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Measuring qualitative participation of weaker sections in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRIs) of India: The case of Bihar

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Abstract

The study attempts to measure qualitative participation of weaker sections in the ensured quantitative representation in Panchayati Raj. Using survey data from four districts of Bihar, it finds that both male and female representatives take the constitutionally mandated institutional innovation positively. It finds that female representatives are relative political outsiders and lack informational resources, as compared to male representatives. Despite limitations, more female representatives consider that PRIs as an agency of social change and empowerment of weaker sections. Indeed, quantitative reservations have had a significant positive impact on the qualitative participation of weaker sections in Panchayats though the importance of capacity building is highlighted.

Keywords: Quantitative representation, qualitative participation, weaker sections and empowerment

1. Introduction

Village *Panchayat* as a system of self-government existed in ancient, medieval and British India. Though the leaders of nationalist movement have no uniformity of approach in treating village as a homogenous, inclusive and undifferentiated category yet it remained a core category of nation formation, democratisation and decentralisation. In 1993, 73rd constitutional amendment act was passed due to the recommendation of various committees, existing socio-economic condition and political factors. In the Indian context *Panchayat* is the primary unit of self-governance, development and participation. The post 73rd amendment period considers PRIs as an agency of democracy, development and social change and empowerment of weaker sections.

2. Literature review, Objective and Research methods

2.1 Literature review

The concern of empowerment of weaker sections through PRIs appears as passing reference in the deliberations and reports of Balwant Rai Mehta (1957), Ashok Mehta (1978), G. V. K. Rao (1985) and L. M. Singhvi (1986) committee. The potential of PRIs in the empowerment of weaker sections remains almost unrecognised till the enactment of the 73rd amendment of the Constitution.

The literature of the first decade of the 73rd amendment period reveals that it has opened space for women, *Dalits* (SCs) and *Adivasis* (STs) (e.g., Susheela Kaushik 1993; Bidyut Mohanty 1995; and Peter Ronald deSouza 2003) [6, 7, 9].

Susheela Kaushik (1993) [6] uses qualitative method. She concludes that so far 'quantitative representation of women in political process has not brought about qualitative change. She suggests that women in rural areas lack the requisite political knowledge, awareness and capabilities of effective leadership so she highlights the importance of capacity building. Women empowerment can be achieved through socio-economic advancement and increase in number and participation in decision-making process, which in result not only change their lives but also the functioning of public institutions' (Kaushik, 1993) [6].

Bidyut Mohanty (1995) [7] uses qualitative method. She mentions cases from 'Rajasthan, Maharashtra and Karnataka. She concludes that majority of representatives are illiterate, no understanding of rules and regulations and additionally they deal with insensitive bureaucracy so many of them will become proxy members. She suggests that women have to

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come across the hurdles of unequal treatment, discrimination of caste and class, criminalization, factionalism and lack of legal awareness before becoming effective partners in the decision-making process' (Mohanty, 1995) [7].

Peter Ronald deSouza (2003) [9] uses qualitative method. He concludes that the 'incidents of violence against *Dalits* and *Adivasis* are on the rise with the 73rd amendment. How the violence against *Dalits* and *Adivasis* should be interpreted, with respect to short term losses or with the long term objective of attaining equal citizenship in the context of Indian democracy' (Ronald deSouza, 2003) [9].

It may be deduced from the literature that the 73rd amendment has ensured quantitative representation of hitherto excluded women and weaker sections. But in case of women representatives their quantitative representation appears not to be getting transformed qualitatively. The case of *Dalits* and *Adivasis* do not seem to differ as their struggle for a just order is often met with violence which seems to be hindering their qualitative participation.

The literature on PRIs and empowerment of weaker sections in the second decade of the 73rd amendment period may be classified into two groups. One group of scholars concludes that participation of weaker sections in the process of decision-making and exercising power is merely quantitative (e.g., Dayabati Roy 2008 and Anand Teltumbde 2011) [10, 11].

