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## **Role of panchayats in rural development: A comparative study of Bilaspur and Milak block in Rampur district of Uttar Pradesh**

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### **Abstract**

*Panchayati raj institutions (PRIs) have been the fulcrum of rural development in the rural fringes since its inception in 1992. Though development has been ubiquitous, still not uniform. A lot of disparities still exist at various levels in this path of development. This paper delves into finding the development lags at micro level i.e. micro disparity existing in district at block and village level. The Bilaspur and Milak block of Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh have been selected as study area for the above. The study clearly indicates the existence of micro disparity between Bilaspur and Milak blocks which can be attributed to various factors such as population, ethnicity, geography, connectivity with city centre etc. The key findings of the study are that PRIs needs to adopt the local needs and the local resources to bring out the best of development in their respective areas. A uniform centre or state sponsored blanket programs is not sufficient for holistic development of rural regions.*

**Key words:** *Panchayat raj institutions, rural development, regional and micro disparity*

### **Introduction:**

Panchayati raj institutions have been the back bone of rural development since its inception in 1992. They have played the central role in shaping the rural landscape and providing fillip to economic growth of India together with providing socio-political equity and justice. The Panchayati Raj Institutions in India represent a cornerstone of decentralized governance, aiming to foster rural development through local self-governance. Established under the 73rd Amendment Act of 1992, these institutions are mandated to facilitate comprehensive rural upliftment, including economic growth and social justice.

This paper aims to draw a comparative analysis between two blocks of Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh based on socio-economic progress in rural regions and the inherent role of panchayats in it. This comparative analysis will delve into the operational modalities and developmental impact of Panchayati Raj Institutions across two distinct districts, examining how their structures and functions contribute to, or impede local progress. This comparative approach will highlight divergent strategies and their subsequent outcomes in fostering local development, ultimately contributing to a nuanced understanding of decentralized governance in India.

Three decades have passed since the inception of PRIs and they have contributed a lot in the unprecedented growth of rural India enabling socio-economic and political justice and equity. But development has not been even. There exist a vast regional and intra-regional disparity in growth and development trends. This paper aims at investigating the micro disparity existing at the root level.

A vast amount of research has been done in this field, but majority of them have focussed on the social and political aspects of PRIs, their functioning and impediments. The micro studies too have been mainly concentrated on the rise or failure of PRIs as a whole in particular region. There exists a clear gap in the field of in-depth analysis of micro disparity in rural development and this paper tries to address that.

**Objectives:**

- To find whether micro disparity in rural development exist at block level in Rampur district, Uttar Pradesh.
- To investigate the role of PRIs in enhancing or diminishing the disparity in rural development.
- Suggest policy recommendations.

**Literature review:**

This section will critically analyse the existing work on panchayat raj institution. The review will highlight key theoretical frameworks and empirical studies that have examined the effectiveness, challenges, and successes of PRIs in promoting rural development and participatory democracy. It will also identify gaps in the current literature, particularly regarding comparative analyses of PRIs in diverse geographical and socio-economic contexts, thus establishing the unique contribution of this research. This includes a detailed examination of how the legislative framework for PRIs intersects with ground-level realities, particularly concerning the empowerment of women and other marginalized communities (Kalaramadam, 2012) (Dr.Nagaraja.S & Kusugal, 2011). The section will further scrutinize the impact of caste and patriarchal norms on the leadership patterns and performance of women within PRIs, drawing on case studies that illuminate how these primordial institutions influence emerging women's leadership, often constraining their autonomy and decision-making capabilities (Sutar, 2007) (Kaur, 2008). It will also assess how various interventions, such as training programs and support networks, have mitigated these constraints, enabling women to become more effective leaders and advocates for their communities (Anukriti et al., 2023) (Dr.Nagaraja.S & Kusugal, 2011). This review will further examine the evolving socio-economic background of rural leadership in the post-73rd Amendment Act period, critically analyzing factors such as age, caste, occupation, education, and gender as major determinants of leadership patterns (Hemalata & Kumar, 2020). Moreover, the review will consider how societal groups and voters may act as barriers to women's political participation, transcending issues of education or mobility (Iyer & Mani, 2019). This analysis will delve into specific instances where, despite formal representation, women face significant hurdles in actively shaping policy and public decision-making due to embedded gender norms and the congruence of political tasks (Girard, 2013).

**Methodology:**

As per need of the study, two blocks of Rampur district are selected which are Bilaspur and Milak. To reduce statistical biases and increase conformity, 20 villages from each block having population between 2000 to 4000 are randomly selected. The extent of development and performance of PRIs are being taken into consideration by their score of Panchayat Advancement Index (PAI) recorded and released by Ministry of Panchayati Raj, Government of India. The comparative analysis will be drawn through standard t-test and inferences would be drawn accordingly.

