



## Political and Electoral Empowerment of Women in Patna District: A Geographical Study of Assembly Elections: 2005, 2010 and 2015

Prerna Bharti  
Research Scholar, Department of Geography, Patna University, Patna



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### Abstract

*It is argued that women need to be empowered in the field of political decisionmaking so as to facilitate their real empowerment. The growing participation of women in elections indicates a silent movement of women empowerment. There is a growing idea among women that social transformation is much slower than political changes; hence, they prefer to play a decisive role in elections. The present article is an attempt to analyze the political and electoral empowerment of women in the Patna district of Bihar. The first part of the article is an analysis of political empowerment of women whereas the 2<sup>nd</sup> part dwells upon the study of the spatio-temporal changes in the electoral empowerment of women. Finally, to analyze the rural-urban differences in the women's political and electoral empowerment. There is a rising trend in the voting participation of women in the study area but their representation is still very low. The research is based upon field survey, primary data, and secondary data along with newspaper reports and articles. The electoral data has been taken from the website of the Election Commission of India.*

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### Introduction

Inequalities between men and women and discrimination against women have become a burning issue all over the world including India. We are living in a patriarchal society where men are the rule makers and we women are followers. This shows that the women need to be empowered. It is observed that in our society women have a very limited role in the decision-making processes. Though there are various aspects of women empowerment, the present research specifically studies the political and electoral awareness as well as the level of participation in the political processes of women in the Patna district of Bihar. Political participation has been defined in various ways. Fainshod (1980) conceptualizes political participation as public membership of citizen 'sharing' justice and orienting their action towards a public or common good. The word 'political' means public awareness towards political system and involvement in good governance as a citizen or decision makers. Political participation depends upon various factors such as individual's perceptions, personality, stimuli towards the socio-cultural and economic aspects of the society. Participation of women in the political process is scarcely very low. It has been often stated that the personality traits of women and the socio-economic culture, on the other hand, the political

environment is responsible for women's marginal participation in politics.

Electoral participation is concerned with contesting elections, sharing power structure and voting. The electoral participation gives women the ability to analyze, organize and mobilize for the social changes. Voting is the most common and important act of political participation. Increasing awareness among women voters about their rights began to influence the political scene.

Participation in the electioneering process is not only confined to voting right but it is also relating to the representation, political activism, political consciousness and many more (Begum, 2015). Women's participation in the election is closely related to their level of empowerment which means the equal status of women, providing them equal opportunity and freedom to make their own decision. Voting behavior is a very important aspect of electoral geography. The important characteristics which influence costing behavior are - age, gender, caste, class, religion, family influence, party affiliation, apathy, education status, and location, etc.

Mehta and Sekhon (1980) studied the areal and temporal variations in participation in the three legislative assembly elections in Himachal Pradesh during the period 1967-77. He attempted to identify, describe, and analyze the pattern of



electoral participation. Kofman and Peake (2004) demonstrated the ways in which gender influences political processes and the politics of space. The United Nations Development of Publication Information (2005) identified that women can participate not only by voting but also by becoming advocates, activists, political party members, and candidates. The UNICEF (2007) pointed out that women's representation in national parliament, local government and peace processes in a critical measure of their political empowerment. Rai (2011) analyzed the women's participation in voting and there has been a marked increase in their voter turnout and election campaign. Carolin (2013) analyzed the role of emotions for the constitution of electoral space and ethnography of emotional performances in a local campaign in Ecuador. He claims that electoral geography needs to be more attentive to the emotional dimension of electoral spaces. Pandita (2014) examines the participation of women in the electoral process of India as contestants in election. The study also attempts to find out how far women candidates have been given representation by national and state-level political parties during all general elections held in India since Independence. Sharma and Pachori (2017) analyzed the methods, voting behavior and results of elections in the context of geographic space and using geographical techniques.

