

Title: Priyanka Singh – A Woman Leader Transforming Devdhi Panchayat from the Grassroots.

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Abstract

This case study presents the powerful journey of Priyanka Singh, the elected Mukhiya of Devdhi Panchayat in Taraiya block, Saran district, Bihar. A former MBA graduate and professional working in Delhi, Priyanka chose to return to her rural roots and lead her community through participatory, transparent, and inclusive governance. Elected in 2021 from a general seat, she brought visible transformation in sectors like sanitation, women's empowerment, digital inclusion, youth engagement, education, health, and environmental sustainability.

Her governance is people-centric, evidence-based, and inclusive of marginalized voices, especially women and the elderly. Her initiatives led to the construction of 200+ toilets, 70% Gram Sabha participation growth, 1000+ tree plantations, creation of youth clubs, and digital grievance redressal. In 2024, she was awarded the National Panchayat Award by President Droupadi Murmu.

Her journey is a true reflection of Rajiv Gandhi's vision behind the 73rd Constitutional Amendment, which gave Constitutional power to Panchayati Raj Institutions and ensured women's representation in governance.

Introduction

India's democratic strength lies in its roots — the villages. Former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi championed the idea that development should begin from the bottom. His government introduced the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, which came into force in 1993, creating a three-tier Panchayati Raj System across India.

This amendment made it mandatory to reserve one-third of all Panchayat seats for women, enabling them to take leadership roles at the local level. Rajiv Gandhi believed that this reform would not only deepen democracy but also bring meaningful inclusion and development.

This case study of Priyanka Singh, an elected woman Mukhiya from Saran district, Bihar, represents the living success of Rajiv Gandhi's dream.

About Devdhi Panchayat and the Local Context

Devdhi Panchayat is located in Taraiya block, Saran district, Bihar. It consists of multiple small villages and hamlets with a population of approximately 8,500 people, of which around 49% are women. The region has low income levels, and people depend largely on agriculture, MNREGA, and small-scale trading for livelihood.

Major Challenges Before 2021:

Only 30% of homes had toilets

Less than 40% of eligible students were enrolled in school

Female literacy rate was below 50%

Less than 20% women attended Gram Sabhas

Frequent migration due to lack of local employment

Poor digital access and weak health infrastructure

Profile of the Woman Leader: Priyanka Singh

Priyanka Singh was born in Devdhi Panchayat and completed her early education in a government school. She later pursued her MBA from Delhi, where she worked for Indigo Airlines as an HR Executive, earning around ₹80,000 per month. Despite her success, she remained emotionally connected to her village.

Her return was triggered during a visit in 2020, where she saw women still walking kilometers for water, students sitting under broken roofs, and no digital link between governance and citizens. She decided to resign from her job and contest the 2021 Panchayat elections.

Her decision to contest from a general (unreserved) seat reflected her confidence. She ran her campaign with minimal funds but focused on issues like women's dignity, clean water, digital rights, and transparent governance. Her approach won the hearts of villagers, especially women and youth.

Path to Leadership

Unlike many traditional leaders, Priyanka's campaign:

Focused on door-to-door conversations rather than caste-based rallies

Emphasized issues like education, health, toilets, and safety

Used social media and WhatsApp to share her message

Conducted open discussions with youth groups and women's collectives

She broke social stereotypes, showing that women, especially young and educated ones, can also understand policy, files, and people. After a clear majority, she was elected Mukhiya in 2021.

Challenges Faced After Becoming Mukhiya

1. Patriarchal Attitudes – Some male leaders and officers initially ignored or underestimated her.
2. Political Resistance – Former power-holders spread misinformation and tried to discredit her.

3. Digital Illiteracy – Many citizens didn't know how to access online services.
4. Bureaucratic Hurdles – Delay in fund release and lack of training among Panchayat staff.
5. Over-expectation – Villagers expected immediate change, not understanding government process time.

Despite these, Priyanka remained composed, polite, but firm. She studied schemes in detail, met block officers regularly, and ensured no money went unaccounted.

Governance Initiatives and Reforms

1. Sanitation and Drinking Water

Constructed over 200 individual household toilets under Swachh Bharat Abhiyan.

Ensured safe drinking water through handpump repair and installing 5 community water filters.

Created a Sanitation Monitoring Committee led by women.

2. Digital Governance

Started a WhatsApp helpline for complaints — responded within 48 hours.

Assisted over 600 villagers in applying for online caste/income/residence certificates.

Initiated a Digital Display Board in Panchayat Bhawan showing budget use and work progress.

3. Women Empowerment

Formed over 25 Self Help Groups (SHGs).

Connected 150+ women with Jeevika, PMEGP, and PM Mudra Yojana loans.

Conducted workshops on legal rights, menstrual hygiene, and financial inclusion.

Enrolled 80+ women in adult literacy programs.

4. Education and Youth Engagement

Distributed notebooks and sanitary pads to girl students in schools.

Helped increase school retention of girls by 60%.

Renovated two schools and ensured mid-day meals were served regularly.

Launched Youth Clubs in each ward — engaging 300+ youth in cleanliness drives, awareness campaigns, and blood donation camps.

5. Health and Nutrition

Conducted monthly health camps in partnership with PHCs.

Promoted immunization and nutrition through Anganwadi visits.

Linked 350 families with Ayushman Bharat scheme.

Created a Panchayat Nutrition Committee to monitor child health.

6. Employment and Skill Development

Enabled 500+ workers to receive job cards under MNREGA.

Organized vocational training for tailoring, beautician, and mobile repair.

Promoted kitchen gardening for food security.

7. Environment and Sustainability

Planted over 1,000 trees under “Har Gaon Hariyali.”

Promoted plastic-free campaigns with school children.

Encouraged vermi-compost pits and household waste segregation.

Community Feedback and Testimonials

- “She is not just our Mukhiya, she is our daughter who came back to serve us.” – Local school teacher

 - “Because of Chhoti Madam, I now earn ₹5,000/month from my SHG tailoring work.” – SHG Member, Ward No. 6

 - “Earlier, women were afraid to speak in meetings. Now, we speak with pride.” – Gram Sabha participant
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Achievements and Awards

Toilets constructed 200+

Trees planted 1000+

SHGs formed 25+

Families linked to health insurance 350+

Online certificates issued 600+

Adult women literacy enrollees 80+

School girls re-enrolled 100+

MNREGA workers facilitated 500+

National Panchayat Award (2024) ✓

Awarded by President Droupadi Murmu ✓

Remaining Challenges

Delay in road infrastructure projects due to state-level approvals

Need for a permanent Panchayat Bhawan with internet access

Migration of youth still continues due to limited job creation

Future Plans

Launch a Digital Skill Training Center for girls and boys.

Create a Women's Leadership Academy for nearby Panchayats.

Build a Waste Management and Recycling Plant at the Panchayat level.

Advocate for solar-powered street lights for safety and sustainability.

Conclusion: A True Reflection of Rajiv Gandhi's Vision

Priyanka Singh's journey is the true reflection of Rajiv Gandhi's dream of empowering rural citizens through grassroots democracy. The 73rd Amendment empowered women to sit in seats of decision-making — but leaders like Priyanka give life to that law.

She is not only a Panchayat leader, but also a mentor, problem-solver, and inspiration for rural women. Her journey proves that educated, honest, and compassionate leadership can bring visible change — and it can begin from a village.

Through her dedication, transparency, and people-first mindset, Devdhi Panchayat has become a model for Bihar — and Priyanka Singh, its shining example of what rural women can achieve when democracy truly includes them.