**Comparative analysis and discussion:**

For this paper, a demographic profile must be precise, structured, and contextualized within the socio-economic framework of the region. Bilaspur is one of the six administrative blocks (and tehsils) of the Rampur district in Uttar Pradesh. It is unique for its agrarian success and significant cultural diversity.

Below is a detailed demographic description of Bilaspur Block.

Demographic Profile: Bilaspur Block, Rampur (U.P.)

1. Geographical and Administrative Context:

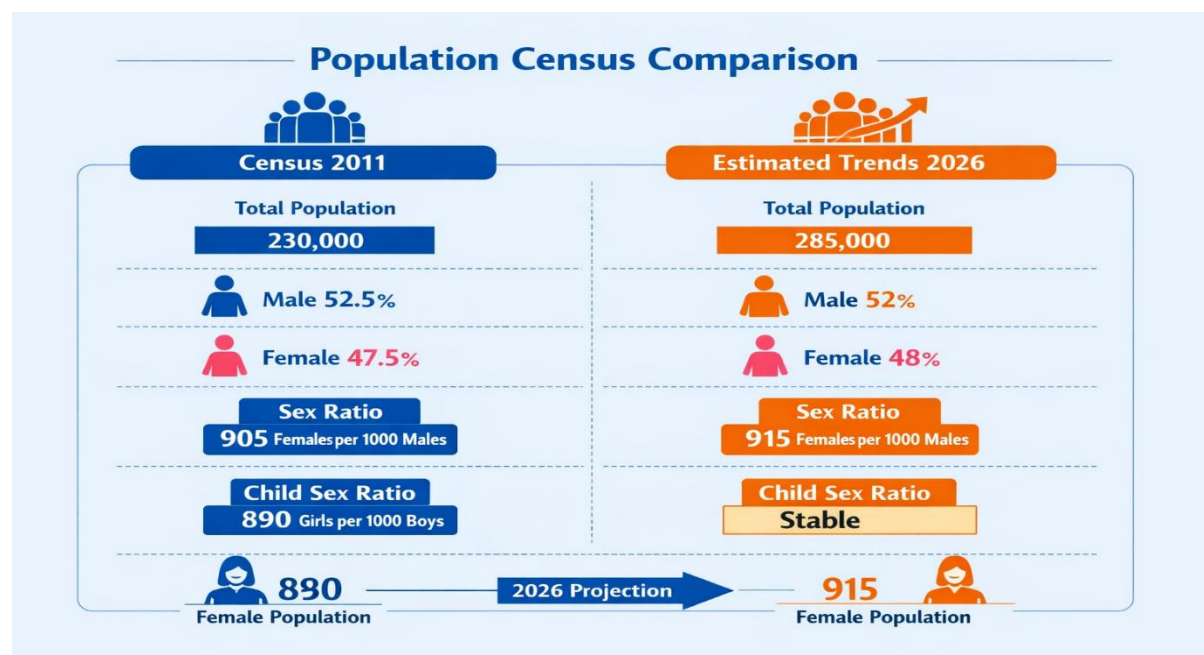
Bilaspur block is situated in the northern part of the Rampur district, bordering the state of Uttarakhand (Udham Singh Nagar district). This proximity to the Terai region significantly influences its climate, migration patterns, and agricultural practices.

- Administrative Status: Block and Tehsil.
- Number of Gram Panchayats: Approximately 90
- Total Villages: 207.

2. Population Structure:

Based on the 2011 Census (with projected adjustments for 2026), Bilaspur exhibits a steady growth rate typical of the Rohilkhand region.

Attribute	Quantitative Data (Census 2011)	Estimated Trends (2026)
Total Population	230000	285000
Male Population	52.5	52
Female Population	47.5	48
Sex Ratio	905	915
Child Sex Ratio	890	stable



### 3. Religious and Ethnic Composition:

Bilaspur is often referred to as the "Mini-Punjab" of Uttar Pradesh. Unlike many other blocks in the state, it has a distinct demographic mix:

- Sikhism: A significant and influential population of Sikhs, many of whom migrated during the partition or the Green Revolution, dominates the agrarian landscape.
- Islam: A substantial Muslim population, primarily engaged in trade, craftsmanship, and agriculture.
- Hinduism: Comprises various castes, including a significant presence of Scheduled Castes (SC).
- Scheduled Castes (SC): Account for approximately 15–18% of the total population, primarily residing in rural pockets.

### 4. Literacy and Education:

- The literacy rate in Bilaspur has seen a moderate upward trajectory but remains a point of concern in rural female demographics.
- Total Literacy Rate: ~58% (2011) → Estimated ~66% (2026).
- Male Literacy: ~68%.
- Female Literacy: ~47%.
- Gap: A persistent gender gap of over 20% exists in educational attainment, though primary school enrolments has improved under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan.