### Women Empowerment in Political and Electoral Processes

Participation of women in political and electioneering process is very low but an increase in their participation can be felt in the current political scenario not only in the study area but in India also. Even though Bihar has one of the worst female literacy rates, the state has one of the highest numbers of women legislators in the assembly and higher voter turnout of women than men. Women empowerment is closely related to the equal status of women, providing them equal opportunity, and freedom for their development. The focus of women empowerment lies in the process of decision making. A few decades back, women would go and vote as per the instruction from their menfolk. Nowadays, scenario is changing, women are going in a group for voting. The problems, demands, and aspirations of women are different from men. In recent years, political parties are considering women-centric issues in their election manifesto such as liquor ban etc. The government is also playing a vital role in the empowerment of women by inaugurating various schemes such as Anganwadi schemes in which women are engaged in teaching and social services. Mukhyamantri Balika cycle yojana, reservation of women in the Panchayat, etc. are examples of empowering girls and women as well.

Considering women-centric issues in the election manifesto of political parties indicates that women are playing a decisive role in the elections. Women have been accepted as a voter but not as a policy formulator. There is apathy of political parties in giving tickets to women candidate, which shows that there is a lot of works needs to be done for women's empowerment in the sphere of politics.

### The Study Area

For the present study, Patna district has been selected as the study area. It is one of the important districts among the entire 38 districts in Bihar. The latitudinal and longitudinal extent of this

district are 25°12'N to 25°44'N and 84°42'E to 86°4'E respectively. Patna district is also known as the heartland of south Bihar. There are fourteen assembly constituencies in the District. These are Maner, Bikram, Bankipur, Patna Sahib, Danapur, Kumhrar, Paliganj, Mokama, Digha, Fatuha, Masauri, Bankipur, Phulwari, and Barh. The district is bounded by the river Son on the west, on the north by the Ganga river and on the south by Nalanda Arwal and Jahanabad districts. On the east, the district is bordered by Begusarai and partly by Lakhisarai. According to the 2011 census, Patna district has a population of 5,838,465 in which the number of females is 2759953. The sex ratio is 897 females for every 1,000 males. The literacy rate is 70.68% in which the female literacy rate is 61.96%.

Six constituencies have been selected for the sample survey, viz. Sampatchak, Dulhin Bazar, Ghoshwari, Patna, Bihita, and Mokama (fig.2). About 45 samples of different age groups from each above-mentioned assembly constituencies have been selected. The total number of samples is  $45 \times 6 = 270$ . These 45 samples have been again stratified in the three age groups of 18-35, 36- 50 and 51-75. About 15 samples have been selected from each of these three age groups ( $3 \times 15 = 45$ ).

### Research Questions

The following are the major research questions for the present study:

1. What is the level of political and electoral participation in the study area?
2. Is there any gap between male and female electoral participation?
3. Is there any difference in political participation of urban and rural women?

### Objectives

With the above background, the major objectives of the present study are:

1. To find out the level of political and electoral participation in women in the study area.
2. To study the spatio-temporal gap between male and female electoral participation.
3. To analyze the difference in political participation of urban and rural women.

### Methodology

For a scientific and a valid conclusion, pre-field study, field study and post field study has been conducted.

**Pre-Field Study:** It includes library work, data collection from the Election Commission of India, Census of India and the Department of Statistics. News Papers are also a part of pre-field survey for the study. Data collection has been arranged in order for statistical and cartographic treatment. The questionnaire has been prepared on the basis of the pattern which has emerged after the processing of the data through the statistical and cartographic method.

**Field Survey:** Primary data collection with the help of a questionnaire regarding their political perception has been done. Respondents have been selected with the help of stratified random sampling technique. A number of samples selected were 270 as this sample size is fair enough to represent the cross-



section of data. Primary data was collected through a survey of literate semi-literate and non-literate women in Patna district. In all 270 respondents from the age group of 18-75 were taken. The sample was selected using stratified random sampling. Stratification is done on the basis of geographical area and age. These samples are selected from six assembly constituencies of Patna District in which three of them, i.e. Sampatchak, Dulhin Bazar and Ghoshwari are rural and Patna, Bihta and Mokama are urban.

**Post Field Survey:** Tabulation and compilation of data collected through primary field survey have been done in order to find an appropriate result. Statistical and mathematical treatment of data has been done and the result so obtained is represented by explanations and suitable diagrams using cartographic techniques. Lastly, the report is prepared.

