

FROM A SELF-HELP GROUP MEMBER TO A SARPANCH

Name : Smt. MunniSaket
Age : 42 Years
Education : Vth Standard
W/O : Sh. Ram Niwas Saket
Caste Category : Schedule Caste (SC)
Caste Name : Shoemaker
Village : Morounhaa
Block : Rampur, Baghelan
District : Satna, Madhya Pradesh



MADHYA PRADESH

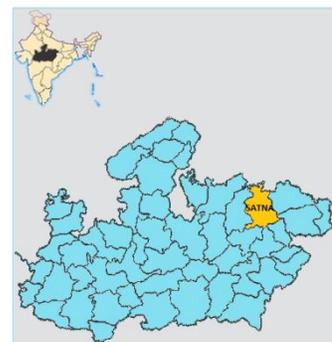
The total population of Madhya Pradesh increased by 24.34 percent between 2001 and 2011 Census and its three-fourth population reside in the rural zones. Madhya Pradesh is a landlocked state surrounded by the states of Maharashtra, Gujarat, Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The rural habitations are sparsely located in the state. A total number of 50 districts exist in the state and the major region wise districts lie in Vindhya, Central, South Central, South Western, Malwa and Northern parts. The state is bestowed with a sub-tropical climate and receives an average of 800-1800 mm rainfall annually. With a sex ratio of 930 females per 1000 males, Madhya Pradesh still lags behind the national average of 940 as per Census 2011. Madhya Pradesh constitutes the highest number of Scheduled Tribe population of 15.3 million in the country. The poverty Headcount Ratio was 31.65% in the year 2011-12 with 234 lakhs people living below the poverty line with a rural-urban poverty gap of 14.74%.

(https://www.researchgate.net/profile/...Madhya_Pradesh.../chapter-4.pdf, 2013).

Agriculture remains the major occupation of the demography and contributes to around 46 percent of the state's income. 80 percent of the total workforce in Madhya Pradesh is engaged in agricultural work. (<https://business.mapsofindia.com/india-state/madhya-pradesh-economy.html>). The rural and agrarian economy of Madhya Pradesh constitutes one of the India's poorest states with 42% of its rural population living below the poverty line (2009-10 estimates) (Press Note on Poverty, 2009-10 , 2012). The various kinds of crops grown in the state are rice, wheat, pulses, oilseeds, soybeans, maize etc. Madhya Pradesh's economy is also boosted by revenue from the forest product sector such as sal, wood, bamboos, teak etc. Minerals storehouse of Madhya Pradesh also contributes to the state's economy. The various types of minerals found are limestone, copper, dolomite, bauxite, coal. Madhya Pradesh stands as the 2nd biggest cement producer of the country for it contributes 13% to the total cement production in India. Various types of cottage industry products found in Madhya Pradesh are leather toys, clay toys, wool products, handloom cloth and chanderi sarees sold all over the country and exported to other countries also.

SATNA DISTRICT

Satna district stands as one of the representative districts of Vindhya region of Madhya Pradesh. Lying in the north eastern part of the state, the district holds a total area of 7424 sqkm. It is bordered by the Katni and Umaria districts in the south, Panna district in the western region, Rewa district in the eastern region and Chitrakoot (UP) district in the north. The district has been divided into 10 Tehsils and 8 Blocks with 1816 villages and 11 towns. Raghurajnagar is the most populous sub-district and kotar stands as the least populous sub-district. Satna's demography is major follower of Hinduism (92.05%) followed by Islam as the second most popular religion. (<http://www.census2011.co.in/census/city/290-satna.html>). The economy of Satna district relies heavily on cement manufacturing, oilseed milling, handlooms and agricultural cultivation. Owing to its large reservoir of limestone, it is referred as the cement city of India. (District Groundwater Information Booklet, 2013). 41% of the population is engaged in either main or marginal works with 51% male and 30% female population. In the year 2006, Ministry of Panchayati Raj named Satna in one of the 250 most backward districts (out of 640 districts) and currently receiving funds from the Backward Regions Grant Fund Program. The district is a major attraction for tourists for being major sites to archeological, religious and tourist interests. Some of the sites include Maihar, Chitrakuta, GriddhrajParvat, Bharhut etc.



DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE – SATNA

INDICATORS	SATNA	MADHYA PRADESH	INDIA
POPULATION	2,228,935	72,626,809	1,210,854,997
SEX RATIO	926	931	940
SC POPULATION	18%	15.6%	16.63%
ST POPULATION	14%	21.1%	8.63%
LITERACY RATE (%)	72.26%	69.32%	74.04%
MALE	1,157,495	37,612,306	623,724,248
FEMALE	1,071,440	35,014,503	586,469,174

CENSUS 2011

A major chunk of the population in Madhya Pradesh is dependent upon agriculture and work as cultivators and agricultural laborers. Women in the state do work as laborers, cultivators or unpaid laborers in their own farm land and a major quantum of the agricultural work is done by them. They play a significant role in sowing, weeding, harvesting of crops. The total workforce participation rate for Madhya Pradesh stands at 42.74%. (MANGESH TYAGI, 2010). More women are employed in the unorganized and informal sector which underpays them and also hazardous in terms of working

conditions. Women in the rural areas often lack public forums and to come together and present their problems and socialize. The patriarchal dominance of males over the females is still being followed whereby a woman cannot challenge the rule of a man; her views are trivialized, sometimes mocked and sometimes silenced for all eternity. A woman's education is considered unnecessary, her economic independence is challenged and her employment is ridiculed. A girl's child birth is treated as a burden since her marriage brings in the question of dowry. She is discouraged to be independent and needs to follow a constricted dress code defined by the society. A woman's aspirations are dependent on the whims and pleasure of a man.

PANCHAYAT SYSTEM

Panchayati Raj Institution stands as the grassroot democracy in India and considered as a local self-government meant for empowering weaker and backward sections of the society, provide for basic infrastructure facilities and initiate the development process at the grassroot level. In the year 1990, Central government realized that local self-government can't be strengthened without given them their constitutional status. In lieu of this, the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act in 1992 which became effective from 20th April 1993 provided for the devolution of responsibilities and powers to the local Panchayat in preparing their plans and executing them towards ensuring socio-economic development. All the activities are to be executed in context to 29 subjects listed in the XIth schedule of the Constitution. The XIth Schedule of the Constitution stipulates that States may, by law, endow the Panchayats with such powers and authority as may be required to enable the latter to function as institutions of self-government (Ibid, Article 243 G). The Act states that the Legislature of a State may, by law, make provisions with respect to the composition of Panchayats, provided that the ratio between the population of the territorial area of a Panchayat at any level and the number of seats in such Panchayat to be filled by election shall, so far as practicable, be the same throughout the State. (Ibid, Article - 243 C (1),).

Panchayati Raj Institutions runs through a three-tier system comprising of Village as the first level, block or Janpad as the second level and Zila or district at the third level. Gram Panchayat is the lowest unit in the three-tier structure at the village level whereby the representatives are elected directly by the village people. Every Panchayat elects a Sarpanch or and an Up-Sarpanch who supervises and co-ordinates the various activities of the Panchayat. Their major functions include implementation of poverty alleviation programs, sanitation, preparation of annual budget and developmental plans, increase of agriculture yield, fisheries, taking care of education and cultural affairs, public health etc.

Block or Union constitutes the intermediate level of local self-government who has jurisdiction over the entire Block area. It may consist of 20-60 villages under its belt depending upon the area and population. There are 6 to 10 directly elected members of whom there will be two women members and one member each from Scheduled Caste and Scheduled Tribes. Major functions of Samiti comprise of coordinating the activities of various Panchayats within its jurisdiction. It scrutinizes the budget and monitors the Panchayats working and suggests measures for improvising the functioning of Panchayats. The Panchayat Samiti prepares and executes plans for the development of Soil Conservation, Water Management & Watershed Development, Khadi and Village Cottage Industries, Construction of Roads, Buildings, bridges, waterways and other means of communication, Animal Husbandry, Poultry, Dairy

Farming, Poverty Alleviation Programs, Primary and secondary education in villages, Cultural Activities, Welfare and Women Empowerment, Welfare of the weaker sections of the society in relation to Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Caste categories, Maintenance of Community Assets, Rural Electrification, effective implementation of Public Distribution system, running of Co-operatives and other such functions bestowed upon by the State government.

District/ Zila Panchayat constitute the apex body of the three-tier structure of Panchayati Raj Institution and have jurisdiction over the entire district. It is comprised of the members of the Panchayat Samiti, all members of State Legislative and Parliament representing a part or whole of the district, all district level officers of the Public Works, Medical and Public Health, Engineering, Agriculture, Education and other developmental departments. The Act also provides for the special representation of women members of Scheduled Tribes and Scheduled Castes provided they are not adequately represented in the normal course. (Ibid, Article 165). Additional Deputy Commissioner in every district shall act as the ex-officio Chief Executive Officer of the Zila Parishad in the District. Every Zila Parishad is to hold meeting at least once in every three months. Major function of the Zila Parishad is to co-ordinate the activities of Panchayat Samiti falling within its jurisdiction and approves for the budget of Panchayat Samiti. It renders necessary advice to the government in context to implementation of various developmental schemes. It is majorly responsible for maintenance and development of agriculture and irrigation systems, Soil Conservation, Forest Management, development of small scale and household industries, representation of weaker sections of the society, executive poverty alleviation programs, Social Reform activities, distribution of essential commodities, food processing etc.