### 5. Occupational Profile and Economy:

- The economy of the Bilaspur block is overwhelmingly agrarian. It is one of the most fertile belts in the district, benefiting from a high-water table and mechanized farming.
- Work Participation Rate (WPR): Approximately 32%.

- Main Workers: 75% of the workforce.
- Marginal Workers: 25% (often seasonal labour).
- Key Categories:
- Cultivators: Large-scale farmers (especially in the Sikh community) growing paddy, sugarcane, and wheat.
- Agricultural Laborers: A large segment of the landless SC and Muslim population works as daily wage earners.
- Household Industry: Minor involvement in wood-cutting and local rice mills.

6. Vulnerabilities and Socio-Economic Indicators:

- Housing: A transition from Kutchha to Pucca houses is evident, though peripheral villages still lack basic sanitation infrastructure.
- Migration: Significant seasonal migration occurs, with labour moving toward the industrial hubs of Rudrapur (Uttarakhand) and Delhi-NCR.
- Health: The block relies on a mix of Government Community Health centres (CHCs) and private clinics in Bilaspur town.

Demographic profile of the Milak:

Milak block serves as a vital comparison to Bilaspur. While Bilaspur is known for its "Mini-Punjab" identity, Milak represents a more traditional Rohilkhand demographic with a significant Hindu majority and a robust agricultural-industrial base, particularly in rice processing. Below is the detailed demographic description for the Milak block.

Demographic Profile: Milak Block, Rampur (U.P.)

1. Geographical and Administrative Context

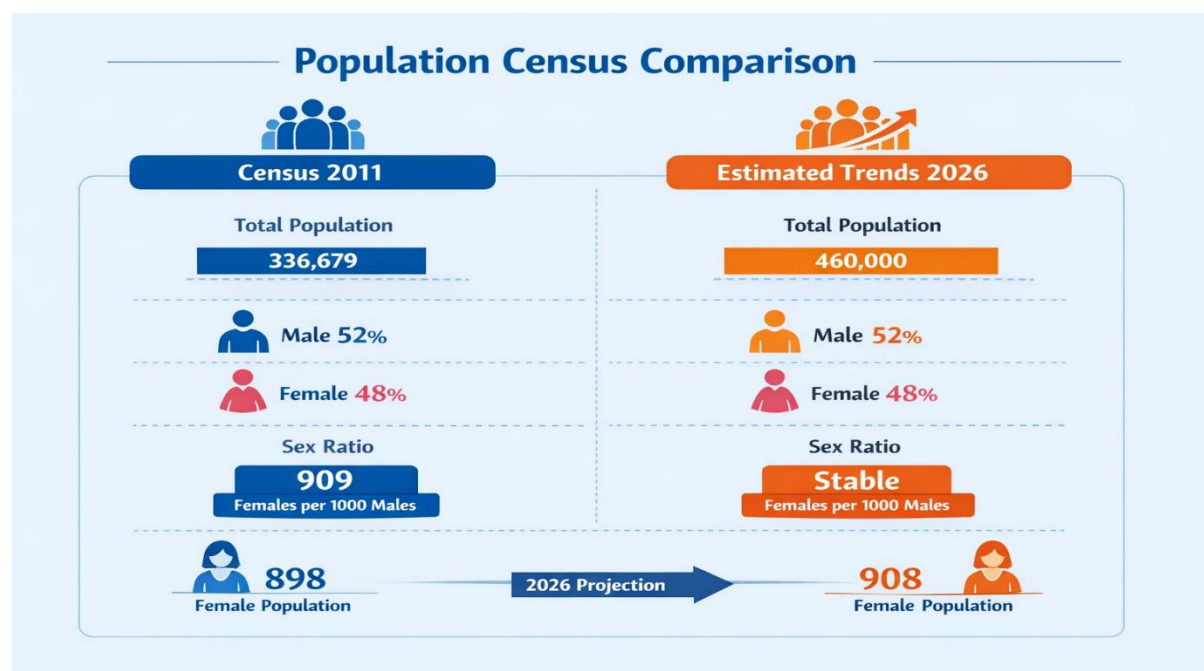
Milak is located in the southeastern part of the Rampur district. It is strategically positioned along the National Highway 24 (NH-24), connecting Lucknow and Delhi, which significantly influences its trade and mobility. It shares its eastern border with the Bareilly district.

- Administrative Status: Block and Tehsil.
- Urban Centre: Milak Nagar Palika Parishad (NPP).
- Rural Composition: Comprises 202 inhabited villages.
- Connectivity: High accessibility due to the Northern Railway line and the NH-24 corridor.

