participation, Rai (2002) argues the proposed bill must challenge the multifaceted power relation based upon caste/class in the socio-economic system. Empowerment of women cannot be disassociated from other aspects of the power hierarchy. Vicky Randall (2006) also highlights the existing caste conflict around the women's reservation bill. In fact, Randall's work also pinpoints another important objection that other feminists have also shown: the women's reservation bill of India is not formulated progressively, and the existence of a rotation system in it might terminate the political career of women even before it starts. Also, electoral competition in reserved constituencies between women will lead to the ghettoization of women; that is to say, it will limit the extent to which women can take participation in politics. Rather than opening opportunities for women, the existing bill will shrivel away their political participation.

1.1 Aim and Objective of the Study

The universality of gender quota as a tool to increase the descriptive representation of women has been well established; the present study aims to investigate the following:

Whether descriptive representation has successfully translated into a substantive representation: to help elected women in their endeavor toward empowerment.

The present study has operationalized a theoretical framework for the empowerment and development of the elected women through concepts like *Political Interest: will to re-contest the election, choosing politics as a full-time career, and awareness about different policies; Social Engagement: their social engagement is assessed through their improved communication skills, freedom to movement and association, and formation of new social networks; and Change in Attitude and Activities: understanding of gender equality, control over one's own environment, and exercise of corporeal agency.*

1.2 Research Questions

The study aims to answer two critical questions in order to understand the impact of gender quota on the empowerment and development of elected women representatives:

1. What effects does an increase in descriptive representation of women through gender quota have on their substantive representation?
2. What kind of changes does gender quota bring in the behavioral attitude and activities of elected women members of the Panchayati raj institution?

1.3 Research Methodology

The present study focuses on the representation of women through gender quota and its impact on the development and empowerment of these women. Data collection was done by fieldwork in the Nawada and Nalanda districts of Bihar. Both of these districts are in the southern part of Bihar. As per Census 2011, the Nawada district's total population is 22,19,146, out of which the male population is 11,44,668, and the female population is 10,74,478. It comprises 2.13% of Bihar's total population. The overall literacy rate of the district is 59.76: female- 48.86 and male- 69.98. In absolute numbers, there are 4,31,538 women who are literate, and 6,59,474 men are literate. The sex ratio of the district is 939, which is less than its previous year's census 2001 (946). Gender Report Card-2019 has categorized it as a promising (a level up to good performing) district in terms of JEEVika and women's mobility. It is listed as a good performing district in crime against women. The performance of the district is low in women's access to financial services and women's capability to exercise agency and very low in girls' education. According to the 2011 Census, the total population of Nalanda is 23.68 lacs: female: 13,80,593 and male: 14,97,060. The languages that are being spoken are mainly Magahi and Hindi. The sex ratio is 921. Total literate population is 1,519,933; female: 6,00,375 and male: 9,19,558. According to Gender Report Card-2019 issued by the Department of Social Welfare of Bihar, Nalanda is one such district that fares well in the JEEViKA program, a self-help group that mobilizes women from marginalized households, especially SCs and STs households. The district also performs well in terms of women owning assets, both physical and financial. It is also among the good performing districts regarding women having access to banking and other financial services. The daily mobility of women, influenced by civic and transport infrastructure, access to information and technology, and societal norms, is also at a good level. Gender Report Card-2019 also mentions Nalanda as one of the good performing districts regarding women's decision-making power. Regarding girls' education, Nalanda fares poorly and is listed as a low-performing district in GRC-2019.

The study had adopted a qualitative method, whereby the information about the changes in life experiences of elected women can be obtained through interviews. Both primary and secondary sources were used to collect the data. The study has interviewed women from different levels of local self-government in Bihar. Interviews were unstructured as it was more favorable,

considering the nature of the study. The flexibility around the unstructured interviews also helped the researcher deal with mundane aspects of the study. One-to-one personal interviews kept the interference of male counterparts at bay. These interviews were recorded and later on transcribed.

Moreover, the study has also used snowball sampling techniques. The study also used a short questionnaire that dealt with specific questions (see, appendix). The secondary sources were mainly books and articles published in journals and other literature related to the research.

The total number of respondents is 40, and these women are from different social backgrounds. To make this more systematic, I have made ten sets of elected women. Each set has four women, and for every three “backward caste” (OBCs, EBCs, and SCs) women, there is one “forward caste” (upper-caste) woman. So among 40 representatives, we have ten women each from OBCs, EBCs, SCs, and upper-caste women. The group of women who were interviewed was both formerly as well as presently elected women. The first meeting always took place at their home, and further conversations sometimes took place in the fields. During the interview, the researcher used both Hindi and Magahi interchangeably. Therefore, all the interviews are taken in either Hindi or Magahi and then translated into English. Sometimes, translation tends to fail in explaining the exact meaning, so I have tried to use certain words of Hindi and Magahi in double quotes with their loose English meaning in brackets. The unstructured interview revolved broadly around the following topics:

1. Role of gender-based reservation in politics on the political interest of women,
2. Impact on communication and mobility of women representatives after being elected,
3. Their control over their environment through the various decision-making processes,
4. Changes that have come in their lifestyle, especially on a personal level, and
5. Focus on changing the nature of her relationship with her husband and other men around them

1.4 Field Work Experience of the Researcher

Collecting data for the study was one of the most challenging parts. This difficulty has been aggravated by the presence of a deadly virus which has resulted in the pandemic. Traveling restrictions, no excess to the library and reading room of university, fear of getting infected, losing someone you know, and constant fear of losing your dear ones have made most of my MPhil an overwhelming experience. Amidst all this, going on fieldwork was a tough choice. The capital city of Bihar was one of the worst-hit cities. Carrying all my emotional and physical fear with me to a state where health facilities are not even at a bare minimum was something I would never suggest anyone do. The fear was not only about getting infected but also about what would happen if the Bihar government decided to extend the lockdown and I would not be able to do my fieldwork. However, when in June 2021, I reached there, the situation was slightly less horrible. Another challenge that I faced was when I decided to live in a village instead of staying in Patna to avoid the traveling expenses, and also, it was time-consuming. The people of the village were not quite welcoming at first as they feared I might be carrying the virus from “Badka Sehar” (big city). Finally, I successfully convinced them and started my fieldwork.

As it was a time of paddy cultivation, people would leave for their fields early in the morning and come back late in the evening. After coming back, women were busy with chores, and thereby they had no spare time to talk to me. The unavailability of women due to cultivation was a challenge—a challenge that was resolved on its own due to supportive and cooperative women and their families. Therefore, we all fixed a time according to the respondents’ convenience and proceeded with my interviews. The challenge didn’t end here, as I managed to get women’s interviews. Their husbands always sit along with them throughout the interview. Initially, they did not allow women to be alone with me and have them speak to me freely. Most of the time, Mukhiya Pati spoke for the Mukhiya. This pattern of behavior by Mukhiya Patis used to influence the answers of elected women and impeded my unstructured interviews. To deal with this problem, I strategically decided to take a small interview of male counterparts of elected women before having an actual conversation with women. Effectively this worked, and most of them had left the elected woman and me alone to have the rest of the interview done. Also, it helped me to understand the environment in which she lives. In her endeavor to understand women’s empowerment, Naila Kabeer (2005) gives the surrounding of women great importance

to measure the overall empowerment of women, so the experience with male members was also very insightful.

While I managed to get free space to have a conversation with women uninterrupted but some of their hesitancy to speak freely was something that I could not do anything about. Some of them did not want me to visit them for further conversation, which was necessary to have a close relationship with the subject. At last, I managed to interview 40 women who spoke as freely as possible and agreed to have further meetings as required. I collected my data and came back to Hyderabad. In December 2021, I again visited the field and met these women as the Panchayat election of 2021 in Bihar was just over. Some respondents also won the election and invited me to their place. During this visit, my respondents were more friendly and answered very openly some of the personal questions that I asked. Unfortunately, this particular visit to the field was not so long as I was infected with the omicron variant of Covid-19. However, the second visit definitely added value to the study's observations.

1.5 Summary of the Dissertation

In this section, I will give an overview of the dissertation. The dissertation starts with an introduction that starts with a general knowledge about the status of women in politics, furthermore it discusses the aim and objective of the research, research questions, research methodology, and an account of the researcher's fieldwork experience. The second chapter is titled "Political Representation Through Gender-Quota: A Pathway to Empowerment and Development." In this particular chapter, I discuss the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter has four sections: Feminist theoretical framework on Political Representation; Arguments for and against Gender Quota through Feminist Lens; Feminist Perspectives on Power and Development and Empowerment: A Complimentary Relation; and Operationalisation of the concepts of Development and Empowerment of Women. Section 2.1 discusses the literature on political representation ranging from Hannah Pitkin to Melissa William. This section aims to give a clear picture of the evolution of political representation as a concept. It shows why the fair representation of women is an issue to be discussed and how representation is instrumental in empowering hitherto marginalized communities. Section 2.2 discusses various literature on gender quotas, and this section includes arguments given in favor of gender quotas as well as against them across the world. It also includes literature that counters the claim that a woman is incompetent to be a decision-maker. Section 2.3 is an important section that starts with the feminist scholarship on power. Power as a concept is essential for this study as the study's complete focus is to assess women's empowerment, where power relation plays a vital role in the journey of women's empowerment. Also, power helps to understand the agency of an actor in a better way. The researcher has agreed that development and empowerment are two sides of the same coin before she delves deep into the concepts of empowerment and development of women. The literature shows how development is an unfinished task if women's empowerment is not taken into account. Beijing Conference, Nairobi Action Plans, SDGs, and MDGs support this claim. Through Naila Kabeer's work (1994 and 2005), the chapter discusses the importance of agency in women's empowerment. The section goes beyond the conventional understanding of empowerment and discusses the psychological empowerment of women, which focuses on their social engagement and freedom of association and movement. It also brings the bodily empowerment of women into the discussion, which focuses on the exercise of corporeal agency of women to challenge patriarchal norms and customs and the bodily integrity of women, that is,

the sexual and social security of women. Lastly, the chapter includes operationalized conceptual frameworks: Political Interest: will to re-contest the election, choosing politics as a full-time career, and awareness about different policies; Social Engagement: their social engagement is assessed through their improved communication skills, freedom to movement and association, and formation of new social networks; and Change in Attitude and Activities: understanding of gender equality, control over one's own environment, and exercise of corporeal agency.

The third chapter of the study, titled "Mapping Development and Empowerment of the Elected Women: An Investigation of their Public and Private Lives," records responses of elected women based on unstructured interviews and questions from questionnaires. The responses that I have written are translated from Hindi and Magahi. During the transcription, the researcher has not tried to sanitize the responses of the women, and this is to say the transcript produces what has been said and, most importantly, how it has been said. The way they have articulated their responses has not been arranged in order to make it "sophisticated." Nothing has been removed or added by marking the relevance of it to make the responses more articulate. Also, I transcribed the respondent's explicit and loud expressions, which they gave during the interview.

The last chapter of the study, titled "Conclusion: Gender Quota in Bihar: An Instinct of Hope in Women," discusses the concluding remarks based on the study's findings. Although the study does not transcribe the interviews of the elected women's family member(s), this chapter discusses some of the observations made during those strategic interviews.

The study ends with an appendix that includes: a flow chart of the PRI structure of Bihar, a map of Bihar state, a map of Nawada district and Nalanda district, a list of Panchayat that the researcher visited in each district, and a list of questions of the questionnaire. Lastly, there are a few graphical representations of Bihar women's political presence in national and state-level assemblies.

Chapter II

Political Representation Through Gender-Quota: A Pathway to Empowerment and Development

2.1 Feminist theoretical framework on Political Representation

There is an immeasurable amount of literature that discusses political representation. The meaning of representation has gone through several critical academic endeavors in time and history. The politics of representation is a highly contested concept. Sometimes, it seems misleadingly simple and, at others, exhaustively complicated. Several scholars have contributed to giving a solid understanding of political representation. The debate around the political representation of women mainly revolves around two types of representation: descriptive representation and substantive representation. Keeping the complexities aside, the simplest way to describe descriptive representations is as a representation concerned only with the absolute number of representatives. However, substantive representation is beyond the headcount of representatives. It is concerned with the changed outcome in policies resulting from the numerical presence of a representative. Although it fails to secure enough attention, a strong correlation exists between substantial and descriptive representation. The researcher has also tried to look into the impact of descriptive representation on the substantive one in the process of empowerment and development of the elected women. At present in only 22 countries women serve as Heads of State or Government, and there exist 119 countries have never had a woman leader. At the current rate, gender parity in the highest positions of power will not be reached for another 130 years.³ Therefore, it is essential to highlight that the crucial role of descriptive representation does not end at enabling conducive conditions for substantive representation; it matters in and of itself. In terms of citizenship and inclusion, descriptive representation conveys a vital aspect of a democratic society; the mere descriptive presence of a marginalized group indicates their claim to citizenship, not only as a voter but also as a member of an elected office.

Hannah Pitkin (1967), in her work *The Concept of Representation*, offers four dimensions of representation—formalistic, symbolic, descriptive, and substantive—that are considered one of the most crucial conceptual frameworks to study the concept of representation. In her view, the

³ <https://www.ipu.org/>

crucial line of division that runs along the different forms of representation is the distinction between “standing for” and “acting for” representation. Substantive representation, defined as “acting in the interests of the represented in a manner responsive to them,”⁴ lies at the heart of her theory as it is the most important dimension out of the four to maintain the integral nexus among all of them. Although her theory of representation gave head-starts to many feminist scholars, it did not take up issues of gender explicitly. Pitkin’s theory of representation has two conflictual claims against the feminist theory; unlike Pitkin, feminist scholarship is concerned with the notion of gendered power, gender-based division of labor, and gendered structure, which highlights the abysmal presence of women in electoral politics. This argument highlights the importance of the numerical rise of women representatives to ensure justice and fairness. Additionally, in feminist scholarship, descriptive representation is considered a critical enabling condition for substantive representation. Descriptive representation likely translates into substantive representation. In line with this argument, Anne Phillip (2012) argues that descriptive representation has not successfully brought what we expect, for it still needs to be descriptive enough.

The theory of representation leaps forward through many feminist scholarly works towards the end of the twentieth century; Anne Philips is one such scholar. Her work, *The Politics of Presence* (1995), has immensely contributed to the robust theory of political representation through two distinct concepts of representation: politics of idea and politics of presence. Anne Phillips has focused on representation, shifting from the "politics of idea" to the "politics of presence." She argues that the secular understanding of political representation, denoted by politics of ideas, is concerned with policies rather than people. Moreover, she points out that in a liberal democracy, the representatives are in complete charge of their constituents' diverse opinions; therefore, it is inevitable that the policies will include issues of women.

In contrast, politics of presence represents a shift in people's loyalties. It stresses upon people rather than policies. With its great emphasis on who represents the interests of the women best, politics of presence challenges the claims of impartiality and just representation made by politics

⁴ Campbell, R., Childs, S., & Lovenduski, J. (2010). Do Women Need Women Representatives? *British Journal of Political Science*, 40(1), 171-194. doi:10.1017/S0007123409990408

of idea. The inadequacy of women in politics as a decision-maker reflects why many people shifted their demand from politics of ideas to politics of presence. Politics of presence lays the ground for gender quotas. Four arguments are elucidated in her work to increase the number of women representatives: role models, principles of justice between sexes, focus on overlooked interests of women, and women's distinct influence on politics. She clearly states that "the least interesting of these is the role model." This point of view requires critical treatment. Another argument seeks justice through a fair political representation of women. The political monopoly of men indicates structural discrimination against women, which needs immediate action to ameliorate women's representation. The presence of women as a constituent of political elites of a society symbolizes their social significance, and exclusion from such groups reinforces the claim about a particular group's social and political incapability. Interestingly, the following argument bases itself on political realism. In a modern democracy, the heterogeneity of interest demands legitimacy. The diverse interests of people must be recognized and held in check. The present condition of women suffices that male representatives majorly overlook women's interests. Although women have successfully won the battle for equal citizenship with equal political rights, their equal right to vote is inadequate as it does not solve the problem of unfair representation of women in elected office. A vital question arises while formulating arguments for the representation of women's interests by women: if women are a unified category with a vividly agreed set of interests. To such a query, Phillips argues that there cannot be any repudiation of the claim that interests are gendered even though the interests of women are varied.

