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Leaving the ‘proxy woman or politician’ dichotomy:

A qualitative study of the possibilities and obstacles for elected women’s participation in
Indian local governance

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the discrepancy between formal and effective power of elected women. By studying perceptions of female representatives in local governance in Indian Bihar this study aims to develop a more nuanced theoretical view on the possibilities and obstacles for effective use of power of elected women in a context of low economic development. The main result of this study is presented in a mapping of perceptions of elected women on their possibilities and obstacles for effective use of power. Another main result is that supporting possibilities for elected women should be seen as derived from the same context as hindering obstacles. The coexistence of obstacles and possibilities for elected women in a context of low economic development is an argument against the dualistic theoretical view that tends to picture the elected women either as “proxy women” or as empowered politicians. With this more nuanced analysis of the possibilities and obstacles for elected women an understanding of their scope for effective use of power can be given.

Keywords: Elected women, Effective power, Gender, Bihar, Proxy women

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Explanations of words and names

BDO = Block Development Officer, a local bureaucrat

BJP = Bharatiya Janata Party

Congress = The Congress Party, or Indian National Congress-I

Daal = A common stew of lentils

Gram Panchayat = The village level institution of the PRI

Indira Gandhi = India's first and to date only female Prime Minister

Lathi = Stick of bamboo, used as a weapon by police and thugs

Mukhiya = Chairperson of Gram Panchayat

Nagar Adhayksha = Chairperson of urban district level institution of PRI

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

Panchayat Samiti = The block level institution of the PRI

Patrilocal = Term referring to the societal practise in which a married couple resides with or near the husbands parents

Pramukh = Chairperson of Panchayat Samiti

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

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

Rickshaw = Mode of transportation, a bicycle with three wheels and a chart

Rupee = The currency of India

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

ST = Scheduled Tribes, legalistic name of "indigenous" or "tribal" people of India

Token = See "Proxy woman"

Ward = Part of a village

Ward Adayksha = Chairperson of the ward

Ward Sadasya = Ward member

Zilla Adhayksha = Chairperson of the district level institution of the PRI

Zilla Parishad = The district level institution of the PRI

Zilla Sadasya = member of the Zilla Parishad

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Political presence and participation of women

This thesis focuses on the representation of women in elected bodies in general and in India in particular. I am interested in exploring the existing possibilities for participation for elected women in a context of poverty. The system of governance in India has undergone big changes the last fifteen years with the implementation of quotas for women in local parliaments, the Panchayat Raj Institutions (PRI's). Today India has more female politicians than the rest of the world together. This could be a big potential for development.¹ However the knowledge about their possibilities to participate is scarce.

During the last decades, representation of women has risen significantly. In Nordic countries a shift has taken place, with the proportion of women in parliaments and elected municipal bodies now exceeding the numbers of the often quoted concept of a “critical mass” of women (Dahlerup 2006a:3). In a number of developing countries quotas have been used to ensure a high representation of women in national assemblies as well as in local governance (Hust 2004:31). However, the presence of women is not necessary synonymous with their participation, there is a difference between *formal* power and *effective* power. Thus a field of research have identified the obstacles elected women face in their political participation, including; a masculine model of politics, a dual burden of domestic chores and professional obligations, lack of support from party and a lack of confidence and self-esteem (Shvedova 2005:33-47). However this research has not fully discussed the aspect of how these obstacles can be valid in a context of low economic development (Matland 1998a: 109-125).

1.2 Participation of elected women in Indian PRI's

In studying the scope for participation of elected women I am interested in the Indian state of Bihar, where in 2006 a reform prescribed 50 % reservation for women in the three layers of the PRI's. This reform is unique both in a national and in an international comparison. However the effective power of women in the PRI's of India is often described as being surrounded by a range of hindering factors. The theoretical response by scholars has often been to use the concept of “proxy women” as a description of elected women with only formal power (Dahlerup 2006b:13-14). Empirical studies also have made attempts to develop the knowledge of obstacles for effective use of power of the elected women in Indian PRI's,

¹ In the policy discussion gender equality is often seen as one of the most important factors to promote social development. For example the UN Millennium Development Goal stresses the need to “Promote gender equality and empower women” (World Bank 2004).

such as; opposition from family of elected women, husbands interfering in political work, discrimination during political meetings, lack of support from local community, few economic incentives, illiteracy, and dependence on support from men (Baviskar 2003:7-8, Hust 2004:248-251, Rai et al 2006:236-237). As I see it this previous research can be subjected to some criticism. The research appears underdeveloped in the sense that it uses the fuzzy concept of “proxy women”. I believe that this concept is too simplistic; it bundles together the different obstacles and ignores the scope of possibilities for elected women. Moreover, when researchers do unfold the obstacles for elected women the picture is more diverse but still many factors seem to be absent. Thus I believe there is a need for a more nuanced theoretical view on the possibilities and obstacles for elected women in a context of low economic development.

1.3 Object and limitation

In my study I want to develop the understanding of the possibilities for an effective use of power of elected women. Exploring their perceptions is a first step of research. Through qualitative interviews with elected women in the PRI's of Bihar I want to investigate how they perceive their ability to participate. My reasons for choosing Bihar as the location for my study were principle as well as pragmatic. Most electoral democracies with low economic income per capita could have been chosen. However since big and obvious institutional changes have taken place in a short time in Bihar this should enable me to find the diverse situation I am interested in and thus the situation could be seen as a theoretically interesting case. Regarding the choice to interview only elected women another design could have been possible. Including elected men however would have made my focus different. With my design I will have the possibility to focus on the perceptions of the elected women.

The results of my study will be discussed in relation to the body of empirical research on elected women in the PRI's of India and on a broader level the issue of representation for women in a developing context.² My results will also be discussed in comparison to the literature where the obstacles for effective use of power of elected women are discussed, for example Shvedova 2005. Her focus is elected women in general, however it is apparent that

² India sometimes appears to be an “exception” to many accepted ideas and laws within Political Science (Strulik 2005:1). For example Inkinen 2006 shows that the wealthiest people in India are the ones least likely to vote in elections, results that do not go in line with research on most of others electoral democracies. However I do not believe this role makes India a country where political science should discard its theories. Instead I think an even bigger knowledge of context and history is important. In interpreting my results I will therefore discuss the meaning of my findings in a perspective where I recognise that India might have certain unique cultural characteristics but still is a part of the world that political scientists claim to be able to draw conclusions about.

she does not fully discuss this in a developing context. In the discussion of my results I will compare this in space, the framework of obstacles for elected women in general related to elected women in a context of developing countries. It is interesting to discuss which part of my results that are contextually bound to India and the context of low economic development and what part of the result that might be valid in a wider context.

2 THEORY

2.1 Why presence matters

In the study of political representation of women the contribution of Phillips has been important in reasoning that the foundations of representation need to move from a “politics of ideas” to a “politics of presence”. Phillips has four key arguments for a politics of presence; the importance of symbolic recognition, the need to tackle those exclusions inherent in the party-packaging of political ideas, the need for a more vigorous advocacy for disadvantaged groups, and the importance of a politics of transformation in opening up a full range of policy options (Phillips 1995:25). Some objections have been raised against the concept of politics of presence. Accordingly these consist out of three main arguments; the fear of undermining social cohesion, the undermining of the basis for political accountability, and the turn to a more deliberative democracy (Phillips 1995: 22-24). Phillips own main caution is that a system of representation following the politics of presence is not enough on its own: “*Changing the gender composition of elected assemblies is largely an enabling condition but it cannot present itself as a guarantee.*” (Phillips 1995:83).