2. Population Structure:

Milak has a larger total population than Bilaspur, with a higher concentration of rural inhabitants.

Attribute	Quantitative Data (Census 2011)	Estimated Trends (2026)
Total Population	336679	460000
Male Population	52	52
Female Population	48	48
Sex Ratio	898	908
	909	stable



### 3. Religious and Ethnic Composition:

- Unlike the Sikh-influenced Bilaspur, Milak's religious landscape is dominated by a Hindu majority, though it remains a diverse social fabric.
- Hinduism: Approximately 73% of the population. This is significantly higher than the district average of ~46%.
- Islam: Approximately 24.8%. Most of the Muslim population is concentrated in the Milak urban area and specific rural clusters.
- Sikhism: ~1.71%. While present, the Sikh influence is much smaller compared to Bilaspur.
- Scheduled Castes (SC): Milak has a very high SC population, accounting for roughly 21.1% of the block, significantly higher than Bilaspur. This is a crucial metric for research focusing on social stratification.

### 4. Literacy and Education:

- Literacy remains a critical development challenge in Milak, particularly in rural areas where the gender gap is pronounced.
- Average Literacy Rate: 57.7% (Lower than the state average).
- Male Literacy: 56.8%.
- Female Literacy: 38.7%.
- Urban vs. Rural Literacy: There is a sharp divide; the urban literacy in Milak city is ~64%, whereas rural female literacy in some villages drops below 30%.

### 5. Occupational Profile and Economy:

- Milak is widely recognized as a hub for Rice Mills in the Rohilkhand region. Its economy is more "Agro-Industrial" compared to the purely agrarian Bilaspur.
- Work Participation Rate (WPR): ~30%.

- Agrarian Base: The primary crops include Mentha (peppermint), Sugarcane, Wheat, and Paddy. Milak is a major centre for Mentha oil extraction.
  - Industrial Sector: The block hosts dozens of small and medium-scale rice mills that process the region's produce for export to other states.
  - Labor Dynamics: A high percentage of the workforce consists of "Marginal Workers" (approx. 20–25%), indicating seasonal employment in the milling industry and brick kilns.
6. Key Socio-Economic Indicators:
- Housing and Infrastructure: The proximity to NH-24 has led to rapid "rurbanization" (rural-urban transition) along the highway.
  - Caste Dynamics: The high SC population percentage (21.1%) makes Milak a focal point for studies on social welfare schemes and grassroots political mobilization.
  - Health and Sanitation: Challenges persist in rural sanitation, though the "Swachh Bharat Mission" has increased latrine coverage significantly since 2014.

A comparative profile:

This comparative analysis highlights the distinct socio-economic and demographic identities of the two blocks. While both are part of the Rampur district, they offer a fascinating contrast between Bilaspur’s agrarian migration model and Milak’s agro-industrial and caste-diverse model.

Comparative Demographic Analysis: Bilaspur vs. Milak

The following table summarizes the key metrics (based on Census 2011 and 2026 projections) to help visualize the disparities.

Demographic Indicator	Bilaspur Block	Milak Block
Total Population (Est. 2026)	~285,000	~450,000
Primary Identity	"Mini-Punjab" (Agrarian Hub)	"Rice Mill Hub" (Agro-Industrial)
Dominant Religion	Sikhism, Islam, & Hinduism	Hinduism (~73%) & Islam
SC Population %	~15–18%	~21.1% (High)
Overall Literacy Rate	~58%	~57.7%
Female Literacy	~47%	~38.7% (Lower)
Sex Ratio (F/1000 M)	~905	~898
Key Crops	Sugarcane, Paddy, Wheat	Mentha, Paddy, Sugarcane
Major Industry	Large-scale Mechanized Farming	Rice Milling & Mentha Extraction
Geographic Advantage	Proximity to Uttarakhand (Terai)	Proximity to NH-24 & Bareilly

**Key Analytical and findings:**

1. The "Terai" vs. "Highway" Influence: Bilaspur’s proximity to the Terai region of Uttarakhand has fostered a high-investment agricultural economy, largely driven by the Sikh community. Conversely, Milak’s location on NH-24 has turned it into a logistical and processing corridor, making it more sensitive to industrial trade and urban-to-rural migration.
2. The Literacy-Gender Paradox: While Bilaspur has a slightly higher overall literacy rate, both blocks suffer from a massive gender gap in education. In Milak, the female literacy rate (sub-40%) is particularly critical and suggests a need for targeted social interventions in rural areas with high SC concentrations.
3. Social Stratification: Milak’s significantly higher Scheduled Caste (SC) population (over 21%) suggests that its labour market is likely more dependent on manual agricultural labour and informal mill work. In contrast, Bilaspur's social structure is defined by larger landholdings, which often results in a higher demand for seasonal migrant labour rather than a reliance on local landless populations alone.
4. Economic Diversification: Milak’s diversification into Mentha oil and rice processing gives it an industrial edge, whereas Bilaspur’s economy is more vulnerable to fluctuations in government-mandated MSP (Minimum Support Price) for wheat and paddy.