Furthermore, she points out that recognizing women's interests is not to establish a unified category of women but to acknowledge the distinction between men's and women's interests shaped by their distinct experiences. Lastly, it has been argued that the presence of women has significant potential to change the nature of politics by inducing specific values which raise the moral tenor of politics. These values and concerns are related to women's caring role as mothers. However, this argument is potent enough to burden women with too many burdens in their role as mothers. Phillips shows two apprehensions while writing about group-based representation. First, she argues that over-emphasis on the presence of members of certain groups undermines the accountability of those members of that particular group as representatives. Secondly, 'balkanization,' which she is concerned about, leads to demand for separate quotas by many

ethnic groups, and that would create political unrest. Jane Mansbridge (2003) disrupts the traditional line of thinking and disassociates political representation with principal-agent relationship theory. She outlines four distinct forms of representation in a modern democratic setup. Moreover, these are *promissory*, *anticipatory*, *gyroscopic*, and *surrogacy*. As the name suggests, promissory representation is linked to the promises representatives make to their constituents during election campaigns. In contrast, anticipatory representation is concerned with post-election rewards by the constituency, which has challenged the understanding of accountability as mainly a retrospective activity. The third form is gyroscopic representation, closely linked to experience-based interest representation. She argues that representatives “look within” to understand the interests through experience and shape their activities based on it. Lastly, surrogate representation occurs when representatives happen to represent beyond their areas. Another fascinating account of representation is depicted in Nadia Urbinati’s works which give prime importance to the idea of representation as advocacy. She argues that undermining the importance of disagreement and rhetoric to democratic procedures ultimately undermines the values for which democracy stands. Conceptualizing representation as advocacy in modern democracy helps us to avoid inevitable mistakes in understanding deliberative procedures.

An advanced take on representation by Melissa Williams (1998) re-envision the theory of representation in reference to the experiences of the historically marginalized community. Her work invokes a concept of representation as “mediation.” She introduces three themes, voice, trust, and memory, that mediate with three distinct dimensions of the political life of representatives. For her, voice, trust, and memory help marginalized communities to put across their representation in an authentic and fair sense of representation. She heavily draws upon the theme of trust as she believes it to be a building block of democracy. Indeed, trust in each other against those who discriminated, the presence of the hitherto marginalized voice in legislative decision-making, and creating a sense of group solidarity by sharing a definite pattern of memory of oppression over a long term seem achievable with an increase in descriptive representation.

2.2 Arguments for and against Gender Quota through Feminist Lens

The persistence of male dominance in politics is alarming as it undermines the political capacity of half a population, which is women. Feminist scholars show unequivocal agreement that the absence of women's leadership represents a model of modern democracy that contradicts the claims it makes. Various measures have been suggested to balance gender parity in politics. Some of them have suggested gender quota as one of the most promising measures, while others have suggested others majors along with gender quota. A group of scholars vehemently rejected the quota system, arguing that it creates a ceiling rather than a floor for women's representation. Advocates of quota argue that it provides the historically marginalized community a fair chance to represent themselves in political spaces that are still non-conducive for the fair participation of women. Quota enables them to deliberate on their issue while formulating policies.

On the contrary to this, the opponents believe that quota represents divisive politics; it privileges a particular community based on gender over others and undermines the fundamental equality among people, and also wholly abandons the meritocratic principle. A significant criticism of gender quota is that it neglects several other important identities of women, such as caste in India, by treating women as a monolithic category. Moreover, it leaves social cleavages neglected. This section elucidates arguments that favor gender quotas. Moreover, it gives a glimpse of academic arguments which oppose the quota system.

Mona Lena Krook (2006) discerns different types of the quota system, and these are; one is called legislative quotas, in which parties commit themselves to nominating a certain number of women candidates. Second is the political party quota, in which political parties set their sights on increasing the number of women candidates and engendering politics, and finally, the reserved seats, which means a fixed number of seats are reserved exclusively for women. In India, we have the third type of quota system at the local level of governance, called the legal quota system. Studies show that the high representation of women in Nordic countries has set an example for many countries to introduce gender quotas. Although the presence of women is relatively high, the direct relation between gender quota and the rise in the number of women representatives is a little misleading argument for Nordic countries. In Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, the quota system came in the 1980s. Back then, women already accounted for 20–30 percent of parliamentarians, which was already the highest in the world at the time. In this regard, Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall (2005) have introduced two discourses: the

incremental track versus the fast track to women's representation. Incremental track discourse identifies the shortage of political resources for women as the primary problem and suggests the gradual development of society as a solution to it. It is based on equality of opportunity. This model has been part of Nordic Countries. However, the fast-track discourse is based on the equality of results.

Moreover, it rejects the idea of gradual improvement in women's representation. In countries like India, the incremental model is inadequate for translating an increase in resources to fair representation of women. The historical exclusion, entrenched in patriarchal discrimination against women, does not allow it. So the solution to it can only be affirmative actions like gender quota.

Drude Dahlerup (2006) argues that the introduction of an electoral quota for women symbolizes the modern democratic inclination of the state. Through her work, she establishes that discourses around the quota system are alike worldwide. The opponents and proponents make a similar argument for opposition/support of gender quotas across the globe. In terms of opposition, she discusses traditional, classical liberal, feminist, and constitutional perspectives. She argues that opposition to gender comes from a traditional perspective based on patriarchal norms and customs, which treat women as subordinate to men. Also, it justifies the underrepresentation of women in politics by arguing that politics is a man's world and women are supposed to be within four walls. Women are trained to do chores and care-oriented work and are not competent enough to make rational decisions. Classical liberal discourse also opposes gender quotas as they believe affirmative actions are antithetical to the principle of equality. Gender quota violates the equality principle and creates a political space where unqualified representatives make their way. They argue for gender-blind discourse in politics and are also concerned about the impact of gender quotas on women. The quota system undermines women's capability to join politics on their own; they are treated with less respect as they have become representatives not because of 'merit' but due to 'grace.'

Feminists believe politics is an androcentric space. Excluding women from politics is an undemocratic way of treating a large chunk of the population. It also opposes the quota system as they are apprehensive about the proxy representation of women. Apprehension regarding tokenism is the most vocal anti-quota argument that comes from feminist discourse. Another

opponent of the gender quota system thinks introducing quotas based on gender or any such identity is unconstitutional. The presence of quotas creates discrimination between men and women, challenging the equality and fairness for which the constitution stands. In response to this opposition, Dahlerup discusses the arguments favoring gender quotas. She argues that those who consider quotas for women as a discriminatory system against men have entirely misunderstood the ideas responsible for the genesis of gender quotas. A quota system has been introduced for women to improve their political participation. It is a compensatory measure to improve the position of women in decision-making institutions. Rather than being discriminatory, the quota system aims to eradicate the discrimination that prevents women's access to politics. She says proponents of gender quota base their support on the justice argument: women constitute half of the population, so half of the seats must be reserved for women so that fair representation of women can occur. Second is an argument based on different experiences and interests of women: women have different experiences than men, which needs representation. Also, they have different interests and values than men, which all men assemblies cannot represent. Lastly, the role model argument argues that the gender quota brings women into politics which helps other women to become active members of electoral politics. Another paramount concern that opponents often voice out is the fear of 'balkanization' which means other groups will start demanding separate quotas for themselves (Philips, 1995). In response to this, Dahlerup argues that there is no harm if other marginalized groups demand such a quota; in fact, it is a significant development that the introduction of gender quotas has made other marginalized groups aware of their exclusion.

Carol Bacchi (2006) elaborates on the link between the quota system and concepts like equality, representation, citizenship, and rights. She also emphasizes the importance of context while reflecting upon the quota issues vis-à-vis, the concepts of equality, representation, citizenship, and rights. The discussion on the quota system evokes a very classical liberal argument against it: quota undermines equality of opportunity and consequently undermines the merit of individuals. In response, it has been argued that equality of opportunity tends to perpetuate the status quo in a highly unfair society. Equality of opportunity does not suffice to challenge the existing power relations. There must be a shift from equality of opportunity demand to equality of results; gender quota paves the way for such demand. In this debate, it has been clearly put forward that it is essential to have women's voices represented and involved in the endeavor to

redefine the existing androcentric definition of citizenship in favor of women. Bacchi also argues that for those who oppose quotas due to merit discourse, it needs to be highlighted that gender is also a kind of merit. Political representation should reflect the whole society. She warns against using the term "preferential treatment" for affirmative action as it indicates that society's only anomaly is inequalities; otherwise, society is just. Moreover, affirmative action is an attempt to highlight men's entrenched privileges, which comes at the cost of the perpetual submission of women to social norms and customs. Mari Teigen (2000) also cautions against the discrimination/anti-discrimination dichotomy. In order to avoid this controversy, she suggests three strategies: demand for equal treatment, benefits of inclusion of women, and putting the burden of proof on those who seek to maintain the status quo rather than on those who challenge it. Her suggestions echo equal relevance in the gender quota debate, as the demand for gender quotas is based on the three suggestions that she has made. Gender quota is an instrument to treat women as equal citizens by providing a level playing field in politics. Also, including women in politics provides experiences and values that can be brought only by women. Hence, it changes the status of politics from a male business to one that believes in inclusive politics.

Through her work, Niraja Jayal Gopal (2006) has sought to understand and evaluate the impact of gender quotas at PRI on the participation of women. She uses two distinct discourses of interest; strategic gender interest and practical gender interest. Strategic gender interests include the abolition of gender division of labor, the right to reproductive choice, the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination, and measures against domestic violence. It aims to shift the power dynamics in favor of women as it ensures greater control by women over their own lives. This process is something other than something that can be done by whirling the wand. It takes time and effort to shake the entrenched patriarchy in our system. In contrast, the practical gender interest aims at basic necessities such as access to food, health care, water, etcetera, which takes less time with immediate effects.

Moreover, she argues that quota has proved to be efficient in making strategic gender interests part of the agenda for women's empowerment, but it is moving at a slower speed. Despite the slow speed, some signs support the claims that the quotas have enabled women to address their practical gender needs and interests. Her focus is on the motivations of women. Jayal also shows concern about the phenomenon of proxy representation; tokenism of representation hinders women's empowerment. She further suggests that education and the women's movement can help

the quota system further to realize the strategic gender interests. Pippa Norris, along with Mona Lena Krook, suggests some majors beyond gender quota, such as the role of civil society, raising political awareness through media, etcetera., to enhance women's political participation.

Gender quota has also been subject to severe criticism, such as Proxy representation or Tokenism is one of the most highlighted disputes around gender quota. At local levels of governance, it has been observed that women representatives are only symbolic representatives and nominal heads; the actual power lies with their male counterparts. *Mukhiya Pati* is an undeniable reality; consequently, it has discredited the debate on gender quotas and created a hysteria that, instead of fighting patriarchy, gender quota perpetuates it. In line with many scholars, the researcher also believes this approach to gender quotas is unfair and paves the way for patriarchy to dominate public spaces. No doubt, the phenomenon of Mukhiya Pati exists, which is detrimental to the very purpose of a gender quota, but we do have studies that also show us another side of the story. Raghavendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo's (2003) work, *The Impact of Reservation in the Panchayati Raj: Evidence from a Nationwide Randomised Experiment*, shows the impact of women leaders who are elected through the reservation on policy decisions. Despite long-held prejudices against women's leadership qualities, this work observes that women leaders are more inclined to work for the enhancement of their constituents, particularly for the women constituents. Women leaders invest more in public goods, which are closely linked to women's fundamental necessities such as water supply, roads, etcetera, and this is true for those women as well who are backed by their husbands. Gender quotas have increased women's self-esteem, confidence, and motivation. Gender quota does recognize women's intrinsic, inalienable right to power, resources, and opportunities. It has also generated political advancement of women and not merely produced a numerical increase of women in elected bodies.

2.3 Feminist Perspectives on Power and Development and Empowerment: A Complimentary Relation

Development and empowerment are multifaceted concepts that make their meaning inevitably elusive. Interestingly, these two concepts have been given several definitions, yet there are no standard definitions. Several scholars, as well as international agencies, have contributed to the development of a solid understanding of development and empowerment. The perspective on development is dynamic: from people's liberation to agendas that focus on the liberation of economies; later on, international agencies' involvement relates development directly to poverty-amelioration, achievement of MDGs, etcetera. Notably, Millennium Development Goals, Sustainable Development Goals, Nairobi Conference, Fourth World Conference on Women, and many more such conferences and goals have established that women's empowerment is integral to all dimensions of inclusive growth and sustainable development. The present study considers that there is an intrinsic link between development and empowerment, and the process of development of women is an unfinished task if their empowerment is not taken into account.

Empowerment has played a significant role in bringing changes in the lives of women. In the 1980s and 1990s, the concept of empowerment was highlighted by feminist scholars as a radical approach to shift power relations in favor of women and also brought light upon issues of women's rights and greater equality between men and women. Power and agency are two of the central tenets we come across while discussing the empowerment of any kind. As a result of this, before delving deep into the discussion of empowerment and development, the researcher would like to give a brief account of power and agency through a feminist perspective so that we can be able to make a more precise picture while we discuss the empowerment of women. The presence of power as a central concept in social sciences can be traced back to the genesis of social order, which makes it an important conceptual tool for understanding the complexity of a society. Mark Haggard and Stewart R. Clegg (2009), in their work, say:

"....it is still better to think of power as plural, as shaped by local context, as a tool which enables us to make sense of the social world rather than embodying a singular essence; and it is always a translational tool not only between different academic language games but between these and the world of mundane practices. Different concepts will articulate different practices;

some will reveal more of some practices, others more or less of these, and, perhaps, other practices."⁵

Power is also an essentially contested concept. Countless endeavors to give a precise and conclusive definition has not provided us with one, and somewhat, they widened the complexity of power as a conceptual tool. The continuing evolution of power as a concept complicates the relationship between gender and power. Feminist theorists treat power as an intrinsic concept while studying women's empowerment. The centrality of power in empowerment theory is self-evident from the word "em -power- ment" itself. In feminist discourse, there are myriad conceptualizations of power that challenged, if not changed, the classical takes on power. Of all, the study discusses power as empowerment in great detail. The conception of power as a resource deals with the unequal distribution of power in society. Clearly, the political, economic, and social power inclines towards men. Feminists urge for redistribution of power by challenging the status quo. Okin (1989) argues that the distribution of power is unequal and unjust, which results in further inequalities between men and women. Such injustices and inequalities treat women as subservient to men, and a prolonged injustice to individuals leads to a changed way of viewing themselves. Therefore, lack of power changes how men look upon women and how women see themselves: as incompetent decision makers. Power is a critical social good that helps women to disrupt the power relation between them and men.

Contrary to the concept of power as a resource, feminist scholars theorize power as domination. Power as domination denotes the power relation between men and women in which women are dominated through power and authority based on patriarchal norms. Domination against women starts even before they are born; the existence of female foeticide proves it. Simon de Beauvoir has rightly pointed out that 'One is not born, but is made woman.' The domination of women is a dyadic relation between men and women where women, the powerless, are subjugated by powerful men (MacKinnon, 1989; Frye, 1983). Scholars like Pateman and MacKinnon believe that sex difference is a social construct developed by dominating women. Carole Pateman (1988) argues that the social contract that brings modern civil society into existence is also a sexual contract that allows the legitimate right of men to dominate women.

⁵ Haugaard, M., & Clegg, S. R. (2009). *The Sage Handbook of Power* (first, pp.1-25). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Gerhard Göhler (2009) argues that power as empowerment sporadically makes a distinction between 'power-over' and 'power-to,' but it treats them as complementary to each other. The presence or absence of power assesses empowerment; the presence of power as 'power to' is actual, whereas the existence of 'power over' is considered potential. He conceptualizes power as two distinct concepts which base their understanding on Weberian and Ardent's notion of power, respectively: transitive power (Max Weber) and intransitive power (Hannah Arendt); transitive power is concerned with the outside as exercise of transitive power refers to the exercise of influence which imposes one's will over others; in contrast, intransitive power is concerned with inside and self-referential which is produced and preserved by society and individuals. Transitive power identifies with the Weberian conception of power, which stands for capability and influence. Intransitive power bases itself in Arendt's understanding of power, which is produced by people's communications and actions. Power is defined by the relationship between people, which they make by acting together. Therefore, he concludes that Weber's conception of power is not only 'power over' but also transitive power.