The purpose of 73rd Amendment was to take democracy to the grassroot level so that rural village demography is to manage their own affairs. It entrusts the people with the power of decision-making and provide them authority and capacity to govern themselves.

PANCHAYATI RAJ SYSTEM IN MADHYA PRADESH

Madhya Pradesh state constitutes a number of laws and regulations which promotes or enable the Right to Information. The Madhya Pradesh Panchayati Raj and Gram Swaraj Adhiniyam 1993 (referred to as the PR Act 1993) include a number of provisions which enables people to access information from Panchayat Raj Institution. The Right to Information Act which applies to all the local and statutory authorities constituted under an act of state legislature also includes the Panchayat bodies in Madhya Pradesh. The government has also issued orders pertaining to the information disclosure to all the government departments in Madhya Pradesh as well as the Panchayati Raj Department. In the near past, the National Parliament passed a comprehensive national Right to Information Act in May 2005 which is applicable to all the government offices in the country including that of Panchayati Raj Institutions.

There stands a three-tier system of Panchayati Raj Institution in Madhya Pradesh which entails Gram Panchayats at the village level, Janpad Panchayats at the Intermediate level, and Zila Panchayat at the Block level.

GRAM PANCHAYAT

For every village, a Gram Panchayat is constituted consisting of elected Panchs and a Sarpanch who will be heading the Panchayat. Every Gram Panchayat consists of 10 to 20 wards which makes the territorial constituencies. A Panch is elected from each ward and thereby Gram Panchayat forms an elected

executive body. This body is to execute his duties as per the directions and guidance of the general body. Similarly there remains a Gram Sabha for every village, a general body which consists of the entire village people registered in the voters list of a village. It is a participatory democracy which provides a local platform for the people to meet and discuss the economic and social problems and analyze for administrative and developmental actions of elected representatives thereby instilling accountability and transparency of the Panchayat system. Apart from this it ensures and platforms people from all sections of the society including women, ST, SC, Dalits and other backward sections to participate in planning and implementation of all the local development programs. The Panchayati Raj Act 1993 offers special powers to the Gram Sabha whereby a Gram Sabha can monitor and question the functioning of Gram Panchayat. It is also entrusted with the power to make annual plans for the villages to be passed by the higher levels of Panchayat Raj Institutions for integration. At least four Gram Sabha meetings are to be organized per annum in the months of January, April, July and October. These meetings are convened by the Secretary and presided over by the Sarpanch.

JANPAD PANCHAYAT

Every district is divided into Blocks which constitutes a Janpad Panchayat. A Janpad Panchayat is framed of the members elected from smaller constituencies, all members of the State Legislative Assembly and one-fifths of the Sarpanch in the territorial area of the Block on a rotational basis for a period of one year. The Janpad Panchayat is headed by a President and a Vice-President who are elected by and among the elected members.

ZILA PANCHAYAT

Zila Panchayat is constituted for a district which comprises of elected members from the constituencies, members of Lok Sabha, Rajya Sabha, and State Legislative Assembly returned from the district and all Chairpersons of Janpad Panchayats in the district. Each Zila Panchayat is headed by a President and a Vice-President elected by and from the elected members.

Each Janpad and Zila Panchayat has a Chief Executive Officer appointed by the State government. His powers and responsibilities includes preparing annual development plans and budgets, furnish to the elected members the returns, estimates, statistics, statements relating to the administration of the project, keep and maintain all records connected with the proceedings of meetings of the Panchayat and its standing committees, ensure efficient execution of schemes and its monitoring etc.

FAMILY BACKGROUND of SMT. MUNNI SAKET

Coming from a very poor and Scheduled Caste community, Smt. MunniSaket wasn't able to complete her education due to financial problem and the male patriarchy dominance in the society. However education remains in high esteem in her mind and for her education is the only source which can earn human being a dignity and self-esteem in the society. Realizing the importance of education all her children are enrolled in school and colleges. She is gifted with 2 sons and a daughter. Her daughter is pursuing her studies in a college, elder son enrolled in engineering studies and the youngest of them is continuing his intermediate studies at a government high school in Madhavgarh. Her husband Sh. Ram Niwas Saket works as a labour in the nearby areas. In absence of any work he migrates to Satna town in search of industrial or civil works. They have 1 acre of land which is used for agriculture purpose but insufficient to sustain the livelihood of the whole family. Since they do not have proper irrigation facilities; agricultural yield is totally rainfed and provides them livelihood for 4 to 5 months. The family welfare is ensured from both the earnings of agriculture and wages earned by Sh. Ram Niwas Saket.