Dayabati Roy (2008) [10] uses qualitative method. It is the 'ethnographic study of two villages of Hoogly district of West Bengal. She concludes that the political situation reveals complete subordination of the SC and ST sections to the organized domain or the hegemony of a single party for thirty long years' (Roy, 2008) [10].

Anand Teltumbde (2011) [11] uses qualitative method. It is the study of 'Tamil Nadu to justify his argument he draws three cases. He concludes that in case of female representatives, it is usually daughter and son-in-law who is made to sign while husband or father-in-law is in control. In case of SCs/STs, it is the bonded labour of the *sarpanch* who becomes a proxy for his rule. He argues that when the weaker sections are empowered and made democratic, PRIs can act as an agency of change and empowerment. He highlights the role of state as an ideal strategy to ensure that marginalized groups are empowered and emboldened to challenge the dominant social groups' (Teltumbde, 2011) [11].

The other group of scholars concludes that quantitative representation of weaker sections in the process of decision-making and exercising power is getting transformed into qualitative participation (e.g., B.S. Baviskar and George Mathew (eds.), 2009 [2] and Nupur Tiwari 2009) [12].

B.S. Baviskar and George Mathew (eds.), (2009) [2] apply qualitative method. It is based on 'intensive field work or participant observation of twelve states. They conclude that there is no uniform pattern of empowerment of weaker sections in different states. The regions with a tradition of social reforms like Maharashtra, Gujarat and South India have responded favourably to the institutional intervention' (Baviskar and Mathew, 2009) [2].

Nupur Tiwari (2009) [12] uses quantitative method which is based on 'large survey of 23 states. It has the sample size of over 20,000. She concludes that PRIs have empowered women from the *Dalits*, *Adivasis*, backwards, poor and illiterates. She suggests that Elected Women Representatives (EWRs) should be given 10 to 15 years of

continued opportunity to become assertive and independent' (Tiwari, 2009) [12].

Most of the studies restrict themselves to the quantitative dimension of empowerment. They hardly attempt to capture the qualitative dimension of empowerment. It is important to re-emphasise that a comprehensive understanding of empowerment cannot be restricted to quantitative representation of the weaker sections in the institution of PRIs. It cannot be the terminal point of empowerment. Empowerment of weaker sections should be understood in terms of their qualitative participation in PRIs which may redefine the power relations at the village level. The paper attempts to measure qualitative participation of weaker sections in the democratic governance and empowering potential of PRIs.

2.2 Objective

The 73rd constitutional amendment has ensured quantitative representation for weaker sections in Panchayats/PRIs. But the amendment does not ensure qualitative participation of weaker sections in Panchayats/PRIs. However question remains as to how and to what extent the quantitative representation is getting transformed into qualitative participation of weaker sections in terms of decision-making and exercising power at the *Panchayat* level. The paper attempts to measure qualitative participation of weaker sections in the process of decision-making and exercising power at the *Panchayat* level.

3. Research methods

The paper was based on 'triangulation of theory (content analysis), triangulation of methods (qualitative and quantitative methods), triangulation of measures (weaker section representatives and focus group discussion) and triangulation of observers (government officials and opinion leaders). Content analysis was applied to describe, explore and explain research topic. Structured interview schedule and focus group discussion are the tools for collection of primary data (quantitative and qualitative data). Official documents, census data, legislative and executive documents of government and report of committees were the sources of secondary data. Data (primary and secondary), research questions, and literature were analysed in the light of research objective. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-16) was used for data processing and analysis' (Jha and Singh, 2017a) [3].

3.1 Key concepts, their operational definition and limitations

PRIs- 'District *Panchayat* (*Zilla Panchayat*), Intermediate *Panchayat* (*Panchayat Samiti*) and village *Panchayat* are the three divisions of PRIs. District *Panchayat* and Intermediate *Panchayat* are important institutional mechanism from governance point of view. The focus on village *Panchayat* is intended towards the critical exploration of empowerment in the guaranteed space of participatory governance. As the paper centres on empowerment so the governance framework of PRIs are not taken into consideration' (Jha and Singh, 2017b) [4].