Similarly, Hannah Arendt's conception of power is not just 'power to' but also intransitive power; both concepts are complementary. Moreover, the exercise of power results in opening up and closing off various options to act as the structuring of fields of action influenced by power. Both transitive and intransitive power structure fields of action of people: transitively, it can be done by exerting influence, and intransitively, it is done with the help of communication and action in concert.

Amy Allen (1998, 2009) has expressed dissatisfaction with the available unsatisfactory account of power as a concept. She offers a new account of power which conceptualizes power as 'power-with.' She argues that feminist discourse on power requires a type of power that is capable of binding feminist movements together and can help to make alliances with other movements, 'power-over' and 'power-to' do not suffice them. Collective empowerment is unachievable if we describe power as either power over or power to and do not take power-with into account. Her theorization of power-with is identical to Arendt's concept of power, i.e., power-with is an act of collectivity that is based on the capability to attain a common or shared end which eventually helps to overturn the system of dominance. She also suggests that neither power-over nor power-to can be understood when put in opposition to each other, nor can power-with be best understood if pitted against either of the aforementioned concepts of power.

Naila Kabeer (2005) discusses agency as: ‘power-to’ and ‘power-over.’ Power over is a negative understanding based on exploitation, domination, and subjugation. In this form of power, individuals or groups use their agency to undermine the agency of the individual or group through the use of violence and other means. Power over is identified with oppression which makes it a masculine concept. Exercise of power can also be in a form that enhances one’s ability without diminishing others’ capabilities. ‘Power to’ is such a positive understanding of one’s agency through which people not only get the power to make their own decisions but also help others to make the choice of life, even when met with opposition. This conception of power is transformative as well as empowering for oneself and others.

Contrary to power as domination, power as empowerment does not fixate on the dyadic relationship between men and women. It goes beyond the master/slave binary and treats cultural norms, customary practices, and other impersonal structural mechanisms as reasons for the subordination of women to men. Nancy Hartsock (2019) argues that in order to achieve the empowerment of women, political change is sought by feminists. Politics involves power, defined as one’s ability to control and dominate others. Social theorists even made an analogous commentary on power as money. Like money, power is also a possession that has value in itself, and actors who possess this are capable of attaining other valuable things. Hartsock disregards such a conception of power and questions the understanding of power in phallogocentric culture. Like her, the French feminist Luce Irigaray also rejects the masculinist conception of power. Furthermore, she argues that feminist scholarship needs to shift from the redistribution of power to the rejection of power as dominance, as a simple change in the distribution of power is not enough to subvert the androcentric cultural and social order.

Works of Kabeer (1994,1999, 2005), Batliwala (1993, 2007), and Bisnath and Elson (1999) observe that the concept of empowerment is an appropriate instrument that facilitates the process of change that women would lead. The struggle for social justice is a journey that women take with their changing consciousness and power relations that happen through their empowerment in economic, social, and political aspects of their lives. Kabeer (2005) has argued that agency, resources, and achievements are three closely interrelated elements that help us understand empowerment's meaning.

Moreover, centrality is given to the agency. *Agency* is defined as the ability to make choices that disrupt power relations in a challenging way. Kabeer (1994, 2005) also argues that empowerment from within is an essential connotation of agency to understand the multi-dimension of power. The 'power within' helps women improve their ability to make choices and enhance their control over resources.

Moreover, empowerment does not only encompass how women see themselves but also how others see them. The work of Andrea Cornwall and Jenny Edward (2014) highlights the significance of changes taking place in women's lives beyond the spectrum of the conventional understanding of empowerment. By shifting focus toward the non-linearity of the empowerment process, their work has highlighted the aspects of empowerment, such as relationship, love, pleasure, care, and leisure, which were not given due importance in the past assessment of the empowerment of women. The empowerment process has a psychological aspect to it as well, which plays a critical role in people's lives to gain greater control over their lives and decision-making ability. It also helps develop a critical understanding of the socio-political environment. Psychological empowerment also includes behavioral action that impacts community relationships, contributing to social and political changes (Christen, 2012; Zimmerman, 1995). Kabeer also emphasizes the relational aspect of empowerment. She warns against the dissociation of women from the relationship web that forms their social and economic lives. Moreover, she also argues:

"In a context where cultural values constrain women's ability to make strategic life choices, structural inequalities cannot be addressed by individuals alone.... Individual women can and do act against the norm, but their impact on the situation of women, in general, is likely to remain limited, and they may have to pay a high price for their autonomy. The project of women's empowerment is dependent on collective solidarity in the public arena and individual assertiveness in private."⁶

Through extensive scholarship on empowerment, it has been established that 'power within' is essential to women's transformative agency. The patriarchal norms and customs which work as an impediment to realizing one's transformative agency are ingrained in the social disciplining of

⁶ Kabeer, N., & Huq, L. (2014). The Power of Relationships: Money, Love and Solidarity in a Landless Women's Organization in Rural Bangladesh. In A. Cornwall & J. Edwards (Eds.). *Feminisms, Empowerment and Development: Changing Women's Lives* (pp. 250–276). London: Zed Books Ltd. Retrieved November 28, 2022, from <http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350220096.ch-013>

women. Cultural values and customary laws force women to discipline their bodies subserviently. Control over women's bodies is the easiest and most prevalent way to maintain the status quo. Merleau-Ponty (1945) explains the importance of the body as something which should not be understood as a mere object but a condition through which we can understand our relation to the world. He also argues that it is the body that lets us know about knowledge of our own body and knowledge of our world. Diana Coole (2013) argues that analysis of the body discerns the power relations that shape and regulate the functioning of a woman's body in a manner that helps patriarchy to grow and sustain.

Furthermore, it is important to understand the politics around bodies and the significance of corporeal agency in resisting the androcentric discourses. She also argues that human bodies "exhibit agency by exercising and experiencing their own corporeal mode of power." Sabala and Meena Gopal (2010) argue that social disciplining starts reproducing gendered bodies at a very young age; women are expected to comply with the regressive norms, which reduce their worth to merely as an agent for procreation and consumption of male pleasure. Their bodies are controlled by the burden of "honor," restriction on their mobility, forceful adherence of women to a particular dress code, and glorifying their role as a caregiver. Martha Nussbaum (2002) provides a philosophical basis for understanding human dignity in the development debate. She provides a list of elements with truly human functioning, which she argues can be used as a blueprint for political purposes by people who believe in a different set of ideas about a good life of a human being. The Central Human Functional Capabilities have the following elements: Life, Bodily Health, Bodily Integrity, Senses, Imagination, and Thought, Emotions, Practical Reasons, Affiliation, Other Species, Play, and Control over one's Environment. For Nussbaum, one must have a meaningful life with good health and length. The person in life must not be constrained by any forceful means, such as restriction on movement and association or threat of violence of any type, and the person must not be deprived of opportunities for love and pleasure. Emotions, imagination, and the ability to enjoy the recreational activities of a person play a crucial role in human development. She also recommends a conducive environment for critical thinking, equal political participation, and the right to seek employment equality for human development. Women are entitled to have control and autonomy over their bodies; if the body is the site of oppression, the same body is a site of resistance too.

2.4 Operationalisation of the concepts of Development and Empowerment of the Women

Evidently, the concept of empowerment and development has a wide spectrum. In order to have a lucid understanding of the impact of gender quotas on the empowerment and development of women, it is important to operationalize the framework under which this study takes place. The present section discusses the indicators of empowerment and development to elucidate the study's main objectives. The researcher has framed three main components which define the empowerment and development of elected women and discern the impact of gender quota on the empowerment and development of women. The following are the components:

- 1. Political Interest of the Elected Women**
- 2. Social Engagement and Network**
- 3. Change in Attitude and Activities of the Elected Women**

Political Interest: Jayal (2006) has suggested through her work that gender-based reservation has helped women participate in the democratic political process. With all the apprehension about proxy representation, Jayal still argues that reservation has successfully induced the desire to become full-time politicians in some women. Fifty percent reservation for women at PRI in Bihar has increased women's descriptive representation in Bihar. The study aims to investigate the impact of gender quotas on the substantive representation of women, so one way to delve deep into it is to find out the interest of these women in politics. The political interest of the representatives is examined through three elements: will to re-contest the election, choosing politics as a full-time career, and awareness about different policies.

Social Engagement and Network: One of the indicators to assess the empowerment and development of elected women is their ability to engage with people. The present study assesses their social engagement through their improved communication skills, freedom to movement and association, and the formation of new social networks. These help women develop skills to navigate the androcentric political space. Inglehart and Norris (2001) say that women are less involved in political/organizations; their participation in politics enhances their connection with other organizations. Moreover, scholarly works, like *Social Justice through Inclusion: The Consequences of Electoral Quotas in India* (2017) by Francesca R. Jensenius, suggests that the electoral quota has enabled marginalized groups to become part of political elites. The inclusion

of women into politics as political elites makes them visible, and this visibility ensures certain social networks which help them further improve the socio-political aspect of their lives. In order to investigate the impact of the quota system on their social engagement, the researcher has asked questions regarding their social mobility, be it in the form of campaigning during the election time; visiting block/district offices. Also, how often do they interact with their constituents? Assessment of their social network is done through their contact with their male colleague and if they have made any new friend(s); how do these social contacts help them?

Change in Attitude and Activities: Political participation brings changes in the behavioral attitude and activities of the representatives. It is interesting to see what kind of changes gender quota brings into the behavioral attitude of these elected women. In order to assess the changes, the study has three indicators to judge their behavioral changes: understanding of gender equality, control over one's environment, and exercise of corporeal agency. Available scholarship on gender quota (Cueva Betete, 2006; Jayal, 2006; Kabeer 2001 and 2005; Huyer & Sikoska, 2003) has mentioned that women's political participation shows many changes in the attitude of these women. It has been argued that the political participation of women through gender quotas has increased the visibility of women in politics. Evaluating the impact of quota on the basis of Molyneux's idea (1984) of strategic and practical gender interest, Jayal (2006) argues that the pace with which articulation of strategic interest is moving is not impressive; however, there is a silver lining that suggests quota system has enabled women to address their practical needs and interests. The work of Huyer and Sikoska (2003) highlights that women's empowerment can be shown through the identification of women's prolific decision-making capability and ability to make choices about their lives with great confidence and self-esteem. Cueva Beteta (2006), Kabeer (2001), Malhotra and Schuler (2005), Jejeebhoy (2000), and Martha Nussbaum (1999 and 2002) have also highlighted that empowerment of women can be assessed through their control over their environment, resources, and ideology.

Their understanding of gender equality is a crucial aspect to examine when we assess the impact of gender quotas on their empowerment, as an increase in the number of women representatives is not the end goal of gender quotas. These women representatives need to understand gender equality to use their power in their respective positions to influence the policies and programs to develop and empower the female population of their constituency. An understanding of gender

equality also helps them to recognize their importance as an individual. To understand elected women's notion of gender equality, the researcher has asked some generic questions like do they think gender quota is good? Is 50% reservation enough? Who makes better leaders? And also asked some specific questions, those questions were: who do you think needs more education, women or men? What is the status of the division of labor in your household? Whom do you contribute more to the development of society? The researcher has tried to ask these latter questions in a slightly personal way, meaning involving these women's situations in their own private spaces.

The second indicator is control over one's environment, which is taken up from Nussbaum's work and deals with the women's possession of property, right to seek equal employment, exercise practical reasons, make choices for themselves, etcetera. Here in this particular research, the researcher has focused mainly on elements such as the ability to form one's own good in life and the possession of goods. The researcher has tried to understand the ways in which these women make their life good, for which their financial literacy is at the center.

The last one is the corporeal agency of these women. It is critical to understand the impact of gender quotas on the exercise of the corporeal agency of women, as the body is a central site of control by patriarchy. Women's bodies and behavior are socially disciplined and trained to be submissive to patriarchal norms and customs. So it is interesting how their political participation enhances their power within and how they use their corporeal agency to defy the patriarchal norms. Also, we do not give much attention to the mundane details of everyday activities that involve women's bodies. The researcher tries to make a relation between the process of empowerment and the role these mundane details play in understanding the endeavor.

Chapter III

Mapping Development and Empowerment of the Elected Women: An Investigation of their Public and Private Lives.

To investigate the impact of quota-based political participation of women on their empowerment and development, the researcher has visited the field to collect the required data. The present study has conducted fieldwork that involves both structured and unstructured interviews of 40 elected women representatives respondents. The fieldwork took place in two districts, namely Nawada and Nalanda, of Bihar. The researcher has visited the field twice, in early June 2021 and mid-December 2021. The gap between the two visits was three months. Also, in those months, a significant event occurred: the Panchayat Raj election of 2021 in Bihar.

This section starts with unfolding the conceptualization of empowerment and development using concepts such as *Political Interest, Social Engagement and Network, and Change in Attitude and Activities of women*. The researcher operationalizes Change in attitude and activities further as; the understanding of gender equality, control over one's environment, and exercise of corporeal agency. With the help of a questionnaire (see Appendix) and unstructured interviews, the researcher has successfully recorded the responses of the 40 elected women, covering every aspect of the present study. The current chapter contains 31 tables showing the data for the recorded responses of the elected women based on the question asked with the help of the questionnaire and an analysis of those responses. Later, a transcribed verbatim of the interviewee is written from the unstructured interviews to have a clearer understanding of their status of empowerment and development. There is no effort by the researcher to sanitize the responses, even not in a manner to make their sentences more concise and comprehensive. The researcher believes that the comprehensiveness of their answers is overarching only when those responses are written in a manner similar to how they were said. Also, as we know, the expression of emotion is a sign of empowerment; the researcher has painstakingly tried to capture the emotions of the respondents while answering the questions asked during the interviews. To do so, the researcher has mentioned their expressions at all possible points. Moreover, to show the impact of certain words, the researcher has used the exact words used by those women, with their loose translation in brackets.

The available scholarship has dealt with these concepts, as mentioned earlier. However, concepts like corporeal agency and social engagement and network have not been given due importance in the enterprise to understand women's empowerment through their political participation based on gender quota. The study is more of a report on the personal development of elected women than a policy-oriented development. The present chapter delineates the impact of gender quota on the development and empowerment of presently and formerly (2006 onwards) elected members of PRIs in Nawada and Nalanda districts of Bihar by using those concepts as indicators of their empowerment and development. It is important to reiterate that the researcher has not separated the concept of development and empowerment but rather treated them as complementary concepts. And the same indicators are used by the researcher to assess both, and the researcher believes the development process is an undone task if the process of empowerment is not done.

3.1 Political Interest

The concept of political interest of elected women has been widely discussed by scholars like Kudva (2003), Kaul and Sahni (2009), Jayal (2006), Zetterberg (2009), etc. Their critical analysis shows favorable and non-favorable outcomes of women's participation through gender quotas on their political interests. They have assessed interest in politics in various ways; moreover, the present study understands it through three elements:

- 1. Choosing politics as a full-time career,*
- 2. Will to re-contest the election, and*
- 3. Awareness of different policies*

Gender quota has provided women a conducive environment to enhance their different political interests. During interviews, women have confirmed that their interest in politics has increased. To the question of re-contestation, choosing politics as a career, and their knowledge about policies, some of the responses are as follows:

Table 1: Politics as a Career

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	35	87.5%
No	5	12.5%

Source: Fieldwork

When asked about making their career in politics, 87.5% of women gave an affirmative response, while 12.5% of women were not interested in pursuing politics as a career option. Women who wanted to become full-time politicians believed that the quota system gave them an excellent opportunity to get out of the four walls of their houses. Their work now is valuable, unlike the household work they have been doing all their life. Interestingly, they were recorded saying that the arena of politics is not discriminatory. It treats educated and uneducated women alike; any one of us, educated or not, can make our career as a politician.

Furthermore, they argued how an uneducated or less educated woman could not become a collector or a teacher. Still, politics has even created room for such people to pursue a career in the public arena. The implementation of gender quota has provided women those opportunities to come out of their homes to make a career in public.