**Statistical Analysis:**

For statistical analysis, the PAI score of sampled villages are being compared based on the following hypothesis.

H0: There exists no difference between panchayat performance and level of rural development between villages of Bilaspur and Milak blocks of Rampur district.

H1: There exists difference between panchayat performance and level of rural development between villages of Bilaspur and Milak blocks of Rampur district.

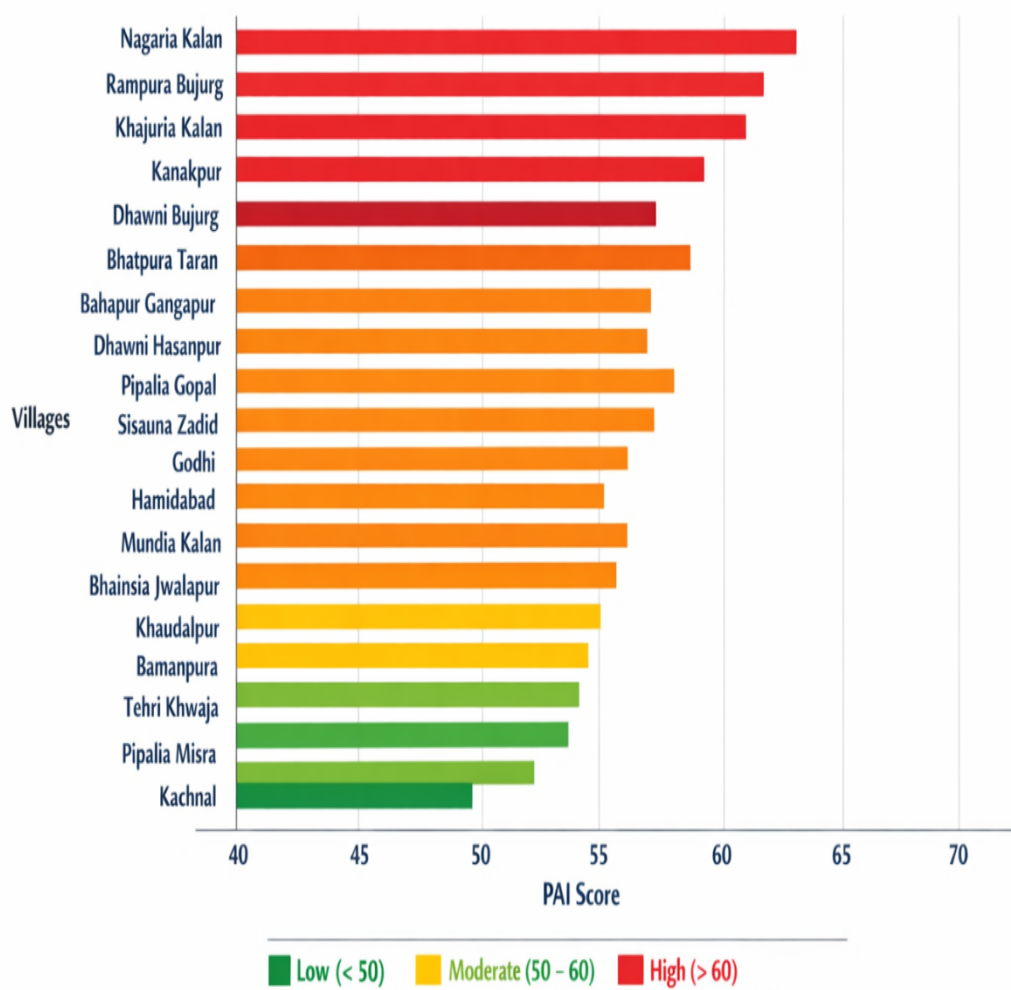
The PAI scores of villages of Bilaspur block are as follows