2.2 Empowerment through representation

Many countries that have enhanced the presence of women in their national parliaments have achieved this through quotas, either through legislative action or self-imposed regulations by political parties (Hust 2004:31). According to this school of thought quotas are seen as a mean to open up the spaces where women can acquire the necessary expertise that historically has been denied to them (Hust 2004:31). Proponents of quotas often argue that this first step will bring self-esteem and confidence for further entrance in political activity. As a proponent of quotas for women Hust therefore focuses on the effect the representation through reservation will have on the empowerment of women. As Hust reminds, representation in political decision-making bodies and the empowerment of marginalized groups are two quite distinct concepts. She also reminds that the specific nature of political

representation is quite distinct from political participation (Hust 2004:27).³ Though bringing women into formal positions of power through quotas could be one path leading to their empowerment it is not even by proponents seen as a sufficient strategy (Hust 2004:48-49).

2.3 Theories on women and effective and formal power

In research on representation of women an important thought is that presence, due to gender related structures, is in itself not a sufficient feature to receive the possibilities for an active participation of women. In political bodies it is said that women get posts “filled with responsibilities but empty of power”. For example empirical studies have found a gender stereotype pattern where women are less present in committees of a traditionally “male” area of work (Heath et al 2005, Wängnerud 1998). Scholars note a difference between formal power and effective power, where constraints based on gender is hindering elected women. In an attempt to analyse these constraints Shvedova has created a framework where she identifies the obstacles that women elected to parliaments face (Shvedova 2005:33-479);

Socio-economic obstacles:

- Lack of adequate financial resources
- Limited access to education and choice of professions
- The dual burden of domestic tasks and professional obligations

Psychological/Ideological obstacles:

- Women’s low self-esteem and self-confidence, endorsed by certain cultural patterns which do not facilitate women’s access to political careers
- The lack of media attention to women’s contributions and potential

Political/Institutional obstacles:

- Lack of party support, including financial and other resources to fund women’s campaigns and boost their political, social and economic credibility
- The type of electoral system as well as the type of quota provisions and the degree to which they are enforced
- The tailoring of many of these institutions according to male standards and political attitudes
- The lack of coordination with and support from women’s organisations

In her analysis Shvedova mentions the importance of the degree of empowerment of the elected women. However she does not discuss the aspect of how the obstacles she identifies

³ With participation I am referring only to the ability to work as an elected women (Mishra 1999:50).

can be valid in a context of low economic development, or if there are obstacles in a context of low economic development that her framework does not incorporate. This highlights the issue whether, in a context with low economic development, formal representation of women is even less synonymous with effective power. According to Matland this discussion has not been fully investigated: “*While research tracking women’s representation in established democracies has been quite successful at identifying causes for variations, attempts to model women’s representation in developing countries have been much less successful.*” (Matland 1998:109) Matland argues that one of the most important characteristics of society that correlate with women’s representation levels is a country’s state of development. Accordingly development leads to a weakening of traditional values, decreased fertility rates, increased urbanization, greater education and labour force participation for women, and attitudinal changes (Matland 1998: 113-115). Matlands assumption is that when women are different from men in levels of literacy, workforce participation, and university education - and thus not equal to men in the social spheres - they are less likely to be seen as men’s equals in the political sphere (Matland 1998:114).

2.4 Gender and local governance in India

The gender patterns of most parts of India is in many way deeply patriarchal with lower sex-ratio of born girls, patrilineal inheritance, patrilocal marriages, and women in different ways being denied access to the public sphere (Mishra 1999:48). In Omvedts words, “*Girls are socialized to be mothers, wives and domestic workers under others authority.*” (Omvedt 2005:2). As an arena of public power the political sphere is not an exception to these inequalities, easily pictured by the low numbers of women in the parliament (Omvedt 2005:1).⁴ The existence of female political leaders at the highest level, for example late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, seem to have little implication for the lowest level of village politics that have been in the hands of men, with women confined to domestic duties (Mishra 1999:49). The last fifteen years a system of quotas have been a part of a process to ensure the presence of women in the PRI’s.⁵ However it has been expressed in the literature that these elected women, because of gender specific obstacles amongst others, will not automatically get the ability to participate in the elected bodies.

⁴ The last two decades the presence of women in the lower house of the parliament, the Lok Sabha (Peoples’ Assembly) has been between 8 and 10 % (Rai 2002).

⁵ Facts of the institutional governance of India will be developed further on in 3.1.1 *The Indian context* and Appendix 1: *Structure of the PRI’s*

As noted the literature on women in political bodies argues that representation of women is in itself not sufficient (Hust 2004:27). A formal seat is not the same thing as the possibilities for an active participation. In a context of poverty this situation is even more obvious. As Hust discusses, in India most women undeniably lag behind men; women are less educated, less exposed, more dependent, and command lesser capabilities than the men, (Hust 2004:31). However the theoretical response to the question of the possibilities for women's effective power is quite scarce. The term "proxy women" is often used in the same way as "token", of elected women with only formal power (for example in Omvedt 2005, Chattopadhyay & Duflo 2003, Mishra 1999). The concept has been defined as "*figurehead elected women representatives who are supposed to do the bidding of male members of the family rather than take their own decisions*" (SAP Network 2003). Dahlerup writes that the argument is that women are dependent on their husbands and families and/or their parties (Dahlerup 2006a:14, Dahlerup 2005:149).

To me it seems that the term "proxy woman" might need a further elaboration. The concept is seldom nuanced or further discussed. In bundling together the different obstacles for elected women I believe it is difficult to conduct an analysis of their room for participation. Also, in using the concept of "proxy women", the large scope for actual possibilities of elected women is ignored. In earlier research a discussion of possibilities for participation has been missing. Often the picture is given that on the way towards empowerment there are certain obstacles for elected women. An analysis of which factors that creates possibilities has been absent. Moreover, when researchers do unfold the different obstacles for elected women the picture is more diverse but still many factors seem to be absent. Some attempts to go beyond the concept of "proxy women" and make a more nuanced description of obstacles to elected women in a context of low economic development have been made in previous research. For an overview of these studies I have collected the important contributions in the following section. In all together the following obstacles for participation of women in Indian PRI's has been identified; opposition from family in the involvement of the woman in political work, influence of husbands, imposed institutional constraints (as the strategic use of 'vote of no confidence' for women panchayat leaders), discrimination in the panchayat meetings through seating arrangements, unwillingness from parties to nominate women on an "open" mandate, caste-based discrimination, lack of education and illiteracy amongst elected women (Baviskar 2003:7-8), low or not existing salary to panchayat members gives members from a more resourceful background a relative advantage (Rai et al 2006:236-237), frustration among elected women due to lack of control

over financial resources, dependence on support from males (Hust 2004:248-251), a risk for a high rate of drop out of elected women during their term in office (Sivakumar & Maduresh 2006:6), and attitudes that women are not supposed to participate in the public sphere (Mahanta 2007:14).

I believe that this research is highly interesting and moves towards an understanding of the often problematic situation for elected women in the PRI's. However these results appear to present a shattered picture and are not easy to compare with research on obstacles for elected women in general, for example Shvedova 2005. Furthermore, it seems to me that in its focus on describing the obstacles of the elected women this research reproduces the problem inherent in the concept of "proxy women", that the scope for possibilities of elected women are forgotten. It seems plausible to me that although numerous obstacles are present some possibilities for effective use of power must have arisen during the tenure of the elected women. Thus I identify a need for a more diverse and nuanced view on both the obstacles and the possibilities for participation of elected women in a context of low economic development. In this thesis I want to contribute to this theoretical field by empirically explore the perceptions of elected women. I hope to find a more diverse and nuanced description of how elected women perceive the obstacles and possibilities for effective use of power and how these obstacles and possibilities relates to each other.

2.5 Questions for research

My interest is the discrepancy between formal and effective power of elected women in a context of low economic development. With the purpose to study how elected women in the PRI's of Bihar have experienced their presence in the elected bodies in terms of effective use of power, my guiding questions for research will be the following ones:

- What is experienced as obstacles in their abilities to function as elected women?
- What is experienced as opportunities in their abilities to function as elected women?

