



# Role of Panchayati Raj Institutions in Women's Empowerment in Jharkhand: A Critical Analysis

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## Abstract

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are local self-government bodies in rural areas. In Jharkhand, the state government has given 50% reservation to women in these institutions. This paper studies how PRIs help in women's empowerment in Jharkhand. Jharkhand has many tribal communities and faces problems like poverty and low education.

Using government reports, research papers, and real success stories, this study finds that many women have become leaders. Women leaders focus on water, sanitation, education, health, and jobs. However, problems like male family members controlling decisions (proxy), low literacy, and social resistance still exist. The paper suggests better training, strong rules against proxy leadership, and linking women groups with panchayats. This research will help understand how local governance can empower women in tribal states.

**Keywords:** Panchayati Raj Institutions, Women's Empowerment, Jharkhand, Tribal Women, Political Reservation, Local Governance

## 1. Introduction

Women's empowerment means giving women power to take decisions about their own life, family, and society. It includes education, economic independence, social respect, and political participation. The 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 introduced Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) in India to strengthen democracy at the village level. It provided at least 33% reservation for women. Jharkhand took a bold step and implemented 50% reservation for women in PRIs through the Jharkhand Panchayati Raj (Amendment) Act, 2010. This reservation applies to all three levels — Gram Panchayat, Panchayat Samiti, and Zila Parishad. Jharkhand was formed in 2000. The state has a large tribal population (more than 26%), rich forests, and minerals, but also high poverty and low female literacy. Traditional customs often limit women's role. This paper examines the role of PRIs in empowering women in this special context.

## 2. Literature Review

Several studies have been done on women's participation in Panchayati Raj. Beaman et al. (2009) studied women leaders in India and found that villages with women leaders have better water supply and more investment in issues important to women. In the context of tribal states, scholars have noted that the Panchayats (Extension to Scheduled Areas) Act, 1996 (PESA) gives power to Gram Sabhas, but there is often conflict between traditional tribal customs and modern democratic rules (Singh, 2018).

Studies specific to Jharkhand show high women's representation. According to Ministry of Panchayati Raj data, women hold around 51.57% to 56.35% of total seats in recent years (MoPR, 2026). Kumar and Singh (2024) observed that while reservation has increased numbers, many elected women representatives (EWRs) act only as proxies for their husbands or male relatives. This is called the "Sarpanch Pati" system.

Das and Verma (2021) conducted a field study in Jharkhand and found that women leaders gained more confidence and mobility, but faced problems due to low education and social opposition. Parvez et al. (2021) highlighted the positive link between Self-Help Groups (SHGs) and PRIs for economic empowerment.

Recent studies (IJFMR, 2025; The Hindu, 2025) present success stories of women leaders like Pratima Kujur, who improved infrastructure and reduced migration in her panchayat. This paper adds to the existing literature by giving a simple, detailed, and updated analysis focused on Jharkhand with practical suggestions.

## 3. Methodology

This research is based on secondary data. Sources include:

- Official reports of Ministry of Panchayati Raj (MoPR) and Jharkhand Government
- Academic journals and research papers
- Newspaper reports and case studies of women leaders
- Election data and scheme performance reports (MGNREGA, PMAY, Jal Jeevan Mission)

Thematic analysis was used to study participation, impact, challenges, and way forward.

## 4. Legal and Institutional Framework in Jharkhand

The Jharkhand Panchayati Raj Act, 2001 and its 2010 amendment made 50% seats reserved for women. Special reservation is also given for Scheduled Tribe (ST), Scheduled Caste (SC), and Other Backward Class (OBC) women. Seats are rotated in every election.

In tribal areas, PESA Act supports Gram Sabha in decision-making on land, water, and forests.

Table 1: Women's Representation in PRIs (Recent Data)

State	Percentage of Women	Year
<b>Jharkhand</b>	56.35	<b>2026</b>
<b>Kerala</b>	54.75	<b>2026</b>
<b>Maharashtra</b>	53.47	<b>2026</b>
<b>National Average</b>	<b>49.75</b>	<b>2026</b>

## 5. Key Findings

### 5.1 Political Participation

More than 30,000 women are elected representatives in Jharkhand. Many of them come from Self-Help Groups and have experience in managing small savings and government schemes.

### 5.2 Development Impact

Women leaders usually give more importance to:

- Clean drinking water and toilets
- Girls' education and school buildings
- Health centres and child nutrition
- Village roads and electricity
- Livelihood programmes for women

**Case Study 1: Pratima Kujur** is from Garyajor Gram Panchayat, Kurdeg Block, Simdega district. She belongs to the Oraon tribe. Before becoming Sarpanch in 2022, she worked as a book-keeper for 10 Self-Help Groups. As Sarpanch, she focused on building roads, improving water supply, solving teacher shortages, and creating local jobs to stop migration (The Hindu, 2025).

**Case Study 2: Dhanwanti Devi**, she made her panchayat TB-free through health awareness campaigns.

### 5.3 Personal and Social Empowerment

Women leaders travel outside the village, talk to government officers, handle money, and learn new skills. This increases their confidence and respect in the family and society. Many become role models for their daughters.

## 6. Challenges

1. Proxy Representation: Many women only sign papers while men take real decisions.
2. Low Literacy: Most rural women find it difficult to read government documents.
3. Social Resistance: Opposition from family and society, threats, and witchcraft accusations.
4. Lack of Training: New leaders do not get enough training.
5. Limited Funds: Panchayats get less money and face bureaucratic delays.
6. Cultural Barriers: Traditional tribal customs often favor men.

## 7. Discussion

The 50% reservation policy is successful in increasing the number of women leaders. However, real empowerment is still limited. Jharkhand needs to focus more on education, training, and removing proxy culture. Better coordination between SHGs and PRIs can give women economic power.

## 8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Panchayati Raj Institutions have created new opportunities for women in Jharkhand. Many women are working hard to develop their villages. To make this empowerment stronger, the following steps are suggested:

- Regular and simple training programmes in local languages
- Strict rules and punishment for proxy representation
- Strong linkage between SHGs and Panchayats
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- Safety and mentorship for women leaders
- Community awareness campaigns to change social attitude
- Better implementation of PESA Act with focus on women

With these efforts, women in Jharkhand can play a bigger role in building a developed and inclusive state.

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