### Background of the Respondents

There are 3 age-groups. Therefore, number of respondents in each group is 90 (Table - 2). The social background of the respondents in each age group is shown in Table -3. Of the total samples, 93 are from general category, 103 from OC, 45 from SC and 35 from ST categories. The marital status of the respondents in each age group is shown in Table -4. Of the total samples, 152 are married, 52 are unmarried, 59 are widows and 7 are divorcee. The economic background of the respondents in each age group is shown in Table -5. Of the total samples, 25b are from very high income group, 63 are from high income group, 91 are from middle income group, 49 are from low income group and 42 are from very poor group. The level of literacy of the respondents is shown in Table -6. Of the total samples, 42 are only illiterate, 50 have education upto class 8, 69 have education upto class 10, 55 have education upto class HS and 54 are graduate and above. Thus, the sample survey, 2018 shows that the 270 respondents represent different age groups coming from a various socio-economic and educational background and the sample has been drawn from different regions of Patna.

### Discussion and Results

#### Political Participation

Political participation affords citizens in a democracy an opportunity to communicate information to government officials about their concerns and preferences and to put pressure on them to respond (Verba et.al, 1995). While voting is the most common aspect of political participation, the others are participating in political activities which influences them through persuasion, awareness programs, being members of political parties etc. Womens' political empowerment depends upon various factors such as nature of participation, financial independence, political awareness, literacy, role of government and NGOs meanwhile accessibility to the political process in for most important issue for political empowerment. The questionnaire was administrated to find out the level of political and electoral awareness of the respondents. About 89% of total respondents are registered voters while only 11% are not registered. This 11% comprises mostly young girls who have just entered in the voting age (Table - 7).

The view of respondents seems to be divided on the issue of

choice of voting. Out of 270 respondents, only 97 respondents cast their vote on personal choice. About 157 respondents said that they always take advice or vote to candidate to whom males in the family decide. Only 16% of them said that they take advice from the local leaders (Table -8). About 49% of the respondents feel women should be aware of political empowerment. About 36% of the respondents feel that there is no need to make women aware of political empowerment and 15% respondents have no opinion (Table-9).

Being a member of a political party is the most evident form of participation in political activity (Table-10). Most of the respondents consider empowerment as the freedom of decision making. While the responses to political empowerments have limitations on the political empowerment. Majority of the respondents do not have active participation in political activities. It is observed that women are involved in political activity only in the form of voting. Women's participation as voters has seen significant expansion since the late 1990s (Deshpandey, 2004). It is observed that very few women are interested in attending party meeting and political discussion. There is a strong perception that literate women are more conscious about their voting rights but in the study area the women belong to rural areas with low literacy are more conscious about voting rights.

#### Spatio-temporal Gap between Male and Female Electoral Participation

Electoral participation is a process in which the electorates participate in choosing their representatives through voting. Voter turnout is significantly influenced by the composite of environmental, demographic and ecological variables which provides a community a structural context and it is positively related to development (Das Gupta and Morris-Jones, 1975) There is progress in women's electoral participation over the last decade. Increasing awareness among women voters about their rights began to influence the political scene (Fadia, 2014).

The Fig. 3, 4, 5 and 6 show that there is an increase in the trend of women's electoral participation. In the last two consecutive assembly elections, the percentage of female turnout is almost equal to male. Individual socio-demographic factors including education and income, socio-cultural norms and caste are also associated with women's opportunities for political participation (Agarwal, 1997). However, there is some spatial variation in the voting pattern of women. In 2015 and 2010 assembly elections the lowest turnout was in Bankipur, Digha, Kumhrar, and Patna Sahib. Patna West, Patna Central, and Danapur recorded the lowest women's turnout in 2005 (Oct-Nov) assembly election. Whereas in 2015 (Feb) lowest women's turnout was in Danapur, Patna central and Patna West.

#### Spatio-temporal Study of the Male-Female Contestants of Assembly Elections 2005, 2010 and 2015

The participation of women in the various political process is multifarious but the level of participation is uneven. Though there is a rising trend in female voting, participation in the electoral process as contestants is still very low. This became fairly evident by numerical analysis of a number of seats allotted to women (Table 10) It can be seen that there is a huge disparity in allotment of tickets to male and female. The political decision



to not allot seats to women by political parties at the national and state level election has been attributed to lack of “winnability” of women (Deshpande 2004). Table - 10, and Fig. 7, 8, 9 and 10 show that very few seats are allotted to women for contesting the elections. The number of female contestants is not even half of the male contestants. Richer (1990) said that within Indian politics women have gained access to the most important political posts, because of familial ties to prominent male politicians. The main factors attributed to low contesting ratio could be a number of factors such as lack of “winnability” of women (Deshpande, 2004), perpetuation of a patriarchal political structure together with class, caste, and gender subordination acting as strong deterrents to women contesting elections (Baseline Report 1998), lack of national consensus and willingness among political parties to give more tickets to women in elections (Basu 1992), lack of reservation of seats for women, and lack of support from the family and society.