Empowerment- "Empowerment is commonly understood as the condition of having power, and being able to exercise it and obtain the benefits thereof" (Narayan, 2006: 219) [8]. Empowerment of weaker sections is analysed at political (qualitative participation of weaker sections and community

in terms of decision-making and exercising power at the village level), social, economic and informational resource level.

Weaker sections- Weaker sections are used for SC men and women who are the most deprived and oppressed section of Indian society. It focuses on SC women in particular and not on women in general. It does not take into consideration STs.

To establish the link between empowerment and quotas or reservation it is relevant to cite: "So in the end, the Indian way of securing empowerment for the un-empowered seems to be by the safe way of providing, as extensively as possible, quotas on the basis of community, caste and gender"(Beteille, 1999: 597)^[1].

4. Variables

- i. Independent variable- Panchayats
- ii. Dependent variable- Empowerment of weaker sections

of Bihar

- iii. Non-observable or intervening variable-
 - a. Gross District Domestic Product (GDDP)
 - b. SC concentration of population

5. Sample for quantitative and qualitative data

Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to obtain data for quantitative analysis. The interview of 80 government officials and 80 opinion leaders were conducted to get triangulation of observers. A single person means limitation of observer and the limitation of research. Multiple observers added their views regarding awareness about roles and responsibilities of representatives to research, thus reduced the limitation of the findings. Four focus group discussions were conducted to know the view of community members regarding the PRIs as an agency of empowerment of weaker sections.

Table 1: Sample size for quantitative and qualitative data

District with GDDP	Total post	% of SC population	Quantitative data					Qualitative data	
			Proportion	Sample for male	Sample for female	Government officials	Opinion leaders	Focus group discussion	
Darbhanga 20	330	15.64	51.61	0.21	08	08	16	16	1
Gaya 10	332	30.39	100.89	0.42	17	17	34	34	1
Patna 1	330	15.77	52.04	0.21	09	09	18	18	1
Siwan 32	293	11.61	34.01	0.14	06	06	12	12	1
			238.55	0.98~1.0	40	40	80	80	4

Source: Economic survey of Bihar (2008-09: 10), www.biharprd.bih.nic.in and Census 2011 (applicable for first three columns only)

6. Analysis and interpretation of data

Table 2: Descriptive statistics (mean) on representatives

	Variable	
	Socio-economic profile	
1	Age	39.38(7.78) 33.88(5.43)
2	Marital status (1=Married; 2=Unmarried)	1.18(.38) 1.00(.00)
3	Ownership of land by respondent's family (1=Landless; 2=Land holding)	1.55(.50) 1.65(.48)
4	For yes, average landholding (acres)	1.25(1.25) 1.42(1.15)
5	Type of house (1=Brick; 2=Others)	1.52(.50) 1.40(.49)
	Political Carrier of Representatives	
6	Member of political family (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.58(.50) 1.78(.42)
7	Active in Politics (1=Around one decade; 2=Around two decades)	1.48(.50) 1.18(.38)
8	Difficulty faced during election (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.38(.49) 1.60(.49)
9	Source of inspiration for contesting election (1=Self; 2=Others)	1.22(.42) 1.30(.46)
	Social equilibrium	
10	Get support of other members of Panchayat (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.28(.45) 1.40(.49)
	Development	
11	Role of PRIs in improving economic status of weaker sections (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.18(.38) 1.18(.38)
	Government officials and opinion leaders	
12	Government officials on awareness of representatives regarding their roles and responsibilities (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.10(.30) 1.15(.36)
13	Opinion leaders on awareness of representatives regarding their roles and responsibilities (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.12(.42) 1.32(.47)
	Social change and empowerment	
14	Reservation in PRIs provided opportunity (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.20(.40) 1.10(.30)
15	Untouchability and ritual distance declined due to reservation in PRIs (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.42(.50) 1.25(.43)
16	Provision of reservation in PRIs changed social attitude of upper castes towards lower castes (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.38(.49) 1.28(.45)
17	Possibility of winning from unreserved seat (1=Yes; 2=No)	1.65(.48) 1.78(.42)
	Sample Size	40 40

Figures in brackets indicate Standard Deviation (SD).