Table 2: Interest in National Politics

Response	Respondent	Percentage
No Interest at all	17	42.5%
Moderately Interested	9	22.5%
Highly Interested	14	35%

Source: Fieldwork

In contrast to over-enthusiastic responses to the question of choosing politics as a full-time career option, very few women showed interest in national politics. Among the respondents, 42.5% were not interested in extending their political careers to the national level. They believed national politics is like a “shark”; it will eat them all in one go. Also, they raised concerns about

the absence of gender quota in national and state-level politics. They admitted that they are incapacitated resource-wise to contest national or state-level elections.

Furthermore, they said local politics is like home for them; if any ups and downs happen, their people will take care of it. However, some women showed great interest in politics, and also, there were those who, if given a chance and monetary support, would go for politics beyond the local level. The latter was 22.5% women, and the former was 35% of them. All those women who belonged to the category of 35% (highly interested) either had a family involved in state-level politics or were associated with some political party. Women representatives who showed moderate interest were around 22.5%. In this category of moderately interested women, they did not have any of the two circumstances that highly interested women had, and 66% (6) of these women (moderately interested) belonged to the OBCs, EBCs, and SCs category of caste.

Table 3: Decision to Contest the Election

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Myself	5	12.5%
My Husband	28	70%
My Whole Family	7	17.5%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 4: Decision to Re-Contest the Election

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Myself	16	40%
My Husband	21	52.5%
My Whole Family	3	7.5%

Source: Fieldwork

Tables 3 and 4 show the vital growth of women representatives, which indicates their increased political interest. Table 3 shows that the husband played a significant role in deciding the election

contest in the case of first-time contestation. During the first contest, in the case of 70% of women, their husbands were the decision-makers. In the case of 17.5% of women, it was a collective decision by the whole family to have her contest the election. Only 12.5% of women took their judgment in their first term to contest the election, and these women were either widowed or estranged.

Nonetheless, Table 4 shows a significant dip of 17.5% in the husband's participation in decision-making in the second time contest of those women. Also, an increase of 27.5% in case of women taking decisions by themselves for re-contestation PRIs elections. This increase is indicative of two facts: first, women are now more interested in politics, and second, there is increased participation of women in critical decision-making. They have a voice in their family that is heard and taken care of. The involvement of family has also decreased. Although there is a decrease in the percentage of husbands involved, that should not lead us to think that the phenomenon of Mukhiya Pati is gone. It is still a massive problem as now 52.5% of women representative's husbands take the decision of re-contestation, which is almost 13% more than the decision they made themselves.

Table 5: Attending Meetings of Gram Panchayat

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Not Very Regularly	7	17.5%
Regularly	23	57.5%
Very Regularly	10	25%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 5 shows data for elected women's attendance in Gram Panchayat meetings; it reveals that 17.5% of the elected women are not very regular, which means they attend meetings when necessary. The rest of the time, their husbands attend the meetings. Their presence in meetings is in cases: when there is a meeting regarding fund allocation; any officials from Panchayat Department or BDO are coming for an inspection, or there is a meeting following the MLC election. While 25% of the respondents said that their attendance in meetings is very regular,

they only miss meetings when they are unwell, or something of great urgency comes in at home. The reason for their high attendance is, of course, their active participation in politics, but other factors also work in their case: they have someone to take care of their household (daughter, daughter-in-law, or sister-in-law); their husbands are employed in government job or live somewhere else; their children are grown-ups. There are 57.5% of women who regularly attend meetings, and they are the women who have an average of 60% attendance in their overall tenure. Notably, the last two categories of women have been elected representatives more than two times and worked at different levels of PRIs. The researcher noticed that some of them have affiliations with some political party.

Table 6: Knowledge about Composition of PRIs

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Not Known at all	1	2.5%
Partially Known	27	67.5%
Completely Known	12	30%

Source: *Fieldwork*

To know the political knowledge of the elected women, the researcher has asked the respondents whether they knew about the composition of Panchayati Raj Institutions. It has been recorded that 67.5% of women have partial knowledge of the PRIs' composition, which means with a bit of help, they named each level of the Panchayat System. Moreover, 30% of the respondents were completely thorough with each level of the Panchayat System. They even knew the process of election; that is to say, they were aware at which level people directly elect representatives and what are the offices in which members are elected indirectly. Only 2.5% of the respondents didn't know about the composition of PRIs; all they knew about was the name of their own office.

Respondent no. 3, currently a ward member, says:

“Since I have become a ward member, everybody’s attitude has changed. They all started respecting me and sensed my presence around them as important. I can see the changed look in their eyes towards me. They know I am powerful; non-powerful people cannot meet BDO (block development officer). I meet BDO frequently. He knows me by my name. All this definitely makes the people of my ward proud, and that’s why they support and love me. And, as long as they support and love me, I will contest and re-contest elections.”

Respondent no. 8, currently a Mukhiya, says:

“Why only Mukhiya? I want to be an MLA too. If you are into a job, you can earn money, but you will not be able to earn the power and respect of a Neta. Maybe you become an IAS officer, but even IAS officers salute politicians. Nothing is more powerful than being a politician. For cracking the IAS examination, aspirants do hours-long study and get the results; after that, what those IAS do is not a matter of concern. But in our case, we have to work hours both before and after winning the election, then only we can become leaders in a true sense.”

Respondents no. 10 and 17, both Mukhiya, have won awards for making their respective panchayats *Nanaura and Pilkhi* open defecation free under the Swachh Bharat Mission. When asked about their other contribution to their respective panchayat, respondent no. 17 has informed:

“I believe voters are not fools, so I have to show work if I wish to be re-elected as a representative. My work is visible to everyone, even to my opponents. We had a temple that was not exactly a temple but debris. I have reconstructed that temple into a brand new temple. However, I have not done anything with the existing statues as they were brought into the temple by our forefathers. I have brought a new statue of Mahadev (a Hindu God) and put it there next to the old god/goddess statues. I have built a chabutra (a platform where people can sit) and

extended the pipeline to the temple so that worshipers, especially women, won't have to bring Jal (water used for bathing gods) from home. I have tried my best to lessen the inconvenience of the women of my panchayat."

Respondent 10 says:

"My work affects men, women, and children equally. I don't believe in discrimination. For instance, the construction of brick and solling roads helps everyone. Men, women, and children are happy that their feet don't get dirty in mud while going to work in the field or playing. Women have benefitted from Nal Jal Yojana, a program where we have to give water supply to every household. Nal Jal Yojna has lessened the burden of women's chores as they don't have to waste their energy on hand pumps. My work reflects SAAT NISCHAY of the Chief Minister of Bihar."

The above responses are a clear indication of the fact that participation leads to an increase in women's interest in politics. Their understanding of politics also seems to correlate directly with the power they acquire. The urge to continue to be powerful raises their attention toward policies. They believe that politics is a gender-neutral space; those who work for the constituents would get a chance to be re-elected. They are strategic in their work. Women who are primarily illiterate believe that the only way they can have the power to bring changes both in their lives and others is to participate in electoral politics. However, some respondents also show apprehension about making politics a career choice. The reasons for apprehension are: the humiliation they have faced, and the burden of work gets doubled for them. Also, power and position have brought jealousy and made their relationships with others bitter and unfriendly. Below are some women's responses to why they left politics after a one-time contest.

Respondent no. 11, an ex-Mukhiya says:

“Villagers pretended to be supportive at first, but once I won the election and actual power came into my hands, the same people developed a feeling of despise for my family. Everybody started feeling jealous of us. This behavior was strange because they were the ones who pumped up my husband and father-in-law to bring me into the field of politics. I don’t know the exact reason, but I feel they had no idea that a woman like me could become Mukhiya. Since I had become the Mukhiya, they started regretting their decision to support me. In 2011 also, my husband wanted me to contest the election. I warned him that I would self-immolate myself if he filed a nomination. I don’t want people of my village to have jealousy and ill feelings for my family.”

Respondent no. 4, an ex- Mukhiya says:

“Politics is not for us; we cannot manage our home if we get involved in politics. I am saying this from my experience. My whole life revolves around my children. When I was in politics, I could not take care of them. My children are young and need to be prepared for school, as I have to meet people and talk to them. I have these responsibilities to my sister-in-law. Although she takes good care of my children, in the end, I do get thoughts that I have not given birth to my children to be taken care of by others. And that’s why I won’t contest any panchayat election.”

Respondent no. 31, an ex-Ward member, says:

“I was an agricultural laborer; the owner of the lands on which I used to work asked me to contest the election. I contested, and I won. He used to go with me to meetings, meet officials, etc. In the meeting, everybody was called by their names or as ward ji/Mukhiya ji, but they called me Kaminiya (a colloquial term to address women in bonded labor) of my owner. Only BDO sahib used to take my name. Initially, I didn’t mind, but then I started feeling smaller than I ever felt about myself. In the next term, when my owner asked me to contest again, I refused to

contest. Why would I become a ward member if I get treated as a bonded laborer? I am good at working in the fields.”(she said it with so much angst in her eyes)

3.2 Social Engagement and Network

The social engagement of women is often restricted within the four walls. Denying women’s freedom to engage with and freedom of movement undermines their democratic participation in socio-political endeavors. Free movement and communication provide women opportunities to make social ties and be part of certain groups and organizations. The study reveals that political participation has improved the chances of those opportunities and strengthened their role as active participants in a community. Moreover, the quota has also enabled women to become political elites. Inclusion of women into politics as political elites makes them visible, and this visibility ensures certain social networks which help them further improve the socio-political aspect of their lives.

Table 7: Campaigning during Elections

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes (1st Time)	13	32.5%
No (1st Time)	27	67.5%
Yes (Succeeding Times)	37	92.5%
No (Succeeding Times)	3	7.5%

Source: Fieldwork

The above table depicts the improved social engagement of the elected women through years of their participation in various elections; it shows that 32.5% of women campaigned for their first election, but there is a surge of 60% in their involvement in campaigning during the next election(s). They admit to becoming more open about sharing their ideas and thought processes

with their constituents. Through their tenure as representatives, they have learned the communication skills to carry forward their social engagement with their surroundings. They have understood that it is not only essential to be a candidate but also a candidate who can make social relationships with their people. They also believe that the succeeding victory was possible due to their engagement with the constituents. However, there is a peculiarity in this trend; it has been recorded that the upper caste women candidates do not go for the campaign in the villages of the lower caste. It is their husband who campaigns in those villages. When the researcher noticed this trend, she asked the lower caste women if they had any reservations of such kind in visiting villages for campaigning; they informed the researcher that they do not follow anything like that if they go for campaigning.

Table 8: Made a New Friend(s)

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	40	100%
No	0	Nil

Source: Fieldwork

The idea of friendship is not something that women, who live within the four walls, relate to; for them, yaari-dosti (friends and friendship) are for men as they go outside and meet many people in their life. When asked about their friends, most respondents talked about their friendship with someone from childhood. Table 5.8 records data on whether the elected women had made friends when they joined politics. The above table shows that all elected women have made new friends (s) through their work. Their participation in politics has increased their movement in the outside world and improved their public interactions, which have helped them meet more people and have a cordial and friendly relationship with them. Shockingly, some women never had a close friend, as they now have, ever in their life.

Table 9: Contact with their Male Colleagues

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	32	80%
No	8	20%

Source: Fieldwork

Women, especially in rural households, interact with men of their own families. Also, their interactions with those men mostly revolve around food, children, and family issues. Women do not play a pivotal role in family decisions; they do not have control over monetary transactions in their families. They don't participate in so-called important conversations with their men at home. Table 9 shows that elected women have started interacting with men outside their families.

Most importantly, these interactions are not frivolous like those with the men of their families; it involves the decision-making process and monetary transaction. Participation of women through gender quota has increased their interaction with other genders. They believe this change in their life has brought so many other positive changes: now they know both men and women are equal in making important decisions.

Table 10: Dispute Resolution

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Myself	14	35%
Husband/Other Male Members	36	65%

Source: Fieldwork

The above table shows that 35% of women resolve disputes in their constituency by themselves, whereas 65% of women's male counterparts resolve those disputes. The data indicate that women still lag behind in resolving issues. In this case, women strictly adhere to their husbands' advice to avoid getting involved in these issues. Nevertheless, it has been observed that there is greater participation of lower caste women, especially SC women, in resolving disputes of their constituents. Through several responses, it has also been established that lower caste women,

especially SC women, resolve disputes of any kind, be it land disputes or marital disputes. In other cases, women involved in dispute resolutions mainly deal with domestic violence issues, fights between a woman and her in-laws, feuds between two women, etc. However, their husbands deal with problematic issues related to land and other disputes.

Table 11: Visit to Block/District Offices

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Never	3	2.5%
Not Very Regularly	7	17.5%
Regularly	17	42.5%
Very Regularly	13	32.5%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 11 depicts the visit of women representatives to the district and block level offices. Some women have never visited any of these offices, and the data shows that those women are 2.5%. For these women, all the work related to the offices is basically done by their husbands. 17.5% of women have visited these offices for work, but their visits are in the one-digit figure. They are the women who have not been very regular in visiting these offices for work. They do not entirely rely upon their husbands to do their office-related work; still, most of their work is done by their husbands. 42.5% of women, almost half of the respondents, visit these offices regularly. They make at least one visit every month to the BDO's office. These women are those who aspire to have a full-time career as politicians. Then, 32.5% of women make very regular visitors to these offices. By very regular, the researcher means these women representatives visit Block almost once a week or two. On average, these women visit district-level offices once a month. They informed that most of these visits are related to addressing the problems faced by their constituents. They said, "it is important to make those visits for a proper allocation of funds for the development of their respective panchayats."

Table 12: Member of any Organization

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	18	45%
No	22	55%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 12 shows the data for the women who have been part of any organization. The recorded data shows that 45% of the elected women have been part of an organization. Their political involvement in local government has influenced their participation in their respective organizations. However, 55% of women are still not part of any organization. It is essential to address that these women are those who have come out of their homes because of their political participation based on gender quota. Therefore, the number of women who are part of any organization is less than those who are not. Nonetheless, it is an appreciable number.

Respondent 6, a Mukhiya, says:

“After being elected, I have realized life is not only about husband and children; they are important but not everything. Initially, during my tenure, I didn’t interact much with others. I could not discuss anything in the meeting with other members. I had no confidence in putting up my points in the meetings. I always asked my husband to deal with problems brought up to me by the people. I was timid and had never talked to people much, especially men. This attitude changed over the years; I have learned that if you are not engaging with people and speaking in meetings, then politics is not for you. As I started engaging with people directly and solving their problems, I started enjoying it and realized that politics is not that bad. A woman like me can also learn to speak in front of a group of people. If I do not understand my people’s problems, then who will, and the first step to understanding their problems is to have a conversation with them. Now I talk to my people and, if necessary, organize meetings to resolve disputes. At a

higher level, I raise my voice to demand funds for the development of my panchayat, and other members take me seriously.”

Respondent 38, one-time ward member and one-time Mukhiya, says:

“Society has taught us that women with a good character do not talk to other men, they cannot sit on the bike of other men, they cannot giggle in public, etc. I always believed in all of those, which definitely shaped my mentality. When I first became a ward member, I hardly went to the meeting or outside. One day I had to go to a district-level meeting for the MLC election, and there I saw everybody knew somebody, and they were talking to each other irrespective of gender. Nobody talked to me as it was my first time in any meeting, let alone a district-level meeting. I felt backward and alone. But when I became Mukhiya, I promised myself and discussed it with my husband that I would attend every meeting and ceremony. It was not easy as there were many barriers, but I overcame some of them. As a result, I have made friends from other panchayats, and one of my friends is Zilla Parishad too. We all meet outside our work. Also, we invite each other to functions at our home.”

Respondent no. 25, a former Mukhiya, says:

“I have always had this understanding that true and life-long friendship is something that the male members of society can only enjoy. If friends meet and talk regularly, then only friendship continues. Otherwise, it exists only for the namesake. Women like us have no free time for such things; how are we supposed to have “jigari yaar” (best friends). After coming into politics, I

have made a few friends with whom I continued my friendship even after the end of my tenure; they were my political colleagues too.

She takes a long pause and continues:

As you know, I am a divorcee. The reason I left my husband was that he was an alcoholic. Our relationship was really abusive. Today I am standing in front of you and giving you an interview only because of those friends. Otherwise, my abusive husband would have killed me. They gave me the courage to stand against him and society.”