### **The Rural-Urban Divide in Women's Political Empowerment**

Rural India is more active when it comes to voting than urban India (Times of India, 2011). The primary survey showed that there is a very unique type of dissimilarity in political participation between the women residing in rural and urban areas. It is quite interesting to know that urban women are familiar with their political rights and political system of the country but most of them show political apathy while on the other hand women in rural area are showing their interest in political participation such as in voting, visiting political rallies and becoming member of political parties but are unaware or having little knowledge about their political rights and political system. The data collected from the primary survey results some of the interesting facts which are as followings:

1. The highest percentage of voting participation of women is in the age group, 18 - 35 i.e. 87%, particularly in the rural area. It is because of the election manifesto that is made by keeping an eye on women issues such as Mukhyamatri Balika Cycle PoshakYojna. Kumar (2013) considered the Mukhamatri Balika Cycle Yojana to be a form of women empowerment. Liquor ban, reservation in panchayat elections and scholarships, etc. These women-centric schemes have crafted silent empowerment in the field of their political participation.
2. Changing nature of rural demography is another explanation of increasing women's political participation. The male members have emigrated to other parts of the country, that creates a situation in which women themselves have to take their decisions. It is observed that 63% of rural women from the age group, 36 - 50 are applying their voting right. The main motivation of women to vote is that they are the mother of the age group of young girls or women who have been benefited by a certain scheme of government. Liquor ban in the election manifesto of a particular political party i.e. JD(U) acted as a pull factor for the voting of women. The age group of 51-75 are politically least active. Their share in total voting is only 18%.

Political participation of women in the urban area is low if we compare to the rural area. The reasons for lower voter turnout

among urban women in India have been sociologically researched and can be broadly put down to time and monetary constraints in reaching polling booths in urban locations (Rai, 2011). Only 54% of women are regular voters; between the age group of 18-35 years, the voting percentage was only 36% whereas in the middle age group it was 51% and lowest 32% in the age group of 51-75. Urban women are politically less active because there is less or no motivational factors for voting. May be also they are either satisfied with the prevailing political system or are completely indifferent to it.

### **Conclusion**

The women community is not homogeneous. In the multi-layered society divided in religion, caste, and sub-caste women are also stratified. In each stratum, they have their own issues, concerns, and challenges. Cultural inhibition is still one of the challenges of women's political and electoral empowerment. The biggest hindrance in the political participation of women is patriarchy irrespective of whether it is an urban or rural area. Women in India have largely failed to acquire the critical mass required to introduce gender friendly legislation (Muni, 1979). Most of the women in the study area agreed that they always follow the instruction of the male member of their home in various aspects of life and also in political participation and voting behaviour. The only level of electoral participation where women have achieved some parity are as voters. Women do not come out of their home without the permission of the head of the family. In general, women still, want a male member to accompany them to go outside or to polling booths. Most of the women are guided by their male member of the family to make any kind of political perception.

Recently, there has been a remarkable percentage of women who are taking interest in elections and are aware of their right to vote. Women have their own issues in politics which is related to their day-to-day life. Small relief that helps women in daily life plays a decisive role while casting their vote. That is the reason in the recent years, as political parties are considering the women-centric issues in their party manifesto during the election propaganda. The Patna-based Asian Development Research Institute had pointed out that the growing participation of women in Bihar's assembly election should be inferred as an affirmation of the beneficial effects of carrying out various women-centered programs of reservation, education, employment, etc. (Agarwal, 2010). Hence, the recognition of women's aspirations, political training by sensitizing and making them conscious about their democratic rights and social support can make entry of women in politics not only as voters but also as representatives.