3 METHOD

3.1 Research design and choice of geographical area

To be able to answer my questions of research, collection of data was executed through a field study in the surroundings of the district Purnea, in Bihar, where qualitative respondent interviews were held with twelve elected women in the months of April and May 2008. With my focus I had a vast range of possible ways to design my study. Finally my reasons for choosing Bihar as the location for my study were based on the foundation of principle as well

as pragmatism. In general most electoral democracies with low economic development and a local representation of elected women could have been chosen. However in India and especially in Bihar big and obvious changes have taken place in a short time with the decentralisation of power and sudden reform of 50 % reservation for women in elected bodies. As will be discussed further on the reform has few comparisons in its magnitude. In this situation it is likely that women from many different social settings has come into power and that old norms suddenly have been challenged. Therefore, I argued, there should be many factors involved that could work as possibilities and obstacles. This would enable me to find the diverse situation I am interested in and hence this could be seen as a theoretically interesting case.

Regarding the choice to interview only elected women another design could have been possible. For example in Hust 2004 interviews with elected men are used in order to explore women's participation. To include elected men in my study however would have made my focus different and posed other question for research. With the design I have chosen for my study I will have the possibility to investigate the discrepancy between formal and effective power of elected women. Since I am most of all interested in grasping the diversity of the elected women's perceptions this design enables me to keep a demarcated focus. In a further step of research other designs could be used to investigate different areas of the topic.

3.1.1 The Indian context

Bihar is the first state in India that has introduced a reservation of 50 % for women in the PRI's. After the panchayat election in 2006 the amount of elected women rose from 44 815 to 70 400, an increase with 25 585 numbers of women.⁶ Before I discuss how I chose respondents from this group I will give a short understanding of the Indian context which embedded the reform.

Historically the 'village square' has been a male area in the villages in most parts of India, reserved by custom for men. Omvedt describes how the panchayats traditionally have worked as caste communities and were dominated by men from the rural elite. After the independence and the formation of the Indian Union attempts to create local governance was not very successful. Usually a handful of women were elected to the panchayat, perhaps one from each village, but their participation was nominal. Many did not even attend meetings and simply gave their "thumbprint" as a signature to whatever decision that was taken (Omvedt

⁶ Background and facts about the reform is further developed in the *Appendix 5: The reform of reservation in Bihar* and *Appendix 6: Quantitative assessment: The panchayat election in Bihar 2006*

2005:2-3). Between 1992 and 1993 the 73rd and 74th constitutional amendment acts were passed. It became constitutionally mandatory for all states in the Indian Union to set up a three-tier system of local self-governance (Ramesh and Ali 2001:viii). The acts also provided for reservation of seats for Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST) in proportion to their population, including reserved chairperson seats, and more importantly: with one third of the seats reserved for women (Singh 1994:7).⁷

The respondents for my study were selected from the surroundings of Purnea district, in the northeast part of Bihar.⁸ This location was decided to be suitable after talks with three informants with professional knowledge of the conditions in Bihar.⁹ The PRI's are described to function relatively uniform in all over the state of Bihar. It was crucial for me to make sure that the status of the institutions in the area were not dramatically different compared to other districts in the state. Since I was focused on selecting respondents with such a diverse background and characteristics as possible, an aspect important taking the huge socio-economic disparities of the state in mind, I argued that the actual geographical aspect would be less interesting.

3.2 Method for collection of data

To conduct a field study was considered to be the suitable choice for my thesis. In some earlier studies on elected women interest has been focused on gender patterns, the access of elected women to different political committees (See for example Heath et al 2005 and Wängnerud 1998). These studies are characterised by a quantitative approach where the selection is big and statistical conclusion possible. The approach in this thesis has obviously been quite different. If I would have a similar interest I would use a big and randomised sample and have a different focus as aim. Instead I am interested in nuances and in dept answers and therefore an approach focused on a smaller number of persons.

3.2.1 Selection of respondents

⁷ Quotas for marginalized groups have been framed in the Indian Constitution since the independence in 1947 to do away with discrimination but allow affirmative action to promote marginalized groups. The need was seen to ensure the political representation of SC and ST. Thus the reservation for women in the PRI's is a logical extension of this reservation (Hust 2004:29)

⁸ For further geographical information see *Appendix 7: Map of Bihar*

⁹ These persons where; Dr. Manindra Thakur, Jawaharlal Nehru University, Mr. Rajiv Roy – senior advocate at High Court of Patna, and Economics Professor M. N. Chauduri, Purnea College.

Since I am interested in the elected women as persons with perceptions I conducted qualitative respondent interviews.¹⁰ Selecting a qualitative approach was suitable since I am interested in, what Kvale see is the essence of the qualitative research interview, describing and interpreting the perceptions of the respondent (Kvale 1997:170). The selection of elected women was made through selection after the principle of maximal variation. This was thought to enable me to find respondents with different perceptions and experiences. In this method of selection the first step was to define certain qualities that can be expected to produce different opinions in a certain issue (Essaiason et al 2007:294). Finding these qualities was crucial since it is likely to assume that the background and prerequisites for the elected women is an important factor in determining their perceptions on their participation in the PRI's. Thus the twelve elected women were selected to have as diverse characteristics as possible, based on eleven factors.¹¹ The choice of interviewing twelve respondents was made after considerations in the field, an approach inspired by the idea of theoretical saturation (Essaiason et al 2007:301). As I continuously analysed obtained answers I experienced that the theoretical saturation was reached when new aspects did not appear from the interviews. The interviews with the respondents were semi-structured. This approach gave me the chance to use a standardised interview guide but also to have a "*scope for pursuing and probing for novel, relevant information, through additional questions ... in order to follow up leads that emerge during the interview*" (ESDS 2007:5). The final guide was somewhat adjusted in the field after the first one or two interviews.¹² The interviews were recorded, a method of working that proved to be efficient and made me free to focus on the content of the interviews. The recordings were afterwards transcribed as soon as possible to enable me to remember impressions and thoughts important for the interpretation of the material.

3.2.2 Problems during interviews

¹⁰ These interviews were made possible by the help of an interpreter and a local guide. Being a male westerner, talking with female respondents can be misinterpreted if caution is not taken. I wanted to eliminate possible misunderstandings by choosing a suitable interpreter (female, knowledge of local language, a university degree and not coming from the upper castes). As noted, the interpreter can be a translator also of cultural language, making communication in many levels easier between the researcher and the respondents (Bragason 1997:7). Secondly an important aspect was to choose situations for the interviews where the respondents were comfortable, preferably in their home with few or none other persons present.

¹¹ These factors were; "age", "caste", "religion", "wealth", "rural/urban", "education", "member in political party", "elected in which layer of the PRI", "from politically active family and/or husband", "elected on quota" and "elected before". Why these were thought to be important is discussed in an explanatory part of each factor and visualised in a matrix as *Appendix number 2: Factors important for selecting respondents*, and *Appendix number 3: chart of respondents*.

¹² This guide can be found in the end of this thesis as *Appendix number 1: Interview guide*.

The respondents I had selected devoted both time and effort to talk with me. However I strove to recognise that time often is precious for a person in poverty and that I therefore had to be careful to adjust the time of the interviews to the wishes of the respondents, an issue often stressed in the methodological literature (Mikkelsen 1995:276).

The issue that proved to be the most problematic were that husbands of the respondents in some cases demanded to be present. I had decided that the interviews would be best performed if no other person than the interpreter, the guide, the respondent and me were present. However I was made aware of that excluding the husband in these cases would have meant losing the permission to do the interview. Hence I would not be able to speak with any of the women with a huge obstacle in their participation: a husband that demands to be present when his wife talks to others. In the end a husband was present during three of the twelve interviews. In the interview with respondent number 5 the husband did not seem very interested and sat quit. Interviewing respondent number 4 the situation was different, with the husband interrupting and answering on the questions meant for the wife. He also referred to the wife as “we”, or even as “I”. It was obvious that her husband, a former politician himself, thought of the election of his wife as a *carte blanche* for his continued use of power. However the wife had interesting views when she was allowed to express them. She was also quite honest about the influence of her husband. I therefore decided that her perceptions should be included in the study.

