

## ILLITERATE SARPANCH LEADING THE WAY

**Name** : Smt. Munni Devi Kol  
**Age** : 36 Years  
**Education** : Literate  
**W/O** : Sh. Jagannath Kol  
**Caste Category** : Schedule Tribe (ST)  
**Caste Name** : Kol  
**Village** : Raipurvamaphi  
**Block** : Karbi  
**District** : Chitrakut, Uttar Pradesh

### UTTAR PRADESH

With over 190 million people, Uttar Pradesh comprises for the most populous state in India. Located in the northern part of the country, it shares its border with Uttarakhand on the North West, Rajasthan on the South West, Madhya Pradesh on the South, Bihar on the East and Nepal on the North. The population mostly comprises to Indo-Dravidian ethnic group and a small proportion of the population reflects the Asiatic origin. One-fifth of the state's population is officially classified as Scheduled Castes and meagre percentage of the population falls under the category of Schedule Tribes generally applied to the indigenous people. With a literacy rate of 67.63% the state reflects the moderate level of education. Lucknow stands as the administrative and legislative capital of the state while Kanpur, the largest city of Uttar Pradesh is held as the financial and industrial capital. With a total area of 243,290 km<sup>2</sup> Uttar Pradesh

stands for India's fourth largest state in terms of land area.

([http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/hlo/pca/pca\\_data.html](http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/hlo/pca/pca_data.html)).

Uttar Pradesh is gifted with abundant forest zones and comprises for 6.88% of the total geographical area of the state. Officially classified into four economic regions, the state can be divided as Western, Eastern, Central and Bundelkhand regions in seventy administrative districts. The main rivers of Uttar Pradesh states are Ramganga, Bhagirathi, Ganga, Yamuna and Alaknanda. Agriculture remains the most important livelihood for the demography. Important crops grown are wheat, millets, rice, sugar-cane and barley. Uttar Pradesh provides employment to nearly one-third of its workforce in sugar refining and textile industries. Other prominent industry in the state includes jute, vegetable oil and cement industries. (Mathur, 2018)

### CHITRAKUT DISTRICT

Chitrakut is the second least populous and 35<sup>th</sup> smallest district by area in Uttar Pradesh. The

population density of the district is 308 persons per km<sup>2</sup> and was carved out from the erstwhile

Banda district comprising Karwi & Mau tehsils in the year 1997. Chitrakut lies on the southern fringe of Uttar Pradesh state and borders a section of Madhya Pradesh state. It is divided into five blocks namely Mau, Manikpur, Pahapi, Ramnagar and ChitrakutDhamKarwi. Among the two sub-districts, Karwi is the most populous and Mau the least populous. Agriculture remains as the most important occupation of people with Maize, Wheat, Paddy, Jowar, Gram, Bajra as the major crops. 40% of the population are involved in agricultural work and a mere percentage of the population are marginally employed. Two important rivers Yamuna and Mandakini serve as support system for the people here. To date it remains a holy place for the tourists and famous for Kamadgiri, Ram Ghat, Temple of Mattagajendreshwar Swami or MadganjanSami, SphatikShila, Atri-Anasuya Ashram, Hanuman Dhara etc.

The Ministry of Panchayati Raj named Chitrakut as one of the country's 250 most backward states of total



640 districts. (District Profile: Chitrakoot, 2016). Successive governments have ignored the backward status of Chitrakoot district and this stands as the basic reason for the district to remain one of the most remote and cut-off districts in India. Nevertheless the district is currently funded from the Backward Region Grant Fund program (BRGF) among the 34 districts of Uttar Pradesh for socio-economic development.

### DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE - CHITRAKUT

INDICATORS	CHITRAKUT	UTTAR PRADESH	INDIA
POPULATION	991,730	199,812,341	1,210,854,997
SEX RATIO	879	912	940
SC POPULATION	26.9%	20.7%	16.63%
ST POPULATION	0.03%	0.6%	8.63%
LITERACY RATE (%)	65%	67.68%	74.04%
MALE	527,721	104,480,510	623,724,248
FEMALE	464,009	95,331,831	586,469,174

CENSUS 2011

The gender equity and women's status remains deplorably stark under the regressive and communal politics in India's largest state by population. With a female literacy rate of 59% and a low child sex ratio the state ranks

abysmally low on the mainstream indicators and stands among the bottom five states. (Joshi, 2014) Uttar Pradesh has the highest Maternal Mortality Rate (27.8) among all India states and women here bear the most children in any state

i.e. 4.14 ranking first in India's longest reproductive spans. (<http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/F-series/F-3.html>). Household in UP are the largest with an average of 5.6 people, another indicator whereby women bear more children than any other states and thus have the largest burden of household work. Uttar Pradesh has a crime rate

## PANCHAYAT SYSTEM

The first draft of Indian Constitution in spite of originating from the grassroots level political participation did not include for the provision for Panchayats. Later in the Part IV of the Art 40 of the Indian Constitution a provision under the Directive Principles of State Policy provided for including Panchayat to be used an experiment rather than giving its full due. In the early 1950s Community Development Programmes were introduced by the Planning Commission. The same programs are to be implemented by the central and state governments with the help of local Panchayats. But the local Community Development programmes failed at the village due to the lack of involvement in local community participation. On the basis of such failure Rajasthan was the first state in India to use the process of decentralization. Then the 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment was introduced in the year 1992 and came into force from April 1993 whereby the Panchayati Raj Institutions gained a newer perspective. The essential pre-requisites of the self-governance of the Panchayati Raj Institutions are

- a. Clearly demarcated constituencies
- b. Clear power and authority on one hand and responsibilities on the other
- c. Availability of enough human and financial resources to manage and realize the planned goals

of 38.4 with one case registered against women every 15 minutes. The state has a Female workforce Participation Rate of 253 well below the national average of 331. Above factors depict the disgraceful status of women in the state of Uttar Pradesh. (Saha, 2016)

- d. Functional autonomy within the structure of third-tier of governance.

The 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment introduced the third tier of Panchayat levels provided panchayats instruments of local government with potential space for women and marginalized group in the administrative set-up. Some of the major features of the Act includes:

- I. Three tier system of governance at the village, block and district level
- II. Direct election to all posts at all levels
- III. Reservation to the ST & SCs in proportion to their population on rotational basis
- IV. Setting up a State Finance Commission on a term of five years to review and monitor the financial position of these institutions
- V. Term of Five Year
- VI. Devolution of powers and responsibilities by the state in preparation and implementation of schemes relating to the subjects listed in the Eleventh Schedule of the Act
- VII. Reservation of not less than one-third of the seats and offices for women
- VIII. Setting up a State Election Commission for holding Panchayat elections.

For the Panchayat to function as institutions of Self-Governance at the grassroots level they should confirm to the institutional existence for the decisions to be taken by people's representatives; gain institutional capacity in the

form of empowering in situations to make their rules independently and thirdly confirm to financial viability in terms of sufficiently empowering panchayats in raising resources to meet their responsibilities. Overall a Panchayat should enjoy administrative, financial and functional autonomy. With the introduction of 73<sup>rd</sup> Amendment the democratic base has widened providing the potential for local level

planning and implementation of Community Development programs. The amendment ensures political empowerment to the marginalized and backward oppressed Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and women at the grassroots level. This new Panchayati Raj Institutions have the potential to act as democratic institutions of local self-governance. (Ansari, 2014)

## PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN UTTAR PRADESH

A three – tier Panchayat system operates in the state of Uttar Pradesh whose main objective is intended to bring government closer to the demography of Uttar Pradesh. Approximately 52,000 Gram Panchayats at the village level covering more than 97,000 villages; 813

Kshettra Panchayats at the intermediate level and 70 Zila Panchayats are functioning at the district level. A Gram Sabha which forms the basic unit of Panchayati Raj mechanism is added to it.