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Table-1: The Study Area

Rural	No. of Samples	Urban	No. of Samples
Sampatchak	45	Patna	45
Dulhin Bazar	45	Bihta	45
Ghoswari	45	Mokama	45
Total	135	Total	135

Table -2: Age Group of the Respondents

Age Group	Respondents
18-35	90
36-51	90
51-75	90
Total	270

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

Table - 3: Social Background

Age Group	Gen	OBC	SC	ST
18-35	37	36	10	7
36-50	36	39	8	7
51-75	20	28	27	21
Total	93	103	45	35

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018



Table - 4: Marital status

Age Group	Married	Unmarried	Widow	Divorce
18-35	39	45	4	2
36-50	62	5	20	3
51-75	51	2	35	2
Total	152	52	59	7

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

Table -5: Economic Background

Age Group	Rs/ month				
	>5,000	5,000-15,000	15,000-30,000	30,000-45,000	<45,000
18-30	10	15	26	34	5
31-50	12	16	38	12	12
51-75	20	18	27	17	8
Total	42	49	91	63	25

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

Table - 6: Level of Literacy

Literacy level	%	
		Total
Illiterate		42
Up to 8 <sup>th</sup> standard		50
Up to 10 <sup>th</sup> standard		69
Up to 12 <sup>th</sup> standard		55
Graduation and above		54

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

Table -7: Women Registered to Vote

Response	Respondents	%
Yes	240	89
No	30	11

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

Table - 8: Choice of Voting of Women

Choice	Respondents	%
Personal Choice	97	35
Take advice from male member of family	157	58
Take advice from local leader	16	7