Another issue that proved to be a problem was that I had not fully grasped the issue of monetary gifts to voters during election campaigns. I was interested in finding out if the elected women spent a big sum of money on campaigning. However the answers to the question of “How much do you spend on campaigning?” were first difficult to interpret. Interviewing respondent number 5 I would first hear that she did not spend “a single cup of tea” on election, only to hear a few minutes later that hiring transport for the campaign had cost huge amounts. The explanation to this “contradiction” was that the respondents, unlike me, were aware of the widespread practise of politicians handing out money to villagers during campaigns. The respondent would proudly say “I don’t beg or crawl for anyone” as a way to make a difference between traditional campaigning and the practise of “buying votes”. This issue if anyone highlighted the importance of the researcher’s contextual knowledge.

3.3 Method for analysis

Once interviews were transcribed I possessed a vast amount of material on my hands that I needed to structure. After reading through the material a number of times I sorted out

passages containing different perceptions and marked interesting aspects.¹³ In analysing the different perceptions of the elected women I had decided to use the method of “creating a tree” of categories. With this method one begins with the studied phenomenon and maps all important aspects. Through answers obtained from interviews with respondents different theoretical categories of meaning will be created. (Esaiasson et al 2007:298). The studied concept, in my case “perceptions of elected women on their possibilities and obstacles for effective use of power”, should be divided in different categories, which in itself all has dimensions and under each dimension different qualities (Eneroth 1984:144). This method was thought to be suitable since it would enable me to present the many nuances of perceptions of the elected women. If I for example had used a method of analysis focused on creating “ideal types” of elected women I would have got fewer and more concise categories. However, since my focus in this thesis has been to actually explore the wide diversity of perceptions, I thought the method of mapping was more suitable.

One problem inherent in this method of analysis is the balance between being too simplistic or being too intricate in presenting the numbers of different categories. Since my aim was to explore the nuances and the diversity of perceived obstacles and possibilities I did not want to become too schematic in my presentation. Thus I wanted to recognize the diversity of my material. This was a matter of continuous interpretation. In many cases I found views that were so similar that I decided they could fit into the same category of perception. On other occasions I felt there was an important difference between perceptions that at a first glance was similar. An example was the decision not to bundle together views of respondents gaining respect since their election into one single category. Instead I noticed a difference where some women expressed a perceived positive discrimination, an interesting aspect that according to me deserved a category of its own. Sometimes this diversity of perceptions will be presented at the sacrifice of a visual understanding. However, since I believe that this area of research is in need of an improved diversity I rather wanted to create a new category than to bundle together two slightly different perceptions.

Another important feature with this method of mapping was the choice of sorting the various perceptions under broad categories. Since these broad categories would order the rest of the material as a frame the choice of categories was to affect the presentation and interpretation of my result. Ultimately I was inspired by an already existing division that I had encountered in the literature, the one mentioned earlier by Shvedova 2005. Her framework on

¹³ This method was thought to be the most practical way of working and was inspired by literature on qualitative interviews (Kvale 1997:121)

obstacles for elected women consists of three broad categories; Socio-economic factors, Psychological/Ideological factors, and Political/Institutional factors. I chose this division as an inspiration firstly because I found the division reasonable. I figured it made sense to sort the material from categories that were relatively easy to separate from each other.¹⁴ Later, during the process of sorting perceptions, I experienced that the division felt natural and that few perceptions were difficult to place. Secondly I thought that an already used division was suitable because I could easily see similar and different patterns in the results. Since my aim in one way was to develop this framework I argued that using it as a ground would be fruitful.

In ordering the perceptions my first step was to know whether they were to be seen as a possibility or an obstacle. In many ways this was an uncomplicated task since the answers were quite frank. Often the respondents were clear and made the interpretation themselves by speaking about perceived aspects in a distinctively positive or negative language. I have not used a formal definition of what is to be seen as an obstacle or a possibility but made interpretations in the few cases where doubt might have arisen. In these cases I did not experience this as a very problematic issue.

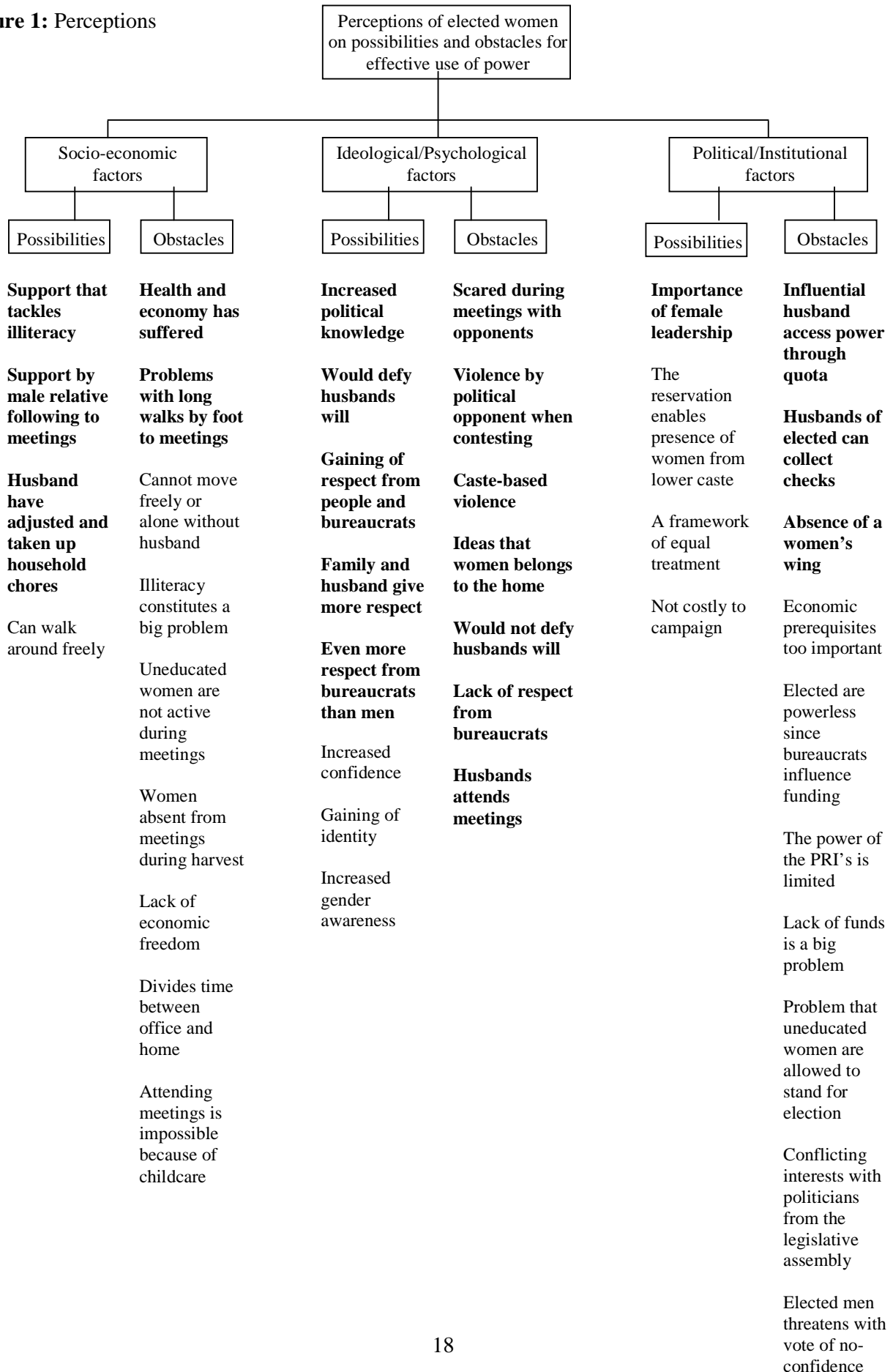
4 ACCOUNT OF RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The concept “Perceptions of elected women on possibilities and obstacles for effective use of power” can, based on the collection of data, be understood through three broad categories; Socio-economic factors, Psychological/Ideological factors, and Political/Institutional factors. This three-folded division is, as mentioned, inspired from earlier research on obstacles for elected women. However one of my main findings is that the many aspects that are perceived as possibilities and obstacles are derived from the same context. Possibilities are, despite the neglect from previous research, as much a product of the contextual surrounding as obstacles are. To highlight the fact that I see obstacles and possibilities as being close to each other I have developed the three-folded division and have in my mapping now listed *both* perceived possibilities and obstacles under each broad category. My mapping should be interpreted as emphasizing the fact that possibilities and obstacles in many ways are derived from the same context. This mapping is visualised below in *Figure 1: Perceptions*.