CHALLENGES & STRATEGIES ADOPTED

The ration card of Smt. MunniSaket was cancelled by contemporaneous Sarpanch. When she visited the Sarpanch to know the reason of cancellation and resolve the issue she was whined by the Sarpanch making excuses. Once again when she approached the Sarpanch for the same reason she was humiliated by the Sarpanch in front of all the elite class members and replied by Sarpanch – As long as I am the Sarpanch of this village, your ration card will remain invalid and never in her life she will be able to renew that. After this incident she approached the government officials with her problems, she had to return empty handed because those government officials were also bribed not to help Smt. MunniSaket. This incident moved her to contest Panchayat election and take revenge from the Sarpanch for embarrassing and not helping her. Being an active member of the SHG group, she presented her problem at the SHG meeting. All her group members were shocked to hear the incident and encouraged Smt. Munni to fight Panchayat elections in the upcoming year and teach the Sarpanch a lesson with a motive of showcasing women's power.

All the women members of SHG groups vowed to help Smt. MunniSaket in campaigning. They started with a walkathon throughout the village constituency which included extensive postering and announcements on community loudspeakers. Their main aim was to position Smt. MunniSaket as a community friendly representative by listening to the problems and grievances of the village people and noting them. This communication and feedback exercise became the basis for Smt. MunniSaket's agenda during the peak election campaign. Her second campaign inducted a caste focused campaign whereby the head and members of every caste and religion met on the same platform and their problems were noted. Such caste campaign had a better managed inter-community relations by turning them into expressions of cultural rather than political difference. The third strategy in reach out to various communities was followed by interactions with the youth in which the demands and problems of youth were presented and discussed. Simultaneously street plays were arranged allowing the talented youth to

capture the attention of voters and position Smt. MunniSaket and her agenda. All these campaigns were used to reach out to the public and Portray Smt. MunniSaket as a benefactor interested in the personal welfare of the people and the development of the village. On the day of filing her nomination, the youth committee and SHG women members came out in huge numbers and followed Smt. MunniSaket which garnered her a lot of attention and a potential candidate to win the Panchayat elections. In between the campaigns, she and her team did a thorough research on the past election results, past turnouts, years of incumbency and the general demographics of the village population. This research helped her team in analyzing “why voters should vote for you” and framed the issue of “change” in the election. With all the support and hard work from her team members she was able to win the Panchayat elections with a margin of 100 votes and served the village from 2010 to year 2015.

After she chaired the position of Sarpanch, she was plagued by many hurdles and by the elite and high class people in executing her responsibilities. On one such incident, she being a Sarpanch and an elected representative of the Panchayat was her constitutional right to unfurl the national flag on the eve of Republic Day. But the high class and elite people oppressed her in fulfilling her responsibilities. She was denied from unfurling the national flag. Immediately she called for the Police and amidst the Police security she unfurled the National Flag and demonstrated the power of an elected representative and a woman’s indomitable determination and courage to fight against injustice.

A **EVEMENTS**

Being virtuous and stubborn in her aims Smt. MunniSaket worked in a varied number of areas including Child welfare, infrastructure development, effective implementation of govt. benefit scheme, agriculture augmentation etc. ensuring the participation of community as a whole. Her first initiative was to improve the nutritional and health status of children below the age of six years in her village. Since Madhya Pradesh including her village rates high in child mortality, malnutrition; she laid the foundation of 2 Anganwadicenters for the physical, psychological and social development of a child. These Anganwadiscetres served in providing proper nutrition, health and pre-school education to all the children in the village. The children of Morounhaa village were reeling under access to quality education and moreover the financially depleted parents could not imagine of paying an educational fees. Having high regards for education, Smt. MunniSaket established 6 numbers of Primary schools which delivered quality education proper text books and learning materials in the schools. She also ensured and monitored over the drop-out rates of children in schools and made all efforts in overcoming these hurdles on the road to educational progress. The educational curriculum was updated at the Panchayat Samiti meeting enthusiastic factors like visual aids, Socially Useful productive works etc. were included to attract more number of students. Appreciating the efforts of students, Smt. MunniSaket introduced scholarships for merit students in the class. Before Smt. Saket chaired the Sarpanch, the Mid-Day Meal Scheme was inefficiently executed in the village with lot of corruption. Utilizing this scheme; Smt. Saket aimed at addressing malnutrition, protecting children from classroom hunger, increasing school enrolment and attendance, improved socialization among children belonging to all castes, and social empowerment through provision of employment to women. Her efforts bore fruit when many women members were

employed through this program and earned a livelihood and the child enrollment increased. Through this initiative, Smt. Saket instilled a valuable input in the development of elementary education.