Respondent no. 34, a former Mukhiya, says:

“In the 2016 election, I was defeated and became inactive in regular politics. It was really tough for me to stay at home as I was highly active in politics for ten years. I really wanted to do something good for women in our society. Eventually, with my former colleagues’ help, I learned about an NGO named SAHYOGI, which works for women’s empowerment. I immediately joined the NGO, and it has been three years now. The NGO is my work and worship. BDO sahib often asks me to conduct seminars and awareness classes for women of my panchayat and neighboring panchayats.”

Respondent no. 19, first-time Mukhiya, says:

“I have won my election only by 30 votes which explains the tension around my winning. My opposition had beaten my elder son and father-in-law badly, and it turned my victory into sorrow. They both were attacked so severely that they had to be taken to a doctor. Everybody suggested that I leave politics for my family members’ lives; it put me in doubt, but I thought it

profoundly and asked myself that if I had not been Mukhiya, would BDO and the police have helped me? (She takes a pause and thinks about something, and takes a deep breath)

She continues...

“These people have become enemies of my family forever; they are after my dear ones’ lives. They will again try to harm us if they get the chance, so my position as a politician helps me get support from big people such as MLA, BDO, and even the police, knowing that I can never be wrong.”

All the responses mentioned above clearly indicate that their political participation has enhanced their social ties and has helped them to be part of an organization/community even when they are not active in electoral politics. Gender quota has enabled them to create social capital through social networks. It has helped them grow and created a safe space to share their vulnerabilities and fear. Their inclusion in politics through gender-quota has made them realize their identity as women. Their engagement with NGOs and other organizations which work for women is indicative of this fact. However, based on the observation, it is essential to highlight that these social engagements are not neutral in nature. These social networks are based on caste as well as class. Women who have made friends and connections, in most cases, have made it to as well as through people belonging to their own caste hierarchy.

3.3 Change in Attitude and Activities of Women

The studies mentioned in the literature review mention that political participation of women shows that there are a lot of changes in the attitude of these women. The present study looks into these attitudinal and activity changes of the elected women through three categories :

- 1. Understanding of Gender Equality**
- 2. Control Over One’s Environment**
- 3. Exercise of Corporeal Agency**

3.3.1 Understanding of Gender Equality

Gender quota has developed an understanding of gender equality among elected women. They have become aware of the unfair gender-based disparities that exist in society. Their changing attitude towards gendered roles has helped them empower themselves and the women around them. During the interviews, they have revealed policies that target women's health, social protection, etc., have made them aware of how important these issues are for women. Indeed, there is a change in their attitudes toward their daughters and other women around them. They believe the policy of gender quota was implemented to bridge the gap between men and women in politics. Therefore their role as a representative is to work towards maintaining gender equality. Following responses of elected women are recorded during interviews regarding their understanding of gender equality:

Table 13: Better Leader

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Women	16	40%
Men	1	2.5%
Gender doesn't matter	23	57.5%

Source: Fieldwork

To the question of who leads better women, representatives responded peculiarly: 40% of elected women said that a woman is a better leader; 57.5% of women representatives thought gender has no role to play in the leadership qualities of an individual; both men and women could become a good leader if they have good intentions and are ready to work hard and selflessly for their people. Interestingly, only a minuscule 2.5% of women believed that men are better leaders than women. In various responses, women have also admitted that their leadership participation has changed their perspective on the idea of leadership and politics.

Table 14: Need for more Women in Politics

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	38	95%
No	2	5%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 15: Whether Gender Quota is Good

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Good	40	100%
Not Good	0	nil

Source: Fieldwork

Table 16: Is 50% Reservation Enough?

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	27	67.5%
No	13	32.5%

Source: Fieldwork

The above table 14 reveals an overwhelming response of women representatives in favor of more participation of women in politics. 95% of women representatives believed that Indian politics needs more women leaders. They even suggest more participation of women leaders in national politics as women at the top are inspirations for young women to participate in politics, which is otherwise considered a field where men rule. Moreover, these women have also praised the gender quota policy of Bihar at the local governance level. They said it was due to reservation that they have received an opportunity to become a leader; otherwise, women hardly stand any chance of being elected as a leader for their people. Table 15 shows that 100% of respondents believed that gender quota is a good step toward making politics more inclusive. They believe gender quotas must apply at the state and national levels of politics. However, reservation in

local government was a great move towards improving women's participation. It is high time that the government should bring reservations in state and national politics so that these elected women get an opportunity to show their leadership qualities in state and national politics. Besides, table 16 has recorded that 67.5% of women think 50% of reservation is not enough. They need more reservations. However, 32.5% of women think fifty percent of reservation is acceptable, and instead of increasing the percentage, the government of India must expand it to another level of politics.

Table 17: Contribution to the Development of Society

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Women	33	82.5%
Men	7	17.5%

Source: Fieldwork

While answering a few questions related to the contributions made by men and women in the development of society, 82.5% of women respondents answered in favor of women. They believed women representatives contribute more than men in many ways: a woman representative takes care of her constituents and her family. In addition, they argued a society is on the right path of development if the leadership focuses on the development of the most oppressed, like the women, of the society. As women representatives, understand the plights of other women better and consequently work in a better way to address those plights. Therefore, under our leadership, the oppressed, such as women and others, become more developed; hereby, women's contribution towards development is not only more but also unique and vital for the development of society. However, 17.5% of women said the contribution of a man representative to the development of a society is more significant than a woman representative. Besides, the reasoning behind this was an interesting one; they said, "Men have been in politics for a longer period than us, so the knowledge they gathered through their experiences is more. As a result, they understand politics and policies better than women and work towards the development process in a better way. All of it is nothing but a matter of time; more women are joining politics due to the gender quota and gaining experiences and knowledge. Soon women will be as good as men, if not better."

Table 18 Need of Education

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Men	5	12.5%
Women	17	42.5%
Both	18	45%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 18 reveals the responses of women representatives to the question of the importance of education to men and women. On being asked whether education is more important to men or women, or whether it is equally important to the both of them. 45% of respondents said education is a vital tool to improve one's life irrespective of gender. Besides, they contend that for women, education plays a crucial role in their empowerment. 42.5% of elected women strongly feel that women need education more than men because education is one of the means that makes achieving ends like freedom of movement and freedom to be on your feet a lot easier for women. Although an overwhelming response came in favor of providing education to women, about 47.5% (8) of women gave patriarchal reasons to educate their daughters. They believed educated women ran their house peacefully. Educated women are better mothers and wives, and the most given reason was: that for educated women, there is a chance the groom side will ask for less dowry, and the possibility of getting a groom with a government job increases for those women. The table shows that 12.5% of women representatives said that education is more important for men as they are the ones "who bring bread to the family." 45% of respondents believed education is essential for men and women equally. It is crucial for the development of them as well as for the development of future generations.

Table 19: Division of Labor at Household chores

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	3	7.5%
No	37	92.5%

Source Fieldwork

Table 19 shows that only 7.5 % of women get a helping hand from their male counterparts in doing chores. 92.5% of women admit that no help has been sought or offered by their husbands in household work. Even when they have to attend meetings in the morning, they leave their house after finishing their household work. There is no division of labor within the home. Respondents reveal that when they have some work or due to illness, they fail to do chores, then either their daughter or sister-in-law helps them, but no help comes from their men. Moreover, a few respondents revealed that even when some of their husbands started helping, the whole village started making fun. They said, “a society can adjust to the fact that a woman is doing work (politics) in a man’s world, but the same society can never accept a man doing household work.”

Table 20: Equal Freedom for both Men and Women

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	34	85%
No	6	15%

Source Fieldwork

A few questions were asked related to various types of freedom for women; Table 20 shows the responses to those questions. The data suggests that 85% of women believed that both men and women should get equal freedom as gender should not curtail anyone’s freedom to movement, freedom to express oneself, freedom to be equal, etc. Those women who said women should be free to move anywhere they want also showed apprehension about the social situation of society. They said, “we want our girls to enjoy freedom as much as our boys do, but society is not fully open to such things.” Women respondents enthusiastically supported the freedom to be equal and express themselves. Also, they argued that it’s equally important for women to be treated equally to men in society. If we fail to do so, it obstructs our development process, which eventually makes society backward. However, 15% of women still believed that women and men are not equal; therefore, they should not be treated as equals.

Respondent no.27, two times Mukhiya, says:

“I have contested elections because the government wants to create gender parity. Now I am also a small part of the government, so I always think of the development of women first. Women are doubly burdened; they have to look after their families and manage household chores. Some women even work in fields. All these women need double care, which they don’t get, but I try my best to help them whenever they need anything. I help them not only as a Mukhiya but as a fellow woman too. If a woman will not help another woman, then who will?”

Respondent no. 7, an ex-ward member and now a Mukhiya, says:

“After joining politics, I know that both men and women can be part of it. Society was not allowing women to join politics so that women could do household work. Now the government has given us an opportunity to show our strength and skills beyond the kitchen. Undoubtedly, I faced problems in public, and I learned to resolve them like I learned household work. One thing I find really important in this endeavor is education. Education is more important than the experience, as experience comes later in life, and education comes early and teaches us to improve our experiences. Education helps to shape your experiences. That’s why I always tell people in my panchayat to eat less but educate their daughters. I tell them about my own experience. After three years of keeping my daughter at home, I enrolled her in B.ed because I realized that daughters should be allowed to be educated so that they can take care of themselves. See, you have to set an example, then only people will believe what you say; they will not take my advice blindly just because I am their mukhiya.” (She said it with a lot of pride and confidence).

Respondent no. 16, two times ward member and currently a Mukhiya, says:

“It is imperative to educate your daughters and make them capable of doing something good in life. Since I have become Mukhiya, I have helped my parents, and I check on them more frequently. If needed, I send them medicine and dry fruits also. Whenever I visit them, I always give them some amount of money. Today I am capable; that is why I am helping them otherwise, how I could have helped them, even if I wanted to. In fact, during my younger sister’s marriage, I helped my brother with the wherewithal of marriage.”

Respondent no. 14, a Mukhiya (also a JDU supporter)

“During training, we were told that gender equality is important to Bihar’s development. Government is committed to ‘Saat Nischay’ to empower women in Bihar. I am a part of governance; I have to be committed to women’s empowerment in my panchayat. Government has enough programs, and their proper implementation automatically establishes equality between men and women in the long run. So we do not have to do anything more than that. For every problem of our sisters, we have a policy to address it. As a representative, I try my best to implement these policies. Also, I do informal meetings with women of my constituency where I make them understand their role to enhance their position at home. I cannot interfere in private space unless it is a serious matter.”

Respondent no. 29, two times Mukhiya, says:

“Since I have come to power, I often visit young girls’ parents and convince them to enroll their daughters in the education system. I wish to have my young women voters educated so they can vote wisely and, if necessary, can also contest elections. I want them to be next-generation

leaders. Unfortunately, they could not go to school for almost one and a half years due to the pandemic. This gap must have changed the mindset of their parents, and I am sure they will not be willing to send their daughters to school once again. Nonetheless, I am prepared to convince them once again. I have faith it will not be that tough this time; now, even the parents understand the importance of education for their sons and daughters.”

3.3.2 Control Over One’s Environment

The concept of control over one’s environment has been directly picked up from Nussbaum’s work. She has mentioned two components of it: political and material. This section of the present study deals with certain aspects of the latter element. Her conception of material is a wide one. It encompasses possession of the property, the right to seek equal employment, exercising practical reasons, etc. This study has narrowed it down and focuses mainly on elements such as the ability to form one’s own good in life and possession of goods.

Moreover, it focuses on the economic aspect of women’s life. The study reveals that women who have been elected have become “economic person”. They have started spending more on their utilities and satisfaction. The frequency of buying clothes for themselves has increased 3-4 times. The gifts they give people at weddings and other such occasions have become almost thrice expensive. This investment is not just an investment to maintain their status as a Mukhiya but also to lure the voters. It reveals that these women are learning the entrepreneurial nature of politics, which has become an essential aspect of today’s electoral politics.

Table 21 Holding Bank Account

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes (before)	2	5%
No (before)	38	95%

Yes (after)	40	100%
No (after)	0	0%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 21 is a compilation of two questions asked to women regarding their present and past (when they were not elected representatives) status of bank accounts. The above table shows whether respondents held any bank account when they were not in politics and their current status as bank account holders. 95% of women had no account in any bank, and 5% (2) of them had because they were recipients of widow pension under Lakshmi Bai Pension Yojana. After participation in politics, there is a cent percent increase in the number of women representatives holding an account. Furthermore, all of them frequently use the banking system as well. However, only a minuscule 10 % of those women have ever used an ATM to make a transaction. None of them have ever heard of the Internet Banking system. A large number of women deposit/withdraw money through passbooks. In fact, in most cases, these women are accompanied by a male member, usually a son/husband, to help them out. Respondents revealed that their inability to read and write is one primary reason they need someone to accompany them. However, on being asked why don't they take any woman member (daughter) from their family who is literate. Surprisingly, they had no concrete answer to this question.

Table 22: Market Transactions in Major Assets

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	4	10%
No	36	90%

Source: Fieldwork

The above table shows the involvement of women in making financial transactions in major assets such as buying land, big items of gold jewelry, taking care of financial aspects of big family ceremonies such as weddings, funerals, etc. The table reveals that only 10% of women make market transactions in major assets. Respondents informed that there was no change in their decision-making role where there is an involvement of large financial expenditure. Male members of the family make significant decisions regarding large amounts of money.

Table 23: Market Transaction in Minor Assets

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	37	92.5%
No	3	7.5%

Source: Fieldwork

The above table shows elected women's financial involvement in making transactions in minor assets such as rations, purchasing clothes for family members at festivals, buying small jewelry items, and buying gifts for friends and relatives. The data reveals that 92.5% of women make transactions in minor assets while 7.5% of women still do not indulge in financial transactions, even for minor assets. Those women without involvement in financial transactions are the women whose mobility was almost nil. Moreover, the women who make market transactions in minor assets reveal a change in seeing women who can make financial decisions. Some women even said that before that, they hardly went to the market to purchase what they do now. They were not allowed to do so because, they said, "there was a sense of distrust and doubt about our ability to spend money. We were thought to spend money not as 'wisely' as our husband or any other male members of our family." As the data suggests, that line of thought seems to be broken.

Table 24: Property Owned

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes (before)	3	7.5%
No (before)	37	92.5%
Yes (after)	35	87.5%
No (after)	5	12.5%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 24 shows the data about how many women have owned property (movable or non-movable) before joining politics and how many acquired property after going into politics. 7.5% of women had owned property before they were elected as representatives. These women

were either widows or were someone who had no brother as a sibling, so their parents gave them land as dowry during their marriage. 87.5% of women have owned property after getting elected. Of 35 women, only five women, roughly 15%, owned land and houses. Most of the property owned by the elected women was in the form of bank balance deposits/fixed deposits, etc. Land and homes are still bought in the name of their male members, in most cases husbands.

Table 25: Increase in Their Own Financial Expenses

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	37	92.5%
No	3	7.5%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 25 shows the increase in the financial expenses of elected women. The data comes from an amalgamation of different questions regarding personal purchases and gifts from their side to others, mostly relatives. 92.5% of women agreed that they spend more money after becoming elected representatives. They revealed that they have never been so self-indulgent in their financial aspects of life. They buy as many clothes as they want, the frequency of buying clothes for themselves has increased 3 to 4 times. They even go out and have food in a restaurant of their choice. This particular development was radical for them as women in rural settings hardly visit restaurants. Eating outside is considered more of a male thing, and women who eat outside are considered gluttonous and frowned upon.

Moreover, women also bring to light an interesting phenomenon where they reveal that when they are invited to any marriage or any other such function, to maintain their status as Mukhiya, women start giving expensive gifts. Increases in expenditure to maintain their own self-worth, be it in buying new clothes or gifting others, have made these women an “economic person”. They have become someone who acts rationally to maximize their utility and satisfaction.