### NAME & LEVEL OF THREE TIER PANCHAYAT SYSTEM

LEVEL OF PANCHAYAT	NAME USED
DISTRICT PANCHAYAT	ZILLA PANCHAYAT
INTERMEDIATE PANCHAYAT	KSHETTRA PANCHAYAT
VILLAGE PANCHAYAT	GAON PANCHAYAT

[WWW.MRCDDP.ORG](http://WWW.MRCDDP.ORG)

### PANCHAYAT REPRESENTATIVES AT EACH LEVEL

LEVEL OF PANCHAYAT	NUMBER
ZILLA PANCHAYAT	70
KSHETTRA PANCHAYAT	820
GAON PANCHAYAT	52000
TOTAL	52890

[WWW.NRCDDP.ORG](http://WWW.NRCDDP.ORG)

## GRAM PANCHAYAT

Gram Panchayat represents an elected body constituted by Gram Sabha members amongst themselves. Pradhan and a number of Panchas take care of the proceedings and functioning of Gram Panchayat. Gram Panchayat is responsible for effective implementation and care for the following basic amenities like Drinking Water, construction of Bridges and roads for better connectivity, effective implementation of Public Distribution System, Social Welfare of the village people, maintenance of community assets etc.

### **KSHETTRA PANCHAYAT**

The rural areas in the Uttar Pradesh state have been divided into Khands or blocks and each Khand is constituted with a Kshetra Panchayat. It is headed by Pramukh acting as the Chairperson assisted by Junior Up-Pramukh elected by the members of Kshetra Panchayat amongst themselves. Some of the important activities carried out by Kshetra Panchayat are conservation of forestry, Public Health, Social & Family Welfare, emancipation of local industries for livelihood, promotion of fisheries & animal husbandry, adult education, celebrating fairs & festivals, disseminating the important information in the village, women & child development etc.

### **ZILLA PANCHAYAT**

With a notification in the Gazette, a Zilla Panchayat is constituted for every district. Adhyaksha functions as the chairperson of Zilla Panchayat and elected by elected members amongst themselves. All the central and state government development schemes are to be implemented by Gram and Kshetra Panchayat under the guidance and monitoring of Zilla Panchayat.

### **GRAM SABHA**

Gram Sabha represents the general assembly of the village at the grassroots level and forms the core functionaries of the Panchayat mechanism. Upon the needs assessment study carried out by Gram Sabha at the village level, developmental works are accordingly planned and implemented in the future. All the Gram Sabha members can question the decisions of the Panchayats in the meetings. The U.P. Panchayat Raj Act provides that a Gram Sabha be established for a village or a group of villages by a state government notification and be named after the village having the largest population. (Section -3, U.P Panchayati Raj Act, 1947)

Funds are allocated for each level of Panchayat to carry out their responsibilities at the required level. State Governments treasury transfers the funds to Zilla Panchayat which then allocates the funds to the Kshetra and Gram Panchayat. Sections 74, 75, 76, 77 and 80 also provides for imposition of taxes and fees by the Panchayat for the work involving construction of roads and bridges etc.

Some of the important initiatives taken by the Uttar Pradesh government towards empowerment of Panchayati Raj Institutions have been the devolution of powers and functions to Panchayats. For example Gram Panchayats have been accorded with the function of eleven departments like Youth Welfare, Medical and Health, Animal Husbandry, Fair Price Shops, Agriculture, Rural Development, Education - primary, upper primary and non-formal education centers, State Tubewells, Handpumps etc. Gram Panchayats have been empowered to collect irrigation tax from state tube wells and to impose surcharge on land revenue. It has been made mandatory for the Gram Panchayats to hold one meeting every month. The responsibilities and works under the jurisdiction of Gram Panchayats will be monitored by six committees i.e. Planning

and Development Committee, Construction Work Committee, Administrative Committee, Education Committee, Health and Welfare Committee and Water Management

Committee. In case where women Pradhans are functioning as Chairpersons, husbands/male relatives won't be allowed to attend the meeting by proxy.