6.1 Inference

From table 2, I found that the mean age of male and female representatives were 39.38 and 33.88 years respectively. This was the test for null hypothesis that male and female had the same mean age. The significance value .000 was

less than .05. Thus, I rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a difference between male and female representatives in terms of average age in the population. The male and female ages were explored and it revealed that median for male and female representatives

were 40.50 and 33 years respectively. The youngest male representative was of 25 years while the oldest male representative was of 53 years. The range was of 28 years. The youngest female representative was of 25 years while the oldest female representative was of 44 years. The range was of 19 years.

7. Discussion

I found that all female representatives were married, younger, with high landholding and better house, as compared to male representatives. Interestingly, fewer female representatives belonged to political family, fewer had long political experience, fewer faced difficulty during election and fewer were self-induced to contest election, as compared to male representatives. On the whole, it thus appeared that compared to the female representatives, male representatives were economically more disadvantaged and

relative political insiders. Fewer female representatives got support from other members of *Panchayat*, as compared to male representatives. Further, I found that mean score of role of PRIs in improving economic status of weaker sections of the male and female representatives was the same. In the views of government officials and opinion leaders fewer female representatives had awareness regarding roles and responsibilities, as compared to male representatives. Fewer male representatives considered that reservation in PRIs provided opportunity, fewer male representatives considered that untouchability and ritual distance declined due to reservation in PRIs and fewer male representatives considered that reservation in PRIs changed social attitude of upper castes towards lower castes, as compared to female representatives. The mean score of possibility of winning from unreserved seats was higher for male representatives, as compared to female representatives.

Table 3: District level analysis of socio-economic profile of representatives

District										
	Darbhanga		Gaya			Patna		Siwan		Total
Male	8(20)		17(42.5)			9(22.5)		6(15)		40(100)
Female	8(20)		17(42.5)			9(22.5)		6(15)		40(100)
Marital status										
	Married					Unmarried				
	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	8(24.2)	10(30.3)	9(27.3)	6(18.2)	33(100)	0(0)	7(100)	0(0)	0(0)	7(100)
Female	8(20)	17(42.7)	9(22.5)	6(15)	40(100)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)	0(0)
Ownership of land by respondent's family										
	Landless					Landholding				
	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	4(22.2)	7(38.9)	3(16.7)	4(22.2)	18(100)	4(18.2)	10(45.5)	6(57.3)	2(9.1)	22(100)
Female	4(28.6)	6(42.9)	2(14.3)	2(14.3)	14(100)	4(15.4)	11(42.3)	7(26.3)	4(15.4)	26(100)
Type of house										
	Brick					Others				
	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	3(15.8)	9(47.4)	6(31.6)	1(5.3)	19(100)	5(23.2)	8(38.1)	3(14.3)	5(23.8)	21(100)
Female	3(12.5)	11(45.8)	7(29.2)	3(12.5)	24(100)	5(31.2)	6(37.5)	2(12.5)	3(18.8)	16(100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

Out of 80 representatives, 40 were male and 40 were female representatives. They were from Darbhanga, Gaya, Patna and Siwan district and each district had equal number of male and female representatives. All female representatives were married while only 7 male representatives were unmarried and all of them were from Gaya. Eighteen male and 14 female representatives were landless. On the basis of GDDP Darbhanga, Gaya, Patna and Siwan occupied 20th,

10th, 1st and 32nd position respectively. Higher the GDDP, higher should be the prosperity of natives. This argument of macro economics was not accepted when applied at micro level. Significant number and percentage of representatives from Patna, Gaya and Darbhanga were landless. There was no significant relation between GDDP and landholding of male representatives but it had slight impact on the landholding of female representatives.