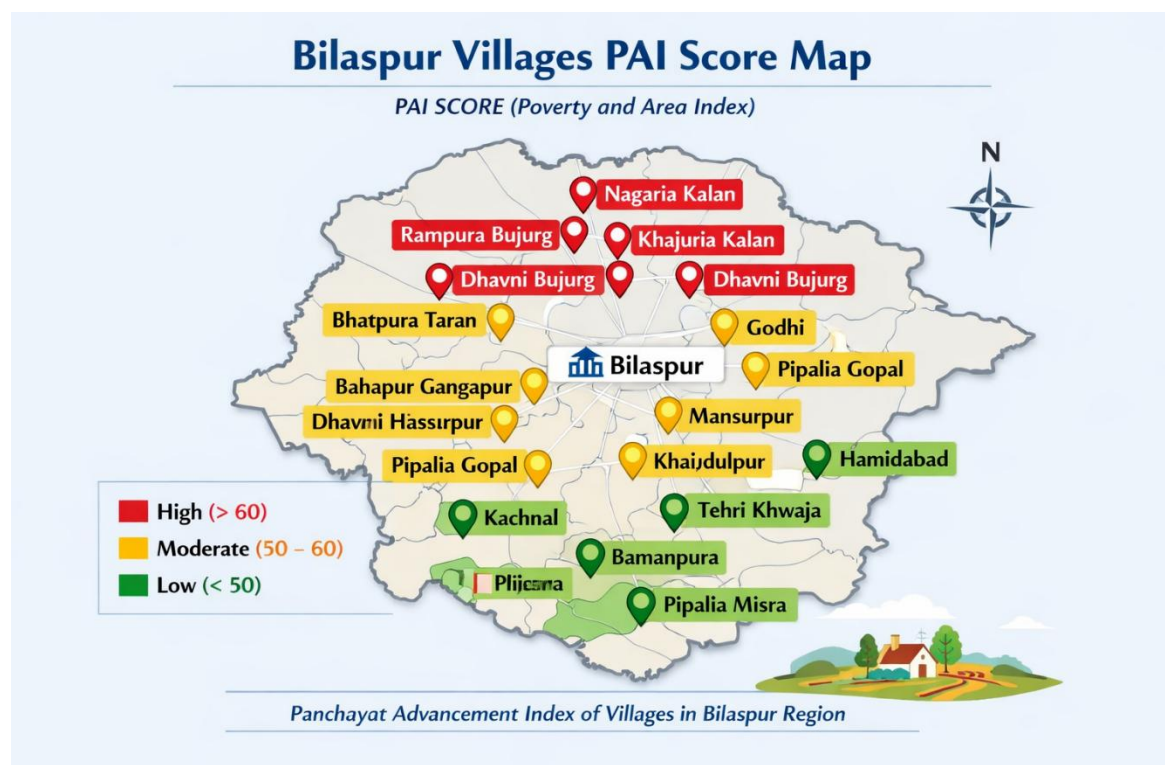
#	Villages	Tehsil	Population	PAI SCORE
1	Bahapur Gangapur	Bilaspur	2314	54.89
2	Bamanpura	Bilaspur	2859	48.35
3	Bhainsia Jwalapur	Bilaspur	3686	52.97
4	Bhatpura Taran	Bilaspur	3958	55.75
5	Dhavni Bujurg	Bilaspur	2718	61.28
6	Dhawani Hasanpur	Bilaspur	3757	54.94
7	Godhi	Bilaspur	2612	59.7
8	Hamidabad	Bilaspur	3424	52.87
9	Kachnal	Bilaspur	2063	45.19
10	Kanakpur	Bilaspur	2715	61.82
11	Khajuria Kalan	Bilaspur	2219	64.29
12	Khaudalpur	Bilaspur	2432	52.52
13	Mansurpur	Bilaspur	2269	59.64
14	Mundia Kalan	Bilaspur	2111	58.39
15	Nagaria Kalan	Bilaspur	2201	66.17

16	Pipalia Gopal	Bilaspur	3211	56.25
17	Pipalia Misra	Bilaspur	2033	57.32
18	Rampura Bujurg	Bilaspur	3119	66.9
19	Sisauna Zadid	Bilaspur	2963	60
20	Tehri Khwaja	Bilaspur	3860	41.3

## PAI Score Comparison of Bilaspur Villages

PAI SCORE (Poverty and Area Index)