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

Table - 9: Perception about Women's Awareness of Political Empowerment

Response	Respondents	%
Yes	132	49
No	98	36
No opinion	40	15

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

Table - 10: Forms of women involvement in political activities

Response	Respondents	%
Yes	132	49
No	98	36
No opinion	40	15

Source: Based on sample survey, 2018

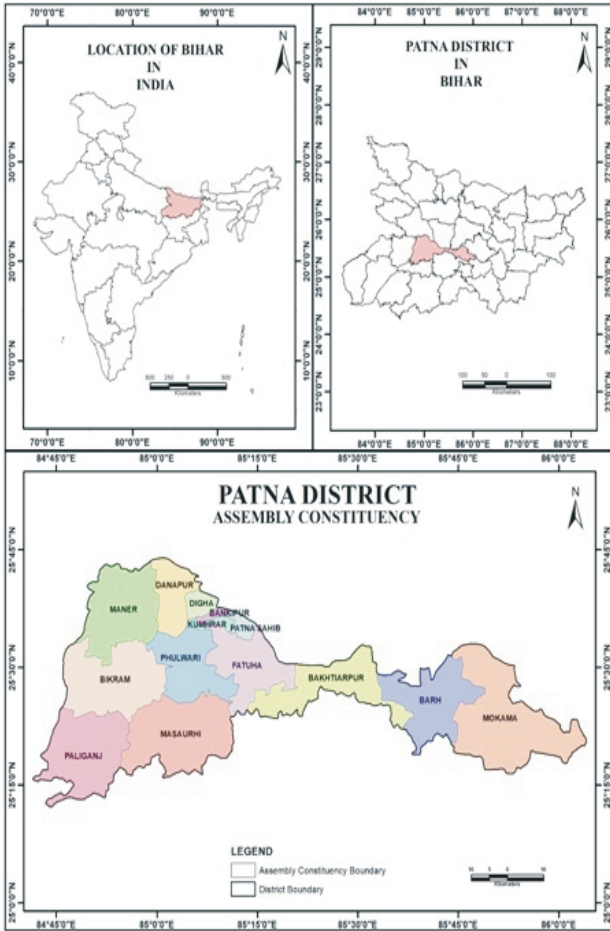


Fig. 1: Location of the Study area

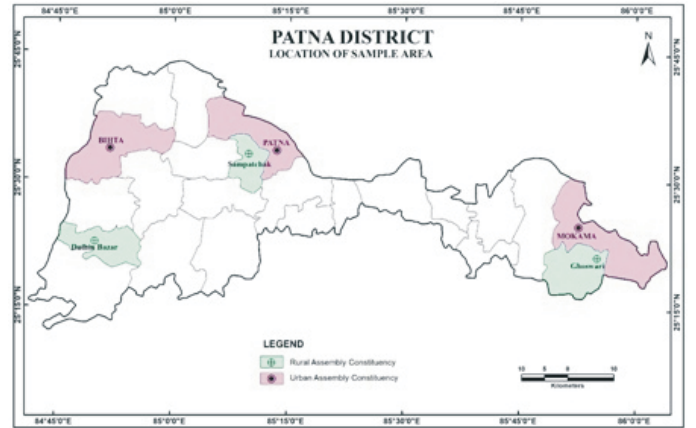


Fig. 2: Location of the Sample Areas, Patna District

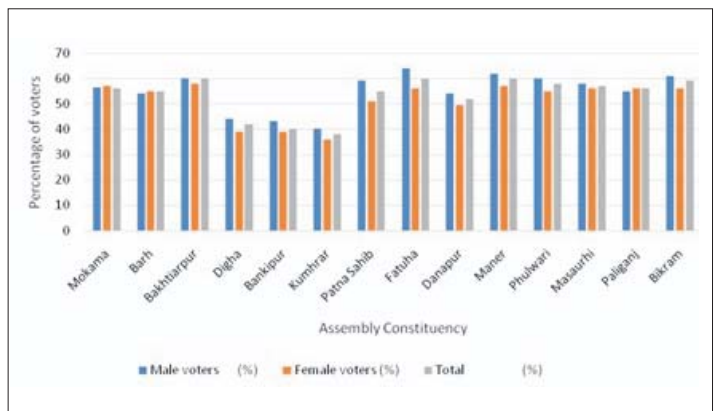


Fig. 3: Percentage of Voters in Assembly Election, 2015

