Khatun Bahan, Ward Member

Gram Panchayat Karamseevas, Block Tijara, District Alwar, Rajasthan
Year of Election: 2010 for the post of Ward Member

Khatun Bahan leads a nomadic existence as she belongs to the nomadic Gadia Lohar tribe who are blacksmiths. She says, "While travelling from one village to another, I would see that people asked for votes in the name of development but after winning the elections they would never show up again to ask about our problems. Therefore, when I got the opportunity to stand for elections from Karamseevas Panchayat due to the reservation for women, I grabbed it. I had to mortgage my jewellery to raise money for my election campaign but it is an honor to serve the village and the people and solve their problems."

Democratic decentralization has the required impact only if there is representation from different communities. Khatun has decided to represent her Lohar caste and respond to their needs and aspirations. While Panchayati Raj has empowered her to respond to these needs, society has thrown its fair share of challenges. The powerful people in the Panchayat tried to dominate given her low caste. She refused to be cowed down, and continued with the campaign. She won the elections only to be faced with more taunts regarding her capability to work as a Ward Member. She is well aware of the problems in her ward and has focused her attention in responding to the developmental needs. She has worked on getting regular drinking water supply and electricity to her ward and also proper implementation of the Indira Awaaz Yojana for the BPL families. Khatun Bahan has made several representations to the authorities on these issues apart from getting resolutions passed in the Gram Sabha and Panchayat meetings and she is certain that soon action would be taken.

She says, "My aim is to gain recognition for my community of Gadia Lohars who have been neglected and exploited for centuries. When people come to us to ask for our votes then why do they not do anything for our upliftment? I have decided to use my post to campaign for better entitlements and development for my community." Khatun Bahan's struggle showcases the deep urge for recognition as a citizen and identity that marginalized communities such as the Gadia Lohars nurture in their hearts amidst a milieu of severe neglect.