Table 26: Discontinuation of Traditional Work

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	24	60%
No	16	40%

Source: Fieldwork

Table 26 shows elected women's discontinuation from their traditionally assigned work. 60% of women have left their traditional work, and these women were mainly agricultural laborers and women involved in other menial jobs. They left the job as soon as they were elected to the office. Among them, 83.3% (20) of women belong to SC castes and EBC castes, and the rest are from OBC and forward castes. Women respondents who left the work of agricultural laborers, mainly from the Rajvanshi and Chauhan caste (SCs), also informed that their husbands and sons have also left the job of farm laborers or are planning to leave it soon. Men of these respondents who have left agricultural labor either work on their own newly bought land or migrate to the metropolitan to work as migrant laborers.

Table 27: Involvement in Decision-Making at Home

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	27	67.5%
No	13	32.5%

Source Fieldwork

Table 27 reveals that 67.5% of women participate in decision-making at home. However, 32.5% of women still have no say in any decisions at home. The male members' words are decisive. Moreover, women revealed that their involvement in decision-making is mostly nominal. They do not have the power to reverse what their husband has already decided. Women are still obligated to their men's decisions. In cases where they try to suggest something, it depends on the subject and nature of the decision whether their suggestion has to be considered. If the subject of decision-making is not so important, there are chances that their suggestion would be entertained; however, in case of an important issue, the sole arbiter is the male- member of the family.

Respondent 36, a Mukhiya, says:

“As a Mukhiya of this Panchayat, I get so many invitations. I hardly attend any marriages outside my village. I ask my husband to go; otherwise, people will not feel good about us. But in my village, I have to attend every function. I cannot choose to go to one and choose not to go to others’ functions. People would think that Mukhiya Ji is a biased person. She goes to one’s home and not to others. Everyone has given me equal support to become what I am now, so I treat everyone with equal respect even though going to marriage means a lot of expenses on the gift. It is unlike earlier when my husband could give a good gift, and I could give a steel plate and fifty-one rupees in cash. Now I am a Mukhiya, meaning my gifts also reflect my status as a Mukhiya. Also, who would like to have a Kanjoos (parsimonious) Mukhiya?!”

Respondent no. 20 says:

“No, I didn’t have any bank account. I never felt a requirement for it earlier, so I never had it. Now I have it as I am required to have one. Earlier it was my husband who dealt with every issue related to money. I only needed it sometimes. Recently, my son taught me to use an ATM card.”

Respondent no. 39, two times ward member, says:

“I don’t even remember which generation of my family had not worked in the fields as laborers until I became a ward member. My husband and sons and I have stopped working as agricultural laborers. I believe this became possible and acceptable to everyone because I am now a politician who has political powers and connections. And these two definitely helped me to grow economically. Anyway, the work on agricultural land doesn’t pay enough. One of my sons had already been working in Madras as a truck driver. After becoming a ward member, the BDO

sahib suggested that I call my son back as he could do all the work. Now my son lives with me, and none of us work as agricultural laborers.”

Respondent no. 33 says:

“I am not a fool. I understand the gravity of the situation; if I am not involved in some decision-making process at home, I do not rebel. I cannot fight every small thing. I understand my involvement should be there while any decision-making is going on. Still, if it’s not there, I am not ready for constant emotional labor to make my family understand my importance. For now, I mainly focus on two things: those decisions should not curtail my hard-earned freedom, and they should negatively affect my children. Other than those two things, I do not care; if I continue to be this powerful, I know there will be a time when these people would come and ask for my advice, even for their personal affairs.” (She laughed very loudly at the end of the sentence).

3.3.3 Exercise of Corporeal Agency

The body of women is a central site of oppression and domination; the power of patriarchy manifested through the body of women goes unnoticed when we discuss women’s empowerment, mainly when we discuss women’s political participation. The prevalence of critical immunity to this enterprise is due to intensely personal attributes of the body. Scholarly agreement exists on the personal aspect of the individual body; however, it has also been agreed upon that the manifestation of an individual’s body is shaped by social norms that establish a hierarchical relationship between men and women where women remain subordinates. Her body becomes a site of power exhibition, which is cyclical: germination, exercise, and legitimation of the power hierarchy. The present section attempts to understand the changes that political power has brought into the lifestyle of these women after being elected as representatives. The exercise of women’s agency is indicative of their empowerment and development. The present study

focuses on the exercise of corporeal agency of women through which they defy patriarchal norms, norms that worked as an impending tool to subvert the process of empowerment and development of women.

Table 28: Decision to Adopt Contraception

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	23	57.5%
No	17	42.5%

Source Fieldwork

Table 28 shows the data for elected women who decide to use contraception. 57.5% of women informed that they are the ones who insist on using contraception while they perform sexual activities with their partners. They also revealed that their opinion on contraception had changed drastically after they attended and organized Family Planning Seminars and other seminars for their constituents, which discussed sexual health. After being elected as representatives, they learned how the use of contraception is not only important for family planning but also for sexual health. Moreover, they revealed that they have even made their partners aware of the benefits of contraceptives. They encourage women of their constituency to have such conversations with their partners. Some of them even showed a great sense of regret for not knowing the benefits of using contraception before. One of the respondents said, “ Had I known about contraception, I would not have gone through those abortions which caused severe infection in my uterus, and later on, I had to undergo a surgery of vaginal hysterectomy.” However, 42.5% of women still have not taken any decision on using contraceptives. If the husband uses it, it is fine; otherwise, they neither resist nor take any after pills.

Table 29: Violence against Women (Domestic Violence)

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	21	52.5%
No	19	47.5%

Source Fieldwork

Table 29 shows data about the violence perpetrated by husbands on elected women representatives. 52.5% of women admitted that their husbands stopped beating them after becoming people's representatives. They said the reason for that could be the shame it could bring if someone from my panchayat learned about it. However, 47.5 % of elected members are still subjected to beating by their husbands. Although wife-battering in public has stopped, these women face violence within their private space.

Table 30: Women's say in the Conjugal Relations

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	25	62.5%
No	15	37.5%

Source Fieldwork

Table 30 shows data about elected women's say in intercourse with their married partners. 62.5% of women revealed that they have a say in their bedroom decisions regarding sexual activities. They said that their husbands have become more considerate about their health and mood, and most importantly, their husbands understand that women can also be tired. 37.5% of women still have no say in the sexual activities they indulge in with their partners. It is always the husband who decides everything. They said, “ we are merely a pleasure machine for our husbands.”

Table 31: Women Defying Patriarchal Norms

Response	Respondent	Percentage
Yes	34	85%
No	6	15%

Source Fieldwork

Table 31 shows data for women who have defied patriarchal norms in daily life after being elected as political representatives. The table is formed by asking elected women different questions regarding the patriarchal norms that had governed their lives before becoming elected members of the PRIs. Also, their political participation has helped them thwart those norms and live a life with more dignity and satisfaction. Data reveals that 85% of women have defied

patriarchal norms in one way or another way. These women have challenged patriarchal norms through their dressing, lifestyle, and much more daily life changes that they have made. Sadly, there are still women who could not challenge the patriarchal norms, especially upper-caste women. 15% of women still work under patriarchal norms. Of these women, 66.6% of women say that they follow the purdah/veil system and other patriarchal norms because they want to work, and if they start defying all these cultural and social norms, they might not be able to work outside their home. Therefore, these women said they had more significant battles to fight first. The rest of the women who still follow those patriarchal norms, mainly from Upper caste backgrounds, argued that these are the cultural and social treasures they don't want to give up. Rather than pulling them back, the purdah system and other cultural and social norms make them feel who they are.

Respondent no. 28, currently a Mukhiya, says:

“It is not possible to carry ghonghat everywhere I go. How can I walk on the road and talk to people, especially officials, with my purdah/veil on? Can men walk and talk blindfolded? No. Then how can we do such things? I am not against the purdah system, but purdah is good for those women who stay at home, not for women like us who meet and greet people.”

Respondent no. 30, currently a Mukhiya, says:

“My husband never allowed me to go to the beauty parlor. He thought going to the parlor was “Faltu kharcha” (waste of money). In the 36 years of my life, I visited a beauty parlor for the first time when I became Mukhiya.”

She laughs and continues:

“Who will dare to stop Mukhiya from going to the beauty parlor? Now, I earn, and I fulfill my dreams. Politics has changed the game.”

Women have defied the traditional dress code even after constant shaming. They have become aware that even choosing one's own clothes is a part of the struggle. The dress code is not a piece of cloth but an important part of structural oppression.

Respondent no. 22 says:

"When I wore a Gandhi cap during flag hoisting in the first year of my tenure, the whole village, including my family, made fun of me. I wear a Gandhi cap during flag hoisting; and also have started wearing salwar kameez. I go out in public wearing salwar kameez and wear nighties at home. Nobody dares to say a single word against me. People have realized I am not taking any step back; they must deal with my changed style."

Respondent no. 40 says:

"Every couple fights, but the fight should not involve beating the wife. If someone beats his wife, he is wrong and needs due punishment. I advise every woman of my constituency that if your husband is exploiting you, abusing you, and not treating you well, you must raise your voice against him. I will help you and be there to ensure justice is done."

When asked about her own encounter with violence, she explains:

"Violence is something that every woman has to experience, be that outside or inside. You must understand one thing if I have taken responsibility for something, I must also become part of that process. Hollow advice does not work. I have to take that path, too. And if I continue to be a victim of violence, how can I have any moral rights to advise my sisters (women of the panchayat) to take steps that sometimes change their whole life."

Respondent no. 25 says:

“The subordinate position of women in a marriage can never change. Even if I become prime minister of India, I will be subordinate to my husband. Believe me, a society can accept a powerful woman, but it can never accept a woman who is more powerful than her husband (as she speaks, she thuds the arm of the chair).”

On further emphasis to recall at least one thing that has changed in her married life since she has come to politics, she answers:

“Nothing has changed except one thing that now my husband recognizes is that I can also be tired. Although being tired does not always avoid unwanted intercourse, it sometimes works. The reason could be that men think one who goes out can only get tired, and since I go outside nowadays, my tiredness is taken into consideration.”

Respondent no.15 says:

“We had never used contraception before, as I was really not sure how it works until a few officials under the Family Planning Programme came to our panchayat and conducted a seminar for women and men separately. The block-level officials gave me instructions to conduct these seminars smoothly, and attendance for me was compulsory.”

The tables and responses mentioned above indicate that gender-quota in Bihar has successfully made these women political. Their admissions of various changes that came in their lives and surroundings have affirmed that no matter what, gender-quota is one of the essential tools for achieving the empowerment of women. In rural set-ups where most women are illiterate, their empowerment sometimes gets halted. Still, political participation with

the help of gender-quota accelerates the empowerment process for those women. Gender quota provides them the opportunities to work for the empowerment of themselves and others.

Chapter- IV

Conclusion: Gender Quota in Bihar: An Instinct of Hope in Women

The study's objective is to understand the concept of development and empowerment of women representatives elected through a gender-based quota system in politics at the local level in Bihar. The central questions throughout the study are: whether political participation has paved the way for women's empowerment and if this has led to the creation of a conducive environment for elected women to be developed and empowered even in their personal spaces, such as a home. To elucidate the impact of gender quota on women's empowerment and development, I have operationalized these two concepts in terms of political interest, social engagement and network, control over one's environment, and the exercise of corporeal agency. It has been mentioned in the literature review and reiterated in this study that this particular research work explains both empowerment and development as intertwined concepts. And complementary to each other; if one is an undone task, the possibility of another done is quite impossible

In Chapter 2 of the study it has been made clear that the political interest of the women is assessed through three vital aspects which indicate their interest in politics: their will to re-contest elections, their wish to further their political career as full-time politicians, and their knowledge of the existing policies. Another essential concept that has helped the researcher to have an overarching idea of these women's empowerment was their social engagement and formation of social networks, which works as social capital for these women. Through the improved communication level and increased mobility of the elected women, the researcher has assessed their enhanced social engagement, which has helped the elected women to form a social network. In her work, Francesca R. Jensenius (2017) shows us that the quota helps marginalized communities to become part of the political elite. Here in this study also, the researcher has investigated the elected women's social engagement, which in turn has helped women become political elites by forming social networks. Their visibility and importance has increased to a level that contributed to further the empowerment and development of these women. M. Nussbaum's work directly inspires the following concept: control over one's environment. For this part of the study, the researcher has used material, not political, aspects of Nussbaum's work. The focus is on women's financial literacy and whether their political empowerment translates

into their economic empowerment, where they become an “economic person”. With the help of practical reasons, these women make certain decisions to seek possession of property and equality at their place of work. The last concept that is used by the researcher to assess the empowerment and development of the elected women is the corporeal agency of women. The body of a woman is not just an object but also a condition which tells us their relation with others (Merleau Ponty, 1945). In "Throwing Like A Girl" (1980), Young takes a cue from Beauvoir; she suggests that women's situation's historical, cultural, social, and economic limits define their existence. The bodily experiences of women are often based on how they are "looked at and acted upon" (1980 [2005: 39]), as well as the source of capacities. "She often lives her body as a burden, which must be dragged and prodded along, and at the same time protected" (1980 [2005: 36]). It was important for this research work to investigate elected women's development of bodily agency as women's bodies are a crucial site for their disempowerment through social disciplining and other norms based on patriarchy. This section deals with very mundane yet important aspects of women; use of contraception, inequality in marriage; domestic violence; and defying patriarchal norms by choosing a lifestyle that is antithetical to patriarchal social and cultural norms. In this part of the study, the focus was on the women's bodies; how they use their bodily agency to maintain their bodily integrity.

Following conclusions about the status of women's empowerment and development through the gender-quota system in politics at PRIs in Bihar are made based on the present research study:

- The study has revealed that the gender-quota system provides an opportunity for women who otherwise would not have ventured into the political arena. Moreover, it empowers women politically and enables them to make certain decisions in their personal life that have a significant impact on their personality and work as a catalyst in the process of their empowerment and development. The present study concludes that gender-quota has increased women's will to re-contestation and pushes them to explore their political selves in a more meaningful manner. Their belief about politics has changed, as now they think politics is not all about men; women also should be active members of the political sphere. Also, the power and privileges of politics should be equally distributed among every elected representative, irrespective of gender. The study also reveals that the elected women have shown their will to take up politics as a career since it brings power,

increase in self-esteem, and confidence to make certain decisions that were otherwise not taken by them. An increase in political interest has also motivated them to learn about the policies and learn some skills that would make them more confident in pursuing their career as a leader. One such skill was learning how to do signatures. Interestingly, the illiterate elected women confessed that giving a thumb impression on official documents was quite embarrassing, so they learned to sign without knowing letters. Their keen interest in re-contestation; will to know about policies and learn specific skills that would avoid some embarrassment in public spaces. And their interest in joining state-level and national-level politics proves that gender-quota has effectively increased women's political interests. Notably, a few women are not willing to re-contest as they are unable to cope with the household work and outside work, and also politics brings jealousy and enmity. The other reason which mainly concerns women from lower castes is the stigmatization of these women with caste-based discrimination.

- In Chapter 1 of the present research study, the researcher has mentioned her difficulties. In that particular chapter, I went at length about the problem of Mukhiya Pati during the interviews, although I eventually dealt with the problem. In dealing with the issue of Mukhiya Pati, I have interviewed some of the Mukhiya Pati. The chapter on the study's findings does not discuss it but has helped me understand the gravity of the problem of Mukhiya Pati. The literature around gender-quota-based political participation of women gives great concern to the phenomenon of Mukhiya Pati (Jayal, 2005; Tanusree Chakraborty & Ishita Mukhopadhyay, 2014; Kudva, S. Agnihotri & V Singh, 2017; and M. Thakur, 2010). After visiting the field, it became understandable why the scholarship around gender-quota discusses Mukhiya Pati in length. So to keep in mind the gigantic stature of Mukhiya Pati in the available scholarship, the present research has also tried to understand certain aspects of this phenomenon. The study affirms that the phenomenon of Mukhiya Pati is real and prevalent. Mukhiya Pati is one such phenomenon that impedes the empowerment and development of elected women. The study's focus is not on the role of Mukhiya Pati as an obstacle to the empowerment of women but looks at another aspect of it. The present research explores the reasons for the existence of Mukhiya Pati.