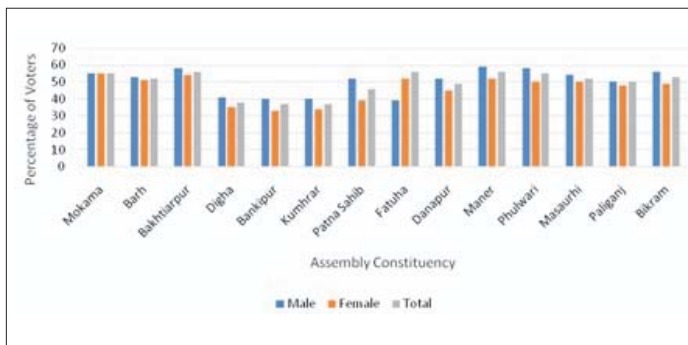


Fig. 4: Percentage of Voters in Assembly Election, 2010

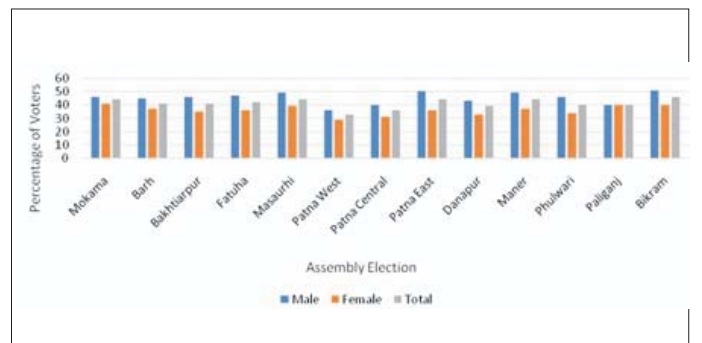


Fig. 5: Percentage of Voters in Assembly Election, Oct-Nov, 2005

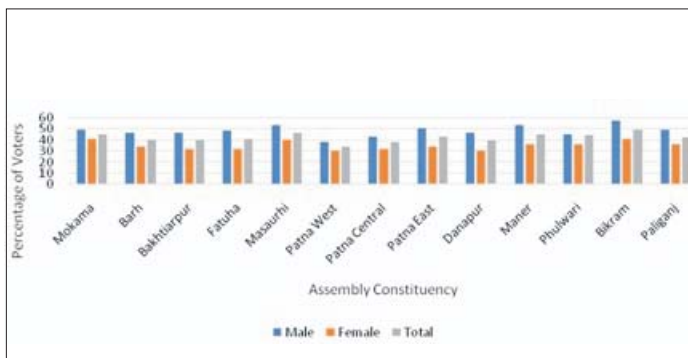


Fig. 6: Percentage of Voters in Assembly Election, Feb, 2005

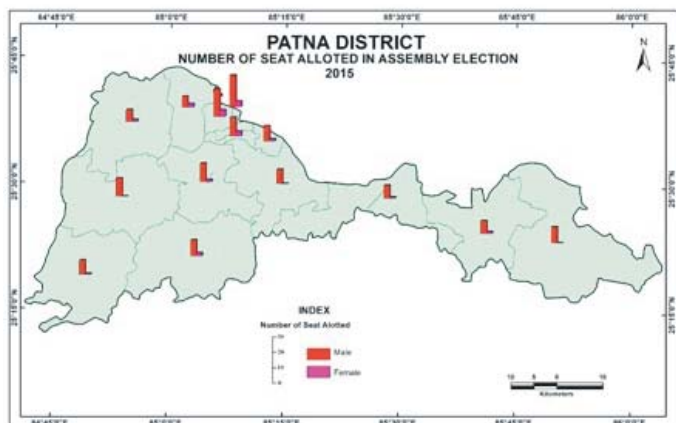


Fig. 7

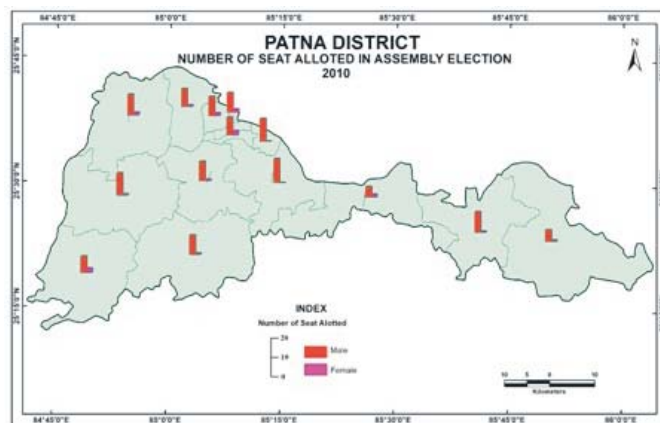


Fig. 8

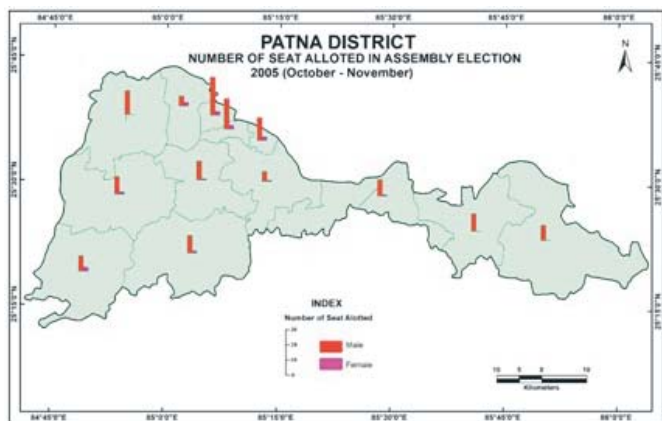


Fig. 9

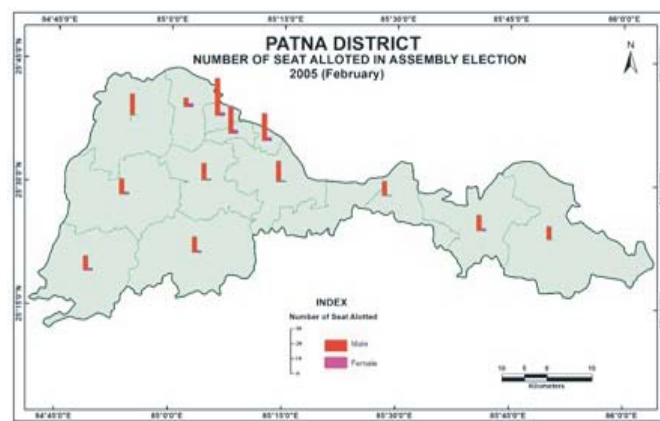


Fig. 10



Prerna Bharti  
 Research Scholar  
 Department of Geography  
 Patna University, Bihar  
 Email: bhartiپرerna123@gmail.com