## **FAMILY BACKGROUND of SMT. MUNNI DEVI KOL**

Smt. Munni Devi comes from a very humble background and belongs to the Scheduled Tribe community of Kol caste. With no formal education and never been to school due to the social hierarchies and lack of finance, Smt. Devi was still a literate and could sign her name. She holds a firm belief that education has the potential to change a human being's life. This is the reason she and her husband work very hard to ensure their children get the best of education. Her elder daughter is studying Bachelor in Arts at R S Satguru College, Jabrapur while her second daughter is pursuing her

education in Std. V at the village school with a younger son in Std. II. She is the mother to 3 sons and 3 daughters. Her husband Sh. Jagannath Kol and the eldest son work as daily wage laborers to feed their family of 8 people. With no agricultural land, there is no option left for them other than working as seasonal daily wage laborer. Sometimes when there are no work available in the village, her husband and son migrate to the city or other places to earn a livelihood. Smt. Munni Devi takes active part in the social affairs of the village and attends the Panchayat meetings.

## **CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES ADOPTED**

Despite having no formal education and never seen the doors of school, Smt. Munni Devi is legible to write and able to sign her name. She was active in women's forum for supporting Mr. Radhe Aahirwar in winning the Panchayat elections and was also a representative of the Village Development Committee. Smt. Munni maintained a very good rapport with all the women members of the village and held a special regard for the backward communities specifically the Scheduled Tribe, since she herself was a Scheduled Tribe. Working for Mr. Radhe, she developed all the general understanding and articulation of political strategy for the village Panchayats. She was even a part of the strategic team which earned Mr. Radhe the leadership position of Sarpanch. After Mr. Radhe won the elections, he couldn't

keep up to his commitment to the village people which he initially promised to win elections. The agenda weren't fulfilled after he became the Sarpanch of the village. His agendas rooted to improvising the irrigation system for the farmers of the village. Farmers of Raipurvamaphi village faced the acute problem of water supply to till their agricultural fields. More of all Mr. Radhe was utilizing the Panchayat fund to fulfill his own selfish benefits. When Smt. Munni Devi and other village people started questioning Mr. Radhe on false promises, he dithered from answering and started humiliating Smt. Munni Devi. In fact he challenged Munni Devi to contest the next Panchayat elections and defeat him. With a spur to rout the ego of Mr. Radhe Aahirwar and to head her village towards the

economic development, she decided to contest elections.

Smt. Munni Devi was influential when it comes to communicate her understanding to the masses and connect to them. First she met all the influential and respected persons of the village and urged them to endorse her in political campaign. With their feedback and counselling she approached and knocked on each door, greeted each dada, dadi, mami, chachi asking for their support as a single fighter campaigning of her own. Her simple ideology is “Getting your work done is what makes you visible. That’s when people know you and see you.”(Woman Panchayat Candidates in UP, 2015). Smt. Munni Devi chose women’s platform to articulate her message. At one of the Mitaaan meeting she campaigned herself by explaining the challenges her village is facing on the agricultural front and exposed the political conspiracy of Mr. Radhe that drove him away from keeping his promises. She reflected the negative side for the opportunism of politicians once they are in power. This “stump speech” with an honesty placed Smt. Munni Devi and her vote bank in an intimate relationship rarely seen in a political campaign. Evaluating the agricultural problem due to water supply as her base agenda she promised to the village masses

## **A** **EVEMENTS**

Smt. Munni Devi was not going to repeat the mistake of getting away from her promises as of Mr. Radhe Aahirwar. After gaining the office of Sarpanch she prepared a plan to stop the problems of soil erosion through Land Bunding. Through this method it was possible to reduce the run-off and impound water longer for it to infiltrate the soil. Since the agricultural land of Rajpurvamaphi village is slopy, consulting with

that her first responsibility as a Sarpanch will be construction of Ponds, wells and preventing soil erosion which is a hindrance towards better agricultural productivity and gaining an economic advantage for her village. Her campaign inspired many women members who later started working as volunteers for her. In the Gram Panchayat meeting she gained the confidence of Panchas to pace a yard sign supporting her candidacy. These yard signs were placed in many places and portrayed Smt. MunniDevis visual representation of the support she have among the community. The villagers appreciated seeing the candidate in person and felt good that Smt. Munni Devi is personally asking for their vote. Moreover the place where her events were organized she invited the local newspapers and journalists to cover her candidacy as a Sarpanch. Her political ideology was to shake the most hands, knock on every door and do your best to meet your voter frequently be it anytime, anyplace.