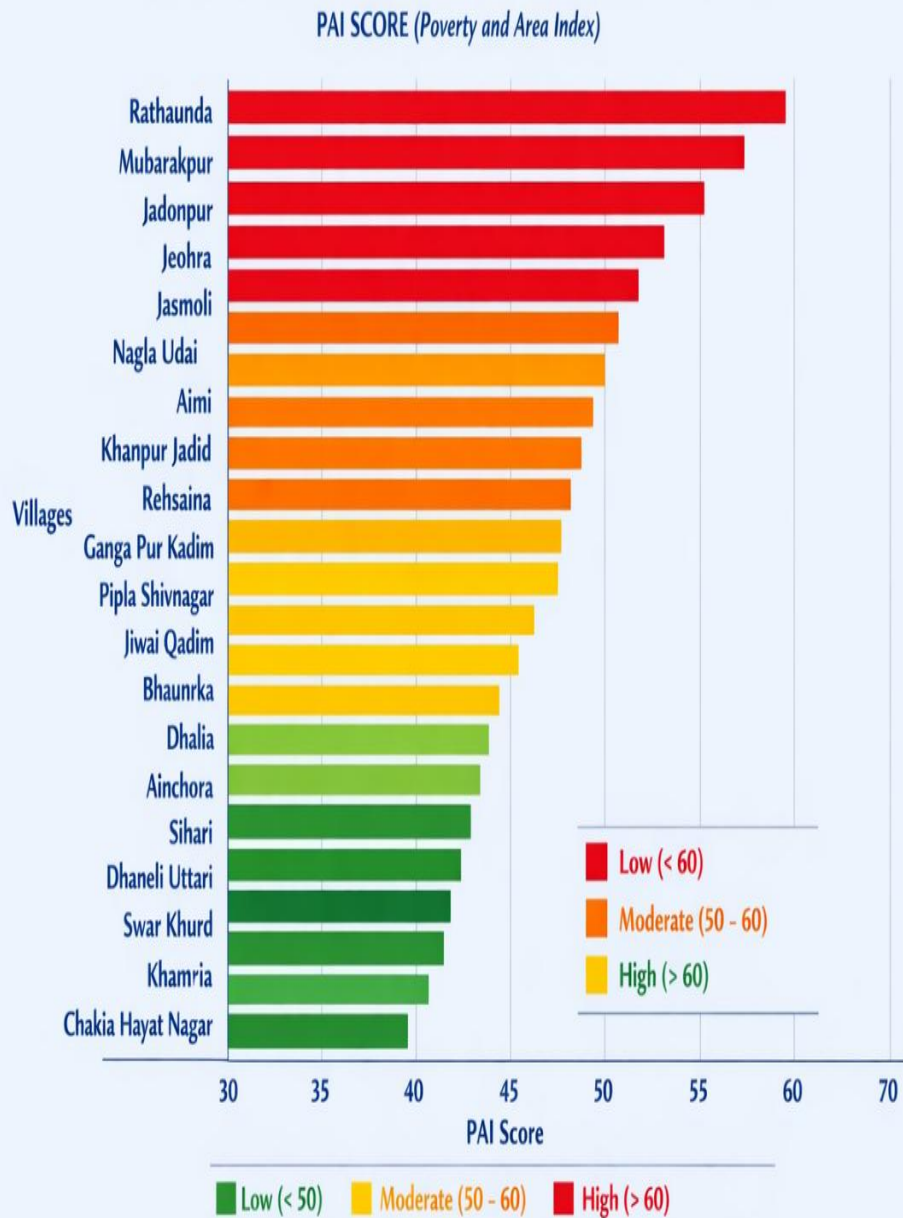




The PAI scores of villages of Milak block are as follows

#	Villages	Tehsil	Population	PAI SCORE
1	Aimi	Milak	2666	55
2	Ainchora	Milak	2627	44.54
3	Bhaunrka	Milak	2633	47.42
4	Chakia Hayat Nagar	Milak	2752	38.5
5	Dhaneli Uttari	Milak	2751	39.07
6	Ganga Pur Kadim	Milak	3090	51.36
7	Jadonpur	Milak	2605	62.35
8	Jasmoli	Milak	3350	60.4
9	Jeohra	Milak	2655	60.77
10	Jiwai Qadim	Milak	2612	47.45
11	Khamria	Milak	2605	35.22
12	Khanpur Jadid	Milak	2723	53.97
13	Mubarakpur	Milak	3003	63.28
14	Nagla Udai	Milak	3266	58.38
15	Pipla Shivnagar	Milak	3920	49
16	Rathaunda	Milak	2679	66.17
17	Rehsaina	Milak	3187	51
18	Sihari	Milak	3130	41
19	dhalia	Milak	3646	45.2
20	Swar Khurd	Milak	2624	38.7

## PAI Score Comparison of Milak Villages



Panchayat Advancement Index of Villages in Bilaspur Region



Upon applying the t-test, following values are obtained-

<i>name</i>	<i>Variable 1</i>	<i>Variable 2</i>
Mean	56.527	50.439
Variance	43.29425368	87.91299895
Observations	20	20
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	34	
t Stat	2.37689896	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.01161496	
t Critical one-tail	1.690924255	
<b>P(T&lt;=t) two-tail</b>	<b>0.023229921</b>	
t Critical two-tail	2.032244509	

Here, a P-Value of 0.02 is obtained which is significantly less than level of significance value 0.05 (confidence level 95%), which mean null hypothesis (H0) is rejected and alternate hypothesis (H1) is accepted implying that there exists a significant difference in level of rural development and performance of panchayats between Bilaspur and Milak Blocks of Rampur district.