¹⁴ *Socio-economic factors* represent perceptions connected to the elected women’s situation of income, livelihood, education and division of labour in the household. *Psychological/Ideological factors* represent perceptions related to the self-esteem of elected women and the norms and attitudes of their surroundings. *Political/Institutional factors* represent perceptions related to views on the political system and the institutional aspect of the PRI’s in general.

The three broad categories of factors that order the perceived possibilities and obstacles for effective use of power all together have 42 different sub-categories. I have chosen to focus on the part of the results of my study that can be said to be new in relation to previous research. Since earlier studies have identified some of the obstacles that I have categorised in my mapping I have made the decision to mostly discuss the results that are new. Hence, in the mapping, I have separated the totally 21 categories that are new in relation to earlier research by visualising them in a darker colour. These are the ones that I will discuss further in my analysis. In most cases it was easy to identify which factors had not been mentioned in earlier studies. In other cases categories of perceptions could be interpreted as being a contextual version of a mentioned phenomenon. One of these cases was the category “*Increased political knowledge*”, that could be interpreted as an example of Hustus argument for reservation, that quotas enabled elected women to acquire the necessary expertise that historically has been denied to them. In the cases that this have arisen I have chosen to present the category as a new one since I wanted to show the diversity of the situation and make earlier findings more nuanced. Due to the space constraints and focus of this thesis I have chosen not to present the remaining 21 categories identified in earlier research. For the respondents these were of course as real as any of the other perceptions. However, in this thesis I will concentrate on the part of my findings that can be said to be new.

Figure 1: Perceptions



4.1 Socio-economic factors

The dimension “Socio-economic factors” represents perceptions connected to the elected women’s situation of income, livelihood, education and division of labour in the household.

4.1.1 Socio-economic factors perceived as possibilities

Regarding socio-economic factors I have identified three categories of possibilities related to support structures. This is interesting since the context of poverty mostly has been pictured as consisting of hindering aspects for elected women in earlier research. With the obstacle from Shvedovas framework in mind, the “dual burden” and “limited access to education”, these categories can be seen as solutions to hindering factors. In the category from my mapping, “*Support that tackles illiteracy*”, illiterate respondents explain how different support strategies for participation are seen as a possibility:

Me, I cannot read, I can only write my signature. I manage this by keeping an assistant. He helps me, so this has not been an issue. When I get a letter I ask him to read it, so I don’t have a problem. (5)

In another collection of views, constituting the category “*Support by male relative following to meetings*”, respondents describe the need for a male member to follow them to meetings. Since this welcome help from sons and father-in-laws is seen as a support I have chosen to arrange this feature as a possibility. As expressed by a respondent:

I cannot go alone to meetings, it has never happened. But my father in law supports me. He always follows me to meetings and stays outside. With his help I can participate. (6)

The elected women will often need the help of the husband by sharing time consuming chores within the household. In the category “*Husband have adjusted and taken up household chores*”, respondents describe how they feel it is an asset that their husband has actively changed his ways in the household. Thus, an understanding is given of that the individual strategies to cope with obstacles can in itself become a possibility. A respondent explains:

Now my husband has looked up. Before he did not. He understands me and supports me. He cooks food so I can go away and leave everything in the household. (3)

4.1.2 Socio-economic factors perceived as obstacles

The perceptions of obstacles referring to socio-economic factors are in some aspects in line with previous research. Interestingly I have found two aspects that are not mentioned in earlier research. These categories indicate that Shvedovas framework is not fully adapted to a

context of low economic development. In one of these, the category “*Health and economy has suffered*”, respondents experience a physical decline since being elected. Respondents perceive that the spending on campaigning and that the political work is not salaried are obstacles for the participation:

To be able to afford the election campaign I had to sell my cattle. Therefore I do not have access to milk now. After being elected I eat less so I have lost weight. I am tensed. I eat normal food, rice and daal (lentils). But no milk. (1)

The second new aspect of socio-economic obstacles I have identified is the category “*Problems with long walks by foot to meetings*”. Respondents perceive the long walks on foot to meetings as a both time consuming and dangerous task to perform. In the words of one of the interviewed women:

It is a problem that I have to walk on foot. I am not paid so I have to walk on foot. Sometimes people help me but otherwise I have to walk. It is a problem with the distance, especially in the dark. (1)

4.2 Psychological/Ideological factors

The dimension “Psychological/Ideological factors” represents perceptions related to the self-esteem of elected women and the norms and attitudes of their surroundings.

4.2.1 Psychological/Ideological factors perceived as possibilities

Among the categories referring to psychological and ideological factors it is extraordinary to note that it exists so many perceived possibilities that previous research have not paid attention to. I have found five new categories that are experienced as possibilities. The category “*Increased political knowledge*” can be interpreted as an example of Hustus argument for quotas, that it enabled elected women to acquire the necessary expertise that historically has been denied to them. A respondent expresses her perception:

In the beginning of my first tenure people in the administration would say ‘she is a woman, it will take many days’, to prolong certain things. Now since I have developed, this is gone. I have learnt to go to officers senior to the ones causing trouble. (7)

Another aspects not mentioned in previous research is the change in power relations between the elected women and their husbands in the male dominated households. In the category “*Would defy husbands will*”, respondents describe how they now have challenged the husbands will and that this is seen as a big possibility:

My husband wanted to interfere. He gave instructions 'go here, go there'. Lastly he told me that if I did not obey him I have to leave the politics behind. But things changed. At some point I told my husband 'No I will not go and do your errand, it does not feel right to me.' (9)

It is possible to find a line of thought about how respondents have gained more respect in the community since their election. This is apparently an important aspect for the elected women and it is interesting that this has not been discussed before. I have identified a difference in this perceived respect. Perceptions from the category "*Gaining of respect from people and bureaucrats*" describe how people in the village and bureaucrats treat the elected women differently after the election:

Now after the election people in the village will speak to me differently. They will open doors and offer chairs. The bureaucrats will treat even us Muslims equally. (8)

Another aspect of the gaining of respect is the category "*Family and husband give more respect*", where this is perceived on a private level, by family and husband. A respondent explains:

Now my husband takes care of me. He treats me well. Before the election when I was not a Mukhiya he did not treat me well. Also my family treat me with more respect. They offer me tea and greet me. (1)

I have also chosen to highlight another aspect of the perceived gaining of respect, constituting the category "*Even more respect from bureaucrats than men*". Respondents explain a form of positive discrimination, how they feel that during meetings they were treated even *better* than the elected men by bureaucrats:

The bureaucrats even give more respect to women. They let us sit in the front during meetings and they want us to speak so we can carry the voice of the people. The men sit in the back. The bureaucrats are helpful although we do not give them commission. (1)

4.2.2 Psychological/Ideological factors perceived as obstacles

Regarding the obstacles related to psychological and ideological factors all categories I have identified could actually be deemed to be new in relation to earlier studies. It is remarkable to notice that in the research I refer to there have not been a discussion on violence and threats against elected women. In Shvedovas framework neither violence nor threats is mentioned as an obstacle. The empirical studies on women in the PRI's do not discuss this issue either. As a contrast my respondents clearly see this as an obstacle in three different ways. The perceptions constituting the category "*Scared during meetings with opponents*" exemplify how threats is perceived as an obstacle in the political meetings:

I believe there is a difference between how the men and women act in the meetings. I am scared. The other women are too. It is always the same. (1)

Furthermore there is one group of perceptions forming the category “*Violence by political opponent when contesting*”. These views relates to an experience of actual violence from opposing candidates in contesting for election:

The men opposed me. After I had won the election there was a procession. First there was no violence. Then there was a man, near a merry-go-round. He shot at me from the crowd! Later I told the administration about the attempt of murder and the government helped me. (5)

A more specific sort of violent treatment related to the Indian context is also described. In perceptions constituting the category “*Caste-based violence*” it is obvious that the fact that many of the women coming into presence are from the lower castes seems to have awakening caste-based antagonism. Respondents describe how people from higher castes have threatened them with violence when they have contested:

During the time of election there was fighting. People came with lathis (sticks). The people who came to fight came from a neighbouring village and a different caste. They were upper castes. (1)

The following three categories could possibly be identified as belonging to the “certain cultural patterns which do not facilitate women’s access to political careers”, that Shvedova mentions. However in my more nuanced description the scope for analysis is more precise. In the first categories of these, “*Ideas that women belong to the home*”, respondents describe how they have felt that the idea that women belong to the household still is prevalent and sometimes even openly aired:

I was the only woman in the politics of this town. There were some elected men who would treat me different because I was a woman. They wanted to throw me out. People were saying ‘A woman should not be in politics. They should be at home’. Behind my back they questioned my ability and me. I struggled a lot. (9)

For some respondents the relation to the husband was an outright hierarchical one. In perceptions forming the category “*Would not defy husbands will*”, acting against the will of the husband was simply not an option, a situation that clearly was an obstacle for participation. A respondent explains:

I could not be more actively involved. This would mean going against the will of my husband. And that is not possible. It would mean trouble. Women should speak, not their husbands. If a woman will go ahead and act against her husband he will throw her out. Because they will tell them ‘so since you have your own life, leave my house’. (10)

There exists a widespread perception among the respondents that negative treatment has been an obstacle for participation, clearly shown in the category “*Lack of respect from bureaucrats*”. Respondents articulate that they feel treated disrespectfully from clerks in the administration. This is expressed in the following quote:

The elected women are not treated with respect in comparison to the men. The bureaucrats will not raise their eyes from the desk to greet them. The biggest problem as a woman is that they will not address you unless you have an important person along with you. If you are a woman and uneducated, once if you are neglected you will not go twice. (10)

Another group of perceptions is related to the presence of husbands during meetings as an obstacle for participation. In the category “*Husband attends meetings*” it is described how both husbands and wives believe that men have a bigger right to attend the meetings. Because this norms relates to the mindset I have identified this category as connected to psychology and ideology. An elected woman exemplify why her husband attends meetings:

My husband attends the meetings instead of me. The meetings are full of shouting and arguments. So my husband will go. He is more experienced than me and more active than me although I am the one who is elected. I go only when it is necessary. Men are still more advanced than women so they always attend the meetings. (11)

4.3 Political/Institutional factors

The dimension “Political/Institutional factors” represents perceptions related to views on the political system and the institutional aspect of the PRI’s in general.

4.3.1 Political/Institutional factors perceived as possibilities

In analysing the perceptions referring to political and institutional aspects I once again sense that the possibilities for participation have not been satisfyingly studied in earlier research. For instance, in my interviews there are views connected to the importance of elected women acting as role models for shyer women, gathered in the category “*Importance of female leadership*”. In Phillips argument for a politics of presence the symbolic value of elected women is an important aspect. In my interviews respondents focus on that they feel less hesitant to participate if the leader of a meeting is a woman. A respondent feels this has enabled a larger participation among women:

Since I am the leader of the meetings women will be present. When the leader is a woman other women will feel less hesitant to come and slowly gain confidence in their role. (2)

4.3.2 Political/Institutional factors perceived as obstacles

The perceived obstacles related to panchayats and the political system proved to be many. In relation to earlier research these categories could all be compatible with the obstacle Shvedova mentions, “institutions tailored according to the needs of men”. In empirical studies on elected women in the PRI’s often “the influence of men” is mentioned as an obstacle. Through the following two categories, I have made this aspect more nuanced. In the category “*Influential husband access power through quota*” a group of perceptions describe how the reform of reservation has been used by influential husbands to get even more influence. The quota is described to have been “invisibly captured”:

Since I am elected my husband is benefited. Before as a Mukhiya my husband had influence in one panchayat only. Now through me (a Pramukh) he can influence eight panchayats. So with the reservation my husband have got political emergence. (4)

In the category “*Husbands of elected can collect checks*” respondents also explain that husbands of elected women can issue checks for public funding. This system is perceived as being an obstacle to the independence of elected women:

When we get the signature on a check anybody can cash it out. This should be changed. The women are like dolls. The funds should be allotted to the elected women. Mostly the husbands go and get the checks at the bank. Only the elected candidates should be able to do this. (10)

Another group of perceptions are based on the thought that the challenges for women are so big in the current system that only solution is female separatism. Perceptions constituting the category “*Absence of a women’s wing*” experience the lack of separate space for women as an obstacle:

There should be a special wing for women. They will feel that this is an arrangement especially made for them and they would not feel hesitant to bring out their problems. Since this is a male dominated society there should be a separation between men and women. Only women should be allowed to speak. Also bureaucrats should be women.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND FINAL DISCUSSION

In this thesis my interest has been the discrepancy between formal and effective use of power of elected women in a context of low economic development. By studying perceptions of female representatives in PRI’s of Bihar I wanted to develop a more nuanced view on the possibilities and obstacles for the effective use of power of elected women. The main result of my study is the above presented mapping of perceptions. The perceptions of elected women were divided in three broad categories of factors that all together have 42 different sub-

categories of perceptions, of which I deemed 21 to be new in relation to previous research.¹⁵ These different categories of perceptions contribute to a more nuanced knowledge of obstacles and possibilities of effective use of power for elected women in a context of low economic development.

The results of my study show that there exists a discrepancy between the formal and effective use of power of elected women.¹⁶ A number of gender-based obstacles are perceived by the respondents. As Phillips and other scholars have noted, this points to the fact that presence of women is in itself not enough to ensure their possibility of an effective use of power. Furthermore, also in line with previous research, my results indicate that reservation is not a guarantee for participation of the elected women. It could also be noted that in my mapping more categories of obstacles are identified than possibilities. Though this should not be interpreted as a qualitative difference it is interesting that the hindering factors are so many and so diverse.

One of the main findings of my study is the coexistence of possibilities and obstacles for participation of the respondents. In earlier research the picture is often given that on the way towards empowerment of elected women certain obstacles can be present, but seldom there is a discussion of the actual possibilities. On the contrary I have found that possibilities indeed are absolute factors working as a support for the elected women, be it somebody that helps an illiterate elected women to read, a bureaucrat that make the elected women sit in front in the meetings, or any of the other perceived possibilities the respondents have explained. Identifying these different possibilities in my study and presenting the perceived possibilities and obstacles in the same mapping contribute to an underdeveloped theoretical discussion.

In analysing the identified perceptions it becomes clear that the elected women's situation is more multifaceted than often described. This coexistence of possibilities and obstacles can be seen as an argument against the view in earlier research where the elected women are pictured either as "proxy women" or full feathered politicians. If, as my study indicates, hindering and supporting factors are derived from the same context and often interact with each other, the earlier dualistic description is probably not very useful. My results indicate that it is possible that even empowered female politicians could experience

¹⁵ Since I wanted to make the presentation of my results in a detailed level this is one of the reasons that so many categories were identified. The comparison of what results that is new is made with the amount of studies that is reasonable in a thesis of this limited magnitude.

¹⁶ Clearly, a situation where entirely effective power of elected women exists is difficult to imagine. I will not discuss when this can be said to be the case, if it is when elected men and women face the same obstacles or when they face no obstacles at all. None of these alternatives is very realistic in a near future.

hinders and that the shyest elected women could perceive some sort of supporting factors in their work. This diversity should be recognized to a bigger extent.