Table 4: District level analysis of political carrier of representatives

Member of political family										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	3(17.6)	10(58.8)	2(11.8)	2(11.8)	17(100)	5(21.7)	7(30.4)	7(30.4)	4(17.4)	23(100)
Female	1(8.3)	9(75)	2(16.7)	0(0)	12(100)	7(25.0)	8(28.8)	7(25.0)	6(21.4)	28(100)
Active in politics										
	Around one decade					Around two decades				
	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	0(0)	16(76.2)	2(9.5)	3(14.3)	21(100)	8(42.1)	1(5.3)	7(36.8)	3(15.8)	19(100)
Female	8(24.2)	10(30.3)	9(27.3)	6(18.2)	33(100)	0(0)	7(100)	0(0)	0(0)	7(100)
Difficulty faced during election										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhang	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	7(28.0)	11(44.0)	2(8.0)	5(20.0)	25(100)	1(6.7)	6(40.0)	7(46.7)	1(6.7)	15(100)
Female	4(25.7)	6(40.0)	2(13.3)	3(20)	15(100)	4(16.0)	11(44.0)	7(28.0)	3(12.0)	25(100)
Source of inspiration for contesting election										

	Self					Others				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	6(19.4)	13(41.9)	8(25.8)	4(12.9)	31(100)	2(22.2)	4(44.4)	1(11.1)	2(22.2)	9(100)
Female	5(17.9)	12(42.9)	8(28.6)	3(10.7)	28(100)	3(25.0)	5(41.7)	1(8.3)	3(25.0)	12(100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

The table revealed that 17 male and 12 female representatives came from political family. Thirty three female and 21 male representatives had been active in politics for a decade. All female representatives from Darbhanga had been active in politics for around one decade while all male representatives of Darbhanga had been active

in politics for around two decades. Twenty five male and 15 female representatives faced difficulty during election. Thirty one male and 28 female representatives were self-induced to contest elections. It thus, appeared that female representatives were political outsiders, as compared to male representatives.

Table 5: Social equilibrium at district level

Get support of other members of Panchayat										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	6(20.7)	15(51.7)	8(27.6)	0(0)	29(100)	2(18.2)	2(18.2)	1(9.1)	6(54.5)	11(100)
Female	5(20.8)	14(58.3)	5(20.8)	0(0)	24(100)	3(18.8)	3(18.8)	4(25.0)	6(37.5)	16(100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

Twenty nine male and 24 female representatives managed to get support from other members of Panchayat. All representatives from Siwan, irrespective of gender, stated

that they did not get support from other members of Panchayat.

Table 6: PRIs as an agency of development at district level

Role of PRIs in improving economic status of weaker sections										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	7(21.2)	14(42.4)	6(18.2)	6(18.2)	33(100)	1(14.3)	3(42.9)	3(42.9)	0(0)	7(100)
Female	7(21.2)	14(42.4)	7(21.2)	5(15.2)	33(100)	1(14.3)	3(42.9)	2(28.6)	1(14.3)	7(100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

Equal number of male and female representatives considered that there was significant role of PRIs in improving economic status of weaker sections. Irrespective

of GDDP, weaker section representatives considered that PRIs played significant role in improving economic status of weaker sections.

Table 7: View of government officials and opinion leaders at district level

Government officials on awareness of representatives regarding their roles and responsibilities										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	7(19.4)	15(41.7)	9(25.0)	5(13.9)	36(100)	1(25.0)	2(50.0)	0(0)	1(25.0)	4(100)
Female	7(20.6)	15(44.1)	8(23.5)	4(11.8)	34(100)	1(16.7)	2(33.3)	1(16.7)	2(33.3)	6(100)
Opinion leaders on awareness of representatives regarding their roles and responsibilities										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	7(22.6)	13(41.9)	7(22.6)	4(12.9)	31(100)	1(11.1)	4(44.4)	2(22.2)	2(22.2)	9(100)
Female	5(18.5)	13(48.1)	6(22.2)	3(11.1)	27(100)	3(23.1)	4(30.8)	3(23.1)	3(23.1)	13(100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

In view of government officials, 36 male and 34 female representatives had awareness regarding their roles and responsibilities. In view of opinion leaders, 31 male and 27 female representatives had awareness regarding their roles

and responsibilities. It was clear that female representatives lag behind male representatives in informational resources. It was due to frequent interaction with government officials, as compared to opinion leaders.