Needless to say, the genesis of the Mukhiya Pati phenomenon is deeply rooted in patriarchy. However, this study shows that sometimes the patriarchy works in a complex way when we study the existence of Mukhiya Pati. In the case of lower caste women, what has been observed in the field is that the Mukhiya Pati exists because of their inability to do work that needs reading/writing/speaking skills. As mentioned in the findings, several respondents informed me that the Block Development Officer himself asked them to bring their husband/son to the meetings and for any work related to the panchayat. Contrarily in the case of upper-caste women, the Mukhiya Pati phenomenon exists because of the idea of “honor”. This means even if the women from the upper-caste community can do their work, they are not allowed to do it as it might hamper the family’s “honor. Elected women from such families have not been able to de-burdened themselves from entrenched patriarchal norms.

- The study has shown us that women's political participation has increased the social engagement of the elected representatives, which helped them acquire social capital in the form of social networks. Two components that enabled women to build social networks are communication and mobility. Women's political participation has provided them with opportunities for free movement and expression. There is a considerable increase in the mobility of elected women as they attend Gram Sabha meetings and visit Block and other offices they are required to visit. These meetings needed them to speak to people around them, put forward people's problems, and have discussions on them. All these exercises made these women improve their communication skills and increase their mobility over a while. As a result, we have seen through the data collected by the researcher that the elected women are showing great interest and making more significant efforts to have a conversation with their constituents; they solve disputes ranging from land to domestic violence. The quota system has helped these women to come a long way from where they started their journey. Going out in public for personal reasons has also increased manifold. Each representative has developed friendships with other representatives, which add an important aspect to their lives. These women hardly had any friends before joining politics. The development of values of friendship in their lives

has helped them not only increase their mobility and skills of communication, but it provided them a pillar of support when they were alone and vulnerable in their lives.

- The study has recorded the changing attitude of the elected representatives towards the idea of gender equality. Through various questions regarding gender equality, the present research has established that the understanding of these elected representatives about gender equality has improved. More leadership of women has been sought by demanding longitudinal expansion of gender-quota. They understand the importance of education in the lives of other women for the overall development of society. However, a few want their daughters to be educated because it will help them be good mothers, wives, etc. The respondents also believed that women representatives play a pivotal role in the development of society; their contribution as a leader is more than a male leader. It has also been recorded that the respondents are willing to have their daughter freedom of movement. Still, due to apprehension of sexual violence against women, they sometimes do not act upon this.
- Political participation of women has a significant impact on their attitude and activities of women, especially when it comes to making decisions for their growth and making choices related to monetary expenses. They have more control over their surroundings than before becoming elected representatives. Every woman is now connected to the banking system. They own some property, so there is a clear improvement in their financial literacy. Women have admitted that since they became political leaders, they have started spending more money than they ever spent on themselves. The frequency of buying clothes has increased almost 3-4 times. They dine out more frequently than ever. Some of them have said they have eaten outside in a restaurant for the first time only after being elected as Mukhiya. They also revealed that women eating outside in a restaurant is not something that is approved in their culture. Moreover, women also bring to light an exciting phenomenon where they reveal that when they are invited to any marriage or any other such function, women have started giving expensive gifts to

maintain their status as Mukhiya. Increases in expenditure to maintain their self-worth, be it in the form of buying new clothes or gifting others, have made these women an “economic person”. They have become someone who acts rationally to maximize their utility and satisfaction. Their economic investment is an indirect attempt to perpetuate their political self. Therefore, political participation through gender quota makes women an economical people capable of making rational choices for their own benefit. Also, they admit that spending money on others is an act that is part of their political strategy. So the elected women not only spend money for their immediate benefits but also learn the art of electoral politics, which gets influenced by money. However, it has been shown by the present research that the elected women still do not take part in decisions that involve significant amounts of money. Their involvement is limited to making transactions in minor assets; transactions in significant assets are still mainly done by male members of the study. The property owned by these women is rarely land and house but mostly bank balance. It is noted that women’s decision-making power has improved both at home and in public. Nevertheless, they do not get involved in the decision-making process of a substantial nature at home.

- Another important change the present study has observed is a disruption in the traditionally prevailing status quo. Women from SC castes (Rajvanshi and Chauhan) and EBC castes have stopped working in the field as agricultural laborers and also left other menial jobs that they were doing after being elected as Mukhiya or ward members. Political participation has set them free from the traditional job, a job that was exploitative. Also, in some cases, it has set their family members free from those jobs they have been doing for generations under an exploitative system.
- The theorization of the body is a critical intellectual endeavor in feminism. This study considers that and shows that women’s political participation has changed their way of carrying and presenting themselves in public and private spaces. At prima facie, the details around the corporeal agency of these women might look superficial and mundane.

Still, the exercise of agency in this form is one significant aspect of women's empowerment as social disciplining of women in the form of diktats regarding dress code and controlling women's lives is in itself an act of violence against women. Defying traditional norms such as dress codes has also been considered in this study. Women admit that there have been some changes in their clothing since they participated in politics. Some started wearing Salwar Kameez and nighties at home and even changed the saree style. They disclose that these changes were not easy at first, but people had to stop ridiculing us as we were not some ordinary women but the "head of the panchayat".

- The present study also deals with explicit forms of violence, such as domestic violence. Also, it looks into the fact of whether the political empowerment of these women has changed anything in their otherwise unequal marriage. It has been found that no drastic changes have occurred in private space politics, but there is a little silver lining that suggests changes can come over a while. It has been recorded that the election of women as political representatives has brought changes in the temperament of their male counterparts. Men's understanding of women's discomfort has not been completely developed, but they have become a little sensitive towards their women's discomfort. Also, women have become more aware of their sexual health, and they also have tried, in some cases they were successful too, to make their husbands aware of their sexual health. Therefore, women are getting educated about issues that help them develop and progress and make others educated and knowledgeable about things that can help boost the process of development for society.

The aforementioned conclusions based on the interactions the researcher had with the 40 respondents and their family members, mainly the respondents' husbands, indicate that, indeed, there is a positive change in those women's public and private lives. Women's desire to become a part of politics has increased, and they have started thinking bigger about their political participation. They believe political participation through gender quotas has made them realize their potential as public figures and be aware of their position in society and family. In Chapter 3,

we have seen many elected women respondents well articulate how their experience as power holders has made them aware of the importance of exercising their agency. Although many areas need to be fixed; for a society like Bihar, where women's socio-economic and political condition is so blemished, one single ray of hope in the form of gender quota at PRIs can be stunning. Making women a part of political elites, improving their social engagement, and advancing their communication skills are some of the developments that have paved the way for the empowerment of elected women. Another two crucial aspects of empowerment that this particular research study focuses on: enquiring about the impact of gender quota on the corporeal agency of women and how Mukhiya Pati is not just a simple phenomenon but it has layers to it.

Also, this study looks into the importance of social ties (friendship) in these women's lives. One of the respondents says that she could come out of an abusive marriage with friends' help, and those friends are made when she has started going out of her home after being elected. Moreover, this study does not imply that gender quota is a prerequisite to the formation of social ties that women make. However, in this particular study, it was gender quota that helped them to get out of the four walls of their homes and make friends and do things that challenged the patriarchal norms of the society. Without their participation in politics through gender quotas, these women could not have done it otherwise.

The study has mentioned achievements and struggles that gender quota has thrown in the path to the empowerment and development of women. Indeed, there is a long way to walk for these women to achieve empowerment and development in true sense. Moreover, it is safe to say that gender quota has helped these women to kickstart that endeavor. Women are given a head-start for the long walk they are supposed to take to become empowered individuals. One of the respondents rightly says, "*gender quota wo subah ki kiran hai jisko dekh ke yeh toh pata nahi chalta ki din kaisa jayega lekin din hoga and raat kategi is baat ki puri umeed hoti hai.*" (Translation: Gender quota is one ray of light that does not tell us how our day is going to be but it definitely tells us that night is about to get over and the day is about to come). Her one statement about the gender-quota policy sums up the whole achievements and struggles related to it. The increased descriptive representation of women in Bihar has definitely shown a way to substantive representation; however, the entrenched patriarchy still has its hold on women.

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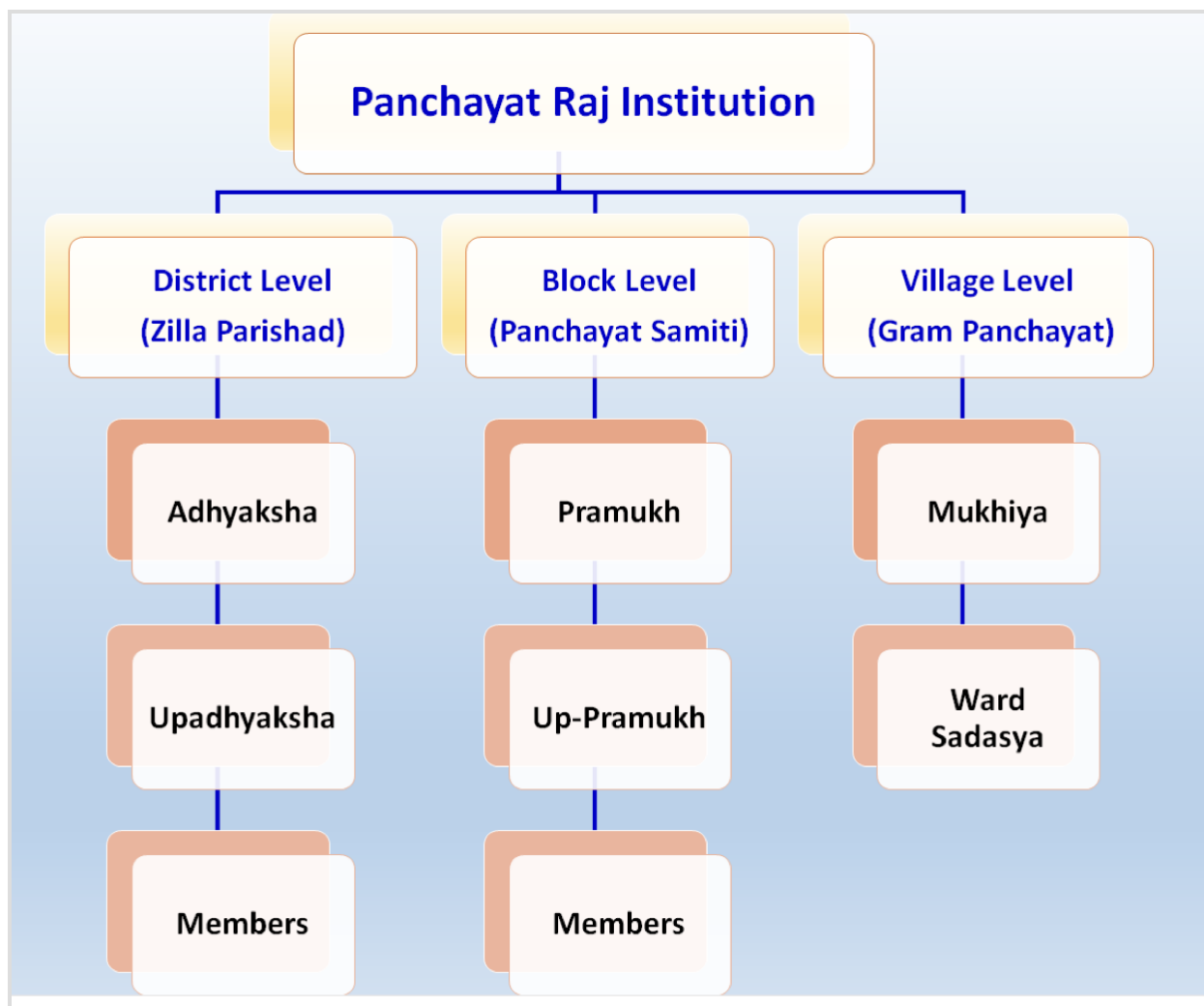
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Appendix