An aim in this study after answering the questions of research was to discuss the room for participation of women in a wider perspective. A discussion of the new parts of my results in comparison with research on obstacles for elected women in general might generate some interesting conclusions.

In a broader perspective it can be concluded that a small number of the perceived categories of possibilities and obstacles identified in my results must be seen as contextually bound to the location of my study, with little scope for generalisation outside Bihar or India. By definition some factors can be identified to be culturally specific to India. Hence the category “*Caste based violence*” might be of less interest on a more general level of research on representation of women. There are also some perceptions related to the local institutions of the Indian PRI’s that should be locally specific, for instance the perception “*Husbands of elected can collect checks*”. However these two perceptions are exceptions and it is rather interesting to note that so many of the categories can be seen as important in a context outside of India.

The major part of the categories that I have identified in my study, that are new in relation to previous research, should have a wider significance for women’s representation in the context of low economic development. Basically the remaining 19 of the 21 new categories could be said to be interesting in another context of local governance framed by a representation of women and low economic development. Most of these categories that I have identified can be seen to belong to a context where women have not yet become an integrated part of the public sphere and are less empowered than men. The major shares of these perceptions are not very useful in an analysis of elected women in welfare states.

However some of the perceptions can also be useful in a wider context of more economically developed countries. On a general level some of the identified categories can have implications for understanding the situation of elected women in a wider perspective. In my study I have for instance found how elected women perceive threats and violence as an obstacle. As mentioned, this aspect is missing in the discussion of elected women and should be valid also outside developing countries. The presence of threats used in order to intimidate female politicians could have obvious policy implications. Some additional categories do contribute knowledge to the discussion of elected women in a wider context, for instance “*The importance of female leadership*” and “*Husband have adjusted and taken up household chores*”.

How then, can these results be understood in a wider perspective? What does it mean that elected women in a context of low economic development face a diverse range of obstacles as well as possibilities in their effective use of power? Above all this thesis contribute to bring in a more complicated and diverse view of the discrepancy between formal power and effective power of elected women. Obstacles and possibilities exist at the same time and derive from the same context. This indicates that there is no 'magical fix' to ensure the political participation of elected women.

In the Indian debate over reforms of quotas for women there is a tendency among scholars to argue that elected women either becomes "proxy women", or empowered politicians. My study indicates that possibilities and obstacles exist at the same time and that a dualistic view is not very useful. Only with a more nuanced analysis of the supporting possibilities and hindering obstacles for elected women an understanding of their room for effective use of power can be given.

6 FURTHER RESEARCH

In expanding the research on the area of participation of elected women in developing countries in general and in India specifically I can see a range of important aspects for further studies. It could be interesting to investigate to what extent the discrepancy between formal and effective power of elected women is gender related. In a study with this focus also elected men should be included. Furthermore it could be studied to what extent the discrepancy between formal and effective power is connected to ethnicity, or in the Indian context, caste. One further step of research in this area could also be to move from a focus on "perceptions" of elected women to include real situations through participatory observations. One additional step of research could also be to study how the presence of women has affected the policy outcomes of these elected bodies.

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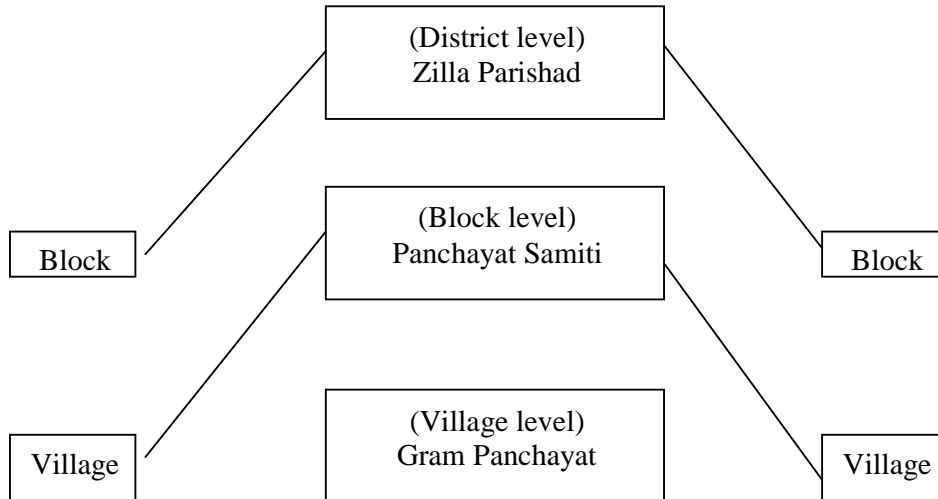
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Appendixes

Appendix 1: Structure of the PRI's



Appendix 2: The reform of reservation in Bihar

After many years of governance by the governance led by the famous Lalu Prasad Bihar got a new Chief Minister in the year of 2005 with the entrance of Nitish Kumar. With this change, where the Janata Dal (U) party got increased influence, a reform of a fifty percent reservation for women in the Panchayat elections of the state was introduced.

Since the 73rd amendment the Bihar Panchayat Raj Act from 1993 has been the governing document on reservations in the panchayat elections. It states that, *“Not less than one-third of the total number of seats reserved under Section (1) shall be reserved for women belonging to the scheduled castes, the scheduled tribes or the backward classes as the case may be. Not less than one-third (including the number of seats reserved for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Classes) of the total number of the seats to be filled by direct election in every Gram Panchayat shall be reserved for women and such seats may be allotted by rotation..”* (Bihar state election committee a). Since this year however the Bihar Panchayat Raj Ordinance of 2006 is the leading document on reservations in the panchayat elections. Accordingly from now, *“As nearly 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, Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Classes, as the case may be. As nearly but not exceeding fifty percent of the total number of seats not reserved for the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and the Backward Classes shall be reserved for women.” (Bihar state election committee b).

The reform in Bihar is the first of its kind in India and according to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance there do not seem to be any other countries where the local governance has adopted a reservation of fifty percent (IDEA 2006). The expectations to the first elections with the reform were therefore big. As a newsletter from the Institute of Social Sciences puts it, “It is expected that a large number of poor and backward caste candidates would be elected to three-tier PRI’s bringing about a sea-change in the social set-up of rural areas of the state.” (ISS 2006).

Appendix 3: Quantitative assessment: The panchayat election in Bihar 2006

So has the reservation for women of fifty percent been implemented? According to the Ministry of Panchayats the answer is yes. I have been able to get the current figures of the latest election result, presented below. The figures presented below are taken from a state-wise comparison for every layer in the three-tier structure of the Indian Union.

Elected representatives in the 2006 Panchayati raj election of Bihar:

Number Of Panchayats	Non-SC and Non-ST Categories	Gram Panchayats						
		Number of elected representatives						
		SC		ST		Total	Women	
		Number	%	Number	%		Number	%
8463	99672	16941	14.4	784	0.7	117397	64152	54.6

Number Of Panchayats	Non-SC and Non-ST Categories	Panchayat Samiti						
		Number of elected representatives						
		SC		ST		Total	Women	
		Number	%	Number	%		Number	%
531	9139	2307	20.0	91	0.8	11537	5671	49.2

Number Of Panchayats	Non-SC and Non-ST Categories	Zilla Parishad						
		Number of elected representatives						
		SC		ST		Total	Women	
		Number	%	Number	%		Number	%
38	956	192	16.6	9	0.8	1157	577	49.9

Number Of Panchayats	Non-SC and Non-ST Categories	Grand Total						
		Number of elected representatives						
		SC		ST		Total	Women	
		Number	%	Number	%		Number	%
9032	109767	19440	14.9	884	0.7	130091	70400	54.1

(Ministry of Panchayati Raj 2006:29-32)

Note:

What first of all is interesting to note is that the reservation of fifty percent is close to have been achieved in every layer. This must be seen as a success. From where I have obtained the data it is not offered an explanation to why the Zilla Parishad and Panchayat Samiti has not fully implemented the reservation. The fact that there are more women elected to Gram Panchayat than the reserved seats shows that a notable number of women have been able to contest for and also win seats from the general category.