Table 8: PRIs as an agency of social change and empowerment at district level

Reservation in PRIs provided opportunity										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	6(18.8)	12(37.5)	8(25)	6(18.8)	32(100)	2(25.0)	5(62.5)	1(12.5)	0(0)	8(100)
Female	7(19.4)	15(41.7)	8(22.2)	6(16.7)	36(100)	1(25.0)	2(50)	1(25.0)	0(0)	4(100)
Untouchability and ritual distance declined due to reservation in PRIs										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	4(17.4)	8(34.8)	7(30.4)	4(17.4)	23(100)	4(23.5)	9(52.9)	2(11.8)	2(11.8)	17(100)

Female	5(16.7)	13(43.3)	7(23.3)	5(16.7)	30(100)	3(30)	4(40)	2(20)	1(10)	10(100)
Provision of reservation in PRIs changed social attitude of upper castes towards lower castes										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	5(20.0)	9(36.0)	6(24.0)	5(20.0)	25(100)	3(20.0)	8(53.3)	3(20.0)	1(6.7)	15(100)
Female	6(20.7)	11(37.9)	6(20.7)	6(20.7)	29(100)	2(18.2)	6(54.5)	3(27.3)	0(0)	11(100)
Possibility of winning from unreserved seat										
	Yes					No				
	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total	Darbhangha	Gaya	Patna	Siwan	Total
Male	2(14.3)	8(57.1)	3(21.4)	1(7.1)	14(100)	6(23.1)	9(34.6)	6(23.1)	5(19.2)	26(100)
Female	2(22.2)	6(66.7)	1(11.1)	0(0)	9(100)	6(19.4)	11(35.5)	8(25.8)	6(19.4)	31(100)

Figures in brackets indicate percentage.

Fewer male representatives considered that reservation in PRIs provided opportunity, as compared to female representatives. Thirty two male and 36 female representatives considered that reservation in PRIs provided opportunity. All representatives from Siwan, irrespective of gender considered that reservation in PRIs provided opportunity. Fewer male representatives considered that untouchability and ritual distance declined due to reservation in PRIs, as compared to female representatives. Twenty three male and 30 female representatives were of the view that due to reservation in PRIs untouchability and ritual distance declined. Fewer male representatives considered that provision of reservation in PRIs changed social attitude of upper castes towards lower castes, as compared to female representatives. Twenty five male and 29 female representatives considered that provision of reservation in PRIs changed social attitude of upper castes towards lower castes. Fewer female representatives considered that there was possibility of winning from unreserved seats, as compared to male representatives. Nine female and 14 male representatives considered that there was possibility of winning from unreserved seats. Gaya (30.39%) and Siwan (11.61%) had the highest and lowest concentration of SC population in sample districts. Significant number of representatives from Gaya and Siwan had contrasting view in considering PRIs as an agency of social change and empowerment. This was due to SC concentration of population.

8. Focus group discussion

In focus group discussion 'attempt was made to highlight the two key issues related to empowerment of weaker sections. First point was whether PRIs made difference in the status of community and majority considered that it made difference in the status of community. Interestingly, in Gaya there was lack of agreement. Second point was the protection of interest of the community and there was consensus that the representatives protect the interest of community. However, majority in Siwan considered that representatives did not protect the interest of community' (Jha and Singh, 2017c:100) [5].

9. Summary

The role of PRIs in empowerment of weaker sections was examined on the basis of analysis of primary data obtained from sample of representatives, government officials, opinion leaders and focus group discussion. I found that female representatives had somewhat better economic status, as compared to male representatives. The political carrier of representatives revealed that male representatives were political insiders, as compared to female representatives. Male representatives were well connected

as compared to female representatives. Irrespective of GDP, equal number of male and female representatives considered that PRIs contribute significantly in improving economic status of weaker sections. In view of government officials and opinion leaders the informational resource of male representatives was higher than female representatives. It was evident that except economic status, female representatives were more disadvantaged to male representatives on other parameters. I found that in general representatives, irrespective of gender take the 73rd constitutional amendment positively. Despite limitations, more female representatives considered PRIs as an agency of social change and empowerment. In spite of significant percentage of awareness about roles and responsibilities there appears need of capacity building for representatives.

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