With all the hardships Smt. Munni Bai was able to win the Panchayat elections and take on the revenge from Mr. Radhe Aahirwar. It was because of Smt. Munni Devi, Mr. Radhe Aahirwar could become a Sarpanch and the same Munni Devi was the reason for his tremendous defeat in Panchayat elections.

the soil experts and decision in the Panchayat meetings she was able to conserve water through high infiltration and permeability by the methodology of contour bunding. The second step she took under this initiative was land levelling which ensured for optimal slope of water movement across the field when irrigated. Because of this uniformity of the crop cover was consistent all over the field and the crop yield

was very high. Drying of ponds in the summer season resulted the loss of breeding habitat in water and the loss of water supply to the fields for irrigation purpose. Smt. Munni Devi with the help of Panchayat funds carried out the deepening of ponds and wells in the region so that water supply remains consistent to the agricultural fields throughout the year. In the process the ponds were also de-silted to encourage the growth of diversified plants and safeguarded the loss of breeding habitat.

The poor, backward and the marginalized families were unable to access the subsidized food grain due to lack of ration cards with them. To enroll them under the Public Distribution System, Smt. Munnidevi helped the marginalized people in issuance of Ration card which benefited them in gaining 35 kg of food grains to feed their family under the subsidized rate. Samajwadi Pension Yojana, one of the pension schemes from the Government of Uttar Pradesh which encourages savings for the people living below the poverty line and aims at providing financial assistance to the needy and marginalized people were a strange and unfamiliar aspect for the people. Smt. Munni Devi under her leadership endorsed the needy and poor people to enroll themselves under the scheme whereby they benefitted with a receipt of monthly pension. The yojana postulates for selection of families by the Gram Panchayat and being a Sarpanch, Smt. Munnidevi was in command of the selection criteria. She left no stone unturned while maximizing the number of required families to be benefitted under the scheme. Apart from these, Smt. Munni Devi has been instrumental in conducting regular

meetings of Gram Panchayat with increased participation of village people along with women members from all caste.

### **Major Highlights of her good work**

- To ensure consistent supply of water to the agricultural fields, she carted the deepening of ponds and wells in the village. Almost all the village wells and ponds were re-profiled to a sustainable level.
- For preventing soil erosion and stopping the run-off water, land levelling and contour bunding of 800 running meter was done
- Under the Samajwadi Pension Scheme, 50 families could access to financial assistance from the government and initiated their base in entrepreneurship which provided a livelihood option for them. Majority of the poor and destitute families in the village were enrolled under the scheme and benefitted through receipt of monthly pension.
- Issuance of ration cards to 35 families ensured their access to the subsidized food grains provided by the government. Some families were also eligible and enrolled under the priority ration cards which provided them with 5kgs of food grains per member in the family.
- Panchayat meetings were held in a regular manner whereby the issues and problems of village were discussed on a single platform with a full membership. The membership ratio only saw an upsurge under the leadership of Smt. Munni Devi.



Smt. Munni Devi despite never been to school was literate enough to analytically locate the problems and could find a solution to the same. She was instrumental in carving people think her way towards working together on a commonly constituted agenda. This commonly objective approach and agenda has been utilized to win elections whereas failing to address the same agenda made the previous Sarpanch pay heavily. Mass mobilization from both the men and women at all levels was a significant contributor to her campaigns success. The case study reflects the factor of honesty, transparency and ownership stands a key to a leader's success. Smt. Munnidevi kept all her promises as a Sarpanch towards the economic and social upliftment of her village set as agenda in her election campaign. With no formal education

Smt. Munni Devi proved that Literacy is not regarded as a condition for leadership but it is emphasized that women must become literate once they assume the positions of leadership. The campaign speech inspiring volunteers to work for her demonstrates that it is the way of communicating to the people that instills an intimate relationship between the leader and the voter. Despite of the political pressure and other hardships Smt. Munni Devi singlehandedly worked to stand as Sarpanch and showcased her potential in motivating the volunteers without paying them a single penny throughout. Overall a new identity and a language of politics took shape in the badlands previously ruled by aegotist and corrupt Sarpanch i.e. Mr. Radhe Ahirwar.

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