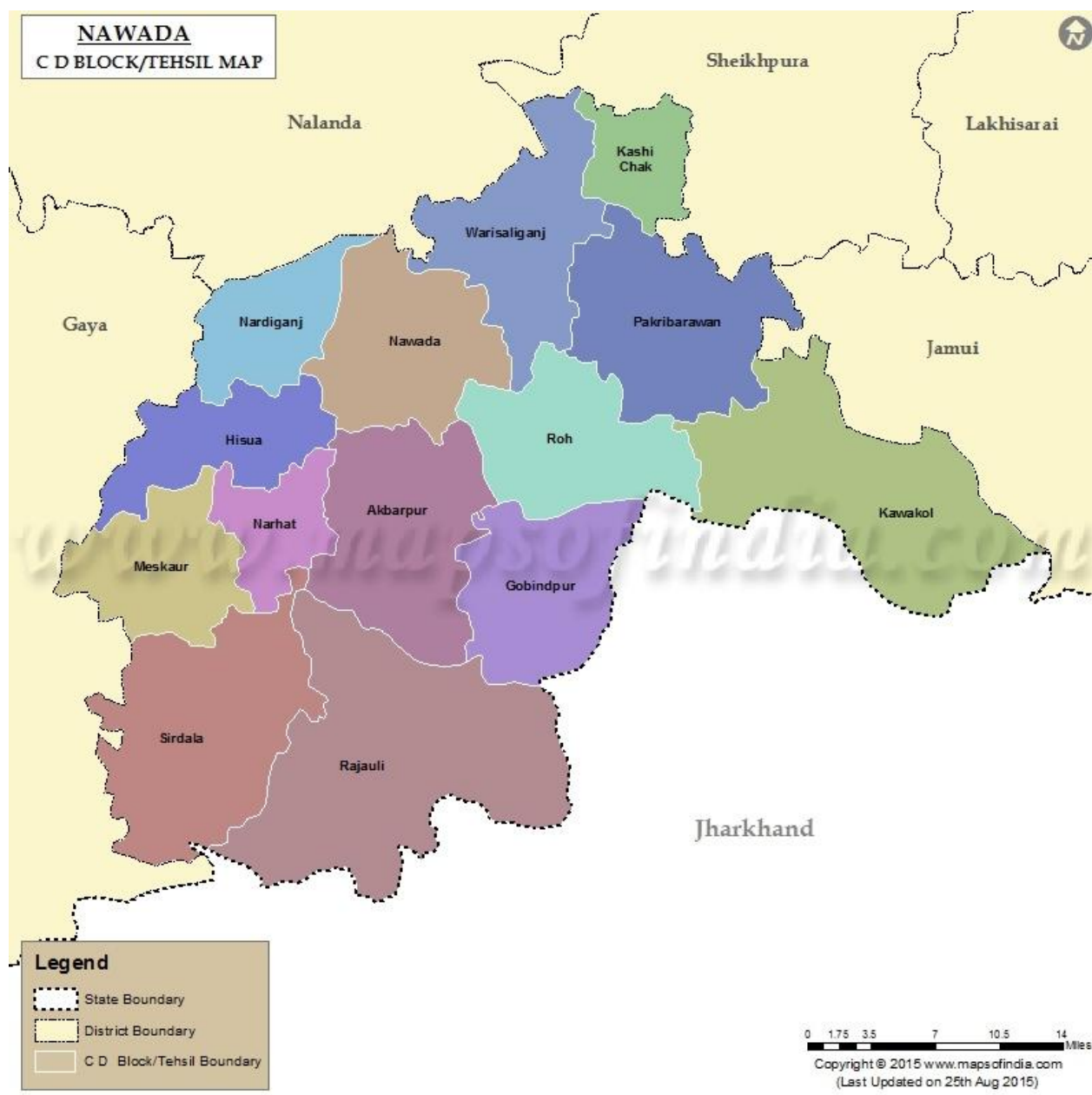
A. STRUCTURE OF PRIs IN BIHAR



B. MAP OF BIHAR



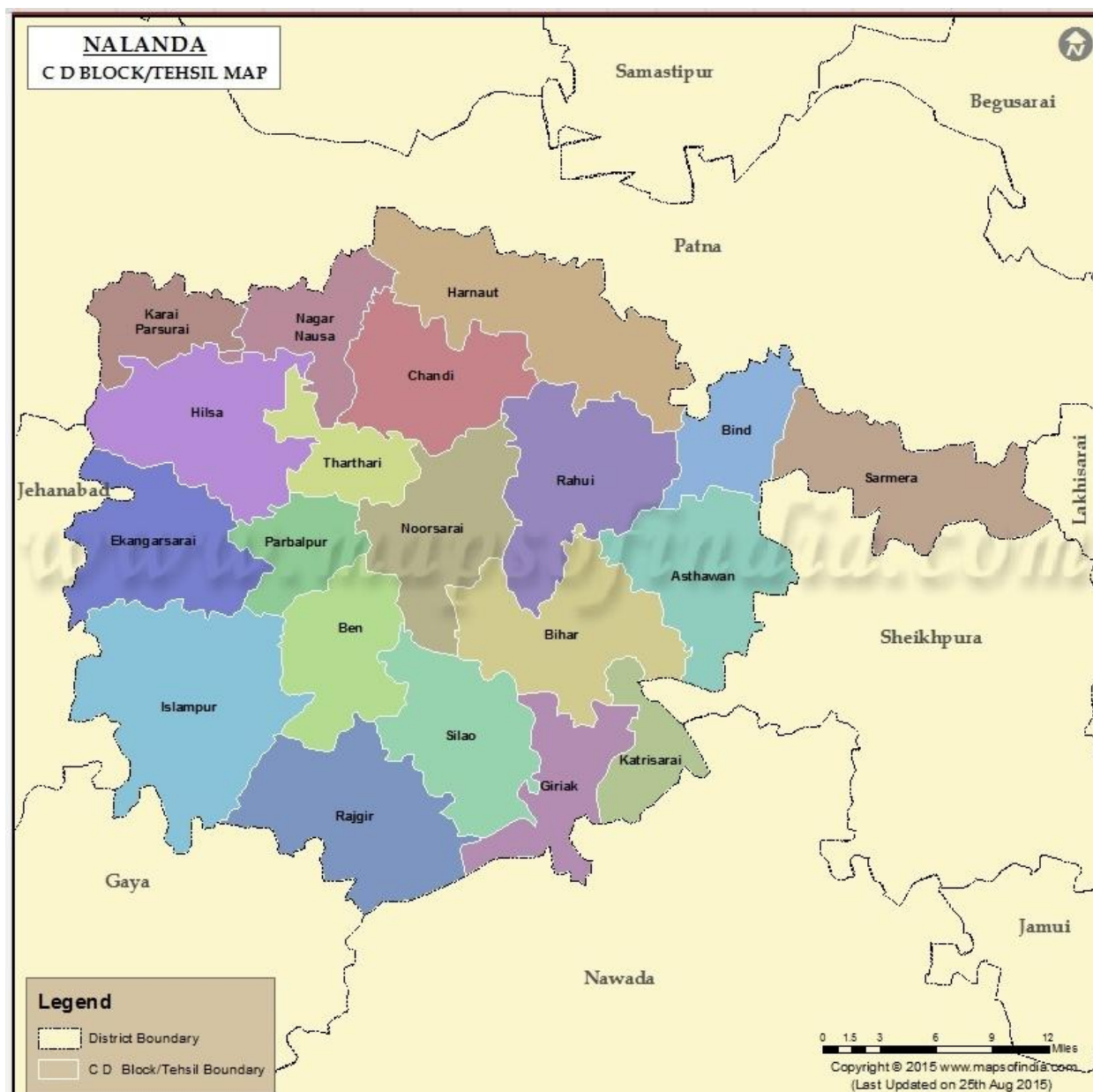
C. MAP OF NAWADA



D. LIST OF PANCHAYATS VISITED BY THE RESEARCHER IN NAWADA DISTRICTS

Serial No.	Block	Panchayat
1.	Nardiganj	Pes
		Odo
		Hadia
		Nanaura
		Ichu Karna
		Kahuara
2.	Nawada	Oraina
		Gonawa
		Loharpur
		Dedaur
		Kharant
3.	Meskaur	Bisait

E. MAP OF NALANDA



F. LIST OF PANCHAYATS THE RESEARCHER VISITED IN NALANDA DISTRICT

Serial No.	Block	Panchayat
1.	Rajgir	Lodipur
		Naipokhar
		Pilkhi
		Meyar
2.	Giriak	Adampur
		Giriak
		Puraini

G. List of Questions asked During the Interview

- Name
- Age
- Educational Qualification
- Marital Status
- Caste Category
- Name of the office presently elected in
- How many times have you held any elected office in PRIs?
- What did you do before joining politics?
- Why have you joined politics?
- Was joining politics your own decision?
- Who gave you advice to re-contest the election?
- Is someone from your family in politics?
- Do you attend any Panchayat meetings?
- How often do you attend Panchayat meetings?
- Do you want to pursue a full-time career as a politician?
- Do you have an interest in national level politics?

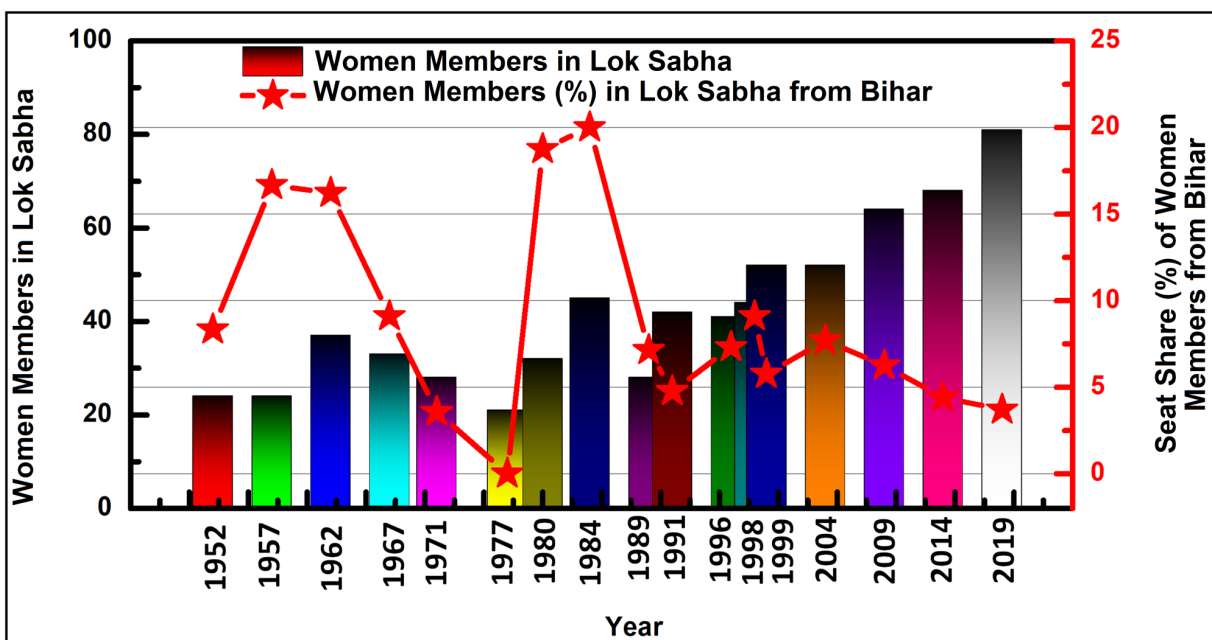
- Tell me about some of the policies and programmes that you have worked upon for the people, especially for women, of your constituency?
- Does your husband take part in the decision making process of issues related to your Panchayat?
- Do you know about the structural composition of the PRIs?
- What do you think about Bihar government's initiative about gender quota at PRIs?
- Do you think 50% reservation for women candidates is enough?
- What is your take on reservation for women in parliament?
- Who do you think makes a better leader, men or women?
- Who do you think contributes more to the development of society?
- Did you go out for the election campaigning during the elections?
- Have you made any new friend (s) at your workplace?
- Do you keep any contact with your male colleagues?
- Who resolves disputes of your panchayat?
- What kind of dispute do you resolve?
- How often do you visit block/district offices?

- Are you a member of any organization? If yes, please tell me about the organization.
- When did you become a member of that organization?
- Do you get any help from your husband at home in doing chores?
- If not, then who helps you with the household work when you are unable to do so?
- Who do you think has more need of education, men, women, or both?
- Do you think men and women should enjoy equal levels of freedom?
- Did you hold any bank account before becoming an elected member of PRIs?
- Do you hold any bank account now?
- Do you make money transactions on your own?
- Who buys assets that involve minor money transactions?
- Who buys assets that involve major money transactions?
- What changes have occurred in respect of spending money on themselves after being elected as political representative?
- Do they go outside other than going to the Gram Panchayat meetings?
- If yes, how often do you go then?
- Do you or your partner use contraceptives?

- Do you have any say in your conjugal relationship?
- Tell me about the major changes that have taken place in your personal life after becoming a political representative.

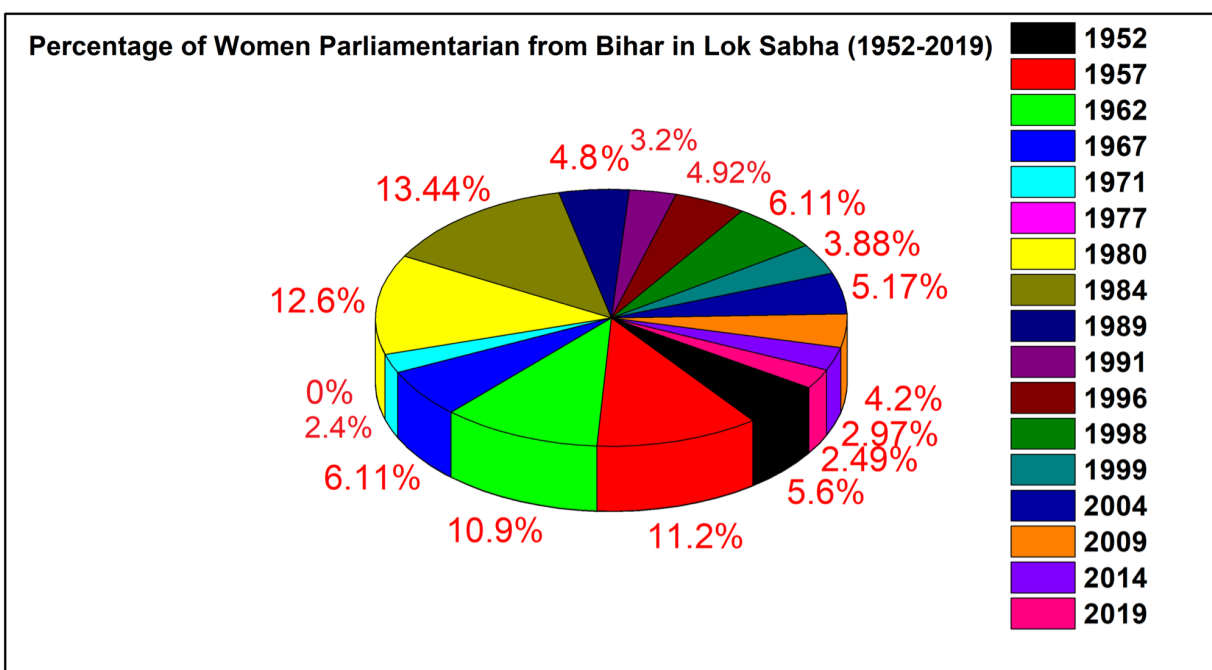
H. Graphical Representation of Bihar's Women in Indian Politics

Figure 1



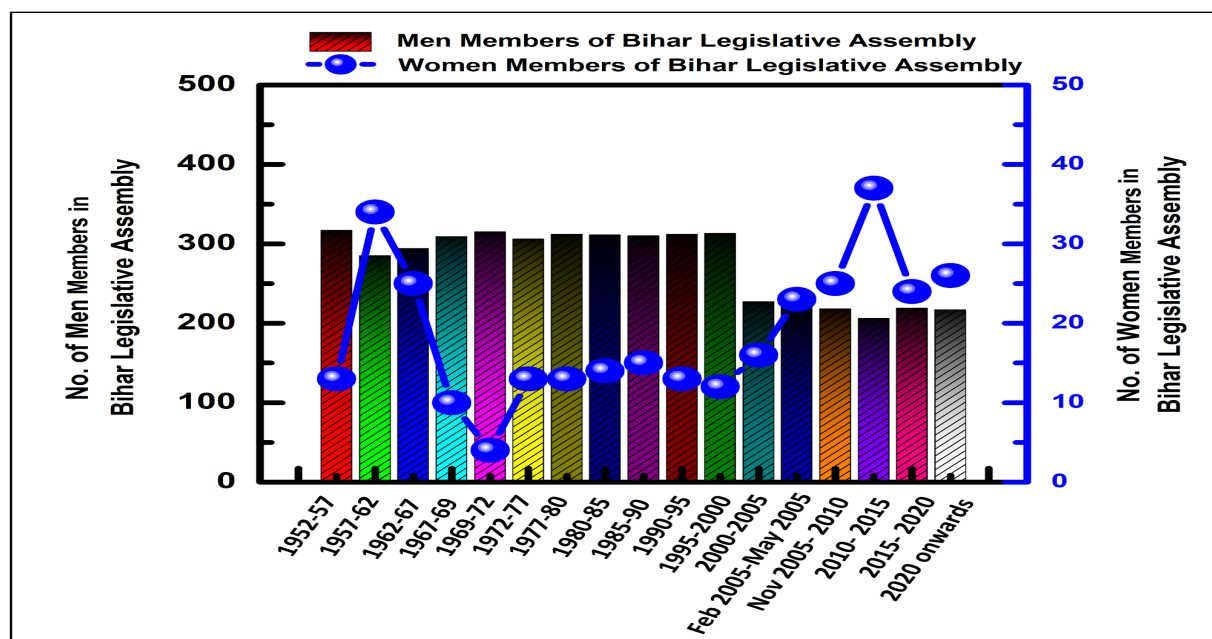
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Figure 2



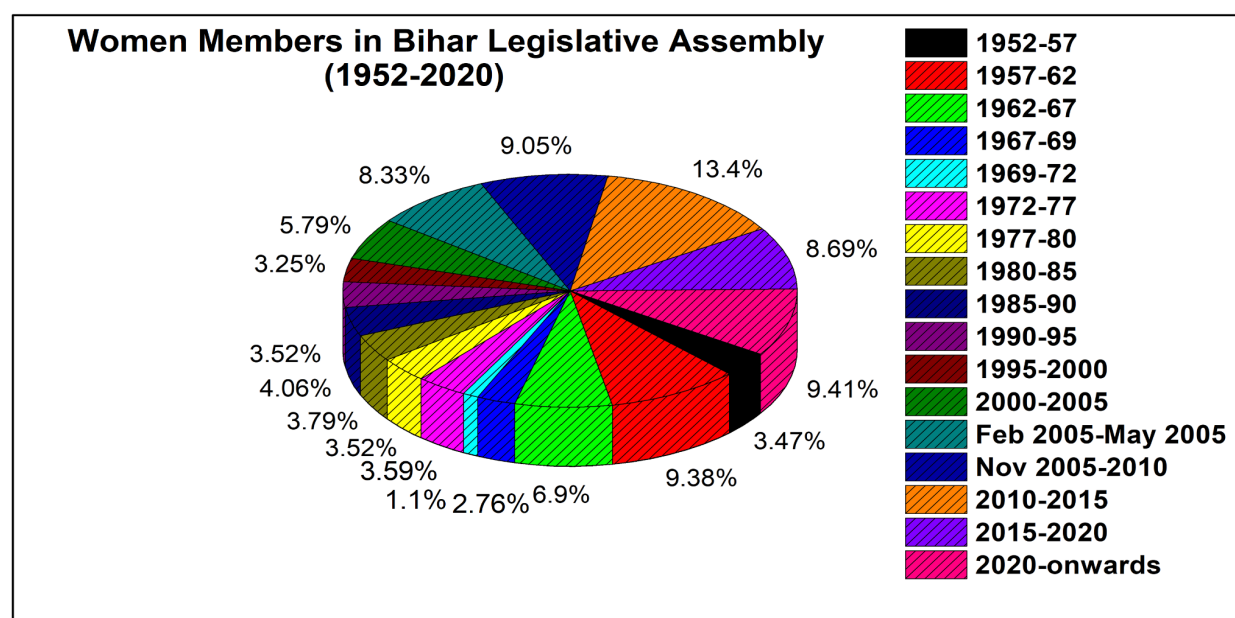
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Figure 3



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Figure 4



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