### **Finding, inferences and policy recommendations:**

Statistical analysis suggests a clear indication of existence of micro disparity at block level in Rampur district in rural development pattern and there are various factors attributing to the above result. They can be discussed as follows.

The comparative analysis of Bilaspur and Milak blocks reveals that while they share the same district administration, their socio-economic pulses are distinct. Bilaspur represents a high-input, high-output agrarian model bolstered by historical migration and mechanized farming. Here, average farm size are large. In contrast, Milak represents a transitional agro-industrial model, where agricultural holding are small dominated by marginalised farmers, but, proximity to major transport corridors (NH-24) and a burgeoning milling industry define its growth.

However, both blocks face a "development paradox"- high agricultural productivity has not yet translated into high social development indicators, particularly regarding female literacy and gender-equitable workforce participation.

### Policy Recommendations:

- Targeted Educational Interventions (Focus: Milak): With female literacy in Milak significantly lagging (approx. 38.7%), the state should implement a "Block-Specific Literacy Mission," and panchayats can come handy here setting the ball in motion. It would be beneficial to establish "Bridge Schools" in rural Milak, specifically targeting the high Scheduled Caste (SC) population where dropout rates are highest. The main focus should be on closing the 20% gender gap in literacy over the next five years.
- Strengthening the Agro-Industrial Value Chain (Focus: Milak): Milak's identity as a rice-milling hub is currently informal and fragmented. It is recommended to develop a "Mini-Food Park" near the NH-24 corridor to provide small-scale millers with ample infrastructure (cold storage, testing labs, and export packaging). It would help in the transition of marginal workers into more stable, year-round industrial roles.
- Sustainable Agriculture and Diversification (Focus: Bilaspur): Bilaspur's reliance on water-intensive crops (Paddy/Sugarcane) poses long-term ecological risks to the Terai water table. It would be fair to incentivize Crop Diversification toward horticulture or organic farming, leveraging the block's existing high-tech farming expertise and provide subsidies for "Micro-Irrigation" (Drip/Sprinkler) to the large-scale farmers of the block.
- Social Inclusion and Welfare Mapping: The high concentration of SC populations in Milak and the diverse religious mix in Bilaspur require nuanced social welfare delivery. It would be helpful to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to map village-level infrastructure, and prioritize programmes such as "Har Ghar Nal" (Piped Water) and "Saubhagya" (Electrification) in the peripheral villages of Milak that show the highest social vulnerability.

Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs) are the most effective vehicle for bridging these gaps because they operate at the intersection of local knowledge and state funding. Since Bilaspur and Milak

face distinct challenges—one agrarian and the other agro-industrial—a "one-size-fits-all" approach fails.

Here is how PRIs can specifically intervene to bridge the development gaps identified above by adopting a selective and area specific planning.

- Localized Planning via GPDP (Gram Panchayat Development Plan): The GPDP allows each Gram Panchayat to create its own "mini-budget" based on local needs rather than district-level averages. In Milak, PRIs should prioritize "Social Equity" funds. Given the 21.1% SC population, the GPDP should focus on "bastis" (settlements) that lack basic drainage and paved roads, ensuring that the marginalized communities are the first beneficiaries of 15th Finance Commission grants. In Bilaspur, PRIs should focus on "Sustainability" funds. The Gram Sabhas can pass resolutions to regulate groundwater usage for paddy and invest in communal rainwater harvesting structures to protect the Terai water table.
- Bridging the Literacy and Gender Gap: Since female literacy is a common pain point (dropping below 40% in rural Milak), PRIs can act as the "social watchdog." Village Education Committees (VECs) can be constituted by Gram Pradhan to monitor teacher attendance and student enrolment, specifically targeting households where girls have dropped out. Incentivizing Schooling is another aspect where PRIs can play a significant role. Panchayats can use discretionary funds or demand fund from state to provide small "attendance scholarships" or cycles for girls, bridging the physical distance to secondary schools which is often a barrier in these blocks.
- Economic Empowerment through MGNREGA & SHGs: PRIs have direct control over MGNREGA, which can be used for more than just digging ponds. In Bilaspur, MGNREGA labour can be used to build community storage centres to help smaller farmers compete with large-scale landholders. In Milak, Panchayats can facilitate the formation of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) for women to enter the "value-addition" chain—such as packaging broken rice or processing Mentha by-products—providing an alternative to seasonal labour in mills.
- Rurban Management in the Highway Corridor: For the Milak block, which sits on NH-24, the PRIs need to transition from "Village" management to "rurban" management. PRIs can collaborate with the District Industries Centre (DIC) to setup "Panchayat Skill Hubs" along the highway, training local youth for the logistics and transportation jobs created by the NH-24 corridor.

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