

**Media Release: Shakti - "Political Power To Women" Shakti Selfie Campaign: Bihar
Women Leaders Demand 50% Women MLAs!
14th Sep 2020**

Shakti - "Political Power to Women," along with grassroots Bihar women's and social groups did a " Women Leaders Selfie & Call Campaign" with female MLAs, Mukhiyas and Sarpanches with superb results!

This unique campaign had volunteers, both women and men from Shakti, and various grassroots groups from Bihar reach out to elected female members of Bihar Panchayats, Nyay Panchayats and women MLAs for echoing the demand of 50% female candidates in the elections, with the parties or sending a selfie!

70 years after a democratic republic, in a state that pioneered 50% reservation in local bodies in 2006, there are a meagre ~11% women only in Bihar's Assembly. There are over 2 lakh elected women in local bodies since 2006, but no career pipeline even for the top 1% of them (i.e. 2000 women) to get tickets to Vidhan Sabha. Political parties in Bihar have been giving a pitiful 9% tickets to women, fielding barely a handful of women each, in every election cycle.

Volunteers including farmers, male social workers, working women, students, civil society activists, minority and Dalit groups in Bihar, etc. participated in the call campaign. Sakhiree Mahila Vikaas Sansthan, Jyoti Mahila Samaikhya, Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum, Gaurav Gramin Mahila Vikas Manch, Centre for Social Equity & Inclusion and others joined hands to reach out to female Mukhiyas, Sarpanches, and female MLAs across various villages, districts and constituencies.

Armed with a list of contacts and sample call scripts, the conversations were enlightening. Attached is the list Mukhiyas., Sarpanches and MLAs who not only support 50% female candidates, they agreed to raise it with their parties.

50 female representatives in local bodies we called, sent selfies (attached) along with their demand of 50% women to be fielded as candidates.

15 female MLAs, across JDU, RJD, INC & BJP vehemently agreed with 50% tickets to be given to women. They promised to raise it with their parties. Some have already raised it and lamented women are not appointed to candidate committees for ticket distribution. The other 9 were unreachable, 1 unwell, and 3 were either not interested or refused to comment.

Attached are the posters with all of the above.

Shakti - Political Power to Women is a non partisan, pan-India citizens collective with a goal to get more women elected as MLAs and MPs.

Tara Krishnaswamy, co-founder of Shakti on the success of the campaign said, "This is a

landmark effort for women's political rights with a simultaneous outreach to both local bodies and state level elected women representatives. These 50 odd Mukhiyas, Sarpanches represent the voices of an average of 6000 voters each, a total of 3 lakh voters across these 50 Mukhiyas and Sarpanches. Further, the 15 female MLAs represent the voices of 2.3 lakh voters each, adding up to 34 lakh voters. The aggregate "yay" from all parties, represents 37 lakh voters of Bihar, demanding a rightful 50% female candidates in the upcoming polls! We hope that the parties will discuss this and ensure that these elections are genuinely representative and gender balanced."

Ajay Ravidas, Bihar Ambedkar Students Forum said, "When I spoke to the block chief Jamui on whether 50% of women should contest the assembly elections, she emphasised the dearth of political leadership among women. She believes that no one can bring justice and fulfil the rights of women without women themselves acquiring decision making power at the state level."

Zafreen Neha, of Centre for Social Equity & Inclusion said, "Female MLAs fully understand the importance of women in governance, and realise the need for pressure on parties. But when male PAs pick up the call and it becomes difficult even to communicate the need to talk to the female MLA and they gate-keep us away from the conversation. This itself is symptomatic of male leaders blocking increased women's representation."

Sincerely,
 On behalf of Shakti
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