Majority of the population in Morounhaa village are dependent upon agriculture for their livelihood. Due to lack of proper irrigation facilities the agricultural yield remains very low. Consulting with the agricultural department and in Panchayat Samiti she stepped into construction of stop dams which are economically sustainable and these dams do not create adverse effects on environment i.e. problem of change in micro-climate, loss of flora and fauna, problem of rehabilitation, risk of reservoir induced seismicity etc. working further on agricultural yield she carried out the Land Bunding to control soil erosion through retention and safe disposal of runoff water. Through bunding, obstruction across the path of surface runoff were created to reduce the velocity of flowing water. This in turn retained the runoff water in the watershed controlling soil erosion. Providing a place to rest for the dead, Smt. Munni constructed a burial ground and fenced it. Previously the ground used to full of ditches and uneven with poor facilities available. People were forced to re-use the tombs for burial since there were hardly any space available for cremation. To connect the suburban rural areas with the village main road, Smt. Saket constructed the CC roads. The CC road improved the communication of the village which in rainy season hindered the movement of these sub-urban people. Open defecation and poor sanitation around the village played a havoc in spreading diseases among the demography which in turn lowered the attendance ratio of children in school. To counter this, she initiated individual toilet and community toilet for the village people. To encourage the savings among the poverty stricken people, Smt. Saket strived to provide financial assistance under the banner of National Family Benefit Scheme. Under this scheme, widows were enrolled and received monthly pension. Old aged persons also benefited under the pension scheme receiving monthly benefits. To benefit the poverty stricken people through the Public Distribution Scheme, Smt. Saket enrolled the poor villagers in the PDS scheme through issuance of ration cards. These ration cards enabled them to purchase food grains under a subsidized rate. Under her leadership, the attendance rate of women members and backward section like Dalits, STs & SCs increased to an all-time high in the Panchayat meetings. Women expressed their problems and participated in the decision making process of the local self-government.

Major Highlights of works

- 2 Anganwadi centers were instituted in the village Mouranhaa towards addressing the needs of children under the age of six years. The anganwadi workers have been pursuing a commendable job in motivating families to adopt family planning, educating parents about the child growth and development.
- Under her leadership, 6 Primary Schools were opened which ensured the enrollment ratio of children consistently increased with providence of quality education.
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme ensured the retention of children at schools and proved to be a catalyst in influencing the decision of the parents belonging to the weaker sections of the population to send their children to school.

- Stop dams were constructed in villages to support the agricultural system in the village and farmers could now cultivate round the year. These dams proved to be very promising and had tremendous scope for betterment of socio-economic rural upliftment.
- Through the mechanized method of Land Bunding, Soil Erosion was controlled in the agricultural field thus augmenting the crop yield. It protected the soil from erosion caused by runoff water.
- A burial ground was constructed with every facilities available to provide a place for the dead to rest since the village was suffering from land grabbing and hardly any empty space available forcing people to re-use tombs.
- 2 numbers of CC roads were constructed in the village connecting the rural sub-urban areas with the main village road.
- Counteracting the problem of poor sanitation and open defecation in the village, individual toilets and a community toilet was constructed.
- Under the banner of National Family Benefit Scheme, 20 Widows got enrolled and benefitted with a pension of Rs. 20,000 each. 65 old aged persons were also benefitted under this scheme.
- 51 new ration cards were issued to the poor people enabling them to purchase foodgrains under the subsidized rate.

LESSONS LEARNT

The uncompromising issue against injustice and courage of Smt. MunniSaket encouraged her to fight against those elite class people who were managing the Panchayat affairs for their selfish motives. She and her team focused intensely on community outreach and garnering positive feedback through discussing the problems of common people and presenting their agenda of solving the same in a more democratic manner. She could build a bonding among the people through a relatable message by drawing their attention and showing them that Smt. Saket's victory would bring considerable improvement in their lives. Presenting and discussing the problems on a common platform was in a way appealing to the real voters of the village who actually do the bulk of voting and also get the bulk of mis-governance that follows. Smt. Saket along with her SHG team members portrayed the collective strength of women in fighting for their rights when exploited by the male patriarch society. Thus the experience gained from Smt. MunniSaket's struggle highlights an extremely positive outcome, even though with consistence resistance but much remains to be done before women can claim their rightful place in governance.

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