In comparison to other state it should also be said that Bihar has the highest percentage of elected women in all three categories. Only few states have more than forty percent in some of the layers and only Maharashtra in all three tiers. The national total average of around 37-38% in the different tiers puts Bihar in a notable position. The reason why most states have more women than the reservation demands is also explained by women managing to be elected from the general seats. In comparison it can therefore be concluded that Bihar has managed to get the most equally represented local government in the country.

The total sum of 70400 elected women is an impressive number. In comparison this is a big change from the election of 2001. Published on the website of the State Election Commission the data indeed indicates the changes of the reform. In the election of 2001 the percentages of women in the different layers were respectively 34.9 %, 34.1 %, and 33.5 %, resulting in a 34.8 % in the layers as a whole. A total number of 44815 women were elected (State Election Commission 2001). Compared to the number of 70400 this year it can thus be concluded that 25585 more women is now representatives.

Appendix 4: Map of Bihar



Appendix 5: Factors important for selecting respondents

Age: In the hierarchical setting of Indian family structure older women have a different level of authority than younger one, notably the newly married wives (whom, in the patrilocal tradition, recently have moved to the family of the husband). Age can be expected to affect the degree of empowerment and perhaps the perception of being an elected representative.

Caste: With the important differences between castes in India, being more than just a division of labour, this factor can be believed to be important in how elected women perceive their possibilities of influence.

Religion: Muslim women in rural India are often depicted as less empowered than women from the Hindu community. Although this may not be the case at all the aspect of religious belonging still should be an important factor to have a variation in during my selection.

Wealth: Since the economic prerequisites are likely to determine the possibilities of an active participation in the work as an elected representative, this factor should be important. This factor was divided in to three categories, “poor”, “middle” and “rich”. In selecting respondents the situation of the respondent were interpreted to correspond with one of these categories.

Urban or rural: It is possible that urban elected women have different experiences than rural, with their assumed higher degree of literacy and awareness of rights.

Education: Since education can be assumed to be a prerequisite of an active involvement in the work of the panchayat, this factor must be considered.

Member in political party: Since the election to local posts is decided by a political party, if the woman is a member of a party, this factor should be important.

Elected in which layer of the PRI's: Since it is likely to believe that in the upper layer of the PRI's relations of power will be more rigid, and in terms of gender relations therefore even more interesting to study, a variation in this factor is important.

From politically active family and/or husband: Since these factors often are mentioned as obstacles to the independent influence of elected women it is an important factor in selecting respondents.

Elected before: Since experience from previous terms is likely to affect ones confidence and knowledge, this factor should be important.

Elected on a quota: It is plausible to believe that the women elected on a general seat have struggled more than the ones being elected on a quota. A differentiation in this factor is therefore sought after.

Appendix 6: Chart of respondents

How the above described important factors were distributed among the selected respondents can be visualised in the following matrix:

Nr	Age	Caste	Religion	Wealth	Urban/ Rural	Education	Member in political party	Elected in which layer of the PRI's	From politically active family and/or Husband	Elected before	Elected on quota
1	50	SC	Hindu	"Poor"	Rural	Illiterate	No	Mukhiya	No	No	Yes
2	56	OBC	Hindu	"Rich"	Rural	B.A.	Yes	Zilla Adhayksha	Yes	Yes	No
3	25	SC	Hindu	"Poor"	Rural	Illiterate	No	Ward Sadasya	No	No	Yes
4	34	OBC	Hindu	"Middle"	Rural	10 th class	Yes	Zilla Sadasya	Yes	No	Yes
5	65	SC	Hindu	"Poor"	Urban	Illiterate	No	Nagar Adhayksha	No	Yes	Yes
6	22	ST	Hindu	"Poor"	Rural	7 th class	Yes	Mukhiya	No	No	Yes
7	45	OBC	Hindu	"Rich"	Urban	M.A.	Yes	Ward Sadasya	No	Yes	No
8	32	-	Muslim	"Middle"	Rural	10 th class	No	Ward Sadasya	No	No	Yes
9	44	OBC	Hindu	"Rich"	Urban	B.A.	Yes	Zilla Sadasya	No	Yes	Yes
10	25	OBC	Hindu	"Poor"	Urban	12 th class	No	Ward Sadasya	No	No	Yes
11	34	OBC	Hindu	"Poor"	Rural	7 th class	No	Mukhiya	Yes	No	Yes
12	40	-	Muslim	"Poor"	Rural	Illiterate	No	Mukhiya	No	No	Yes

Appendix 7: Draft of interview guide

Open question:

Can you tell us in your words your way to the Panchayat. Please begin the story as long back as possible.

Questions about the election:

Why did you decide to run for the panchayat?

Have you been interested in politics before this?

Are there any political issues you think is more important for you?

Have you tried to be elected previous terms?
Why do you want to be an elected panchayat member?
Are you elected on a quota?
Would you have run for election even without the reform of reservation?
Did the election campaign cost you any money?
Was it costly for you to spend the time on the campaign for election?
Are you affiliated to a political party?
What influence did the political party have on your decision to run for election?
Have you received grants from a political party to be able to run for election?
Why do you think you were elected?
What do you think made people elect you; were there any special features of you, such as your caste, your reputation, your knowledge, or other aspects important in the support for you?

Questions about the meetings:

What does it mean to be an elected member of the panchayat?
Can you describe an ordinary week of work as an elected member?
How much time do you spend in a week on the work in the panchayat?
Do you think this time is more or less than the other elected members?
In the meetings, do you think it is important to be able to read?
Do you attend all meetings?
Do you fulfil the tasks and assignments given to/taken by you?

Which expectations did you have on being elected before you began your work in the panchayat?
Can you be active as an elected member the way you want to?
What do you think is the biggest threat against being an active member of the panchayat the way you want to?
What do you think is the biggest support to the possibility of being an active member of the panchayat the way you want to?

In the panchayat meetings do the men and the women sit in a different way?
In the meetings, do you think the elected women are present as often as the men?
In the meetings, do women talk less than men?
Are you accompanied to the meeting by your husband or a male family member?
What do you do if no male family member can accompany you?
In the meetings, do you think there is a difference between men and women in how they act?
Are elected women treated respectfully from bureaucrats?

Personal experiences from election:

Have you learnt anything from this work?
What has been the best thing of being an elected member?
Have there been any bad things connected to your work as an elected member?
Do people in the village speak to you in a different way now after the election?
Have your position in the family or village been different since the election?
Do you have more or less confidence today than compared with previous of the election?

About the family and the village:

Have your family supported you in running for election?
Have some members of your family been opposing it?

How do you manage to spend time in the panchayat and still be responsible to your housework?

Have people in the village been opposing that you are active as an elected woman?

Have people in the village been saying that your husband or father is telling you what to do in the panchayat?

If so, what do you tell the ones who say so?

Where any members of your family actively involved in your campaign for election?

If a husband says that his wife, an elected panchayat member, should do something in the work of the panchayat, though it is against her will, do you think she should do it?

Would people listen more to an elected women of high caste, than of one from the SC?

Do you know if there have been attempts of a vote of no confidence passed against any female sarpanch?

Why do you think people are absent from panchayat meetings?

What improvements do you think can be made to ensure an active participation of a larger number of the elected women?

What do you think of the reform that says that half of the seats in the panchayats must be reserved for women?

According to the constitution, the panchayat have 29 areas of work. Which one do you think is the most important?

Last I would like you to mark eight choices. Grade how big importance the following factors are for female participation as elected in the panchayat raj:

Education

Literacy

Economic status

Caste

Influence of Family

Household work

Influence of other members in the panchayat

Influence of political parties

This was my questions. Is there anything you think we have not spoken about that you have thought about? Is there anything you would like to add or clarify?